

**MIGRATION FROM CENTRAL ASIAN
COUNTRIES TO RUSSIA AND KAZAKHSTAN
IN THE CONTEXT OF INTEGRATION PROCESSES
IN THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION FORMAT**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines migration from Central Asian countries to Russia and Kazakhstan in the context of integration processes within the EAEU. There exist large and stable migration corridors between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, on the one hand, and Russia and Kazakhstan, on the other. Migration from these countries to Russia and Kazakhstan, which is second in scale only to migration from Mexico to the United States, has serious political, social, economic, and demographic impacts both on the migrants' native countries and on the countries they come to. People seeking

work abroad make up the bulk of this human stream.

However, labor migration becomes intertwined with, or transformed into, other forms of cross-border movements such as moving abroad for permanent residence or for marrying a foreign citizen. Quite often, going to Russia or Kazakhstan to work ends up in permanent residence in one of those countries. Many workers from Central Asia have become citizens of Russia or Kazakhstan, which means that they have become successfully integrated into the societies of the two countries.

KEYWORDS: *migration, Central Asia, Russia, Kazakhstan, EAEU, interaction, policies.*

Migration in the Context of EAEU Integration Processes

Migration, primarily labor migration, has become a form of mutual economic and political integration of former Soviet republics, facilitating the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The member nations' total population is 183 million. Nationals of the EAEU member states—Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia—need no visas to cross the borders between any of them. Nor do nationals of any of them need permission to work in any of the other

four countries. The EAEU's member countries constitute an area with free movements of goods, services, capital, and labor, and with coordinated or uniform economic policies.

There exist large and stable migration corridors between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, on the one hand, and Russia and Kazakhstan, on the other. Central Asians who go to Russia or Kazakhstan to work number up to 4.2 million, accounting for 16% of the above-mentioned countries' economically active population. This scale of migration has serious political, social, economic, and demographic effects both on the migrants' home countries and on the countries they come to. In 2013, earnings that Central Asian workers sent back home from Russia reached \$13.5 billion. Although end-of-2015 statistics showed remittances to have dropped because of the depreciation of the ruble and 30% outflow of foreign labor from Russia, labor migration remains an important source of income for most of the Central Asian countries. According to the World Bank, in 2015 the world's top countries that were recipients of recorded remittances in terms of shares of gross domestic product were Tajikistan (it ranked first—47%) and Kyrgyzstan (it ranked third—29%).

Central Asians coming to Russia have been acquiring Russian citizenship on a wide scale, and this is apparently an indication of a desire to integrate into Russian society. Unfortunately, Russian law is not too consistent in granting citizenship to Central Asians. Liberal rules, for example for Kyrgyz or Tajik nationals, have been revised and made more restrictive. Restrictions put into force in 2002 and 2010 resulted in a lot fewer Central Asians receiving Russian passports.

Key Factors in Migration from Central Asia to Russia and Kazakhstan

Economic factors. There are typical sets of outmigration-stimulating factors in the Central Asian countries, including declining production, low wages, high unemployment, and poverty. Russia, on the other hand, is a country with a diversified economy, high demand for labor in many industries and regions, and wages and a quality of life higher than those in the Central Asian countries. All this has given rise to a large-scale Eurasian migration subsystem whose nucleus are Russia and Kazakhstan as destinations for migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Demographic factors. Russia's population as a whole has been aging since the 1990s and its working-age population decreasing in this period. This causes shortages of labor with consequent strong competition among employers and stimulates the inflow of foreign labor. The Central Asian countries, Russia's main source of foreign workers, present an opposite demographic picture. Their working-age population is projected to increase by 2050—by 6.4 million in Uzbekistan, by 2.8 million in Tajikistan, and by 600,000 in Kyrgyzstan.

Cultural and historical factors. Today's Eurasian migration subsystem has its roots in Soviet-era social and economic ties between the Central Asian countries, on the one hand, and Russia and Kazakhstan, on the other, and on the continuing wide-scale use of Russian as the main language of communication between nationals of countries that were republics of the Soviet Union. Central Asians who plan to go abroad to work usually choose Russia as their destination. Knowing the Russian language and understanding the Russian mentality means a better chance of finding a job. The majority of Central Asian job seekers who come to Russia find work through social networks or family contacts or private intermediaries. Unfortunately, private recruitment agencies and state job centers play an insignificant role in the employment of foreign nationals.

