OPPORTUNITIES FOR EFFECTIVE REGULATION OF EXTERNAL LABOR MIGRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. *Demographic trends in Uzbekistan have a specific character associated with the active natural growth of the country's population (in the past 50 years, the country's population has increased by 2.86 times and amounted to 35 million people). In the early 1990s, there was an outflow of people to their historical homeland, the migration balance is still having a negative character. The article analyzes the gender and age composition of the population, changes in the dynamics of indicators of the natural movement of the population, in which the fertility rate decreases, life expectancy increases (73.4 years). The high proportion of young people (up to 60% in the population structure) and the annual high growth of labor resources (about 500 thousand people) creates a burden on the internal labor market. There is a significant flow of labor migration to foreign countries, in which the Russian Federation occupies a leading place. The article analyses the current reforms in the field of regulation of labor migration, which have been significantly developed under the new government of the country (since 2016), including the establishment of organized forms of labor migration. There are highlighted the present main targets of the Government of Uzbekistan, to create conditions and mechanisms that contribute to ensuring managed and regulated migration flows, legitimate rights and interests of citizens of the country. The author analyzes the trends in the normative and legal regulation of the sphere of labor migration, the relevance of the development of a new draft "Law on External Labor Migration" aimed at improving the efficiency of state bodies in solving complex migration issues. There is shown the institutional reform of the Agency for External Labor Migration in the field of migration management. It is proposed to develop a Concept and Strategy of state policy in the field of labor migration, as basic documents relating migration for the future. There are proposed directions of reforms in the migration sphere, establishment of organized forms of labor migration, expansion of international cooperation, powers of various departments of the country, improvement of the system for collecting statistics and data analysis, and conducting scientific research in the migration sphere.*

Keywords: *socially oriented management, migration processes, legislative regulation of external labor migration, concept of labor migration, organized forms of migration, legal migration.*

Introduction

The World Migration Report 2020, prepared by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)[1], notes the need for a global approach to governance and systematizes the flows and scale of migration processes, in which a key role should be given to state regulation of migration processes in various countries.

A significant factor in the development of global migration processes are demographic factors associated with low birth rates and, consequently, depopulation in developed countries and

overpopulation in developing countries. IOM research has shown that over $140 billion US dollars flow annually from developed countries to developing countries through private channels[2], and these figures reflect only the bank transfers recorded in reports. Taking into account informal transfer channels, the amounts are significantly higher, and they have a positive impact on households in the countries of origin of labor migrants. The relevance of studying migration processes in Uzbekistan is determined by the country's complex demographic trends, which directly impact the socio-economic, political, social, professional, and cultural development of the country and individuals. In the context of independent development, Uzbekistan has encountered new types of migration, previously uncharacteristic of the republic, such as forced migration, refugee flows into the country, illegal migration, and so on [1, p. 154].

Table 1. *Population growth in Uzbekistan (1991-2020)*

Years	Population at the beginning of the year		
	Total	*City*	*Countryside*
1991	20,608	8,305	12,303
1995	22,462	8,671	13,791
2000	24,488	9,166	15,322
2005	26,021	9,442	16,579
2010	28,001	14,424	13,577
2015	31,022	15,748	15,274
2020	34,558	17,487	17,071

Source: Data of the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan.

Recording, regulating, managing, and minimizing spontaneous forms of migration processes and reducing the negative factors of migration are important tasks. States, requiring the development of an effective public policy. The Republic of Uzbekistan (RU), among other CIS countries, has become an active participant in international relations, including migration. However, from 1991 to 1997, migration processes became spontaneous and unregulated. The study of migration processes was not systematic and was difficult to predict. This complicated the process of regulating and managing migration.

Under these conditions, state policy on migration management adopted a cautious, step-by-step approach to regulating migration processes, which has changed radically in recent years. President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev has defined conceptual reform directions for all areas of the country's socioeconomic development, and has also fundamentally revised efforts in the areas of migration management[3], intensifying the development of organized forms of labor migration, creating conditions for the legalization of flows and destinations for citizens' employment abroad[4], and ensuring comfortable conditions for the migration process[5]. These are aimed at addressing pressing issues in the area of labor migration and safe travel to foreign countries [2, p. 14].

