

# INFORMATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY OF INTENDING AND RETURNING MIGRANTS IN KYRGYZSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

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## Acknowledgements

This publication on *information needs assessment* was prepared under the EU-funded Project PROTECT on “Improving Migration Management and Migrant Protection in Selected Silk Routes and Central Asian Countries”. This study aims to investigate the information needs of Kyrgyz and Uzbek migrants on migration-related topics. To this end, it analyses the resources available from national agencies and other relevant stakeholders for migrants, as well as the information gaps that Migration Resource Centers (MRCs) in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan can address to promote safe and orderly migration.

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The implementation of this project will help to improve migration management and protection of migrants, raise awareness of the risks of irregular migration, facilitate and promote the protection of migrants, and support informed migration decisions at the individual, family and community levels.

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AELM</b>	Agency for External Labor Migration under the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction, Republic of Uzbekistan
<b>CECA</b>	Center for Employment of Citizens Abroad
<b>EAEU</b>	Eurasian Economic Union
<b>EPS</b>	Employment Permit System
<b>ICMPD</b>	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>MLSSM</b>	Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic
<b>NSC</b>	National Statistical Committee
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>KR</b>	Kyrgyz Republic
<b>MEPR</b>	Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction, Republic Uzbekistan
<b>MTM</b>	Mobility Tracking Matrix
<b>PEA</b>	Private Employment Agency
<b>RF</b>	Russian Federation
<b>ROSSTAT</b>	Federal State Statistics Service, Russian Federation
<b>SI</b>	Semi-structured interview
<b>SCNS</b>	State Committee on National Security
<b>SWP</b>	Seasonal Workers Program
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>WB</b>	World Bank



## Glossary

### GENERAL TERMS

#### Intending/outgoing

##### **Migrant**

Migrant who has the desire to migrate, but it is uncertain whether he/she will act or have the capacity to act upon this desire

#### Returning migrant

##### **/Returnee**

Persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short term or long term) in another country and who are intending to stay in the country for at least one year

### KYRGYZSTAN SPECIFIC TERMS

**Emigration** - Exit of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic from its territory to another state for the purpose of permanent residence for a period of more than one year.

**Internal migration** - Movement of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic for various reasons within the Kyrgyz Republic in order to permanently change their place of residence. In terms of crossing territorial boundaries, migration is divided into interregional (inter-oblast) and inter-district (intra-oblast) migration. Inter-regional migration includes moves from one district (city) of the oblast to another district (city) of the same oblast.

**Kairylman** - An ethnic Kyrgyz who is a foreign citizen (stateless person), who wishes to move (has moved) to the Kyrgyz Republic for permanent residence and has been granted the status of a Kairylman

**Program of State social order** - A set of organizational, economic and technical measures approved by an authorized state or local government body and aimed at providing social services to the population and/or implementing socially useful projects through the placement of a state social contract;

**State social order**<sup>1</sup> - A mechanism for implementing part of republican, sectoral, regional or municipal social programs aimed at providing social services to the population or achieving other socially useful goals by involving legal entities and individual entrepreneurs in their implementation, based on contractual relations and financed from the republican and/or local budgets;

**The system of state-guaranteed legal aid** - The system of organization of provision and rendering of state-guaranteed legal aid by state bodies, the Bar of the Kyrgyz Republic, local self-government bodies, other organizations and persons in accordance with Law. State-guaranteed legal aid shall be provided in the form of legal counseling and qualified legal aid.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/111577/edition/1268503/ru>



## UZBEKISTAN SPECIFIC TERMS

**Persons who have returned from labor migration** - persons who have been engaged in labor activity abroad for three months or more and from the moment of their return to their place of residence no more than one year has passed.

**Enterprises with foreign investments** - enterprises in the authorized capital of which non-residents, foreign legal entities (branches and departments of foreign companies), foreign citizens and stateless persons participate.

**Compatriots living abroad** - Citizens of Uzbekistan permanently residing outside the territory of Uzbekistan or temporarily staying abroad in connection with study, employment, family and other circumstances; Natives of Uzbekistan who have left the country and became citizens of a foreign State, as well as their descendants who have retained a sense of spiritual and cultural attachment to their homeland and are striving to develop friendly cultural, humanitarian, socio-economic and other ties with Uzbekistan; Foreign citizens or stateless persons living abroad who identify themselves as Uzbeks or Karakalpaks in terms of ethnicity, language, culture and history and who wish to maintain comprehensive ties with Uzbekistan.



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## Executive summary

The Information Needs Assessment Study was conducted under the EU-funded Project PROTECT on “Improving Migration Management and Migrant Protection in Selected Silk Routes and Central Asian Countries”.

During the period from August to September, 2024 nine FGDs and nine semi-structured interviews with intending and returning migrants were conducted in 6 locations of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as well as 5 key informants’ interviews with experts and state servants working in the area of migration.

The analysis of the interviews conducted and the data collected allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The **profile of Kyrgyz and Uzbek nationals** seeking migration information predominantly includes individuals aged 20 to 40+, many of whom are married and possess either General Secondary (10-11 grades) or Secondary Technical (vocational school) education. A significant portion of this group is unemployed, making them more susceptible to the pressures and risks associated with labour migration. Those particularly vulnerable to human trafficking are often males within this age group, especially those engaged in labour migration (sectors such as construction, farming, and mining is relevant for Uzbekistan). Additionally, young people from rural areas and children from orphanages are at heightened risk, and women are at risk for sexual exploitation. Furthermore, individuals who have faced the challenges of climate change, particularly those from ecologically vulnerable areas, often require fast migration labour opportunities, further exposing them to the risks of exploitation and trafficking.
2. The **information needs** of labour migrants vary depending on their stage in the migration process: pre-departure, during migration, and post-return. Migrants from rural regions often lack crucial information on pre-departure procedures, increasing their vulnerability to issues such as legal complications and unpaid wages. Additionally, many returnees face challenges in finding help with employment or investment opportunities upon their return. Gender-specific needs also emerged, particularly for women who require additional information on healthcare services, schools, and climate conditions in destination countries. Women also expressed concerns about domestic violence during migration and difficulties in accessing culturally appropriate resources in foreign countries. Furthermore, teachers in rural areas are increasingly expected to play a more active role in supporting the children left behind by migrant parents, highlighting the need for a community-wide approach to managing the effects of migration.
3. Labour migrants in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan often rely on **trusted sources** such as family members and close friends for information about job opportunities, particularly in the Russian Federation. Many migrants prefer to receive information through informal networks, believing that relatives and friends, who have firsthand experience, are more reliable than formal sources. However, these trusted connections can also lead migrants into irregular migration channels, as they may unintentionally share outdated or incomplete information. The increasing use of digital **communication platforms**, such as Telegram and WhatsApp, has become a preferred means of communication among migrants. Migrant communities use these platforms to share advice about working conditions, employers, and selection processes,



especially for seasonal work opportunities, based on personal experiences. Despite the popularity of social media, some migrants expressed concerns about the trustworthiness of these platforms. State television channels are seen as more reliable by some respondents, particularly those who may lack digital literacy or access to the internet. Television can also play a vital role in reaching remote or underserved populations, ensuring that migrants without access to smartphones or social media still receive crucial migration-related information. Therefore, it is essential for Migration Resource Centers (MRCs) and government agencies to utilize a diverse range of platforms—social media, traditional media, and face-to-face outreach—in their information campaigns to ensure that accurate and reliable information reaches all potential migrants, regardless of their preferred communication method.

## Introduction

This study was undertaken with the primary purpose to understand the need for information on migration at community level as well as the tools and means on how rural and urban communities can be better reached. Furthermore, the assessment aims to provide the basis for strategic interventions and activities of the newly established MRCs in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, e.g. development of campaigns to reach the broader public, ascertaining community-specific demographics in order to develop context-specific, sustainable, and long-term activities that are driven by the needs of the communities. The assessment also serves as a baseline, while continual operational monitoring and research will enable effective measurement of the change, outcome or long-term impact of such interventions and activities.

The tasks of the present needs assessment:

- 1) **Identify the profile of Kyrgyz and Uzbek nationals requiring information** on migration, including the most relevant districts and union levels, gender, age group, educational background and skills qualifications, push and pull factors, drivers of migration as well as needed information to capacitate them to make informed decision on migration (e.g. migration processes, labour market opportunities, employment requirements, consequences of irregular migration, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, costs of migration, government programmes and services, return and reintegration, remittances, migration and development, etc.)
- 2) **Identify the information needs of Kyrgyz and Uzbek nationals**, according to different profiles identified, with regard to information and support needed at community level, during the various cycles of migration: pre-migration/pre-employment/pre-decision, pre-departure, while abroad and upon return. This will also identify what migrant information sources and services are already available to the community in order to help reduce duplication of functions and services, help fill the gaps in the needed service, open opportunities for complementarity and increase the added value of the MRC in Kyrgyzstan.
- 3) **Identify the means and platforms** by which the interested population can be efficiently, responsibly and timely reached, specifically at the community level.



## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach and consists of two stages: a desk study and an analysis of data on information needs for migrants obtained from interviews (KIIs and semi-structured interviews) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The desk study involves analyzing existing information on migration flows, with a primary focus on labour migration, the main destination countries for citizens of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and challenges they face. The interviews and FGDs defined the information needs of migrants that MRCs can provide them in the future.

### Reasoning for the district selection as study area

For Kyrgyzstan 3 regions have been selected for the needs assessment on migration information: Batken, Jalal Abad and Osh oblasts. All those regions are covered by the activities of MRC in Osh city. Those regions are also significantly affected by outmigration, encompassing both internal and external movements where up to 40% (in Batken 42%, Jalal-Abad 40% and Osh 32%) of the working-age population in these areas is absent due to migration.

For Uzbekistan the following 3 regions were selected based on ICMPD proposal: Samarkand, Nukus and Tashkent oblasts. The selection criteria of the 3 districts is based on the highest number of migrants going for employment overseas from those districts and high poverty rate.

### Definition of target groups

The target groups of migrants are defined below:

*Potential migrants:* Migrants who are contemplating or have decided to migrate abroad for overseas employment – those in the pre-decision stage.

*Outgoing/departing migrants:* Migrants who have already completed the process of migration such as pre-departure training, health check-up, passport with visa etc. – those who are now ready to go abroad.

*Returnees or Return Migrants:* This category includes migrants who stayed abroad for at least 6 months, returned to Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan, and had either a regular or irregular work and/or residence status in the destination country.

**Sampling of migrant interviews, FGDs and KIIs Migrant interviews:** 10 semi-structured interviews (Kyrgyzstan – 7, Uzbekistan – 3) were conducted with the representatives of target groups identified above based on purposive sampling approach. The recruitment of the respondents was based on the suggestions from MRC in both countries as well as from local partners with whom Consultant organized the data collection.

**FGDs:** 9 FGDs have been conducted in proposed regions of both countries with potential/departing and returning migrants and family members:

*Kyrgyzstan (6 FGDs – 3 males/3 females):* in Batken, Osh and Jalal Abad regions.



*Uzbekistan (3 FGDs: 2 males and 1 female):* in Tashkent (male), Nukus (female) and Samarkand (male) regions.

Conducting separate male and female FGDs on migration was crucial to capture the unique experiences and perspectives of each gender, which are often shaped by different challenges and opportunities. Separate FGDs allowed participants to discuss sensitive topics more openly and comfortably, especially in cultural contexts of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of gender-specific needs and priorities, improved data quality by reducing social desirability bias and fostered and contributed to the overall research addressing the distinct issues faced by male and female migrants.

The proposed age group for both semi-structured interviews and FGDs was young male and female representatives of both genders aged from 20 till 40 as this is the main age group for labour migrant and returnees. The group sizes varied from 8 to 10. Each participant was asked to fill in an express questionnaire that contained information about their gender, age, occupation of respondents and family status.

**Key Informant Interviews:** Overall 5 Key Informant Interviews (KII) have been conducted under the study. In Kyrgyzstan, the KIIs covered the representatives of Center for Employment of Citizens Abroad under the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration (2 – central and south branch), Council on Migration and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings under the Toraga of the Jogorku Kenesh (1), Private Employment Agency (1). In Uzbekistan only one KII has been conducted with the migration expert/lawyer.

### **Data collection**

The tools (Consent Forms and Questionnaires) were preliminary designed in Russian language and prior to start of data collection stage they were translated into Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Karakalpak languages as the majority of target groups' representatives was not able to speak Russian language. The data collected was further transcribed and analyzed. Three half-page segments of each transcript were randomly selected and checked against audio records for accuracy.

### **How is anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed**

Prior to conducting the interviews (SI and KIIs) and FGDs the respondents were asked their consent to participate at this study. The procedure for obtaining informed consent was carried out twice: during the recruitment and at the beginning of the discussion. At the beginning of the discussion, the interviewer/moderator explained the purpose of research, duration of the SI/KII/FGD and the SI/KII/FGD procedures as well as their consent to be audio-recorded for the purposes of the research. The interviewer/moderator obtained explicit oral consent from participants to continue the discussion. During the oral consent procedure, the interviewer/moderator also clearly stated that participants' participation is voluntary and anonymous.



## Limitations

Due to time and budget constraints, the major part of the research is focused on Kyrgyzstan. While the core findings provide valuable insights to inform MRC activity plans in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, it is important to note that this study is primarily based on qualitative data, which may not fully represent the broader population. Therefore, complementing this research with findings from other recent reports and further studies could be beneficial in identifying additional information needs for target groups.

In Uzbekistan, only one Key Informant Interview (KII) was completed with a migration/legal expert. Planned interviews with state agencies and representatives of private employment agencies (PEAs) were postponed due to administrative complexities and state agencies restructuring, and limited participation from PEAs. However, these interviews may be covered in future efforts of ICMPD, particularly as part of the ongoing work to establish a Migration Resource Center (MRC) in Uzbekistan.

## 1. Socio-economic profile of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, both landlocked countries in Central Asia, together account for nearly 60% of the region's total population. The border regions of the two countries, known as the Ferghana Valley, continue to be the most densely populated areas, with the highest number of residents.

**Map 1: Total number of permanent population in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan by 1 January, 2024**



Source: National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, 2024, and Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2024

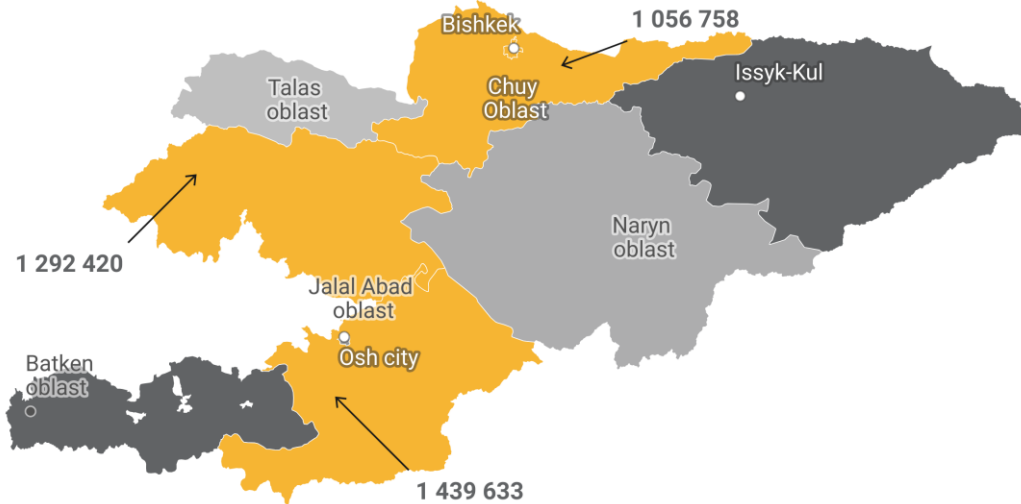


## Kyrgyzstan

*Economic indicators.* According to World Bank Economic Update in 2023<sup>2</sup> the real GDP has expanded by 6.2% in 2023. The services sector has driven growth, particularly services associated with transit trade since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. On the demand side, growth has been supported by higher consumption and exports. Consumer price inflation decreased from 13.8% in 2022 to 10.8% in 2023, as global food and fuel price pressure abated and domestic monetary policy remained tight. Income inflows declined due to a drop in inward remittances from 30.8% of GDP in H1 2022 to 25.6% a year later. The poverty rate has declined to 11,2% in 2023 (compared to 13% in 2022). This mainly happened due to social security programs for vulnerable groups (“Social Contract” program<sup>3</sup>, “Ui-Bulogo Komok”<sup>4</sup> program, Program to support women's entrepreneurship<sup>5</sup>), implementation of the labour market information system, increase in pensions and other measures have contributed to poverty reduction in 2023.

**Kyrgyzstan, 2023 (WB)**  
GDP US\$ billion 14.0  
GDP per capita US\$ 2023.9

**Map 2: Most populated regions of Kyrgyzstan, 2022**



Source: National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, 2023

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Group, “Unleashing the Power of the Private Sector: Europe and Central Asia Economic Update”, Spring 2024, available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/8638323b-3046-4233-a748-0365af4dbf2f/download>

<sup>3</sup> Social contract is an agreement on mutual obligations between a low-income family (or their group) and the territorial unit, under which the territorial unit undertakes to provide social assistance to the family (100 000 soms – approx.1100\$) to start a business, the family (or their group) undertakes to implement the measures provided for by the Program, available at: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/159294/edition/1260679/ru>

<sup>4</sup> “Uy-bulogo komok” may be received by a family that has children under 16 years of age and the monthly income per person in the family is below the guaranteed minimum income, i.e. below 1000 soms (approx.10-11\$), available at: <https://mlsp.gov.kg/ru/ezhemesyachnoe-posobie-nuzhdayushhimsya-grazhdanam-semyam-imeyushhim-detej-do-16-let-uj-bulogo-komok/>

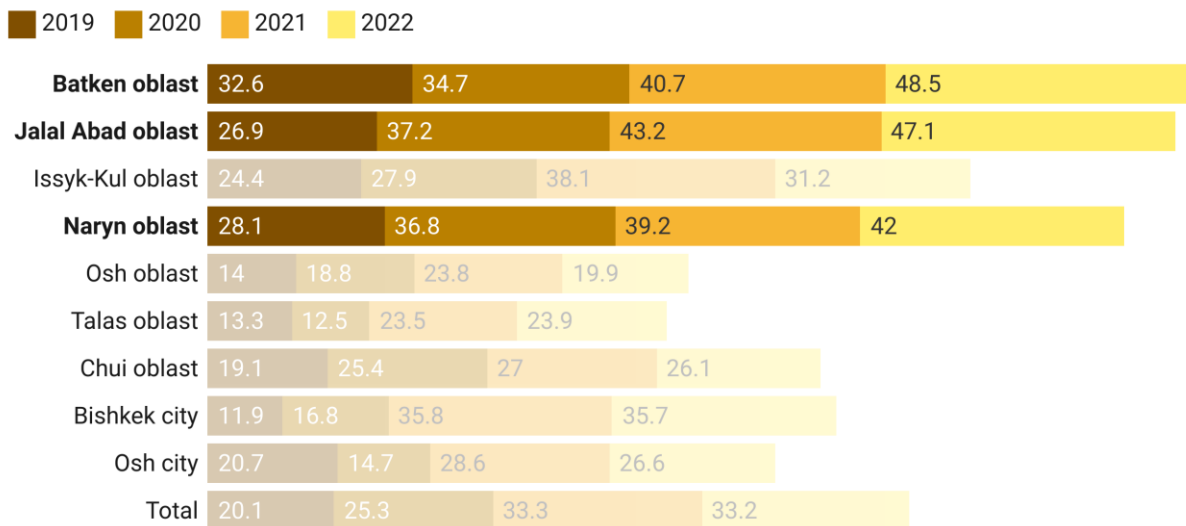
<sup>5</sup> Program to Support and Develop Women's Entrepreneurship in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2022-2026 aims to optimize the legislative and regulatory framework, enhance the financial infrastructure and accessibility of financial services for women entrepreneurs, and foster entrepreneurial infrastructure, culture, and financial literacy among women entrepreneurs, available at: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/53-309/edition/1117600/ru>



*Demographic situation.* The population of Kyrgyzstan as of 1 January, 2024 was estimated almost 7,162 million people. Due to the mountainous geographical characteristics of the country, the population is concentrated in two main regions: the metropolitan area, which includes the city of Bishkek and the adjacent administrative districts of Chui oblast, and along the Osh-Jalal-Abad axis characterized by high population density.