Infrastructural and geographical factors. Though located in the heart of Eurasia, the Central Asian countries have much better transportation links to Russia and Kazakhstan than to China, the Middle East, or Western Europe. Russia can be reached from Central Asia and Transcaucasia by rail,

car, sea, or air. Increasingly frequent flights in recent years have given a boost to labor migration into Russia. Many airlines have launched direct flights not only to Moscow but also to other large Russian cities. Air tickets are comparatively inexpensive, and there are loan programs in Central Asian countries for flights to Russia.

Political factors. In the 1990s and early 2000s, ethnic Russians and other Russian speakers living in Central Asian and Transcaucasian countries have been emigrating to Russia for a range of reasons, including civil wars, local nationalism in the 1990s, ethnic conflicts, restrictions on the use of the Russian language, and obstacles to career progress in 2000-2010.

On the other hand, former Soviet republics have been rapidly building up political and economic ties. The EAEU founding treaty, which was signed on 29 May, 2014, and put into force on 1 January, 2015, offers significant opportunities to nationals of EAEU member states.

A citizen of an EAEU member state needs no visa to enter any member country or permission to work there. Nationals of EAEU member states may stay in Russia for a maximum of 30 days without having their temporary residence registered, while other aliens entering Russia for temporary stay are to register within seven business days of arrival. Nationals of EAEU member states who come to Russia are also allowed to spend up to 90 days looking for work.

Nationals of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Moldova need no entry visas for Russia either. However, a Tajik national must register within 15 and a national of Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, or Moldova within seven business days of arrival. After registration, they may look for work for a maximum of 30 days but they need a work permit, although one of a preferential type as distinct from regular work permits needed by nationals of all other countries. The similar system of preferential work permits exists in Kazakhstan.

Russia has a three-level system of regulations on the use of foreign labor (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Regulations on Employment of Aliens
in the Russian Federation Depending on Their Nationality
(as of 1 December, 2016)**

Nationality	Documents Needed for Entering Russia	Type of Work Permit	Necessary Procedures
EAEU member states— Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan	Passport and migration card	None needed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Registration at temporary residential address within 30 business days of arrival in Russia; 2. Contract with employer to be signed within 90 days of entering Russia; 3. Notification of Federal Migration Service (FMS) by employer about signature/severance of contract with foreign national within 3 business days of signature/severance date
Former Soviet republics whose nationals need no entry visas for Russia— Azerbaijan,	Passport and migration card	Preferential permit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Registration at temporary residential address within 15 business days of entering Russia for Tajik nationals and within 7 business days for nationals of the other states; 2. Acquisition of work permit within 30 days of entering Russia;

Table 1 (continued)

Nationality	Documents Needed for Entering Russia	Type of Work Permit	Necessary Procedures
Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan			3. Notification of FMS by employer about signature/severance of contract with migrant within 3 business days of signature/severance date
States whose nationals need entry visas for Russia—ex-Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Turkmenistan, and other countries	Passport, visa, and migration card	Regular permit	1. Acquisition by employer of employment permission; 2. Registration of alien at temporary residential address within 7 business days of arrival in Russia; 3. Acquisition by alien of work permit within 30 days of entering Russia; 4. Notification of FMS by employer about signature/severance of employment contract within 3 business days of signature/severance date

The Scale and Trends of Migration from Central Asia to Russia in the Context of Mutual Integration of EAEU Member Countries

Russia is today the main destination in Eurasia for nationals of Central Asian countries who are planning to work abroad. Statistics in Table 2 represent the scale of migration into Russia.

Seekers of temporary jobs make up the bulk of Central Asian migrants arriving in Russia. They were employed on a large scale in Russia in the nineties as the country was short of labor. Labor migration into Russia peaked in the 2000s. Today Russia is still attractive for people in Central Asia, some other Asian, some Eastern European countries, and Transcaucasian countries who are planning to work abroad.

Official statistics on numbers of foreign nationals who come to Russia to work are based on recorded numbers of work permits issued by the FMS. In 2014, the FMS issued a total of 3,690 thousand permits—2,387 thousand preferential and 1,303 thousand regular ones. However, because of the recent financial and economic crisis, only 1,887 thousand permits were issued—1,710 thousand preferential and 177,000 regular ones (see Fig. 1 on p. 46). Between January and July 2015, 1,406 thousand permits were issued—1,265 thousand preferential and 141,000 regular ones.¹

¹ See: Data on migration in the Russian Federation for seven months of 2015, available at [<http://www.fms.gov.ru/about/statistics/data/details/159274/>], 3.12.2016.

