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Affecting International Migration Trends through a Multi-Faceted Policy: Kazakhstan within Central Asia and the EAEU*

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Abstract

This article assesses the implementation of migration policy in Kazakhstan over the past twenty years, focusing on the results attained through attempts to reverse Kazakhstan's net negative migration trends. Our analysis traces the impact of socio-economic conditions on migration processes, using the example of the Central Asian and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states including Kazakhstan. Consideration of further factors, such as ethnic repatriation, also points to the uphill battle that Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries face in maintaining their skilled workforce and encouraging high skilled migrants to come into the country. The results of the analysis reveal the causes of the low level of efficiency in the Republic of Kazakhstan's migration policy. Undocumented workers continue to play a major role in industries outside of the highly skilled and household workers, yet they are often denied their labor and human rights. The authors propose new approaches in the regulation of migration activities aimed at improving the quality of life of prospective migrants, improving the socio-economic conditions of the native population, and mitigating the further outflow of highly qualified specialists from the country. These approaches recognize that solutions must not only

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address barriers to economic success in Kazakhstan, but also must inspire confidence in Kazakhstan's improving economic situation even when per capita income remains relatively low.

Keywords: migration policy, government regulation, repatriates, the external migration balance.

Introduction

Global migration flows have changed dramatically in structure and volume over the past decade. In 2017, according to the UN, 258 million people or 3.4 % of the world population engaged in migration. The majority of these migrants were born in Asia (106 million), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (38 million). Over the past twenty years, the number of migrants has almost doubled, driven in part by the rapid population growth in the third world and the precarious conditions in many communities.¹

Europe and Central Asia (ECA) are home to developing and high-income countries, and here the number of international migrants reached 30.4 million in 2013. Of those, 16.4 million were claimed by developing countries such as Russia (11.9), Ukraine (5.1 million), Kazakhstan (3.5 million), and Turkey (1.9 million).²

Remittances are the main driving force behind this movement, and the economy of many countries depends on funds sent by migrant workers from abroad. Moreover, remittances represent a large portion of countries' GDP. For instance, Ukraine, with \$9.3 billion, remains the largest recipient of remittances, followed by Tajikistan with \$4.1 billion, and Romania with \$3.6 billion. Remittances represent 4.8 percent of GDP in Ukraine, 48 percent of GDP in Tajikistan, 31 percent of GDP in Kyrgyzstan, and 24.5 percent of GDP in Moldova.³

There are both socioeconomic and policy realities that encourage workers from Central Asian countries with an excessive labor supply and low wages to migrate to Russia and Kazakhstan. These two countries, whose economic growth has been driven by revenues from oil exports, benefit economically from the presence of cheap migrant workers. Even though visa-free agreements exist between former Soviet Republics, most Central Asian migrants work illegally in these countries. According to Russia's Federal Migration Service, in 2013 three million foreigners entered Russia to work illegally.⁴ Kazakhstan is no exception.

¹ "World Migration Report 2020," International Organization for Migration, accessed March 15, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/wmr_2020.pdf.

² "Migration and Remittance Flows in Europe and Central Asia: Recent Trends and Outlook, 2013-2016," World Bank, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/02/migration-and-remittance-flows-in-europe-and-central-asia-recent-trends-and-outlook-2013-2016>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Between 2016 and 2018, more than 5.6 million foreign citizens entered the country, with more than 90% of them being citizens of the CIS (mainly Uzbekistan, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan). The number of migrants from non-CIS countries is also increasing, reaching 620,000 people in 2019. These are mostly citizens of Turkey and China.⁵ Altogether, from 300,000 up to 1.5 million migrants work illegally in Kazakhstan.⁶

Migrant workers from Central Asia, representing unskilled and illegal labor, work in extremely severe conditions having much lower salaries as compared to legal migrants. They are deprived of rights and because of their legal status they can be detained and deported by police at any time. This situation has attracted much attention from the international community. In order to solve the problems of labor migration in Central Asia, the International Organization for Migration, UN Women and the World Bank, with the support of the UK Government, have been implementing a regional program on migration in Central Asia since 2007, which is aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of migrants and reducing poverty. The main participants of this program are Russia and Kazakhstan as migration destinations, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as migration sources.

Today, the foundations of state labor migration policy in Kazakhstan are formulated in the “Concept of the Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, approved by the Decree of the Government dated September 5, 2000, N 1346. This document is in turn based on the long-term “Kazakhstan-2030” strategy of national socio-economic development, reflecting state priorities in the field of population migration.⁷

The Concept states that the migration policy of Kazakhstan is based on the principles of respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, enshrined in the Constitution of Kazakhstan and embodied in other normative acts and international treaties to which Kazakhstan is a party. It prohibits discrimination based on race, language, religion, gender, ethnic and social origin, views, political affiliation, property status, or for any other reason.

The general legislative framework for the implementation of migration policy in Kazakhstan was established by the Law of July 22, 2011, “On Migration of the Population,” where labor migration is defined as “the temporary movement of individuals from other states to the Republic of Kazakhstan and from the

⁵ “Kazakhstan tries to protect itself from illegal migrants,” *Forbes.Kz*, April 16, 2018, https://forbes.kz/process/resources/kazahstan_pyitaetsya_zaschititsya_ot_nelegalnyih_migrantov/.