The main goal of the Government of Uzbekistan at the present time is to create conditions conducive to ensuring managed and regulated flows. Migration, in which a significant role should be given to state institutions aimed at ensuring the legitimate rights and interests of Uzbek citizens. The Action Strategy of Uzbekistan for the period 2017–2021 envisaged the development and

approval of bills aimed at the effective use (prevention of labor drain) of highly qualified personnel for public service and work in various economic sectors, the development of a draft "Law on External Labor Migration," and a radical increase in the effectiveness of government agencies in addressing issues of external labor migration. The author of this article contributed to the development of a number of regulatory legal acts in the above-mentioned areas, as well as to the development of organizational mechanisms for managing migration processes in Uzbekistan.

The main findings and results

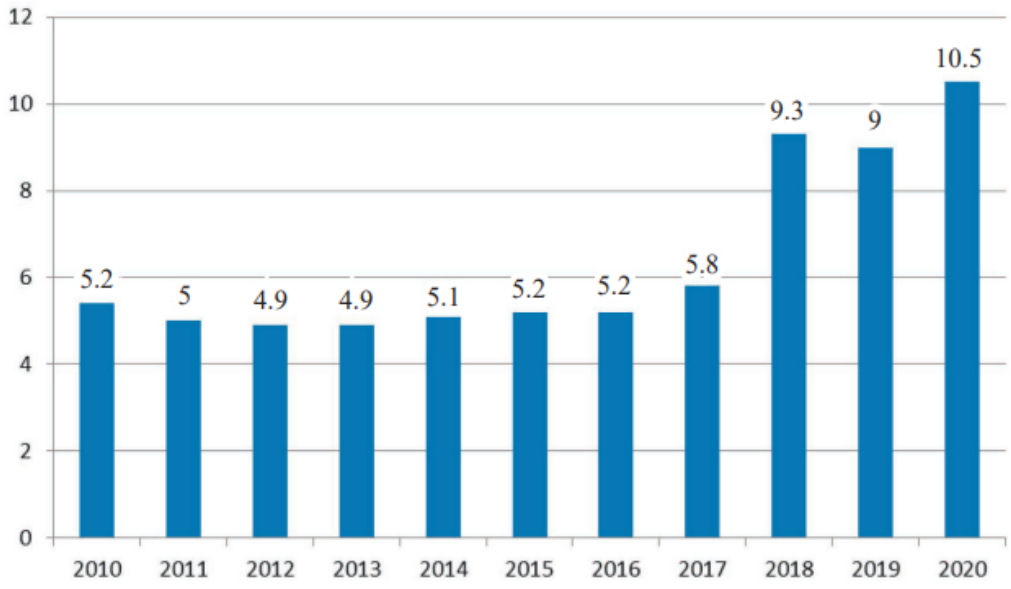
The objective of this study is to analyze demographic trends in Uzbekistan, identify the driving factors of migration, and identify problematic issues in regulating migration, including in the context of a significant flow of available labor resources from the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Russian Federation.

Demographic Situation in Uzbekistan Uzbekistan is a country with a dynamically growing population. It ranks third in terms of population among the CIS countries, after Russia and Ukraine (40th in the world). As of September 15, 2021, Uzbekistan's population was 35 million people[7], and according to forecasts from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs[8], by 2030, Uzbekistan's population will reach 37.4 million, and by 2050, it will reach over 42.9 million people (up from 20.61 million in 1991).

Over the past 50 years, the population of Uzbekistan has grown from 12.18 million to 34.55 million (as of the beginning of 2021), or 2.86 times.

This population growth rate is the result of the high birth rate of the country's indigenous population. Moreover, a decline in the birth rate has been observed since the 1990s and continues to this day. At the beginning of 2021, the ratio of the urban to rural population was 50.7% and 49.3%[9].

Graph 1. *Unemployment in the Republic of Uzbekistan (%)*



Source: data compiled by authors on basis of statistics provided by the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, 2020.

