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**New Trends in Labor Migration From Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and  
Tajikistan in the 2020s**

E. A. Visyashcheva

Lyceum No. 130 named after Acad. M. A. Lavrentyev, Novosibirsk, Novosibirskaya oblast,  
Russia

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**Abstract**

Labor migration from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the 2020s continues to hold high social and economic significance for both the countries of origin and the receiving labor markets. At the same time, recent trends have emerged that could significantly influence migration processes that have developed over decades. This research paper aims to identify current features of labor migration from these Central Asian countries at the level of attitudes and perceptions regarding possible relocation destinations for employment in the 2020s, and to compare the features of labor migration in the 2020s with migration data from the 2010s. The study revealed the formation of a new generation of people from these countries for whom labor migration ceases to be a mandatory norm of life success and is viewed as one possible scenario, but not the only rational one. Respondents now consider not only Russia but also European and American countries and even choose the option of staying in their own country: 52.2% of respondents, when answering the question "Which countries would you consider going to for work?" selected their own country as a preferred destination. The obtained data indicate significant variability in migration orientations and signs of changing attitudes in the 2020s. Labor migration from these Central Asian countries is undergoing a qualitative transformation: from the dominance of the Russian direction to a multi-country model, and overall — to a revision of the inevitability of migration as the sole strategy for life development.

**Keywords:** migration, labor migration, Central Asia, economic growth, new destinations.

**1. Introduction**

Population migration data comprises an integral part of a country's demographic statistics. Migration influences changes in population size, national composition, and demographic characteristics. In general, migration is the movement of people across territorial boundaries (regions, cities, countries) associated with a change of residence and caused by various reasons (Napishem.ru, 2026). Migration can be voluntary or forced, permanent or temporary. Voluntary migration is usually associated with a change of workplace or educational institution, or marriage, while forced migration typically occurs due to interethnic conflicts, wars, or natural disasters (Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg, n.d.). Less common reasons for migration

include business trips, tourist trips, environmental distress, and personal or family reasons. Migration is also divided into regular and irregular. Regular migration includes pendulum migration (daily or weekly regular movements from place of residence to place of work or study) and cross-border migration (complementing the pendulum system by crossing borders). Irregular migration includes such types as shuttle migration (periodic trips of varying durations), rotational migration (work in areas with extreme climates), seasonal migration (during a specific season), and episodic migration (vacation or tourism) (Napishem.ru, 2026).

There are numerous migration flows worldwide. In global migration, countries are typically divided into donor countries (from which people leave) and recipient countries (which accept migrants). Over 60% of all global migration is labor migration aimed at obtaining higher-paying work and better working conditions (International Labour Organisation, n.d.). Due to globalization and increasing labor mobility, the share of illegal migrants is growing daily. People cross borders without visas or violate their periods of stay. This problem is becoming key for many states, so migration requirements and law and order are being tightened annually (ASAFOV,RU, 2026).

Despite extensive research on labor migration from Central Asia to Russia, there is a lack of recent empirical data on how migration attitudes have evolved in the 2020s, particularly in light of economic growth in the countries of origin and tightening migration policies in Russia. While previous studies have documented the dominance of the Russian direction and the economic necessity driving migration, the present study addresses this gap by providing survey-based evidence on current migration preferences and comparing them with data from the 2010s.

The aim of this study is to identify current features of labor migration from Central Asian countries at the level of attitudes and perceptions regarding possible relocation destinations for employment in the 2020s; to compare the features of labor migration in the 2020s with migration data from the 2010s (Ryazantsev, 2016).

## **2. Methodology**

The methods of this research include a field quantitative study conducted by the marketing agency "Scanmarket": an in-person survey of migrants on the streets of Moscow and the immediate Moscow region; period: 23.12.2025–20.01.2026; sample size n=615 (in equal shares: Uzbekistan/Tajikistan/Kyrgyzstan); data collection on tablets with geolocation recording (ScanMarket Agency, 2026). Additionally, data from the UN, World Bank, IMF, EBRD, OECD, and scientific publications on migration processes in Central Asia were used. For comparison with the situation in 2016, the article "Labor Migration from Central Asia to Russia in the Context of the Economic Crisis" by Sergey Ryazantsev (2016) was used.