⁶ “Documents and Statistics,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

⁷ “Concept of the Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as within the state for labor activity.” The Law also creates grounds for the introduction of licensing procedures for attracting foreign labor, along with permits issued by local executive bodies. Foreign citizens carrying out labor activities without permission are to be expelled from the country.⁸

The Government Decision of June 19, 2001 No. 836 set in place the basic legal framework for attracting and contracting foreign labor to come to Kazakhstan.⁹ In the following years, the rules have been repeatedly changed, but the procedures and conditions for issuing permits to attract foreign workers remain similar to the present day.

The Law on Migration does not contain detailed provisions regarding the rights of migrant workers and concerning the differentiation between regulated vs. unregulated status. Basic principles determining the legal status of foreign citizens and stateless persons residing in Kazakhstan are enshrined in paragraph 4 of Article 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to this constitutional provision, foreigners enjoy rights and freedoms in the country, and bear the obligations established for citizens of the country, unless otherwise provided for by the Constitution, laws and international treaties.

This paper aims to analyze how the provisions of the Concept affect the migration situation of the country. How has Kazakhstan’s migration policy changed over the years since the implementation of the Concept? This study is a preliminary step toward answering this question. In order to identify the causal relationship of negative manifestations in this area, the study applies a retrospective analysis of the history of migration policy in Kazakhstan. It conducts an analysis of basic indicators, i.e., net balance of migration, remittances, and government quotas for attracting foreign labor and the proportion of qualified specialists in their various compositions, all of which are used in international official statistics to assess migration policy. At the same time, the method of analysis of the level of socio-economic development of the country, on which migration flows largely depend, is used. Here the main criteria are the level of monetary income of the population, average wages, and the number of social benefits.

⁸ “On Migration of the Population,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

⁹ “On approval of the Rules for establishing quotas for engagement of foreign labor force in the Republic of Kazakhstan and its distribution among regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, identifying persons whose work does not require permission from local executive bodies to attract foreign labor, and recognizing as declared to be no longer in force of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 802 dated December 15, 2016, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

Literature Review

According to scholars, the migration process in Kazakhstan differs across time and across the factors that impact on migration decisions of people. It can be studied from various perspectives.¹⁰ The first dimension typically mentioned by scholars is ethnicity and the willingness to move back to the country of origin. Following the collapse of the USSR, many ethnic groups that had previously been forbidden from migration took advantage of the new situation and left Kazakhstan, their numbers far outweighing any migration into the country in the years immediately after independence.¹¹ This was driven by ethnic Germans and the nationalities of Slavic origin returning to their ethnic-origin countries.¹² Zhaksybayeva and Nurzhanova (2018) argue that the artificial separation of ethnic groups and a general lack of incentives to stay in Kazakhstan were major factors driving this type of migration.¹³

Indeed, a desire for ethnic unity, all else being equal, is a recognized impetus for the movement of peoples.¹⁴ On a more individual scale, reactivated or newly formed connections on the level of family and friends in other countries have also served as a significant motivation and pathway for migration.¹⁵

The sociopolitical reality of Kazakhstan has also influenced migration. Linguistic shifts, particularly in the rise of Kazakh language schools over Russian language schools, have contributed to stress and consequent migration trends within

¹⁰ Nurtay, Mustafayev. "Migration process in Kazakhstan," / *PARAGRAF*, (2006): 101-107.

¹¹ Kenzhegul, Nurumbetova. "Migration of Kazakh population in the beginning of 90s," / *E-HISTORY.KZ*, (2013), accessed March 15, 2020, <https://e-history.kz/ru/seo-materials/show/29021/>.

¹² Zhanna Zayonchkovskaya, "Migration in the post-Soviet space," *RAND*, Center for Ethnopolitical and Research (1996): 23-48; Yuri Andrienko and Sergei Guriev, "Understanding migration in Russia. Designing of internal and external model of transition for population of Russian Federation" (World Bank Policy Note, 2005).

¹³ Nurlyaiym Zhaksybayeva and Saltanat Nurzhanova, "The Migration Response to the Economic Factors: Lessons from Kazakhstan," *Trade policy*, no 8 (2016): 101-124, ISSN 2499-9415.

¹⁴ Dinesh Bhugra and Matthew A Becker, "Migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity," *World Psychiatry*, no 1 (February 2005): 18-24; Piesse Mervyn, "Factors Influencing Migration and Population Movements" (Strategic analysis paper, Independent Strategic Analysis of Australia's Global Interests, 2014).

¹⁵ Zayonchkovskaya, "Migration in the post-Soviet space," 23-48; Timothy Heleniak, "The 2002 Census in Russia: Preliminary Results," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, no 6 (May 2013): 430-442, DOI: 10.2747/1538-7216.44.6.430; Yuri Andrienko and Sergei Guriev, "Understanding migration in Russia. Designing of internal and external model of transition for population of Russian Federation" (World Bank Policy Note, 2005); Jan Fidrmuc, "Migration and regional adjustment to asymmetric shocks in transition economies," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, no 2 (2004): 230-247.

the non-Kazakh ethnicities of the country.¹⁶ As migration crested in 1994, nearly 500,000 Kazakhstani citizens departed from the country to Russia.¹⁷

The economic transition was another key factor driving migration in Kazakhstan. The early 1990s were years of crisis, with high levels of unemployment.¹⁸ These economic factors were highly significant in strengthening existing trends.¹⁹

