

Massive Inflow of Central Asian Migrants to Russia : Causes and Consequences

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INTRODUCTION

It would not be wrong to call Russia a museum of nationalities. Present Russia, particularly after the break down of the Soviet Union has become a magnet of migration. Now it is the second largest recipient country of migrants after America. Even if Russia receives migrants from all over the world, the lion share of its immigrants comes from its former Soviet Union countries in general and from Central Asian countries in particular. In the 1990s when Russia's influence over Central Asia was waning, the immigration process played a vital role in reviving its influence in Central Asia's geo-politics and economics. This immigration has wide ranging positive and negative repercussions for both Russia and Central Asia. The immigrants play both an economic and social role in the host country and in the republics of Central Asia. Labour immigration has become a part and parcel of the Russian economy. Through labour immigration Russia fulfils its labour shortages, development of infrastructure and service sector and maintains stability in the region. The most fascinating contribution of immigration for Russia is that, it compensates the "demographic resource" of Russia which is going through a negative trend since two decades. So the labour immigration plays a vital role in the economic development of a resource rich and people poor country like Russia. While from the economic and demographic point of view this process of immigration is very much beneficial for both Russia and Central Asia, sometimes from security point of view, these migrants are look down upon by the

citizens of the receiving country, as they are suspected of creating social instability in the host country.

Factors promoting immigration to Russia:

Economic factors:

One of the main push factors of Central Asian labour migrants to Russia is the far better economic condition of Russia compared to its Central Asian counterparts. By far Russia is the largest successor state of the Soviet Union endowed with great wealth of natural resources like oil and natural gas. On the one hand in the Central Asian countries the main economic prerequisites prompting departure of the employable population are typical push factors. These are stagnation of production, low wages, widespread poverty, high unemployment and lack of jobs. On the other hand, Russia's diversified labour market offer employment opportunities in different industries and regions and higher wages.

The economic imperative of Central Asian migrants to Russia is very natural because most of the migrants from Central Asia who come to Russia are very poor. Despite their young age, most of the migrants have their own family and children. About half are the only breadwinners in the family. On an average every migrant has 3 dependent persons. They even lack sufficient incomes to fulfil their daily needs like food, and clothing. Despair and lack of any way of supporting their family in their home country made them willing to accept exploitative and often slavish labour conditions in Russia. (NHDR, 2008).

Geographical factors:

Geographically Russia is the closest neighbour of all the Former Soviet Union countries. This geographical proximity motivated most of the Central Asian migrants to migrate to Russia than any other country. It is very easy to go to Russia from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Besides geographical proximity, there is also existing transportation infrastructure as Russian federation and these Central Asian republics were previously one country. The most important motivating factor of massive out flow of Central Asian labour migrants to Russia is that, the existence of the visa-free agreement among the CIS countries, of which both Russia and Central Asian countries are members. The non-requirement of visa makes the entry of migrants feasible, as it saves money and time in paper work. As a result, it becomes easy for the migrants to make repeated trips to Russia for seasonal work.

Demographic factor:

The migration trend of Central Asia to Russia is also greatly influenced by the demographic factors. Now the demographic scenario of the Russian Federation is very much alarming. In this crucial time of declining population, accompanied with higher mortality and falling fertility, immigration seems to be the only viable option which can compensate the natural population loss to some extent. On the contrary, in the Central Asian countries (the neighbours of Russia), an increasing trend of population growth has been noticed since 2000, except Kazakhstan. So in these Central Asian countries like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan where population is growing, out-migration dominates. And all these countries choose Russia to migrate because of the geographical proximity (Peter Rocco, 2013).

Common culture:

Most of the migrants to Russia, approximately 80 percent of the total, comes from the CIS countries, because migration within the CIS maintains an intra-regional characteristic. This intra-regional character is maintained largely due to shared history, common cultural ties, similar educational systems and corresponding labour market (Elizabeth Anne Potter, 2011).

