



UNITED NATIONS  
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



UNIVERSITY  
OF CENTRAL ASIA

# DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE LONG-TERM EVIDENCE-BASED MIGRATION POLICY FOR THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

POLICY BRIEF | MAY 2019

## Migration and the 2030 Agenda

1 NO POVERTY



Migration can be an effective poverty reduction tool for migrants and their families and can make significant contributions to development efforts in both countries of origin and destination

2 ZERO HUNGER



Food insecurity can be a driver of migration for individuals and their families

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Addressing the health and well-being of migrants is a precondition for social and economic development

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



Education can facilitate migrant children's socio-economic integration and improve their livelihoods as adults

5 GENDER EQUALITY



Migration can be a source of empowerment for women and girls, but they can also be especially vulnerable to violence, sexual abuse and exploitation

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



Water scarcity and related issues may impact on living standards, food availability and health which in turn can be drivers of migration

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



Inexpensive and alternative energy solutions can benefit vulnerable or displaced communities with limited or no access to electricity

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Decent jobs and safe and secure work environments for migrants are essential if they are to become productive members of society and contribute to economic growth

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Migrants can transfer valuable knowledge and skills to their countries of origin and destination, helping to support technology development, research and innovation

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



Effective migration governance is vital for safer, more orderly and regular migration



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Migrants help cities to thrive and become more vibrant, successful centres of economy and life

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



Promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns can help to protect migrant workers from exploitation

13 CLIMATE ACTION



Migration can be a potential climate change adaptation strategy and a way to build resilience

14 LIFE BELOW WATER



Combating marine and coastal ecosystem degradation and diversifying the livelihoods of communities that are dependent on marine resources can help address forced displacement and migration

15 LIFE ON LAND



Deforestation, land degradation, desertification and biodiversity loss can have profound impacts on communities whose livelihoods rely on natural resources and can be drivers of migration

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



Stronger, more transparent and accountable institutions and improved access to justice can help to protect and promote migrants' rights

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Timely, reliable and comparable data on migration can help policy makers devise evidence-based policies and plans to address the migration aspects of the SDGs



## CURRENT SITUATION AND TRENDS

Internal and external migration has been a characteristic feature of the country's development for the last 25-30 years. In recent years there has been an intense internal migration from rural regions and small towns to urban centers with a developed infrastructure such as Bishkek, Osh and Jalal-Abad. The highest inflow of internal migrants is observed in the Chui region, the lowest in the Naryn and Batken regions.

According to the report of the State Migration Service under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, in 2017 over 700,000 citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic were labour migrants, of which the majority were in the Russian Federation. The accession of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 significantly influenced the growth in the number of workers migrating from Kyrgyzstan to Russia: from 526,000 people in 2014 to about 665,000 people in 2017. It has also led to a decrease in the number of re-entry banned migrants to the Russian Federation, which is estimated to be 83,000 people in 2017 compared to 118,000 people in 2016.

According to the World Bank, in the last several years remittances of Kyrgyzstani labour migrants have been progressively increasing. In 2018 they made up to 35% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP, making the Republic the second country with the highest contribution of remittances to GDP in the world. These remittances are an important contributor to

poverty reduction in the country, as observed for the last 10-15 years. The outflow of labour from Kyrgyzstan also results in wage growth for workers remaining in Kyrgyzstan, which has increased faster than the country's economic growth.

In regards to how migrants' remittances are being spent, the money sent to families in Kyrgyzstan allows them to invest in real estate, thereby stimulating employment in the construction industry. However, the investments, including in agriculture and food processing sectors, are minimal with over 90 percent of remittances spent on primary needs, whereas much smaller shares go to savings and investments in rural areas.

Almost 40% of Kyrgyz migrants to Russia are women. Migrant women work primarily in the service sector, catering, textiles, and as domestic workers. Majority of women migrants work in the informal employment sector for more than 10 hours a day and have limited access to social protection services. Women migrants are often facing multiple forms of discrimination and stigma in the country of origin and destination and become vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence.

Parents of more than 61,000 children are working abroad and most of them are outside of the country. This has serious adverse implications for the children and families with migrating parents. The decision to leave children behind in the care of relatives is made because migrating parents perceive migration as unsafe for their family since they are not sure whether their children will be safe in the destination country, able to receive schooling and have access to medical and other social services.

Only 52% of Kyrgyzstani citizens working in the Russian Federation are fluent in Russian. The remaining 48% face difficulties in finding decent jobs, including due to the lack of language skills.