While in some regions of Kyrgyzstan the poverty rate is decreasing, in Batken, Jalal Abad and Naryn oblasts this indicator is steadily growing (see *Diagram 1*). Batken and Jalal Abad oblasts are also significantly affected by outmigration, encompassing both internal and external movements where more than 40% of the working-age population in these areas is absent due to migration and this trend most probably will remain the same in the coming years (see *Diagram 2*).

**Diagram 1: Poverty rate by regions of Kyrgyzstan, in %**

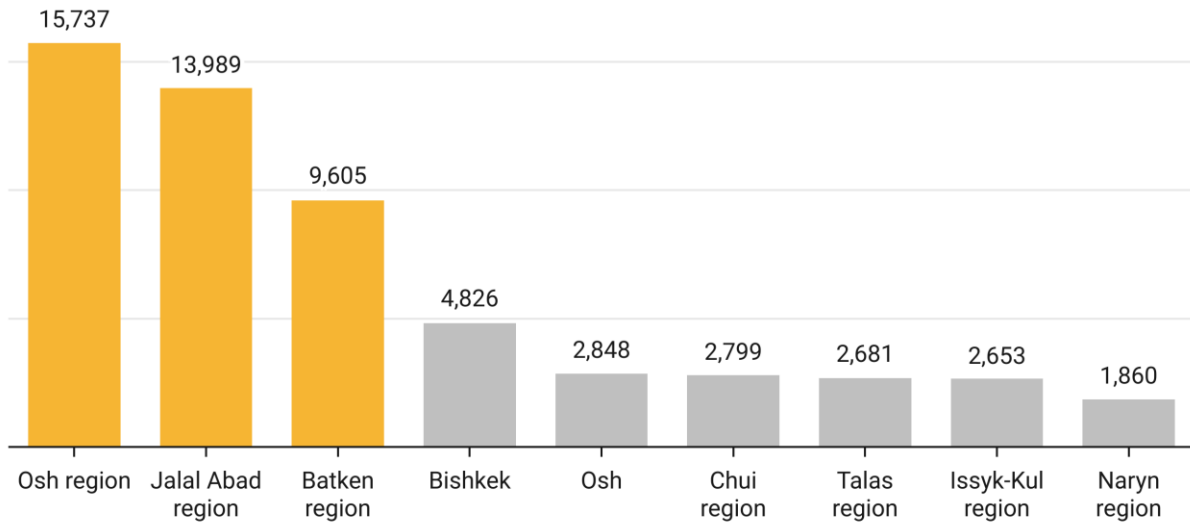


Source: National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, 2023

*Labour market.* The economically active population is 2.7 million people. According to statistical data the number of the employed population is 2.6 million people, the number of unemployed 131.6 thousand people. The number of the unemployed registered with the employment service, as of June 1, 2024, amounted to 83.1 thousand people. The number of officially registered unemployed amounted to 59.5 thousand people. The number of vacant jobs declared to the employment services as of September 1, 2024, amounted to 8009 units, among which the demand for working unskilled specialties estimated more than 29%, sewer – 28%, construction workers – 10%, service industry workers – 9,9%, health care professionals – 7,3% and others<sup>6</sup>.

**Diagram 2. Number of officially registered unemployed persons, as of 1 October, 2024**

<sup>6</sup> MLSSM, “На рынке труда имеется более 8 000 вакансий”, 19/06/2024, available at: <https://mlsp.gov.kg/ru/2024/09/16/mintrud-na-rynke-truda-bolee-8-tysyach-vakansij/>



Source: MLSSM

In 2022, the National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyzstan conducted a census of population and for the first time included questions on migration. The census revealed that 16% of the total population of Kyrgyzstan (1 094 500 people) were temporarily absent from their permanent residence, where 876, 883 (80% of absent population) migrated abroad and the rest (271,631) reside within territories of Kyrgyzstan.

**Diagram 3. Number of the permanent population, working age population and temporarily absent persons by territory, 2022**

Territory	Total, people	Of them of working age, people	of the total number - temporarily absent, people	absent to the total population, %	absent to the working-age population, %
Batken oblast	561,443	294,875	124,071	22.1	42.1
Jalal-Abad oblast	1,292,420	683,788	277,359	21.5	40.6
Talas oblast	271,950	143,180	56,589	20.9	39.5
Osh oblast	1,439,633	765,710	245,620	17.1	32.1
Naryn oblast	306,573	172,534	45,311	14.8	26.3
Bishkek city	1,120,827	769,309	157,569	14.1	20.5
Issyk-Kul oblast	534,472	293,294	59,082	11.1	20.1
Chui oblast	1,056,758	593,901	106,636	10.1	18.1
Osh city	353,080	219,378	22,277	6.3	10.2

Source: National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, 2022





To date, the MLSSM is reviewing its approaches to assisting those wishing to obtain additional skills, retraining or advanced training in accordance with the needs of the labour market. Within the framework of the Instruction of the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers to create 250,000 jobs, various active measures and programs are being implemented to assist unemployed citizens in finding jobs among which is a national study of the labour market to be conducted to determine the demand for personnel in the areas of the economy of Kyrgyzstan and to forecast the demand for personnel in the labour market for the next 3-5 years.<sup>7</sup>

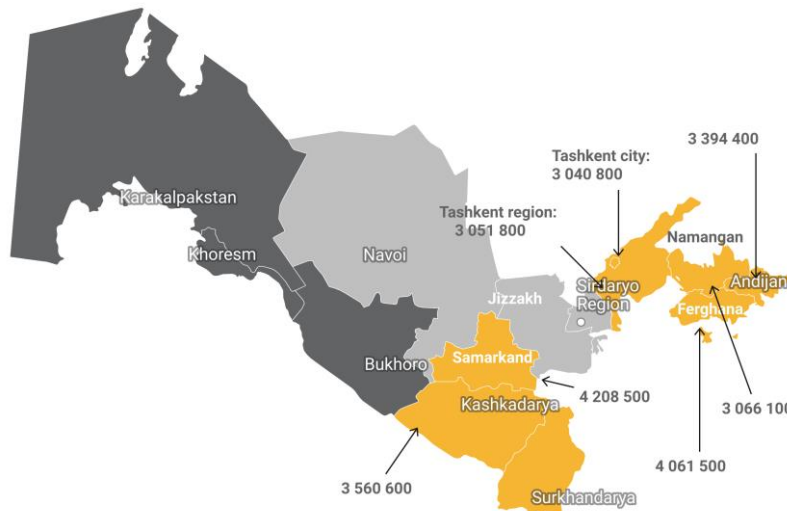
### Republic of Uzbekistan

*Economic indicators.* The World Bank Economic Update<sup>8</sup> for 2023 reports a 6% growth in real GDP, driven by investment, private consumption, and exports. Consumer price inflation fell to its lowest point in seven years, reaching 8.8% year-on-year in December 2023, down from 12.3% in 2022. The Uzbek Som depreciated by 9% against the US dollar, partially influenced by the depreciation of the Russian ruble. Real wage growth of 7.8% helped reduce poverty from 5% in 2022 to 4.5% in 2023. However, this wage growth was more pronounced among skilled and wealthier workers, leading to increased income inequality.

**Uzbekistan, 2023 (WB)**  
GDP US\$ billion 90.9  
GDP per capita US\$ 2510.1

*Demographic situation.* The population of Uzbekistan as of the beginning of 2024 was 36.8 million people. The population growth rate accelerated from 1.7% in 2010-2019 to 2.1% in 2020-2023, or in absolute terms by about 700-800 thousand people annually.

**Map 3. Most populated regions in Uzbekistan (as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023)**

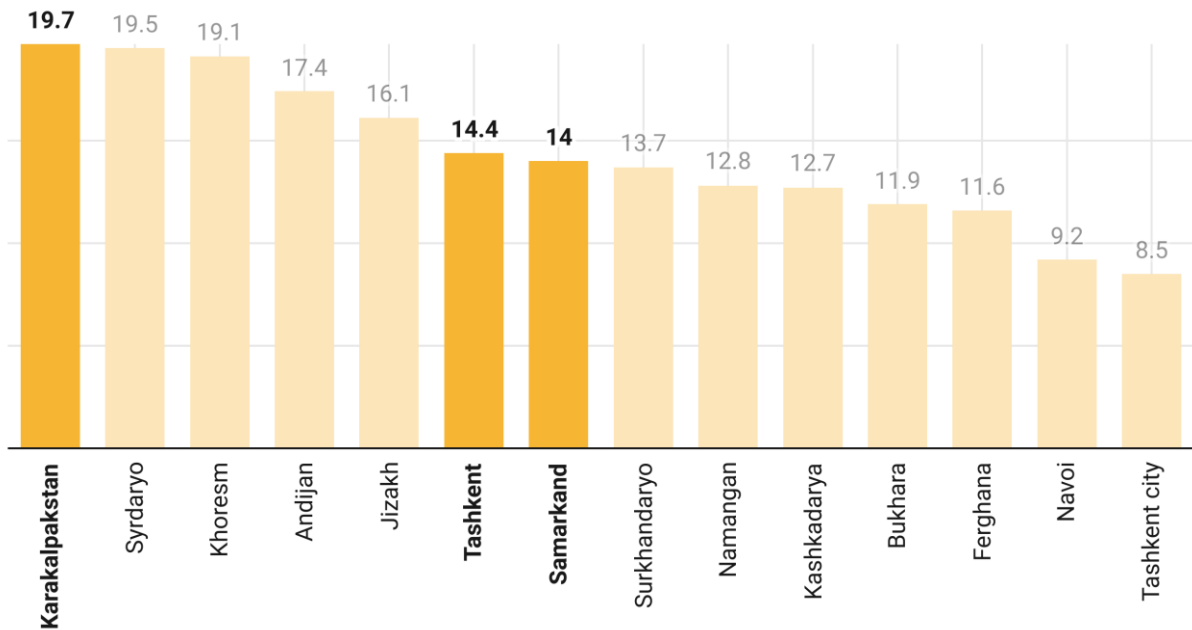


<sup>7</sup> MLSSM, “Минсоцтруда и МОН запустили новый проект Чебер по развитию навыков”, 05/07/2024, available at: <https://mlsp.gov.kg/ru/2024/07/05/minsoctruda-i-mon-zapustili-novyy-proekt-cheber-po-razvitiyu-navykov/>

<sup>8</sup> World Bank Group, “Unleashing the Power of the Private Sector: Europe and Central Asia Economic Update”, Spring 2024, available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/8638323b-3046-4233-a748-0365af4dbf2f/download>

In 2023 there were 1 million 307.8 thousand low-income families in the country, and the poverty rate was 14.1% and Karakalpakstan turned out to be the region with the highest poverty rate (19.7%).

**Diagram 4. Poverty rate by regions of Uzbekistan 2023, in %**



Source: Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023

*Labour market.* At the end of 2023 due to high investment activity, the total number of employed persons increased by 312 thousand people or by 2.3% compared to the previous year. The unemployment rate in the economy significantly decreased and amounted to 6.8% (see Diagram 3). The main contribution to employment was made by construction and trade sectors.

Demand for labour force, estimated as the number of vacancies in the labour market, increased significantly. The average number of vacancies in the Quarter 1 of 2024 amounted to about 36.8 thousand, 14% higher than the December 2023 figures (32.2 thousand). The largest number of vacancies continues to be in the retail, construction, food service, manufacturing, and education sectors. Regionally, the majority of vacancies are concentrated in Tashkent city (about 60%), Samarkand (11%) and Tashkent regions (9%). The number of people employed in the agricultural sector decreased.<sup>9</sup>

As of January 1, 2024, the number of operating enterprises and organizations in the country amounted to 485.0 thousand units (without farms and dekhkan farms), including small enterprises and micro-companies 417.1 thousand units. The largest number of small enterprises and micro-companies was registered in most populated areas of the country: Tashkent city (99,151), Tashkent oblast (45,295),

<sup>9</sup> Central Bank of Uzbekistan, "Labour Market Review 2024", available at: [https://cbu.uz/upload/iblock/7fd/y17qu1k1w89xpnq43q1jc6fq1dbzlb6c/Obzor-rynka-truda\\_-1kv.-2024\\_.pdf](https://cbu.uz/upload/iblock/7fd/y17qu1k1w89xpnq43q1jc6fq1dbzlb6c/Obzor-rynka-truda_-1kv.-2024_.pdf)

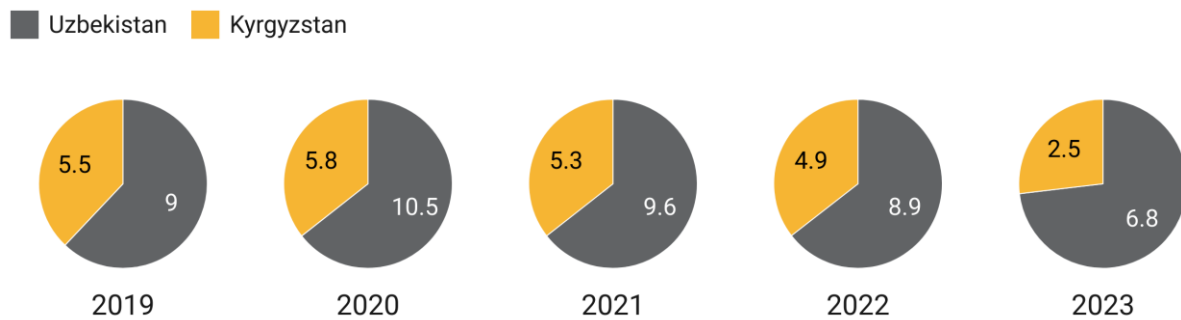


Samarkand oblast (43,477), Fergana oblast (42,574), Kashkadarya oblast (33,064), Bukhara oblast (31,203) and Andijan oblast (29,717). In January-December 2023, 88.8 thousand enterprises and organizations were newly established in the country, of which small enterprises and micro-companies accounted for 86.0 thousand units.<sup>10</sup>

### Unemployment rate

Despite the growth of working age population in both countries, the unemployment rate data indicates a steady decline in both countries (see Diagram 3). It is mainly due to the stabilization of internal economic situation and diversification of labour markets. In Kyrgyzstan the MLSSM noted that the decline was due to the active governmental measures to promote employment, such as training in the professions most in demand on the labour market, vocational guidance for young people, assistance in finding employment and “social contract” payment of 100,000 soms<sup>11</sup> to open a small business. In Uzbekistan such decrease related to increase in the number of jobs, of small and micro-companies, registration of the self-employed and diversification of labour migration flows.

**Diagram 5. Unemployment rate, 2019 – 2023, in %<sup>12</sup>**



Source: MLSSM, MEPR

## 2. Labour Migration

### 2.1 Legislation framework

The Constitutions of both countries, along with the international treaties to which they are party, guarantee citizens the right to freely move within and beyond their borders. External and international

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Социально-экономическое положение Республики Узбекистан (за январь-декабрь 2023 года)”, available at: <https://stat.uz/img/talil-2023-jil-yanvar-dekabr-ruscha-.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> 1166 USD, estimated by the author according to exchange rate of National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic on 9th of July, 2024

<sup>12</sup> Press service, the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of Uzbekistan, available at: <https://t.me/mehnatvazirligi/16163>



labour migration is governed by the national Labour Codes, laws, legislative acts and development strategies that address issues of employment and migration.<sup>13</sup>

Out of 191 ILO Conventions and Protocols Kyrgyzstan ratified 54 Conventions and 1 Protocol and the Republic of Uzbekistan – 21 Conventions and 1 Protocol (8 of which were ratified since 2016 in Uzbekistan). Below the table with the most recent **national** and **international** legislative documents related to labour migration in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Year	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
2018	<p>Establishment of the Council for Relations with Compatriots Abroad under the President</p> <p>The Development Program of the Kyrgyz Republic “Unity. Trust. Creation 2018-2022”</p> <p>Adoption of Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and provided National Voluntary GCM review.<sup>14</sup></p>	<p>Concept of State Policy on Cooperation with Compatriots Living and Working Abroad”</p> <p>Program of Priority Measures for the Development of Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and Compatriots Living Abroad.</p> <p>Decision of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to ensure the safety of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan during their departure by transport outside the country for temporary labour activity” No. PP-3584 dated March 5, 2018.</p> <p>Presidential Decree “On the opening of foreign representative offices of the Agency for Foreign Labour Migration under the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan” No. PP-3743 dated May 28, 2018.</p> <p>Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On additional measures to further improve the system of external labour migration of the Republic of Uzbekistan” dated July 5, 2018.</p> <p>Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers “On Measures to further improvement and radical revision of the system of organized employment of citizens</p>

<sup>13</sup> There is no specific Law on Migration in Uzbekistan (the last attempt to adopt the Law on external labour migration was rejected by the Senate of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2022), while in the Kyrgyz Republic there are two: The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On External Migration” dated 17 July 2000, No. 61, Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On External Labour Migration” dated January 13, 2006 (both of them were amended in 2023).

