

A new direction of labor emigration from Central Asian countries to the Republic of Korea in the context of global challenges

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Abstract

The influx of emigrants from the Central Asian countries to the Republic of Korea (hereinafter referred to as Korea), social and demographic composition of migrants, labor migration as a new direction of migration, labor migration channels from the Central Asian countries, as well as the Labor Agreements among states have been considered. The history of migration among the Central Asian countries and Korea began during the Soviet period, when ethnic Koreans were deported from the border regions of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan). A new stage of migration from the Central Asian countries to Korea began after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with ethnic Koreans initially migrating. Ethnic Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks have lost their jobs and started leaving Russia since 2014, after the beginning of the currency crisis, and later, after new economic sanctions implementation against Russia due to the special military operation, as well as stricter migration controls, and some of them have shifted to the Korean labor market. At the same time, Korea and the United Kingdom have begun to attract migrants from the Central Asian countries to their labor markets.

Keywords

Central Asia, Republic of Korea, Russia, money transfers, ethnic Koreans, labor migration, SMO, visa category

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Новое направление трудовой эмиграции из стран Центральной Азии в Республику Корея в контексте глобальных вызовов

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Аннотация

Рассмотрены приток эмигрантов из центральноазиатских стран в Республику Корея (далее – Корея), социально-демографический состав мигрантов, трудовая миграция как новое направление миграции, каналы трудовой миграции из стран Центральной Азии, а также трудовые соглашения между государствами. История миграции между странами Центральной Азии и Кореей началась в советский период, когда были депортированы этнические корейцы из приграничных районов Российской Советской Федеративной Социалистической Республики в республики Центральной Азии (Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан, Узбекистан). Новый этап миграции из стран Центральной Азии в Корею начался после развала Советского Союза, причем изначально мигрировали этнические корейцы. Этнические кыргызы, таджики и узбеки с 2014 г., после начала валютного кризиса, и позже, после введения новых экономических санкций в отношении России ввиду проведения специальной военной операции, а также ужесточения миграционного контроля, потеряли работу и начали покидать Россию, и часть из них переориентировалась на корейский рынок труда. В то же время Корея и Великобритания начали привлекать на свои рынки труда мигрантов из центральноазиатских стран.

Ключевые слова

Центральная Азия, Республика Корея, Россия, денежные переводы, этнические корейцы, трудовая миграция, СВО, категория визы

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INTRODUCTION

The historical development of migration relations among the Central Asian countries and the Republic of Korea (hereinafter referred to as Korea) can be divided into three distinct stages.

1. During the Soviet era, a significant number of Koreans were relocated to the Central Asian countries [1]. According to the 1989 census, there were approximately 318 thousand Koreans residing in Central Asia, with a majority residing in Uzbekistan (183 thousand), Kazakhstan (103 thousand), Kyrgyzstan (18 thousand), and Tajikistan (13 thousand)¹. At the time, Koreans constituted approximately 73% of the total Korean population in the USSR, making Central Asia a major destination for Koreans.

2. The second phase began after the dissolution of the USSR and continues to the present day [2]. Ethnic Koreans from the Central Asian countries started migrating to their historical homeland and also to Russia due to military (the civil war in Tajikistan), social and economic, and social and political conditions in the Central Asian countries [3; 4]. In 2021, there were 174.2 thousand Koreans in Uzbekistan, 118.4 thousand in Kazakhstan, and 17.1 thousand in Kyrgyzstan^{2,3,4}. According to the 2010 Tajik census, there were only 634 Koreans in that country⁵.

3. The third phase began when ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks started migrating to Korea on a labor basis [5]. Korea has Labor Agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Each year, a significant number of highly- and low-skilled professionals from the Central Asian countries migrate to Korea to work. Labor migrants from Central Asia working in Russia after the tightening of migration control in Russia, economic sanctions imposed on it, and deportations have reoriented towards the Korean labor market [6].

In this study, we selected four Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, to examine emigration to Korea. The purpose of the study is to determine the sociodemographic composition of migrants and to identify prospects for labor migration from Central Asia to Korea.