### *2.1 Aim of the study*

The present study explores the relationship between economic growth, personal and societal attitudes, and the changing landscape of labor migration from Central Asia. The goal is to

provide insights that could be valuable for institutions, policymakers, and migration experts in both sending and receiving countries.

## *2.2 Research Design*

This research utilizes a descriptive, mixed-method design, primarily relying on quantitative data from the field survey and secondary data from international organizations, allowing for a robust comparative analysis.

- **Independent Variables (IV):**

- Economic growth in Central Asian countries (measured by GDP growth rates).
- Tightening of migration legislation in Russia.
- Socio-cultural factors (mentality, collectivism, attachment to homeland).

- **Dependent Variables (DV):**

- Migration intentions and preferences of Central Asian citizens (measured by survey responses regarding preferred destinations).
- Actual migration flows (measured by FSB Border Service data on entries into Russia).
- Remittance behavior (measured by the percentage of migrants sending money home).

## *2.3 Hypothesis*

Improved economic growth in Central Asian countries increases the number of citizens who prefer to stay in their homeland rather than migrate for work.

Certain values and mentality prevent migrants from fully relocating to the destination country.

## *2.4 Consent and Ethical Considerations*

All ethical considerations were followed for the current study. The in-person survey was conducted by a third-party agency (Scanmarket) in a public setting, ensuring anonymity for the respondents. Informed consent was implied by the respondents' voluntary participation in the survey. Confidentiality and privacy of the respondents were maintained; no data would be disclosed to a third party. No identifiers such as names or pictures were disclosed in the article or while conducting the study. Ethical guidelines of research were followed.

## *2.5 Sample*

The sample for the primary research consisted of 615 labor migrants from Central Asia.

**Sample Size:**  $n = 615$ .

**Proportions:** The sample was divided in equal shares among the three target countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), with 205 respondents from each (ScanMarket Agency, 2026).

**Gender Ratio:** The sample was predominantly male (90% men, 10% women).

**Age Group:** The average age of respondents was 32 for men and 35 for women.

**Geographical Area:** The survey was conducted in person in Moscow and the immediate Moscow region.

## 2.6 Scales

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the marketing agency "Scanmarket" covering country of origin, profession, length of residence, remittance behavior, preferred destination for labor migration, and demographic information (ScanMarket Agency, 2026).

## 2.7 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure was divided into two phases: primary data collection via an in-person survey on the streets of Moscow and the immediate Moscow region from 23.12.2025 to 20.01.2026 (ScanMarket Agency, 2026); and a secondary data review from international reports.

## 3. Results

### Coordination of Migrant Survey Results from the "Scanmarket" Agency with the Real Situation of Migration to Russia

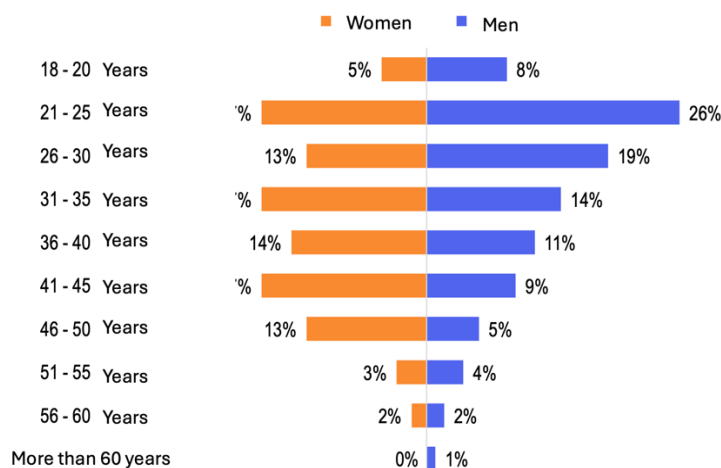
The agency "Scanmarket" conducted a descriptive field quantitative study involving an in-person survey of migrants in Moscow who had sent remittances to their country of origin or taken out loans within the year. The sample included migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan in equal proportions. A total of 615 respondents were surveyed (Table 1).