<sup>14</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, available at: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/imrf-kyrgyzstan.pdf>



		<p>of the Republic of Uzbekistan abroad” No. 725 of 12 September 2018. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Private Employment Agencies” dated October 16, 2018.</p> <p>The Republic of Uzbekistan has been accepted as a member state of the IOM and ratified the Constitution of the IOM by the Law "On Ratification of the Constitution of the International Organization for Migration" December 26, 2018</p> <p>Adoption of Global Compact for for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and provided National Voluntary GCM review<sup>15</sup>.</p>
<b>2019</b>	Adoption of the Resolution No. 175 “On some Issues in the Field of Labour Migration in the Kyrgyz Republic”	<p>Decree of the President “On measures to further strengthen the guarantees of protection of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan engaged in temporary labour activity abroad and members of their families” of August 20, 2019.</p> <p>Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On additional measures to protect the rights and legitimate interests of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan engaged in temporary labour activity abroad” of August 23, 2019.</p> <p>ILO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) ratified on 19th November, 2019</li> <li>- Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) ratified on 19th November, 2019</li> <li>- Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129) ratified of 13th August, 2019</li> </ul>
<b>2020</b>	Law No. 89 on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Kyrgyz Republic On the Legal Status of Compatriots with Foreign Citizenship	Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to introduce a system of safe, orderly and legal labour migration” of September 15, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



	Kyrgyzstan ratified the Agreement on Pension Provision of Workers of the Member States of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)	
<b>2021</b>	<p>Concept of the Migration Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021–2030 through Decree No. 191</p> <p>President Decree “On Taking of Measures Directed at Improvement of the Migration Situation.”</p> <p>Newly adopted Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic.</p> <p>Rename of <i>Information and Consultation Center</i> under the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic to the <i>Center for Employment of Citizens Abroad</i> under the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic by the DECISION of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic from November 15, 2021 № 252 “On issues of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic”</p>	<p>Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On additional measures to encourage citizens leaving for organized labour migration abroad” of July 30, 2021.</p> <p><b>ILO Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) ratified on 14th September, 2021</b></p>
<b>2022</b>	Digital Nomad program for international labour migrants (mainly for citizens of the Russian Federation relocating to Kyrgyzstan due to mobilization and sanctions in RF)	<p>Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Additional measures to support citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan engaged in temporary labour activity abroad and members of their families" #PP-149 of March 1, 2022<sup>16</sup></p> <p><b>ILO Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 (No. 167) ratified on 9th June, 2022</b></p>
<b>2023</b>	<p>Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On External Migration” dated 17 July 2000, No. 61</p> <p>Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On External Labour Migration” dated January 13, 2006</p>	<p><b>ILO Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention, 1977 (No. 148) ratified on 12th June, 2023</b></p>

<sup>16</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Постановление Президента Республики Узбекистан №149: О дополнительных мерах по поддержке граждан Республики Узбекистан, осуществляющих временную трудовую деятельность за рубежом, и членов их семей”, 01/03/2022, available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/5893255>



<p><b>2024</b></p>	<p>ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) ratified on 3rd June, 2024 and will enter into force on 3rd June, 2025</p> <p>ILO Private Employment Agency Convention, 1997 (No.181). A draft law developed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration KR has been submitted for public consultation until the end of July, 2024.<sup>17</sup></p> <p>The Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic “On agreement with the foreign policy initiative of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic to join the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Legal Migration” of August 27, 2024 № 229 was signed. It should also be noted that the implementation of the Global Compact components does not require additional expenditures from the state budget.<sup>18</sup></p>	<p>Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures to Improve Labour Migration Processes and Support Persons Engaged in Temporary Labour Activity Abroad №UP-59 of 4th April, 2024<sup>19</sup></p> <p>Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Priority Measures to Reform the Migration Management System №UP-162 of 17th October, 2024<sup>20</sup></p> <p>ILO Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95) ratified on 17th April, 2024 and will enter into force on 17th April, 2025</p>
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Since 2018, both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have increasingly focused on the rights and freedoms of migrants, including labour migrants, as well as their social security and that of their families. Significant efforts have been made to develop legal, financial, and material support mechanisms for labour migrants. Recognizing the importance of this issue, these countries are increasingly focused on creating job opportunities domestically. The aim is to ensure that labour migrants can return and find employment within their home countries, thus improving their overall well-being and contributing to the national economy. This shift reflects a growing commitment to address the challenges faced by labour migrants and to support their reintegration into the local workforce.

In addition to state-organized labour recruitment, there are also private agencies that facilitate the labour migration of Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens abroad. These private agencies play a significant role in organizing and managing the recruitment process, providing an alternative pathway for individuals seeking employment opportunities outside their home countries.

<sup>17</sup> Единый портал общественного обсуждения проектов нормативных правовых актов Кыргызской Республики, “О ратификации Конвенции 181 Международной организации труда о частных агентствах занятости, принятой 3 июня 1997 года в городе Женева”, available at: <http://koomtalkuu.gov.kg/ru/view-npa/3960>

<sup>18</sup> Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic dated August 27, 2024 UP No. 229 “On agreeing with the foreign policy initiative of the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic to join the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Legal Migration”, available at: [https://base.spininform.ru/show\\_doc.fwx?rgn=161827](https://base.spininform.ru/show_doc.fwx?rgn=161827)

<sup>19</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Указ Президента Республики Узбекистан №УП-59: О дополнительных мерах по совершенствованию процессов трудовой миграции и поддержке лиц, осуществляющих трудовую деятельность за рубежом”, 04/04/2024, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/6868873>

<sup>20</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Указ Президента Республики Узбекистан №УП-162 от 17 октября 2024 «О первоочередных мерах по реформированию системы управления миграционными процессами», available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/7170461?otherlang=>



*Kyrgyzstan.* According to the President Decree No. 114 of May 5, 2021, "On the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic," the Government was transformed into the Cabinet of Ministers, and its structure was defined. As part of this reorganization, the State Migration Service was abolished, its office in the Russian Federation was closed, and its staff was transferred to the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Russian Federation. The responsibilities for forming and implementing migration policy were assigned to the Department of External Migration under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Later in 2022, in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic Resolution №392 dated 22 July, 2022, the Department of External Migration has been reorganized and transferred to the Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Migration (MLSSM) of the Kyrgyz Republic that became the new authorized body for combating human trafficking and managing issues related to refugees and migrants.<sup>21</sup>

Within the MLSSM the issues of migration are coordinated by the Directorate for the preparation of decisions on migration issues. Under this Directorate there are four departments:

- Migration Policy Department
- Department for Work with Kairylmans and Refugees
- Division for Work with Foreign Citizens
- Department for Work with Diasporas and Compatriots

In addition, there are 9 subordinate units operating under the MLSSM including the Center for Employment of Citizens Abroad (CECA) (see Figure 1 below). The purpose of the Center is to assist citizens of Kyrgyzstan in finding employment in the external labour market, to protect the rights and legal interests of labour migrants abroad, and to compensate for the costs of transporting home the bodies of those who died outside the country. The organized recruitment of Kyrgyz citizens abroad is conducted on the basis of intergovernmental agreements, as well as provision of CECA allows it to sign direct agreements with foreign private employers. The main tasks of the CECA are as follows:

- 1) development of the system of organized employment of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic abroad;
- 2) integration and realization of forms of safe migration;
- 3) development and implementation of projects in the field of external labour migration with the participation of international and non-profit organizations;
- 4) provision of information and consulting services on the issues of entry to the country of destination and legal employment abroad.
- 5) protection of rights and legal interests of labour migrants abroad;

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<sup>21</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Постановление Кабинета Министров КР от 22.07.22 г. №392 Об организационных вопросах Министерства труда, социального обеспечения и миграции Кыргызской Республики", available at: <https://www.gov.kg/ru/npa/s/3984>





6) compensation of expenses for transportation to the Kyrgyz Republic of bodies of Kyrgyz Republic citizens who died outside the country.

It is worth mentioning that the official website of CECA provides a wide range of information for potential migrants planning their labour journey abroad. It contains the legislation of the host country, its cultural peculiarities, contact details of diaspora representatives and embassies of Kyrgyzstan, list of licensed PEAs, all relevant information on safe migration and other useful information that potential migrants may require. However, not all information is available in Kyrgyz language, particularly the one that related to Recommendations for intending migrants and information related to the combating trafficking in human beings.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 1. MLSSM's subordinate units**



The Representative Office of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic has a branch office in Moscow, Russian Federation. Since the beginning of 2024, the MLSSM has successfully secured payment of delayed wages and compensation for work-related injuries for Kyrgyz migrants in Russia. Over the last four years the branch has helped to more than 1400 migrants recover more than 100 million rubles in unpaid wages and supported 11 injured workers in obtaining

<sup>22</sup> Center for Employment of Citizens Abroad, “Рекомендации выезжающим за границу”, available at: <https://migrant.kg/kg/useful/rekomendacii-vyezshayushim-za-granicu/>

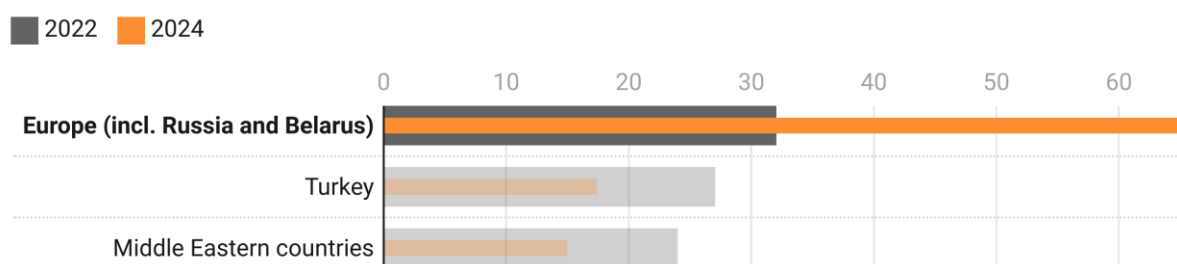
4.8 million rubles in compensation, it has also organized free housing and legal assistance for Kyrgyz citizens in difficult situations in Russia.<sup>23</sup>

The activities of private employment agencies (PEAs) in Kyrgyzstan are regulated by the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On External Labour Migration" dated January 13, 2006, No. 4, the Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Some Issues in the Field of Labour Migration in the Kyrgyz Republic" dated April 16, 2019, No. 175, and the Regulations on the Procedure for Employment of Kyrgyz Citizens Abroad. The regular monitoring of the licensed PEAs is conducted by CECA. This legislation obliges PEAs to:

- execute a written contract with the job seeker when providing services and to conduct explanatory work before migrants leave the country;
- deposit a set amount as a security deposit to a bank account (100 000 KG soms - approx. 1166 USD, estimated by the author according to exchange rate of National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic on 9th of July, 2024) established by the authorized body, and these funds can be used by the authorized body to compensate for possible material damage caused to the worker by PEAs.

Kyrgyzstan has a well-developed network of PEAs compared to other countries in the region. While in 2013, a total of 4 PEAs<sup>24</sup> were registered, as of October 2022 there were 181 PEAs<sup>25</sup>, and as of August 2024 the number of PEAs estimated around 180 PEAs authorized to employ citizens abroad, of which: Estonia (2), Russian Federation (26), UK (2), Bulgaria (33), Saudi Arabia (8), Republic of Korea (1), Slovakia (15), Finland (1), Bahrain (5), Serbia (1), Qatar (13), Kuwait (11), Belarus (7), Egypt (1), Germany (20), Türkiye (54), Oman (3), Croatia (1), Denmark (3), Lithuania (20), UAE (17), Japan (5), Poland (36), Hungary (26), Czechia (5), Latvia (8).

**Diagram 6. A number of PEAs licensed to employ Kyrgyz citizens abroad, by country, 2024<sup>26</sup>**



Source: CECA, MLSSM, WInrock Int.

<sup>23</sup> MLSSM, "Жылдыз Полотова: С начала года мы добились выплаты около 40 млн рублей зарплаты и компенсаций мигрантам из КР", available at: <https://mlsp.gov.kg/ru/2024/07/29/zhyldyz-polotova-s-nachala-goda-my-dobilis-vyplaty-okolo-40-mln-rublej-zarplaty-i-kompensaczij-migrantam-iz-kr/>

<sup>24</sup> American University of Central Asia, (2017), Article, "PEA Association: Establishment of Legal Employment of Kyrgyzstani Workers Abroad" in IOM Compilation Report 2023

<sup>25</sup> "Оценка наиболее благоприятных стран для трудоустройства граждан Кыргызской Республики за рубежом", Council on Migration, MLSSM, CECA, USAID, Winrock International, 2023, available at: [https://migrant.kg/media/useful\\_documentation\\_file/2023/07/10/otsenka-naibolee-blagopriiatnykh-stran-final-2.pdf](https://migrant.kg/media/useful_documentation_file/2023/07/10/otsenka-naibolee-blagopriiatnykh-stran-final-2.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> This number may be incorrect as in the study it was not indicated whether Russia and Belarus were calculated for 2022



In 2024, Kyrgyzstan has signed the ILO Private Employment Agency Convention, 1997 (No.181). As a result, a draft law developed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration KR has been submitted for public consultation until the end of July, 2024. Accession to the Convention can enhance the regulatory framework for Private Employment Agencies (PEAs), thereby improving service quality and promoting ethical recruitment. It will also aid in preventing human trafficking and forced labour, protecting workers' rights against abuse and fraud throughout the recruitment process, and reducing labour migration costs. Convention No. 181 supports the development of suitable economic and legal instruments, ensuring PEAs adhere to uniform regulations and operate on an equal footing.<sup>27</sup>

*Uzbekistan.* The external labour migration in Uzbekistan used to be coordinated by the Agency for External Labour Migration (AELM) under the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction (MEPR) and was responsible for organized recruitment of Uzbek citizens for work abroad. The information portal that provides the labour opportunities for intending/potential migrants<sup>28</sup> provides vacancies in 5 countries: Russian Federation (15.352 vacancies), Belarus (300 vacancies), Germany (36.295 vacancies), Switzerland (1.000 vacancies) and Great Britain (10.000 vacancies). The portal provides some information about countries of destinations, particularly the job requirements that foreign employers expect from labour migrants, however, there is no detailed information about each country in regards to cultural and legislative issues (except information about Russian Federation). The AELM was responsible for pre-departure orientation programs for migrants, however, there was no clear information available what the content of such programs was.

In order to improve the efficiency of the processes of temporary labor activity abroad, by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (#UP-162 of October 17, 2024) the activity of the Agency of External Labor Migration under the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction was terminated and the new Agency of Migration under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan was established.<sup>29</sup> The main activities of the Agency of Migration will include comprehensive regulation of external labor migration processes, controlling organized overseas employment of citizens, and maintaining relevant data records. The Agency will also be responsible for licensing private employment agencies, developing and implementing international migration projects, collaborating with foreign authorities on temporary employment and workers' rights. Additionally, it will organize training in professions and foreign languages based on foreign employers' needs, establish qualification assessment and certification systems recognized in developed countries, provide legal and social protection for citizens facing financial hardships abroad and facilitate their return to Uzbekistan in accordance with the law. Lastly, it will maintain ongoing interactions with Uzbekistan's diplomatic missions abroad and foreign embassies, while expanding ties with Uzbek diasporas and fellow nationals.

To protect labour migrants, in 2021 the MEPR has established a Fund to support and protect the rights and interests of citizens working abroad. This Fund provides legal and social protection, material

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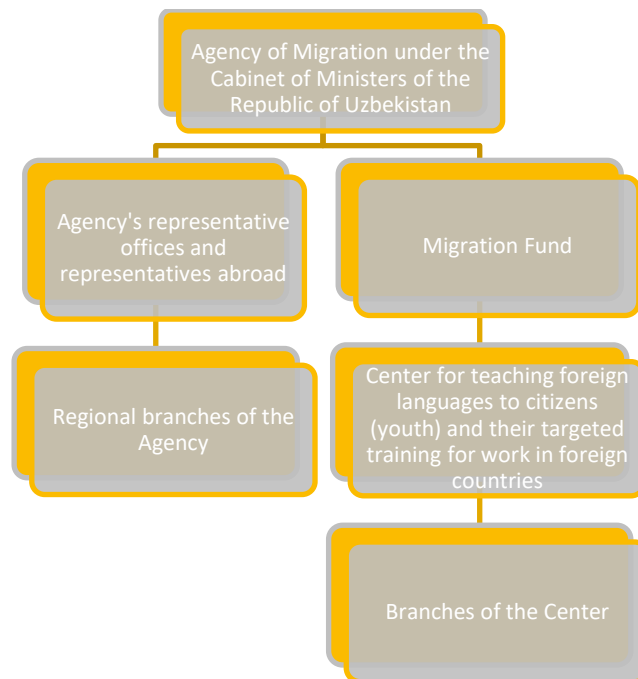
<sup>27</sup> Единый портал общественного обсуждения проектов нормативных правовых актов Кыргызской Республики, “О ратификации Конвенции 181 Международной организации труда о частных агентствах занятости, принятой 3 июня 1997 года в городе Женева”, available at: <http://koomtalkuu.gov.kg/ru/view-npa/3960>

<sup>28</sup> AELM, Electronic platform of Work Abroad, available at: <https://xorijdaish.uz/>

<sup>29</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Указ Президента Республики Узбекистан №УП-162 от 17 октября 2024 «О первоочередных мерах по реформированию системы управления миграционными процессами», available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/7170461?otherlang=>

assistance to victims of violence, forced labour, discrimination, and those in difficult financial situations or without identification documents. It covers medical expenses for migrants who are injured or unable to pay for medical services, and facilitates the repatriation of the deceased or severely injured migrants. Additionally, the Fund manages the return of deported migrants or those who were not provided the promised employment conditions, and creates pre-departure adaptation centers for professional training and foreign language testing<sup>30</sup>. According to the Decree of the President of Uzbekistan<sup>31</sup> the Fund was transferred to the Agency of Migration and was transformed to Migration Fund.

**Figure 2. Organizational structure of the Agency of Migration under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan**



In regards to the recent *Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures to Improve Labour Migration Processes and Support Persons Engaged in Temporary Labour Activity Abroad* #UP-59 of 4th April, 2024<sup>32</sup>, there are initiatives to create attachés focused on labour migration issues in diplomatic and consular institutions abroad; labour migrants can receive compensation for qualification exams, work visas, and travel expenses; insurance organizations can get subsidies for life and health insurance premiums for low-income families; call center to assist migrant workers with free

<sup>30</sup> “Добровольный национальный отчет о внедрении ГДМ в Узбекистане”, available at: [https://migrationnetwork.un.org/system/files/docs/Uzbekistan%20-%20Добровольный\\_национальный\\_отчет\\_о\\_внедрении\\_ГДМ\\_в\\_Узбекистане.pdf](https://migrationnetwork.un.org/system/files/docs/Uzbekistan%20-%20Добровольный_национальный_отчет_о_внедрении_ГДМ_в_Узбекистане.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Указ Президента Республики Узбекистан №59: О дополнительных мерах по совершенствованию процессов трудовой миграции и поддержке лиц, осуществляющих трудовую деятельность за рубежом”, 04/04/2024, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/6868873>



international calls; subsidies will be provided to organizations employing returning migrants and monitoring of the families and particularly children of labour migrants will be supported by the social workers.

The activities of private employment agencies (PEAs) in Uzbekistan are regulated by the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan On Private Employment Agencies adopted by the Legislative Chamber on September 6, 2018 and approved by the Senate on September 27, 2018 (amended in 2020).<sup>33</sup> As in Kyrgyzstan this legislation has similar obligations to PEAs to execute a written contract with the job seeker when providing services and to conduct explanatory work before migrants leave the country; deposit a set amount as a security deposit to a bank account (earlier it used to be 50 000 USD, but recently – about 200 000 USD); the service fee that private employment agencies (PEAs) are permitted to charge job seekers was set at approximately 25-30 USD (300 000 Uzbek soms).

Since the adoption of Law on PEAs, there were 114 PEAs registered and 80 PEAs of which were licensed to employ citizens abroad.<sup>34</sup> However, by 1 October, 2024 the official registrar of PEAs amounts only 16 licensed PEAs. The significant decrease in number of PEAs since 2022 were related to 59 revocation at the request of licensees, and 12 due to the opening of criminal cases.

