

Eurasian Economic Union: Problems and Perspectives of Labour Migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russia

By

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Today, migration affects over three million people in the Kyrgyz Republic and will remain a significant economic and social factor in the foreseeable future. Every fourth household in the country i.e., around 26 per cent has at least one labour migrant.¹ High rates of unemployment, low wages, political instability, and corruption in the public administration system of Kyrgyzstan have negatively affected the external labour migration of citizens. According to the latest official data around 1,118,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan work in foreign countries: 1,063,000 in Russia; about 30,000 in Kazakhstan; 20,000 in Turkey; 10,000 in the USA and Arab countries; 6,000 in Germany, Canada, and Italy; and more than 5,000 labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan in South Korea. In addition, 76,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan cannot enter Russia because they are on the “blacklist.” The share of labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan to the Russian Federation is 80 per cent, and Kazakhstan is in second place with about 15 per cent.²

Part of the labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russia work in the black economy, and even within the Eurasian Economic Union, there are difficulties with the legalisation of their employment, which means their significant vulnerability to the employer. The Eurasian Economic Union Treaty between Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Armenia came into force in January 2015, with Kyrgyzstan joining in August 2015. The Treaty provides for the free movement of goods, people, services, and capital. Migration between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan makes up a small part of the labour migrant flows, and therefore the provisions for the free movement of labour are not particularly controversial for these three countries alone. However, the accession of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan had a visible impact on the labour markets in Russia.³ The total number of labour migrants in the EAEU is estimated at 1,647,000 people.⁴ Most of them work in Russia. About a million of them are citizens of

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Kyrgyzstan, about 300,000 migrants belong to Armenia, and the rest are citizens of Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Eight years have passed since Kyrgyzstan became a member of the EAEU. One of the main goals of Kyrgyzstan in joining this Union was the free movement of labour. According to the Treaty, labour migrants can stay in the host country as long as they have a valid employment contract.⁵ The Member States shall cooperate and coordinate policies in the field of labour migration within the EAEU, as well as assist in the organised recruitment and attracting employees from one Member State to another.⁶ Changes in legislation in Russia liberalised employment conditions for foreign migrants. For example, since 2015, Kyrgyz migrants do not need to get a patent to work in Russia or work permission. Despite all the positive changes, the protection of labour rights of migrants working in Russia remains outside the area of priorities in the EAEU. The facilitation of employment documentation is not accompanied by the establishment of protection mechanisms against unscrupulous employers. Family members of working migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russia are in a vulnerable situation and there is no comprehensive format or financing mechanisms for their adaptation and integration. Children of working migrants do not have full or open access to Russian schools. The problem of retraining and requalification of working migrants remains outside the sphere of priorities of the EAEU.

Within the framework of the EAEU, the basic rights of workers are enshrined in the founding Treaty. The Treaty plays a backbone role in integration and is the starting point for the development of a common labour market. Article 1 enshrines the implementation of four freedoms within the EAEU necessary for building a common market, viz, freedom of movement of goods, services, capital, and labour. One of the goals of the Union enshrined in Article 4 of the Treaty is the desire to form a single market for goods, services, capital, and labour resources within the Union. Issues of labour migration are regulated by Section XXVI of the Treaty which consists of only 3 Articles. It is important to consolidate several concepts in Article 96 of the Treaty. Labour activity is understood as an activity based on an employment contract or activity for the performance of work (rendering of services) based on civil law contract, carried out on the territory of the state of employment in accordance with the legislation of that state. The EAEU Treaty for the first time extended activities to workers not only under an employment contract but also under a civil law which significantly expanded its scope of legal regulation in terms of persons. The Treaty does not use the concept of a migrant worker; instead, the definition of “worker of a Member State” is fixed which means a person who is a citizen of a Member State, legally located and legally working in the territory of the state of employment, of which he is not a citizen and in which he does not permanently reside.