INFLUX OF EMIGRANTS FROM THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES TO KOREA

Initially, Russia was the primary channel for emigration from the countries of Central Asia. Currently, migration is one of the most significant political relations among these countries and Russia [7]. For three Central Asian states, such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, labor migration plays an important role in their economic development [8]. Tajikistan has the highest proportion of migrant worker remittances relative to its gross domestic product (hereinafter referred to as GDP). In 2023, the value of these remittances amounted to USD 4.6 billion, representing 38% of its GDP. At its peak in 2022, they accounted for approximately 50% of Tajik GDP (USD 5.3 billion). Kyrgyzstan was ranked 12th globally in terms of remittance-to-GDP ratio in 2009 at USD 882 million, or 15% of GDP, while at its peak in 2021 it reached 32.6%⁶. According to the World Bank, approximately 2 million citizens of Uzbekistan migrate annually for work-related purposes [9]. Remittances from migrant workers from Uzbekistan to the country's economy

¹ All-Union population Census of 1989. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20100316172713/http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php (accessed 15.10.2024).

² Data on the ethnic composition of the Uzbek population has been published. Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/08/20/ethnic-groups/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

³ Bureau of National Statistics. Nationality, religion and language proficiency in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Available at: https://stat.gov.kz/upload/ibl_ock/107/5zkn34tqn5atonvbhoob28p7cbnrb19/Национальный%20состав,%20вероисповедание%20и%20владение%20языками%20и%20ПК.pdf (accessed 15.10.2024).

⁴ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. National composition of the population. Available at: <https://stat.gov.kg/ru/opendata/category/312/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

⁵ Agency for Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. National composition and language proficiency, citizenship of the population of the Republic of Tajikistan (2010). Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20131014054442/http://www.stat.tj/ru/img/526b8592e834fcaaccec26a22965ea2b_1355501132.pdf (accessed 15.10.2024).

⁶ World Bank. World Development Indicators. Available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#> (accessed 15.10.2024).

amounted to approximately USD 14.2 billion in 2023, representing 14% of its GDP. The peak in money transfers occurred in 2022, with the volume reaching USD 15.5 billion and representing 17.2% of GDP⁷.

Following the onset of the currency crisis and fall of the Russian ruble in 2014, remittances from citizens who had emigrated to Russia, including those from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, began to decline [10]. Additionally, new Russian migration regulations introduced on January 1, 2015, significantly tightened conditions for work permit issuance for migrant workers and increased deportations of illegal residents, leading to increased unemployment in the Central Asian countries [11]. As a result, migrants began seeking new areas for labor emigration, such as Korea, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, among others.

According to the Korean Statistical Information Service, between 2018 and 2023, the number of migrants arriving from the Central Asian countries totaled approximately 563 thousand (Table 1). In 2020, this figure decreased by a factor of 5.3 due to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 2019, with the influx of Uzbek migrants to Korea amounting to approximately 305 thousand, Kazakh migrants about 203 thousand, Kyrgyz migrants 36 thousand, and Tajik migrants approximately 20 thousand.

Table 1

Influx of migrants from the Central Asian countries to Republic of Korea in 2018–2023

Country	2018, thousand persons	2019, thousand persons	2020, thousand persons	2021, thousand persons	2022, thousand persons	2023, thousand persons
Kazakhstan	51.8	52.3	10.1	8.7	31.7	48.3
Kyrgyzstan	8.1	8.4	1.6	2.6	6.3	9.2
Tajikistan	3.0	4.6	0.9	1.5	3.7	6.0
Uzbekistan	85.2	89.4	16.6	16.1	40.6	57.0
Total	148.0	154.7	29.1	28.8	82.2	120.5

Compiled by the author on the materials of the source⁸

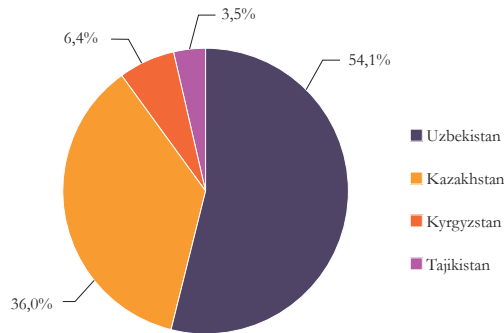
In recent years, the influx of migrants from the Central Asian countries to Korea has begun to grow due to new economic sanctions against Russia, as well as stricter migration controls there.