In addition, the available data on recent investment projects by the MEPR of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which are planned to be implemented from 2019 to 2027 and total nearly 460 million USD<sup>35</sup>, indicates that the country's labour policies aim to enhance the management of vocational education systems and employment promotion. These initiatives include measures to introduce effective social support programs for low-income segments and other activities that improve vulnerable groups' access to the labour market. Together with other national policies, these investment projects could support the government's response to the growing number of economically active individuals and returning migrants.

In 2022 the MLSSM of the Kyrgyz Republic and MEPR of the Republic of Uzbekistan have signed the Memorandum of Understanding. From September 1, 2023 citizens of Kyrgyzstan and the Uzbekistan are able to use ID-cards for entry, exit, movement and stay on the territory of the two states along with other travel documents. And this year (2024) the MLSSM of the Kyrgyz Republic and MEPR of the Republic of Uzbekistan signed a Protocol of Intentions in the field of labour, employment and migration. The document stipulates that the two ministries will hold regular meetings and consultations on the development of active measures in the labour market, forecasting the need for specialists and training of in-demand personnel, as well as cooperation in the field of migration. The

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<sup>33</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Закон Республики Узбекистан №ЗРУ-501 О Частных Агентствах Занятости” 16/10/2018, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3992894>

<sup>34</sup> “Почти 90% лицензий частных агентств занятости аннулированы”, News Agency Spot.uz, 07/07/2022, available at: <https://www.spot.uz/ru/2022/07/07/hiring-agencies/>

<sup>35</sup> Open Data Portal, “Information on Investment Projects of the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan”, available at: <https://data.egov.uz/rus/data/610259922a2e256d868e82e9>



agencies also intend to consult on approaches to working with women, youth, persons with disabilities, returned labour migrants, and the elderly population.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.2 International migration

### Labour migration

Regulation of external labour migration is an important issue for both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as it contributes to the economic well-being of a significant number of the population in these countries. Current labour migration flows are mainly concentrated in a few nearby countries, particularly the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, while there has been a gradual geographical diversification of such flows. The requirement of certain skills and qualifications in foreign vacancies remains a major barrier to the migrant employment.

*Kyrgyzstan.* In regions heavily impacted by international migration, the southern areas of Jalalabad, Osh, and Batken show significant trends in both the migration flows and the population originating from Kyrgyzstan.<sup>37</sup> According to data from the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (NSC KR) survey in 2022 the labour migrants were mostly represented by young women and men aged from 20 to 40 years.

Among the top 5 countries of destination for Kyrgyz nationals are (international migration flows) were:

- Russian Federation (870,304),
- Kazakhstan (2,158),
- Republic of Türkiye (1,828),
- Germany (336) and
- South Korea (240).

According to estimations by IOM MTM 328,458 Kyrgyz nationals as of 2023 were residing abroad since 2020 (international migrant stock), where 79% of them were in the Russian Federation, 4.5% in Kazakhstan and 4% in Türkiye. The majority of Kyrgyz citizens migrate abroad for the purpose of employment, regardless of gender, while the rest indicated family reasons, study and other reasons. For Kyrgyz citizens the main fields of activity abroad were trade (17%), construction and architecture (8%), hotels and restaurants (6.9%), education and science (6.5%), logistics and warehouses (5.5%) and Information Technology (IT), programming, design (4.8%).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> MLSSM, “Министр труда Жылдых Полотова подписала протокол о намерениях с профильным ведомством Узбекистана”, 19/07/2024, available at: <https://mlsp.gov.kg/ru/2024/07/19/ministr-truda-zhyldyz-pilotova-podpisala-protokol-o-namereniyah-s-profilnym-vedomstvom-uzbekistana/>

<sup>37</sup> IOM and NSC KR

<sup>38</sup> IOM, “Migration Situation Report”, December 2023, available at: [https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1321/files/documents/2024-04/compilation\\_report\\_dec\\_2023.pdf](https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1321/files/documents/2024-04/compilation_report_dec_2023.pdf)



In an IOM survey conducted in 2023<sup>39</sup>, most of the respondents indicated that they migrated from Kyrgyzstan in order to:

- improve their financial situation and earn more money (36.9%),
- for employment and their career (15.9%),
- for family reasons (13%),
- to get better education to their children (11.6%) and
- to get better education (11.1%)

*Uzbekistan.* According to AELM in 2023, the registered number of Uzbek migrant workers abroad was equal to almost two million individuals and most of them resided in the Russian Federation (60%), Kazakhstan (10%), Türkiye (6%), Republic of Korea (3%) and in other countries (21%). About 1,452,300 of them were male (72.4%) and about 547,700 (27.6%) - female as of December 2023. Most of them were employed in the construction sector (52.7%), industry (12.8%), service (9.7%), catering (6.9%), trade (6.7%), transportation (4.3%), agriculture (4.1%) and other sectors (2.8%).

**Table 1. Labour Migration from Uzbekistan (as of December 2023)**

Source: AELM

Destination country	Percentage of migrants	Number of migrants
Russia	60%	1,200,000
Kazakhstan	10%	191,800
Türkiye	6%	113,800
South Korea	3%	68,100
Other countries	21%	424,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,998,100</b>

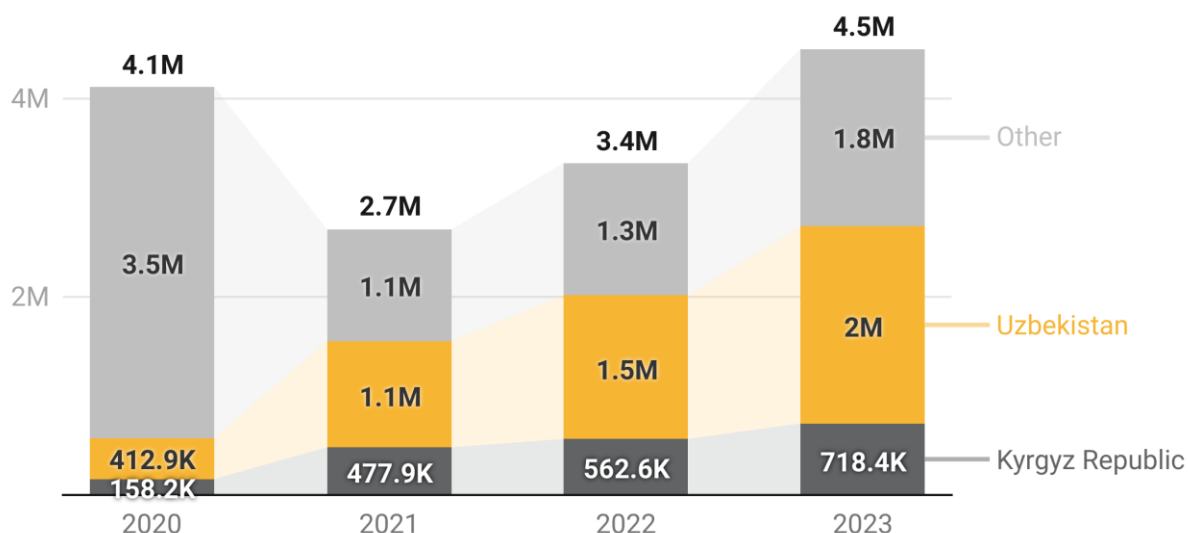
#### *Countries of destination*

**Russian Federation.** Data on labour migration in the Russian Federation varies from Federal Border Service of the RF (records the facts of crossing of foreign citizens who stated the purpose of their trip as "work"), ROSSTAT (statistical agency that counts foreigners registered at the place of residence or or temporary stay), and Ministry of Internal Affairs of the RF (recording data on a number of foreigners who have received a work permit or patent). Citizens of Uzbekistan are recorded under those three

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

agencies, while Kyrgyz citizens do not need the work permit due to the membership of Kyrgyzstan at the EAEU.

**Diagram 7. Number of facts of border crossing of Kyrgyzstan’s and Uzbekistan’s citizens in Russian Federation, who stated the purpose of their trip as "work", millions of facts**



Source: data from Federal Border Service of the Russian Federation, 2020-2023

The national data on labour migrants from Uzbekistan differs from the data collected in the Russian Federation: AEML states that there is a decrease in Uzbek labour migrants in the Russian Federation and estimated about 1,2 million for 2023. This is related to the different methodology of data collection: while AEML estimates the number of migrants, the Federal Border Service of RF calculates a number of facts of border crossing.

Uzbek citizens in Russia mainly work in such spheres as construction, logistics, automotive industry, agriculture and industrial production, while labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan are involved in such areas as wholesale and retail trade, construction, catering and hotel services, various services, manufacturing, agriculture, transportation and real estate.<sup>40</sup>

On July 1, 2021, the EAEU countries launched the *Work without Borders Unified Search System*, which provides access to information about vacancies and job seekers contained in the employment-related information systems of the member states. The Work without Borders Unified System project creates opportunities for employment and job search for citizens of Kyrgyzstan in the EAEU member states.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “Киргизские граждане в России задействованы в торговле и строительстве”, News Agency CentralAsia.News, 22/11/2023, available at: <https://centralasia.news/25203-kirgizskie-grazhdane-v-rossii-zadejstvovany-v-torgovle-i-stroitelstve.html>

<sup>41</sup> The Kyrgyz Republic National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, available at: <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/system/files/docs/Kyrgyzstan%20-%20Voluntary%20GCM%20Review.pdf>





Despite the fact that the unemployment rate in the Russian Federation has reached its historic minimum (2.9%), a significant part of industries experienced labour shortages in 2022 and 2023. In order to attract employees, employers raised wages and sought to improve working conditions and reduce requirements to applicants.<sup>42</sup> Russia's acute labour shortages, with a demand for 4.8 million workers, have led to more job opportunities for Central Asian migrants. However, alongside these opportunities comes the risk of military conscription, as a new decree allows fast-track naturalization for foreigners joining the military, but also includes the threat of revoking citizenship for failing to register for service within 14 days of naturalization.<sup>43</sup> The country's leadership intends to address the shortage of labour resources by means of the national program "Personnel" (aimed at training future able-bodied citizens of the Russian Federation for the domestic labour market)<sup>44</sup>, as well as the 5-year forecast of the demand for personnel, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour of the Russian Federation.<sup>45</sup> The efforts to address labour market shortages by relying on Russian citizens are occurring alongside recent restrictions in migration policy<sup>46</sup> and a general decline in social tolerance toward migrants from Central Asia and other regions. Recent social studies in Russia reveal a rise in xenophobia and interethnic tensions, particularly among ethnic Russians towards ethnic minorities, with Central Asian migrants being a key target.<sup>47</sup> The terrorist attacks at Crocus City Hall have worsened public attitudes toward Central Asian migrants in the Russian Federation.

#### *Other destinations*

Other destinations attracting labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan include Kazakhstan, Türkiye, the UAE, Great Britain, Republic of Korea, and more. While some countries offer short-term opportunities for seasonal workers without requiring specific skills, others seek long-term labour force with language proficiency and, in some cases professional experience (for example, medical professionals).

**United Kingdom.** Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have signed the Agreement with the UK Government under the short-term Seasonal Workers Program (SWP) to cover the labour shortages in such economic sectors as horticulture (6-month visa) and poultry (3-month visa). Seasonal workers cannot apply for a permanent job, get public funds or bring their families; they have to return to their home country after the visa's expiration.

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<sup>42</sup> Bank of Russia, "Годовой отчет 2023", available at: [https://www.cbr.ru/Collection/Collection/File/49041/ar\\_2023.pdf](https://www.cbr.ru/Collection/Collection/File/49041/ar_2023.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Y. Matusevich, "Impacts of Russia's War in Ukraine on Migration in Central Asia", Policy Brief, Prague Process, ICMPD, July 2024, available at: <https://www.pragueprocess.eu/en/resources/repository/34-briefs/487-impacts-of-russias-war-in-ukraine-on-migration-in-central-asia>

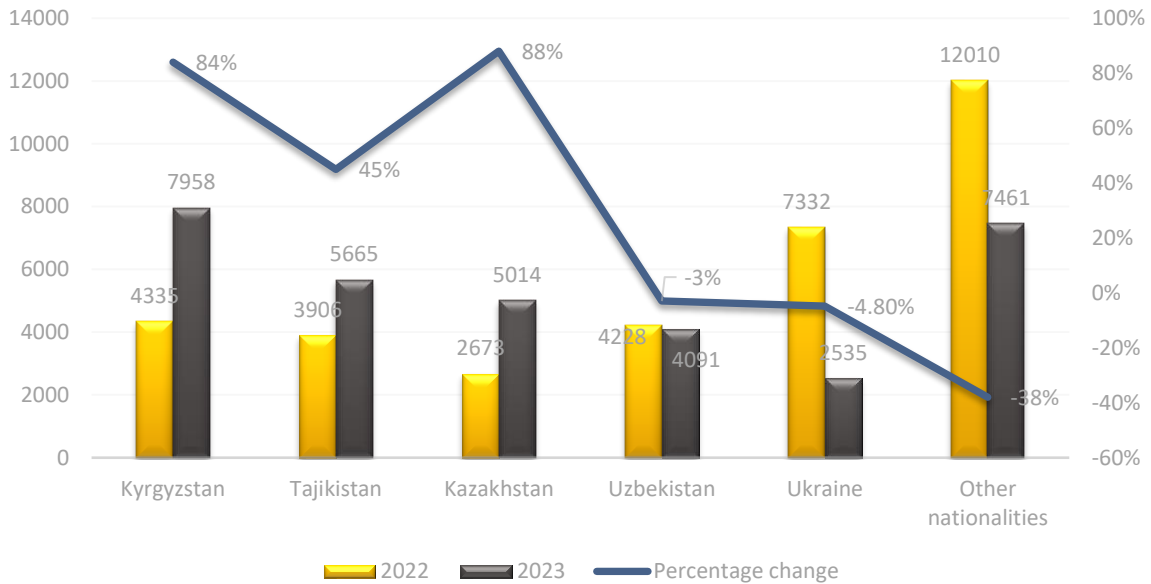
<sup>44</sup> "В РФ будут реализовывать новый нацпроект «Кадры»", News Agency Interfax, 29/02/2024, available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/948323>

<sup>45</sup> "Прогноз работы: Правительство будет вычислять потребности рынка труда на пять лет вперед ежегодно", News Agency Kommersant, 22/09/2023, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6225947>

<sup>46</sup> Умаров, Т. "Спираль дискриминации. Зачем российские власти ополчились на мигрантов", Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/10/russia-migrant-discrimination?lang=ru>

<sup>47</sup> Levada Center, "Уровень ксенофобии и межнациональной напряженности, отношение к приезжим", 14/05/2024, available at: <https://www.levada.ru/2024/05/14/uroven-ksenofobii-i-mezhnatsionalnoj-napryazhennosti-otnoshenie-k-priezzhim/>

**Diagram 8: Top 5 nationalities of ‘Seasonal Worker’ visas granted to main applicants in 2023<sup>48</sup>**



Source: Government of UK, statistics on visas for work, 2022-2023

The data on issued visas has demonstrated the raised interest among Kyrgyz citizens to apply for this program, while the decrease of issued visas to Uzbek citizens may be assumed as an indicator for the return to previous countries of destination (for example, Russia) as well as newly opened opportunities to other international labour markets in 2023.

### Republic of Korea.

*Kyrgyzstan.* On June 24, 2007, the State Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic on Migration and Employment and the Ministry of Labour of the Republic of Korea signed a Memorandum of Understanding on sending labour force to the Republic of Korea under the Employment Permit System (EPS), approved by the order of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated June 13, 2007, No. 169. More than 5 thousand citizens were successfully employed under this memorandum. Currently, according to CECA about 1.5 thousand citizens are working in the Republic of Korea under the EPS program and most are employed in the manufacturing industry: food processing, chemical, paper industry, and factories producing plastic, rubber and glass products.

It is attractive for labour migrants due to the average salary of \$1,800, with accommodation and meals (partially or fully) covered by the employer and a long-term contract (up to two years). The main requirements of the EPS program is an adequate level of Korean language proficiency, age limitation (18-39 years), no restrictions on leaving the Kyrgyzstan, no medical contraindications to physical labour

<sup>48</sup> Government of UK, “Accredited official statistics: Why do people come to UK? To work”, 29/02/2024, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2023/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-to-work>



and monotonous work, not having been deported from the Republic of Korea, not having a history of stay in the Republic of Korea on E-9 and E-10 visa types for more than 5 years in total. According to data provided by the CECA despite the increased quota for labour force there is a decrease in Kyrgyz labour migrants in the Republic of Korea in 2023 (420 employed) than in 2022 (888).<sup>49</sup>

*Uzbekistan.* In 2007, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Human Resource Management of the Republic of Korea. On 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 2011 the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Korea on temporary labour activity of citizens of one state in the territory of the other state has been signed.<sup>50</sup> The annual quota for Uzbeks was three thousand jobs. In March 2016, the parties signed an updated memorandum, under the terms of which about twenty-three thousand people from Uzbekistan went to South Korea to work under contracts. In November 2017, during Sh. Mirziyoyev's visit to the Republic of Korea, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Human Resources Management of the Republic of Korea. As a result of the implementation of this document, a representative office of the Agency for External Labour Migration of the Republic of Uzbekistan was opened in Gwangju in 2018.<sup>51</sup> After COVID-19 in 2021 Republic of Korea resumed hiring the citizens of Uzbekistan for seasonal work (under the E-8 visa), but many of them violated the labour contract and did not return home within the designated period, prompting Korean authorities again to suspend E-8 visa (for seasonal work) for Uzbekistan citizens<sup>52</sup>. In addition, in 2023 Uzbekistan was among the top three countries in the number of illegal immigrants entering Republic of Korea on a D-4 visa (this type of visa is usually issued for foreigners who arrived to learn Korean language).<sup>53</sup> Currently citizens of Uzbekistan make up the fifth largest foreign diaspora in the Republic of Korea and as of the end of 2023, 87.6 thousand of them lived there with 12.5 thousands being students.<sup>54</sup> Due to labour shortages and the implementation of the Fourth Basic Plan for Policies on Foreigners (2023-2027), the authorities of the Republic of Korea are seeking to expand the foreign workforce by creating more job opportunities for migrant workers and students. In this regard, this year the authorities of Uzbekistan and Republic of Korea have finally reached agreement on resuming the recruitment of total 100 000 Uzbekistani citizens to the Republic of Korea with more than 37,000 at the

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<sup>49</sup> CECA, migrant.kg, in some resources it is stated 920 migrants

<sup>50</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Government of the Republic of Korea on temporary labour activity of citizens of one state in the territory of the other state", available at: <https://lex.uz/acts/2051312>

<sup>51</sup> М. Дмитриева, Троякова Т., "Корейцы Узбекистана в поисках новой идентичности в Республике Корея", Известия Восточного Института, Выпуск 2, Владивосток, 2021, available at:

<sup>52</sup> "Uzbekistan citizens granted renewed access to seasonal work in South Korea", News Agency Gazeta.uz, 13/05/2024, available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/en/2024/05/13/seasonal-work-korea/>

<sup>53</sup> Тен А., "Сколько узбекистанских студентов-нелегалов в Южной Корее?", Uz.Kursiv.Media, 10/11/2024, available at: <https://uz.kursiv.media/2023-10-10/skolko-uzbekistanskih-studentov-nelegalov-v-yujnoy-koree/>

<sup>54</sup> **국내 외국인 251만명...전체 인구 4.9%로 '다문화사회' 목전 , "2.51 million foreigners in Korea... We are on the verge of becoming a 'multicultural society' with 4.9% of the total population", 16/01/2024, available at: <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20240116058800371?section=search>**

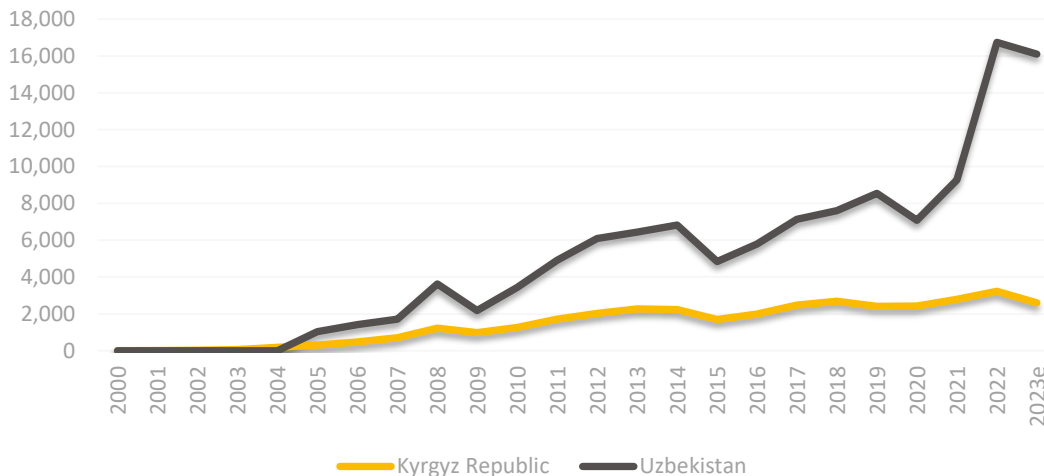


first stage and the quota for Kyrgyz citizens has also been increased by approximately 18%, providing an estimated 3 300 job opportunities for Kyrgyz nationals.