Based on the provisions of Articles 97 and 98 of the EAEU Treaty the following rights of the workers in the Union are guaranteed:

1. **Free implementation of labour activity without considering restrictions on the protection of the national labour market:** Article 97 of the Treaty prohibits Member States from establishing and applying restrictions through legislation to protect the national labour market, except restrictions to ensure national security and public order, in relation to the labour activity carried out by the workers of the Member States, the type of occupation and the territory of residence. The wording of this Article, at first glance, is aimed at providing migrant workers from the Member States with a labour regime equal to the labour regime of citizens in the state of employment. But in reality, it is about maintaining the possibility of applying measures to protect the national market at the will of the state. Workers of the Member States are not required to obtain a work permit in the state of employment. However, the Treaty maintains that migrant labour working in a Member State other than their own will be governed by the legislation of the state of employment.

2. **Recognition of education documents:** The state of employment recognises the education documents issued by educational institutions of the Member States, without carrying out procedures for the recognition of documents on education. The rule of not having to recognise documents of education does not apply to engaging in teaching, legal, medical, or pharmaceutical activities in another Member State.

3. **Simplified procedure for staying in the territory of the state of employment:** Within 30 days from the date of entry into the territory of another Member State to carry out labour activities or employment, citizens of a Member State and family members are exempted from the obligation to register. If this period of stay is exceeded, these citizens are required to register in accordance with the law of the host state. It is important that the Treaty establishes the right of the worker in the event of early termination of an employment or civil law contract after the expiration of 90 days from the date of entry into the territory of the Member State of employment without leaving the territory of the Member State of employment within 15 days to conclude a new labour or civil law contract.

4. **Simplified entry procedure:** Citizens of a Member State, when entering the territory of another Member State, use migration cards. However, if the period of stay does not exceed 30 days, citizens can enter the territory of a Member State using one of the valid documents that allow border control authorities to mark the crossing of the state border. In this case, they are exempted from using a migration card.

5. **Offset of labour (insurance) experience:** The length of service of workers of the Member States shall be counted in the total labour (insurance) length of service for social security (social insurance). This rule does not apply to pensions. Pension provision for workers of the Member States and family

members is regulated by the legislation of the state of permanent residence, and by a separate international treaty between Member States.

6. **The right to social security:** Migrant workers from the Member States and their family members are treated as equals in social security rights with citizens of the state of employment. However, the agreement does not apply to pensions.

Article 98 also establishes several other rights, like the right to join trade unions, the right to receive information from the employer regarding the procedure for his stay, and the conditions for carrying out labour activities, etc. Children of an employee of a Member State staying with him in another state of employment shall have the right to attend pre-school institutions and receive education following the legislation of the host state where they are employed. Workers have a general duty to comply with the legislation of the state of employment, respect the culture and traditions of the peoples of the state of employment, and bear responsibility for offences committed in contravention of the legislation of the state of employment.

The most difficult problem faced by labour migrants is registration at their place of residence. Citizens of an EAEU Member State who arrived for work activity or employment in the territory of another Member State shall be exempt from the obligation to register (registration) for 30 days from the date of entry. In the case of stay of a national of one Member State in the territory of another Member State for more than 30 days from the date of entry, these citizens are required to register (registration) in accordance with the legislation of the State of entry, if such obligation is established by the legislation of the state of entry.⁷ The migrants and their family members may be in the Russian Federation without registration for up to 30 days. The Russian system of registration at the place of residence, which replaced the Soviet *Propiska*, seriously impedes not only the development of migration processes within the EAEU but also complicates the free flow of labour within Russia itself. The main problem is renting housing, as apartment owners are very reluctant to register foreign labour migrants in their living space, who, in turn, cannot officially register because of this. Moreover, there are no systemic associations of trade unions in the EAEU, and the trade unions themselves do little to protect the labour rights of both local and foreign workers. If labour migrants do not register on time at their place of residence, they cannot use any of the opportunities created by the union, in other words, they will join the group of illegal migrants.