Central Asian migration to Russia during 1990s:

A remarkable shift in the migration process of the Russian federation has been noticed in 1990s. Russia

which had been remained a country of emigration since 19th century, converted into a country of immigration in the 1990s. Between 1990 and 2003 the country received more than 10 million people of which almost 8 million were former Soviet citizens. Immigration from CIS to Russia reached a record high in 1994. However, as early as 1996-1997, the official migratory flows between the new post-Soviet states began to decrease. In the first half of the 1990s, immigration to Russia was dominated by, forced migrants, asylum seekers and the return of the ethnic Russians. In the first half of the decade these groups represented two-thirds of the total migration into Russia, but since then their share has been reduced remarkably.

During the first half of the 1990s, these migratory flows mainly concerned the national minorities of these republics, above all the Russians. Since the second half of the 1990s, migration flow from Central Asia to Russia is mainly consists of individuals holding titular nationalities. Since 1994 the net migratory balance of each of the titular nationalities from Central Asia to Russia has been positive. However, the number of Central Asian migrants who live legally and permanently in Russia has increased only moderately between the censuses of 1989 and 2002. It rose from 882,000 to 963,000 persons, although only half of this increase can be attributed to migration. The number of Kazakhs settled in Russia increased from 636,000 to 654,000; the number of Uzbeks increased from 97,000 to 123,000. The Tajiks have seen the highest proportion of increase, from 38,000 to 120,000 people, particularly because of the forced migrant status Russia granted to people displaced as a result of Tajik civil war, which lasted from 1992 to 1996 (Marlene Laruelle, 2007).

During the early 1990s, the migration policy of Russian Federation was influenced by two major factors. First, the lack of practice and knowledge in the field of international migration management and secondly, huge inflow of former Soviet citizens from different parts of the Post-Soviet territory who had to be provided with social protection, including access to public medical care, and education systems, habitations, social benefits, provision of pensions, etc. The situation was complicated by the fact that, most of the migrants were mostly refugees, who arrived from the areas of armed ethnic conflicts and lost all their possessions and needed urgent help. All these situations led Russia to adopt reactive and emergency oriented migration laws during 1990s (Irina Ivakhnyuk, 2009).

Immigration to Russia during 2000s:

While immigration in the 1990s was mostly determined by ethnic consideration and the returning of the compatriots, the immigration of the 2000s is basically economic migrants. In that period countries with population boom and poor economic conditions migrate to countries with better economic condition and countries facing population loss. This trend was also practiced during the Soviet period. In soviet period there was a cross-flow of population from labour-excessive to labour deficient regions of one and the same country that is the Soviet Union. During that period some measures were taken to encourage labour migration from Central Asia to European Russia and other regions of Russia but uncontrolled migration from over populated republics occurred irrespective of these measures. The number of Central Asian migrants also increased to a large extent during those times. For example, between the censuses of 1979 and 1989, the number of Uzbeks in Russia increased by 1.8 times, Turkmen 34%, Kirgiz 2.9 times (33%), and 2.1 times for Tajiks that is 46%. The collapse of the USSR gave rise to widening of the economic inequalities among the Former Soviet Union republics including the Central Asian republics. This economic

inequality naturally led to the migration of many Central Asian republics' population to migrate to Russia whose economic condition was far better than those republics.

The highest numbers of labour migrants come to Russia from Uzbekistan. Before the dissolution of the USSR, Uzbekistan was destination country for most of the migrants, particularly from Russia. But after the breakup of the Soviet Union, particularly at the end of the 1990s, it took the reverse turn. This drastic change in the migration process occurred due to a steady decline in living standards. There are basically four reasons why Uzbekistan migrants choose to go Russia : low language barriers Uzbeks that have Russian language skills at a level acceptable for social communication; a real need for foreign workers in Russia since that country has been struck by depopulation as a result of low birth rate; the absence of visa-barrier between Russia and Uzbekistan; and the most significant factor, a much higher living standards and salary level in Russia compared to the poorest Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan (Alisher Ilkhamov, 2006).