In 2018–2023, according to the Korean Statistical Information Service, people migrated to Korea the most from Uzbekistan (54%), Kazakhstan (36%), Kyrgyzstan (6.4%), and Tajikistan (3.5%) (Fig. 1).

The main factors of emigration are high wages in Korea, the social and economic situation in Russia, re-unification with the homeland (mainly ethnic Koreans), Korea's active policy of attracting labor migrants from the Central Asian countries, etc. [12–14]. In 2018–2023, the influx of migrants from Uzbekistan to Korea was 16 times greater than the one from Tajikistan.

⁷ World Bank. World Development Indicators. Available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#> (accessed 15.10.2024).

⁸ Korean Statistical Information Service. Available at: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (accessed 15.10.2024).



Compiled by the author on the materials of the source⁹

Fig. 1. Influx of migrants from the Central Asian countries to Korea in 2018–2023

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF MIGRANTS FROM THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES IN KOREA

The new migration stage from the Central Asian countries to Korea has begun since the implementation of new economic and political sanctions against Russia by Western countries in connection with the ongoing military operation [15]. Russia has been a major economic partner for these countries, and the imposition of sanctions has resulted in a decrease in remittances from migrant workers to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. According to data from the World Bank, the economies of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are expected to shrink by 33 %, 22% and 21% respectively, due to the impact of the recession in the Russian economy caused by the sanctions. Additionally, the devaluation of the ruble has led to a decline in the value of currencies in these countries. For example, the currency in Kyrgyzstan has fallen by 15% and in Kazakhstan by 14%¹⁰. As a result of these developments, the Central Asian countries have begun to redirect some of their migrant labor flows to a new destination – Korea.

According to the Korean Statistics Agency, among the Central Asian countries, the largest number of migrants are in the following categories: B1, B2, C3, D2, D4, E9, F1, F4, F6, and H2. Of the Central Asian nations, only Kazakhstan has a visa-free agreement with Korea. Their citizens are permitted to stay in Korea for up to 30 days without obtaining a visa¹¹. In the year 2023, approximately 28.5 thousand people migrated from Kazakhstan under the B1 visa category (Table 2). Individuals with dual citizenship from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Russian-Tajik and Russian-Uzbek) can also benefit from the visa-free arrangement between Russia and Korea.

Table 2

Categories of Korean visas issued to Central Asian citizens in 2023

Country	B1, per- sons	B2, per- sons	C3, per- sons	D2, per- sons	D4, per- sons	E9, per- sons	F1, per- sons	F4, per- sons	F6, per- sons	H2, per- sons
Kazakhstan	28,540	3	1,721	1,456	472	0	3,714	220	507	3,216

⁹ Korean Statistical Information Service. Available at: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (accessed 15.10.2024).
¹⁰ Realities and Challenges of Migrant Workers in Central Asia after Ukrainian crisis. Available at: <https://diverseasia.snu.ac.kr/?p=6209> (accessed 15.10.2024).
¹¹ Visa regime of the Republic of Kazakhstan for foreign citizens. Available at: https://egov.kz/cms/ru/articles/visa_regime_for_foreigners (accessed 15.10.2024).

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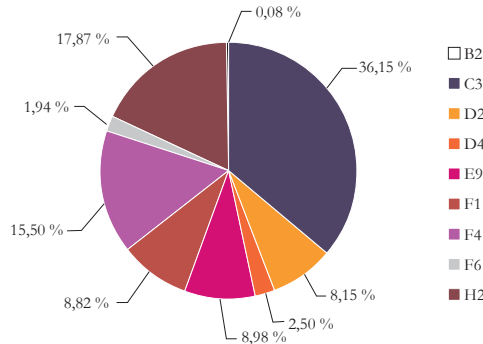
Country	B1, per- sons	B2, per- sons	C3, per- sons	D2, per- sons	D4, per- sons	E9, per- sons	F1, per- sons	F4, per- sons	F6, per- sons	H2, per- sons
Kyrgyzstan	0	6	3,521	513	404	864	617	157	247	448
Tajikistan	0	1	4,895	140	102	0	89	38	9	27
Uzbekistan	0	1	13,054	7,198	1,038	8,767	3,904	859	1,323	4,992

