

WORKFORCE MOBILITY IN THE EAEU: TRENDS, BARRIERS, PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The authors have studied the factors and specifics of the integrated labor market and workforce mobility in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). They rely on sociological polls to discuss what the people in the EAEU countries think about

trends and prospects of economic integration and benefits and drawbacks of labor mobility.

They have analyzed the key problems, the mechanism of the free movement of workforce in the EAEU; identified institutional and psychological barriers, offered two

possible scenarios—intensive and extensive—of the future of labor migration in the region and assessed the advantages and disadvantages of both. This allowed the authors to demonstrate how the migration and labor market policies can become better coordinated and, therefore, more balanced.

KEYWORDS: *the Eurasian Economic Union, mobility, workforce, labor migrants, migration policy.*

Introduction

Free movement of workforce in the EAEU is one of the key conditions of its functioning and development; it is a strong instrument of sustainable economic growth, higher living standards, more jobs and, therefore, social stability in all its member states. Labor migration implies the flow of workforce from depressive to economically active regions, which raises the efficiency of its use and alleviates social tension. According to the EDB's Integration Barometer 2017, one half of the population of Armenia, over one half in Belarus and Russia, and the majority of the population in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are positive about their governments' decision to be integrated in EAEU. Also, 71%-87% respondents in these countries have a positive attitude towards allowing free movement of EAEU citizens throughout the structure's territory. In Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, the positive response comes mostly from the relatively well-to-do population groups; in Kazakhstan—from the poorer segments. In Armenia and Russia, the support does not depend on the economic status: in all income groups 70% assessed the idea positively.¹

Methods and Materials

Mobility of Workforce in the EAEU: Factors and Trends

The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union has laid the foundation for the free movement of workforce within this integrated alliance.² EAEU members no longer apply the national laws limiting the use of workforce from other countries in their labor markets. They accept education-related documents issued by other member states at face value with the exception of the documents pertaining to pedagogical, legal, medical and pharmaceutical spheres, in which additional verification is needed. A visa-free regime, no customs inspections and no employment quotas, medical and social insurance and education in any of the member states can be described as additional advantages.

¹ See: EDB Integration Barometer-2017, Report No. 46, Center for Integration Studies, St. Petersburg, 2017, pp. 19, 21.

² See: *Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union* (signed in Astana on 29.05.2014) (version of 8.05.2015) (came into effect with amendments and additions on 12.08.2017), available in Russian at [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_163855/], 24 January, 2017.

Sociological polls and expert assessments speak of the following:³ Russians are more satisfied with the results of EAEU efforts to create a common labor market than with certain other achievements in the spheres identified by the Treaty. The expert community, likewise, has assessed the results as “much has been done and the greatest progress has been achieved.”⁴ Migration statistics in the EAEU countries consists of two primary data sets, the first related to migration for permanent residence; the second, to labor migration. The studies of labor mobility in the EAEU have revealed that the freedom of labor migration has barely affected the migration situation and the general trends of migration flows. The figures of permanent migration testify to the fact that Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had a negative migration balance with the EAEU countries, while the net migration in Belarus and Russia was decreasing (see Table 1).⁵

Table 1

International Migration Balance within the EAEU (men)

	2014	2015	2016
Armenia	-1,584	-2,675	-2,123
Belarus	5,981	4,412	1,559
Kazakhstan	-20,670	-21,479	-26,253
Kyrgyzstan	-8,228	-4902	-452
Russia	86,698	70,144	62,293

The legal status of labor migrants in the EAEU countries encouraged further migration. In 2015, 3,325 citizens of EAEU countries arrived in Belarus as labor migrants;⁶ 16,349 labor migrants arrived in Kazakhstan.⁷ In 2015, against the background of the dropping figures of labor migration to Russia caused by the economic crisis, Russia received 166,600 labor migrants from EAEU countries more than in 2014. According to the Eurasian Economic Commission, the number of labor migrants from the EAEU countries in Russia has reached 835,600 (see Table 2).⁸