A whole series of difficulties and problems, including corruption, have arisen around the registration, which has a controlling rather than a reporting nature. In November 2018, criminal liability was introduced for illegal registration of migrants in non-residential premises. Previously, the law applied only to owners of so-called “one-size-fits-all” apartments, where several thousand migrants were falsely registered in some cases. The amendments have now removed the phrase “residential premises” and extended the liability to owners of “accommodating” offices, all non-residential premises, including

warehouses, factories, offices, and apartments. According to the survey, carried out by Tyuryukanova E.V. in 2010, the youngest women migrants from the CIS countries were Kyrgyz migrants (average age 31 years), and the oldest migrants came from Georgia (average age 41 years).⁸ The results of our survey are in line with these figures. Respondents by age: 18–24 years around 34 per cent; 25–30 years around 33.3 per cent; 31–35 years around 14.7 per cent, 36–44 years around 10 per cent; 45–55 years around 8 per cent. The majority of migrants are between 18 and 30 years old. For 72 per cent of the respondents, the main reason to migrate was economic. 67.3 per cent said that remittances were essential as the earned money would be sent over for household expenses. Other reasons for migration include housing construction (42 per cent), saving money (36.7 per cent), children's education (31.3 per cent), repaying loans (20 per cent), and marriage and funeral ceremonies (10.6 per cent). Earning money in Russia does not always satisfy migrants. When asked: "Are you satisfied with the money you earn in Russia?" they would answer the most important is to buy the most necessary things and save the extra money (58.7 per cent); buy the most necessary things but cannot save money (21.3 per cent); buy only necessary things (7.3 per cent); there is not enough money (12.7 per cent).

According to Article 98 of the EAEU Treaty, the section on migration contains a provision on the right of the worker to the unhindered transfer of funds. This right is of great importance not only for remuneration for the work of an employee but also for the life of a family/household in the country of origin of the migrant. It is violated without any agreement with the countries concerned and without even coordinating the restrictions introduced with the EEC of the EAEU. Thus, in April 2019, the Central Bank of Russia introduced limits on the amount of monthly transfers (within 30 calendar days) from Russia to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.⁹ There is no supranational body that would have the right to cancel this decision of the national institution and punish it for this violation. Therefore, the problem was submitted for discussion at the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council of the Heads of Government of the EAEU countries.

Within the framework of the EAEU Treaty, the Member States shall mutually recognise documents on education issued by educational organisations without having to pass the procedures established by the legislation of the country of destination. Under the legislation of the Russian Federation labour migrants following appropriate procedures as directed by law may be admitted to teaching, legal, medical, or pharmaceutical activities respectively. The rights of taxi drivers coming from Kyrgyzstan should be highlighted. Drivers from Kyrgyzstan can exercise their national rights in Russia, which is an advantage over migrant taxi drivers from other countries. As for the literacy of migrants in Kyrgyzstan, most of them around 32.9 per cent have special secondary education, 28 per cent have higher education, 20.7 per cent have secondary education, and 14.6 per cent have not completed higher education. Unfortunately, in most cases, the level of educational qualification of the migrants does not allow them to get a good job in their profession. When they first arrived in Russia, 19.3 per cent of migrants said the biggest problem was finding a job. To overcome this situation, migrants continue to work willingly

in any job. Migrants from Kyrgyzstan are widely involved in the cleaning sector; every fifth migrant from Kyrgyzstan works there.¹⁰ This lowers the social status of migrants and undermines their self-confidence. Many migrants say that they are depressed but are used to the pressures of life. In general, 39.3 per cent of Kyrgyz migrants work in the cleaning sector, 18.7 per cent work in the service sector, 18 per cent in trade, and 16.7% of migrants do not do any work. At present, all listed sectors of employment are “spheres of risk” due to the peculiarities of labour relations in these types of employment, and the absence of legal channels of labour migration makes their situation even more precarious. In the event of a conflict, many migrants (about 48.7 per cent) rely on the assistance of the Russian consulate in the country; 2 per cent know about the existence of non-governmental organisations and rely on them; 44.7 per cent rely on friends, relatives, and acquaintances; 4.7 per cent on independent lawyers, attorneys.