The net migration of Central Asian migration to Russia since 2000 has been remained positive from all the Central Asian countries even though the rate varies

Table 1 : The share of foreign nationals engaged in labour activities in Russia

	Percentage of the total						
	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Including from countries other than CIS countries	50.1	51.1	47.0	32.8	26.6	26.0	23.9
From CIS countries	49.9	48.9	53.0	67.1	73.4	74.0	76.0
Azerbaijan	1.5	2.5	2.8	3.4	3.1	2.7	2.5
Armenia	2.6	3.7	3.9	4.3	4.1	3.7	3.6
Georgia	2.4	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.2	-	-
Kazakhstan	1.4	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5
Kyrgyzstan	0.4	2.3	3.3	6.4	7.6	7.0	7.2
Moldova	5.6	4.4	5.0	5.5	5.0	4.6	4.0
Tajikistan	2.9	7.5	9.7	14.6	16.1	16.2	16.4
Turkmenistan	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Uzbekistan	2.9	7.0	10.4	20.1	26.5	30.0	31.2
Ukraine	30.1	20.2	16.9	12.2	10.1	9.2	10.2

Source-Vladimir Mukomel, 2013

Table 2 : Net-migration of Central Asian Migrants to Russia

Countries	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Kazakhstan	106990	39508	26658	30047	32481	31598
Kyrgyzstan	13679	15119	15064	24063	23366	22591
Uzbekistan	37724	29841	36478	52080	42570	41862
Tajikistan	9885	4283	6099	16845	20080	26418
Turkmenistan	6062	3979	3977	4735	3872	3274

Source-Demographic Year Book of Russia 2010

from each other. Since 2005, the rate of net migration of Uzbekistan migrants in Russia has been remained the highest, even crossing Kazakhstan which was far ahead in number in the year 2000.

Structurally foreign workers work in the economic branches of construction, agriculture, transportation, housing, communication services, and trade and service industry. Migrants from different Central Asian countries work in different areas of the Russian labour market. Tajik migrants work primarily in construction, housing and communication services. Migrants from Uzbekistan work in construction, agriculture, housing, trade, transportation and other services. Kyrgyz migrants are mostly engaged in housing, communication services, transportation, trade and other services. Most of the Turkish workers work in construction sector (Ryazantsev *et al.*, 2010).

Most of the Central Asian migrants to Russia are temporary and seasonal in nature. A majority of the migrants leave their country in spring and summer and return in autumn. In Central Asia two age groups particularly migrate to Russia. They are: young people particularly in their twenties, who have to pay for a wedding or the building of a house; and older men in their forties and fifties, who need money for family celebrations like children's weddings, circumcisions, or the extension of the family property. 90 percent of migrants from Tajikistan are men. A quarter of them are between the ages of 18 and 29, another quarter is between 40 and 49, and those from 30 to 39 constitute 40 percent of the total number of migrants. The older generation is statistically more educated compared to the young generation. As the older generation has a good command over Russian language, they are better placed in good and skilled jobs, particularly in the building trade. (Marlene Larulle, 2007).

In Russia the concentration of labour migrants in its different regions is uneven, even though foreign migrants are dispersed all over the country. Central Russia holds the largest number of foreign workers, which accounts for 40 % of the total regular foreign labour force. Within Central Russia 1/3 of the total labour migrants are concentrated in Moscow. Next to Central Russia, comes the Urals Federal Okrug, where every sixth of migrants work. Oil industries of Yamal and Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Khanty-Mansy Autonomous Okrug have been the major source of job opportunities, and marks second and third place in the country for the number of foreign workers employed. Labour migrants in this region mostly

engaged in oil mining industry and in construction sector. Far East Okrug is the third largest region attracting foreign workers which accounts 10% of the total foreign work force (Ryazantsev *et al.*, 2010).

Migration policy in Post-Soviet Russia:

The basic principles for the Russian migration policy were established after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Federal Migration Service (FMS) was established in the year 1993 as a reaction to the breakup of the USSR. One year later laws covering refugees and displaced persons were introduced. Unfortunately, in 2002, the service had to shut down temporarily because of the unsuccessful attempts to regulate migration. However, its successor, the Ministry for Federal Affairs, Nationalities and Migration Policy was also shut down only a year after it was established. The FMS was subsequently re-established under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Johann C. Fuhrmann, 2012).