According to the RF Ministry of the Interior, in 2016 about 2.4 million citizens of EAEU countries were registered as migrants in the Russian Federation (including 927,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan, 632,000 citizens of Armenia, 546,000 citizens of Kazakhstan and 346,000 citizens of Belarus).⁹ In

³ Here and elsewhere the results of the project Social-Political Dimension of Eurasian Integration were used (sampling N = 1,500). The poll was conducted by ISPI RAS in May and October 2014, May and October 2015, February-November 2017, April, June and, November 2017.

⁴ S. Glaziev, “Prioritetnaia zadacha EAES—edinyi ryok truda,” *Izvestia*, available at [http://izvestia.ru/news/607260], 19 February, 2017; “Sozdanie obshchego rynka truda—odin iz glavnykh prioritetov EAES,” available at [http://www.eurasian-commission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/30-11-2016.aspx 30.11.2016], 17 January, 2017.

⁵ See: *Statisticheskiiy ezhegodnik Evraziyskogo soiuz*, Moscow, 2017, p. 48.

⁶ Information on the number of guest workers who arrived in the Republic of Belarus from the members states of the Eurasian Economic Union in January-December 2014, 2015, 2016, available in Russian at [http://mvd.gov.by/ru/main.aspx?guid=16721], 17 January, 2017.

⁷ See: “V 2016 godu bolshinstvo trudovykh migrantov iz Kazakhstana uezzhalo v Kitay,” *Vlast*, 20 September, 2016, available at [https://vlast.kz/novosti/19354-v-2016-godu-bolsinstvo-trudovykh-migrantov-iz-kazahstana-uezzhalo-v-kitaj.html/], 27 February, 2017.

⁸ See: *Trudovaia migratsia i obespechenie trudiashchikh v Evraziyskom ekonomicheskom soiuze*, EEK, 2016, pp. 26, 32, 38.

⁹ See: *Evraziyskaia ekonomicheskaia integratsia. Report No. 43*, Center for Integration Studies, St. Petersburg, 2017, p. 72.

addition, in 2016, in Russia there were registered 362,000 labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan; 210,000 labor migrants from Armenia; 98,000 from Belarus and 72,000 from Kazakhstan (a drop of 11% of labor migrants compared to the previous year,¹⁰ caused by the economic crisis).

Table 2

**Number of Labor Migrants from the EAEU Countries
in Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2014-2016 (men)**

Countries of Origin	Target Countries						
	Russia			Belarus		Kazakhstan	
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2015	2016
Armenia	124,500	286,700	210,000	163	383	2,074	1,685
Belarus	3,500	4,300	98,000	—	—	608	394
Kazakhstan	187,000	113,800	72,000	569	656	—	—
Kyrgyzstan	354,000	430,800	362,000	23	77	1,138	1,496
Russia	—	—	—	1,866	2,209	12,529	9,388
Total	669,000	835,600	742,000	2,621	3,325	16,349	12,963

Russia's main attractions are the capacious labor market coupled with workforce deficit and shortage of workers and specialists. In fact, its labor market is 8 times bigger than the labor market of Kazakhstan; 17 times bigger than that of Belarus; 30 times bigger than Kyrgyzstan's and 58 times bigger than Armenia's.¹¹ There is an obvious disproportion between national labor markets. On the one hand, Russia and Kazakhstan are in dire need of labor resources, while Kazakhstan and Belarus require highly qualified workers and specialists.¹² On the other hand, in some countries (Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) the workforce is much larger than their employment potentials. With the average unemployment level of 5.3% in 2017, 16.5% of Armenia's able-bodied population remained unemployed, the highest number within EAEU.¹³

In 2015, the conditions of labor migration for the citizens of EAEU member states were significantly altered in the Russian labor market: EAEU labor migrants are actively pushing aside labor migrants from other countries.¹⁴ Segmentation of migrants in Russia is caused by registration costs: registration of labor migrants from EAEU countries is cheaper and, therefore, preferable.¹⁵

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ See: *Evrasiyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz v tsifrah*, Concise Statistical Collection, EEK, Statistika, Moscow, 2017, p. 42, available at [http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/act/integr_i_makroec/dep_stat/econstat/Pages/dynamic.aspx], 17 January, 2017.