According to the research, 81.7 per cent of respondents have children. Not all took their children to Russia. About 47.8 per cent left all their children in their homeland and 40.6 per cent took all their children with them. 11.6 per cent of respondents have one of their children left at home. There are instances where children do not live with their parents since as labour migrants, they cannot properly take care of their children in Russia (36.2 per cent) and it is difficult to work with their children in Russia because their parents want to earn money (this reason was mentioned by 29.8 per cent of parents). Many migrant parents do not want to take their children out of school (17 per cent), and due to the higher cost of childcare in Russia (17 per cent). These children living apart from their parents had to face serious difficulties due to lack of parental supervision and control, especially when the father or mother or both are absent. Children of labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan do not have the same access to education. Admission to kindergarten is more difficult than school admission. 39.6 per cent of children of junior age go to kindergarten, and 35.8 per cent of children do not go to kindergarten because their parents had difficulties in enrolling them in kindergarten. Another 7.5 per cent of the respondents reported that not all children of junior age go to kindergarten, and 11.3 per cent of respondents said that their children do not need kindergarten. As a rule, the lack of registration and the lack of places in kindergartens are the main obstacles to admission to kindergarten.

Access to school for school-aged children is better with 84.7 per cent of children going to school. Children of 15.3 per cent of parents do not go to school. 72.5 per cent of school-aged children had problems entering school and kindergartens. All of these problems are related to the lack of registration of the child from abroad at the place of residence, which is necessary for electronic enrollment in the school, and the lack of vacancies in schools located near the family’s place of residence. According to experts, children from Kyrgyzstan have better access to schools. In general, Russian schools treat children from Kyrgyzstan well. This was noted by approximately 80 per cent of parents while 5 per cent of parents showed disapproval. It should be noted that parents who were not working officially had a significantly higher level of negative attitudes toward their children at school (around 7 per cent). Due to

poor knowledge of the Russian language, or inconsistency of knowledge with the level of the class in which they are suitable by age, children who are not citizens of the Russian Federation are admitted to Russian schools with a loss of 1-2 years of education. In the near and medium term, it can be assumed that the number of children from Kyrgyzstan in Russian schools will gradually increase, as migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia is feminised and such migrants are increasingly coming to Russia with their families or marrying and settling in Russia.

The access to medical services by labour migrants in the country of employment has not been fully resolved in the EAEU. EAEU citizens who legally work in Russia, have a valid employment contract and taxes paid by the employer, and have free access to Compulsory Health Insurance (CHI), on an equal basis with Russian citizens. However, competent authorities in Russia do not advertise and systematically disseminate information about free CHI among labour migrants from the EAEU. Russian insurance companies also do not inform labour migrants from the EAEU about the possibilities of free medical care. Migrants from Kyrgyzstan are not aware of their right to receive a CHI in Russia. Previously migrants were well informed of the free medical services, this has not yet been observed about CHI. In Russia, only labour migrants have access to CHI and do not cover their family members. About half of the parents (47 per cent) take their children to doctors for prevention or visit the doctor only when it is necessary (45 per cent) as medical policy is expensive and not all migrant parents can afford it. Families with several children are in a difficult situation.

Changes in Russian legislation in 2015 liberalised employment conditions for labour migrants from the EAEU. According to the opinion of 45 per cent of Kyrgyz migrants, the changes have greatly facilitated their employment. According to 31 per cent, it has become a little easier for them to find a job. Only 8 per cent of the surveyed Kyrgyz people believe that the changes did not help them find a job, and another 5 per cent indicated that there were no changes in employment. It has become easier for Kyrgyz migrants to get a job because employers prefer to hire citizens of the EAEU so that they pay less tax. 13 per cent is kept the same as citizens of Russia. As labour migrants tend to seek employment through diasporic connections, this sometimes puts them at risk, leaving them vulnerable to fraud without considering the option of formalising a contract. Nowadays, they use the services of intermediaries from their diaspora and formalise fake employment contracts for registration. No one pays any taxes unless there are contracts in place. This leads to very bad consequences. Labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan to the Russian Federation have to face several problems especially as they are not well aware of the migration legislation of either the Russian Federation or the Kyrgyz Republic, which directly affects their legal status, employment opportunities as well as conditions for social adaptation, which leads to illegal migration. The socially unprotected migrants, on the one hand, formed the social basis of ethnic criminal groups, and on the other hand, quite often become victims of conflict squabbles. Under these conditions, Kyrgyz labour migrants complain about non-payment of wages and harassment by employers

