

## Forced emigration from Russia 2022: Russian IT-specialists' potential for Central Asian CIS member countries

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### Abstract

The article examines the factors and the scale of a forced emigration's new wave from Russia to Central Asian countries. Wages in Central Asian countries are one of the factors in attracting highly qualified specialists from Russia. Such factors also include the potential of Russian IT-specialists in Central Asian countries and the policy of Central Asian countries to attract and retain IT-specialists from Russia. Emigration from Russia to Central Asian countries is a new wave of forced emigration. Various categories of people are leaving Russia: from ordinary emigrants to highly qualified specialists and also IT specialists. The active policy of the Central Asian countries to attract and retain specialists from Russia, as well as the visa-free regime between the Central Asian countries and Russia played a big role in choosing countries for the professionals' migration from Russia. For the Central Asian country this is a new impetus for the development of an innovative economy. The article purpose is to identify the features of forced emigration from Russia to the Central Asian countries that are Commonwealth of Independent States' members, as well as the prospects for using the potential of IT specialists in the development of Central Asian member countries of Commonwealth of Independent States.

### Keywords

Forced Russian emigration 2022, IT-specialists, emigration policy in the Central Asian countries of CIS, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

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# Вынужденная эмиграция из России 2022: потенциал российских IT-специалистов для центральноазиатских стран-участниц СНГ

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## Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются факторы и масштабы новой волны вынужденной эмиграции из России в страны Центральной Азии. Заработная плата в странах Центральной Азии является одним из факторов привлечения высококвалифицированных специалистов из России. К таким факторам также относятся потенциал российских IT-специалистов в странах Центральной Азии и политика центральноазиатских стран для привлечения и сохранения IT-специалистов из России. Эмиграция из России в страны Центральной Азии – это новая волна вынужденной эмиграции. Россию покидают различные категории людей: от обычных эмигрантов до высококвалифицированных специалистов, в том числе IT-специалистов. Активная политика стран Центральной Азии по привлечению и сохранению IT-специалистов из России, а также безвизовый режим между странами Центральной Азии и Россией сыграли большую роль в выборе стран для миграции профессионалов из России. Для стран региона Центральной Азии – это новый импульс для развития инновационной экономики. Цель статьи заключается в выявлении особенностей вынужденной эмиграции из России в центральноазиатские страны, входящие в состав Содружества Независимых Государств, а также перспективы использования потенциала IT-специалистов в развитии центральноазиатских стран – участниц Содружества Независимых Государств.

## Ключевые слова

Вынужденная эмиграция из России 2022, IT-специалисты, эмиграционная политика стран СНГ, Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан, Узбекистан

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Russian IT-specialists have always played a big role in the development of the IT sphere in Central Asian countries, since all IT technologies of these countries operate in Russian language. But after the imposing of new economic sanctions by the countries of the European Union (EU) and the United States against Russia, which led to the complete or partial closure of many foreign companies, the depreciation of the ruble occurred, which became one of the main reasons for the emigration of IT specialists from Russia [1].

Historically, the main inflows of emigrants to Central Asian countries were other migrants from Central Asian States. The current status of Central Asian countries for emigration is that Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are donor countries, and Kazakhstan is as recipient country, and the main inflows of emigrants to these countries are the Central Asian migrants themselves.

Forced emigration in the research means that the countries of Central Asia have never been attractive for emigrants from Russia. But the economic deterioration of Russia's economic situation due to sanctions led to the fact that some of its highly qualified specialists, primarily IT specialists, began to leave the country.

The study purpose is to identify the features of forced emigration from Russia to Central Asian countries of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as well as prospects of using the potential of Russian IT-specialists in the development of Central Asian countries. The objectives of the work are: to identify the factors and the scale of forced emigration from Russia to Central Asian countries; to determine the role of Russian IT-specialists in the prospects for the development of the IT-sphere in Central Asian countries; to reveal the policy of Central Asian countries on retaining and attracting of Russian IT-specialists in their IT-labor market.