**Table 1 Survey Sample Distribution**

| Country of origin of respondents | Planed quotas            |      | Actual quotas            |      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
|                                  | Number of questionnaires | %    | Number of questionnaires | %    |
| <b>Kyrgyzstan</b>                | 200                      | 33%  | 205                      | 33%  |
| <b>Uzbekistan</b>                | 200                      | 33%  | 205                      | 33%  |
| <b>Tajikistan</b>                | 200                      | 33%  | 205                      | 33%  |
| <b>In total</b>                  | 600                      | 100% | 615                      | 100% |

(Source: ScanMarket Agency, 2026)

Among the respondents, 90% were men and 10% women; the average age of men was 32 years, and of women — 35 years. From the age-sex structure, it can be observed that the number of women in categories 21–25, 26–30, 31–35, 36–40, and 41–45 years is approximately equal, while the number of men noticeably decreases when moving from younger to older age groups (Figure 1).



**Figure1. Age and Gender Distribution of Respondents**  
(Source: ScanMarket Agency, 2026)

The survey results revealed that over the past year, 607 people (99%) sent remittances to their country, indicating maintained contact with relatives and, presumably, only temporary residence in Russia for the purpose of earning money. This trend is observed among migrants across different criteria: country, age, gender, and length of residence in Russia. In each case, the percentage of remittances remains at 98% or higher (Tables 2, 3, 4, 5) (ScanMarket Agency, 2026).

Tables 2-5. Remittance Rates by Country, Age, Gender, and Length of Residence

|                            | Country of origin |            |            |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
|                            | Kyrgyzstan        | Uzbekistan | Tajikistan |
| <b>Only Transfers</b>      | 93%               | 91%        | 92%        |
| <b>Only loans</b>          | 0.5%              | 1%         | 2%         |
| <b>Transfers and Loans</b> | 7%                | 8%         | 6%         |
| <b>Number of people</b>    | 205               | 205        | 205        |

Table 2

|                            | Length of residence in Russia |           |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
|                            | Less than 2 years             | 3-5 years | More than 5 years |
| <b>Only Transfers</b>      | 93%                           | 95%       | 88%               |
| <b>Only loans</b>          | 1%                            | 1%        | 2%                |
| <b>Transfers and Loans</b> | 6%                            | 5%        | 10%               |
| <b>Number of people</b>    | 187                           | 192       | 234               |

Table 2

|                     | Age         |             |                    |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
|                     | 18-25 years | 26-40 years | More than 40 years |
| Only Transfers      | 90%         | 92%         | 94%                |
| Only Loans          | 2%          | 0.4%        | 1%                 |
| Transfers and Loans | 8%          | 7%          | 5%                 |
| Number of people    | 205         | 271         | 139                |

Table 3

|                     | Sex   |         |
|---------------------|-------|---------|
|                     | Males | Females |
| Only Transfers      | 92%   | 86%     |
| Only Loans          | 1%    | 2%      |
| Transfers and Loans | 6%    | 13%     |
| Number of people    | 551   | 64      |

Table 4

(Source: ScanMarket Agency, 2026)

The most sought-after professions among migrants from Central Asia, according to the survey results, are courier (17%), construction worker (13%), construction specialists (crane operator, electrician) (11%), trade worker (10%), bartender, waiter, cook (10%). Respondents also worked as janitors, drivers, taxi drivers, cleaners, loaders, and security guards (Polshenko, 2025).

The largest share by length of residence in Russia consists of migrants who have lived in Russia for 3 to 5 years (31%). In second place are migrants who have lived in Russia for more than 10 years (24%). However, migrants who have lived from 6 to 10 years are significantly fewer (14%) (ScanMarket Agency, 2026).