Note: B1 – visa exemption, B2 – tourist visa, C3 – short-term visit, D2 – student visa, D4 – general trainee, E9 – non-professional employment, F1 – visiting or joining family, F4 – overseas Korean, F6 – marriage to Korean citizen, H2 – working visit (for ethnic Koreans)

Compiled by the author on the materials of the source¹²

As can be seen from Table 2, in the E9 category (non-professional employment) in 2023, mainly migrants migrated from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. At the moment, Korea has an employment contract for low-skilled labor recruitment only with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Starting in 2025, foreigners with non-professional employment visas will also be allowed to work in the hotel business.

Currently, all categories of migrants, from low to highly qualified specialists, from the Central Asian countries migrate to Korea. According to the Korean Statistical Information Service, in 2018–2023, the main categories of migrants were people with short-term goals (C3, 36%) (Fig. 2). The second category is ethnic Koreans, who made up 33.4% (H2 with work goals (about 18%), F4 for compatriots).



Compiled by the author on the materials of the source¹³

Fig. 2. Categories of Korean visas issued to Central Asian citizens in 2018–2023

Compared to migrants from the Central Asian countries, ethnic Koreans migrate to Korea for long-term purposes, while others often set shorter-term goals for themselves¹⁴.

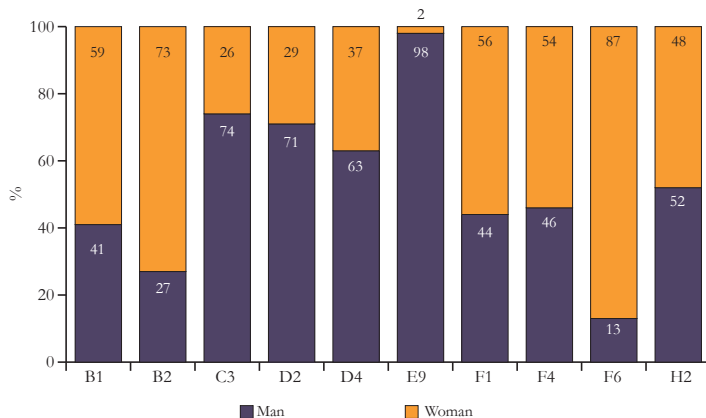
¹² Korean Statistical Information Service. Available at: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

¹³ Korean Statistical Information Service. Available at: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

¹⁴ Matusevich Ya. How migrants from Central Asia live in Korea. Available at: <https://russian.eurasianet.org/как-живут-в-корее-мигранты-из-центральной-азии> (accessed 15.10.2024).

The share of labor migrants in 2018–2023 was about 9% of the total influx from the Central Asian countries. Another category of people who migrated to Korea are citizens who came to visit, which was 8.8% (F1). The share of educational migration for the specified period was 8% of the total influx (D2).

In Russia, the main channel of emigration from the Central Asian countries is labor migration, with mostly men coming. In Korea, the situation is different since in some categories of migration the proportion of women is higher than that of men (Fig. 3).



Compiled by the author on the materials of the source¹⁵

Fig. 3. Share of Korean visas issued to Central Asian citizens by visa categories and gender in 2023

The high proportion of female migrants from the Central Asian countries in the Korean labor market indicates that their main area of activity is not solely related to manual labor. According to data from the Korean Statistical Information Service, in 2023, among all categories of visas granted to migrants, men constituted the majority (53%), with women accounting for 47% on average. During this period, men tended to predominate in categories such as labor, educational, internship, and short-term visits, while women tended to dominate categories such as tourism, marriage, and guest visits. In 2023, most women used a marriage visa (87%) to enter Korea, suggesting a higher likelihood of marriage with Korean men compared to men marrying Korean women.