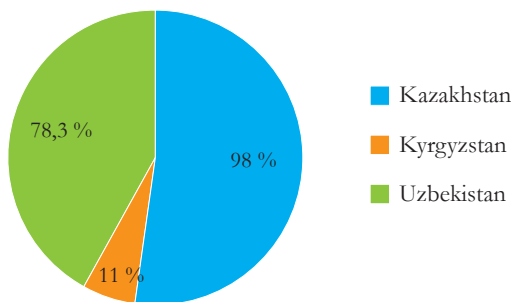
## **FACTORS AND SCALE OF FORCED EMIGRATION FROM RUSSIA TO CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES THAT ARE MEMBERS OF CIS**

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, many Russian citizens have migrated to other countries. The main emigration factors of Russian citizens can be divided into four groups:

- 1) the first is situational emigration. This group includes big businessmen and apolitical stars who would like to wait out the crisis times outside the country;
- 2) the second group is "children's" emigration. Parents take their children away, wanting them to study in Western schools, hoping for better living conditions;
- 3) the third group is the emigration of high technology specialists. Employees of IT companies are leaving because they can quickly find work in other countries;
- 4) the fourth group is political emigration. It refers to journalists and cultural figures who were in solidarity with the policies of Western countries and the United States [2].

Among the main factors of emigration from Russia to Central Asian countries, one can single out visa-free agreement between the Central Asian countries and Russia; access to Russian news channels; spread of the Russian language in Central Asian countries; simplified paperwork (registration, residence permit, etc.); easier access in the labor market in Central Asian countries; loyal attitude from the local people to the Russian citizens and etc.

After the announcement of partial mobilization, part of the Russian population began to leave their homeland. After the EU countries closed or restricted the possibility of Russians entering via Schengen visas to European countries, immigration to visa-free countries among Russians has increased, including the Central Asian states bordering Russia. Fig. 1 should be considered.



*Compiled by the author on materials of sources [3–5]*

Fig. 1. The Inflow of Russians to some Central Asian countries in September 2022

Inflow of Russians to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in September 2022 amounted to 187.3 thousand people (fig. 1).

Kazakhstan has become the main destination of forced emigration from Russia. The Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan Marat Akhmetzhanov claimed: “On 21 of September, we received information that about 98 thousand Russians had arrived to Kazakhstan” [3]. But the inflow of Russian citizens to Kazakhstan for the first nine months of 2022 amounted to 1.7 million people.

Among the countries of Central Asia, a lot of emigrants arrived to Kyrgyzstan from Russia. The Ministry of Digital Development of Kyrgyzstan announced the registration of about 11 thousand Russian citizens for the period from September 23, 2022 to October 3, 2022 [4].

Uzbekistan has also become a popular destination for emigrants from Russia. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, from January to the end of September 2022, 318.2 thousand Russian citizens entered Uzbekistan, and the majority – 209.5 thousand (53%) migrated during July-September 2022. Only in September 2022 about 78.3 thousand Russians crossed the border of Uzbekistan [5].

The number of foreign citizens who visited Tajikistan increased 2.5 times in the first nine months of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. In January-September 2022, 870 thousand foreign citizens entered Tajikistan, while this figure in the same period in 2021 was 344 thousand people [6]. The number of Russian citizens who entered Tajikistan increased most – about 112 thousand people in the first two quarters, and 113 thousand people in the third quarter. The high inflow of Russians is associated with partial mobilization in Russia [6].

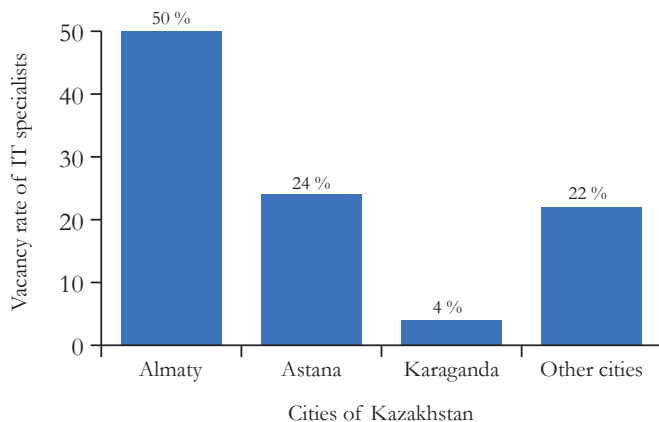
## THE POTENTIAL OF IT-SPECIALISTS FROM RUSSIA IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES THAT ARE MEMBERS OF CIS

After the announcement of partial mobilization in Russia, some citizens of the country began to migrate to neighboring countries. Central Asian countries are no exception. Only in September 2022, several thousand Russians arrived in Central Asian region.