Russia's migration policy has been changing over the period depending on the need of the hour. Sometimes it takes liberal forms and sometimes radical and strict stance. So while in the early 2000s the migration policy of Russia took a strict stance in the form of 2002 migration policy as a reaction to the growth of illegal labour migrants inside Russia, the 2006 migration policy is comparatively liberal.

The 2006 migration policy was a reaction to the previous restrictive migration policy, which instead of reducing the number of illegal migrants, led to its growth. So in 2005, president Putin realising the gravity of the problem of illegal migration and the shrinkage of working age population, took initiatives to adopt more liberal policy of immigration. The priority of this policy was to receive migrants from the CIS countries. He also emphasised that in order to consolidate relations with the CIS countries, migration plays a key role. The major change in the new legislation was that it made clear difference between the migrants who come from countries within visa-regime on the one hand and migrants coming from visa-free regime, such as CIS countries on the other. The basic reason behind this shift was that, Russia tried to take advantage of the knowledge of Russian culture and Russian language among the migrants coming to Russia from former Soviet republics. Getting a work-permit has also become easier as a result of the 2006 migration policy. The migrants who belong to the visa-free regime are entitled to acquire a work-permit independent of an

employer (Myhre, 2012).

Irina Ivakhnyuk (2009) has broadly divided the migration policy of Russia into four phases. These are: 1991-1995 laissez-fair migration policy basically to settle the wide inflow of migrants, particularly refugees and forced migrants; 1996-2001, when the focus of the migration policy shifted to dominating economic migrants; 2002-2005, brought tough migration policy as a reaction to the growth of irregular migration in Russia. But unfortunately this strict and complicated migration policy provoked a further growth of irregular migration; the 2006 liberal policy towards the CIS countries.

This liberalisation of migration policy increased the rate of regulated migrants in Russia. By 2008, the portion of recorded migration in labour immigration has increased 35-40 % (Ivanov, 2012).

Illegal Migrants in Russia:

Throughout the 1990s, Russia arguably was one of the most open countries in the world in terms of both immigration and emigration. This open-door practice was accompanied by highly inaccurate recording of immigrants and by various forms of their exploitation, such as, forced labour, human trafficking and fraudulent recruitment schemes. Many Russians accustomed to the long lasting closed-country regime of the USSR, became increasingly wary of “too many” foreigners in their cities. Prompted by growing uneasy the Russian government moved to the opposite extreme and introduced rigid immigration laws. Adopted in 2002, the Federal Law “on the Legal Status of Foreigners in Russian Federation” erected substantial barriers to the lawful stay and the employment of immigrants. Employment authorisation, a separate process, was to be procured by the prospective employer; it was impossible to even solicit an employment authorisation without the residential approval stamp in the passport. However, this offered a substantial outlet for corruption. In every major Russian city, intermediary services offered residential registration and employment authorisation for a significant fee, some of which was used to bribe the police. This situation narrowed the immigrants’ legal room for manoeuvre and boosted corruption; the recorded component of immigration consequently shrank (Ioffe and Zayonchkovskaya, 2012). The number of illegal migrants in Russia is alarmingly high. There is a considerable difference between the official figures and the actual number of labour migrants in Russia. It is estimated that the number of illegal

migrants are several times higher than that of registered. Approximately 70 percent of the illegal migrants come from the CIS countries. No doubt they arrived in Russia legally as they do not have to produce visa for their entry. However, they have not been able to register nor produce work permits in Russia. All these conditions lead to the growth of illegal labour markets in most of the big cities (Ryazantsev *et al.*, 2010).

