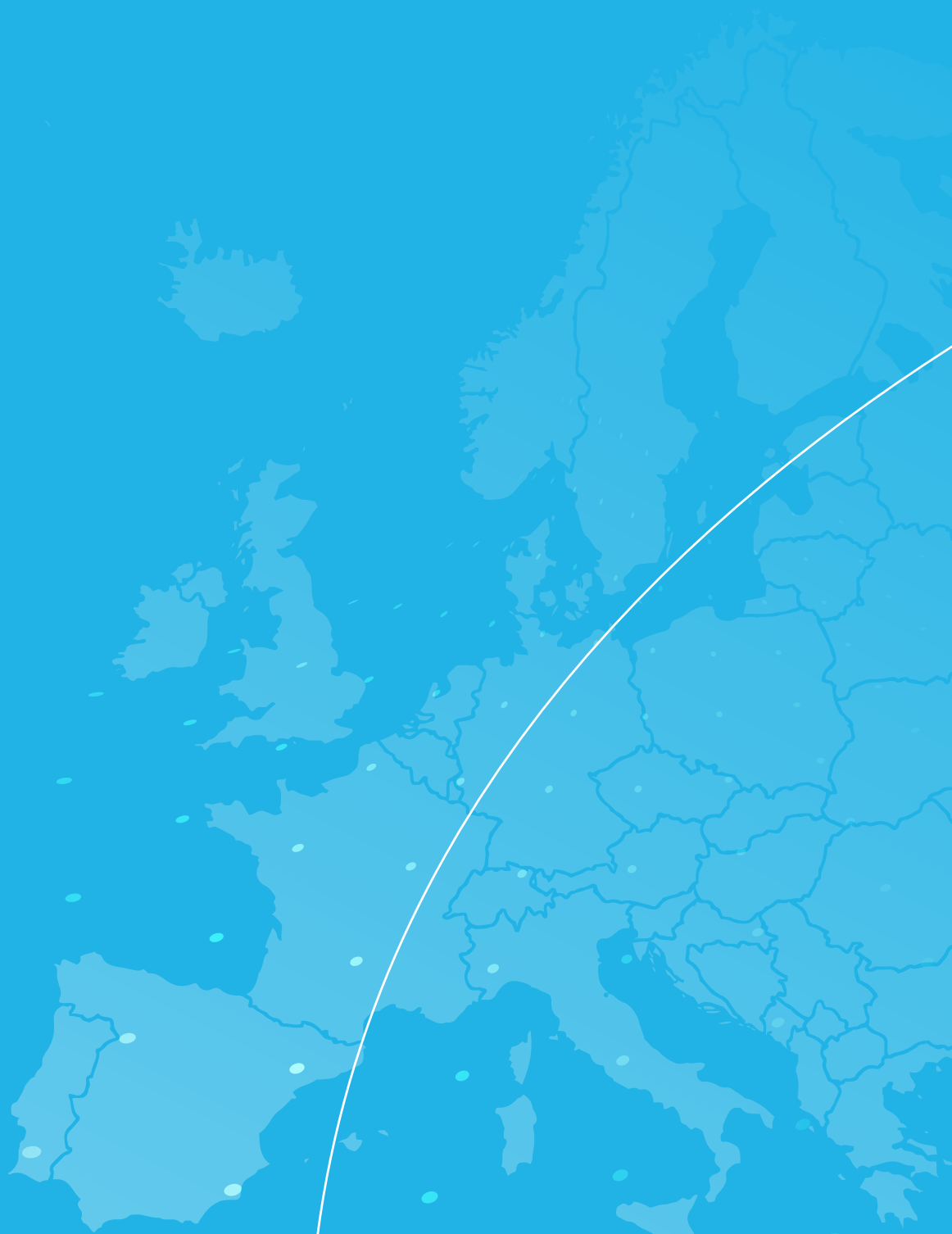


EUROPE AS A NEW VECTOR FOR KYRGYZ MIGRANTS IN RUSSIA:

an Assessment of Routes of the Kyrgyz Labour
Migrants in Russia Travelling to Europe





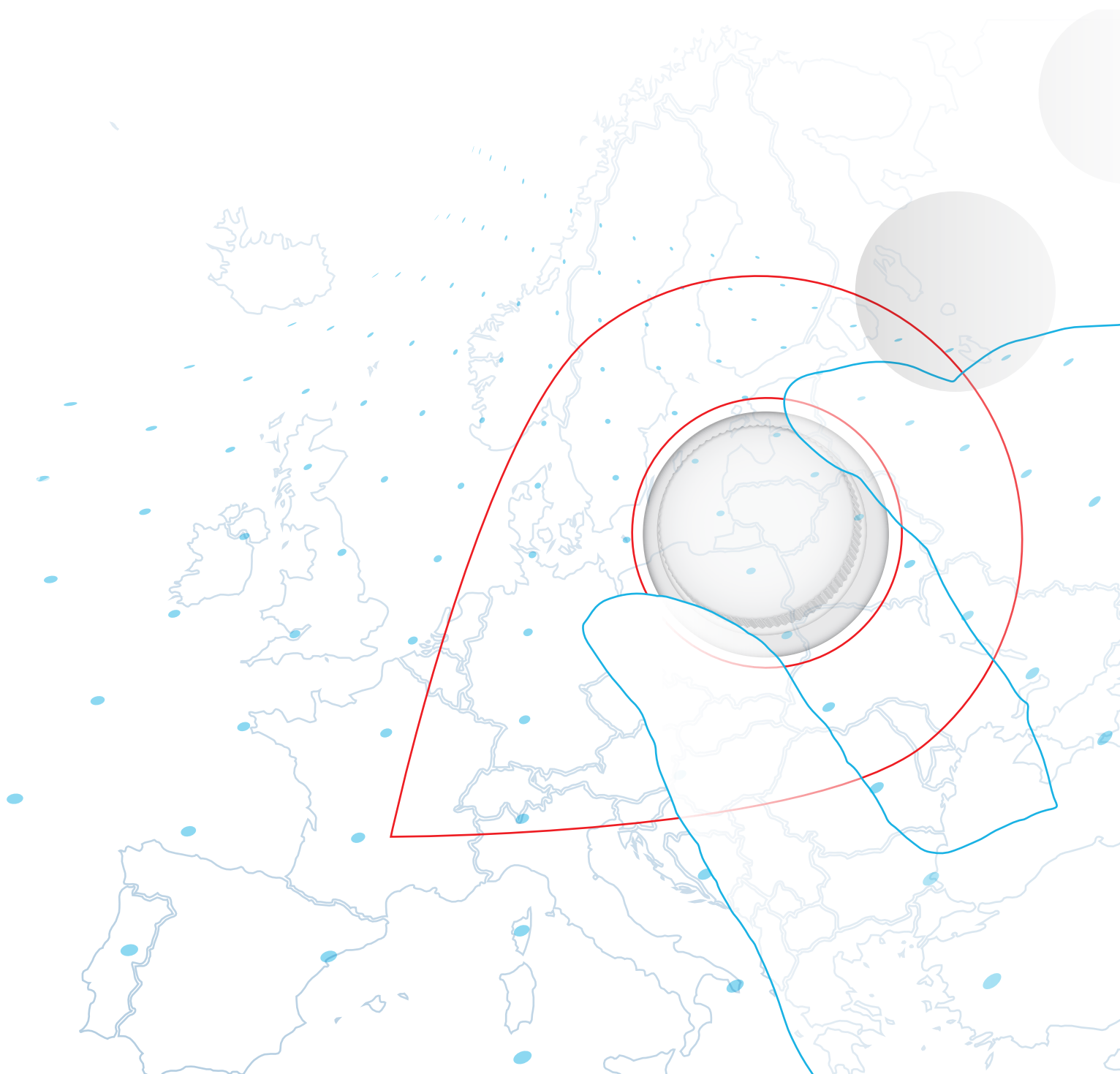
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BACKGROUND

Over the past three decades, Central Asian migrants have survived multiple crises. They have evolved from the most vulnerable segment of the population into one of the most adaptable groups that can cope with challenging situations, whether in the economy, politics or even war-related consequences. Moreover, migrants not only effectively integrate into the local system, but also build their own space, connections and institutions that help them to effectively address multiple legal and regulatory conflicts.

Contrary to negative forecasts that predicted a crisis of labour migration in Russia due to the special military operation in Ukraine, it has not only decreased, but rather retains the same intensity and remittance volumes. CA Countries are making attempts to institutionalise labour flows to Russia at their national levels achieving varying progress. Moreover, the migrants themselves have different interests. Some migrants obtain Russian citizenship, while others stay in Russia for purely economic reasons. So far, Russia, where millions of labour migrants from almost every Central Asian country enter every year, continues to remain in first place, outpacing other countries by a considerable gap. No new labour markets can yet replace the Russian market for migrants from Central Asia due to complexities in document and visa acquisition, lack of language skills; and a new cultural environment further hinders this process.

However, according to surveys conducted among labour migrants, Russia is losing its former attractiveness, despite the fact that migration level remains high. Only a decade ago it could be hardly envisaged that hundreds of thousands of labour migrants from Central Asia would go for work to other countries rather than to Russia. Today, this is already a reality, and the role of the Russian market will continue to decline. The Russian authorities are increasingly active in combating the influx of Central Asia labour migrants into the country, despite the growing shortage of workers in the country. The fight against migrants is conducted through strict laws and growing anti-migrant and xenophobic attitudes in the society. This became particularly aggravated after the terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall,¹ which was followed by mass raids, border checks and work bans in a number of sectors. The economic attractiveness of the Russian market was already declining against the background of international sanctions after the start of the SWO (special military operation) in Ukraine, and coupled with new legislative restrictions, this forced migrant



workers from Kyrgyzstan to look for other labour migration destinations; and they manage it well.

According to a comprehensive sociological study of migration trends in Central Asia conducted by the Solidarity Centre in 2024, Germany, Turkey, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan are among the top 5 most attractive countries for migrants currently working in Russia.² European countries are among the most attractive destinations for labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, especially for those seeking new opportunities after the events in Russia.