There have been multiple studies showing how widespread inability to find satisfactory jobs, as well as the poor living standards afforded by available salaries, influenced migration in Kazakhstan.²⁰ This was particularly the case for educated professionals, and their subsequent exit from the country in the form of migration had a multiplying negative factor as it grew.²¹ In the twelve years following independence, this brain drain was estimated to have cost the Kazakhstani economy US\$125 billion.²²

Remittances, the sending of money across borders to support kin, is an influential factor in migration. According to the World Bank, there were \$542 billion in remittances transferred in 2013.²³ Since this count only includes “officially recorded” remittances, it is plausible that the total global remittances

¹⁶ Irina Yerofeyeva, “Regionalnyi aspekt slavyanskoi migratsii iz Kazakhstana (na primere SKO i VKO) (Regional aspects of Slavic migration from Kazakhstan on the basis of examples from North Kazakhstan and East Kazakhstan provinces),” Natalis, Moscow (2012): 154–179; Galina Vitkovskaya, “Forced migrants from newly independent states on the Russian labor market” (Scientific reports of the Carnegie Moscow Center, 1998): 30-70; Natalya Shulga, “The Great Migration: returnees, refugees, labor migrants” Institute of Sociology of the NAS, 2002): 700; Yuri Andrienko, Sergei Guriev, Understanding migration in Russia. Designing of internal and external model of transition for population of Russian Federation” (World Bank Policy Note, 2005).

¹⁷ Kenzhegul, Nurumbetova. “Migration of Kazakh population in the beginning of 90s.” *E-HISTORY.KZ*, (2013), accessed March 15, 2020, <https://e-history.kz/ru/seomaterials/show/29021/>.

¹⁸ Zhaksybayeva and Nurzhanova, “The Migration Response.”

¹⁹ Charles Becker, Erbolat Musabek, Ai-Gul Seitenova, and Dina Urzhumova, “The migration response to economic shock: lessons from Kazakhstan,” *Journal of Comparative Economics, Elsevier*, no 1 (2005): 107-132; Erzhan Zhatkanbayev et al., “The Impact of Globalization on Brain Drain in Developing Countries,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, no 47 (2012): 1490-1494; Zhaksybayeva and Nurzhanova, “The Migration Response.”

²⁰ Zhaksybayeva and Nurzhanova, “The Migration Response.”

²¹ Wilbur Zelinsky, “The hypothesis of human transition,” *Geographical Review*, no 2 (April 1971): 219-249; Koichi Hamada, “Taxing the brain drain: A global point of view,” in *The New International Order*, ed. Jagdish Bhagwati (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1977), 135; Valentina Bosetti, Cristina Cattaneo and Elena Verdolini, “Migration of skilled workers and innovation: A European Perspective,” *Journal of International Economics*, no 2 (2015): 311-322; Lucas Stanczyk, “Managing skilled migration,” *Ethics & Global Politics*, no 1, DOI: 10.3402/egp.v9.33502.

²² Zhatkanbayev et al., “The Impact of Globalization.”

²³ “Migration and Remittance Flows.” World Bank.

are even larger. It is not clear within the literature whether remittances encourage or discourage migration overall. It has been argued that extremely low and very high levels of remittance discourage migration: low levels of remittance send a negative economic signal, while high levels reduce the need to migrate in the first place.²⁴

It is not simply working people who seek a better life, but retirement-aged people as well.²⁵ This age group has the highest level of migration from Kazakhstan.²⁶ Zhaksybayeva and Nurzhanova (2018) argue that economic factors driving migration from the country are more significant to urban dwellers.²⁷ Those from rural areas seeking to improve their lot would be likely first to go to cities in their countries before going abroad.²⁸ A factor preventing retirement-aged people from leaving would be to stay close to their families.²⁹ Economic reforms that improve indicators in Kazakhstan would lead first to working-age people staying, and then as a result of their older relatives staying as well.³⁰

The literature seems to suggest that often harder-to-measure factors, like the configuration and availability of both local and transnational social networks, as well as the social, political, and economic incentives offered by public policy, can be definitive for those seeking a better life through migration choices.

Research

The first decade of independence saw an extremely high migration rate from Kazakhstan, a result of economic and sociopolitical upheaval. Around 2.7 million people in total left the country during this time, or around 225,000 per annum on average. More than 60% of these were working-age people,

²⁴ Claire Naiditch, Agnès Tomini and Christian Ben Lakhdar, “Remittances and incentive to migrate: An epidemic approach of migration,” *Handbook of International Economics*, Elsevier, no 4 (2015): 118-135.

²⁵ Charles Longino and Don Bradley, “A first look at retirement migration trends in 2000,” *The Gerontologist*, no 43 (2003): 904–907; Becker, Musabek, Seitenova and Urzhumova, “The migration response.”

²⁶ Longino, “A first look at retirement migration trends in 2000,” 904–907.

²⁷ Zhaksybayeva and Nurzhanova, “The Migration Response”

²⁸ Alisher Aldashev and Barbara Dietz, “Economic and spatial determinants of interregional migration in Kazakhstan,” *Economic Systems*, no 3 (2014): 379-396.

²⁹ Becker, Musabek, Seitenova and Urzhumova, “The migration response.”