from Russia. 32.9 per cent of respondents said they have no employment contract. Some migrants consider there is no need for an employment contract (10.3 per cent); for a few the employer does not deem it necessary (20.5 per cent); a few had recently got a job and did not have the contract yet (2.6 per cent); while others did not think about it (10.3 per cent); many thought that everyone works the same way (43.6 per cent); many works with new client/customer each time (10.3 per cent); familiarity with the employer was also a cause for not going into the contract (3.2 per cent). Migrants do not understand that such a decision creates many problems for them. If there are violations by the employer, such as non-payment of wages, ordering additional work in addition to the work assigned, violence, use of force, etc., they will lose the opportunity to defend their rights in Russian courts. In 2019, the Department of External Migration under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic received 255 complaints on non-payment of wages amounting to RUB45,064,500 to 833 citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic. As a result of the activities carried out by the employees of the Department (visits and negotiations, correspondence), the above citizens were paid RUB12,455,400.¹¹ If migrants knew the migration law of the Russian Federation, they would not make such a decision. 64.7 per cent of migrants are not fully aware of Russian law; 12 per cent of migrants do not know; 23.3 per cent of migrants have information on the law.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation has an electronic database informally known as the “black list” which contains data on foreign citizens whose entry into Russia has been restricted. The list includes persons who worked without filling out the necessary documents, exceeded the period of legal stay, or violated Russian migration legislation in any other form. Among the citizens of the EAEU Member States, the largest number of entry bans were issued to citizens of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan even before the accession of both countries to the Treaty on the EAEU. To date, the situation with the inclusion of labour migrants from the EAEU in the “black lists” remains unstable and acute. From 2014 to 2016 The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs issued 145,218 entry bans against citizens of Kyrgyzstan, of which 55,018 were lifted in the same period. 51,578 citizens of Kyrgyzstan out of 90,200 remain on the “black list” and the entry ban could only be lifted upon judicial review. Since November 2018, based on the results of bilateral negotiations between the Presidents of Russia and Kyrgyzstan, citizens of Kyrgyzstan who were banned from entering Russia can return after checking themselves against the database on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. Citizens of Kyrgyzstan who violated the migration legislation of Russia and continued to stay on its territory had the opportunity from October 16 to December 10, 2018, to freely leave the Russian Federation and return to their home state. In 2023 there were about 76,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan on the “black list” of which only about 47,000 people fell under the amnesty.

Employment of migrants of Kyrgyzstan in foreign labour markets reduces the overall level of unemployment in the country, positively affects the financial position of their families, and contributes to the achievement of

individual goals of development of the Kyrgyz Republic. Foreign labour migrants get acquainted with the culture of other countries and peoples, acquire foreign languages, adopt new technologies, and professional skills, and establish new contacts.¹² Money received by labour migrants abroad is positively influenced by the social structure of Kyrgyzstan, increasing the middle class, and, accordingly, reducing the category of the poor and the very poor. The positive results of leaving their homeland, determined by the migrants themselves, show that the money they earn is mainly spent on food (9.3 per cent), education of children (34 per cent), and improvement of housing conditions (68 per cent). The business experience gained by the migrants abroad has a positive impact not only on migrants themselves and their households but also on the economy of Kyrgyzstan. Entrepreneurship is a hope and a positive future for this country, as it opens up opportunities to reduce the outflow of the economically active population of Kyrgyzstan to the Russian Federation.

Currently, there is a significant migration flow from EAEU countries to Russia which includes highly qualified specialists as well. As a result, Russia receives a category of migrants with new cultural traditions that require their adaptation to new living conditions. According to experts, the improvement of the migration situation in the country can be facilitated by the socialisation of migrants due to their success in the professional sphere, the opportunity to occupy work niches that correspond to their capabilities, and the development of the system of training specialists in popular specialities. At the same time, there is a psychological and sociocultural problem of adaptation of migrants. This process has a two-way effect. The perception of migrants by the local population plays an important part. In general, according to the opinion of the surveyed migrants, the local population of the Russian Federation looks favourably on Kyrgyz people. For example, almost two-thirds of respondents (61 per cent) say that the local population treats them well, and a quarter (26 per cent) said that they would have a neutral attitude. A few respondents said that the local population treats them with hostility (5 per cent), and there are more registered workers (7.3 per cent) than undocumented workers (4.4 per cent). The latter, Kyrgyz people who work officially are more local than those who work informally. They found that they worked with residents and were in direct competition with them for jobs, so they often felt discriminated against. Labour migrants with high-quality skills who are much sought-after in the working sector in destination countries (although they are a minority in number when considered the bulk of labour migrants from a country) often obtain permanent residence after receiving the required positions and higher wages in the host country, since the average monthly salary of Kyrgyzstan cannot meet their needs. The difference in wages between Kyrgyzstan and Russia, therefore, should be addressed to solve the problem of migration of skilled workers.

