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BEYBUTOVA R. A.

КНУ н.а. Ж. Баласагына, Бишкек

БЕЙБУТОВА Р. А.

КНУ им. Ж. Баласагына, Бишкек

[beybutova\(a\)gmail.com](mailto:beybutova(a)gmail.com)

Migration and demography in Central Asia: causes, patterns and perspectives

МИГРАЦИЯ И ДЕМОГРАФИЯ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: ПРИЧИНЫ, МОДЕЛИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

Орто Азияда миграция жана демография маселелери: себептери, модельдери жана келечеги

***Abstract:** the article deals with causes, patterns and perspectives of migration and its influence on the demography of Central Asia based on Kyrgyz perspectives. It reveals positive and negative aspects of migration. It also discusses activities of international organizations on issues of migration.*

***Аннотация:** статья исследует причины, модели и перспективы развития миграции и ее влияние на демографические процессы в Центральной Азии, в частности, основанные на данных по Кыргызстану. В ней раскрываются позитивные и негативные стороны миграции, а также деятельность международных организаций в этой области.*

***Аннотация:** макалада Орто Азияда, анын ичинде Кыргызстанда, миграциянын себептери, моделдери, клечеги жана анын демографияга тийгизген таасири изилденген. Миграциянын терс, оң жактары, ошондой эле эл аралык уюмдардын миграция жаатындагы чыгармачылыгы да каралган.*

***Keywords:** labor migration; illegal migration; migratory rules; inflow outflow of capitals; state policy on migration; migratory streams; receiving country; sending country.*

***Ключевые слова:** трудовая миграция; нелегальная миграция; миграционные правила; приток и отток капитала; государственная политика в области миграции; миграционные потоки; принимающая страна; страна, которую покидают; социально-экономические условия;*

***Негизги сөздөр:** эмгек миграциясы; мыйзамсыз миграция; миграция агымдары; миграция эрежелери; капиталдын агым келиши жана чыгып кетиши; мамлекеттин миграция боюнча саясаты; мигранттарды кабыл алуу өлкөсү; мигранттардын чыгуу өлкөсү; социалдык. жана экономикалык шарттар.*

Migration as a socio-economic phenomenon was not typical to countries of the Soviet Union. But after it collapsed huge army of professionals began to move from one country to another in search of better

paid jobs. And Kyrgyzstan was not an exception. Most of them were young and able-bodied. Among them were Russians, professionals, technically qualified people. Except better paid jobs, Russian speaking community was looking for historical homeland because the new coming era was not promising a better life for them. Besides, existing economic ties between the countries were broken and unemployment brought into life socio-economic crisis in all post-soviet countries. In these conditions the countries of Central Asia had to face two major subsequent shocks: the food and fuel price increase, and consequently the economic and financial crisis that spread across the CIS. Households, both poor and rich, were directly and adversely affected by the crisis. Kyrgyzstan was especially hard hit. This resulted in intensive internal migration, mainly from villages to urban areas. The majority of migrants were, as a rule, young and able-bodied people. Apart from this, out-migration of people from rural areas abroad also partially contributed to the decrease of rural population. Out-migration occurred mainly to Russia and Kazakhstan constituting 52% out of all migrants including those who left to earn more money to keep their families.

With intention to contribute to preventing unwanted migration of people, which was catastrophically accelerating in our country, to reduce internal social tension that gave rise to negative phenomena and enabled extreme growth of various political, religious and criminal forces, and to protect integrity and unity of country which was very important for Kyrgyzstan it started to take urgent measures including setting up a special structure Ministry of migration and youth politics. International organizations and civic foundations started to deal with various aspects and manners of migration, including causes and patterns of migration, the migrants' characteristics, and impact of migration on communities, origin and destination, economic and psychological impacts of migration on demography and so on.

Today migratory movements have acquired an unprecedented character. According to the data of UNO, IOM and IOL migrants at present constitute about 65 million people. According to these data, most of migrants leave their homes and their countries due to conflicts, political persecutions and poverty. Migratory processes in Central Asia started after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The post-Soviet period witnessed globalization, open and free communication, transportation, which facilitated both internal and external migration.