The relatively high birth rate, the high proportion of young families of reproductive age in the population structure, and the high proportion of children and youth in the country's population (over 60%) determine a long-term trend of growth in the working-age population. [3, p. 54] There

is no risk of labor shortage in Uzbekistan currently or in the near future. This necessitates effective human capital management and the use of the "demographic dividend." Over the past 30 years, positive demographic changes have occurred in Uzbekistan, despite a difficult period of socioeconomic transformation of society and the transition to a market economy, population outflow, and declining birth rates. A number of CIS countries (Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine) experienced population decline during this period. As in all CIS countries, in Uzbekistan, the first wave of population migration in the early 1990s was associated with the voluntary return of people to their historical homeland.

It is clear that, based on the results of 2020, the situation regarding Uzbekistan's vital statistics has changed significantly. In 2020, 841,800 children were born in the country, which is 100,000 more than in 1991, but 1.5 times less in relative terms. Similar figures are observed for natural population growth. At the same time, life expectancy at birth in Uzbekistan in 2020 was 73.4 years (women 75.5 years, men 71.2 years)—significantly higher than in 1991. Overall, industrialization processes and a number of other demographic factors and trends indicate that Uzbekistan is entering a stage of "demographic transition."

Moreover, between 1991 and 2020, significant changes were observed in the age composition of the republic's population. For example, in 1991, the population below working age (0–15 years) constituted 43.1% of the total population of the republic, while those of working age (men aged 16–59, women aged 16–54) constituted 49.1%, and those of older working age (men aged 60 and older, women aged 55 and older) constituted 7.8%. In 2020, these figures were 30.67%, 61.17%, and 7.14%, respectively. This demonstrates the high growth rate of the labor force entering the labor market. Currently, Uzbekistan enjoys a "demographic window of opportunity," in which the proportion of the working-age population is higher than that of dependents and older adults. Overall, Uzbekistan is one of the world's best-off countries in terms of labor force resources. Uzbekistan accounts for over 40% of Central Asia's labor force, demonstrating the importance of the region's labor potential. In recent years, approximately 500,000 people have entered the country's labor market annually. In our view, this opportunity should be effectively utilized in the national interest, primarily in the domestic labor market, and excess resources should be optimally allocated to highly productive markets of foreign countries and directed toward building the country's human capital through temporary external labor migration to industrialized countries.

External Migration Trends in Uzbekistan Uzbekistan is an active participant in international migration processes, the dynamics of which can be traced through both the rates of permanent migration and temporary labor migration. Figure 1 shows the dynamics of this migration. As can be seen, active external migration was observed between 1991 and 1995, associated with the intensification of the processes of transformation of the social structure of society, the emergence of the independence of the CIS countries, and the formation of new borders between countries.

An analysis of statistical data indicates the first wave of emigration between 1991 and 2005, which saw an average annual negative net migration of minus 75,000 people. Overall, from 1991 to 2020, 5.17 million people arrived in the country, 6.83 million left, and the negative net migration was 1.66 million. This is reflected in the country's population diversity indicators.

During this period, the share of Uzbeks increased from 72.8% in 1991 to 83.8% in 2019 of the total population. In subsequent years, due to significant reforms carried out in the country, an improved socioeconomic situation, accelerated job creation, and reduced incentives for

emigration, the situation with permanent emigration in Uzbekistan stabilized. In the current and medium term, the rate of labor force growth exceeds the rate of job creation in the country—as a result, there is a significant number of unemployed people in the republic. According to the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the unemployment rate in 2020 was estimated at 10.5% (in 2000—0.4%, 2005—0.3%, 2010—5.4%, 2015—5.2%). Prior to 2006, the unemployment rate in the country was insignificant due to the imperfections of the statistical system and unemployment accounting. The new government has begun large-scale efforts to regulate unemployment and employment through the state's monetary policy. In our opinion, positive trends in the country's macroeconomic development, confirmed by high ratings from international organizations, as well as targeted efforts to create employment for the population and a real increase in household incomes, may significantly reduce the scale of labor migration from Uzbekistan in the near future. An analysis of the results of our surveys conducted in 2007–2017 and a comparison with 2021 data showed that the decline in the desire to leave for work abroad was 44% in 2021, 71% in 2017, and 54% in 2007. This is largely due to the rapid creation of new jobs, the construction of numerous facilities, and a significant increase in the average wage in Uzbekistan (since 2016), which reduces incentives for international labor migration, including to Russia [3].