¹² See: N.N. Kotliarov, L.V. Levchenko, E.B. Starodubtseva, "Sostoianie i tendentsii razvitiya obshchego rynka trudovykh resursov v ramkakh evraziyskogo ekonomicheskogo soiuzha," *Vestnik Omskogo universiteta*, Series Economics, No. 1, 2015, p. 31.

¹³ See: *Evrasiyskaia ekonomicheskaya integratsiya. Report No. 43*, pp. 70-72; *Evrasiyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz v tsifrah*, p. 42.

¹⁴ See: *Trudovaia migratsiya v EAES na nachalo 2016 goda. Report of EAK*, available at [<http://evrazklub.ru/analitik/trudovaya-migratsiya-v-eaes-na-nachalo-2016-goda-doklad-eak.html>], 22 January, 2017.

¹⁵ See: S. Ryazantsev, "Kazakhstan Today: Migration—Trends and Regulation Approaches," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 70-79.

Freedom of Labor Migration in the EAEU: Problems and Barriers

Free labor migration across the EAEU is somewhat restrained by undeveloped legal and normative regulation; the problem of pension provision has not been resolved despite the efforts of the supranational regulator and the national governments of member states, which have not yet arrived at a comprehensive legal and normative base.¹⁶

More problems are created by unscrupulous employers who cheat Kyrgyz citizens; the status of Armenian labor markets likewise causes certain problems.¹⁷ Unprotected by relevant documents, labor migrants remain socially vulnerable; the shadow employment sphere is expanding along with violations in the sphere of labor.¹⁸ It should be said that workforce of the EAEU countries is not used as efficiently as it should be on Russia's labor market.¹⁹ The scope of illegal exploitation of labor migrants can be described as considerable in Russia and Kazakhstan.²⁰ About 2.5 million migrants were employed in the shadow sector of Russian economy; about 1-1.5 million were exploited (they were deprived of their passports and, therefore, of the freedom of movement, and were locked up in places where they work and live, etc.).²¹

There is no comprehensive databases by branch, region and employer, which is very much needed in the recipient countries; they also need an elaborate program of education, language and professional training for labor migrants. The EAEU countries are aware of the deficit of highly qualified workers and laborers with adequate technical skills.²² Inadequately developed social infrastructure in the form of rented housing, shortage of kindergartens and medical services strongly affects workforce mobility.

Results

How Local People Treat Labor Migrants from EAEU Member States

Freedom of labor migration in the EAEU is strongly limited by the negative attitude of the local population to labor migrants. The majority of Russians supports the idea of freedom of labor migra-

¹⁶ See: S. Ryazantsev, R. Manshin, "Special Features of the Adaptation of Migrant Workers from Asian Countries in the Russian Economy," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 17, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 95-103.

¹⁷ See: M. Sulaymanova, "Migranty iz KR dazhe posle vstuplenia respubliki v EAES stankivaiutsia s problemami," available at [<http://old.kabar.kg/EAES/full/106591>], 14 March, 2017; "Migrantov iz Armenii i drugikh stran EAES mogut vydvorit iz Rossii," available at [<http://newsarmenia.am/news/society/migrantov-iz-armenii-i-drugikh-stran-eaes-bez-trudovykh-dogovorov-mogut-vydvorit-iz-rossii/>], 5 February, 2017.

¹⁸ See: *Migration Problems Inside and Outside Russia: Materials for the Meeting of the Scientific-Expert Council at the Chairperson of the Federation Council*, Federation Council of the RF FA, Moscow, 2015 (in Russian).