Patterns of migration in Central Asia as reflected in the present period is unpredictable partially because of migratory rules and

transboundary issues in Central Asia, threatening regional stability and security. However, any migration process has positive and negative aspects, such as: cultural exchange, knowledge exchange, gaining experience, improved relations between the countries, cheap labor, inflow of skilled labor, inflow of capital (for receiving country). Negative factors form loss of control over migration streams: brain drain, drug trafficking corridors, spread of infectious diseases, outflow of capital (for sending country), and potential ethnic conflicts [1].

As for the causes of migration, people migrated and had to continue to migrate today for a complex set of reasons that rooted in the internal socioeconomic dynamics of their societies, which changed over time, generation, and space. People from Kyrgyzstan seem to immigrate for various reasons. These reasons are categorized under "Push" and "Pull" model. The information indicates that push factors are responsible for migration from Kyrgyzstan. Push factors exert pressure on people to leave the homeland in search of better opportunities. The pull factors that attract the migrants are also responsible for movements of people. The majority of the people from Central Asia choose Russia and Kazakhstan as their destination as well as some other foreign countries. Causes and patterns of migration in Kyrgyzstan as well as Central Asia are explained below.

Ethnic migration - outflow of people representing about 70% of a certain ethnic group (for instance, Crimean Tatars), out-migration according to ethnic or religious belonging. *Forced migration* is a movement of people because of political, economic or any other reasons, unemployment, instability in the country or religious factor. Throughout the world, there are multiple cases when people flee from natural calamities, wars, diseases, human-rights abuses such as forced labor or political persecution and/or the total loss of livelihood options, etc. *Labor migration* - voluntary movement of people in search of jobs beyond one's country as well as inflow of foreign citizens for waged labor. We identify unemployment as the main reason of migration in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan. Unemployment is a strong force, which urges young able-bodied and educated people to leave their home. Many of those leaving the country say that they cannot find jobs in the country [1]. They are virtually forced to leave the country to find a job for various expenditures like daily needs and goods, education, health etc.

Drug business, human trafficking are the levels of criminal structures that use migratory processes for their benefits. The main reason of drug and human trafficking is instability in the region, unsolved economic reasons, low level of education and culture. Very often, mountainous regions

become drug trafficking corridors. Migration, drug business and human trafficking are the direct consequences of political instability, lack of strict customs control and effective economic reforms. Much depends on organizations that deal with migration issues like OSCE, IOM and other international organizations. We need to more effectively organize the study, control and regulation of migratory processes in Kyrgyzstan as well as in Central Asia [2].

Increased drug business and human trafficking also result from a weak border policy in the country. More than 15% immigrants in Kyrgyzstan deal with drug selling. Human trafficking in Kyrgyzstan involves transportation of women as small traders and for sex business, and other purposes [1].

Illegal migration is a direct consequence of weak border control. Because a lack of strict passport control at the border one can easily pass the borders of Kyrgyzstan by counterfeiting documents. This is the way how the country becomes a home for various negative elements such as religious and criminal groups that aggravate the unstable situation in the country.

Illegal migration leads to increased international terrorism, religious extremism, and transnational crime that threaten international stability and security. It also results in worsening of overall international situation. There are currently 65.3 million people worldwide are forcibly displaced- roughly the population of France, out of which 21.3 million refugees, 40.8 million internally displaced people and 3.2 Asylum- seekers (UNO data for 2016), [3], compare 45 thousand refugees and immigrants (UNO data for 2002). In the conditions of Kyrgyzstan lack of national ideology can also cause migration. We cannot shield our distant provinces from the ideological influence of criminal structures such as religious extremism and international terrorism that recruit more people into their organizations by providing financial means.