### Remittances

Labour migration processes have an impact on aggregate household incomes, domestic demand and balance of payments sustainability through the remittances channel. According to World Bank estimates the remittances to both countries from the Russian Federation in 2023 has fallen due to the depreciation of the Russian ruble against the US dollar that directly affected the national currencies in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as well as a high level of inflation, particularly the rise of prices on housing and products.

**Diagram 9. Remittances flow from Russian Federation to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, 2000-2023**



Source: World Bank-KNOMAD, December 2023

In Uzbekistan over the period 2018-2023, about 16% of total aggregate personal income came from remittances from labour migrants. Most of the trade deficit is also offset by the inflow of cross-border remittances, which are also a major source of supply in the domestic foreign exchange market.<sup>55</sup> The Central Bank of Uzbekistan indicated that there is geographical diversification in labour migration with a decreasing share of remittances from Russia. There were no significant changes in trends in external labour migration in the first quarter of 2024. This was reflected in the dynamics of cross-border remittances, which increased by 8.6% compared to the same period last year.<sup>56</sup>

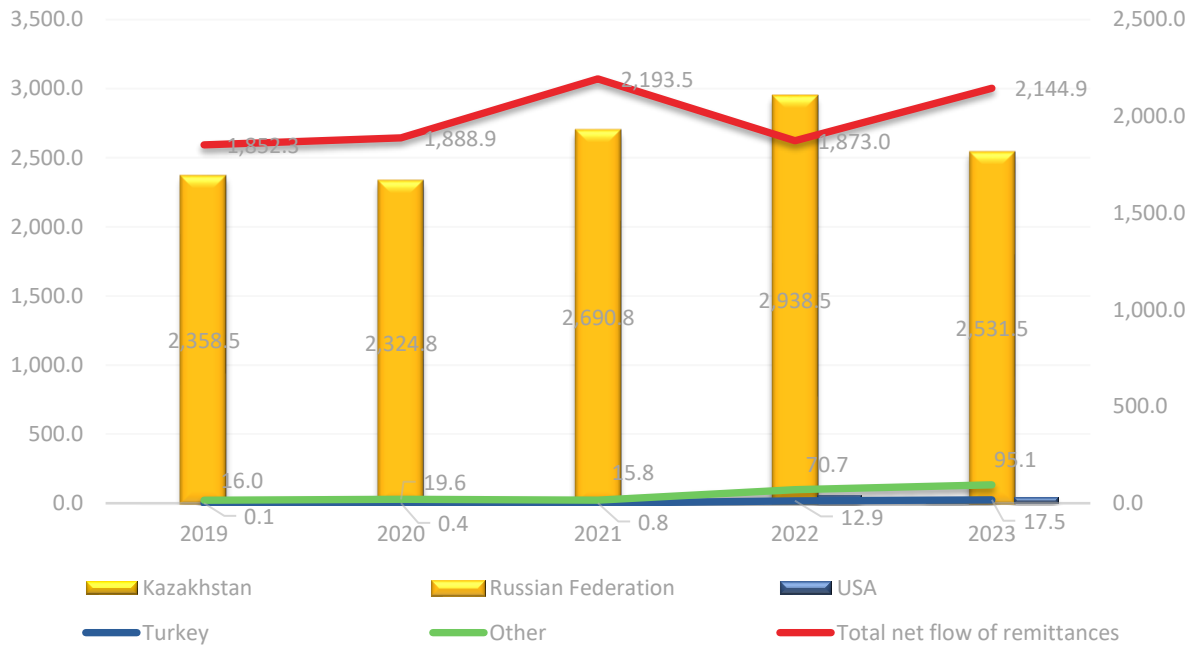
According to the National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, the net flow of remittances decreased by 15% in 2022 compared to 2021 (2,193.5 million USD in 2021 and 1,873.0 million USD of net flow in 2022) and increased in 2023 by 272 million USD compared to the net flow in 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Central Bank of Uzbekistan, "Labour Market Review Uzbekistan", 2024, available at: [https://cbu.uz/upload/iblock/7fd/y17qu1k1w89xpnq43q1jc6fq1dbzlb6c/Obzor-rynka-truda-\\_1kv.-2024\\_.pdf](https://cbu.uz/upload/iblock/7fd/y17qu1k1w89xpnq43q1jc6fq1dbzlb6c/Obzor-rynka-truda-_1kv.-2024_.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



**Diagram 10. Cross-border remittances of individuals to Kyrgyzstan, 2019-2023, in mln USD**



Source: National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic

In 2019, the share of remittances from Russian Federation made up 98 per cent of total remittances while in 2022 it has decreased to 95,2 and in 2023 - 93,6 per cent respectively. The decrease in flow also affected the remittance from the USA from 54,9 mln USD in 2022 to 45,3 mln USD in 2023. Interestingly, the share of *Other* increased from 0,6% in 2019 (16 mln USD) to 3,5% (95,1 mln USD) in 2023, thus, demonstrating the diversification of international labour markets by migrants from Kyrgyzstan.

### Immigration

*Kyrgyzstan.* In response to high immigration flows from Russian Federation in 2022 due to mobilization activities related to war conflict between Russian Federation and Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan has implemented the "Digital Nomad" program. This status allowed citizens of a number of countries to stay in Kyrgyzstan without registration and permits for labour activities, and facilitated interaction with government agencies. A total of 2,353 people have been granted Digital Nomad status since September 2022, including 239 since the beginning of this year.<sup>57</sup>

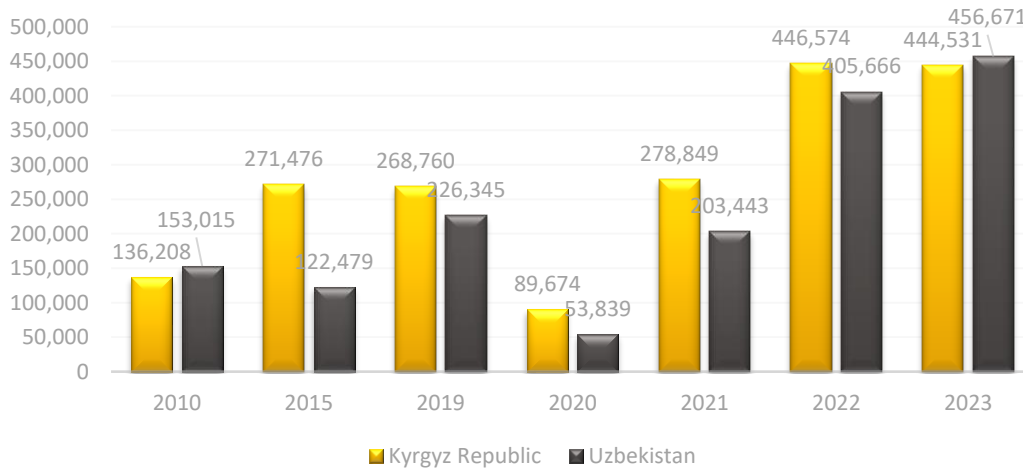
According to IOM conducted research, the data for *international migrants* in Kyrgyzstan between 2020 and 2023 indicated a total of 46,370 individuals engaged in or previously engaged in remunerated

<sup>57</sup> MLSSM, "Минтруд: за два года более 23 тысяч человек получили статус «Цифровой кочевник»", 23/07/2024, available at: <https://mlsp.gov.kg/ru/2024/07/23/mintrud-za-dva-goda-bolee-23-tys-chelovek-poluchili-status-cifrovoy-kochevnik/>

activities within the country: 23,723 international migrants in 2023, 13,060 in 2022, 6,110 in 2021, and 3,477 in 2020. These migrants have resided in Kyrgyzstan for at least one month.<sup>58</sup>

*Uzbekistan.* The largest share of those arriving for permanent residence in the Republic of Uzbekistan from abroad (in % of their total number) is accounted for by those from the Russian Federation (37.4%) and Kazakhstan (21.9%). From Tajikistan 11.2% of arrivals were registered, Kyrgyzstan - 8.0%, Turkmenistan - 1.4%, other countries - 20.1%.<sup>59</sup> The data from federal Border Service of RF demonstrates the increase in border cross of Russian citizens particularly in 2022 and 2023.

**Diagram 11. A number of facts of border cross by citizens of the Russian Federation, by country**



Source: based on data from Federal Border Service of the Russian Federation, 2010-2023<sup>60</sup>

## 2.3 Internal migration

*Kyrgyzstan.* According to last national population census conducted in 2022 the number of people who changed their place of residence during their residence in the territory of Kyrgyzstan amounted to 625,918 people, of which 28.3% arrived in Chui oblast, 21.2% - in Bishkek city, 10.4% - in Jalal-Abad and Issyk-Kul oblasts, 6.5% - in Naryn oblast, more than 7% - in Osh oblast and Osh city, 4% - in Talas oblast, respectively.

The major part of the population of Issyk-Kul, Jalal-Abad, Osh, Talas and Chui oblasts (45% and more) moved only within the oblasts themselves, except for the population of Batken oblast, who left not only to the territory of the oblast itself (29%), but also to Chui oblast and Bishkek city (21% each). 33%

<sup>58</sup> IOM, “Baseline Mobility Assessment and Return Migrant Worker Survey: Round 2 Kyrgyzstan”, December 2023, available at: [https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1321/files/documents/2024-04/kg\\_baseline-and-returning-migrant-worker-survey.pdf](https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1321/files/documents/2024-04/kg_baseline-and-returning-migrant-worker-survey.pdf)

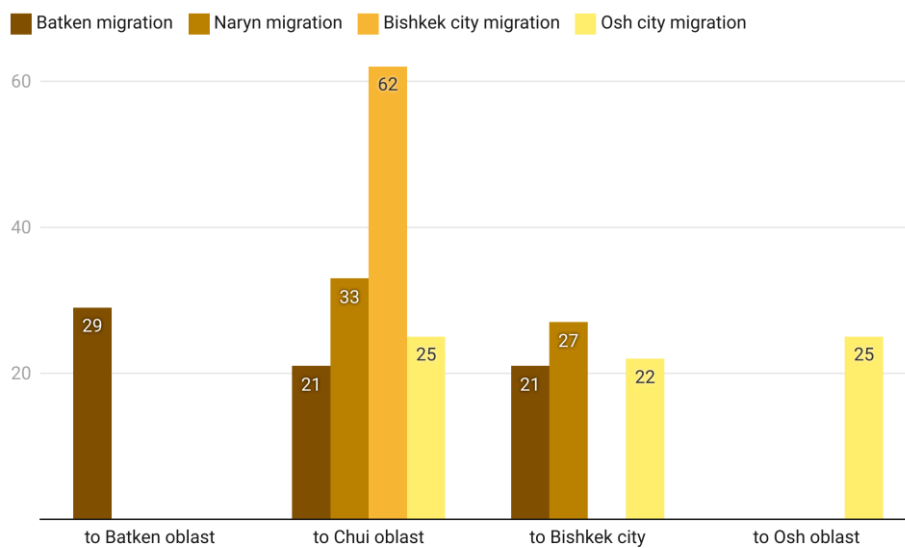
<sup>59</sup> Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “Демографическая ситуация в Республике Узбекистан: январь-март 2024”, available at: [https://stat.uz/img/demografiya-press-reliz-26\\_04\\_2024-rus.pdf](https://stat.uz/img/demografiya-press-reliz-26_04_2024-rus.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> Европейская экономическая комиссия, «Административные данные и статистика миграции в странах СНГ», Женева, 2024, доступно на: [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/6.Admin%20WP7%20CIS%20Kiseleva%20RUS\\_0.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/6.Admin%20WP7%20CIS%20Kiseleva%20RUS_0.pdf)



of the population of Naryn oblast migrated to Chui oblast, 27% - to Bishkek city, 62% of the population of Bishkek city - to Chui oblast, and Osh city – 25% each to Osh and Chui oblasts, 22% - to Bishkek city. As demonstrated from the diagram below, one can observe not only rural to urban migration (from regions to Bishkek city), but also urban to rural migration (from Bishkek city to rural area around it).

**Diagram 12. Internal migration in Kyrgyzstan, 2022, in %**



Source: Migration of Population, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2022

*Uzbekistan.* Information available from the Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan estimates that 215,864 individuals migrated internally from one region to another in 2023. Of these, 126,336 were women (58.5%) and 89,530 were men (41.5%). This represents almost a 1.5% increase compared to the registered internal migration in 2022, which was 212,498 individuals, with 60.3% females and 39.7% males.<sup>61</sup> Based on data from 2016-2017, Tashkent, Samarkand, Surkhandarya regions, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan were leading in population attrition. During 2018-2019, Samarkand and Kashkadarya regions topped the list, with Tashkent's indicator remaining unchanged. By 2020, the highest attrition rates were observed in Kashkadarya and Tashkent oblasts.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.4 Returning migrants

*Kyrgyzstan.* In 2022 and 2023 the Mobility Tracking Matrix (MTM) of the IOM in Kyrgyzstan has conducted two rounds of its Baseline Mobility Assessment to track the mobility of people and particularly the return migrants. It revealed that between 2020 and 2023, a total of 137,353 migrant

<sup>61</sup> IOM, "Migration Situation Report Uzbekistan October-December 2023", available at: <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/uzbekistan-migration-situation-report-quarterly-compilation-oct-dec-2023>

<sup>62</sup> Ж. Рахимова, "Внутренняя миграция: куда едут люди из областей", 30/10/2021, Hook Report Media Agency, available at: <https://hook.report/2021/10/migration/>



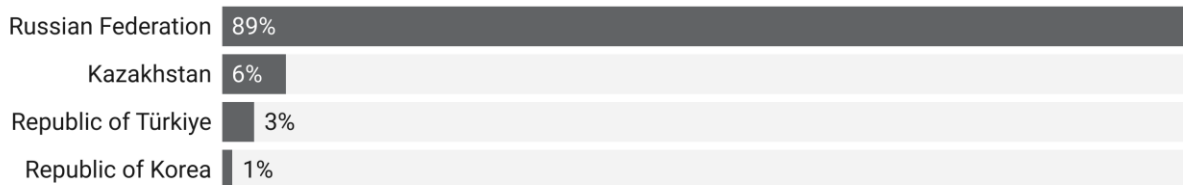
workers returned to Kyrgyzstan. The highest number of returnees was from the Russian Federation (122,125 individuals), followed by Kazakhstan (8,072), the Republic of Türkiye (4,380), and the Republic of Korea (947). Sixty-four per cent of the migrant workers who returned were men.

The data allows to define the socio-economic profile of the returned migrants:

- are male/female of average age 38 years old
- are returnees to Jalal-Abad (46%);
- were mainly involved in community, social, personal services (30%), construction (24%) and transportation in the country of destinations and who found this job through personal connections including family and friends;
- having work upon their arrival to Kyrgyzstan (65%);
- and intending to re-migrate again (55%<sup>63</sup>)

The reason to migrate for both male and female migrant workers were mainly dominated by the higher income in country of destination.

**Diagram 13. Countries from where the Kyrgyz migrants return, %**



Source: IOM, 2024

The reason to return due to family issues almost doubled in 2023 (51%) in comparison with 2022 (28%). The partial mobilization announced by the Russian Federation in September 2022 and economic downturn in Russian Federation were not among the top reasons for Kyrgyz citizens who returned in 2023 as it used to be in 2022 (see Table below).

**Table 2. Reasons to return of Kyrgyz citizens in 2022-2023, %**

<sup>63</sup> This percentage includes the answers on intention (1) to continue circular migration between Kyrgyzstan and countries they returned from, (2) to migrate to another country, (3) to permanently settle in the country of return.





Reasons to return to Kyrgyz Republic	2022	2023
Family issues including reuniting with family members, marriage, and supporting family members in Kyrgyzstan.	28	51
Partial mobilization announced by the Russian Feder	21	3
Economic downturn in host country	20	6
Conflict and security situation	11	1
COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact	11	N/A
Other	10	39

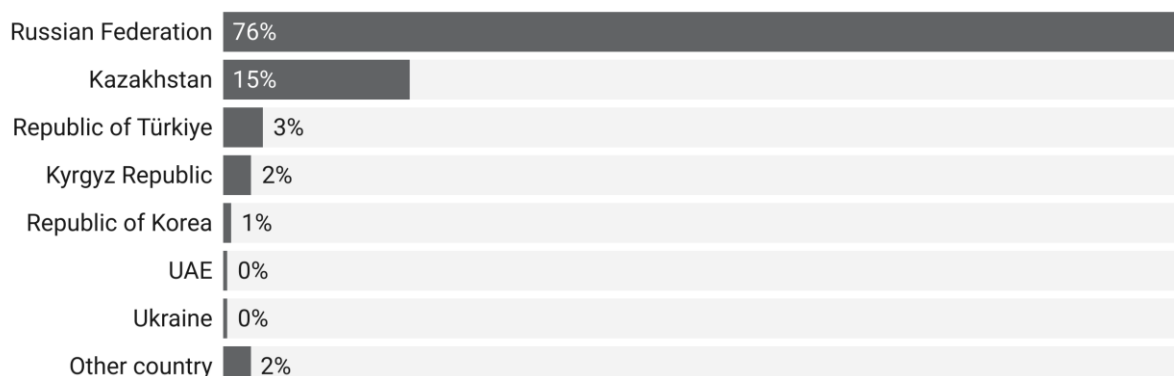
Source: IOM Baseline Mobility Assessment in Kyrgyzstan 2022, 2023

*Uzbekistan.* In 2022 the UNDP country office in Uzbekistan for the first time conducted research on returning migrants in Uzbekistan.<sup>64</sup> A sample survey conducted for this study found that in Uzbekistan, labour repatriates are typically men aged 25 to 44 with secondary or vocational education, residing in rural areas and returning mainly from the Russian Federation.