¹⁹ See: *Rossiyskiy rynek truda: tendentsii, instituty, strukturnye izmeneniya. Report of the Center of Labor Studies and the Laboratory of the Studies of the Labor Market NIU VShE*, Moscow, 2017, p. 8.

²⁰ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, "Integratsia migrantov v kontekste vneshney migratsionnoy politiki Rossii," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, No. 1, 2018, pp. 105-111.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² See: "Information on the Number and Requirements of Organizations of Workers by Professional Groups in Russia by 31 October, 2016," in: *Bulletin of Statistics*, Moscow, 2017, pp. 131-135 (in Russian); "Chislennost i potrebnost v kadrakh krupnykh i srednikh predpriyatii Respubliki Kazakhstan," *Statistichesky sbornik*, No. 17, 2017, p. 150; "Ministerstvo truda i sotsialnoy zashchity Respubliki Belarus. Spros i predlozhenie po professionam, vostrebovannym na rynke truda Respubliki Belarus na 01.12, 2016," available at [<http://www.mintrud.gov.by/ru/rynok/>], 7 February, 2017.

tion, while 32%-52% of them are against the freedom of labor migration within the EAEU. The wider the social and cultural gap between migrants and local people, the more vehement is their rejection. According to the public opinion poll carried out by ISPI RAS in February 2016, 60% of the polled population were ready to accept labor migration from Belarus; 44% conceded to labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan and 19%—to migrants from Tajikistan. Young males are less inclined than other population groups to support the general concept of labor migration: after graduating from an educational establishment, they have to organize their lives and start a family; first and foremost, they need jobs and, therefore, are apprehensive of possible competition from migrants. According to the results of sociological studies, ethnic intolerance of labor migrants among Russians is rising: the respondents subjectively assessed its level among their friends over the course of the last 25-30 years as having grown 2.5-3-fold (see Table 3).

Table 3

Attitude to People of Other Nationalities, in % Among the Respondents to the Question: "Do You Think That People You Regularly Communicate with (Colleagues, Family Members, Friends...) Have Negative Opinions about People of Other Nationalities?"

	1982 Russia*	2008 Russia	1982 Moscow	2016 Moscow
Few, minority	92.6	76.6	89	74.2
Majority, nearly everyone	7.4	23.4	8.9	25.8

Source: The Table is based on the results of the polls:

- (1) All-Union studies of the Soviet way of life carried out by ISI USSR AS in 1982, N-5522, questionnaire poll;
- (2) All-Russia study carried out in 2008, N-2017, questionnaire poll;
- (3) All-Russia study "The Way of Life of Russians in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia: Comparative Analysis and Assessment of Changes" conducted in June 2016, samplings—1,500 interviews.

* See: A.A. Vozmitel, G.I. Osadchaia, "Obraz zhizni v Rossii: dinamika izmeneniy," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 17-27.

Hostile attitude to migrants undermines social cohesion. Even though the majority of the polled population from the EAEU countries were positive, with one out of three optimistic, one-fifth of the labor migrants from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan working in Russia admitted recently becoming worried, irritable or even frightened, desperate and despondent. Practically one out of three or four migrants living in Moscow was uncomfortable and aware of national or ethnic discrimination. In most cases, migrants from Armenia remain indifferent to the situation; one out of seven migrants from Kyrgyzstan and one out of ten migrants from Kazakhstan described Muscovites as unfriendly or even hostile. Kyrgyz migrants are of even worse opinion about public authority figures: one out of four spoke about their unfriendliness or even hostility.²³ All this is explained by the highly divergent behavior, everyday practices and mentality of the migrants and local population. Negative feelings deepen when the number of young people and people from agricultural regions among labor migrants increases.²⁴

²³ See: Issledovanie "Migranty iz stran-chlenov EAES na moskovskom rynke truda." Opinion polls carried out in June 2015 and June 2016. One hundred migrants from Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were polled.