Development of Labor Migration from Uzbekistan to Russia In Uzbekistan, due to the imperfection of the labor migration statistics system and the lack of publicly available specialized research, there are gaps in migration that prevent in-depth research for effective and comprehensive management decisions. According to estimates by the Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1,678,400 labor migrants were working abroad in 2020. This figure is 780,000 fewer than in 2019. Of the total number of labor migrants, 1,192,800 (71%) work in Russia, 209,300 (12%) in Kazakhstan, 62,300 (4%) in South Korea, 43,200 (3%) in Turkey, and 5,200 Uzbek citizens in the UAE.[12] Russia has been and remains the main destination for migrant workers from Uzbekistan: the trend of annual growth continued until the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic led to a significant decline in migration flows globally, including in Russia. The lockdown in Russia in 2020 and the associated closure of many businesses and international borders led to a critical situation for migrant workers. Migrants are in a more vulnerable position, as their employment is most easily terminated during times of crisis.

As a result, many labor migrants decided to return to their home countries, including Uzbekistan. Moreover, there were numerous problems with transport links between Uzbekistan and Russia during the acute sanitary and epidemiological situation.

Much data on the driving and restraining factors of migration, the motives and purposes of migration, and the volume of remittances are poorly available. Therefore, to collect primary data, we conducted a sociological survey of potential labor migrants over time (574 respondents in 2007, 754 respondents in 2017, and 850 respondents in 2021). A standardized survey of "potential migrants" was conducted in person using questionnaires completed by respondents (the target group) seeking employment at the Agencies/Bureaus for External Labor Migration located in the country's regions, ensuring the representativeness of the study.

Given the annual growth of labor migration flows from Uzbekistan, a proportionally larger number of respondents was expected at each stage. The survey aimed to analyze the current situation and identify migration trends related to the migration mobility of the population, changes in permanent residence, and the impact of migrants' remittances on household well-being. The

main goals were to develop a basic social profile of a potential labor migrant, study the drivers and constraints of migration, and analyze the socioeconomic impact of labor migration on those leaving and their families. Regarding the attractiveness of various countries for employment, the analysis revealed that Russia is the most attractive for the vast majority of respondents, with over 60% reporting this (compared to 57.4% in 2017 and 31.7% in 2007). This is largely due to the visa-free regime between Uzbekistan and Russia, the similarity of mentalities and cultures, a certain knowledge of Russian as the lingua franca in the CIS countries, the development of migrant networks and ethnic diaspora, and the tolerance of the host community towards labor migrants.

Uzbekistan's main labor migration partners in the CIS countries have traditionally been Russia and Kazakhstan. Among non-CIS countries, South Korea is the leading partner for organized migration, while Turkey and European countries are the leading partners for independent migration. Over the past four years, organized centralized labor migration routes have been established, including with Russia, Kazakhstan, Poland, the Republic of Korea, and Turkey. A number of intergovernmental agreements have been concluded with Russia on labor migration and the protection of the rights and interests of participants in migration processes [4].

It is known that Russia is actively improving migration management processes. In the pre-COVID period in 2019, the number of foreign migrants in Russia was estimated at 12 million people[13], ranking fourth in the world in terms of migrant reception after the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Germany. It is estimated that by 2025, the Russian economy will need 20 million labor migrants[14]. On average, over the period 2017–2019, Russia hosted between 9 and 11 million labor migrants annually.

However, due to the global pandemic and the resulting decline in economic activity, the number of migrants has decreased to 6–8 million.

Due to the stabilization of the economic situation and the growth of the Russian economy, as well as the liberalization of migration legislation, including labor migration, an increase in demand for labor migrants can be predicted, both now and in the medium term [5].

