

MIGRATION PROBLEMS IN TAJIKISTAN

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Over the last 14 years, the ethnic picture of Tajikistan has changed a lot mainly under the pressure of the transition period. According to the 1989 population census, Tajiks (the title nation) comprised 62.3 percent of the total population; Uzbeks, 23.5 percent; Russians, 7.6 percent; Tartars, 1.4 percent; the Kyrgyz, 1.3 percent; Ukrainians, 0.8 percent; Germans, 0.7 percent. All other ethnic groups, over 20 of them, accounted for less than 0.5 percent. According to the 2000 census, the share of Tajiks increased to 80 percent; the share of Uzbeks went down to 15.3 percent; Russians comprised 1.1 percent; Tartars, 0.3 percent; the Kyrgyz, 1.1 percent, Ukrainians, 0.1 percent; Germans, less than 0.1 percent. We should take into account that the country's demographic potential is high: between the two censuses its population increased by 20.3 percent to reach 6,127,500. In these years the number of Afghans increased from 2.1 thous to 4.7 thous; Arabs, from 0.3 to 14.5 thous; Gypsies, from 1.8 to 4.2 thous. At the same time, new nationalities and ethnic groups appeared in statistical reports: Lakais, Kongrats, Mings, Dourmens, Katagans, Barloses and others, with the total population of about 80,000.

After 1991, when the republic became independent, it lived through one of the hardest periods in the history of the Tajiks: the transfer to market economy affected all spheres of life. The country was shaken by external catastrophes (disintegration of the Soviet Union and ruptured economic ties) accompanied by internal processes, especially the civil war that drove away many people between 1992 and 1997. Later, they all came back; the combination of all these processes spurred on migration.

At present, the social-economic picture is not complete without external labor migration; it is the most important social phenomenon of the turn of the 21st century. Today, external labor migration is exerting decisive influence on the life-supporting system of nearly all Tajik families. There are obvious positive and negative effects; there are also other sides: rural-to-urban migration, migration between the regions, voluntary resettlement from the mountainous densely populated areas to the valleys and planned resettlement from exogenously dangerous to safer places. The scope of these changes cannot be compared, though, with that of external labor migration.

Tajikistan has become a country that receives refugees. They come mainly from Afghanistan; according to the latest registration carried out by the State Migration Service with cooperation of the UNHCR office, there are about 2.6 thousand of them. Some of these people either never had official status or lost it.

Labor migration became a large-scale social phenomenon in 1994. So far there is no mechanism of its registration, yet repeated studies of the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance established that between 2001 and 2003, 200-250 thousand, or over 7 percent of the republic's able-bodied population, sought employment abroad. Over 90 percent of them went to the Russian Federation: this is confirmed by the 2000 population census and annual information about tickets sold and passenger traffic supplied by the Ministry of Transport of Tajikistan.

According to a large-scale study of households, as of 1 August, 2003, 347,000 citizens of the republic were labor migrants working abroad, over half of them being young people between 15 and 29; 12 to 16 percent were women. With the statistical error of 15-20 percent of the total number of labor migrants one can safely say that there are 400-420 thousand labor migrants in Tajikistan. I should add that this number includes only those who while working abroad remained citizens of Tajikistan and maintained regular contacts with their families at home.

Their lot is not an easy one: they undertake any work so as to avoid deportation. About 10 to 15 percent of them, having fulfilled all the necessary procedures, work legally; the majority of them are engaged in state structures, large enterprises and the private sector. The majority of migrants, however, works illegally either at private enterprises or as domestic help. Their employers prefer to avoid official registration, which leaves the migrants outside social insurance and medical services, their wages being impossibly low. More and more often employers refuse to pay illegal migrants who fall easy prey to all sorts of structures, including criminal groups set up by their compatriots.

Annual investigations revealed several trends: the number of young men with no skills and qualifications that the labor market needs is rising. Even if such people have adequate practical experience, they lack documents to confirm their skills. The number of women among labor migrants is gradually climbing up. On the whole, migration is seasonal: in spring and summer migrants leave the republic to come back in fall and winter. Recently, the share of those who stay for 12 months or more has been growing.