¹ On 22 March 2024, a terrorist attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall killed at least 145 people, injured more than 550, with over 1,700 others recognised as victims in the case. The suspects were citizens of Tajikistan from the radical group Viloyat Khorasan.

² Solidarity Centre

MIGRATION IN KYRGYZSTAN



Labour migration has for many years remained a tool to maintain well-being for the majority of families in Kyrgyzstan. According to the National Statistical Committee, the total population of Kyrgyzstan in 2022 was 6,936,200 people. Of the total population, 1,094,500 people were 'temporary absent' (labour migrants) from their permanent place of residence, or about 16% of the total permanent population in the country and 28% of the working-age population.³ The largest number of temporarily absent persons was observed in Batken, Jalal-Abad and Talas regions (more than 20% of the total number, or 40% and above of the working-age population).

A total of 1,094,500 people temporarily absent from their place of permanent residence reported in the census, 964,600 or 88.1 per cent were absent for work reasons; 77,400 or 7.1 per cent for family reasons; 41,400 or 3.8 per cent for study; and 11,100 or 1.0 per cent for other reasons.⁴

Of the total number of those who were reported temporarily absent, 876,900 or 80 per cent migrated out of the country; while 217,600 or 20 per cent migrated within the country. The majority of those who migrated outside the country - 872,900 or 99.5 per cent moved to CIS countries, and 4,000 or 0.5 per cent - to non-CIS countries. Russia (870,300 people), Kazakhstan (2,200 people), and Turkey (1,800 people) appear to be the most favoured countries of stay for the temporary absent population. These figures do not adequately reflect the real labour migration, as the calculations are based on persons staying abroad for up to 1 year.⁵

Russia hosts a significant number of temporary labour migrants from our country. Multiple factors influence significant labour flows to Russia. On the one hand, common 'push-out' factors, including production decline, low wages, high level of poverty, unemployment, and surplus of labour, have caused migration of a significant workforce in the migrant workers' countries of origin. On the other hand, Russia offers 'pull' factors: a large labour market, a developing economy, the need for workers in many sectors and regions, high wages, a better quality of life, and a more accessible linguistic environment (Russian language).

Currently, the majority of migrants to Russia are low-skilled workers from rural areas or small towns who struggle with employment and low income challenges (Figure 1).⁶

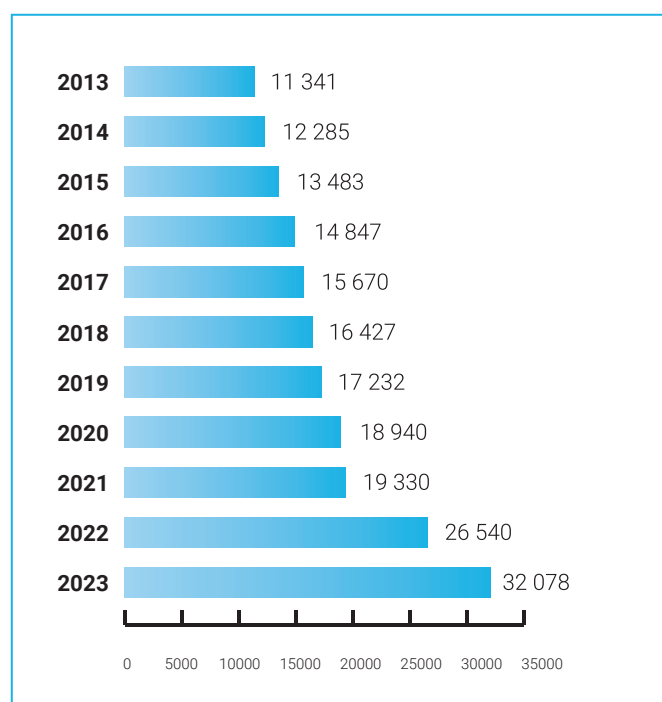
The most important reason for external migration in the

Kyrgyz Republic is the increase in poverty.⁷ One of the factors in reducing poverty in Kyrgyzstan are remittances of migrants. The impact of migrants' remittances on their welfare developed a traditional perception of remittances as a contribution to the economy. Because of remittances, migrant households are better off than households with no migrant workers, which on average account for more than half of the total household income of migrants. In the Kyrgyz Republic, the share of remittances in GDP was over 21 per cent in 2023.⁸

⁷ The National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023

⁸ World Bank Migration and Development Analytical Review, 2023. https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/publication-doc/migration_and_development_brief_38_june_2023_0.pdf

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARY IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC IN 2013-2023, KGS



³ According to the 2022 census data. <https://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/d029839d-b662-42f1-bf1a-3eaa751331d6.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ According to the 2022 census data in Kyrgyzstan. <https://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/d029839d-b662-42f1-bf1a-3eaa751331d6.pdf>

⁶ The data of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2023

CHANGING MIGRATION TRENDS IN KYRGYZSTAN



COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on migrant workers, along with geopolitical developments in EECA, have noticeably deteriorated the remittance-dependent economy of Kyrgyzstan.

International sanctions against Russia in response to the onset of war with Ukraine, for example, have reduced the monthly income level of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan to Russia by as much as 29%;⁹ the ruble devaluation; and forced return migration primarily among the men owing to the announced military mobilisation have affected the poverty level in the country. It has maintained a high rate of 33 per cent over the last 2 years (Figure 2).

For the first time in many years, the number of registered migrant arrivals to Russia in long-term international migration in the first three quarters of 2023 was 412,000 with a significant decrease (by more than 20%) compared to the same period in 2022, when 524,000 arrivals were registered. At the same time, in the first three quarters of 2023, the number of registered arrivals from all CIS countries except Turkmenistan¹⁰ decreased compared to the same period in 2022.

⁹ The impact of economic sanctions against Russia on the labour rights of migrants from Kyrgyzstan 2022, Insan-Leylek Public Foundation https://kyrgyzstan.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/ru_sanction_impact_on_imigrants.pdf

¹⁰ INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TRENDS IN RUSSIA IN QUARTER I-III, 2023, Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy, file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/tendentsii-mezhdunarodnoy-migratsii-naseleniya-v-rossii-za-i-iii-kvartaly-2023-goda%20(1).pdf

The reason for this change was due to several very critical factors:

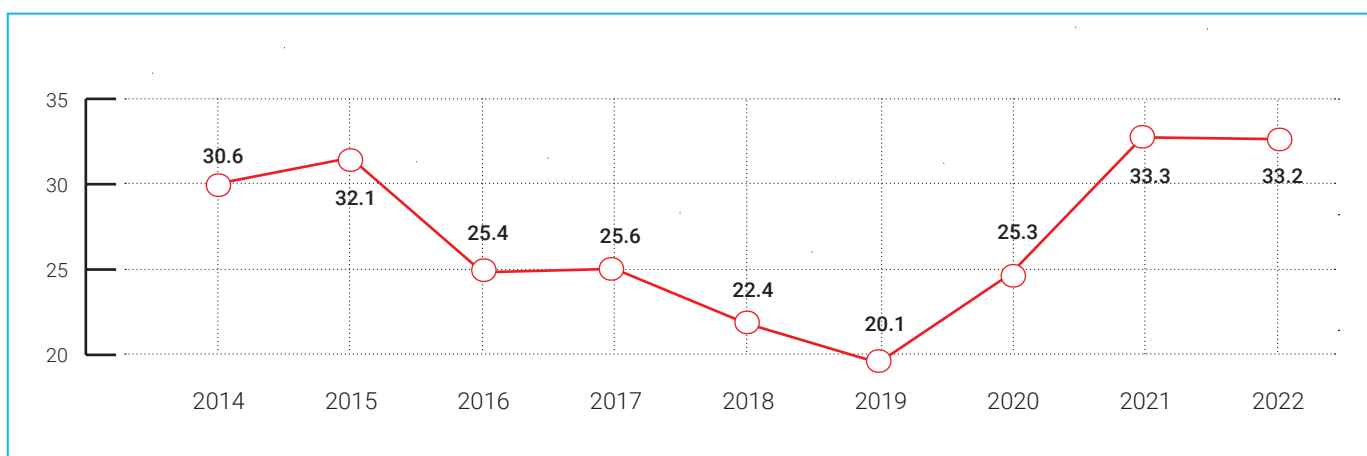
1. Sanctions and Economic Crisis

A series of economic sanctions imposed by a number of countries in response to the military aggression against Ukraine has had a significant impact on Russia's domestic economy. Thousands of international companies employing large numbers of Central Asian migrants have also left the Russian market, with their employees taking unpaid leave. Migrant workers were the first to be affected by the crisis, with 34% of them experiencing a significant drop in remittances, while some had to return home due to a lack of job. The economic crisis in Russia caused a significant escalation of labour rights violations among migrants, with high rates of mass layoffs, wage delays, wage non-payment, idle time, etc. All these factors exacerbated the situation of migrants and their families.¹¹ This was particularly true for migrants who remained in Russia illegally due to complicated migration registration procedures.

The status of irregular migrants makes them vulnerable and unprotected from illegal behaviour of unscrupulous employers. It is often a matter of fraudulent employers who do not take into account the established quotas and try to use the labour force without labour contracts. This results in serious violations of

¹¹ Insan-Leylek PF study: 'The impact of economic sanctions against the Russian Federation on the situation of labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan', p. 36.

FIGURE 2. POVERTY RATE IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC, 2012-2022, %.



fundamental rights, including restriction of freedom of movement, non-payment of remuneration, living in poor conditions, beatings, insults, humiliation, and etc. Untimely payment of wages or non-payment of the initially agreed amount are the most frequent cases. Over the years, all of the above-mentioned issues forced labour migrants to renounce their original countries' passports and obtain Russian citizenship.

2. Military Mobilisation, Recruiting Migrant Workers into the War in Ukraine

Apart from the economic crisis, the reduced number of migrants from Kyrgyzstan was also caused by Russia's military policy due to the war in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Russian authorities have been conducting full-scale campaigns to recruit foreign mercenaries, including among labour migrants from Central Asia.