Table 2

**Scale and Structure of Migration from Central Asia to Russia
(numbers of people)¹**

Purpose of Migration	Total Number of Migrants	Migrants from Central Asia
PERMANENT RESIDENCE		
Migrants who arrived	482,241 ²	257,473 ³
Increase in no. of migrants who arrived	295,859 ⁴	164,704 ⁵
Recipients of permanent or temporary residence permits	435,802	
Recipients of citizenship	157,791	96,950 ⁶
Ethnic Russian immigrants	106,319	
Refugees	124 ⁷	9 ⁸
TEMPORARY RESIDENCE		
Migrants who arrived	17,281,971	
Registered migrants	8,393,655	
Total no. of aliens in Russian territory	11,072,255	
LABOR MIGRATION		
Recipients of preferential permits for employment by individuals	2,386,641	915,814 ⁹
Recipients of permits for employment by legal entities	1,303,258	723,388 ¹⁰
Including permit recipients who were highly qualified professionals	31,101	722
EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION		
Aliens already receiving higher education in Russia	164,800 ¹¹	44,700 ¹²
Aliens admitted to Russian higher education institutions	46,800 ¹³	
UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATION		
Deported migrants	139,034	
Persons banned from entering Russia	675,950	
Undocumented migrant workers	5,000,000-6,000,000 ¹⁴	
¹ See: Data of the Russian Federal Migration Service for the year 2014, available at [http://www.fms.gov.ru/about/statistics/data/details/110975/], 10.12.2016. ² See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the year 2013, available at [http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat25747300_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/#], 15.12.2016. ³ See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the year 2013, available at [http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/#], 8.12.2016.		

Table 2 (continued)

- ⁴ See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the year 2013, available at [http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/#], 10.12.2016.
- ⁵ See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the year 2013, available at [http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/#], 12.12.2016.
- ⁶ See: International Migration Outlook 2013, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2013, p. 411, available at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2013-en], 18.12.2016.
- ⁷ See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the year 2012, available at [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b13_107/Main.htm], 11.12.2016.
- ⁸ See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the year 2013, available at [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b13_107/Main.htm], 10.12.2016.
- ⁹ The Federal Migration Service says that in 2013 it issued 1,117,833 preferential work permits for employment by individuals. This number included 915,814 permits issued to nationals of the five Central Asian countries. These statistics have not yet been published officially and have been made available to the Federal State Statistics Service to be included in the collection *Trud i zanyatost v Rossii, 2015* (Labor and Employment in Russia, 2015).
- ¹⁰ The Federal Migration Service says that in 2013 it issued 1,111,494 regular work permits for employment by legal entities. This number included 723,388 permits issued to nationals of the five Central Asian countries. These statistics have not yet been published officially and have been made available to the Federal State Statistics Service to be included in the collection *Trud i zanyatost v Rossii, 2015* (Labor and Employment in Russia, 2015).
- ¹¹ See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the 2012/2013 academic year, available at [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/b13_13/lssWWW.exe/Stg/d1/07-57.htm], 10.12.2016.
- ¹² See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the 2012/2013 academic year, available at [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/b13_13/lssWWW.exe/Stg/d1/07-57.htm], 2.12.2016.
- ¹³ See: Data of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service for the 2012/2013 academic year, available at [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/b13_13/lssWWW.exe/Stg/d1/07-57.htm], 10.12.2016.
- ¹⁴ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, E.E. Pismennaia, M.F. Tkachenko, "Formirovanie Tsentralnoaziatskogo segmenta Evraziiskoi migratsionnoi podsystemy," *Mezhdunarodnye protsessy*, No. 34, 2013, p. 47.

Russia receives its foreign labor from various countries but the Central Asian states are a source of a steadily increasing inflow of migrant workers. In 2015, the majority of foreigners who came to Russia to look for work were nationals of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Moldova, China, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan (see Fig. 2).