Globalization is one of the main reasons of a migration situation in the world as well as in Kyrgyzstan. It has resulted in labor movement between labor markets. Migration from one country to another country has become a common phenomenon. Migration can be seen as a significant feature of livelihoods in developing countries is pursuit of better living standards. It is through migration that people become a part of a globalized world. Globalization has 2 aspects: *political aspect* - freedom of movement, international differentiation of labor, exchange of experience and skills, etc. *The economic aspect* involves the fact that people want to move where they can earn more money. Developing countries also get involved in the

globalization process, but they often lose because they are economically less developed as compared to developed countries. Often, large-scale in- and outflow of people endanger social and economic stability, particularly in countries already suffering from economic underdevelopment, political instability and ethnic tensions. Globalization is an objective and inevitable process, where migration is seen as a closely associated factor. It is important to improve procedures of citizenship acquisition and registration of migrants. It is also important to use Internet resources in order to explore the issues of migration and employment.

Despite the fact that the migration policy of the Kyrgyz Republic has been developed, in fact, it is still a lot to be done to meet the demands of time and its strategic implementation. Such legislative documents on migration issues as the Geneva Convention on refugees, the 2000 law of the Kyrgyz Republic on external migration and other legislative and normative documents often fail to work in the interests of migrants. It is necessary to improve the legislation on free trade zones and foreign investments in Kyrgyzstan.

The state migration policy in Kyrgyzstan has been shaped right after independence, which marked the peak of migratory processes across the former Soviet Union. In May 1993, Kyrgyzstan joined IOM as an observer and adopted the law on refugees in 1996.

Migratory processes are regulated according to bilateral agreements with Russia and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, the CIS Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union. Primarily, in 1997, an agreement was signed with UNHCR on the formation of a Migration Control Centre, which contributed to the development of migration policy of the Kyrgyz Republic. Later the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs succeeded in arranging the signing of an agreement between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on labor activities of migrants (particularly in agriculture). Kyrgyzstan and Turkey also established a visa-free regime, which allowed to start controlling the migratory processes in the early 1990s.

Migration policy of the Kyrgyz Republic is an open-door policy that aims at keeping other ethnic groups in their own countries. However, given intensifying globalization processes, increasing drug trafficking, organized crime it is important to thoroughly define and specify the national policy in the field of migration.

Internal and external factors conditioning migratory processes in Central Asia. In the last two decades Kyrgyzstan as well as other Central Asian republics has experienced a dramatic growth in internal and

international migration, especially from rural areas to urban centers.

Economic factors include lack of radical reforms, ecological threats (landslides, earthquakes, environmental pollution, etc.), political instability and conflicts (local, regional such as Tajik civil war), which, one way or another, affect not only Kyrgyzstan, but the whole Central Asian region as well.

Internal factors involve economic instability, weak operation of existing industrial enterprises, regional instability, unemployment, unsolved social problems, and discrimination. External factors include cultural and economic attractiveness of other developed countries, high salaries, better living standards and stable human security. The data for this demonstrate that 740 people from Kazakhstan came back to Kyrgyzstan compared to more than 3000 people who left Kyrgyzstan for Kazakhstan. These facts unmask the real picture of migration though they tend to change every year.

As it was mentioned, the main factor of migration is economic. For instance, no Russian-speaking person intends to leave the Baltic countries despite open infringement on their legitimate rights, because these countries are more developed economically as compared to Russia.

Internal problems include economic issues (migration of people from rural to urban areas that causes population misbalance), ethnic issues (outflow of Russians, Ukrainians and Germans from Kyrgyzstan). Central Asia is a transit zone between eastern countries and Europe. South-eastern countries are interested in economic development of Central Asia but we are not always able to use the opportunities that could lead us to economic prosperity. Japanese experience is often neglected, and things are done inadequately if this experience is used.

Impacts of migration in Central Asia. When interviewed (1) it was revealed that people made adjustments in their personal and sociocultural lives when they moved from one place to another. It is difficult to ascertain the true social or economic benefits of migration as there are many factors that affect analysis of benefits and costs involved in such movements. Secondly, the advantages and disadvantages of moving along are not symmetrical. Questions on the impact of migration were as follows:

- Does migration have demographic effects?
- How does migration affect social values?
- Does migration have favorable or unfavorable effect on people's lives?
- Does migration have economic advantages or not?