Research has revealed repeated attempts of the Russian authorities to recruit migrant workers from Central Asia to participate in combat operations, including recruiters visiting mosques and staff at migration centres offering foreigners service in the Russian army. The Russian authorities set up a range of incentives to recruit migrants to their armed forces. They offer, for instance, a lump-sum payment of USD \$2,390 in ruble equivalent and a salary of up to USD \$4,160 per month (in rubles). In addition, Russia amended the law on accelerated admission to Russian citizenship for those who have signed a contract to serve in the Russian army. Certainly, high salaries and the possibility of accelerated acquisition of Russian citizenship may interest a lot of migrants who found themselves in a difficult life situation after the war.¹² Added to that, according to the new law adopted by the Russian State Duma on July 31, 2024, new Russian citizens shall immediately enroll in the military register.¹³ According to statistics, this law is aimed primarily at Central Asians, who dominated among applicants for Russian citizenship in recent years.

3. Tightening Russian Migration Policy towards Labour Migrants

In recent years, Russia has initiated measures to develop clear rules regarding registration of migrants, issuance of residence and work permits, transition to e-services in this sphere, entry regulation of foreign citizens infected with 'hazardous diseases' into the Russian Federation and their rehabilitation, combating crime, etc.

Moreover, it should be noted that even though the Kyrgyz Republic is a member of the EAEU, Kyrgyz citizens staying in Russia experience certain challenges. Recent changes in

migration law adopted in the Russian Federation have actually complicated their circumstances. The terrorist attack on March 22 in Moscow, killing hundreds of people, had particularly impacted the tightening of migration policy. The group of terrorists appeared to be primarily citizens of Tajikistan, with one national holding a Kyrgyz passport among them. The terrorist attack and its media coverage led to an increase in xenophobic and anti-migrant sentiments in Russia. Thus, clients refused to travel with ethnic Tajik drivers because of their nationality. Anti-migrant police raids took place in a number of cities, and violence against migrants increased across the country. In major cities, anti-migrant operations were held, with mass arrests and deportations of migrants who lack the right to stay in Russia. Flights from CA countries were delayed at major airports, stringent document checks were carried out, and passengers could not depart home for several days. More than a dozen Russian regions have imposed restrictions on migrants to work in certain sectors, such as taxi and freight transport services, agriculture and others.

The increasing activity of Russian Community and Northern Man nationalist organisations, promoting anti-migrant attitudes on social media and demonstrating their 'raids' on migrant workers place of work and stay locations, is of particular concern. For example, a large anti-migrant raid on a construction site in Ekaterinburg in January 2024, involving FSB, Russian Guard, Interior Ministry and prosecutor's office staff, as well as members of the local Russian community. It was the 'community members' who posted a video of the raid on their channel, showing the workers at the construction site forced to walk in a file under law enforcement supervision. This caused a public outcry, and the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry (three of the workers in the video were Kyrgyz citizens) responded, describing the Russian law enforcement officers' methods a degrading treatment.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Russian politicians propose to introduce various measures to tighten the stay of migrants, ranging from a digital migrant profile, which would impose total control over their movements, to a ban on their entry with their families. In July 2024, the State Duma passed in the second reading the draft law 'On conditions of entry (exit) and stay (residence) of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation'. It is a huge document containing a number of absolutely impossible restrictions, in particular:

- The RF MIA plans to issue migrants an ID document in Russia in lieu of their national passports. This document shall be universal and contain all migrant details and his/her status in Russia;

¹² 'The impact of military mobilisation in Russia on labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan', 2023, Insan-Leylek PF, https://kyrgyzstan.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/_RU_war_impact_on_imigrants.pdf

¹³ BBC Article, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/cv2gx42ypngo>

¹⁴ BBC Article of June 7, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/cxrrd7x0353o>

- A migrant entering the country for more than 30 days in a year will be obliged to sign a 'loyalty agreement to Russia' committing to respect the laws and 'national traditions and customs of the peoples of Russia' (no list of those is available);
- Any police officer will have the right to place migrants in a 'controlled regime of stay -'expulsion' in case of any violation of the law by him or her or by others against that migrant. In other words, a migrant will not be allowed to leave the place of his registration without prior permission from a district police officer;
- Employers will now not be allowed to officially employ a migrant. They will have to obtain permission to hire each individual migrant for each individual vacancy by placing vacancies with requirements for citizenship in a special e-register, and each separate vacancy shall be approved;
- The draft law provides for arbitrary bans on entry into Russia without a prior court order.

Currently, the State Duma of Russia is working on a bill that would make it mandatory to test the Russian language skills of migrants to enroll in primary or secondary schools. That means a migrant child who fails to pass the test may not receive a school education in Russia at all.¹⁵ In our opinion, this initiative will lead to the isolation of children of labour migrants, increase juvenile delinquency and create risks of child labour exploitation instead of effectively integrating them into the Russian community. Measures taken by the Russian authorities to restrict the entry and work of the CA labour migrants contradict the current labour market in Russia, experiencing a severe shortage of human resources. According to the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the labour force shortage in Russia in 2023 amounted to more than 4.8 million people¹⁶ and has already become a factor hampering the national economy growth. All these changes impacted migration trends among Kyrgyzstan citizens, making European countries the most favourable for employment. For this reason, studying labour migrants' position in Europe is of particular relevance nowadays.

¹⁵ Parlamentskaya Gazeta, June 28, 2024,

¹⁶ Akhapkin N.Y. 'Russian economy under sanctions restrictions: dynamics and structural changes', p. 22, . <https://vestnik-ieran.ru/index.php/component/jdownloads/send/19-2023-n6-articles/136-vart-2023-6-p7-25>

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the study was to explore changes in migration trends among migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Russia, with a focus on European destinations. The study also aimed at identifying which EU countries they are travelling to and which channels they use, and what difficulties they encounter on the way and in the country of destination.

Objectives of the study:

1. Analyse 1) the reasons for the labour diversification of Kyrgyz migrants in Russia and 2) to identify the routes and channels used by Kyrgyz migrants in Russia travelling to Europe;
2. Identify the main problems faced by Kyrgyz labour migrants when looking for work in Russia and EU countries.
3. Measure these migrants' access to safe migration services provided by the state and non-governmental organisations;
4. Identify the major economic sectors to employ Kyrgyz migrants in Europe;
5. Assess their current needs and expectations;
6. Develop recommendations for state agencies to develop plans to mitigate and prevent violations of labour rights of the Kyrgyz migrants in Russia when travelling to Europe.

A total of 157 active labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Europe participated. 8 representatives of PEAs. The team also interviewed Mr Omurbek Chirkeshovich Tekebaev, the Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to Germany.

Period of empirical data collection: March-July 2024.

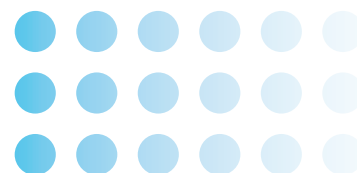
Information collection tools:

1. Desk study: assessing the migration situation in Kyrgyzstan and host countries, changes in migration trends. Current studies assessing the status of labour migrants from Central Asia in Russia and Europe were also reviewed. Special emphasis was given to the activities of local and international PEAs.
2. An online survey of labour migrants who, among others, were in labour migration in Russia and left for labour migration to European countries following the outbreak of war in Ukraine. The survey covered 149 people.
3. The survey was conducted by means of an online Google form. To identify compatriots abroad, members of Kyrgyz diaspora organisations in Russia and Europe (Kyrgyz Birimdigi, Migrant Trade Union in Russia, Danaker in Poland), Kyrgyz Embassies and Consulates in Europe, social media



- and groups (KyrgyzClub-Germany), as well as personal contacts were involved. Participants received a link to answer a short questionnaire within 5-10 minutes by clicking on it.
4. 2 focus group discussions with 5-8 respondents in labour migration in Europe (the study team visited Berlin to conduct focus group and in-depth interviews). They were also included among the online interviewees. During the discussion, participants had the opportunity to share their personal opinions, experiences and knowledge about their migration route, outlining their major achievements, obstacles and challenges in preparation for migration, during the migration journey and after arrival in countries of destination.
5. The study team also conducted interviews with representatives of 5 local PEAs to find out the conditions offered to Kyrgyz migrants wishing to work in Europe, to understand the recruitment process, the most popular destinations for migrants and the industries they work in, as well as the achievements and failures/challenges they face in their daily work.
6. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted involving migrants deceived by private agencies, suffering from labour rights violations, as well as successful EU migration cases. A total of 8 migrants participated in in-depth interviews of maximum 20 minutes each.

RESPONDENTS' GENERAL INFORMATION



This survey totaled 157 respondents (8 took part in the IDI; 149 in the online survey and in the FGD). Of these, 135 were in Europe during the study. 61% of the total number of respondents were previously in labour migration in Russia.

Online Questionnaire Findings

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 149 people were questioned via google forms. Male and female respondents were almost equal in number: 56 per cent of men and 44 per cent of women.

The survey involved current migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in Hungary (28 per cent), Italy (22 per cent), Germany (17 per cent), Poland (16 per cent) and Slovakia (10 per cent), Lithuania (3 per cent) and Bulgaria (3 per cent). The interviewees represented different age categories ranging between 21 and 55 years of age.

Young people prevailed in the survey, most of them aged 20 to 29 - 32 per cent, and aged 30 to 39 - 32 per cent. This could indicate that young people more easily migrate to new countries compared to older people due to their greater flexibility, mobility and ability to settle in a new place and learn new languages. It is worth noting that language skills are almost the main criterion for labour migration to some European countries. While labour migration flows generally consist of young men, the number of women among migrants has increased. Young

men and women are equally likely to leave for labour migration, with young girls (19%) prevailing in the 20-29 age group, compared to boys (13%). These are mainly students who go for seasonal work in the summer period. However, men (25 per cent) prevail in the age group from 30 to 39 years compared to women (only 7 per cent).