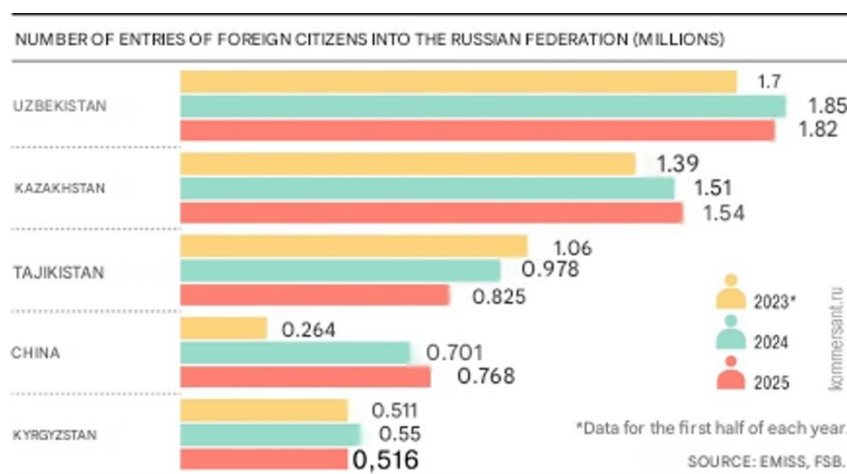
On average, the older people are, the longer their duration of residence. For example, in the age group 18 to 25, the average length of residence is 3.9 years, while in the age group over 40, it is 7.1 years (ScanMarket Agency, 2026). The survey data indicate that migrants who have resided in Russia for longer periods may have different intentions regarding their stay, though this cannot be confirmed without additional questions about long-term settlement plans.

Statistics on responses to the question about countries other than Russia where migrants would consider labor migration showed that 52.2% would prefer to stay in their homeland and work in domestic enterprises (ScanMarket Agency, 2026). The next most popular countries were European countries (unspecified) (8.9%), Germany separately (7.3%), and the USA (5.7%). This trend persists among migrants from all three countries represented in the survey. Moreover, according to the survey results, older people (over 40) choose the option "None" more often than younger people (18 to 40) (ScanMarket Agency, 2026).

### Migration Trends in Russia

State policy must be aimed at maintaining security and law and order. However, it is difficult to achieve significant growth in a country's economy without attracting additional labor resources, the main source of which is migrants from other countries (Interfax, 2024). During the 2019–2025 period, Russia's migration policy concept was focused on developing legal migration mechanisms, monitoring compliance with legal regulations, and ensuring conditions for legal entry and stay for migrants. However, the new concept for 2026–2030 tightens requirements for migrants, restricts their fields of work, and strengthens registration controls, which reduces the number of new migrants entering Russia (Shustov, 2026).

In 2025, approximately 5.48 million people immigrated to the Russian Federation. The list of key countries of origin of immigrants includes Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan is the leader in the number of migrants to Russia — in 2025, 1.82 million people from Uzbekistan came to Russia (Figure 2) (PRIME, 2025).



**Figure 2. Number of Entries of Foreign Citizens into the Russian Federation (Millions)**  
(Source: EMISS, FSB, as cited in Asiaplustj.info, 2026)

For the most part, migrants coming to Russia have low levels of education and work as janitors, general laborers, or couriers. Demographer Alexander Safonov notes that highly skilled migrants from Central Asia would prefer Korea or Europe as a potential workplace (RBC, 2024). According to Rosstat data for 2023, the majority of migrants have completed secondary education; the second largest group consists of graduates of technical schools and colleges (RBC, 2024).

The regions leading in the number of migrants include Moscow and the Moscow region, St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region, Tatarstan, Tyumen region, and the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug. The regions with the smallest influx of migrants are Primorsky Krai, Tomsk region, and several regions bordering Ukraine (Crimea, Rostov region, and Belgorod region) (RBC, 2024).