Migrants face a lot of challenges during the migration process and on return, some of which are related to health. As per the latest statistics, 45% of registered cases of active tuberculosis in medical institutions of the Kyrgyz Republic are migrant returnees. It is just as important to mention that emerging challenges of migrants in obtaining medical insurance became the main reason for migrants experiencing health problems.

The question of pension provision for migrant workers is a looming one since, despite their pension contributions in destination countries, no actual savings are made as in most cases there are no bilateral agreements on social security between countries of origin and destination. Besides challenges with employment, there are other external factors affecting migrants' well-being abroad. According to the study of the Search for Common Ground

and Royal United Services Institute on understanding the factors contributing to radicalization among Central Asian migrant workers in Russia, there is some evidence of

structural factors within the process of labour migration leading to marginalization, exclusion and alienation. These are caused by the administrative and legal challenges of the migration process, economic exploitation, and the migration discourse shifts toward an emphasis on security, which constitute drivers that can be exploited by violent extremist entities.

In 2018, the average age of the population in Kyrgyzstan amounted to 27.5 years making it the second youngest population in Central Asia, after Tajikistan, while the number of economically active population in Kyrgyzstan reached 2,547,400, which accounts for 40.6% of the total population. In regards to age-determination of migrants working abroad, according to statistics 60.46% of total number of migrants are young people aged between 15 and 29 years.

## STATE POLICY IN THE FIELD OF MIGRATION REGULATION

The National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic, adopted in 2018 for the period 2018-2040, notes the importance of addressing migration issues. According to the adopted National Strategy in the Field of External Migration, the government will create opportunities to diversify the geography of labour migration, not limited to the labour markets of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan; it will make efforts to assist citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in increasing their competitiveness and ensure legal and economic protection in the destination country. In addition to improving the well-being of the population through job creation, the Strategy focuses on revising the substantive foundations of migration policies to preserve the ethnocultural identity of migrant workers and organizing the process of voluntary resettlement of the ethnic Kyrgyz to the Kyrgyz Republic based on the principles of promoting the socio-economic development of regions and solving demographic problems, and also improving the institution of granting immigrant status for foreign citizens who arrived in the Kyrgyz Republic for the purpose of permanent residence and who are able to make an economic, cultural, and scientific contribution to the Kyrgyz Republic. The Strategy also notes the importance of creating the necessary conditions for migrant workers to invest their earnings in the economy of the Kyrgyz Republic, promising areas of production to learn from and apply the experience of other countries in creating new industries and enterprises in Kyrgyzstan.

The developmental program of the Kyrgyz Republic "Unity. Trust. Creation" for the period 2018-2022 includes a component on migration policy within ensuring economic well-being of the people, which places an emphasis on the creation of better conditions for ensuring the rights and interests of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic and foreign citizens in the migration process, and creates conditions for labour employment, providing quality public services in the field of labour and labour migration, and achieving gender justice.



On March 24, 2018, the Law “On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Kyrgyz Republic” came into force. The amendments to the law are designed to protect the national labour market from the influx of low-skilled foreign labor to ensure the rights of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic to meet labour market demand in the Kyrgyz Republic.

According to the presidential decree, within the framework of the Mekendeshter Forum of Compatriots, the Council for Relations with Compatriots Abroad will be established under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and administered by the State Migration Service, which will be appointed as the secretariat. The main priority in the work of the State Migration Service will be given to the development of the concept of a migration policy, as well as to the development of plans and mechanisms for its implementation.

Last time the concept of the State Migration Policy was adopted was in 2004 and it was valid until 2010. Since then, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic has raised the issue of creating a new migration policy.

A large number of regulatory legal acts in the field of migration and related processes gives rise to the opinion that without a single document, the state migration policy of Kyrgyzstan cannot be effective enough; therefore, in order to prevent fragmentation of legislation in this area, streamline the regulatory framework, ensure consistency and compactness of issues in regulating migration processes, the government should consider elaborating a single evidence-based migration policy document.

Certain challenges faced by both migrants and the Government of Kyrgyzstan have been constant over the past years and to date. Despite the fact that certain mechanisms for managing and regulating migration exist, they remain insufficient.

Among the challenges, it is also important to note the lack of mechanisms for the integration of immigrants, as well as tools for the reintegration of returned migrants, which subsequently negatively affects the psychological and economic state of the migrants themselves, as well as their families.