Demographic impact. It is known that migration has various demographic impacts in Kyrgyzstan. It changes sex ratio and the dependency

of labor force. Migration reduces male portion of population. Obviously the absence of young adult males increases the proportion of other population group, such as: women, children and old. But today young females are also group moving to urban areas as well as abroad leaving old parents and children behind. This lack of economically active population restricts the progress of economic and social development in the country.

Overall, migration from rural to urban areas is a problem that concerns all Central Asian republics. Disputed territories create additional conditions of conflict for migration. It is important to develop provinces as border lands abandoned by residents might be quickly occupied by communities of a foreign state, which might result in seizure of given territories by another state and thus lead to conflicts.

Economic impact. Migration of people certainly has an effect on the economy of the country. Migration affects supply of labor force. Majority of the able-bodied male population seems to be outside the country. The participants reported that majority of active male population, particularly from the south of the country was engaged in different economic sectors of Russia as migrant workers.

Also, migration is considered as an important source of income. In 2017 total amount of money transfer to Kyrgyzstan was 1,740 billion USD- compared to last 2016- 259.7 million USD (5). People think that migration is a significant source of income for migrants' families staying back in Kyrgyzstan. According to them, migrants usually bring back a larger part of their income. Families use money in Kyrgyzstan to buy food, clothes, pay for school and health and maintain other household expenses. Some families try to save money to buy a house or plot of land for building a new house. Remittances contribute to economic development of the country.

Social impact. The social status of people in the country has changed. Poor families have improved their economic status by purchasing houses or lands. Participants also talked about negative health effects of migration. They referred to media reports about increased cases of venereal diseases in the country. According to media reports, migrants picked diseases outside Kyrgyzstan and passed them to their wives and girlfriends in their home cities and villages.

Also, migration reveals unsolved gender issues. Some family heads and members do not return home at all. The absence of migrants for a long time creates social psychological anxiety and often results in rupture of families.

Relationship among family members has changed as well. Most

young, able-bodied males and females who migrated have chosen to live permanently in recipient countries by changing their citizenship and buying houses. Old parents, women and children stay back alone.

Any policy is nothing if anything substantial is done to meet the demand of time with the goal to work out the strategy for solving migration issues in Central Asia which include political, legal, socio-cultural, informational, educational, health, ecological-economic and security aspects that are connected with migration.

Identifying military-technical perspectives it should be noted that all problems of Central Asia started in the early years of Soviet dissolution, when the security system of the Soviet Union collapsed. Kyrgyzstan chose a peace-loving strategy. All military facilities were sold out, which made Kyrgyzstan extremely vulnerable militarily. The situation is now aggravated by lack of a military doctrine, economic strategy and heightened interethnic tension.

Proposed solution-Regional military security (Shanghai Cooperation Organization (ShCO), Organization of Treaty on Collective Security (OTCS), Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union that Kyrgyzstan became a member of. Not all Central Asian countries are aware that only together with neighboring countries we can prevent various negative phenomena associated with migratory processes.

In the past, the Kyrgyz Republic used to be a home, not as elsewhere, for 2 military airbases that represented 2 counterbalancing military forces. Russians and Americans never ever have been as close distance-wise to each other as in Kyrgyzstan. But what benefits did we have from this, except family business of high officials and intense outflow of migration. There were some employment opportunities, though limited. Nevertheless, it gave only a relative political stability in the country and in the whole region.

Meanwhile Uzbekistan has found a solution to a frontier control problem by having all borders mined (2000). As for Kyrgyzstan, it was seeking for a different solution of the problem. For that, we needed to undertake the following measures:

- it was necessary to strengthen customs control and service observation at the borders;
- qualified cadres had to be trained to work at borders with knowledge of local geographic conditions;
- border troops and army had to be equipped with relatively modern facilities.