²⁴ See: V.S. Malakhov, E.B. Demintseva, A.B. Elebaeva, A.D. Musabaeva, "Vstuplenie Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki v Evraziyskiy ekonomicheskiy soiuz: vlianie na protsessy migratsii," *Working Paper of RSMD and NISI, KR*, No. 26, 2015, pp. 17-18.

Discussion

Two different scenarios—*extensive and intensive*—of labor mobility in the EAEU countries may emerge in the near future. According to the former, the integrative structure may acquire new members. In 2015, it signed a free trade agreement with Vietnam; Tajikistan has also come close to EAEU membership. If and when it joins the common labor market, the volume of remittances will increase by 15-25% to reach 50-55% of GDP.²⁵ The Eurasian Economic Commission has already received 30 agreement proposals, the most important being the potential agreement between Russian and Chinese leaders about the unification of the EAEU and the New Silk Road. According to the latter, the labor market might stabilize if and when the quality of labor resources improves due to a higher educational level and higher professional skills. As long as non-qualified workforce dominates in the migrant flow, social and cultural adaptation will remain a big problem, while the situation with medical services and dwelling for migrants stays the same. Jobs are few and far between for low-skilled or unskilled labor migrants; this adds tension to the social and economic situation in the host countries.²⁶

The problem can be resolved by teaching the Russian language to potential and actual migrants in their countries; the infrastructure of Russian-language courses should be improved, while access to it should be made significantly easier and free of charge. In fact, good command of the Russian language should become a social project.²⁷ Today, migrants have to pay for Russian-language exams at various centers and universities. The Russian language is the working tongue of the Eurasian Economic Commission, the CIS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. We should bear in mind that labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Tajikistan who flock to Russia in great numbers can count on better-paid jobs and successfully integrate in the host society if they have a reasonably good command of Russian.²⁸

In this context, the EAEU should pay particular attention to the development of innovative economy that requires highly qualified workers and engineers as a road towards higher mobility of labor resources. Innovative economy is the objective basis on which infrastructure and unified educational space will emerge. It is very important to create the conditions attractive to highly qualified specialists and students, etc. This means that the intensive scenario will lead us to a single labor market of qualified specialists and a common educational space.²⁹

Education can and should be regarded as an important instrument of deepening integration within the second scenario. The integrated labor market requires common approaches to training and education; today, the EAEU has no common educational system. Unified economic policy within the EAEU makes the integrated educational space a requirement: mobility of highly qualified specialists is an important factor that will positively affect the national labor markets of all member states. Indeed, an integrated economic space will offer employment to university graduates from any country that belongs to the integrated educational space and allow them to compete successfully on the national and the common labor markets.³⁰

²⁵ See: S. Ryazantsev, A. Ter-Akopov, E. Pismennaya, M. Khranova, "Scenarios of Migration within the EAEU in Conditions of Enhancing Economic Integration," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 18, No. 3, 2017, pp. 43-51.

²⁶ See: S. Ryazantsev, R. Manshin, op. cit.

²⁷ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, "Integratsia migrantov...", pp. 105-111.

²⁸ See: S. Ryazantsev, A. Ter-Akopov, E. Pismennaya, A. Lukyanova, "Diasporas as Informal Tools for Regulating Migration in the Eurasian Economic Union," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 18, Issue 3, 2017, pp. 35-42.

²⁹ See: E. Pismennaya, S. Ryazantsev, V. Bozhenko, "Central Asian Diasporas in the Russian Federation: Migration Channels and their Contribution to the Socioeconomic Development of the Sending Communities," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 17, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 87-95.

³⁰ See: S. Ryazantsev, A. Lukyanets, "Emigration of Young People from Russia: Forms, Trends and Consequences," *International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research*, Volume 15, Issue 23, 2017, pp. 485-493.