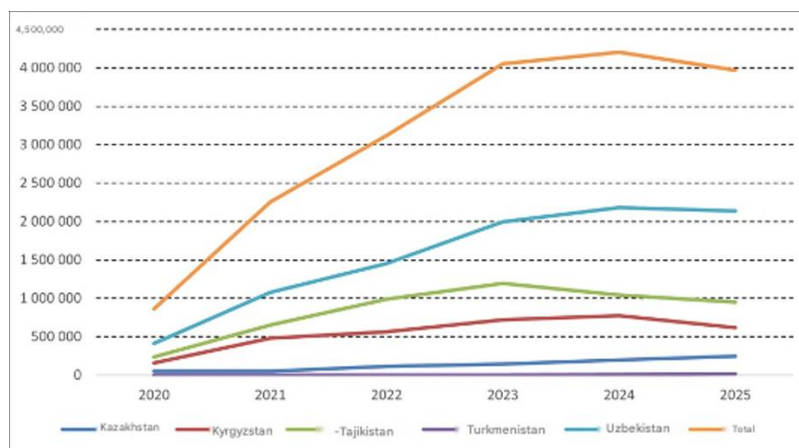
Despite tightened migration control measures in Russia, the influx of migrants, as data shows, is not decreasing significantly. People from Central Asia continue to travel to Russia in large numbers for work.

According to official statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs on migrants in Russia across various economic sectors: 26.7% of migrants work in construction; 11.7% in wholesale and retail trade; 6.4% in transportation and storage; 2.1% in agriculture (PRIME, 2025). Other professions for migrants include electricians, welders, plasterers, concrete workers, and masons (Poleshenko, 2025).

Such professions are not popular among Russian citizens, so jobs remain unfilled. Migrants help fill these vacancies with their willingness to work where there is a labor shortage. According to estimates from the Ministry of Labor, the labor market's need for personnel until 2030 is at least 2.4 million people (Interfax, 2024).

### Restrictions on Migration to Russia from Central Asia

In January 2026, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs reported a decline in the influx of migrants from Central Asia. The number of foreign citizens decreased by 10% from 6.3 million to 5.7 million people (Shustov, 2026). The reduction in the number of migrants is confirmed by Border Service data, which recorded a decrease in the number of entries of citizens from Central Asian countries into Russia for work purposes (Figure 3) (*Asiaplustj.info*, 2026).



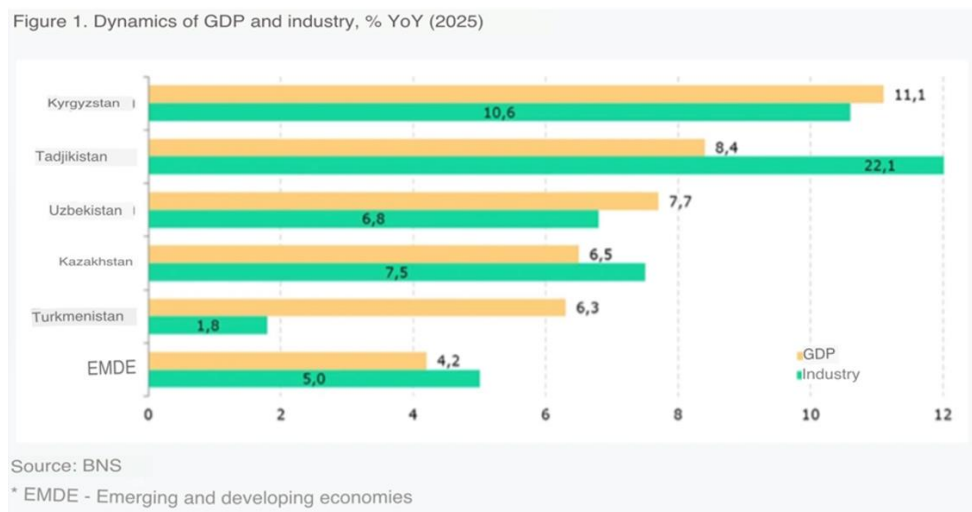
**Figure 3. Number of Entries of Citizens of Central Asian Countries into Russia for Work Purposes**

(Source: FSB Border Service data, as cited in *Asiaplustj.info*, 2026)

Entries of citizens from Kyrgyzstan in 2025 decreased by 17.7%, Tajikistan — by 15.1%, Uzbekistan — by 7%, and Kazakhstan — by 6%. These countries are the main suppliers of labor migrants to Russia, and in 2025, the number of labor migrants from these countries decreased by 10.5% (*Asiaplustj.info*, 2026).