³⁰ Gulnur Rakhmatullina, “Diversification of economy of Kazakhstan,” *Journal KAZENERGY*, no 4 (2012): 1–9.

disproportionately higher-educated and constituting a brain drain from Kazakhstan.³¹

Brain drain in Kazakhstan is not considered in the context of ethnic groups but more in regard to immigrants' professional qualifications. The country has been anxious about the amount of talent crossing the borders. Moreover, ethnic considerations, except those related to ethnic repatriates, have not been involved in Kazakhstan's migration policy. Yet it remains a fact that those who are currently crossing the border are generally Russians. In 2019, 34.2 thousand people left Kazakhstan, and 8 thousand arrived. It is most often Russians who leave the country, and Kazakhs who arrive in Kazakhstan.³² The proportion of ethnic Kazakhs continues to grow, amounting now to 58.9%, while Russian – 25.9%, Ukrainians – 2.9%, Uzbeks – 2,8%, Uighur, Tatar and German - 1.5% each, and other groups 4.3%. There are around 130 ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan.³³

What measures have been taken by the state to alleviate the negative repercussions related to the net negative migration in the Republic of Kazakhstan?

First, the focus of the Migration Policy Program of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the years 2001-2010 was to encourage and support the immigration of ethnic Kazakhs who mainly resided in China, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. Based on the law "On Migration", the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan annually approves the immigration quota for ethnic Kazakhs living abroad who want to move to their historical homeland and are waiting for permission. Between 1991 and 2020, 313,256 families received returnee status. In 2019, 17,661 ethnic Kazakhs or 9,993 families returned to their historical homeland. Most of the returnees came from China - 41.5% (7,326 people), Uzbekistan - 40.1% (7,074 people), Turkmenistan - 6.5% (1,152 people), Mongolia - 6.2% (1,095 people), Russia - 1.8% (313 people), and 3.9% (701 people) from other countries.³⁴

Secondly, within the framework of the implementation of Phase 1 (2001-2005) of the Sectoral Program of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2001-2010, centers for the adaptation and integration of repatriates (ethnic Kazakhs) were established. The centers provide legal and psychological assistance to returnees, as well as employment and vocational training, and language courses. Thirdly, the Government of Kazakhstan has

³¹ "Documents and Statistics," Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

³² "Mostly Russians are leaving Kazakhstan," *EurAsia Daily*, January 22, 2020, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/01/22/uezzhayut-iz-kazahstana-v-osnovnom-russkie>.

³³ "About Kazakhstan Culture. Ethnic Groups," Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Washington DC, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://kazakhembus.com/about-kazakhstan/culture/ethnic-groups>.

³⁴ "Over 17.6 thousand oralmans arrived in Kazakhstan in 2019," *Forbes.Kz*, January 23, 2020, https://forbes.kz/news/2020/01/23/newsid_217371.

developed mechanisms of social support, including the purchase of housing on a return basis and grants for the education of their children. Thus, a family consisting of 5 people could receive a one-time allowance of 833 thousand tenge (approximately 5,866 US dollars) to purchase housing and to reimburse family relocation expenses.

To collect information on labor migration and the registration of foreign citizens, as well as related processes, a single electronic information system “Berkut” was deployed. The system, implemented at Centers for Adaptation and Integration of Repatriates, is available to center officials and integrates information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Border Service of the National Security Committee, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The measures taken contributed to the effective implementation of migration policy in Kazakhstan. In 2004, for the first time, there was a net positive balance of migration.

In turn, the educational and professional level of repatriates has been lower than that of the indigenous population, which has had a negative impact on the quality of the labor market. Thus, among the repatriates of working age who arrived in Kazakhstan from 1991 to June 1, 2013, in terms of education, 8.6% had higher education, 20.6% – secondary special education, and 70.8% – general secondary education, or no education at all.³⁵

In addition, repatriates tended to settle in the southern and western regions of the country. This situation had a negative impact on the territorial distribution of labor resources in the country and caused social tensions in some regions.

In order to reduce the negative consequences of migration processes and to preserve and develop the national identity and security of the country by minimizing illegal and selective migration, the Concept of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2007-2015 was adopted in 2007.

The Concept presents the results of an analysis of the previous Program of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan over its 2001-2010 implementation, which revealed the low migration attractiveness of Kazakhstan in comparison with other countries.³⁶

³⁵ “About the complex plan for the solution of problems of migration, strengthening of control of migratory flows from the neighboring States, creation of favorable conditions for domestic qualified personnel not to allow their excessive outflow on the foreign labor markets for 2014-2016,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 1371 dated December 15, 2013, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

³⁶ “Concept of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2007-2015,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Decree of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 399 dated August 28, 2007, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

In this case, the mechanisms that should stimulate the influx of in-demand professional and highly qualified specialists did not work. The system of labor migration was not effective enough, impacting the illegal residence of low-skilled foreign citizens in Kazakhstan, the prosperity of the shadow labor market, and a reduction of tax revenues to the budget. In addition, this situation led to the spontaneous resettlement of the migrating population, cases of illegal seizure of land for housing construction, and the unregulated resettlement of rural populations in the cities, especially in Astana (now Nur-Sultan) and Almaty.

The state program “Nurly Kosh” for 2009-2011 was adopted in 2008 for the planned resettlement and effective assistance of returnees.³⁷ Within the framework of the program, internal and external migration processes were reoriented to concentrate labor resources in economically promising areas, support cities, and favor conservation in natural and climatic zones. The planned resettlement of returnees was meant to help them quickly adapt and better integrate into the labor market. It planned to resettle ethnic Kazakh 75,000 families who were able to take advantage of the program. At the same time, a special quota for 1.6% of the economically active population of the country was established to attract high-skilled migrants.