Basically, IT-specialists migrating from Russia are scarce in Central Asian region. In Russia IT specialists have cooperated with international companies and still maintain contacts with them. This opens up great opportunities for their work with organizations from the Central Asian region.

According to HeadHunter Kazakhstan, in the first half of 2022, employers placed about 20 thousand vacancies in the IT-sector, which is almost twice as much as in 2020 [7]. Most vacancies are

offered in Almaty, Astana and Karaganda (fig.2). The most in-demand jobs are engineer, developer, enterprise management systems (ERP), web engineer, webmaster, system administrator and technical support specialist [8]. In the first half of 2022, more than 50 thousand residents of Kazakhstan were looking for work in the field of information technology. The growth in the number of active resumes of applicants in 2022 compared to 2019 increased 9 times.



Compiled by the author on materials of source [8]

Fig. 2. Vacancy rate of IT specialists in cities of Kazakhstan for 2022

In 2022, the average salary of IT specialists in Kazakhstan varied between 387 thousand – 535 thousand tenge (830 – 1.144 USD), which is 78% more than in 2019 [8]. When choosing which country to emigrate, the salary of the destination country always plays a certain role [9].

Also, a lot of highly qualified specialists from Russia migrated to Kyrgyzstan. After the announcement of partial mobilization, dozens of IT specialists arrive daily from Russia to Kyrgyzstan, in which Kyrgyzstan needs. Deputy Zhanar Akayev noted: “Winston Churchill said that the crisis created great opportunities. Now every day from Belarus and Russia, IT-specialists come to our country, where it is quiet and cheaper to live. We have a High Technologies Park, we can place them in one of its buildings” [10].

Today there are from 3 to 5 thousand experienced domestic programmers in Kyrgyzstan. Co-founder of the coworking network “ololo” Daniyar Amanaliyev noticed: “This is very small. The arrival of 2–3 thousand specialists from Russia increases this number almost twice. It is valuable for us because they are ready to share knowledge and teach. I know IT courses, colleges of creative professions that employ them, because there is an acute shortage of programmers in specialized professions” [11].

According to experienced IT-specialists, the curricula of Kyrgyz universities are several years behind in time. Young specialists have to catch up on their knowledge at courses or already in practice. Interaction with advanced programmers from Russia will help them to improve their skills.

Since the beginning of March 2022, there has been a massive outflow in Russia, primarily of representatives of the IT-sector. Deputy Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan Shukhrat Vafayev spoke positively: “The presence of such a large number of additional specialists in various industries will benefit” [12].

Uzbekistan is planning to attract Russian emigrants both as IT and other highly qualified specialists. For example, some Uzbekistan universities have started to invite Russian teachers of economic specialties, as well as other professionals from Russia, (teachers of foreign languages in language centers, engineering, technology specialists, workers, medical personnel, etc. [13]

Qualified Russian specialists, first of all, could also be engaged with the new technology sector in Tajikistan. Tajik economist Rustam Nasimov said: “To be more specific, we have been talking about creating IT parks for several years, but the issue remains at a dead point. One of the main reasons is the lack of qualified personnel. And there are many such specialists among Russian refugees” [14].

Russian specialists could help fill the deficit in the field of high technologies and give impetus to the development of this strategically important direction in the economy of Central Asian countries. The Central Asian countries should take advantage of this situation to attract visiting specialists, taking into account their knowledge and skills in various sectors of the economy for the development of the Central Asian region. Russia has been doing the same for 20–25 years, using the labor resources of the Central Asian countries for the development of its country and economic growth [15].

### **THE POLICY OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES CIS MEMBERS TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN IT-SPECIALISTS FROM RUSSIA**

Among the countries of Central Asia, Kazakhstan has already been one of the most attractive countries for business in the region. In 2022, 250 companies from Russia have already relocated their business to Kazakhstan. Global companies Skoda, GE Healthcare, Philips have agreed to move their offices and specialists to major cities [16].