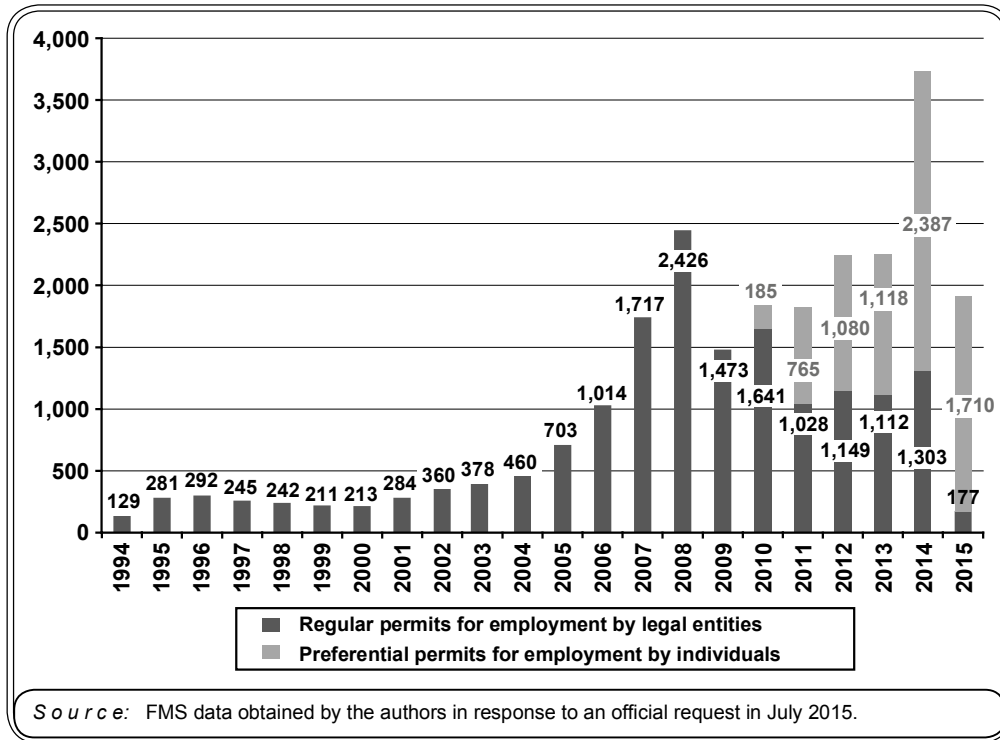
All these countries have been stable sources of labor for Russia since the nineties. The list has practically remained unchanged since then, but there have been changes to ratios between the two types of work permits issued by the FMS to nationals of some of those states. Since 2015, nationals of Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan have been eligible for preferential permits. Nationals of states that were not republics of the Soviet Union may only receive regular permits. Nationals of the EAEU member states of Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan need no work permits in Russia.

Obviously, the actual number of foreign workers in Russia is much larger than the number of work permits issued by the FMS. For instance, there is a major gap between the number of work permits issued in 2014 and the number of foreign nationals registered at their residential addresses in Russia (see Fig. 3).

The territorial distribution of the foreign workforce in Russia is uneven, with 43% of migrants working in the Central Federal District. The city and region of Moscow accumulate about one third of migrants working in Russia.

Figure 1

Work Permits Issued to Aliens
in Russia between 1994 and 2015
(thousands)



In terms of occupations of foreign workers, Russia can be divided into five principal groups of regions.

The majority of migrants in, for instance, the regions of Smolensk, Yaroslavl, Rostov, Samara, and Krasnodar, work in *construction*. The city and region of Moscow can be put in the same category, although there quite many foreign nationals are employed in various other sectors. Many of the regions in this group have experienced a construction boom at one time or another, when they wanted cheap labor and attracted migrants.

In another group of regions, among them Kaliningrad and Kaluga, most foreign workers are employed in *transportation*, usually driving buses or trolleybuses.