Russia is also a key source of remittances. According to the Central Bank of Russia, in 2019, $4.4 billion was transferred from Russia to Uzbekistan. This ranks Uzbekistan first among CIS countries (second to Tajikistan, with $2.5 billion). The average amount of a single remittance to Uzbekistan was $374. The return flow of remittances from Uzbekistan to Russia in 2019 amounted to only $333 million. In Uzbekistan, the main body coordinating foreign employment is the Agency for External Labor Migration under the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of Uzbekistan, which has regional offices in all regions of the country. The Agency also has representative offices abroad, including in the Russian cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Samara, and Ufa. There are plans to open representative offices in other countries around the world where Uzbek labor migrants are concentrated [6]. An "Agreement on the Organized Recruitment and Engagement of Uzbek Citizens for Temporary Work in the Russian Federation" was signed with Russia on April 5, 2017.

A Cabinet of Ministers resolution was adopted, providing for a significant increase in organized recruitment, including for work in Russia, vocational and language training, and the creation of preferential conditions for pre-departure preparation and travel, including increased availability of air and train tickets. Uzbekistan became the first country with which Russia began cooperation in the organized recruitment of migrant workers. In March 2021, a representative office of the Multifunctional Migration Center (MMC) of Moscow opened in Tashkent. The main functions of the MMC representative office include: disseminating information in Uzbekistan

about job vacancies in Moscow and informing Moscow employers about the availability of specialists with the required qualifications; organizing online interviews and assessing the professional skills of migrant workers; and verifying their eligibility for entry into Russia and employment. A key role is played by consulting migrant workers on employment issues, the procedure for obtaining work permits, and the rules of stay in Moscow, including taking into account restrictions related to the pandemic. Due to the shortage of migrant workers associated with the impact of COVID-19, the departure of migrant workers to their home countries, and the lack of incentives for return migration, Russia initially prepared to transport approximately 10,000 migrants on charter trains. High demand for construction workers has been noted in many regions of Russia, including for projects such as logistics warehouse construction, large infrastructure projects, and housing construction.

Also, due to the departure of many migrants from Russia, the average cost of migrant labor has increased by 30%, which is an attractive factor [7].

However, studies show[19] that Uzbek labor migrants are no longer considering employment options with monthly wages of less than 40,000 rubles (previously 25,000–30,000 rubles), as ongoing reforms in Uzbekistan, the rapid rate of job creation, and rising wages within the country, particularly in industry and construction, are reducing incentives for labor trips to Kazakhstan and Russia. Traveling to non-CIS countries has become preferable. Currently, employment contracts are being concluded with Russian employers with wages starting from 50,000–60,000 rubles, which is a positive factor for the economic well-being of migrant households.

In October 2021, discussions began on the allocation (lease) of agricultural land in Russia for the cultivation of a number of crops (oilseeds, soybeans, wheat) by Uzbek entrepreneurs, with the subsequent export of the harvest to Uzbekistan. Negotiations were held at the level of the ministries of agriculture of Uzbekistan and Russia. If the pilot project is successful, it is planned to allocate up to 300,000-500,000 hectares of land in the coming years, and eventually up to 1 million hectares. It should be noted that Russia has 8-13 million hectares of land available for agricultural use, and 23 constituent entities of the Russian Federation have already expressed interest in supporting this Uzbek-Russian project. The implementation of this mutually beneficial project will yield tangible results for the socioeconomic development of both countries and will help streamline labor migration in the agricultural sector.

Reforming the Labor Migration Management System in Uzbekistan. The above-mentioned trends in the international labor market, in the main migration countries, require the implementation of an active state policy in Uzbekistan to regulate migration processes, aimed primarily at a managed, socially oriented mechanism based on the interests of the country's citizens. The Republic of Uzbekistan has its own specific legal and regulatory system in the area of social and economic relations, including migration regulation. Unfortunately, there is no specific law regulating migration processes in the country. Some aspects of the departure of citizens, as well as the entry and stay of foreign citizens and stateless persons in the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan, are regulated by separate by-laws. The State Program for the Implementation of the Action Strategy for Five Priority Development Areas of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017–2021 provided for the development of three important legislative and regulatory acts in the area of migration: the "Law on External Labor Migration," the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution "On Measures for the Effective Use (Prevention of Labor Drainage Abroad) of Highly Qualified Personnel for Civil Service and Work in Sectors of the Economy," and "On

Measures for Further Improvement and Fundamental Review of the System of Organized Employment of Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abroad."