The dependence of the family on remittances leads to serious risks for the socio-economic security of the country. Therefore, the Government of Kyrgyzstan should seriously consider the possibility of reducing dependence on migration. One way to reduce emigration is to create new employment opportunities in Kyrgyzstan through foreign direct investment which will reduce the outflow of citizens and allow them to earn a profitable income in

the state, thereby reducing family dependency on remittances. Kyrgyzstan needs a qualitative improvement in education. Currently, higher education is a formal process that has nothing to do with future employment. According to the National Statistical Committee, more than 33,000 specialists graduate annually. Annually more than 70 per cent of university students graduate in humanities (economics, law, management, education).¹³ Kyrgyzstan needs technical specialists for the development of the energy complex, mining sectors, as well as agricultural specialists (these sectors are a priority according to the national strategy). Graduates generally cannot find a job in their speciality and are forced to look for vacancies in other countries. There is a need for qualitative transformation of educational processes in the Republic and an increase in the number of highly qualified personnel who will be in demand in the labour market. Initiatives should be taken to improve investment through legislative measures to protect the interests of investors and consider the possibility of attracting investments from EAEU countries which will create additional jobs thereby reducing the level of migration.

At present, there is an urgent need to develop and implement a coordinated migration policy for the EAEU Member States. To this end, state and interstate bodies should develop and implement common programs and foster cooperation in every possible way in the field of regulating migration processes. It is necessary to intensify the development of the interstate legal framework in the field of migration regulation. Particular attention should be paid to the issues of ensuring the freedom of movement of labour in the territory of EAEU countries to reduce the problem of illegal labour migration. Within the framework of EAEU, it is necessary to eliminate any manifestations of discrimination against citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic when moving and finding employment on the territory of the Member States of the Union. The entry of the Kyrgyz Republic into the EAEU created good conditions for labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan to stay and find a job. For the effective deployment of labour resources, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic needs to intensify work on the development of an effective migration policy. State authorities should develop cooperation in the field of regulation of migration processes. New socio-economic relations in the migration sphere should serve the interests of all EAEU countries. In the coming years, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic should direct the main part of measures to regulate migration processes to reduce the level of spontaneity of external labour migration of the population. It is necessary to learn the benefits of integration into a single labour market. For the Republic, the need to create and implement long-term measures to send excess labour abroad, to implement a policy of attracting cash transfers of labour migrants for the development of the national economy of Kyrgyzstan, has become of particular importance,

Migration flows from Kyrgyzstan require proper regulation and a move away from spontaneity. Kyrgyzstan and Russia are introducing necessary mechanisms for managing the migration process to fully utilise the potential of external labour migration. For example, the Government of Kyrgyzstan created the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018–2040, as well as the Development Program of the Kyrgyz Republic as “Unity.

Confidence. Creation” for the period 2018–2022. In January 2021, the President of Kyrgyzstan signed a Decree “On taking measures aimed at improving the migration situation.” Speaking about the prospects for migration policy in general for the entire EAEU and in particular the migration relations between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, it is important to note that there is a need for the initiative to create an electronic labour exchange information portal that would incorporate everything related to the labour markets of all five EAEU Member countries. The “Eurasian Electronic Labor Exchange” project is planned to be implemented in the future. However, the “Work Without Borders” search system is now operational which is the first joint digital project in the Eurasian space that started in 2021 and is the basis for the implementation of a larger project to create a common electronic labour exchange information system.