Three macro zones were identified in Kazakhstan for the resettlement of the population in accordance with the program “Nurly Kosh”:

- 1) North zone – Akmola, Aktobe, East Kazakhstan, West Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Pavlodar and North Kazakhstan;
- 2) South zone – Atyrau, Mangistau, Kyzylorda and Karaganda;
- 3) Central zone – Astana, Almaty, South Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, and Almaty regions.

In total, 197,795.6 million tenge (approximately 1318.6 million US dollars) were allocated for the implementation of the program in 2009-2011. At the same time, from the national budget in 2009 – 17,551.5 million tenge (approximately 1.17 million US dollars), in 2010 – 85,267.3 million tenge (approximately 0.6 million US dollars), and in 2011 – 76,737.7 million tenge (approximately 0.52 million US dollars) were allocated for the program implementation. From local budgets in 2009 - 25.8 million tenge (approximately 0.17 million US dollars), in 2010 – 5,208.9 million tenge (approximately 0.04 million US dollars), in 2011 - 4,946.6 million tenge (approximately 0.03 million US dollars), as well as from other sources: in 2009 - 7,207.2 million tenge (approximately 0.05 million US dollars), and in 2010 -

³⁷ “State Program Nurly Kosh,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated December 1, 2008, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

850.6 million tenge (approximately 1.17 million US dollars) assigned for the program.³⁸

As an example of the effectiveness of state support measures, we can consider a pilot project for the construction of preferential housing for returnees in the village “Asar” of South Kazakhstan. At the same time, repatriates created a construction company and built brick and cement plants. In addition, as part of the program “Nurly Kosh” in Aktau, a temporary residence for repatriates was built. Within six months, having a residence permit, they could receive a number of the social benefits provided for returnees.

Despite the measures taken, the total number of immigrants under the quota in 2009 amounted to 0.43% of the economically active population of the country, which is almost 4 times less than the established quota. At the same time, the number of undocumented immigrants began to grow in Kazakhstan. These migrants mainly found work in the construction and agriculture sectors.

In our opinion, the main factors contributing to illegal labor migration were high rates of economic growth, political and social stability in the country, a liberal migration policy, geopolitical location, and visa-free entrance regimes within the CIS countries. Another reason may be the existence of transnational and “shadow” public structures focused on illegal migrants, as well as corruption among employees of responsible bodies and “open” borders with neighboring countries. The migration legislation has significant gaps in the regulation of the procedure for the forced expulsion of violators, which puts migration police in a difficult position and allows a foreigner to stay in Kazakhstan for months, despite violations of the law. These assumptions are confirmed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan, moreover, citizens of other countries, such as Afghanistan, try to obtain the status of Kazakh-returnees. In addition, citizens of Bangladesh and Afghanistan use the territory of Kazakhstan to enter Europe and settle there for permanent residence.³⁹ The flow of illegal migration in Kazakhstan is also associated with drug trafficking, extremism, and human trafficking.⁴⁰

Within the framework of the adopted Concept of Migration Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021, three strategies for the effective management of migration processes were developed. The first strategy was aimed at attracting foreign labor to the largest sectors of the economy to provide a short-term economic effect. The purpose of the second strategy was to create

³⁸ “State Program Nurly Kosh,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated December 1, 2008, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

³⁹ “Kazakhstan is trying to protect itself from illegal migrants,” *Forbes.Kz*, April 16, 2018, https://forbes.kz/process/resources/kazahstan_pyitaetsya_zaschititsya_ot_nelegalnyih_migrantov/.

⁴⁰ “Kazakhstan is trying to protect,” *Forbes.Kz*.

liberal conditions for attracting qualified foreign specialists in the implementation of long-term projects aimed at achieving results from the introduction of innovations and growing the innovation economy, the development of human capital, and improving the competitiveness of the economy. The third strategy was of a national scale and aimed at improving the skills of domestic specialists through the development of a national qualifications framework, modernization of the education system, training, and retraining.⁴¹

Thus, in order to attract highly qualified foreign labor, employers pay fees for the employee, the rate of which depends on the industry and the level of qualification of employees. The higher the qualification level, the lower the fee rate. Therefore, it is beneficial for the employer to attract qualified specialists. In addition, highly qualified specialists have the right to stay in Kazakhstan and find a job, if their profession and industry are identified as a priority.

Despite several measures taken by the state to create favorable conditions for qualified domestic personnel and attract relevant foreign specialists, there is a demographic imbalance in the country. Thus, for the period from 2015 to 2018, net migration amounted from 13.5 thousand to 30 thousand people, respectively.

In order to identify the reasons for the attractiveness of Kazakhstan for migrants, this study further analyzes the economic indicators among countries whose citizens most arrive in Kazakhstan for working purposes.

As can be seen in Table 1, for the period from 2013 to 2017 in Kazakhstan there is an increase in the negative balance in the international migration flow. Therefore, if in 2013 the number of people leaving the country exceeded the number of people entering by 2,234 people, in 2017 it exceeded by 22,426 people, that is, almost 10 times. The negative trend was due to the growth of immigration to Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries by 1.75 times, and due to a decrease of 2.61 times the positive balance of immigration of people from other countries.⁴²

Destination countries for the people of Kazakhstan are graphically represented in Table 2. Thus, among the EAEU countries, the migration of people to Russia and Belarus exceeds their immigration to Kazakhstan. Among other countries, the largest number of people come to Kazakhstan from Uzbekistan and China and go to Germany and the United States.