Other challenges and gaps in regulation of migration that need to be addressed are lack of employment opportunities with decent wages within Kyrgyzstan becoming the main reason of the migration outflow, and lack of common vision on how to turn migration processes for the benefit of the country’s development. On the other hand, misconceptions have developed related to the role of migration in the framework of development and migrants have been usually perceived as only breadwinners. Because of these misconceptions, the needs of migrants, especially those who are returning to the country, remain unaddressed and misunderstood. Lack of understanding of migrants’ needs both leaving the country and returning from destination countries leads to lack of shared perspectives regarding the problems confronting the country today and growing challenges which need to be overcome through effective policy response.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Set up the national dialogue** in order to enhance the importance of and the relevance of discussions on development of a holistic migration strategy, which will contribute to developing a common vision, improving coordination and enhancing the understanding of complexity of migration and needs of migrants at the Government level with the involvement of civil society.
- **Develop a national system for collecting comprehensive migration data** to form the necessary policies such as migration policy and national action plans to respond on migration issues.
- **Conduct comprehensive research on migration** by national institutions in order to develop evidence-based policies on migration both external and internal, which will include all migration pillars and all population groups affected by migration. This research should also include a deep analysis of the current state on regulating migration issues in Kyrgyzstan and of its key indicators; comprehensively and systematically cover all aspects of migration, its root causes; and inform all relevant types of policies – economic, social, cultural, security etc.
- **Elaborate and implement a strategy for improving migration data**, as the need in comprehensive migration data arises, at the local and national levels with the participation of all relevant stakeholders by strengthening analysis and dissemination of migration-related data and indicators.
- **Take into account migrant vulnerability** when developing integration and reintegration policies since these programs should be developed in regard to gender specificity, age and etc.
- **Develop flexible, rights-based and gender-responsive labour mobility schemes** for migrants in accordance with national labour market needs and skills supply at all skill levels.
- **Work towards ensuring full participation of migrant workers in the formal economy** by facilitating access to decent work and employment in local and national labour markets and coverage with adequate social protection for vulnerable groups of migrants, including social security and social assistance and by promoting entrepreneurship.
- **Review relevant policies and practices** to ensure that they do not create, exacerbate or unintentionally increase vulnerabilities of migrants, including by applying human rights-based, gender- and disability-responsive, as well as age- and child-sensitive approaches.  
**Conclude bilateral or regional security agreements** on the portability of earned benefits for migrant workers that refer to applicable social security entitlements and provisions such as pensions, health care or other earned benefits in order to address labour migrants' issues on social protection and services.
- **Develop gender-responsive migration policies** to address particular needs and vulnerabilities of migrant women, girls and boys, which may include assistance, health care, psychological, referral, life skill and other counselling and social services;
- **Consider economic, social, cultural and environmental issues when developing migration-related policies** and programmes. Incorporate the health needs of migrants into national healthcare policies and strengthen capacities for social protection and social services provision facilitating affordable and non-discriminatory access for both migrants and their families.
- **Facilitate sustainable reintegration of returning migrants** into community life by providing them with equal access to productive and social services, including social protection, to fully build upon their entrepreneurial skills and human capital in order to contribute to their empowerment as active members of society and contributors to sustainable development in the country upon return.
- **Develop and adopt an inclusive rural finance model to address the issue of rural migration** through the complementary funding to help migrant families with their small and medium scale rural investment projects. A program for Attracting Remittances into the Economy (such as Pare 1+1), helping to create and expand micro, small and medium enterprises in rural areas would foster rural development and local economic growth through agriculture, agri-food sector employment and off-farm activities.
- **Include provisions on the needs of returning migrants'** communities in Kyrgyzstan in national and local development strategies and other relevant policy decisions through cooperation with local authorities and relevant stakeholders.
- **Closely coordinate all migration-related policy measures** with other Government policies to account for the central role of labour migration and remittances in the social and economic development of Kyrgyzstan, including fiscal, monetary, exchange rate, foreign trade and other relevant economic and social policies.
- **Mainstream into migration policy systemic legal awareness raising activities** and digital literacy among youth in Kyrgyzstan, as well as diaspora structures, places of residence of Kyrgyz migrants and students studying abroad to prevent committing of crimes and/or being recruited by violent ideologies  
**Further improve legal aid assistance abroad to Kyrgyz migrants** who have fallen into difficult life situations (e.g. those who have been convicted or charged of crimes, including on violent extremism related cases, protecting of rights of Kyrgyz citizens in penitentiary institutions, etc.