Aigerim, 21 years old, IDI: "I study at the Kyrgyz-German Institute in KSTU named after I. Razzakov. Every year I come to Germany for summer work... I have been studying German for three years now. It is a good opportunity for me to improve my language skills and also to earn good money to pay my contract at the university... Germany has always been a big dream for me."

Given the mindset of the Kyrgyz society, male migrants tend to leave for long-term labour migration once they build up their families. Wives often stay with their parents-in-law. However, women (14 per cent) prevail in the age group from 40 to 49 years old, mostly working in the domestic sector with high labour demand in all European countries. In particular, women are employed as housekeepers or caregivers to look after the elderly and seriously ill people.

The average age of respondents was 31 years. This suggests that this study represents mainly the views of young labour migrants in Europe.

FIGURE 3. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENTS, %

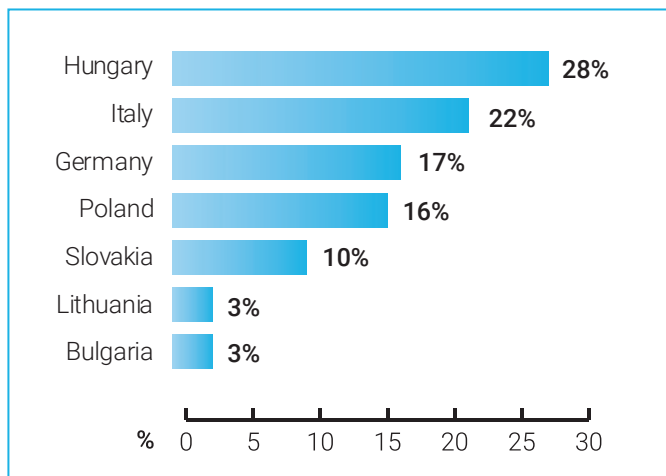


FIGURE 4. PARTICIPANTS DISAGGREGATED BY AGE AND SEX, %

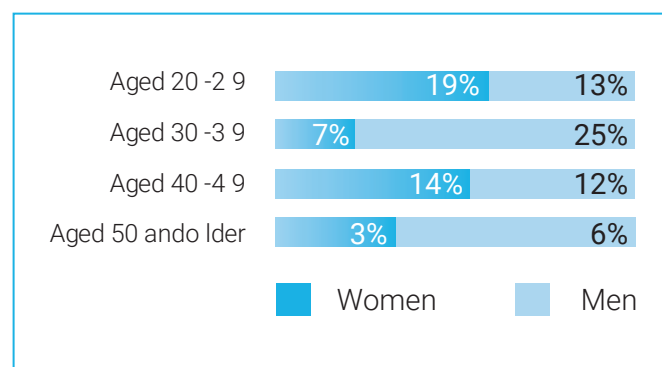
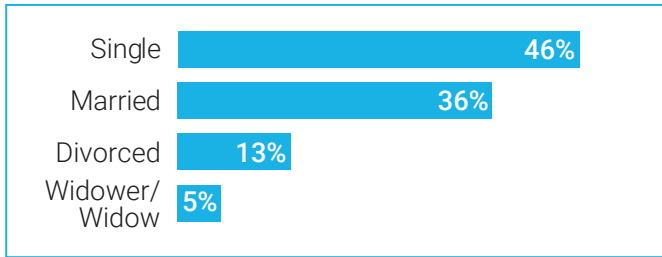


FIGURE 5. FAMILY STATUS OF RESPONDENTS, %



The majority of the respondents (46%) have families; only 16% of them responded that they left for labour migration 'with husband/wife' or 'with husband/wife and children'.



Aibek, a 31-year-old FGD participant, stated. "I have been working in Hungary for about 5 months now. Unfortunately, it is not possible to bring my family here yet. We have little children. But here we live in a hostel of our employer. They don't accommodate families. And renting a flat on our own is expensive, we can't afford it."



Mukaram, 41, an FGD participant, said. "I got a job as a caregiver in Palermo (Italy) two years ago. I am here on my own. I was invited by my friend who has been living and working here for more than 10 years... I can't go home yet because we bought a flat in Bishkek in mortgage... My husband is a second category disabled person, and my children go to school..."

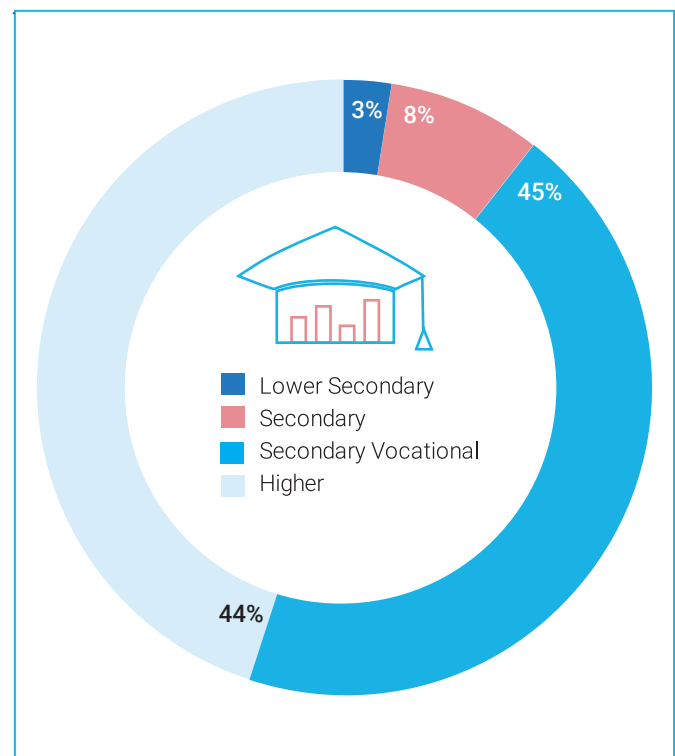
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

The educational background of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan is relatively high. 45 per cent of respondents have higher education; 44 per cent have secondary vocational education; 8 per cent have secondary education, and 3 per cent have a lower secondary education. The majority of educated migrants are employed in low-skilled positions, as evidenced by the data of FGDs and in-depth interviews, despite the high numbers of well-educated migrants.

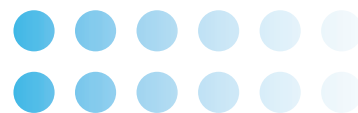


Zhibek, 30 years old: "I graduated from the Faculty of International Relations at KNU named after J. Balasagyn. While in the university, I studied foreign languages in depth, with a focus on English. Thanks to my proficiency in English, I worked as a consultant in a brand clothing shop for a very long time in Poland. Unfortunately, my profession is not very much in demand here. At the moment I work in a real estate agency as a realtor. Now I speak Polish fluently as well."

FIGURE 6. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS, %



MIGRATION EXPERIENCE



Employment Sectors

Most migrants participating in this study are employed in the transportation sector - 19% (truck drivers, taxi and bus drivers, etc.); industry - 14% (factories, industrial enterprises); catering - 12% (cafes, restaurants, bistros, etc.); private employment - 11% (caregivers, babysitters, housekeepers, etc.); trade - 11% (salespeople, cashiers, shop consultants, etc.); agriculture - 9%; services - 9%; further, in descending order, healthcare, construction, IT and others.

Migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, especially among men, are most employed in cargo companies, industrial enterprises, agriculture, logistics facilities as loaders, packers, labellers, etc. Whereas women are more employed in catering, trade and domestic sector.



Mairambek, 41: "When the special military operation in Ukraine started and the sanctions were imposed, our earnings in Russia decreased significantly. I was working there as a driver in a cargo transport firm. I was even going to apply for Russian citizenship. But then I decided that there was no point for me to stay in Russia: continuous checks, frequent changes in migration rules, and raids. There

(in Moscow) I submitted an application to a private employment agency, and they helped me find a job in Lithuania. Now I am a tractor driver. I travel all over Europe. I can't complain about my earnings. And most importantly, nobody disturbs me."

61% of the total number of respondents had previously been in labour migration in Russia. Respondents had an average of 2 years experience in labour migration.



Kyimat, 27 years old: "I went to Russia to earn money together with my mother right after finishing school... During 7 years I worked in different places. I can say I know all the hardships and thorny path of a labour migrant... In 2023, because of the sanctions, we both lost our jobs.... Being aware of the situation there (in Russia), my mother and I decided to go to another country to earn money, and on the Internet, we saw 'Come and work in Hungary' ads. With a Russian PEA support, we came to Hungary and at the moment we are working in the LIDL hypermarket in Budapest.

FIGURE 7. EMPLOYMENT OF MIGRANT PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY, %..