The present Russia-Ukraine war has a negative effect on the country’s economy particularly on migrant remittances. It also influenced the fate of migrants as they were drawn into this conflict. Since the beginning of the armed conflict in Ukraine, local media have written about at least fifteen natives of Kyrgyzstan who died. At least four of them were serving sentences for crimes committed in Russian prisons.¹⁴ The Russian authorities recruit migrants from the region and send them to the conflict zone to fight or restore destroyed infrastructure. Despite the high risks involved and warnings from the authorities of the Central Asian countries hundreds or even thousands of migrants are still working in the occupied lands. Most are involved in rebuilding destroyed cities like Mariupol and Donetsk, while others are digging trenches and collecting corpses on the front lines. Women work in military hospitals, canteens, and factories in eastern Ukraine. Job advertisements are published on major websites like Headhunter, Avito, or regional resources, as well as distributed through social networks, migrant communities, or directly through advertising placed by construction companies. Employers promise to cover travel expenses to Ukraine, as well as provide workers with housing, food, and overall expenses. Monthly salaries range from \$2,000–3,300, much more than what migrants can earn in Russia. It sounds tempting in words, but in practice, in the occupied regions of Ukraine, migrants face the same problems as in Russia like insanitary conditions, lack of heating, rude treatment by employers, etc. There are many reports of migrants being underpaid or not being paid at all. Not to mention the fact that now these people are under the threat of criminal prosecution in Kyiv or their native countries as they are being considered as accomplices of Russian aggression. There were cases when frustrated migrants tried to leave Ukraine, but Russian border guards forced them to return to the front line.

Russia remains the main destination for labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan. The geographical proximity, good knowledge of the Russian language and culture by the inhabitants of the region, and the urgent need for workers in the Russian economy keep Moscow in Kyrgyzstan’s migration orbit. The simplified procedure for obtaining citizenship by highly qualified workers like doctors and engineers from the former Soviet Republics adds to the attractiveness. The economic cost of the war on the one hand limits

opportunities in Russia but with large numbers of ethnic Russians moving out of their country to escape mobilisation and draft, opportunities are opening for migrants. While evaluating these optimistic possibilities, one needs to look into the profile of Russians leaving the country and the skills of migrants from Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, news of Kyrgyz and Tajik migrants being encouraged to join the war efforts and being returned in body bags may restrict the movement. This would not of course have any significant impact on female migrants for the moment. However, it would be interesting to know the areas in which the female migrants work (for men it is mainly construction and transport) and whether they move as parts of families or as single individuals.

Conclusion: Constraints and Recommendations

The existing system of recruitment with the help of compatriots perpetuates informal employment practices and preserves the vulnerable position of migrants, and protecting their rights becomes more difficult. In the event of conflict situations, labour migrants in Russia have little chance of protecting their labour rights through the courts, in an official way. Since Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, procedures for legal residence and work for migrants and their family members have been simplified, and access to health care and education for children has improved. However, since most Kyrgyz migrants remain undocumented and those who migrate legally often do not have a written employment contract, they cannot exercise these rights and therefore remain very vulnerable. Laws, policies, and practices regarding migration, both in Kyrgyzstan and in the main destination countries, do not yet incorporate a rights-based approach that is gender and age-sensitive. Unfortunately, most migrants from Kyrgyzstan do not sign employment contracts due to a lack of legal literacy. As a result, they are discriminated against and tortured by their employers and are forced to adapt. Thus, labour migration in the conditions of the single market of the EAEU has become a stimulating factor for the economies of all Members of the alliance. The Government of Kyrgyzstan believes that labour migration is a positive factor in reducing unemployment and reducing social tension. This allows citizens to leave their country to work to support their families through remittances. Considering the problems faced by migrants in the host country, it can be concluded that the Member States of the EAEU still have a lot of work to do to improve the management of immigration relations. As for the migrants from Kyrgyzstan, despite the current difficulties with work and housing abroad, their number continues to increase. Because the domestic labour market does not create new jobs for them at home and the number of unemployed is increasing every year. Although within the framework of the integration association, the possibility of free movement of labour was announced, it must be understood that there are many restrictions on the actual implementation of this possibility. There are still differences of interest between countries that import labour and countries that export labour.