Among the reasons to migrate, the majority of respondents mentioned lack of well-paid jobs in the home country (75,7%), the desire to acquire new skills and improve qualifications that will be useful in the home countries (4,5%), poor infrastructure and low quality of life (16,9%), other (2,8%).

#### Diagram 14. Countries from where the Uzbek migrants return in 2022, %

<sup>64</sup> UNDP Uzbekistan, "Support and Reintegration of Labour Repatriates in Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects", December 2022, available at: [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/Migrant%20Survey%20Report\\_Final\\_UNDP.docx\\_.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/Migrant%20Survey%20Report_Final_UNDP.docx_.pdf)



Source: UNDP, 2022

Similar to Kyrgyz returnees of 2023, the main reason for Uzbek returning migrants were family issues related to death, illness, accident, weddings and other events concerning members and relatives. 14% returned due to seasonal work or to vacation and 11% indicated the deterioration of the economic situation in the host country. Taking into account that majority of respondents returned from Russian Federation, this was natural due to the depreciation of the Russian ruble towards US dollar as a result of the Russian war in Ukraine that started in 2022.

**Table 3. Reasons to return of Uzbek citizens in 2022, %**



Deterioration of the economic situation in the foreign country of residence (reduction of wages or partial / complete loss of work)	11
Family circumstances (death, illness, accident, weddings and other events concerning family members and relatives, etc.)	55
Improving the socio-economic situation at home (you can find a good job)	3
Temporary return due to job being seasonal/temporary or return due to vacation	14
To complete the necessary documents	8
Deterioration of own health (labor injuries, acquisition of chronic diseases)	3
Other	6

Source: UNDP, 2022

The research revealed the challenges that returning migrants have faced after their return to their home country. Out from 569 individuals 158 respondents mentioned that they were visited after returning to their homeland by assistants of khokims or the chairman of the mahalla or another employee of the state body in order to study their problems and needs, assist in their solution, as well as improve their material, social and living conditions, however 89 of them mentioned that they did not receive any help after the meeting.



The comprehensive report proposed a list of recommendations that state authorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan started implementing in 2024. Thus, according to the Decree of the President of Republic of Uzbekistan dated 4 April, 2024<sup>65</sup>, in each makhalla "*makhalla seven*" has to conduct a census of persons who have returned from labour migration. Former labour migrants will be provided with reintegration assistance. Ensuring their official employment will be one of the main indicators of the khokims' assistants' effectiveness of the work. The Ministry of Health, in turn, has been instructed to establish the practice of free medical examinations for returning labour migrants and members of their families. Those suffering from socially significant diseases (tuberculosis, cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, mental illness) have to be provided with free medical care.

## 2.5 Human trafficking and irregular migration

*Kyrgyzstan*. Since 2005<sup>66</sup> the government of the Kyrgyz Republic has developed and adopted a number of legislative documents related to prevention and combatting human trafficking. Among the most recent legislative documents in this area is the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic "On the Program of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2022-2025"<sup>67</sup>. That resolution aimed to achieve a number of tasks related to improvement of the normative legal framework in the sphere of combating trafficking in human beings, prevention measures to trafficking in human beings and forced labour, increasing the effectiveness of measures for investigation and criminal prosecution, trials related to trafficking in human beings and forced labour, development of the system of providing protection and assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings, and development of partnership and international cooperation in the sphere of combating trafficking in human beings. In September 2022, within the structure of the Council on Migration and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings under the Toraga of the Jogorku Kenesh, the Institute of the Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings was established by order of the Speaker of the Parliament. The Rapporteur's institution promotes the anti-trafficking agenda, identifies gaps, studies trends in human trafficking in Kyrgyzstan, and prepares an annual national report on the issue.<sup>68</sup>

According to the U.S. Department of State's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, labour migrants, especially adult men working abroad, as well as young people from rural or low-income backgrounds,

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<sup>65</sup> National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Указ Президента Республики Узбекистан №59: О дополнительных мерах по совершенствованию процессов трудовой миграции и поддержке лиц, осуществляющих трудовую деятельность за рубежом", 04/04/2024, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/6868873>

<sup>66</sup> Act on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2005), Programs of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and Action Plans to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (since 2008), A specialized unit to combat kidnapping and trafficking in persons has been established in the Criminal Investigation Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (2017), National Referral Mechanism (2019), Criminal Code (2021, art.166, 167 and 170), Constitution (art.28, 2021), principles of safe and regular migration are also indicated in national programs, laws and other legislative acts related to migration.

<sup>67</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic "On the Program of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2022-2025", Ministry of Justice, available at: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/7-21555/edition/1164358/ru>

<sup>68</sup> U.Nogoibaev, "It's about people: national leadership in combating human trafficking", 23rd Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons, OSCE, April 18-19, 2023, Vienna, Austria, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/549139.pdf>



children in the welfare system, and orphans, are among the most vulnerable groups to human trafficking.<sup>69</sup> Human traffickers have exploited both domestic and foreign victims in the Kyrgyzstan, with Kyrgyzstani men, women, and children being exploited in forced labour in countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, to a lesser extent in Türkiye, Kuwait, Georgia, Ukraine, and other European countries, as well as within the Kyrgyz Republic – specifically in agriculture, construction, trucking, service sectors, textiles, domestic service, and childcare. Women and girls also face significant risks from bride kidnapping, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation. While men are often victims of forced labour, women are more susceptible to long-term stigma from sexual exploitation.<sup>70</sup>

*Uzbekistan.* Since 2008, the government of Uzbekistan has developed and enacted extensive legislative measures aimed at preventing and combating human trafficking.<sup>71</sup> In line with the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued on July 30, 2019, titled "On Additional Measures to Further Improve the System for Combating Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labour," the National Commission on Countering Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labour was formed, and its members were approved.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, there are 14 territorial branches in oblasts/regions of Uzbekistan. Additionally, the role of the National Rapporteur on combating trafficking in persons and forced labour was created. In addition, the country also adopted the Law "On Combating Human Trafficking" in new edition and the corresponding resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers approved the system of "referral at the national level of victims of trafficking in persons or suspected of being victims of trafficking in persons".

In regards to the profile of the vulnerable to human trafficking individuals, over the past five years,<sup>73</sup> Uzbekistani victims have been exploited both domestically and abroad. Although the government has reduced forced labour in the cotton harvest, isolated cases persist, especially among rural women and state employees. Workers in construction, farming, and mining face high risks, and climate change has exacerbated vulnerabilities. The LGBTQI+ community, children in institutions, and those involved in drug trafficking are also at high risk of trafficking. Uzbekistani nationals are trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, especially in construction, agriculture, and retail.

Both countries cooperate in their efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking on national, regional and global levels. The USAID- funded project *Safe Migration in Central Asia* started in 2019 with the overall goal to promote safe migration and combat human trafficking through strengthened bilateral and multi-country strategies. It also aims to reduce the vulnerability of at-risk populations,

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<sup>69</sup> "US Department of State, "2024 Report on Trafficking in Persons: Kyrgyzstan", available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/kyrgyzstan/#:~:text=Civil%20society%20reported%20assisting%20140,of%20unspecified%20forms%20of%20trafficking.>

<sup>70</sup> Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, "Baseline Study for the Safe Migration in Central Asia Project", Winrock International, USAID, January 2022

<sup>71</sup> Presidential Decree No. 911 "On Measures to Improve Effectiveness in the Fight Against Human Trafficking" (2008), Law No. 154 of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Combatting Human Trafficking" (2008),

<sup>72</sup> National Commission on Countering Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labour, available at: <http://ht.gov.uz/>

<sup>73</sup> US Department of State, "2024 Report on Trafficking in Persons: Uzbekistan", available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/uzbekistan/>



improve identification and assistance for trafficked persons, and enhance the prosecution of human trafficking crimes, with a specific focus on Kyrgyzstan.

Despite the fact that work is constantly being done in two countries to improve legislation both in terms of prosecution of criminals and in the area of protection and effective assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings, it still remains ineffective. In addition to poor economic conditions that fuels irregular migration the recent study<sup>74</sup> in Kyrgyzstan identified the systemic issues, including weak state capacity, corruption, lack of trust between the government and society, and challenges in maintaining the reliable data on migration and particularly on trafficking which contribute to the people's vulnerability and hinder the efforts to protect migrants.

### 3. Migrants' Information Needs Assessment

The landscape of labour migration has become increasingly diverse, with a growing number of European, Middle East, and South Asian countries expressing interest in recruiting workers from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. This development has led government agencies and media in both the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan to emphasize migration management, acknowledging its rising significance and its economic and social impacts. This trend has been especially pronounced in the Kyrgyzstan, where the number of private employment agencies (PEAs) has notably increased in recent years.

*“Because of the ruble exchange rate has fallen and the pressure on migrants has increased, my husband is now going to Europe.” - Woman, Osh, Kyrgyzstan*

Nevertheless, despite the ongoing war conflict between RF and Ukraine, the Russian Federation remains the primary destination for labour migration from both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The typical labour migrant headed for RF is a young male or female between the ages of 18 and 50, with a secondary level of education. Kyrgyz migrants opt to work abroad, even though some wages are comparable to those in Kyrgyzstan, because they have greater opportunities to save and accumulate money while working overseas.

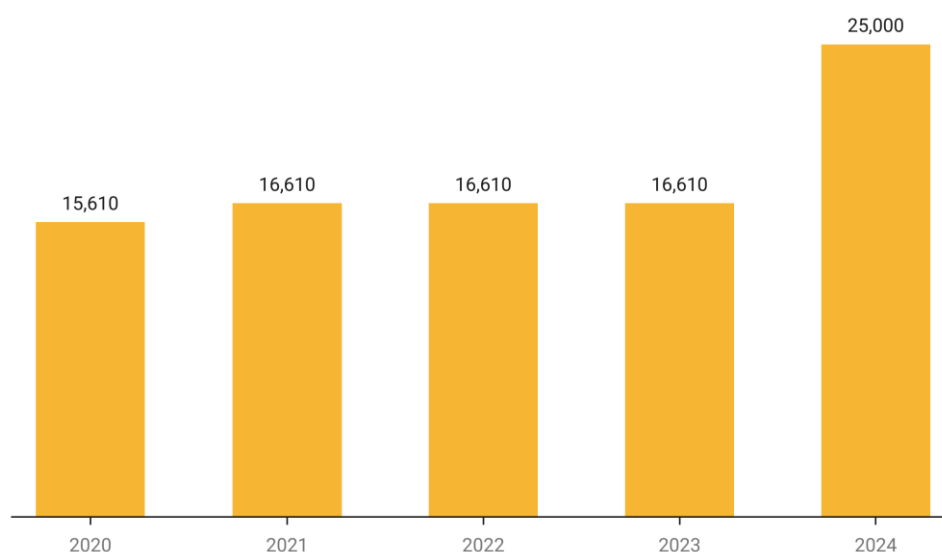
*“In Kyrgyzstan, their earnings would likely be spent on immediate family needs and community obligations, making it difficult to accumulate savings locally”. – KII, state servant, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

In Kyrgyzstan, the outflow of labour migrants has led to domestic workforce shortages, prompting an increase in quotas for foreign labour. The demand for workers in the sewing industry, in particular, has made the country's labour market appealing to immigrants, especially from South Asia.

#### Diagram 15. Foreign labour quota in Kyrgyzstan by years, number of people

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<sup>74</sup> E.Kasper et al., “The Systematic Nature of Vulnerability to Trafficking for Kyrgyz Labour Migrants”, Winrock International, Humanity Research Consultancy, USAID 2023, available at: <https://winrock.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Asia-CTIP-Systemic-vulnerability-to-HT-in-KYR-3.pdf>



Source: MLSSM

### 3.1 The profile of the respondents who participated in the FGDs and KIIs

The study included both intending migrants, men and women, as well as those who had already returned from migration in three regions of Kyrgyzstan and three regions in Uzbekistan. The key difference about the attitude towards migration, its planning stage and information needs lies between those who never migrated and returned migrants. Additionally, the KIIs were held with government officials, PEAs and experts in the respective countries.

#### *Distribution of FGDs and interviews*

The following table breaks down the focus groups and interviews by location and the three target groups (intending, returning migrants and KIIs with experts):

**Table 4. Distribution of FGDs and Interviews by country**

Kyrgyzstan			
Location	Focus groups	Interviews	Total
Osh city	1 FGD with returned migrants and family members (male)	1 – SI with returned female migrant; 1 – SI with returned male migrant	5
	1 FGD with intending migrants and family members (female)	1 – KII with CECA south	
Jalal Abad city	1 FGD with intending migrants and family members (male)	1 – SI with returned male migrant	4
	1 FGD with returned migrants and family members (female)	1 – SI with intending female migrant;	



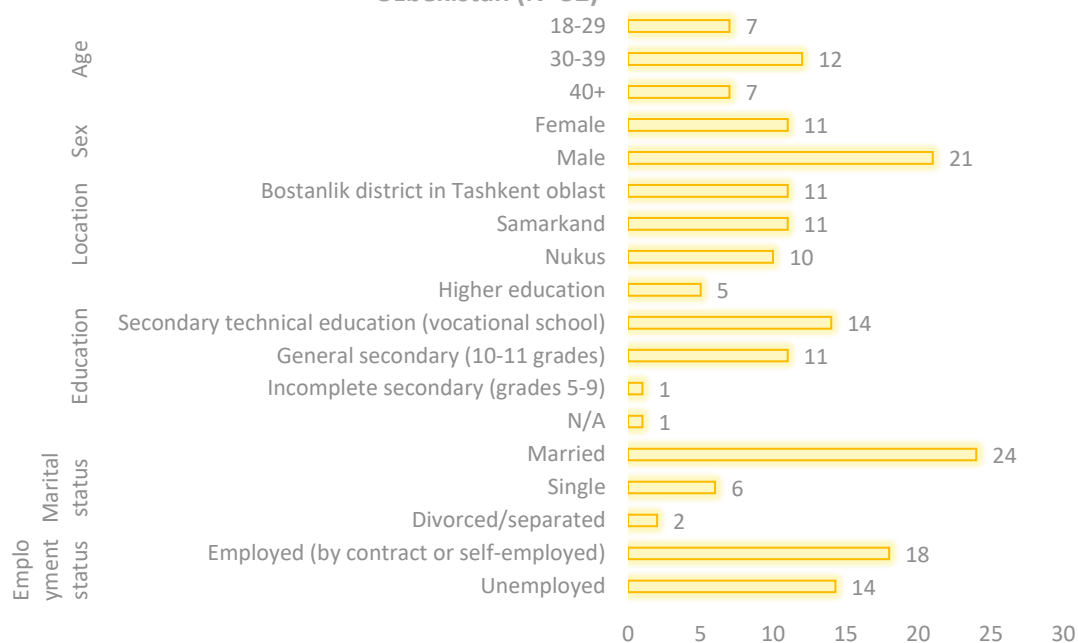
Batken city	<i>1 FGD with returned migrants and family members (male)</i>	<i>1 – SI with intending male migrant;</i>	4
	<i>1 FGD with intending migrants and family members (female)</i>	<i>1 - SI with returned female migrant</i>	
Bishkek city	-	<i>1 – KIIs with CECA</i>	3
		<i>1 – KII with PEA</i>	
		<i>1 - KII with Council on Migration</i>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Uzbekistan</b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Focus groups</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Total</b>
Samarkand city	<i>1 FGD with returned migrants and family members (male)</i>	<i>1 – SI with intending female migrant</i>	2
Tashkent oblast	<i>1 FGD with intending migrants family members (male)</i>	<i>1 - SI with intending male migrant</i>	2
Nukus city	<i>1 FGD with intending migrants family members (female)</i>	<i>1 – SI with returned male migrant</i>	2
Khoresm city		<i>1 – KII with lawyer/expert in irregular migration</i>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>

#### *Profile of the respondents participated in this study*

The socio-demographic profile of participants in the Needs Assessment study conducted in Kyrgyzstan (58 participants) and Uzbekistan (32 participants) reveals that participants from both countries come from diverse educational and geographical backgrounds, with most being of middle age (30-39 age group) and married. Kyrgyzstan has a higher rate of unemployment among its participants, while Uzbekistan shows a more even split between employed and unemployed participants. Both in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, secondary technical education and general secondary education are the most common. In terms of employment, the profiles differ between the two countries. In Kyrgyzstan, the majority of participants are unemployed (39), while 16 are employed either by contract or as self-employed. In Uzbekistan, the numbers are more evenly distributed, with 18 employed and 14 unemployed.

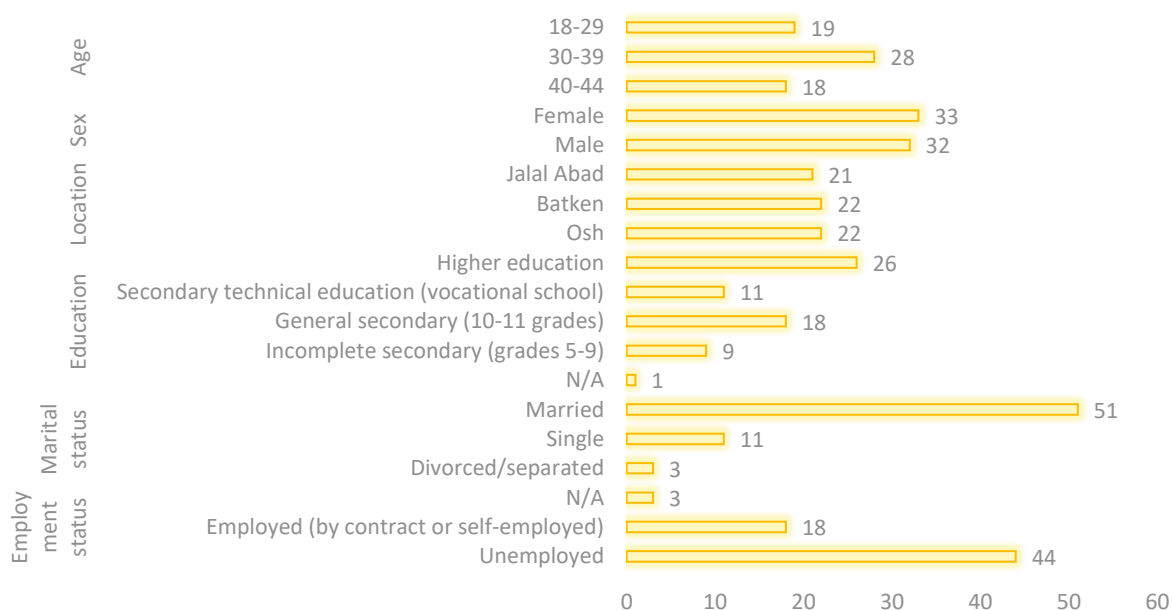
**Table 5. Profile of respondents in Uzbekistan**

### Socio-demographic characteristics of Needs Assessment study participants in Uzbekistan (N=32)



**Table 6. Profile of respondents in Kyrgyzstan**

### Socio-demographic characteristics of FGD and SI participants in Kyrgyzstan (N=65)







Intending migrants demonstrated various attitudes towards the migration. While some of them (particularly those who never migrated) reflected the idealized version of migration, where they believed that moving to another country would lead to almost immediate financial success and personal fulfillment,

*“When I hear the word **migration**, I immediately imagine magnificent two-storey houses and beautiful cars. I also imagine that when I arrive, I immediately get a good job and immediately start calling my relatives, and inviting them. This is how I imagine migration” – women FGD, Osh, Kyrgyzstan*

others (including those who already had experience in migration) perceived it with several concerns particularly regarding language, documentation, and living conditions. They worry that language barriers may hinder first of all to apply to more attractive destinations (European countries) as well as their ability to communicate and fully integrate into their new community. Handling the complex process of securing proper documentation, such as visas and/or work permits, can be a significant source of stress. Additionally, concerns about air quality and environmental conditions in the destination country can influence their decision-making. Uncertainty about housing, cost of living, and access to services also shapes their attitudes, as they seek stability and comfort in their new surroundings.