The time has come to establish normal living and labor conditions for migrants and to finally liquidate exploitation and corruption in the migration segment of Russia's economy. Today, there is a so-called migration-based economy in Russia that brazenly exploits labor migrants who have no documents, hence no rights and who can, therefore, be shamelessly taken advantage of, underpaid, kept in appalling conditions and often treated with cruelty. All those who use migrant labor should be bound by law to build or rent temporal dwellings for them, which should comply with at least minimal habitation requirements.³¹ Trade unions and labor inspections should regularly check the conditions in which migrants work and to which they return after working hours, assess accident prevention systems at industrial enterprises, etc.³²

It is highly advisable to apply the instrument of taxation to encourage employers to include the hired workers in the corporate medical insurance system: the rate of employers' social contributions (payroll tax) can be lowered for those employers who invest in the programs of corporate life and health insurance for Russian citizens and labor migrants.³³

It is likewise highly important to integrate the migration politics of the EAEU countries: in its migration policy Russia concentrates on the regulation of migration flows into the country and integration of immigrants. Republic of Belarus is doing more or less the same and considers migration an element of its demographic policy. Kazakhstan welcomes the return of ethnic Kazakhs (the Oralman repatriation program) to maintain the ethnic and cultural balance within the country; it is willing to admit labor migrants to cope with the deficit of labor resources. Armenia and Kyrgyzstan stimulate emigration to enhance the contacts with the corresponding diasporas and lead them to invest in national economies.³⁴

Conclusion

Despite the crisis, the new legal status of the EAEU member states' citizens helped maintain labor mobility within the new integrative structure. The vector of labor mobility of the citizens of member states—from these countries to Russia—has been determined by the highly capacious Russian labor market that needed labor resources as well as by the state of labor markets in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The new context of labor mobility changed the structure of Russia's labor market: labor migrants from the EAEU countries are actively pushing aside labor migrants from other countries.

The process was somewhat constrained by undeveloped legal regulatory norms, lack of experience of joint management of migration processes in the format of a common labor market and common migration infrastructure, undeveloped social infrastructure and hardly efficient use of migrant labor.

There are psychological barriers that interfere with the free movement of workforce in the EAEU: on the one hand, some people refuse to accept labor migrants as equal members of their so-

³¹ See: S. Ryazantsev, I. Bogdanov, V. Dobrokhleb, A. Lukyanets, "Migration from Central Asian Countries to Russia and Kazakhstan in the Context of Integration Processes in the Eurasian Economic Union Format," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 18, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 39-49.

³² See: S. Ryazantsev, A. Ter-Akopov, E. Pismennaya, M. Khranova, op. cit.

³³ See: S. Ryazantsev, A. Ivanova, "Migrant Workers from Central Asian Countries on the Russian Labor Market: Living Conditions and Self-Preserving Behavior," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 18, Issue 4, 2017, pp. 65-74.

³⁴ See: E. Pismennaya, S. Ryazantsev, O. Pichkov, A. Lukyanets, "South Caucasian Countries: Socioeconomic Development and Demographic Potential in the New Geopolitical Conditions," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 18, Issue 4, 2017, pp. 57-64.

cieties; on the other, some migrants reject the cultural specifics, everyday practices, mentalities, expectations and local rules of behavior.

In the short term two scenarios are equally possible: an extensive scenario based on the geographic expansion of the EAEU, which will acquire new members, and an intensive scenario based on improving the quality of social and labor relations. The common EAEU labor market can be stabilized by developing an innovative economy that will require highly qualified workers and specialists; integrating migration policies of the member countries; increasing the number of member states; raising the quality of labor resources due to a higher educational level and professional skills; getting access to greater possibilities for learning Russian, normal labor and living conditions; eliminating exploitation of migrants and corruption in the migrant segment of Russian economy; and by uniting all migrants into corresponding trade unions.