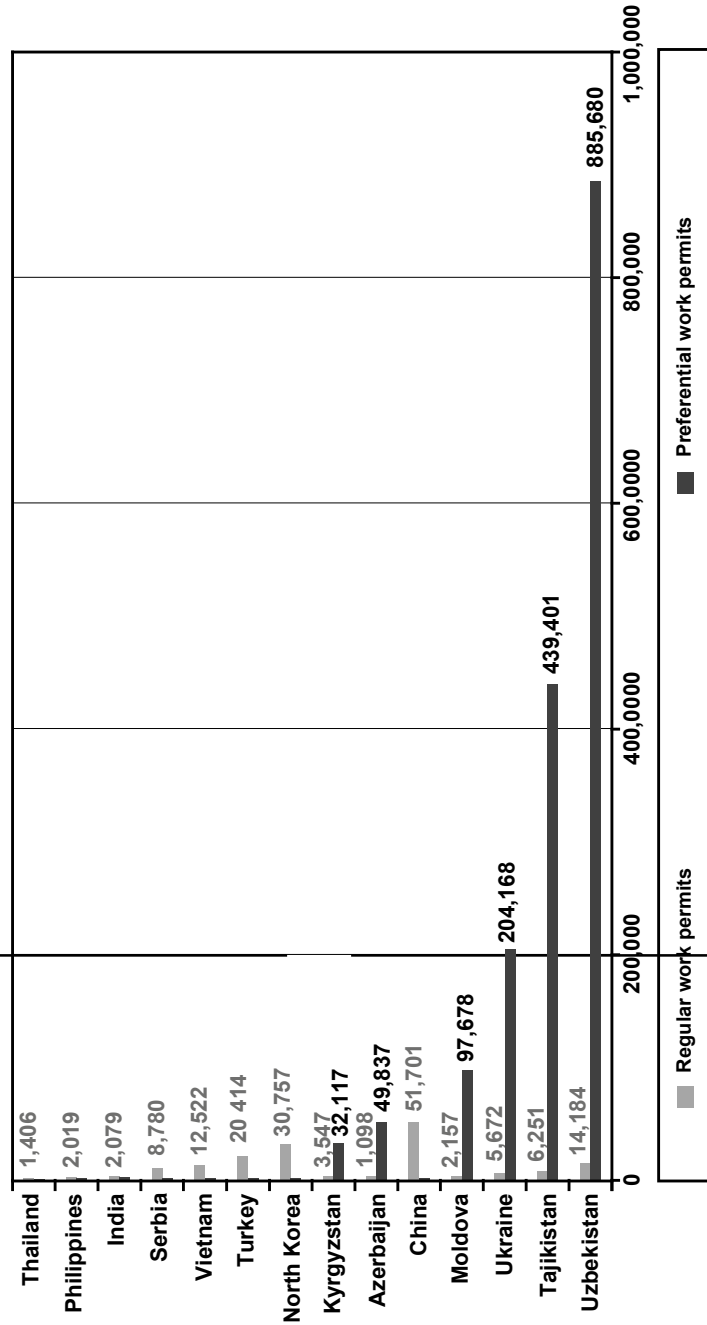
A third group of territories cover most of central and northwestern Russia and include the regions of Novosibirsk and Trans-Baikal. There it is *industry* and *transportation* that bring together the majority of migrant workers.

Jobs in *retail and services* are the main occupation of migrants in a fourth group – mainly the regions of Bryansk, Oryol, Saratov, Penza, Stavropol, Altai, Primorye, and the Ural area.

Agriculture and *forestry* are the sectors that use most of the foreign labor in the fifth group of regions, chiefly Karelia, Kalmykia, Novgorod, Volgograd, Astrakhan, Kirov, Omsk, Amur, Krasnoyarsk, and Khabarovsk. Migrants there are hired by farmers or lumbering companies or rent land to do their own farming.