Until mid-1990s labour immigration was not a priority of the Russian Federation, at which time hundreds of thousands of migrants from CIS countries were flooding to Russia for temporary work. At that time Russia signed bilateral agreements with most of the CIS countries and welcomed the migrants. Even if Russia welcomed the massive inflow of migrants, it did not set up necessary infrastructure within the appropriate government agencies to process, register and place the new comers. This led to the growth of irregular migration with migrants reaching and working without proper documentation (Rocco, 2013).

In 1992 a visa-free agreement was signed among the CIS countries, which is called the “Bishkek Agreement”. But, this visa-free entry gave rise to the growth of cross-border terrorism, arms, drug and human trafficking. However, in 1999, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and in 2000, Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan withdrew from this agreement. In 2003, visa requirement agreement was signed by Russia for Georgian citizens as a result of political tensions between the two countries. In addition, a visa-free movement was signed in November 2000 between the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) members (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan). Uzbekistan joined the EurAsEC in 2006, and correspondingly the multilateral visa-free agreement (Irina Ivanyuk, 2009).

In the sphere of migration management, the over-bureaucratic registration process became a major impediment of legal immigration. It also gave rise to rampant corruption in the process of immigration. Even though, labour inflow of CIS countries was essential, but clashing against an irrational work permit procedure, has made migrants employment a largely illegal sphere.

Impact of Labour Migration on Russia and central Asia:

The massive inflow of Central Asian migration to Russia creates both positive and negative consequences for both sides. The major positive consequences are:

From sociological point of view, the money sent by

migrants to the home country are spent by households for essential goods like, food, cloth, etc. The migrants' remittances also greatly contribute to the human development of the home countries. The money is used for various developmental activities of the migrants' families. It increases the standard of living of the migrants' families such as access to better health facilities, better education and good quality food (Ivakhnyuk, 2009).

Economic impact:

Labour out migration of Central Asian republics to Russia has also wide ranging economic impact for both sides. It has a greater hand in the economic development of the home country. The larger amount of remittances sent by migrants to their home country increases the consumption capacity of its citizens. An increase in the consumption increases the production of consumer goods and stimulates the economic growth.

Labour out migration postpones unemployment fuelled social tensions and socio-political instability. Labour migration from CIS countries in general and Central Asian countries in particular has strong incentives associated with the state of affairs of those countries. According to the surveys by the International Organisation for Migration in 2006, about half of the migrants did not have steady jobs in their native country. They were either unemployed or had temporary jobs. Moreover, a growing volume of money transfer creates new ways to use them, including buying land and real estate, investment in human capital, founding one's business and development of the local infrastructure. Not only the families of the migrants are benefited by the money transferred to the home country, the families of the non-migrants are also greatly benefited from the money transferred by the migrants to their country via the multiplier effects of growing incomes and employment (ibid).

Political impact:

The migration process of Central Asia and Russia also helps in the development of a strong political and foreign policy relation between Russia and Central Asia. Myhre, 2012, highlights the political impact of Central Asian migration to Russia. In his speech at the Security Council's Conference on Migration Policy in 2005, Putin emphasised the stimulation of migration processes as one of Russia's most important tasks. In that speech he also acknowledged the importance of immigration as an important factor in consolidating its relation with the CIS

countries in general and the Central Asian countries in particular. In this way the process of immigration from Central Asia plays a vital role in establishing Russia's sphere of influence on its near abroad and keeping Europe at bay from this region.

The Russian Federation Foreign Policy Concept of 2013, speaks both the opportunities and values of Central Asia region to Russia and also the risks and challenges. The major areas of interest include: Vital geo- political position; economic and trade opportunities; lasting Russian cultural impact; and the presence of Russian speaking communities. In its focus on destabilizing factors, Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020 identifies many risks like: development of nationalistic mind-set, xenophobia, separatism, and violent extremism including religious radicalisation (Craig Oliphant, 2013).

An important development in the field of politics and security is that, a positive trend of Central Asian migrants in Eastern Siberia region of Russia is being noticed now-a-day, even if Chinese citizens still comprise a sizable majority of the foreign work force in Amur Region and several other regions that border china. But now the ratios are changing in favour of more Central Asian migrants. This trend of massive Central Asian migration to Russia's Siberian Region indirectly de-escalates Russia's security and political threat, which is being posed by China (ibid).