Summing up the results of the study, we can say that the processes of labour migration in the post-Soviet space have undergone great changes over

the past few decades. Eurasian integration has become an incentive to create a completely effective mechanism for managing labour migration. The benefits of creating a union include: simplifying migrants' access to new labour markets, increasing the level of their social security, and legalising a significant part of the migration flow. It is these aspects that contributed to the intensification of migration exchanges between the EAEU Member countries. At the same time, we must not forget about problematic issues in the migration sphere of the EAEU, which require solutions that do not allow full use of the potential. Points that need to be addressed usually include the lack of joint programs of the Member States, in our case, Russia and Kyrgyzstan, according to professional training, language training programs, and most importantly, the lack of an established mechanism for the organised recruitment of migrant workers, and preparation of their employment process in their home country. As practice shows, the necessary infrastructure and information are lacking to implement these tasks. However, further cooperation between Member countries can overcome the existing imperfections. The dynamics of migration processes from the Kyrgyz Republic to the Russian Federation generally reflect the positive nature of labour migration. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, labour migration plays both a positive and negative role. As noted earlier, the active remittances of migrants to their homeland make a significant contribution to the GDP of Kyrgyzstan; migration, in essence, reduces the number of unemployed in the country, which has a positive effect on social stability in society. However, it posits risks for society such as dismantling the institution of family, loss of landed property of the migrants in their homeland, etc. For Kyrgyzstan, external labour migration brings both great benefits and potential dangers. It is necessary to advise labour migrants to get a legal job and to improve their basic knowledge of the migration law of the host country.

The Kyrgyz Republic should stress pre-migration activities i.e., explain the importance of legal employment to labour migrants from the Kyrgyz Republic to the Russian Federation, create information work on issues of medical care, stimulate the creation of a training system for labour migrants in the Kyrgyz Republic before departure. It is appropriate to create a special pre-departure training program for migrants, which includes language training, a short legal course, cultural studies, a country studies course, and a course on general life skills necessary for a good life in the EAEU country chosen for migration. It is also necessary to protect the rights of labour migrants, organise the labour force, exchange information on vacancies, license private employment agencies, and develop the housing rental market. For some Kyrgyz migrants, the problem of the "black list" has not yet been resolved. There is still a risk that migrants will be included in such lists. These issues should be resolved in a short period of time. Improving information about the processes of labour migration in the EAEU will reap positive results. Reporting their current problems through mass media, creating periodical TV and radio programs about migration processes in EAEU on central TV and radio channels of the Kyrgyz Republic, using social networks (mainly Instagram and Facebook) and messengers (mainly WhatsApp) to spread knowledge about orderly and safe migration practices will help in a better transit of migrants and

a life of dignity in the host countries. The Kyrgyz Government should bring regulations for the centralised collection and analysis of statistics and results of studies on labour migrants from the Kyrgyz Republic, including family members of labour migrants (conducted within the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as in the Russian Federation). Development of a special Internet service for Kyrgyz citizens in the Russian Federation, including children who go there with their parents who are labour migrants, to learn the Russian language. Learning Russian (and with children) can include fragments of Soviet and Russian cartoons, films, songs, and fairy tales, which allows migrants and their children to learn Russian and get acquainted with Russian culture at the same time. It is considered appropriate to create such applications for mobile phones (smartphones) and personal computers.

The Eurasian Economic Commission should try to develop separate regulatory legal acts that will establish a legal mechanism within the boundaries of the EAEU for easier labour movement. Active involvement of primary and secondary vocational education institutions for training and retraining personnel in new joint projects within the EAEU can become an important component of the new policy in terms of educational migration. For example, there is talk of training and retraining of working professionals in EAEU countries. In the case of financing educational programs from a special fund, new specialities would be introduced, and training and retraining for working with new technologies, new materials, etc., would be organised. In addition, the money transferred by the families of labour migrants for the education of their children at home would also be re-directed to occupations relevant to the labour market of the EAEU, and the coordination of structural changes in the education market of the EAEU and orientation to the training of personnel in the required professions would be the financial responsibility of the EAEU. It is necessary to introduce modern digital technologies in the field of employment within the EAEU. The Russian Federation should also strive for the creation of specialised structural units/departments responsible for accounting and maintaining statistics of persons who arrived from the EAEU to carry out labour activities in Russia. A change in the registration system is necessary. In Russia, statistics on taxes paid by migrants should be prepared and migrants to be allotted a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN).

Notes

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