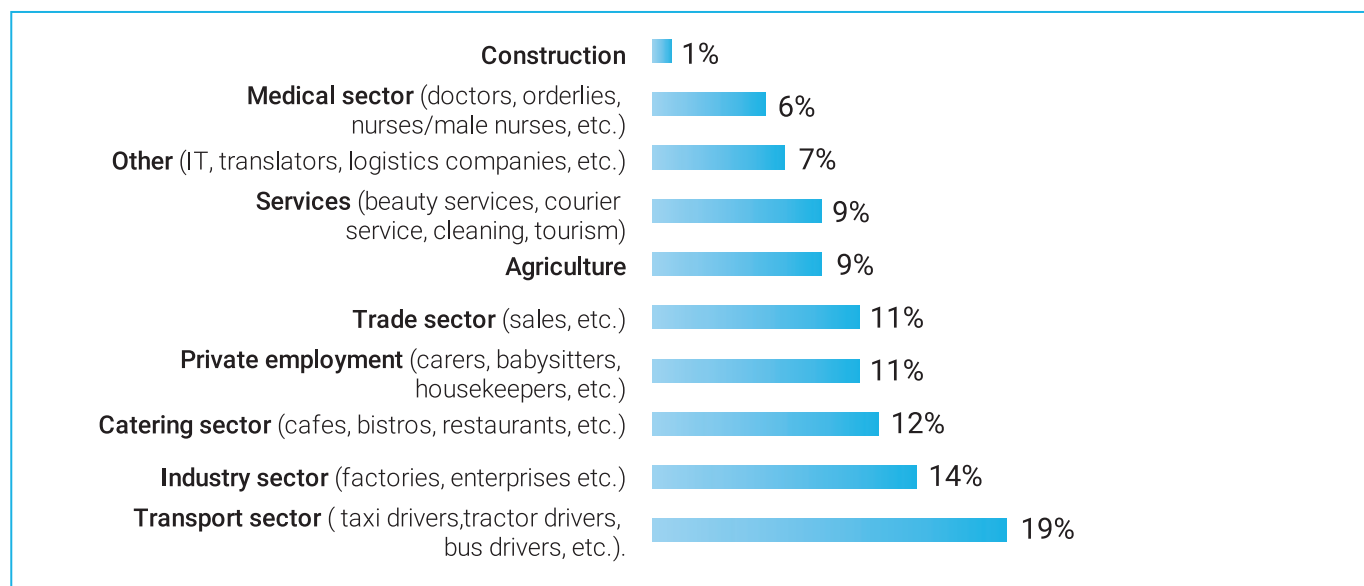
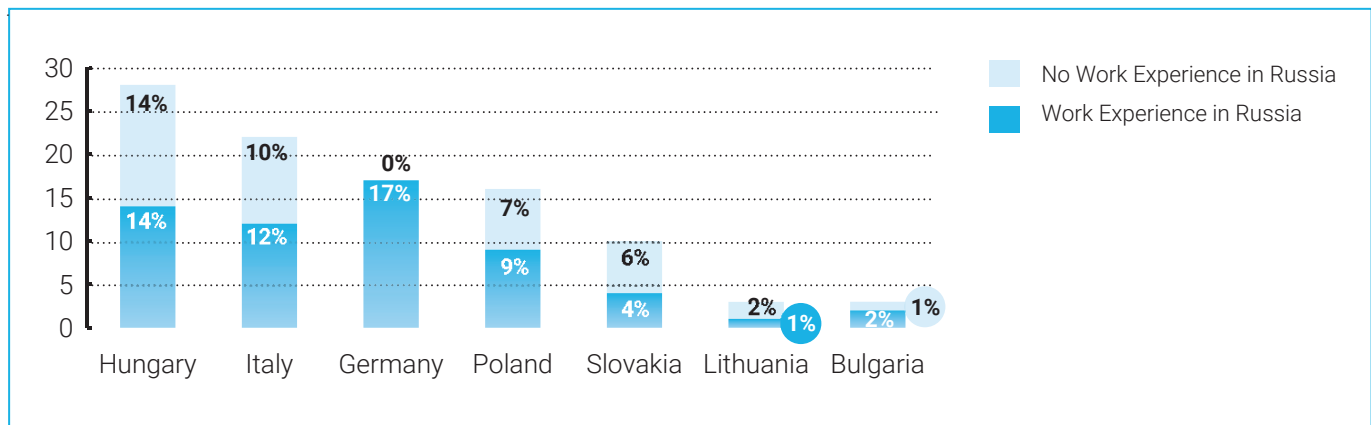


FIGURE 8. WORK EXPERIENCE IN RUSSIA AMONG RESPONDENTS CURRENTLY WORKING IN EUROPE, %



Employment Geography

According to our survey, most Kyrgyz migrants from Russia travelled to the following European countries: 14% going to Hungary; 12% going to Italy; 9% going to Poland; 4% going to Slovakia; 1% going to Lithuania; and 2% going to Bulgaria. No respondents in Germany had worked in Russia (see Figure 8). This is likely because until recently it was impossible to enter Germany without language skills and professional education.

Germany is one of the most popular destinations for labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan. In 2023 alone, 2,118 people went to Germany for work, mostly with PEAs support. Labour migrants in Germany accounted for 17% of all respondents in our survey, among them young people from 20 to 30 years of age prevail (94%). Most of them are students and recent university graduates with language skills.

The survey participants explain their desire to find a job particularly in Germany because of favourable working conditions (73%), high standard of living (59%), security and stability (47%), and an appropriate ratio of salaries to the cost of living in the country (47%).

The largest number of respondents to this survey were in Hungary. Hungary is increasingly gaining popularity among migrant workers, since in 2022, Kyrgyz citizens were allowed to obtain work visas under a simplified procedure. According to Sándor Dorogi, the Hungarian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, one can only apply for a work visa through the PEAs licensed by the CECA in the country.¹⁷



Adylbek, 24 years old: "I am a veterinarian. I graduated from the Kyrgyz Agrarian University named after K.I.Skryabin in 2022 and decided to go abroad to gain experience in my profession and earn some money. I studied German for several years. This year, I worked on a farm in Germany, in Bavaria, in a small village called Konzenberg, located in the Borge province. I worked on a small livestock farm. I was responsible for 300 head of cattle, in particular, for feeding, milking and taking care of them. This experience was valuable for me: I learnt how to operate large livestock farms, their quality standards, best practices and technologies. I generally consider the treatment of workers in Germany very favourable. All labour conditions were clearly agreed upon, and any unforeseen situations were discussed and paid according to the agreement."



Narmat, 55 years old: "I have 30 years of experience as a driver of light and heavy vehicles... I have worked in Russia as a taxi driver for more than 6 years, before that I worked together with my wife in Turkey in a big hotel. Migrants from Central Asia have been treated very badly there (in Russia) in recent times. Therefore, last year I went to work in Bratislava (Slovakia) through PEA. I am (now) a driver of public transport - a bus driver. I like the work. Knowledge of the language is not required... The language is a bit like Russian, so it's easy to understand the locals. They pay pretty well. So for the time being, I want to stay here..."

¹⁷ JK KR Website, <https://old.kenesh.kg/ru/fraction-article/1/1767/show/kirgiz-respublikasinin-zhogorku-keneshinin-ata-zhurt-kirgizstan-parlament-tik-fraktsiyasinin-deputati-ulan-primov-vengriyanin-kirgiz-respublikasindagi-atayin-zhana-iygarim-ukuktuu-elchisi-shandor-dorogi-menen-zholugushtu>



Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, in the media and social media demand stricter regulation of PEAs' activities at the legislative level. Raids and inspections by the CECA and law enforcement agencies are becoming more frequent.

FGD participant, PEA representative: "... We always talk only about the PEA liability, that employs a person at the enterprise, especially when some problem arises (in the country of destination) ... But I want to draw your attention to the responsibility of citizens themselves. After all, often, especially young guys, once they get there, they do not comply with the terms of the labour contract, they are regularly late for work, and the work is not done because of them... Then their parents start calling us and complaining that they have paid so much, and now their child is fired."

MIGRATION CHANNELS

The migrants surveyed mainly entered the European labour market through Kyrgyz PEAs - 59%; the CECA - 20%, through foreign PEAs - 14%, and independently - 13%. Foreign PEAs mean agencies that are not registered in Kyrgyzstan. According to respondents' answers, these are primarily Russian, Ukrainian and Kazakh PEAs.

On average, PEAs charge between KGS 45,000 and KGS 55,000 (Figure 10) to employ migrants in Europe. This amount does not include airfare, insurance, visa fees and any incidental expenses. In fact, migrants themselves pay for these expenses. Therefore, it is not a cheap treat to fly to Europe to work. Of those interviewed, every third respondent reported that they borrowed money to pay for all the costs mentioned above (credit, loan, etc.). Among FGD and IDI participants there are persons who became victims of unscrupulous PEAs. Increased facts of deceiving potential labour migrants are of particular concern to both the national authorities and civil society. It is particularly difficult to monitor foreign PEAs that are not accredited by the authorised national agency and are not registered in the Kyrgyz Republic. Precisely this prevents law enforcement agencies from achieving a fair investigation of persons who, after accepting money, did not fulfil their obligations. Payment for the services of PEAs far exceeds 50% of a migrant's monthly wage, violating international standards of migrant employment. Frequent facts of deceit of potential labour migrants have changed public attitude towards PEAs in the Kyrgyz Republic. Currently, more and more people at the meetings of the Jogorku