Meanwhile, the number of migrants from other countries living in Kazakhstan has remained more stable. By a large plurality, the migrants currently living in Kazakhstan originate from Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

⁴¹ “About the approval of the Concept of migration policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021 and the action Plan for implementation of the Concept of migration policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, #602 dated September 29, 2017, <https://www.enbek.gov.kz>.

⁴² Eurasian Economic Commission’s Statistical Yearbook. – M., 2018, 40.

While the balance of migration is negative, these three categories of migrants have not only maintained their large quantity within Kazakhstan, but their numbers have shown moderate gains over the past decade.

According to the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan Statistics, in 2017 the largest number of people went to the EAEU countries, including Russia (32,874 people) and Belarus (289 people). Among other countries, emigration to Germany amounted to 2,966 people, and to the US – 285 people.⁴³ Migration flows consisted mainly of repatriated Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Germans.

As can be seen in Table 2, the number of migrants leaving for Russia is growing significantly. The outflow of the population is observed mainly in the border regions with Russia. Among the reasons for the emigration are higher wages, pension benefits, free education, and medical services, as well as perceptions of political stability in the country. For further evidence of this, we will conduct a comparative analysis of the basic indicators of the socio-economic levels of the EAEU member states.

In 2018, the amount of money sent through international money transfer systems amounted to 601,815.5 million tenge or 1745.7 million USD (the average dollar exchange rate in 2018 amounted to 344.71 tenge), and the volume of received transfers – 361 966.1 million tenge or 1050.1 million USD. Starkly, the outflow of funds from Kazakhstan was 60% higher than its inflow. Money transfers to Kazakhstan were carried out mainly in two currencies: US dollars, which accounted for 58.2% of the total amount of money transfers, and the Russian ruble, which accounted for 28.1% (n.d.).

Table 3 shows data on the number of money transfers through international money transfer systems in the context of countries. Almost 80% of transactions are to 4 countries from Kazakhstan, including Russia (42.0%), Uzbekistan (14.1%), Turkey (11.8%), and Kyrgyzstan (11.3%). In terms of countries from which funds are transferred to Kazakhstan, the largest remitter is Russia (54.3%), the second, South Korea (18.4%), the third, Uzbekistan, and finally Kyrgyzstan (8%).

The main generalizing indicator characterizing the standard of living of the population is cash income, part of which is spent on current consumption and the rest on savings.

Table 4 presents data for 2013-2017, showing that in Russia, per capita income is 2.1 times higher than in Kazakhstan. For all countries, there is a considerable deterioration in this indicator which occurred due to the relatively low prices for energy and other commodities, as well as weak growth of the global economy and trade.

⁴³ Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. - Astana, 2018, 237.

The existing data points out that in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, per capita income per month is much lower compared with other EAEU countries. Therefore, this study focuses on the average per capita income of households in the EAEU countries.

As can be seen from Table 5, this figure in Kazakhstan is 3.2 times lower than in Russia, but 2 times more than in Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, in 2017 in Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus, the rate of per capita cash income in real terms decreased compared to 2016. But in Kyrgyzstan, it increased by almost 8%, a marked difference and potential impetus for immigration.

The statistics of the Eurasian Economic Commission show that the average per capita income of households is mainly formed by wages and pensions.⁴⁴

In 2017, in Kazakhstan, the share of wages and pensions in the structure of this indicator was 65.6% and 16.4%, respectively. In Russia – 70.2% and 16.1%, in Belarus – 61.6% and 25.9%, in Armenia – 55.1% and 15.2%, and in Kyrgyzstan – 42.9% and 15.7%.

As can be seen from Table 6, in 2017, the lowest average monthly nominal salary was \$228 in Kyrgyzstan and the highest salary was \$671 in Russia. If we consider the relative changes, in Kazakhstan this figure decreased by 35.4% over the last five years. Salaries are, on average, 45% lower than those in Russia.⁴⁵

The main factors that influenced the decrease in the average monthly wage are the slowing national economic growth, the devaluation of the tenge, and the introduction of a freely floating exchange rate by the National Bank of Kazakhstan.

In the structure of the average per capita income of the population, the first place among social payments is the pension. In 2017, the average pension in Kazakhstan and Belarus amounted to \$156, which is less than 1.5 times that of Russia. However, in comparison with Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, this figure is almost 2 times more (see Table 7).

The average pension in 2017 was less than half of the average wage working in all member states of the EAEU and exceeded the subsistence minimum of a pensioner in Belarus (as of December 2017) – 2.1 times, Kazakhstan – 2.3 times, Kyrgyzstan – 1.3 times, and in Russia – 1.6 times.⁴⁶ Regarding the monetary income of the population, it is impossible to ignore such an important indicator as consumer spending aimed at purchasing food, non-food products, alcoholic beverages, and services.

According to Table 8, in 2017 the real level of consumer spending in Kazakhstan decreased by 99.6% compared to 2016. At the same time, its

⁴⁴ “About the standard of living of the population of EAEU in 2017,” Eurasian Economic Commission, February 15, 2019, <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/>.

⁴⁵ Statistical Yearbook of the EAEU. – M., 2018. 60.

⁴⁶ “About the standard of living,” Eurasian Economic Commission.

absolute size is more than 2 times lower than in Russia, but almost 3 times higher than in Kyrgyzstan.

One of the indicators of the investment attractiveness of certain types of economic activity is the employer's labor costs. Labor costs in terms of US dollars in 2017 amounted to \$274 in Kyrgyzstan, \$406 in Armenia, \$505 in Kazakhstan, \$544 in Belarus in 2016, and \$1,027 in Russia⁴⁷ (Table 9).