There was the opinion in Soviet times that among all nations of the U.S.S.R. Tajiks were the least mobile one. According to studies conducted in the 1970s, territorial mobility among the autochthonous rural population of Central Asia and the Trans-Caucasus was about four times lower than in similar areas of Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic republics. According to the 1970 population census, the share of those who changed place of habitation during the previous two years was 5-6.7 percent among Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians; 2.5 percent among Kirghizes, and 2.2 percent among Tajiks. At the same time, agrarian overpopulation was typical of Tajikistan in the 1960s through 1980s. Now manpower surplus in Tajikistan is as high as before. In 2002 the natural population growth coefficient was 22.5; in the past over 85 percent of natural growth of the rural population remained in the countryside. Towns and cities with limited social capacities could not integrate large masses of people who found no employment in agriculture. In the past the scope of labor migration was much lower than in the last decade when large masses of people rushed to other former Soviet republics in search of employment.

In the Soviet Union two factors kept migration in check: the low professional level of the local ethnic groups and planned distribution of workforce. There is any number of opinions about the causes of higher territorial mobility of people in the manpower-surplus areas. We should say, however, that the low territorial mobility in Tajikistan was due to Soviet social policies that guaranteed physical survival. At the same time, despite agrarian overpopulation and manpower surplus, people could earn enough within the limits of Tajikistan itself to live at the subsistence level. There were no reasons to look for a job in other countries.

Today, different factors are responsible for territorial mobility. While in 1991 the level of employment among the able-bodied population in the formal economic sector of the republic was 78 percent, in

2002, it dropped to 53.4 percent. Incomes went down: according to a 1999 poll, about 83 percent of the local people was counted as poor. Informal employment is developing.

The employment dynamics of the 1990s was mainly determined by the change in the physical GDP volume, though over the last ten years this correspondence was not always even. Until 1996 the GDP volume had been declining much faster than the employment level; starting with 1997, when the volume of industrial production went up, the paces nearly coincided. The so-called labor accumulation coefficient, or the labor resources indicator, calculated as the difference between the level of contraction of GDP and the employment level, was 45.8 percent, the figure that demonstrates the speed with which the labor market responded to production decline and, by the same token, the way macroeconomic reforms affected manpower demand. According to the preliminary results of the 2003 poll, the standard of living has somewhat improved, though the present rates of economic growth cannot affect external labor migration yet.

This is a complicated process that should be carefully studied and regulated along with other economic, social and political factors. The state should exert an active influence on external labor migration, elaborate and implement a scientifically substantiated policy in this sphere. To be able to accomplish this the state should clearly formulate its goals and current and future tasks with due account of the traditions, customs, national and historical specifics of our population.

With this aim in view the government has already charted important measures designed to create a normative-legal basis applied to migration in general and labor migration in particular. In 1998 the country acquired a Conception of State Migration Policy that formulated the following urgent aims and tasks:

- An adherence to international treaties in the sphere of migration and compliance with corresponding international obligations;
- Protection of the migrants' rights and interests in accordance with the international legal norms, the republic's Constitution and legislation;
- Development of legislative base regulating processes of migration;
- Improvement of the system of state administration of migration and providing training for its personnel;
- Forecast of these processes, elaboration and realization of all necessary state and other programs in the sphere;
- Prevention of illegal migration;
- Signing of bilateral and multilateral agreements on migration;
- Setting up a system of control, creation of a unified database, etc. that meet all international requirements.

Since 1999 the Law on Migration has been operating in Tajikistan; in 2002 it received a number of special articles related to external labor migration. In 2001 the president signed a decree On Stepping Up the Struggle Against Illegal Migration in the Republic of Tajikistan. There is another decree that describes the order of issuing permits (licenses) to employment agencies engaged in finding employment for Tajik citizens abroad and inviting foreign workers to Tajikistan; the government endorsed the External Labor Migration Conception. It formulated the main goal of the state migration policy as social and legal support of the Tajik citizens temporarily working abroad, regulation of migration flows, prevention of illegal labor migration and making migration a legal process. To reach these goals within the present economic context and in view of the emerging labor market the state decided that regulation of internal and external labor migration was the most effective instrument. The priority was given to a system expected to help labor migrants by creating favorable conditions for the development of a net of private employment firms.