FIGURE 9. EMPLOYMENT CHANNELS FOR KYRGYZ PEOPLE IN EUROPE, %

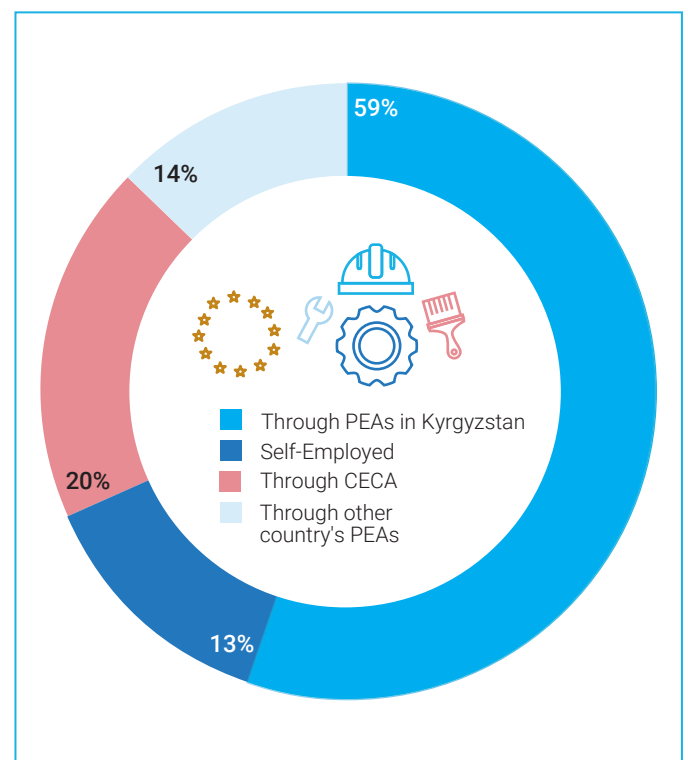


FIGURE 10. AVERAGE FINANCIAL COSTS OF MIGRANTS PEA SERVICES (EXCLUDING TRANSPORT, VISA FEES AND INSURANCE), %

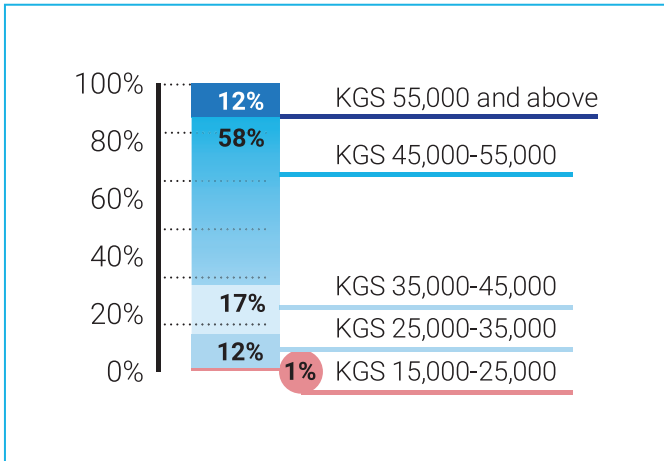
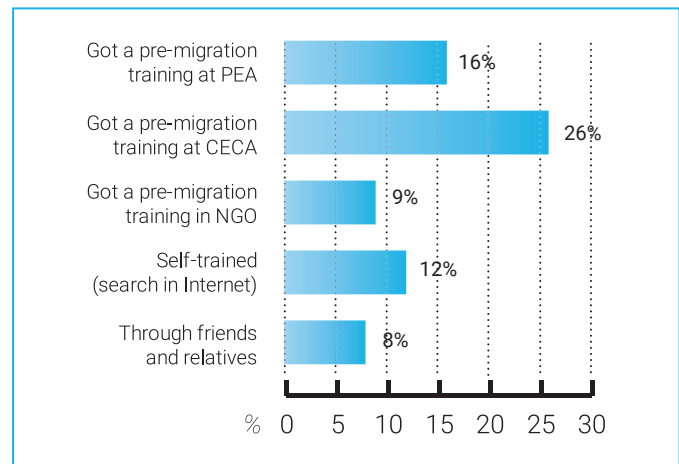


FIGURE 11. PRE-MIGRATION TRAINING FOR RESPONDENTS, %



FGD participant, PEA representative: "... Sometimes they come, make arrangements for (our company) to find a job, and at the same time they go to another agency with the same request. And when you have already done all the work, found an employer, prepared all the documents..., the applicant refuses and demands a refund, because the other company has already found him a job earlier."

However, PEAs are not responsible for all difficulties faced by applicants. For example, PEAs cannot guarantee a visa to be issued or the time it takes to receive a visa, as it is outside their competence. Another thing that job seekers need to learn is how to identify signs of fraud on behalf of obscure consulting firms or recruitment agencies that actively advertise their services on the Internet.



FGD participant, PEA representative: "... inappropriate actions of some firms (PEAs) in the market negatively affect other PEAs that fulfil their obligations to jobseekers in good faith..."



FGD participant, PEA representative: "... We do not want our company's reputation to be tarnished, so we try to solve the problems and challenges of the jobseekers we have sent to work. ... if they lose their job, we try to find them another one, with no extra fees... if a person ends up on the street, for whatever reason, we try to help them through consulates, diasporas, etc. ... we always stay in contact with the applicant..."

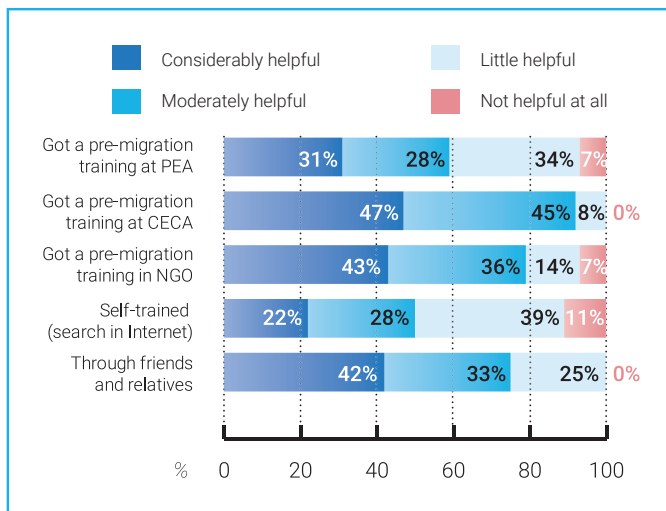
Interview participant, PEA representative: "Unfortunately, our citizens keep being deceived by fraudulent firms they find on the internet. They are lured by large salaries of over 2-3 thousand euros, free accommodation and relocation. Our migrants cannot get such salaries there. (The firms) promise them a work visa as soon as possible... The duration of the visa obtaining process is beyond our control... However, these firms rush people to pay for their services as soon as possible, saying that they will not start their work until the advance payment is transferred... You should not fall for such tricks."

PREPARING FOR MIGRATION

71% of respondents believe that they made purposeful preparations for labour migration. Of this number, 26 per cent received pre-migration training at the CECA; 16 per cent at PEA; 12 per cent searched for information on the Internet; 8 per cent at NGOs and 8 per cent through relatives and friends.

Pre-migration training provided by the CECA - 47%, NGOs - 43%, PEAs - 31% proved to be the most useful and effective (Figure 12). According to the respondents, self-preparation through internet resources was the least effective - 39% felt that it was not helpful enough, and 11% said that it was not helpful at all.

FIGURE 12. SATISFACTION WITH PRE-MIGRATION TRAINING, %

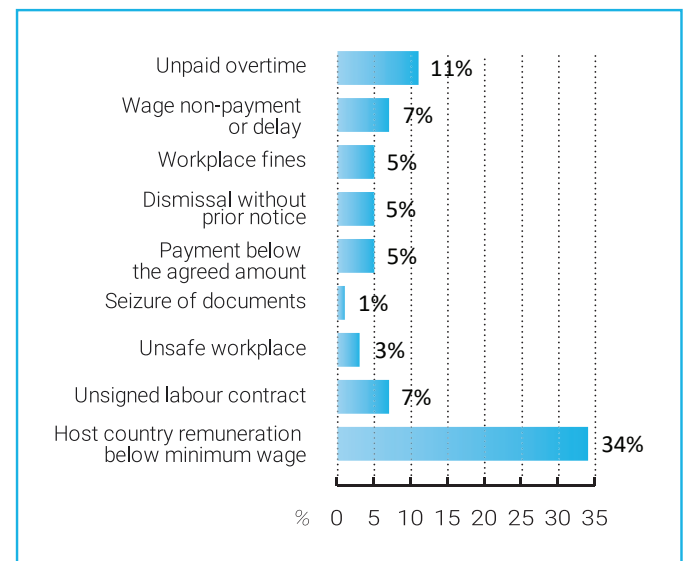


LABOUR RIGHTS SITUATION

While employers in European countries have a fairly high commitment to labour standards, violations of migrants' labour rights are still occurring, especially among irregular migrants.

According to our survey, 93% of respondents claim that they have a labour contract with their employer, while 7% do not. The latter attribute this to the fact that they are staying in Europe illegally. 75% of the respondents stated that they were 'satisfied with their working conditions', while 25% 'would like to improve them'. Only 34% of all interviewed respondents believe that they have experienced violations of labour rights. According to the respondents, salaries below the minimum wage set in the country are the most frequent type of offence - 34%. Different countries have different laws and the minimum wage may not apply to some categories of workers. The other

FIGURE 13. LABOUR OFFENCES EXPERIENCED BY RESPONDENTS IN EUROPE, %



offences include unpaid overtime work - 11%; fines at the workplace - 7%; failure to pay or delay of wages; payment below the agreed amount and dismissal without notice or compensation - 5% each; failure to comply with safety conditions at the workplace - 3%; and confiscation of ID documents - 1% (Figure 13).



Mr. Tekebaev O.Ch., Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Germany: "In the last 2 years, we have not received any appeals to the Embassy regarding serious violations of



labour rights of the Kyrgyz citizens. Firstly, this is due to the fact that most of the people who come to Germany are highly qualified specialists who can solve their own problems. Secondly, employers here are highly serious about compliance with the migration law requirements."

22% of the survey participants live in Italy, with a prevalence of domestic workers (84%). Italy is characterised by a high rate of ageing population across Europe. It was 24.3 per cent¹⁸ in 2024 alone. Italy is attractive for Kyrgyz people because this country does not have high requirements for 'domestic' positions: age between 18 and 63; no bad habits; good physical and psychological health; and, of course, good housekeeping skills, honesty and integrity.

Most migrants from Kyrgyzstan come to Italy on a tourist visa, find a job and stay in the country even after the visa has expired. The lack of data on labour migrant sent through PEAs and the CECA also testifies to this fact. There are tens of thousands of irregular migrants working in domestic sector in Italy. The risk of deportation is not particularly high. If there are no complaints about a particular person from another country, the authorities turn a blind eye to migrant's labour activities.



Ayimkan, 56: "I worked as a maths teacher in Kara-Balta town for over 20 years, but I was not satisfied with my salary... I came to Italy 3 years ago on a tourist visa and stayed here. I work mainly as a caregiver for elderly people. I am paid good money - around 800 - 1000 euros a month, accommodation and food are provided. They will not hire me as a teacher here, as my diploma is not recognised here. But I love living and working here."

People who take care of the elderly and seriously ill people are called 'badante' in Italy. There is also such a term as 'colf' - housekeeper. They are mostly women over 35 years old, many of them do not speak the language and are not aware of their labour rights upon arrival. Unscrupulous employers take advantage of these migrant women's vulnerability and may deceive them.



Ayimkan, 56: "Since I don't have a work permit, I have never signed a labour contract. Everything is negotiated verbally...I have been cheated many times...Once I worked for a woman for a month, taking care of her elderly father 24/7. At the end of the month, she cut my salary by 50 per cent (500 euros instead of 1000), allegedly for repairing a washing machine that I had broken."