With regard to the emigration of ethnic Koreans, by gender, from the Central Asian countries to Korea, according to data from the Korean Statistical Information Service, in 2023, there were more women (52.3%) who left Central Asian countries compared to men (47.7%). Factors contributing to this emigration include the economic situation deteriorating in Central Asia, as well as the policy of Korea to attract ethnic Koreans from around the world in response to its demographic crisis¹⁶ [16].

LABOR MIGRATION FROM THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES TO KOREA AS A NEW MIGRATION DESTINATION

Labor migration is the movement of people from one country or region to another for the purpose of employment. It plays an important role in the economic, social, and demographic development of both recipient (host) and donor (sending) countries.

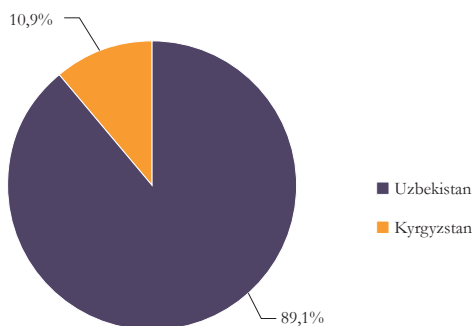
¹⁵ Korean Statistical Information Service. Available at: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

¹⁶ Demographic Change and National Security: A Review of Korea's Population Crisis and International Migration Issues. Available at: https://www.ifs.or.kr/bbs/board.php?bo_table=News&wr_id=53471 (accessed 15.10.2024).

Against the backdrop of new economic sanctions against Russia and stricter immigration controls, a number of migrants from Central Asia have begun to leave Russia, with some of them choosing to migrate to Korea. In addition to Russia, Korea and the UK have emerged as major destinations for low-skilled workers from the Central Asian countries [17].

As of 2024, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan remain the primary sources of low-skilled labor migrants for Korea, as they have employment agreements with the country in the E9 category. Korea has employment agreements with 16 other countries to attract such migrants, and in 2025, Tajikistan is expected to join this list¹⁷.

Between 2016 and 2023, the Korean Statistical Information Service found that Uzbek citizens accounted for the majority of labor migrants (89%), while Kyrgyz citizens accounted for approximately 11% (Fig. 4).



Compiled by the author on the materials of the source¹⁸

Fig. 4. Influx of labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to Korea in 2016–2023

The main city where most labor migrants from Commonwealth of Independent States (hereinafter referred to as CIS) countries come is Gwangju. This area, known as Wolgok-Dong, is also referred to as the Russian district because a significant number of migrants from the post-Soviet states reside there. There is a sizable mosque in the city, numerous Uzbek and Kazakh establishments, and there are vacancies available for Russian-speaking migrants¹⁹. After adapting and learning the language, some of these migrants move to other cities. For instance, Zhanne, who came from Kazakhstan to Korea for work, stated: “I did not speak a word of Korean, so I simply asked the first person, who seemed to know Russian, I saw at the arrivals desk. He directed me to the bus to Gwangju and advised me on how to begin seeking employment in the Russian district”²⁰.

Labor migration from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan has become a new aspect of relations among these countries and Korea. Between 2016 and 2023, the number of labor migrants totaled 25.4 thousand, of which approximately 22.6 thousand were citizens of Uzbekistan and 2.8 thousand of Kyrgyzstan (Table 3).

¹⁷ Seo Eh Yeon. Tajikistan will start sending workers on an E-9 visa to Korea. Available at: <https://russian.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=244717&pageIndex=1> (accessed 15.10.2024).

¹⁸ Korean Statistical Information Service. Available at: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

¹⁹ Matushevich Ya. From Samarkand to Seoul: migrants from Central Asia in Republic of Korea. Available at: <https://koryo-saram.site/ot-samarkanda-doseula-migranty-iz-centralnoj-azii-v-yuzhnoj-koree/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

²⁰ Ibid.