In addition to the tightening of Russian migration policy, the main reasons for the decline in migration influx from Central Asia are presumably the strengthening economic growth of Central Asian countries, which allows citizens to find work in their homeland (Shustov, 2026).

Indeed, currently GDP growth — one of the key indicators of economic development — is very high in Central Asian countries (Figure 4, Figure 5), indicating growing enterprises that require labor (News of Kyrgyzstan, 2026).

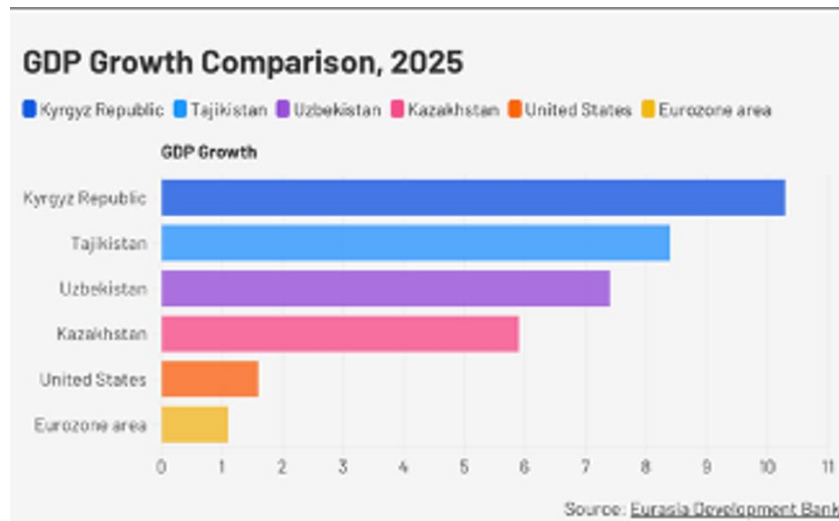


**Figure 4. GDP of Central Asian Countries Exceeded \$500 Billion**

(Source: open.kg, 2026)

**Uzbekistan.** Uzbekistan's GDP in 2025 grew by 7.4%, and in 2026 growth is expected to be 6.8% (Aliakbarova, 2026). Over the same period, GDP per capita increased from €1,750 to €3,220, indicating improvements in labor productivity and living standards. Investments in fixed capital increased by 15%, and export value increased by 33% (Aliakbarova, 2026). President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev announced that about 5 million people have received stable income, and 1.5 million people have risen above the poverty line (Aliakbarova, 2026).

**Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.** Kyrgyzstan's GDP increased by 10.3% and is expected to continue growing in 2026 (News of Kyrgyzstan, 2026). Tajikistan showed 6.5% growth in 2025 due to high volumes of remittances and government investments (Aliakbarova, 2026). However, forecasts for 2026 suggest that economic growth in this country will slow to 4.9% (Aliakbarova, 2026).



**Figure5. GDP Growth Comparison, 2025**

(Source: Eurasia Development Bank, as cited in euronews, 2026)

#### 4. Discussion

##### The Influence of Socio-Cultural Factors on Migration Decisions

Survey findings and existing literature suggest that socio-cultural factors may influence the migration decisions of Central Asian citizens. According to Bedrina and Lazareva (2021), the mentality of Central Asian citizens includes a number of socio-cultural and psychological aspects that create barriers to full assimilation and permanent relocation to Russia.