According to Italian law, even when babysitters and caregivers live in the employer's home, the working day cannot be longer than 10 hours. Work above 10 hours a day should be paid at a different rate, and only if the worker agrees to this work. Most of women in these jobs are paid less than the minimum wage, are subject to illegal dismissals, discrimination and other labour rights violations.



Gulnara, 51 years old: "Some people are lucky to have workdays that look like a holiday. Others complain that they have to work 24/7, do not sleep at night and suffer humiliation. People in old age are very demanding and moody. Many families try to burden their caregivers with all household chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, pet care, but they don't want to pay much."

Violations of labour rights occur not only in Italy, but in Germany as well. Migrants in agriculture have experienced situations when they were paid less than the agreed amount.



Azizbek, 26: "In Germany I worked on a horticultural farm growing apples. I went there through PEA. They told me that I would be paid 1,000 euros a month, have free accommodation and food. But in fact, the employer deducted from this amount 270 euros for accommodation, 200 euros for food, and in winter deducted 50 euros for heating each month. I decided to write an application to the labour inspectorate myself. The labour inspectorate found

¹⁸ Source Statista <https://www.statista.com/statistics/785104/elderly-population-in-italy/>

several violations of my labour rights: I was paid less than the minimum monthly wage, I worked more than the agreed time. And there was illegal underpayment of my wage. However, the process of considering my complaint took more than 1 year. The Labour Inspectorate obliged my former employer to pay me the remaining amount of more than 5 thousand euros. I was only refunded 2 thousand euros. I am still waiting for the remaining amount.”

Kyrgyz labour migrants in Hungary also face problems. Some workers coming to Hungary are hired through so-called temporary employment agencies (munkaerő kölcsönző). This type of finding the job, while in many ways contributing to employment in Hungary, often leads to complicated and difficult-to-understand labour relations. Therefore, it is very important to clearly understand what they are and who are the key parties. Temporary work through employment agencies is a form of employment whereby a worker is employed by an employment agency that sends workers temporarily to work for third-party companies. Employers sort of ‘rent workers’ from these employment agencies. Thus, there are three actors involved in this process: the worker, the employment agency and the company-employer. In case of employment through an agency providing temporary work, it becomes difficult to understand who exactly the employer is, all sorts of problems that may arise; and it is hard to identify whether the company-employer or the agency should be approached. For example, in May 2024, 200 migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan who had recently arrived in Hungary lost their jobs and did not receive any compensations due to dismissal without notice. They worked in a factory owned by SK On Hungary, a subsidiary of South Korea’s SK Group. The workers paid several thousand euros each to an employment agency to work in Hungary. The workers say they took loans to pay for their services. However, the workers were denied to issue migration documents legalising their status in the country.

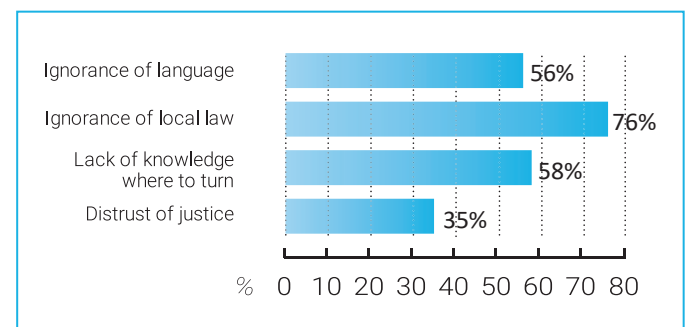


Sabirzhan, 33: “I got a job through a firm in Kyrgyzstan at a factory assembling vehicle batteries in Hungary. I paid KGS 65,000 to the firm (PEA) to get a legal job in Europe. But at the moment I have been for 4 months in Hungary. We agreed that the employer would solve the issue of obtaining a residence permit. My visa has expired two months ago, but I have not received my residence permit. A week ago, we were fired from the factory together with hundreds of other Kyrgyz people. We are staying in their dormitory for the time being. Where shall we go if they ask us to leave? If we go back now, they will find out that we have been staying illegally for two months and we will be blacklisted. That’s what the firms have pushed us into.”

SK On Hungary responded that it had temporary contracts with employment agencies, and there were no actual layoffs. According to them, the company merely ‘terminated the lease of approximately 600 foreign workers.’ The company argues that it did not hire the workers but ‘rented them’ and therefore severance payments cannot be recovered. Migrant workers employed by recruitment agencies in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia face the same issue.

Only half of the 34% of respondents who think they have experienced labour rights violations have sought help or advice. The following reasons for not seeking help were given: lack of language skills of the host country - 56%; lack of knowledge of the host country law - 76%; lack of knowledge of where to turn - 58%; and 35% do not believe that their problem can be resolved (Figure 14).

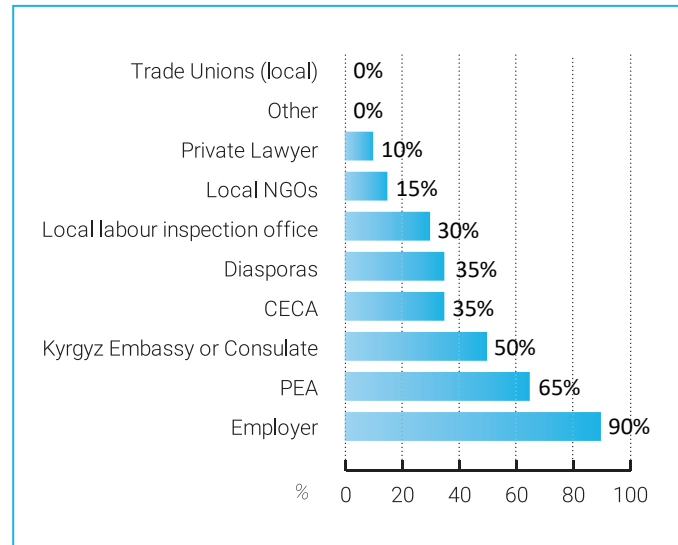
FIGURE 14. REASONS FOR RESPONDENTS NOT SEEKING HELP OR ADVICE IN CASE OF THEIR LABOUR RIGHTS VIOLATION, %



Those who sought help or advice, first turn to the employer to solve the issue - 90%; PEA - 65%; Embassies and Consulates - 50%; CECA - 35%; diaspora organisations - 35%; local labour inspectorate only 30%; and others (Figure 15).

Satisfaction with the advice and assistance received varies by the agency they applied to (Figure 16). The services of a private lawyer are noted to be more effective - 60%. This is due to the fact that lawyers perform their services for money, they are located directly in this country and they are well familiar with the laws. The CECA takes the second place - 35% of satisfaction. It is explained by the fact that the CECA clearly outlines the working conditions prior to signing the organised recruitment agreement, which facilitates the negotiations. 25 per cent of respondents managed to protect their interests with employers through direct negotiations. Satisfaction with the Embassy and Consulate assistance, as well as diaspora organisations, 25% each, and PEA and the local labour inspectorate support 20% each. Unfortunately, trade union organisations proved to be ineffective in protecting the labour rights of our compatriots, as not all of them have the opportunity to join existing trade unions, or they are not available at all in the enterprises where migrant workers are employed.

FIGURE 15. AUTHORITIES WHERE SURVEY RESPONDENTS APPLIED FOR COUNSELLING OR ASSISTANCE, %



Nodira, 32 years old: "The biggest challenge for our labour migrants in Europe is that they think that here, as in Russia, it is impossible to protect their rights, they are afraid to apply because of their illegal status. In fact, in many European countries, government institutions respond quite well to such signals, regardless of the migrant's legal status. Therefore, it is important to prepare migrants in advance, to give them information about institutions to contact, to equip them with some local language skills, and to video and audio record their work..."

NEW LABOUR MARKETS



According to the Kyrgyz Republic Development Programme until 2026, the authorities intend to reduce unemployment from 5.8% to 5%, which they plan to achieve, among other things, through labour migration.

According to official data, more than 1 million citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic are labour migrants. Currently, the second after Russia destination for labour migration from Kyrgyzstan is Turkey, where over 68,000 migrants are working; Kazakhstan - 65,000 labour migrants; the United States - 36,000; European countries - about 37,000; South Korea - 14,000.¹⁹

All CA countries, which used to look at Russia as the main labour market, are trying to diversify labour flows through active efforts. Uzbekistan is leading this trend, achieving increased quotas for the organized labour migrant recruitment to Germany and South Korea to 50,000 and 100,000 people respectively

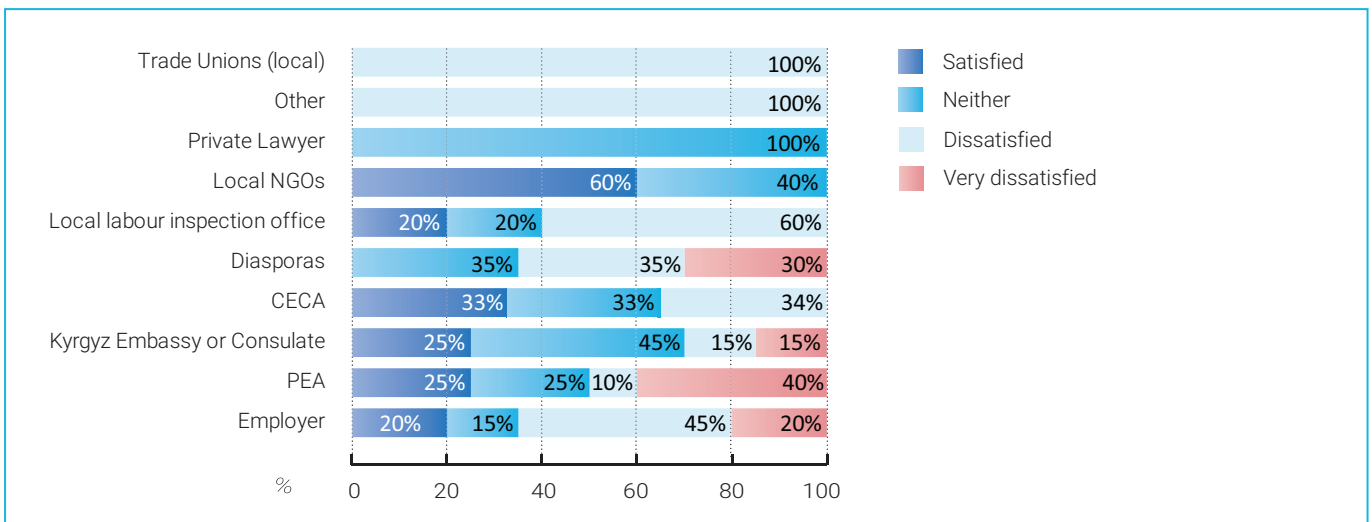
¹⁹ There is no reliable data, these figures are provided by the Embassies and Consulates of the Kyrgyz Republic in the above countries.