**Motivation for migration.** The main reason for their migration the respondents mentioned the low salaries, opportunity to accumulate money to build the house, pay for children’s education or start the business. Some of the intending migrants said that they go abroad for labour migration to “...earn money for a house and car *“as everybody does”*”, expressing a common social aspiration and the pressure to meet societal standards of success. It indicates that in their communities, owning a house and a car symbolizes stability and status, making it not just a personal goal but an expected norm. The phrase reflects their motivation to follow in the footsteps of others who have achieved these milestones through migration, as earning enough for such assets might be challenging in their home country. Migration is seen as a faster, more reliable way to accumulate the necessary funds and fulfill these social expectations.

### 3.2 State services for intending and returning migrants

*Kyrgyzstan.* The interview with the CECA’s representatives revealed certain improvements in communication with potential labour migrants. If previously all procedures were conducted offline, then since 2023 they started to provide services online on the Migrant.kg platform that was designed with the help of international partner. The platform allows intending migrants to fill in an application form, then the CECA team is conducting a preliminary screening (exclusion of repeaters (blacklist), violators), announcing the list and, finally, conducting a face-to-face interview in the office with the employer. The employers arrive to CECA and sign a contract with migrants (except for Korean employers - they do through the Ministry of Employment Labour of the Republic of Korea and their system subsequently selects suitable migrant workers). After signing the contract, the migrants are going through the pre-departure trainings about the country of destination, legal issues and other important details. These services from CECA are free of charge for intending migrants. Moreover, the CECA representatives tend to create the WhatsApp or Telegram group chats with those who were recruited in order to monitor their migration journey and respond to any information needs that CECA can provide for them. Even though the information provided in platform is very comprehensive,



however, the most important information on recommendations and human trafficking is unavailable in Kyrgyz language, it is only in Russian.

In regards to private employment agencies, if earlier the PEAs had to provide their reports to CECA via email or in paper form, since 2023 this digital platform has enhanced the monitoring of licensed PEAs by requiring them to create an account (personal cabinet) within the system and regularly report the number of recruited labour migrants for specified time periods.

Interagency communication and cooperation in Kyrgyzstan is designed to provide the CECA with data on the official registration of private employment agencies (from the Ministry of Justice), PEAs' tax status (from the State Tax Service), to reach potential migrants and organization of information sessions with the help of the Ministry of Education in universities and colleges, and to facilitate communication with foreign employers through diplomatic channels of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, it involves informing Kyrgyz embassies about the number of Kyrgyz citizens who have migrated to those respective countries. Collaboration with law enforcement agencies (MIA and SCNS) primarily focuses on implementing preventive measures to address irregular migration routes both domestically and internationally.

*“With the support of partners, information kiosks were set up at airports and railway stations. By scanning the qr-code, migrants open the CECA page, where they can already check themselves on the RF blacklist and get information on the countries they are interested in.” – state representative, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

The cooperation of state institutions with international organizations, civil society and other actors are mainly focused on informing the migrants about the safe and regular migration pathways as well as providing the financial and capacity-building training sessions for intending and returning migrants. Among them worth mentioning English language and business plan development courses for returning migrants in partnership with IOM, and cooperation with Empirica Group on reclaiming the overpaid taxes for seasonal workers in UK.

*Uzbekistan.* Similar to Kyrgyzstan, there are various state platforms and portals in place for applying for labour opportunities. Some function as informational portals, offering services such as self-checks for inclusion on RF's blacklist or verification of work permit and patent validity<sup>75</sup>. Other digital platforms such as *xorijdaish.uz* are focused on facilitating the registration process for prospective migrants and provides with the language courses details for interested migrants (free of charge and paid).

The recent developments in migration policy demonstrated the state willingness to ensure the safe and order migration for the citizens of Uzbekistan. In addition to information and employment platforms there are provisions in place to account for work experience, allowing labour migrants to contribute to the pension fund, which will be considered when calculating their future pension benefits. Additionally, a policy exists whereby the state allocates specific quotas for migrant workers as part of the affordable housing program. The established Fund to support migrants targets only legal

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<sup>75</sup> The information portal migrant.uz, intended to offer opportunities for validation, was found to have non-functional links during a recent visit to the site.



migrants. But the bulk are illegal migrants and they do not fall into the category through which safe return can be guaranteed.

*“The state provides some financial assistance to migrants. For example, they [migrants] can get transportation costs at low prices/ or on credit. These services are mostly available to migrants who are bound to the organizational recruitment.” – KII, expert, Uzbekistan*

Moreover, the mono-centers established in Uzbekistan that were aimed to help vulnerable citizens to improve their economic situation, are not always practical for potential labour migrants. As noted by an expert, the stipends provided during the training period, which lasts several months, are equivalent to unemployment benefits and are insufficient for a household head to meet their family's daily needs.

In Uzbekistan in contrast with Kyrgyzstan the FGD male participants in Samarkand mentioned that after their return they were contacted either by district superintendent or district health clinic for medical tests, however, not all received any information in regards the opportunities for returned migrants.

The state recognizes that despite a number of initiatives aimed at improving the lives of the population, migration remains one of the main strategies to reduce poverty in Uzbekistan.

*“The state sees poverty reduction in migration,” – KII, expert, Uzbekistan*

Even though the relevant state agencies in both countries are trying to cover the intending and returning migrants with their services, the significant part of the respondents within the study never heard about them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MRC

While the transition to online services through the Migrant.kg platform in Kyrgyzstan is a significant improvement, efforts should be made to ensure that all potential labour migrants, especially those from rural areas, have adequate digital literacy and internet access. Consider implementing offline support channels and/or mobile outreach teams to assist those who face difficulties using the platform. Those mobile outreach teams can consist of MRC volunteers, NGO partners or activists trained by MRC to cover those vulnerable groups of potential labour migrants in rural areas.

While the Fund and social advantages in Uzbekistan to support migrants focuses only on legal migrants, it is essential to assist irregular migrants as well. This could include providing relevant information on how to legalize their status and ensuring they have access to safe return programs, thereby reducing the risks associated with irregular migration.

Continue to promote and enhance the accessibility of programs that account for work experience, such as pension fund contributions for labour migrants as well as access to affordable housing. Ensuring clear communication about these benefits to both legal and irregular migrants could encourage participation and awareness of long-term social security advantages.

The intergovernmental agreement between Kyrgyzstan/Uzbekistan and Republic of Korea provides labour opportunities for returned labour migrants in their respective countries. The "Happy Return Program" is designed to employ returnees in Korean companies operating in Kyrgyzstan and



Uzbekistan. These returnees are highly valued by Korean investors and business leaders due to their proficiency in the Korean language, their work experience in Korea, and their familiarity with Korean workplace culture. MRC in this regard in cooperation with the state and non-state actors can contribute to the advocating for similar programs.

### **3.3 Employment challenges in regular and irregular pathways**

Age, gender and language continue to be significant barriers in accessing employment opportunities through organized recruitment, as these factors are often tied to the specific requirements of job descriptions. As a result, individuals from these groups are often left with no choice but to seek alternative routes, including irregular migration pathways.

Interview with the representative of PEA in Kyrgyz Republic revealed new forms of illegal recruitment that is organized by some university staff who are ineligible to recruit. Such practices jeopardize the safety of students, as such “illegal” recruiters are not responsible for the density of labour migrants, and creates an unfavorable impression of the employer about the students, the universities and the country itself.

Due to the fact that attractive job opportunities in Europe often have higher requirements (language or certain qualifications) forces some interested labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan without qualifications to enter there through third countries.

*“They get to the first European country legally, work for a while and run away from the employer, then they become illegal in this country and illegal in the other country and spoil their visa history and we feel bad for them too” - KII, state representative, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

Labour migrants that were recruited by certain unlicensed visa issuing companies and sent abroad on tourist visas face significant challenges that jeopardize their safety and legal status. Tourist visas do not grant the right to work, leaving migrants in a vulnerable position where they are forced to engage in informal or illegal employment. This exposes them to exploitation, including lower wages, unsafe working conditions, and extended work hours without legal recourse. Since they lack proper work permits, migrants are also at risk of deportation if authorities discover their unauthorized employment, which can lead to fines, legal penalties, or even bans on future entry. Furthermore, without legal protections, they have limited access to healthcare, social services, or legal aid, making it difficult to address grievances or escape abusive situations.

In addition, the illegal recruitment of people through social media has become a significant issue, posing various problems for individuals and society. Recruiters often use deceptive tactics, creating fake job postings or offering attractive employment opportunities that don't exist, luring vulnerable individuals into scams or exploitative situations. The representative of CECA informed about the established mechanism of reporting to such cases to relevant law enforcement bodies and migrant communities via official channels (website and App) and communication tools (WhatsApp and Telegram), however, it remains difficult to trace and hold these recruiters accountable.

The key respondent from Uzbekistan shared the issues of mismatch between the education and foreign labour market requirements: the college system does not cover the demand for qualified



workers. In practice, college graduates (welders and other technical specialists) are not able to pass the employer's selection round, i.e. the knowledge they have acquired is not enough. This can be explained either by low quality of education or by excessive requirements of the employer.

Regarding the challenges in seasonal work, particularly in the UK, labour migrants frequently face shorter-than-expected assignments. Jobs often end earlier than agreed, with migrants working only four months instead of the six months initially promised, forcing them to return to Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan prematurely.

*"I left at the end of June, but the season ended at the end of October. And those who sent us from here said that it was the end of the job and returned us after 4 months. And we still had 2 months of time left. According to the contract, we were supposed to work until December 24th. But because the season was over, we could not work. The employers said "there is no work and we can't transfer you to other places. We were forced to return". – SI, woman, Osh, Kyrgyzstan*

The research highlighted distinct challenges encountered by labour migrants depending on whether they migrated through organized channels or independently. Male participants from Kyrgyzstan with experience on organized channel shared challenges encountered during their migration experiences, particularly concerning unmet conditions outlined in agreements signed with employers.

*"I went to South Korea. It was written in the contract that you were given a living room, 3-4 people live there in one room. But when I arrived, there was no room. I lived alone in one container."*  
- male returnee, FGD, Osh, Kyrgyzstan

Labour migrants who migrated independently, both men and women from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, frequently faced the issue of regular non-payment of wages by intermediaries who arranged their employment. In many cases, these intermediaries were fellow labour migrants who exploited the vulnerable circumstances of their compatriots for personal gain. Such intermediaries would often act as informal agents, connecting migrants with employers but failing to uphold their promises regarding payment, leaving migrants without the wages they had rightfully earned.

*"Delayed paychecks. The employer promised to make the documents, but I was deceived".*  
- male returnee, FGD, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

The importance of having legal documents were the most often issue raised by women and men from both countries.

*"I had problems only with registration. For example, you register for 3 months. And after a month it turns out that everything is gone, and you yourself are not aware of it, and it turns out when you are detained and checked through the database."- male returnee, FGD, Batken, Kyrgyzstan*

The foreign labour migrants in Kyrgyzstan quite often become the victims of labour exploitation. According to the interview with CECA representatives, sometimes such immigrants arrive to CECA and ask for certain information. In addition, the Special Rapporteur of the Council on Migration and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings under the Toraga of the Jogorku Kenesh is dealing with the cases of irregular migration and human trafficking not only relevant to Kyrgyz citizens, but also towards foreigners on the territory of Kyrgyzstan.



The recent BOMCA research on pendular migration from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan found that the level of legal awareness of the majority of pendulum migrants from Uzbekistan who participated in the study is very low. Moreover, the researchers found out that there is no information literacy and sources of information about the rules of stay and registration on the territory of Kyrgyzstan for pendular migrants.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MRC

The MRC should increase outreach efforts to inform students and prospective labour migrants about the dangers of illegal recruitment. This can be done through workshops, informational brochures, and digital campaigns on identifying authorized recruiters and the risks of unlicensed recruitment practices. The center could also establish a hotline where potential migrants can verify the legitimacy of recruiters and report suspicious activities.

The MRC should partner with vocational training institutions to offer language and skills training that align with the requirements of European and other international labour markets. The center can contribute or coordinate the developing of training sessions or job fairs in collaboration with vocational institutions, international organizations or embassies to help migrants obtain qualifications that are recognized abroad, such as certificates in welding, healthcare, or hospitality services. The center can also facilitate employer feedback loops to improve the curriculum offered by vocational schools.

The MRC should develop support mechanisms for labour migrants engaged in seasonal work, particularly in countries like the UK, where early termination of contracts can be a common issue. The center can provide guidance on the legal rights of seasonal workers and offer advice on contract negotiation and dispute resolution. Establishing partnerships with legal aid organizations abroad can help the MRC extend protection to migrant workers when they face premature termination of employment.

To reduce reliance on irregular migration routes, the MRC should collaborate with relevant authorities to expand the availability of formal, transparent migration channels. The center can provide counseling and legal advice to migrants seeking opportunities in Europe or other regions, helping them navigate visa requirements and avoid the risks associated with third-country entry.

The MRC can also become a resource center for foreign labour migrants in Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan by providing relevant legal information for them, particularly about registration requirements within the countries as well as job opportunities. To address the low legal awareness among Uzbek pendular migrants highlighted by the BOMCA research, Migration Resource Centers (MRCs) should focus on improving access to critical information. This can be achieved by distributing clear and concise informational materials in multiple languages and conducting legal awareness campaigns to educate migrants about the rules of stay and registration in Kyrgyzstan. Also, MRCs could establish information centers at key border crossings, provide pre-departure orientation sessions, and develop digital platforms or hotlines offering real-time assistance. As pendular migrants begin their job search in city markets, along with those arriving from rural areas for work, MRCs can broadcast important information via radio in the markets.

In addition, it is essential to enhance information dissemination regarding visa types for potential migrants and their families to ensure a safer and more secure labour migration process. MRC, PEAs and government authorities should collaborate to develop comprehensive informational materials that clearly explain the different visa types, their specific purposes, and the legal rights and limitations



associated with each. These resources should highlight the risks of using tourist visas for employment purposes and the legal and practical consequences of working without the appropriate visa.

The MRC can create a reintegration program for migrants who return home earlier than expected due to shortened seasonal contracts. This could involve offering job placement services in collaboration with relevant state institutions in both countries, reskilling opportunities, or even temporary financial assistance. By forming partnerships with local businesses facing labour shortages, the MRC can help returning migrants reintegrate smoothly into the local workforce.

By addressing the increasing risks posed by fraudulent foreign intermediaries and unlicensed Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) operating through social media, the MRC in both countries in addition to awareness raising online and offline campaigns, can collaborate with the state agencies and develop the certain Agency verification online tool similar to one that exists in Philippines<sup>76</sup>. Moreover, the expert from Uzbekistan has shared that sms-campaign their NGO was implementing on safe migration was also significantly successful and increased a rise of calls to hotline from intending and returning migrants.

In supporting the state agencies in their work on pre-departure orientation sessions, the MRC in both countries can design the interactive and practical pre-departure sessions in the format of Theater, World Café, Simulation Games, Speed networking with migration experts/state servants or returnees, problem-solving case studies where preliminary designed scenario can practically demonstrate the challenges and opportunities for migrants while abroad.

### 3.4 Migration-development nexus

The migration-development nexus underscores how migration can drive economic growth, skill development, and cultural exchange, contributing to the broader development of both migrants' home and host countries. The testimonies from returned migrants illustrate the transformative impact of migration, where individuals not only acquire new skills and trades, such as construction techniques or business ideas inspired by observing others abroad but also gain cultural knowledge and language skills. This experiential learning fosters personal growth and has a ripple effect, influencing families and communities when migrants return home. For example, sharing knowledge about foreign cultures or starting new business ventures inspired by experiences abroad can lead to social and economic benefits in the migrants' home countries.

*“The migrants brought the strawberry seedlings and opened their business here in Kyrgyz Republic”  
- KII, state servant, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

Moreover, migration serves as a pathway to professional development, especially in fields like medicine, where exposure to advanced technologies and techniques in other countries can address the limitations of local healthcare systems. The exchange of experiences with other migrants fosters innovation and encourages shifts in mindset, leading to ongoing growth and development.

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<sup>76</sup> Agency verification tool, Migrants Workers Office, Rome, Italy, available at: <https://www.polorome.com/resources/agencyverification/>



*“For development, to raise our qualifications, for example, if we take medicine, in Kyrgyzstan there is no possibility to provide full assistance to people. There is no equipment, so we go to other countries to learn how to use new techniques, to use new medicines.” - FGD women Osh, Kyrgyzstan*

It is important to note that many returning migrants are uncertain about how to invest the money they earned while abroad. Projects like IOM's "1+1" initiative, which supports returned migrants in launching businesses by matching their investment with grants, further emphasize the potential of migration to stimulate local economic development and entrepreneurship.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MRC

MRC can provide the returned migrants with the information in regards to the existing investments opportunities and national programs and initiatives for returning migrants in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In regards to the mechanisms that MRC can develop, the mentorship programs, financial training programs, networking events that connect returned migrants with successful entrepreneurs and investors who can share their experiences and insights on investment strategies would significantly contribute for economic empowerment and improve economic stability in the locations where migrants return.

### 3.5 Migration-climate nexus

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as upstream and downstream countries, face interconnected challenges concerning water resources, particularly in the context of shared transboundary rivers like the Syr Darya. Kyrgyzstan, located upstream, holds much control over water flow that eventually reaches Uzbekistan downstream, which heavily depends on this water for agriculture and daily needs. Climate change intensifies these challenges by disrupting water availability, with glacial melt in Kyrgyzstan and altered precipitation patterns threatening to reduce long-term water flow. Additionally, the region is increasingly vulnerable to natural hazards fueled by climate change, such as more frequent droughts, heatwaves, floods, and landslides. In Kyrgyzstan, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) pose a growing risk, while Uzbekistan faces heightened risks of desertification and severe droughts. These hazards can significantly reduce agricultural productivity, endanger livelihoods, and push rural populations toward migration. The consequences of these environmental shifts are not confined to borders and relevant to all countries in the region, as climate change affects all nations indiscriminately.