The author of this article developed drafts of the above-mentioned legislative and regulatory acts, which were submitted for review to the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations.

The most important document is the "Law on Labor Migration," which will regulate a number of legal, socioeconomic, and organizational processes in the field of migration, filling gaps in terminology and in the legal framework governing migration processes. In preparing the draft law, international experience in legislative regulation of migration processes was analyzed, and the conceptual aspects of rulemaking were studied based on compliance with the international rights of individuals to freedom of migration. The draft law is currently undergoing approval by the country's ministries and agencies for subsequent consideration by the Legislative Chamber of Uzbekistan.

Publication of the draft law "On Labor Migration" on the e-government portal regulation.gov.uz will allow for a legal review of the law for compliance with the law, the absence of corruption norms and risks, consistency with legal practice, and consideration of suggestions from all stakeholders. In our opinion, it is necessary to significantly expand the powers, rights, and obligations of legal entities in the area of labor migration and reflect them in the "Law on Labor Migration."

It is necessary to develop key directions of state policy, formalized in the form of a "Concept of Migration Policy in the Sphere of External Migration" covering the migration of foreign citizens to Uzbekistan, as well as the external labor migration of citizens of the country to foreign countries. The concept should include directions and mechanisms for achieving target indicators, various types and forms of employment, taking into account the medium- and long-term national interests of the country.

It is also necessary to note among the new regulations for supporting migrants the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures to ensure the safety of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan during their travel by transport outside the Republic for temporary labor activity," adopted on March 5, 2018. The main goal of this document is to create favorable conditions to ensure the safe passage of citizens of Uzbekistan to their temporary work destinations outside the Republic. Comprehensive measures have been taken to prevent road accidents along the route [8].

Furthermore, on July 5, 2018, a Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan was adopted, which, effective September 1, 2018, grants legal entities the right to employ citizens abroad under special licenses. However, due to lapses in oversight of private employment agents and their unscrupulous practices, many previously issued licenses were revoked. On September 15, 2020, a new Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan was adopted, which expands and improves support mechanisms for citizens working abroad, ensures the reintegration of returning migrant workers, and creates favorable conditions for their entrepreneurial activities. The functions of authorized government bodies have been expanded in the areas of external labor migration, training for individuals wishing to work abroad, protecting the rights of citizens during their stay abroad, ensuring employment for returning migrant workers, and providing social support to their family members.

Specifically, it is necessary to improve the activities of government agencies, ministries and departments, and governmental and non-governmental public organizations to ensure their

coordinated work in migration processes, aimed primarily at protecting the rights of citizens, ensuring the constitutional rights of individuals to freedom of migration, and ensuring their employment opportunities.

Conclusion

The use and implementation of international norms, the refinement of existing regulatory and legal acts, and, if necessary, the development of new ones in the Republic of Uzbekistan are important and relevant areas for further improving public relations in the migration sphere. It is important to develop new methodological approaches for assessing the performance and effectiveness of government agencies [6], which will allow for the analysis and monitoring of migration processes in a given country. In this regard, it is necessary to initiate the process of concluding agreements on the transfer to Uzbekistan of social security payments, taxes, and other payments made by Uzbek citizens to migrant workers in host countries. Work will also be carried out to further improve the legal and regulatory framework governing pension provision for citizens working abroad.

To better coordinate migration efforts, it is important to develop an "Interdepartmental Program of Measures to Improve the Employment System for Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abroad."

The established ties between Uzbekistan and Russia, the willingness of regional authorities and economic entities to work together, and the high level of cooperation in regulating migration processes between the two countries create unique opportunities for developing new methods and tools that ensure effective mechanisms for managing labor migration that meet the mutually beneficial interests of our countries.

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