Table 3

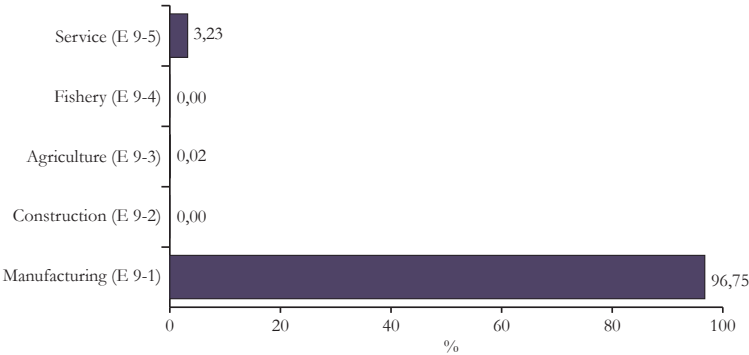
Statistics of labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in Korea
by gender and visa categories in 2016–2023

Visa category/ Country	Gender	E9-1, persons	E9-2, persons	E9-3, persons	E9-4, persons	E9-5, persons
Kyrgyzstan	Total	2,775	0	0	0	0
	Men	2,645	0	0	0	0
	Women	130	0	0	0	0
Uzbekistan	Total	21,773	1	4	0	820
	Men	21,464	1	3	0	801
	Women	309	0	1	0	19

Note: E9-1 – manufacturing, E9-2 – construction, E9-3 – agriculture, E9-4 – fishery, E9-5 – service

Compiled by the author on the materials of the source²¹

In 2016–2023, about 98% of the total influx of migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to Korea as part of labor migration were men. The share of women was only 2% of the total influx. One of the main factors driving the growth of labor migrants is Korea’s policy of attracting labor migrants from the Central Asian countries, as well as reducing the influence of Russia’s policy in Central Asia. In 2024, Korea allocated 100 thousand quotas for low-skilled migrants from Uzbekistan (E9), including 22.248 thousand in the manufacturing sector, 6.858 thousand in agriculture, 2.898 thousand in construction, and 5.403 thousand in the service sector (hotel and kitchen jobs) (mostly women)²². The data is shown in Fig. 5.



Compiled by the author on the materials of the source²³

Fig. 5. The sphere of activity of labor migrants Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in Korea in 2016–2023

²¹ Korean Statistical Information Service. Available at: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

²² 100,000 Uzbek citizens are invited to work in Republic of Korea this year. Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/02/05/south-korea/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

²³ Korean Statistical Information Service. Режим доступа: <https://kosis.kr/eng/> (дата обращения: 15.10.2024).

In the period from 2016 to 2023, the main area of activity for migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan was in the production sector (E9-1), accounting for approximately 97% of all migrants. Approximately 3.2% worked in the service industry.

Bilateral cooperation on labor migration is beneficial for both the Central Asian countries and Korea. For the Central Asian countries, it provides an opportunity to alleviate social tensions and reduce unemployment, while also attracting direct investment from the earnings of labor migrants into their economies. For Korea, it ensures a reliable supply of labor from Central Asia. The diaspora communities of Central Asian origin assist with the adaptation and integration of migrants, as well as the Koryo-saram Association, which assists Russian-speaking migrants from the CIS in finding employment²⁴. The head of this association is Roman Kim, an ethnic Korean originally from Uzbekistan.

CHANNELS FOR LABOR EMIGRATION FROM THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES TO KOREA

There are various channels for labor emigration, however, the main ones can be categorized into three groups.

1. Emigration through the labor ministries of the Central Asian countries. In Uzbekistan, the authorized body to employ citizens in Korea is the Agency for External Labor Migration under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan [18]. In Kyrgyzstan, people are sent abroad, including to Korea, through the State Committee for Migration and Employment. In Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population is responsible for migration. In Tajikistan, the selection and dispatch to Korea are carried out by the Ministry of Labor, Migration, and Employment of Tajikistan. The Agency for Employment Abroad also sends workers from Tajikistan to Korea²⁵.

2. Emigration via recruitment agencies. In the Central Asian countries, there are numerous public and private agencies that assist with the migration of workers to Korea. In particular, two companies in Kazakhstan are involved in this process – Asa and Nika [8]. These companies hold the necessary licenses for this type of activity and have signed agreements with Korean companies for industrial internships.