Nowerdays, from political and legal perspectives we should mention opportunities taken: the states in the region demonstrated their political will in the solution of the problem. All states became concerned with the problem. This problem was also a matter of concern for international organizations (IOM, OSCE) and NGOs that were interested in regulating migration problems. There were also normative-legislative documents, bilateral, multilateral agreements signed on a regional level). These documents brought certainly visible strengths in the solution of migration problems: most obvious is the fact of effective cooperation in the area of migration issues to protect migrants' rights. Migrants must be informed about their rights in time. At the same there are certain cases of weaknesses such as: security threat (visa-free regime); declarative nature of normative-legislative documents; overpopulation of cities; lack of effective migration management levers; increased tension in border areas; lack of coordination and agreement between Central Asian states in relation to migration policy; there is no common legal space to implement migration policy; low awareness of migrants about existing legal documents. Solving migration issues are always accompanied by old type threats that tend to acquire new forms of expression such as: drug trafficking; arms trade; human trafficking; radicalized religious and violent extremism and fanaticism mixed with terrorism.

From socio-cultural, educational and health perspectives, certain things can be mentioned, as timely financing by states of healthcare institutions located in border areas; provision of health insurance for labor migrants; establishment of extreme healthcare service; state support to NGOs dealing with migration and employment; recruitment of young specialists into healthcare system in regions; organization and reform of military-healthcare service at the borders; organization of first-aid training; elimination of information shortage particularly in frontier areas; upgrading the education level in regions by attracting young specialists (teachers, doctors and others); organization of meaningful leisure activities for youth by conducting various cultural and educational activities and building cultural facilities; support to youth initiatives; popularization of a non-violence concept by introducing non-violent methods of conflict resolution and peaceful resolution of conflicts; correct provision of information to people about migration issues. The government also has to think about creating ethno-cultural associations of our citizens abroad and other measures to preserve cultural values of Kyrgyz migrants.

From security perspective, we can mention migration policy of the

Kyrgyz Republic which has been developed with less account for national security threats. The policy was excessively transparent and liberal, which was inadmissible at times under current frontier circumstances. It should be specified to give account for national interests of Kyrgyzstan in the field of security, such as preserving genetic fund, support for demography etc. Otherwise, the consequences are marginalization and criminalization of communities in the country that lay on the surface of migratory picture. Corruption in frontiers and customs control services also makes it difficult to ensure control over migratory processes in the country as well as in the region. The proposed solutions of the unsolved issues certainly include toughening of customs control at the borders; revision of agreements and treaties with bordering countries in order to maintain national interests of Kyrgyzstan; formation of an actually efficient control system in border areas; updating of a database on migrants; work with representatives of religions and control of their activities within a legal framework; control of the operation of mosques and medresehs to prevent distribution of anti-state, anti-national literature and separatist mood; increase level of education and culture in rural areas often paid less attention by the government.

As for ecological and economic perspective, they indicate the direct result of unsolved economic issues in Kyrgyzstan. The main reasons of migration from an economic perspective are unemployment and low living standards. This is why solution of migration problems depends primarily on the solution of economic and social problems. As Kyrgyzstan is an agrarian country and therefore the main focus should be on agricultural production and stimulation of domestic producers as it was practiced before, i.e. state purchase of agricultural products at market prices; widening of micro financing (external and state) system; introduce tax remissions and tax-free periods for farmers; abolition (reduction) of state duty on exported goods and reduction of customs duties on imported equipment for the agrarian sector of the republic; monitoring of market opportunities for agricultural products; formation and development of business competitions in the country to export competitive agricultural products. In this context certain ecological measures are preferable to be taken such as: development of an ecologically safe agrarian sector; use of modern technologies in agricultural production; building waste processing plants; use of biogas facilities (like in China) to process waste in order to produce fertilizers and energy.

Another big and disputable issue could be taxation guarantees to migrants. It is also the demand of time to provide migrants with an access to information through websites to keep them informed with local events while

they are abroad.

In conclusion we see the necessity of developing and updating existing state migration policy for short-, mid- and long-term measures, including political and legal regulations of migratory processes as well as interstate fence-mending and development of cooperation on mutually advantageous terms.

As it is seen in practice people migrate from Kyrgyzstan for various socio-economic reasons, the so-called «push-pull factors». The major reasons for migration can be attributed to the unemployment, lack of food, poverty, and interest in economic well-being. Such factors cause the desire of people to leave their own places for other ones. The pull factors are inwardly associated with push factors. Despite being unskilled and patriots of their homeland, people prefer job availability, more cash and other social benefits.

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