In November 2001 the Tajik parliament ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the republic also signed the 1951 Conven-

tion Relating to the Status of Refugees. Within the CIS Tajikistan is party to the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Labor Migration and Social Protection of Migrant Workers (15 April, 1994) and the Agreement on Cooperation of the CIS Member States in Fighting Illegal Migration (6 March, 1998). In this way, the laws of Tajikistan cover practically all its international obligations; though these fairly liberal laws are not free of shortcomings. One of the greatest achievements in this sphere was a system of transfer of the money earned by migrants to their homeland. In 2001 they transferred \$300,000, in 2003 they sent back home \$256 million (over 20 percent of the GDP). The state has to devise methods designed to stimulate investment activity of labor migrants by raising interest rate on their hard currency deposits in the republic's banks and lowering the bank service payment below the world's level.

External labor migration helped develop the market of construction, transport, and banking services; it improved the culture of labor and raised the professional levels of those who worked in other countries.

Regulation has its positive sides as well as many negative effects evident in the economic and social spheres. First, labor migrants are mostly young people (between 20 and 45) with the highest labor productivity; so far their absence is not acutely felt because there are no jobs for them. At the same time, the small but evident economic growth and several large construction projects require skilled workers. Second, the majority of the migrant workers are men; they either have families or are single. Our studies revealed that about 30 percent of single men start families abroad; as a result there is a surplus of unmarried women in the republic. Today, an average age of marriage among women is 30, which creates a new problem in Tajikistan. In addition, left without breadwinners, the families of labor migrants become social outcasts. Third, labor migration causes huge losses in human capital expressed in professional degradation. While abroad, most of migrants work in different professions as compared with those they were trained for. Tajik academics have calculated that in the last 10 years at least \$15 billion were lost in the form of human capital, which is a non-renewable resource. Fourth, the social and economic aspects of external labor migration are extremely unfavorable. Hundreds of thousands of our citizens are exploited abroad; they fall victims to political speculations, they are accused of drug trafficking and drug pushing. Fifth, Tajikistan is absolutely unprotected against infections; the venereal diseases and AIDS present the greatest danger.

Regulation of labor migration is not free from faults either: the infrastructure of services is undeveloped, this can be said, in particular, about information and legal support; there is no training or professional education system; a system of coordination of all relevant structures' activity, including civil society, is absent as well; migrant workers mainly go to Russia. Our legal system lacks laws envisaging responsibilities for organizing illegal labor migration abroad and for bringing foreign migrant workers in Tajikistan; the climate is not conducive to economic activities of intermediaries; there is no investment program that could attract savings of labor migrants, etc.

The state should work toward diminishing the negative sides of labor migration and developing its positive aspects. There are positive shifts in the process. Today, we have a program of external labor migration for 2003-2005 and a special system that will help translate the program into reality (on 1 January, 2004 migrant registration cards were introduced). It was clearly stated that they would be used for statistical purposes only, to gather information about the gender-and-age structure of migration flows and places of their origin, the migrants' qualifications, the reasons for migration and the duration of absence, as well as the country they headed for. No extra people were stationed at checkpoints, while the process of filling in the cards is straightforward and does not take much time. In March 2004 the government passed a decision on considerable extension and strengthening of the representative office of the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance of the Tajik Republic in the Russian Federation. Its functions and tasks were revised and new priorities identified: it has to concentrate on receiving Tajik citizens and helping them in everything related to all aspects of labor migration as well as providing expert opinions about the contracts signed by employment agencies in Tajikistan with employers in Russia. The same decision suggested that obligatory medical insurance should be introduced for all citizens traveling abroad. This has been introduced in the Russian Federation for migrant workers entering the country.

On the whole, these measures can be successfully carried out only if the state creates a clear and balanced system of state regulation. It can be actively supported by state and private structures, the public, political parties and NGOs. Success is impossible without a genuinely national policy. This will transform external labor migration into an efficient instrument of raising the standard of living in the country and successfully addressing investment and other long-term problems.