Among the visitors there are IT-specialists and people working remotely for foreign companies. They do not take jobs from locals and contribute to the economy thanks to their high purchasing power. In September 2022, the Kazakh authorities announced the introduction of an investment immigration program to attract foreign businessmen, IT specialists and investors to Kazakhstan [17]. The head of the Migration Committee of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection Ilyas Ispanov claimed: “We will form a specific list by requesting information about scarce specialists from ministries and sectors of the economy. We must create conditions for enterprises that want to use high-precision technologies and competitive products” [18]. All these conditions indicate that the Kazakh authorities are actually interested in attracting highly qualified citizens from Russia.

Another country gaining popularity is Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan has adopted a regulation on designation the status of “Digital Nomad” to IT specialists from Russia. This status makes it possible to stay in the country without registration at the place of residence, work without obtaining a work permit, open and use accounts in republican banks, as well as automatically receive a personal identification number [19].

The Head of the Kyrgyz Ministry Daniyar Amangeldiyev said: “The trend towards an increase in the number of digital nomads, the so-called digital nomads, is gaining strength all over the world. People can work from any country if they only need a computer and a good high-speed Internet to work” [20]. The purpose of the pilot project is to provide such people with comfortable conditions for moving. Musa Kataganov, Head of the Business Environment Department of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Economy, believes that Kyrgyzstan can become attractive for “digital nomads” thanks to natural and geopolitical factors [21].

Uzbekistan is also trying to attract specialists of different professions to its side. For example, a Technopark is organized here, as in Kazakhstan, for IT-specialists. Since the beginning of 2022, more than 3 thousand foreign IT specialists, mostly citizens of Belarus and the Russian Federation,

have moved to Uzbekistan as part of the TashRush relocation program [22]. Since the 1 of April, 2022, Uzbekistan has started issuing a special IT-Visa to qualified IT specialists for up to 3 years with the right of its automatically renew it. This visa guarantees a simplified residence permit for the applicant himself or herself and a guest visa for his or her family members, receiving medical services, education on equal terms with citizens of Uzbekistan, etc.

There are also benefits for residents of IT Park: full exemption from all types of taxes; exemption from customs duties, income tax rate of 7.5%; tax on dividends of 5% [23]. There is a possibility of obtaining a virtual office; the possibility of paying dividends in foreign currency; of salary payments in foreign currency; a work permit for foreigners is not required.

As for Tajikistan, the majority of Russian citizens consider Tajikistan as a temporary relocation point. The process of integration into local life is hindered by some bureaucratic procedures. According to Pavel Tkachenkov, a doctor who came to Tajikistan from Novosibirsk: “One of the problems is that Tajik companies can not hire foreigners without an appropriate license. In addition, there are restrictions for foreign citizens in purchasing local housing” [24].

At the moment, the issuance of a license for the employment of foreign citizens takes up to 30 days, but during this period, many of the visitors can already leave the country. In addition, not all Tajik companies are ready to obtain licenses for the sake of 1 or 2 new employees, even if they are highly qualified specialists. In order to attract and retain highly qualified Russian citizens in Tajikistan, the government needs to cancel or temporarily impose a moratorium on the employment licenses' issuance of foreign citizens.

## CONCLUSION

In the history of Russia, highly qualified specialists left Russia in different times for a variety of reasons. In 2022, some highly qualified citizens, mainly IT specialists, began to leave Russia due to the sanctions imposed by the United States and the EU countries, which have caused leaving of many international companies from the Russian market.

Among the main reasons why migrants from Russia chose the Central Asian countries as a channel of emigration were the spread of the Russian language in Central Asian countries; easier access for IT specialists from Russia to the labor market of Central Asian countries; loyal attitude of the local people to Russian citizens; visa-free regime between Russia and the Central Asian CIS member countries.

The arrival of IT specialists from Russia has become a new impetus to the development of the IT industry in Central Asia. In particular, due to IT specialists from Russia, Central Asian countries will have access to great opportunities to operate with international companies with which Russian experts cooperate. Accordingly, the Central Asian countries do not want to miss their chance, and are beginning to actively pursue a policy for attracting and retaining of Russian IT specialists.

Emigration of IT specialists will be a great loss for Russian IT industry, but for the Central Asian CIS countries, these specialists will create an impetus for the development of high technologies – a strategically important direction in the economy of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

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