Social status of migrants in Russia:

Upon their arrival to Russia, the majority of the migrants acquire lower social status than they had in their home country. The typical path of migrants in the labour market is down ward labour mobility –occupying a position that is worse than the one they previously held in their home country (Vladimir Mokumel, 2013).

Ryazantsev , et al., 2010, focus on various aspects of social conditions of the Central Asian migrants in Russia. The social condition of most of the Central Asian migrants is very miserable in Russia. Migrant workers generally do various “non-prestigious niche” jobs with severe working conditions. The lack of fully developed policy for labour migration has created room for intermediary persons to cheat the migrants and recruit them in the niche market. They work under harsh conditions and environments. Their life is always at risk. The Labour Codex does not define the guidelines on the management of the labour conditions of the workers. The employers exploit the migrants very badly. Most of the migrants work more than eight hours a day, sometimes

without weekends and holidays. The worst thing is that, most labour migrants do not sign official labour contracts. Even if in some cases labour contracts are signed, they are not given to the migrants. Therefore, when the labours get into conflict with the employers, they cannot claim any legal assistance, as they do not have the labour contract. They are less paid compared to the Russian workers, doing the same work. Even if the immigrants who are given Russian citizenship, some are not guaranteed to be paid same wages as Russians.

Bartolomeo *et al.* (2014), discuss the miserable family conditions of the migrants. Due to migration, the families remain separated for a long time, which consequently leads to spousal differences and ultimately convert into divorce. The number of single mothers and fathers are also increasing day by day as many women also leave for work. Under such circumstances, the conditions of children become worse, when both parents leave and children stay in care of elderly grandparents.

Security threats:

The massive inflow of Central Asian migration in the form of economic cooperation between Central Asia and Russia, gives rise to security threats for both countries. The non-requirement of visa for Central Asian countries, make their entry to Russia easier. This visa-free entry of migrants leads to many illegal activities like drug-trafficking from Central Asia to Russia. Drug – trafficking financially supports illegal economic sector, corruption and organised crimes in both Russia and Central Asian countries (Craig Oliphant, 2013).

The major stumbling block in the field of immigration is the question of integration. No doubt, Russia is a multi-ethnic country, which embraces people from all over the world, but in spite of its multi-ethnic nature, it has failed to develop institutions to integrate and socialise new people coming to the country. The nationality of a migrant may have an impact on the probability of an emergence of a threat. There is a positive correlation between ethno-cultural distance between the migrant sending and receiving countries and the emergence of the social threats. A large scale of unskilled labour from Central Asian countries who are ethnically and religiously different from other major migrant sending countries like Ukraine, Moldova, in the overall structure of the migration flow into Russia may have an additional impact on the emergence of social tension in the society caused by international labour migration (Tsiulina, 2008).

Conclusion:

Russia has been remained the magnet of Central Asian migrants since the demise of the Soviet Union, even though the nature of immigrants is different over the periods. The ethnic basis of immigration of the 1990s, was replaced by the economic or labour immigration of the 2000s. The migration of Central Asian labour to Russia is very much beneficial for both Russia and Central Asia. As the demographic blanket of Russia is becoming thinner day by day, and the labour force of Russia is decreasing in a rapid pace, the very survival and the economic development of Russia is dependent on these immigrants. This immigration is not only an imperative for Russia, it is also very much helpful for the poor Central Asian countries. No doubt there are some irritants on the way of immigration. But it is also true that efforts have been taken by the Russian government and also its Central Asian counterparts to solve these problems, as it will be beneficial for both the parties. So in his State of the Nations Address 2013, Putin put emphasis on the issues of immigration from the CIS countries. He said, “we need to put orders to in the procedures for employing foreign nationals who have visa-free entry to Russia, and increase employers’ responsibility for employing foreign workers. Russia must be able to know why people are coming and, and how long they plan to stay”.

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