Figure 2

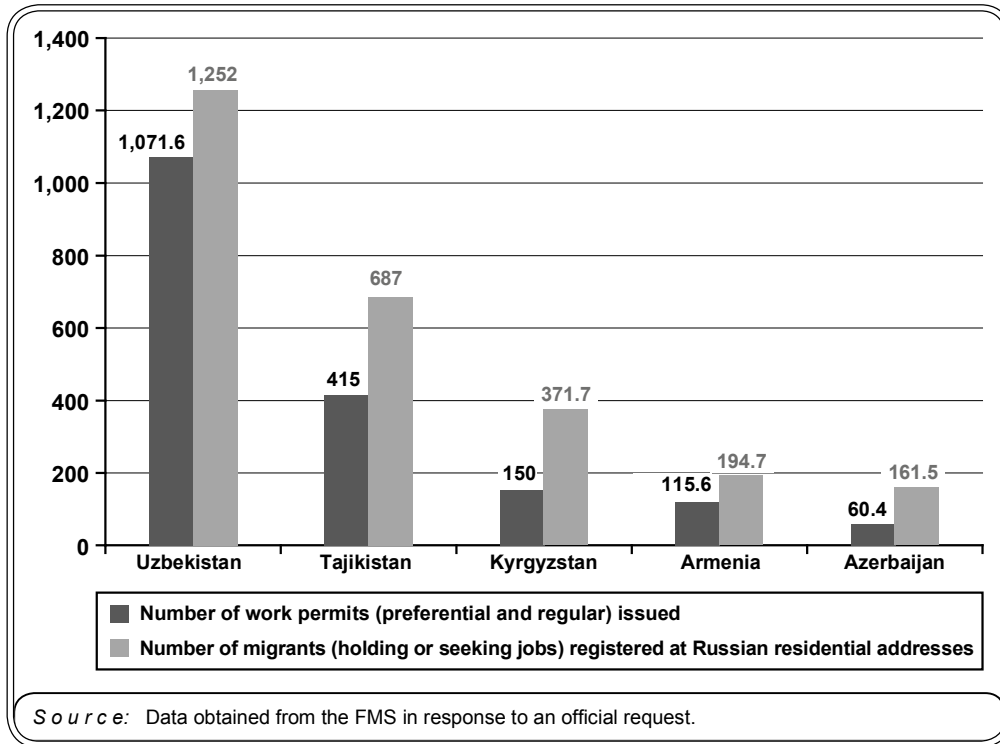
Holders of Work Permits in Russia in 2015
(numbers of people)



Source: Data obtained from the FMS in response to an official request.

Figure 3

Numbers of FMS-Issued Work Permits and Numbers of Foreign Workers Registered at Russian Residential Addresses, 2014
(thousands)



Migration Policies in the Context of Mutual Integration of EAEU Member Countries

Economic integration is one of the main aspects of strategic interaction in the EAEU format among Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. It is also the basis for labor migration within the Union. Russia and Kazakhstan are recipients and the other three states the native countries of migrant workers. Labor migration is a form of social and economic interaction between former Soviet republics and facilitates their mutual integration. The liberalization of trade between EAEU member countries is a catalyst for economic integration, which, in turn, stimulates migration. However, the EAEU does not have a coordinated policy on labor migration. Each member country has regulations on migration that are intended to serve its own ends. Some of the countries try to have as many people as possible work abroad so that a lot of money comes home as remittances, and at best such countries defend the rights of their fellow citizens abroad. But remittances that come in are in no way used to stimulate the economies of those nations.

On the other hand, Russia and Kazakhstan try to attract cheap labor but time and again limit its inflows and raise quality standards for it. However, due to the large-scale exploitation of migrant

workers, the widespread illicit issue of work permits and employment quotas, and the lack of clear information on how much foreign labor is needed, the recipient countries often make politicized moves and impose restrictions that are not always logical, consistent, or understandable. The logic of integration within the EAEU suggests that the five countries need a common labor market that is regulated under agreements. Migration may be one of the forms of regulation of this market.

In seeking more effective use of migrant labor within the EAEU, a proposal has been put forward for having different forms of regulating it for at least two groups of industries, those engaging in tradable lines of business and those specializing in non-tradable business.

In tradable sectors, indirect regulation through trade and investment is suggested. Today Russia, because of its dependence on agricultural imports, pursues a policy that stimulates job creation in, for example, the European Union, Turkey, or Israel. At the same time, the majority of foreign nationals who illegally work in agriculture in Russia and Kazakhstan come from Central Asia. It can be expected that, if more Russian capital is invested in the agriculture of the Central Asian countries, and that, if efficient use is made of such investments, the flow of illegal labor into Russia and Kazakhstan will decrease.

Foreign labor in non-tradable sectors such as construction, transportation, utilities, and retail, should be put under direct legal regulation as these industries will apparently need foreign labor for a long time. Today productivity in such sectors both in Russia and Kazakhstan is low—employers prefer to use the cheap labor of undocumented migrants than to invest in advanced technology.

The following measures may be suggested:

- First, each recipient country, Russia and Kazakhstan, should determine the total size of the workforce it needs.
- Second, the two countries should calculate what proportion of jobs they can fill with their domestic resources, including the unemployed, students, pensioners, and domestic migrants, and how much foreign labor they need.
- Third, they should identify their migration policy priorities in the context of political and economic integration in the EAEU format and sign agreements on labor migration.