3. Illegal emigration via other visa categories. Recently, illegal migration from Central Asia to Korea has emerged as a significant issue in relations between the two nations. Instead of high-skilled citizens from Kazakhstan in the healthcare and education sectors, low-skilled migrants seeking to work illegally have been arriving in Korea²⁶.

EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENTS OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES WITH KOREA

As of 2024, Korea has entered into employment agreements with all four countries of Central Asia. The employment agreement between Kazakhstan and Korea, which was signed on June 18, 2014, is titled “Agreement between the Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea regarding the Temporary Employment of Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Korea and Citizens of Korea in Kazakhstan within the Framework of Intra-Corporate Transfers”²⁷. Highly qualified specialists participate in this agreement.

The first labor agreement between Kyrgyzstan and Korea, known as the “Agreement on Mutual Employment of Kyrgyz and Korean Citizens in Business Units and Organizations”, was signed in 1999 in Bishkek. This agreement was followed by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ministry of Employment and Labor of the Republic of Korea in 2008. The Memorandum established a framework for the implementation

²⁴ Koryo-saram Association in the Republic of Korea. Available at: <http://koryosaram.org/> (accessed 15.10.2024).

²⁵ Yusufzoda M. Work in Republic of Korea: basic requirements for Tajik citizens. Available at: <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/rabota-v-yuzhnoy-koree-osnovnye-trebovaniya-k-tadzhikistantsam/33203048.html> (accessed 15.10.2024).

²⁶ Kazakhstan and Korea agree on solving the problems of illegal migration. Available at: <https://24.kz/ru/news/in-the-world/item/673870-kazakhstan-i-koreya-dogovarivayutsya-o-reshenii-problem-nezakonnoj-migratsii> (accessed 15.10.2024).

²⁷ Agreement between the Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea regarding the Temporary Employment of Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Korea and Citizens of Korea in Kazakhstan within the Framework of Intra-Corporate Transfers. Available at: <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1400000675> (accessed 15.10.2024).

of the Employment Permit System (EPS), which allows Kyrgyz nationals to work in Korea while enjoying access to social security and benefits²⁸.

The employment agreement between Tajikistan and Korea was first signed on October 31, 2024, with the signing of a memorandum between the Ministries of Labor of both countries, opening up new opportunities for Tajik labor migrants. The implementation of this agreement will commence in 2025, with the first Tajik workers being able to officially seek employment in Korean companies. This memorandum aims to facilitate requirements for services related to labor recruitment and the vocational training programs development²⁹.

On August 23, 2011, the Government of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Korea signed an agreement on the temporary employment of nationals of one country in the territory of another. This agreement came into effect on March 1, 2012³⁰.

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have signed an employment agreement with Korea, allowing them to send low-skilled laborers to Korea. Additionally, starting in 2025, the number of countries eligible to send citizens to work in Korea on an E9 visa will expand from 16 to 17, with Tajikistan joining the list. It was announced by the Government of the Republic of Korea on December 29 at the 41st Meeting of the Committee for Foreign Worker Policy, confirming the addition of new industries and expansion of participating countries. Tajikistan has been assessed as a state capable of ensuring transparent financial transfers, as the government and state institutions in the country are accountable for such activities. The country also provides pre-training and screening for workers and has measures in place to prevent illegal immigration.

An E9 non-professional work visa will be granted to citizens of Tajikistan starting from 2025, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding a system of employment permits between the two countries and the establishment of a local support center for foreign workers (EPS)³¹. Under this decision, hotels, guesthouses, and hostels located in Seoul, Busan, Gangwon-do, and Jeju-do will be permitted to hire foreign workers on an experimental basis with E9 visas as room cleaners and kitchen assistants. Training for these new industries will be provided by relevant organizations, and the foreign workers will not only receive professional training but also a comprehensive safety briefing. Additional measures will be taken to effectively manage human resources, considering the specific requirements of the industry and the work permit system.