Analysis of the structure of labor costs for 2017 showed that in all countries the overall structure of consumer spending is dominated by wages.

Table 10 shows that social spending in Kazakhstan is significantly lower than in Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. Thus, in comparison with Belarus – almost 5.5 times, Russia – 5 times, and Kyrgyzstan – 3 times.

Discussion

Following the economic difficulties post-independence, Kazakhstan has built trade and capital ties to the world. One example of these ties is the Eurasian Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Increasing opportunities have led to increased interest in migration to Kazakhstan, particularly for residents of Central Asia who can benefit from a visa-free regime. However, at this time legal employment-based migration is limited to highly skilled labor and household employees. Those participants in low-skilled labor, such as constructions or agriculture, exist outside of legal frameworks and in tenuous situations where their rights are not always respected. Such undocumented workers in Kazakhstan number anywhere from 300,000 to 1.5 million over the last few years.⁴⁸ (Ministry of Labor, 2018).

In the meantime, since 2013, Kazakhstan has experienced net negative migration without any indication of abating (Table 1). Between 2013 and 2017 the number of people leaving the country exceeded the number of people arriving in the country tenfold. This trend occurred due to the growth of immigration to the EAEU countries (by 1.75 times), as well as a decrease of immigration from other countries (around 2.61 times).

However, despite a bout of acute economic stagnation caused by the Russian economic crisis and falling energy prices, the most voluminous migrant stocks in Kazakhstan have remained resilient. The largest contributors to Kazakhstan's migrant stock have maintained and expanded their volume. Even though the data is not sufficient to substantiate a causal effect, it is worth noting that the largest migrant stocks in Kazakhstan are responsible for a large portion

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Documents and Statistics,” Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

of the remittances flowing out of the country: 56% of all remittances from Kazakhstan are received in Russia and Uzbekistan (Table 3).

Perhaps part of the answer to addressing Kazakhstan's net negative migration lies in the stability of these migrant stocks: what economic and social factors are contributing to the maintenance and growth of these populations? Part of the answer must be remittance flows, as they exist as not only as an economic means but as a social signal. Further, what kind of regional workforce strategy can be negotiated not only between CIS nations, but also Russia? Any such plan, to gain the attention of each national government, would have to account for the interests of each economy in terms of actual competition between nations for workers. The authors believe that the setting of a regional workforce policy is not necessarily a zero-sum game and that agreements can be developed that complement the growing sectors of each CIS nation. Simultaneously, such a policy must address the political barriers to negotiating such an agreement. The Post-Soviet project for CIS nations, after all, is not only one of industry building and economic liberalization, but it is also tied up in the politics of national identity development and reification that are confirmed in the various CIS agreements.

The character and volume of migrant flows and stocks depend on numerous social, economic, and political factors. Future policy concepts must address each of these considerations. Certainly, the decline of both real and nominal wages (see Table 6) is a substantial factor accounting for migration outflows; it is plain that a robust, national economic development plan with targeted market interventions is necessary to increase wages. From the currently available data, it is challenging to say whether nominal wages have hit their bottom or not. While concern for the market competitiveness of Kazakhstan's wages vis-a-vis its neighbors is warranted, further research is necessary to better understand how potential migrant stocks in neighboring nations assess the economic conditions in Kazakhstan.

Such an analysis must focus on the social networks that deliver both remittances and economic perceptions throughout the region. At the very least, it is probable that a focus on improving the lived conditions of current migrant stocks in Kazakhstan will facilitate further migration, and at least in part will address the issues surrounding the current net negative migration balance. Concurrently, an evaluation of the implementation of the ethnic Kazakh repatriation policy is timely, with a focus on the efficacy of the repatriation policy in the socio-economic integration of repatriates and their retention.

Conclusions

Thus, over the past twenty years, despite the adopted Programs and Concepts in the field of migration policy in Kazakhstan, there have been no qualitative changes in migration processes. The net migration deficit is growing,

the brain drain problem is not decreasing, and the number of low-skilled immigrants is growing.

In addition, a comparative analysis of the main socio-economic factors of the EAEU member states showed that in Russia, the average per capita income is much higher than in Kazakhstan (by 2.1 times higher).

This fact plainly explains why the population emigrates to Russia and why the number remains high. An accurate mirror image, but with a negative effect, is observed with the influx of low-skilled labor from Kyrgyzstan, as the level of socio-economic development in Kazakhstan is comparatively much higher.

Solving these problems requires a systematic approach, as migration policy should be consistent with the country's social and economic policies, as well as with international migration policy. In our view, Kazakhstan should harmonize state migration policy programs with the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, the position of the international organization for migration, which offered its vision of the migration component in the complex tasks of SDGs, is interesting. For each of the 17 SDG goals, proposals are made on the relevance of migration. For example, recognizing and promoting the links between migration and poverty reduction for migrants through increased income, access to housing, health care, and education. Recognizing and increasing the contribution of migrants to the community and to the country, the positive impact on labor markets, and productivity. The essence of harmonizing the state migration policy programs with SDGs is not in listing all the goals of SDGs, it is essentially covering the migration component. The main thing is that in the formation of migration policy in the country, it is necessary to involve all stakeholders into the decision-making process, realizing that the Post-Soviet legacy with a centralized top-down approach is still active and must be addressed in current days. Stakeholders are experts from various spheres of state policy and public organizations, ready to support migrants and their social adaptation, returnees themselves, and international organizations.