Individuals affected by natural disasters often become vulnerable to migration, as they typically lack sufficient time to adequately prepare for safe migration due to the immediate need to address survival concerns.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MRC

MRC in their overall information campaigns may launch awareness campaigns to educate potential ecological migrants on the risks and opportunities associated with displacement due to environmental factors, such as natural disasters, climate change, and resource scarcity. This will help communities better prepare for and respond to environmental challenges. Additionally, MRCs should develop tailored support programs that address the specific needs of ecological migrants, providing assistance with relocation, legal rights, and access to social services. These programs should offer guidance on alternative livelihoods, access to housing, and sustainable living solutions in safer areas. Additionally, MRCs can promote awareness on the importance of using remittances for climate change adaptation





measures as well as share the real practices via trainings, social media or other formats of delivery with the families of migrants.

### 3.6 Returned migrants as Agents for regular migration

The majority of respondents from both countries reported that they continue to receive valuable and reliable information about labour opportunities abroad through their personal networks, including relatives, friends, and colleagues. These informal sources are trusted because they often provide firsthand insights and real-life experiences, making them more appealing and believable compared to formal channels.

*“People we know and friends called us and asked questions about our experience. They too would like to go, and asked for advice on how to go”. - SI, returned woman, Osh, Kyrgyzstan*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MRC

To promote returned migrants as agents for regular migration, the Migration Resource Center (MRC) could train them as peer educators, equipping them with knowledge on legal migration routes and labour rights to share within their communities. Additionally, the MRC could create platforms for returned migrants to mentor others, engage in advocacy, and offer support through networking groups or community forums. Their firsthand experiences can be valuable in awareness campaigns, helping to highlight the benefits and importance of regular migration. It is worth mentioning that returned migrants from rural area are highly recommended to be trained for such purposes.

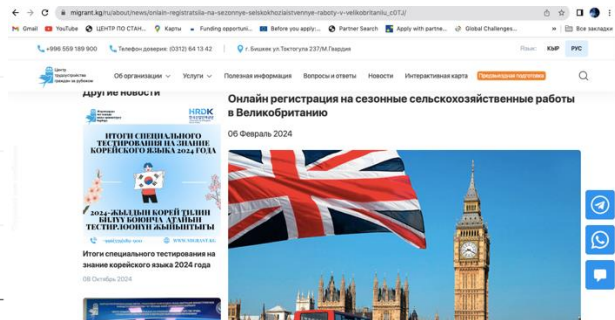
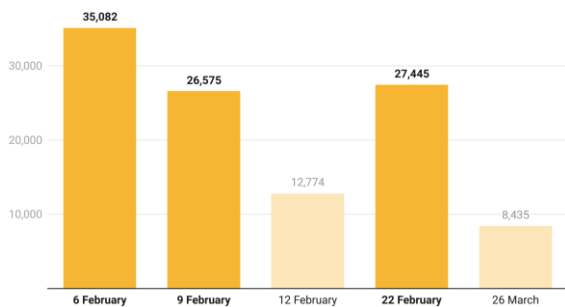
MRC in partnership with the state agencies in the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan can develop the pre-return initiatives or program that will be directed to communication with labour migrants abroad and employment opportunities in Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan, thus, after their return they will not spend significant time for searching the job.

### 3.7 Information needs and resources

#### *Communication strategies of state agencies*

*Kyrgyzstan.* During the KII with the CECA representative, it was mentioned that in addition to the mobile app Migrant.kg that is freely available, they have followers mainly in Instagram (more than 50,6 thousand of people). The average daily views of the official CECA website are around 1,500 to 2,000 people. The high-traffic reaching more than 35000 people visiting the website is observed during the call for UK seasonal work and announcement of results, as well as announcement of results of successful applicants to the Republic of Korea.

#### **Diagram 16. The number of CECA official website visitors, February-March 2024**



Source: CECA under the MLSSM, Kyrgyzstan

The communication strategy of CECA is based on the Roadmap until 2025 of the Concept of Migration Policy (2022) as well as Cabinet of Ministers' Plan, MLSSM's Plan and Media Plan. Since 2023 together with partners the CECA is organizing the "Caravan of safe migration" in other regions of the country. This activity is aimed to provide the potential migrants with the information about employment opportunities, licensed PEAs, blacklist self-check, presentation of mobile app, conducting the job fairs for internal labour market and other information. Additionally, the CECA cooperates with religious institutions, particularly imams from mosques, who contribute to dissemination of safe migration knowledge during the Friday prayers in cities and rural areas of the country.

The CECA representatives recognize that the physical meeting with people in cities and rural areas are mostly useful as *"...a lot of urgent problems related to migration are discussed during such meetings"*. Local WhatsApp groups is very useful for communicating with local communities to inform them about the upcoming information sessions.

The KII with the representative of the Council on Migration and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings revealed that labour migrants while in their journey can receive the needed information or help from Kyrgyz embassies as well as from the Council's public representatives mainly comprised of diaspora leaders based in such countries as RF, USA, UK, EU and South-Eastern Asia countries. Their help was particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic and humanitarian evacuation of Kyrgyz citizens from Ukraine territories in 2022.

*Uzbekistan.* Contrary to Kyrgyzstan the citizens of Uzbekistan prefer Telegram. The official Telegram channel<sup>77</sup> of AELM is followed by more than 230 000 followers. However, the majority of the content shared on this channel is in Uzbek, making these important messages inaccessible to individuals who do not speak the language.

In terms of offline communication activities state relevant agencies organize activities in schools and other education institutions, civil society organizations support the law enforcement agencies with the trainings on the work with and protection of victims of human trafficking, meetings are held in makhalla committees, and anti-human trafficking months are held (flyers and information leaflets are distributed in places from where labour migrants are leaving the country: train stations, airports).

<sup>77</sup> Official Telegram Channel of AELM, available at: <https://t.me/migratsiyaagentligi>



### *Information needs*

The data from FGDs and interviews demonstrates that information required for labour migrants depends on their stage of migration journey: pre-departure preparation, during the migration journey and after returning to the country of origin. The data collected during the FGDs revealed that the region from which migrants depart affects their awareness of migration-related issues: those from major cities (Osh city in Kyrgyzstan) or suburban areas near capitals (Tashkent oblast near to Tashkent city) tend to be more informed about safe migration practices,

*“Nowadays, there are fake companies as well. For example, they send you contracts from Telegram, YouTube, and other social media to get you interested. You don't have to believe these things”, - FGD, male intending migrant, Tashkent oblast*

while labour migrants from rural areas (other locations of the research study) far from metropolitan centers possess more limited knowledge on **the pre-departure process**. However, due to the fact that there were limited number of respondents participated in the study, this data is not representative enough and additional research is required.

*“Yeah, maybe things would have turned out differently. If I had gone to Russia or another country after getting all the necessary information from your resource center. You'd help me with jobs, housing. I wouldn't have become a tractor driver, maybe, if I had gotten my paycheck on time.” - FGD, male returnee, Batken, Kyrgyzstan*

Migrants often face challenges **during their journey**, such as issues with legal status or unpaid wages, and may not know where to seek advice or assistance.

*“We didn't find where to go for help, for example, when I didn't get my paycheck, I didn't know where to go for help.” – FGD, male returnee, Samarkand, Uzbekistan*

After **returning** to their home countries, migrants typically not only spend their earnings on intended purposes but also seek out employment and investment opportunities. One returnee shared a story of being deceived during this process:

*“I bought a plot of land, but the documents turned out to be false. I was deceived, cheated out of money.”*

Along with a lack of knowledge about the property market, long-term absent migrants often face challenges related to adaptation and reintegration into their communities.

### *Gender specific and family needs*

The study revealed a clear distinction between the information needs of **male and female migrants**. For women, in addition to general information on legal status and other essential aspects of safe migration, it is also crucial to have details about the availability of medical clinics, kindergartens, and schools in the areas they are heading to. Furthermore, the risk of domestic violence remains a significant concern within the context of migration.



*“Spouses go to work and there due to various disputes and conflicts the woman suffers and being kicked off by her husband and she ends up on the street. We have a lot of such cases, their parents come to us and we try to help them to find them”. – KII, expert, Uzbekistan*

Women more frequently than men focused on gaining knowledge about food and climate conditions in the regions where they planned to migrate. A respondent from Jalal-Abad mentioned the difficulty of accessing Halal food in the UK, other woman mentioned the difficult weather conditions that worsened her health, while an interview with a PEA leader revealed that religious young women often decline certain job opportunities, particularly those involving work in cafes that serve alcohol, due to their religious beliefs.

*“... we've been to Northern Ireland, it's cold. But the food is very expensive. There is nothing halal, no meat for example. There were Turkish stores, but they were far away from us.”*  
– FGD, female returnee, Jalal Abad, Kyrgyzstan

Concerning the family needs of labour migrants, the key informant from CECA noted instances where families participated in pre-departure activities alongside labour migrants under the agreement between Kyrgyzstan and South Korea. However, this involvement did not prevent some migrants from absconding from their employers and continuing to work illegally in Korea.

In regards to children left behind by parents-labour migrants, the studies demonstrate that there is increasing public expectation for teachers in rural schools from migrant-sending communities to take on a more parental role in the upbringing of migrant workers' children.<sup>78</sup>

#### *Trusted sources*

Although labour migrants frequently fall victim to irregular migration through people they know, relatives and friends continue to be the primary source of information on job opportunities, particularly in the Russian Federation.

*“We don't take information. We go through our sister or brother, so we don't take information. If we go, our relatives will help us. We trust them”. - FGD, male returnees, Batken, Kyrgyzstan*

#### *Preferable platform for communication and receiving information*

From interviews and FGDs it is clear that the migrants prefer to rely on Telegram and WhatsApp groups with the people who already in migration or had such experience before. An analysis of a Kyrgyz Telegram group, consisting of individuals who migrated to the UK for seasonal work, revealed that most discussions focused on inquiries about employers' working conditions, the selection process, and advice on avoiding certain employers based on negative experiences shared by some migrants. Although most participants expressed a preference for receiving information through social media, some respondents indicated a lack of trust in social media channels and favored state television

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<sup>78</sup> A. Murzakulova, Abdoubaetova A., “Mainstreaming the Needs of Migrant Children and Sending Communities into the Rural Schools Development Agenda in Kyrgyzstan”, AGRUMIG Policy Brief Series #8, OSCE Academy, 2022, available at: [https://osce-academy.net/upload/file/final\\_pb\\_8.pdf](https://osce-academy.net/upload/file/final_pb_8.pdf)



channels as more reliable and trustworthy sources. Television channels can also reach individuals who lack the skills to use social media or the internet, thereby preventing their exclusion from information campaigns conducted by government agencies, as well as civil and international organizations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MRC

In collaboration with relevant state authorities, the **MRC could take advantage of high-traffic days on these authorities' websites to post important information about legal migration routes.** This could be done particularly on days when job openings are announced and when results are published. By doing so, more people would have access to crucial information that could help make their migration journey more organized and safer. Additionally, **sharing this information with migrant family members** would enable them to inform other relatives, further extending the reach of this valuable guidance.

Based on responses the MRC should continue their work on **providing information that is needed during the pre-departure preparation process**, during their migration journey and return: migrants should be informed about legal requirements, such as obtaining the correct work visas and permits, and the risks of using tourist visas for employment. They need to understand the importance of having a signed employment contract that clearly states job duties, wages, working conditions, and working hours. Additionally, knowledge of labour rights in the destination country is crucial, including the right to fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to legal recourse. Migrants should also receive information on health and safety protocols, available support services abroad, and safe migration practices to avoid exploitation and trafficking. Knowledge about the culture, weather and food availability should also be shared with migrants so they can be emotionally and physically ready.

It is crucial to provide the migrants with **information about available support organizations in the destination country.** This should include contact details for diaspora representatives, embassies, and other relevant actors who can offer guidance and support. MRC can closely work with diaspora organizations as the majority of them significantly contribute to the wellbeing of migrants as well as economically support their countries of origin. Diaspora organizations and individuals can help with very basic information on how to get from airport to the place, where to find kindergartens or schools for children, medical clinics and other issues that can help easily integrate newly come migrants and make their life safer.

The MRC can also offer **support to internal migrants of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, who often face unfair treatment, illegal employment status, and poor working conditions.** The MRC could fill this gap by providing information to the public, thereby helping to bring citizens out of the informal economy, which would enhance social protection and secure future pension benefits.

The **MRC may also consider support for immigrants that are recently becoming a part of the labour market in Kyrgyzstan, those particularly from Uzbekistan and South East Asian countries.** According to Task 1, paragraph 5, sub-paragraph 2 (Conducting information campaigns to foster a friendly non-discriminatory attitude towards all categories of migrants: foreign investors; foreign students studying at KR universities; tourists; ethnic Kyrgyz-Kairylmans; internal migrants; labour migrants, especially women migrants; refugees) of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Concept on Migration Policy until 2025 the MRC can support national stakeholders in accomplishing this task by providing essential information to immigrants in Kyrgyzstan about their legal status and other relevant matters. This will help prevent labour exploitation, human trafficking, and other violations of foreigners' rights



within the country. This particularly relevant to pendulum migrants from Uzbekistan in the south part of Kyrgyzstan.

**Gender-specific information needs for migrants** are crucial to address by MRC and its state and non-state partners, particularly concerning access to medical clinics, childcare services, and support for domestic violence. Female migrants, in particular, may require information on medical clinics that offer women's health services, such as prenatal care, reproductive health, and general medical support tailored to their needs. Additionally, access to information on affordable or free kindergartens and childcare facilities is essential for mothers who need to balance work with family responsibilities. Migrants should also be informed about resources and support services available for victims of domestic violence, including shelters, legal aid, and hotlines, to ensure they can seek help safely if needed.

**Schools**, especially in rural areas, can be **valuable partners for MRCs** as they often witness the challenges faced by children left behind by migrant parents. MRCs in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan could organize awareness-raising events and teacher training programs to address these issues. Schools can be encouraged to collaborate with MRCs to develop in-school support initiatives, including psychological counseling, academic tutoring, and peer support networks for these children. Teachers can serve as key intermediaries, identifying students in need and connecting them with relevant MRC programs.

MRC should **continue the support of state agencies in organizing common information campaigns** in both countries. The state partners in Uzbekistan may consider the "Caravan of Safe Migration" as a good example for organizing similar events in the various regions of the country with the help of MRC in future.

## 4. Conclusion

The interviews and studies conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan reveal recent improvements and challenges in migration management systems in both countries. In Kyrgyzstan, the introduction of the [www.migrant.kg](http://www.migrant.kg) platform in 2023 has streamlined the application process for labour migrants, allowing online applications and providing free services, including pre-departure training and employer interviews. However, some crucial information, particularly regarding human trafficking, is not yet available in the Kyrgyz language, limiting accessibility. Collaboration between the government and international partners has also strengthened, allowing for better tracking of migrants and enhancing communication with other agencies. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, digital platforms like [xorijdaish.uz](http://xorijdaish.uz) assist with the registration process and offer services such as language courses. Recent policy developments in Uzbekistan also allow labour migrants to contribute to the pension fund and benefit from affordable housing programs. Despite these efforts, many migrants remain unaware of the services available to them in both countries, highlighting a gap in outreach and communication. Additionally, financial support for migrants, while available, is often inadequate, particularly in Uzbekistan, where stipends provided to potential labour migrants are insufficient to meet daily family needs. Overall, migration is seen as a key poverty reduction strategy in Uzbekistan, but both countries face challenges in ensuring that all migrants, especially illegal ones, receive adequate support and protection.



In regards to information profile of migrants who need support from MRC it worth mentioning:

1. **New migrants, as well as those whose age exceeds the limits typically accepted by regular employment agencies, remain among the most vulnerable groups in terms of safe migration.** New migrants, in particular, are at greater risk due to their lack of experience living abroad and often naive understanding of the complexities and challenges involved in migration. This makes them more susceptible to misinformation, exploitation, and unsafe conditions. Similarly, other intending migrants, who may not fit the age criteria of regular employment agencies, face limited access to formal employment opportunities and support systems, increasing their risk of engaging in irregular migration practices.
2. The migration-development nexus highlights how **migration promotes economic growth, skill acquisition, and cultural exchange**, benefiting both home and host countries. Testimonies from returned migrants reveal that migration fosters personal development through new skills, such as business knowledge or technical trades, as well as cultural and language learning, which they bring back to their home countries. This knowledge transfer often sparks new business ventures and drives local innovation, like migrants introducing new agricultural techniques or establishing small businesses. Additionally, professional development, especially in sectors like healthcare, benefits from exposure to advanced techniques abroad. Initiatives which supports returned migrants in starting businesses, demonstrate migration's potential to contribute to economic and entrepreneurial growth in home countries.
3. On the other side the research highlighted various challenges faced by labour migrants in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. **Age, gender, and language barriers prevent many migrants from accessing employment through organized channels**, pushing some toward irregular migration. In Kyrgyzstan, illegal recruitment practices by unauthorized university staff endanger students, while migrants seeking work in Europe often enter through third countries, which exposes them to legal and employment risks. Migrants on tourist visas are particularly vulnerable, as they lack the legal right to work and access to essential services, making them susceptible to exploitation. In Uzbekistan, a mismatch between educational qualifications and labour market demands leaves many college graduates unable to meet employers' expectations. Seasonal work opportunities in countries like the UK often end prematurely, adding financial strain. Additionally, both countries face issues such as non-payment of wages by intermediaries, poor living conditions, and problems related to registration and legal documentation. The low level of legal awareness among pendular migrants from Uzbekistan further complicates the situation, as many lack information on the rules of stay and registration in Kyrgyzstan.
4. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan face **significant climate-related challenges** due to their shared reliance on transboundary rivers like the Syr Darya. Climate change is worsening water availability, with Kyrgyzstan experiencing glacial melt and Uzbekistan at risk of desertification and droughts, threatening agricultural productivity and livelihoods. As these environmental changes intensify, rural populations are increasingly pushed toward migration. A new group of vulnerable migrants is emerging—those displaced by natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and landslides. These ecological migrants often lack the time and resources to



prepare for safe migration, making them particularly susceptible to exploitation and unsafe conditions during their displacement.

5. State agencies in **Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have implemented various communication strategies to reach potential labour migrants** and inform them about safe migration practices. In Kyrgyzstan, CECA uses a combination of online platforms like the Migrant.kg app and Instagram to reach thousands of followers, with the highest web traffic observed during announcements for UK and South Korean employment opportunities. The "Caravan of Safe Migration" campaign, launched in 2023, involves job fairs and collaborations with religious institutions to spread migration-related knowledge. Kyrgyz embassies and diaspora leaders have also played a crucial role, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and humanitarian evacuations. In contrast, Uzbekistan primarily relies on Telegram, with over 230,000 followers on the AELM channel, though the content is mostly in Uzbek. Both countries have been proactive in organizing offline activities like meetings in schools, makhalla committees, and anti-human trafficking campaigns. However, the information needs of migrants vary based on their location and migration stage, with urban migrants more informed than their rural counterparts. Gender-specific needs also emerged, with women focusing more on family and health-related information. Trusted sources of information remain family and friends, though social media platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp are popular for communication among migrants. In addition, rapid changes in migration policies should be communicated more effectively to communities to enhance their implementation and better support the needs of migrants.





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