CONCLUSION

Migration plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of the Central Asian countries. In Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, remittances from migrants are sometimes the sole source of income for many families. Each year, more than two million people from Central Asia migrate to other countries in search of employment. In 2023, over 652 thousand people from Tajikistan left on a temporary basis³². The number of labor migrants from Uzbekistan abroad at the end of 2023 amounted to two million, and from Kyrgyzstan 909.4 thousand^{33,34}. The proportion of migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Russia in 2023 was approximately 78% of the total number of migrants from these countries abroad.

²⁸ Migration Situation Report. Available at: https://dtm.iom.int/dtm_download_track/57161?file=1&type=node&pid=39226 (accessed 15.10.2024).

²⁹ Tajikistan and South Korea strengthen ties in the field of labor migration. Available at: <https://centralasia.news/30961-tadzhikistan-i-juzhnaja-koreja-ukreplajut-svjazi-v-sfere-trudovoj-migracii.html> (accessed 15.10.2024).

³⁰ Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Korea on temporary employment of nationals of one country in the territory of another. Available at: <https://lex.uz/acts/2051312> (accessed 15.10.2024).

³¹ Seo Eh Yeon. Tajikistan will start sending workers on an E-9 visa to Korea. Available at: <https://russian.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=244717&pageIndex=1> (accessed 15.10.2024).

³² The Republic of Uzbekistan. Migration agencies. Available at: <https://www.pragueprocess.eu/ru/countries/925-respublika-uzbekistan?tmpl=component&ml=1#:~:text=По%20данным%20Агентства%20по%20внешней,России%2C%20191%2C8%20тыс.> (accessed 15.10.2024).

³³ The Kyrgyz Republic. Migration agencies. Available at: <https://www.pragueprocess.eu/ru/countries/873-kyrgyzskaa-respublika?tmpl=component&ml=1> (accessed 15.10.2024).

³⁴ Lebedeva O. More than 2 million migrants left Russia in a year. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/ru/iz-rossii-za-god-uchali-bolee-2-mln-migrantov/a-70263764> (accessed 15.10.2024).

Korea has entered into an employment agreement with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to attract low-skilled migrant workers. Additionally, beginning in 2025, the number of countries that may send their citizens to work in Korea on an E9 visa will increase from the current 16 to 17, with Tajikistan being added to the list.

According to the Korean Statistical Information Service, for the period 2016–2023, the primary areas of employment for migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have been manufacturing (E9-1), accounting for approximately 97% of all migrants. Approximately 3.2% of these migrants have been employed in the service sector.

Channels for emigration from the Central Asian countries to Korea may be categorized into three types: migration through government Ministries of Labor in the Central Asian countries, through public and private employment agencies, and independent migration. Diaspora communities from Central Asia assist in the adaptation and integration of migrants, as does the Koryo-saram Association, which assists Russian-speaking migrants from the CIS in finding employment.

In addition to Russia, the United Kingdom and Korea have become the major destinations for low-skilled migrant workers from the Central Asian countries. The new stage of migration began after the imposition of economic sanctions on Russia in connection with the special military operation, which led to the loss of jobs for many migrants in Russia. As a result of the new migration laws, more than two million migrants left the country in 2022.

The shift of migrants from Central Asia to Korea could have economic, political, and demographic implications for Russia.

1. Labor shortage. Central Asian migrants comprise a significant portion of workers in the construction, housing, and communal services sectors, as well as in agriculture, logistics, and the service industry. The outflow of these migrants can result in staff shortages and increased wages in these sectors, which can have a significant impact on large cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Novosibirsk, where the proportion of migrants in certain industries reaches 40–50%.

2. Increased business costs. Russian employers often employ migrants due to the relatively low costs associated with their wages. The scarcity of this cheap labor can lead to higher wages, subsequently increasing the prices of construction, services, and agricultural products.

3. Geopolitical implications. The loss of migrant workers could potentially impact Russia's political and economic relationships with the Central Asian countries. If a significant number of migrants are to relocate to Korea, it will necessitate Russia to reassess its foreign and domestic policies towards these nations, potentially affecting long-term stability and cooperation between the two regions.

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