Citizens of Central Asian countries possess certain mental and cultural attitudes that allow them to view residence in Russia only as temporary. One such factor is attachment to the homeland, the community, and a policy of collectivism. Their mentality is dominated by familism, care for older generations, and a desire to raise children in their traditional national culture (EURAC Research, 2024). These findings are consistent with the survey data showing that 99% of respondents sent remittances to their home country, which may indicate continued ties with families and communities in the country of origin.

Another obstacle is religious differences between countries. Despite Islam being one of the traditional confessions in Russia (second in number after Orthodoxy), the norms of daily life in Russia differ from the more conservative way of life to which people from Central Asia are accustomed. Issues related to observing religious rites and accepted social norms from home in a different cultural environment create discomfort for permanent residence (Bedrina & Lazareva, 2021).

The language barrier also complicates adaptation and creates feelings of isolation, as not all migrants speak Russian fluently, which hinders their full socialization in the environment (EURAC Research, 2024).

These socio-cultural factors, combined with the survey finding that 52.2% of respondents would prefer to stay in their homeland, suggest that many migrants from Central Asia may plan to return to their country of origin after earning money, though the survey did not directly measure return intentions (Return migration, 2026).

### **Comparison of Migration Trends of the 2010s and 2020s**

It should be noted that the comparison between the 2010s and 2020s is based on different data sources rather than a longitudinal study. The data for the 2010s are drawn from Ryazantsev's (2016) analysis, while the 2020s data come from the ScanMarket survey (2026) and various international organizations. Therefore, the comparison provides a general overview of changes in migration patterns rather than tracking the same individuals over time.

Studying the data from Sergey Ryazantsev's article (Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Economics, Professor, Head of the Center for Demography of the Institute for Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor at the Department of Applied Analysis of International Problems at MGIMO University), we can conclude that the trends in labor migration in 2016 and at present have a sufficient number of differences (Ryazantsev, 2016).

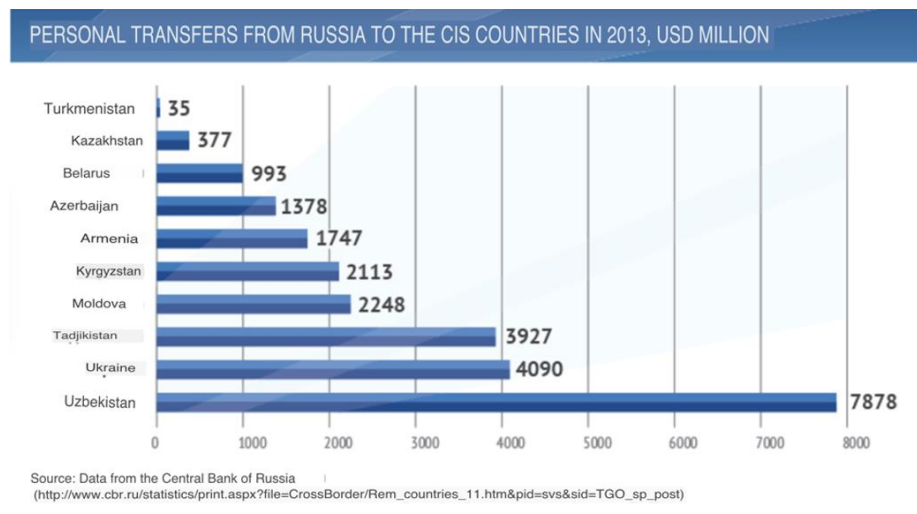
In 2016, labor migration from Central Asian countries involved 10% to 16% of the economically active population of the region. This was due to the economic problems of Central Asian countries: high unemployment rates reaching hundreds of thousands of citizens in each country, widespread poverty, declining production, and low wages. People viewed labor migration to Russia as the only possible option for achieving material success and financial well-being (Ryazantsev, 2016).

Citizens of Central Asia preferred migration to Russia because of a common language, shared values, and a shared history uniting the peoples of the countries (Ryazantsev, 2016).

In 2016, the largest number of migrants came from Tajikistan — about 700,000 people. Most migrants, as in the 2020s, worked in trade (24%), construction (20%), agriculture (12%), and transportation (8%) (Ryazantsev, 2016).