Annexes



Figure 1. Map of Central Asian Countries

Source: “Map of Kazakhstan and surrounding countries. Political Map of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan,” Kazakh Archives, accessed March 15, 2020, <http://www.kazarchives.kz/>

Economy/map-of-kazakhstan-and-surrounding-countries

Table 1. Balance of international migration (people)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Change 2017/2013, in %
Kazakhstan	-2234	-11265	-13026	-20594	-22426	10 times
<i>including:</i>						
with EAEU countries	-16063	-20670	-21479	-26253	-28158	1.75 times
with other countries	15784	8508	8013	5108	6028	(-) 2.61 times

Source: Eurasian Economic Commission’s Statistical Yearbook. – M., 2018.40

Table 2. Balance of external migration by country (people)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Kazakhstan	-2234	-11265	-13026	-20594	-22426
<i>EAEU countries</i>					
Armenia	124	89	197	99	69
Belarus	-953	-1404	-430	-244	-166

Kyrgyzstan	1327	793	531	446	467
Russia	-16561	-20148	-21777	-26554	-28528
<i>other countries</i>					
USA	-108	-167	-201	-192	-184
Germany	-1037	-2003	-1974	-2465	-2741
Uzbekistan	12506	8481	7228	4820	4775
China	2049	596	1217	2069	2953

Source: Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. - Astana, 2018. 237.

Table 3. Cross-border money transfers December 2018

Country	Sent abroad		Country	Received from abroad	
	Amount, tenge, million	Share of total amounts, %		Amount, tenge, million	Share of total amounts, %
Russia	20 265.3	42.0%	Russia	15 168.1	45.3%
Uzbekistan	6805.9	14.1%	Uzbekistan	2 666.1	8.0%
Turkey	5 704.4	11.8%	Turkey	618.6	1.8%
Kyrgyzstan	5 452.4	11.3%	Kyrgyzstan	2 687.6	8.0%
China	3 511.0	7.3%	South Korea	6 171.7	18.4%
Azerbaijan	1 047.7	2.2%	USA	1 263.2	3.8%
Ukraine	930.2	19%	Ukraine	232.5	0.7%
Tajikistan	778.9	1.6%	Tajikistan	548.4	1.6%
Armenia	730.6	1.5%	Germany	1 089.4	3.3%
Georgia	573.8	1.2%	UAE	300.7	0.9%
Other	2 495.5	5.2%	Other	2 769.9	8.3%
TOTAL	48 295.9	100.0%	TOTAL	33 516.0	100.0%

Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data from the National Bank of Kazakhstan.

Table 4. Cash income per capita (per month) in USD

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Belarus	434	451	304	257	291
Kazakhstan	371	348	304	224	255
Russia	815	731	502	460	540

Source: Eurasian Economic Commission's Statistical Yearbook. – M., 2018, 40.

Table 5. Per capita household cash income in 2017

	Unit of National Currency	USD	In % to 2016	
			Nominal	Real
Armenia	58474	121	103.4	102.4
Belarus	390	202	105.7	99.6
Kazakhstan	47562	146	107.0	99.6
Kyrgyzstan	4739	69	111.3	107.9
Russia	26723	468	100.6	97.1

Source: "About the standard of living of the population of EAEU in 2017," Eurasian Economic Commission, February 15, 2019, <http://www.eurasiancommission.org>.

Table 6. Average monthly nominal wage USD

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Changes from 2017 to 2013, in %
Armenia	358	381	359	363	368	102.7
Belarus	564	590	413	361	426	75.5
Kazakhstan	717	675	568	418	463	64.6
Kyrgyzstan	234	229	209	212	228	97.4
Russia	936	856	561	549	671	71.7

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the EAEU. – M., 2018, 60.

Table 7. Average pension in 2017

	Unit of national currency	USD	In % in 2016	
			Nominal	Real
Armenia	40634	84	100.4	99.5
Belarus	314	156	110.4	104.1
Kazakhstan	50850	156	110.5	102.9
Kyrgyzstan	5578	81	102.7	99.5
Russia	13304	228	104.3	100.6

Source: "About the standard of living of the population of EAEU in 2017," Eurasian Economic Commission, February 15, 2019, <http://www.eurasiancommission.org>.

Table 8. Household consumption expenditure in 2017

	Unit of national currency	USD	In % in 2016	
			Nominal	Real
Armenia	44162	91	103.4	102.4
Belarus	319	165	105.7	99.6
Kazakhstan	42891	132	107.0	99.6
Kyrgyzstan	2974	43	111.3	107.9
Russia	16770	287	100.6	97.1

Source: "About the standard of living of the population of EAEU in 2017," Eurasian Economic Commission, February 15, 2019, <http://www.eurasiancommission.org>.

Table 9. Cost of labor USD

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Armenia	389	413	389	394	406
Belarus	...	885	...	544	...
Kazakhstan	797	736	621	451	505
Kyrgyzstan	283	289	250	256	274
Russia	1 442	1 027

Source: "About the standard of living of the population of EAEU in 2017," Eurasian Economic Commission, February 15, 2019, <http://www.eurasiancommission.org>.

Table 10. Structure of labor costs in %

	Armenia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Russia
Structure of total cost	100	100	100	100	100
Salary	97	71.8	86.6	83	75
Special costs	0.9	25.1	4.5	13.7	22.1
Other costs	1.5	2.2	1.3	3.0	2.2

Source: This table was made by the authors based on the analyzed collected data