Working conditions were extremely unsatisfactory. Migrants became victims of labor exploitation and human trafficking. They were housed in basements and non-residential premises. However, many of them wanted to stay and work in Russia and obtain permanent residence (48%) (Ryazantsev, 2016).

Labor migrants sent most of their earnings to their families back home. For example, \$7.9 billion was sent in personal transfers to Uzbekistan, \$3.9 billion to Tajikistan, and \$2.1 billion to Kyrgyzstan (Figure 6) (Ryazantsev, 2016). This indicates an uninterrupted connection between migrants and home and a desire to return.



**Figure 6. Remittances to Central Asian Countries**  
(Source: World Bank, as cited in Ryazantsev, 2016)

This trend has not changed over the decade: according to World Bank estimates, remittances from migrants form a critically important share of GDP in the region's countries: 45% in Tajikistan (the highest rate in the world), 24% in Kyrgyzstan, and 14% in Uzbekistan (World Bank, 2025; Jalolova, 2025).

## 5. Conclusion

During this research, countries such as South Korea, the United States, and Germany were identified as potential destinations for labor migration by Central Asian citizens (ScanMarket Agency, 2026). Moreover, more than half of the migrants who participated in the Scanmarket survey would prefer to stay in their own country and work in domestic enterprises (ScanMarket Agency, 2026). For a more thorough study of the topic, current labor migration data was compared with data from ten years ago (Ryazantsev, 2016), which revealed both unchanging aspects of migration (including mentality and the maintenance of financial remittances to the homeland) and changes caused by innovations in migration policy and the economic situation in the Central Asian countries themselves.

The study also revealed that the number of labor migrants to Russia is indeed influenced by the level of economic growth in the countries of origin, the mentality and cultural values of Central Asian citizens, as well as the tightening of migration legislation, which confirms the proposed hypotheses. World Bank data shows GDP growth in Central Asian countries: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan — and Central Asia remains the fastest-growing subregion in the world (World Bank, 2025; Aliakbarova, 2026). At the same time, there is a decline in the flow of labor migration from these countries to Russia (Asiaplustj.info, 2026; Shustov, 2026). The economies of Central Asian countries are growing, reducing unemployment as more high-paying jobs become available (News of Kyrgyzstan, 2026). An additional stop factor is the tightening of migration legislation, including the introduction of digital registration and additional quotas for

vacancies most popular among labor migrants (taxis, delivery services, service sector) (Shustov, 2026). The mentality of Central Asian citizens is based on the values of collectivism, care for family and the older generation, so a significant portion of migrants' earnings is sent home, often at the expense of their own personal needs (Bedrina & Lazareva, 2021; EURAC Research, 2024). This behavioral factor has remained unchanged for labor migrants for decades (Ryazantsev, 2016; World Bank, 2025).

The obtained data indicate significant variability in migration orientations and signs of changing attitudes in the 2020s (ScanMarket Agency, 2026). Labor migration from Central Asia is undergoing a qualitative transformation: from the dominance of the Russian direction to a multi-country model, and overall — to a revision of the inevitability of migration as the sole strategy for life development (ScanMarket Agency, 2026; Ryazantsev, 2016).

Major drawbacks or limitations of the study include the sampling frame, which was drawn exclusively from migrants already residing in Moscow, and the geographical scope limited to the Russian context (ScanMarket Agency, 2026). Future scope should broaden the geographical scope of the study by conducting surveys with potential migrants in Central Asia and with those who have successfully migrated to alternative destinations like Germany or South Korea. Longitudinal studies that track the intentions of migrants over time would also be valuable. This research work allows us to draw conclusions about the trends in labor migration from Central Asia (the most popular destination for Russia) over the past 10 years, which makes it possible to analyze the positive and negative aspects of migration's impact on the country's economy due to the emergence of new trends. Moreover, this work can be used for future comparisons of labor migration data in several years to determine development directions and build predictive models.

### **Acknowledgments**

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