only in 2024.²⁰ Recruitment is carried out through the Agency for External Labour Migration in Uzbekistan. They also hold close negotiations with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Canada and other countries. Kyrgyzstan, likewise, is taking active measures to diversify its labour markets. For example, in 2022 and 2023, about 5,000 Kyrgyz nationals worked in the UK alone, while in 2024 their number was more than 8,000. The EU, especially Eastern Europe, is also showing a growing interest in migrants from Central Asia. This is caused by the outflow of their own citizens to work in wealthier Western European countries. In Slovakia, for example, 75 per cent of companies face workforce shortage.²¹ There is demand for migrants from Central Asia in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Bulgaria and

²⁰ <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/02/05/south-korea/>

²¹ Data from the Association of Recruitment Agencies in Slovakia, <https://slovakinfo.sk/novosti-obshhestva/kadrovye-agentstva-slovakii-top-vostrebovannyh-vakansij/>

FIGURE 16. RESPONDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH COUNSELLING OR ASSISTANCE, %.



Hungary. So far, few labour migrants from the region go to these countries - around several hundred to several thousand people. However, labour migrants are becoming more interested and the migration flows are gradually growing.

Migrants from the KR leave for migration more often independently (mainly to Russia). The number of citizens who apply to state institutions to get assistance in employment or use private employment agencies (PEAs) is relatively small. However, Kyrgyz citizens prefer to apply to PEA when travelling to European countries to work.

The Centre for Employment of Citizens Abroad under the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration (MLSSM CECA) is the main state body to promote employment of the Kyrgyz citizens in other countries. The CECA is aimed at assisting citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in getting employment in the external labour market, protecting the rights and legitimate interests of labour migrants abroad and compensating

the expenses for transporting the bodies of Kyrgyz Republic citizens who died outside the country to their home country.

The Centre has been successfully recruiting labour migrants to such countries as the Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, Russia and the United Kingdom, and continues to work towards diversifying labour markets. In 2023 alone, the CECA assisted in employing 5,682 Kyrgyz people, including 5,200 to the UK; 453 to Korea; 24 to Kazakhstan; and 5 to Germany.²²

The CECA is also mandated to regulate the PEAs' activities through issuing permits and monitoring their activities. Recently, the number of PEAs in Kyrgyzstan has sharply increased after the outbreak of war in Ukraine. This is caused by the high demand for PEA services among returning labour migrants from Russia. Currently, in accordance with the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, 170 PEAs provide employment services to citizens in 28 countries around the world.

²² According to 2023 CECA MLSSM data.

TABLE 1. INFORMATION ON EMPLOYED CITIZENS WITH PEA ASSISTANCE*

Destinations		Employment in 2023	Employment in 6 months 2024
		Total	Total
1	Republic of Turkey (Türkiye) (assisted by 59 PEAs)	3,107	3,091
2	Germany (assisted by 19 PEAs)	2,118	810
3	The UK (assisted by 2 PEAs)	2,108	1,244
4	Hungary (assisted by 41 PEAs)	1,545	464
5	Republic of Bulgaria (assisted by 40 PEAs)	1,202	725
6	Russian Federation (assisted by 33 PEAs)	1,167	690
7	UAE (assisted by 19 PEAs)	351	49
8	Republic of Poland (assisted by 36 PEAs)	229	229
9	Republic of Lithuania (assisted by 23 PEAs)	162	242
10	Slovak Republic (assisted by 7 PEAs)	129	248
11	Cruise Liners (assisted by 2 PEAs)	112	56
12	State of Kuwait (assisted by 13 PEAs)	83	16
13	Finland (assisted by 2 PEAs)	51	15
14	State of Qatar (assisted by 21 PEAs)	49	2
15	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (assisted by 10 PEAs)	32	26
16	Japan (assisted by 7 PEAs)	25	3
17	Sultanate of Oman (assisted by 5 PEAs)	10	1
18	Republic of Croatia (assisted by 1 PEA)	6	0
19	Kingdom of Bahrain (assisted by 6 PEAs)	6	3
20	Czech Republic (assisted by 3 PEAs)	3	0
21	Republic of Estonia (assisted by 2 PEAs)	3	3
22	Denmark (1 PEA)	1	0
23	Republic of Belarus (7 PEAs)	0	7
24	Arab Republic of Egypt (1 PEA)	0	0
25	Republic of Serbia (1 PEA)	0	0
Total:		12,549	7,930

* According to 2023 and six months 2024 CECA MLSSM data.

Republic of Turkey, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Bulgaria, Russia and other countries were the main countries of destination for labour migrants through PEAs in 2023 (see Table 1). In total, in 2023, only PEAs in Kyrgyzstan assisted with employment of 12,549 people. This is 2.2 times more labour workers employed by the CECA for the same period (5,862 people). It is also worth noting that, unlike the CECA, PEAs can offer a wider range of countries for employment - 25 countries. The CECA is currently focussing its efforts in 4-5 countries only.

Today, PEAs in Kyrgyzstan became a part of the rapidly changing labour market in Kyrgyzstan, where they act as a catalyst in establishing new forms of human resources services and contribute significantly to improve working conditions. This will continue to be supported by legal amendments, labour migration management reform, agreements and other measures aimed at enhancing migrants' access to legal migration channels.

EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AS A NEW VECTOR

According to surveys, EU countries are listed as the second most attractive destination for migrant workers in Russia who are seeking new labour markets.²³

Migrants in these countries worked in the service sector, construction and freight transportation. There is also data that not all employed migrants via PEAs are included in official statistics, and it is likely that the number of employed migrants may be higher.

According to the German Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt), Germany experienced a significant number of arrivals and departures in 2023. A total of 1.9 million arrivals and 1.3 million departures were recorded. This translated into an official net migration of 662,000 people.²⁴ It is important to remember that many people come to Germany while leaving other European countries. In 2022, net migration was even much higher owing to the 1.1 million registered arrivals of Ukrainian citizens in Germany. In 2022, a total of 20.2 million people with an immigration history lived in Germany. This is 1.2 million or 6.5 per cent more than in the previous year (2021: 19.0 million).²⁵

Due to the ageing population, Germany faces a labour force constraint and relies on migration. Therefore, the German government published the Migration and Development Strategy in 2016. In 2020, Germany changed the rules to simplify labour migration by adopting the Skilled Immigration Act. This law introduces measures to accelerate the recognition of foreign

professional qualifications and simplify administrative procedures. To increase Germany's attractiveness for skilled workers from third countries, the regulations established based on the 2020 Skilled Immigration Act became permanent and were further developed in 2023 through legislative amendments.²⁶ Some of these new rules are as follows:

- There is no longer an obligation for workers who are subject to the formal recognition of their foreign qualifications to initiate this process before coming to Germany. This particularly applies to many professions in the public health and care sector.
- A 'Chancenkarte' similar to the Canadian scoring system has been introduced: employers are allowed to hire foreign workers for up to eight months to meet specific needs. This applies to industries where there is a high demand for labourers.
- More people from non-EU countries (so-called 'third countries') can now work in Germany without formal recognition of professional qualifications obtained abroad. To be eligible, they must have at least two years of work experience and have a professional qualification or higher education that is recognised in their home country.

²⁶ Brief overview of the new Skilled Person Immigration Act, <https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/visa-residence/skilled-immigration-act>



²³ 'The impact of economic sanctions in Russia on the labour rights of migrants' 2022, Insan-Leylek PF

²⁴ German Federal Statistical Office, Migration between Germany and foreign countries, 1950-2023. <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration/Tables/migration-year-01.html>

²⁵ German Federal Statistical Office, Press Release No. 158 of April 20, 2023, https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2023/04/PE23_158_125.html

On top of that, the law provisions allowing highly qualified foreign professionals with a university degree or a recognised qualification diploma to fill vacancies in German companies came into effect on June 1, 2024, along with the current EU Blue Card.

As the minimum wage in Germany has increased from €12 per hour in 2023 to €12.41 per hour in 2024,²⁷ it makes Germany very attractive to migrants from Kyrgyzstan. There is no legally binding migration agreement between Germany and Kyrgyzstan; however, the Kyrgyz government has concluded several memoranda of understanding with a number of German government agencies to facilitate labour migration to Germany. Furthermore, several PEAs such as Janser Consulting, EDUVISO and IWEX actively network between Kyrgyzstan and Germany.

A Kyrgyz citizen may be allowed to work in Germany upon successful completion of vocational education or acquisition of other documents. Training and professional development, work opportunities for students on holidays for a maximum of 90 days (Ferienjob) or internships are also available.

Hungary is another top destination country in Europe for Kyrgyz citizens. Currently, the Centre for Employment of Citizens Abroad under the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration does not conduct organized recruitment of the Kyrgyz citizens for employment in Hungary. It was mostly implemented by PEAs which supported labour migration to Hungary. More than 41 PEAs in the Kyrgyz Republic are licensed to assist Kyrgyz citizens' labour migration to Hungary. Many industries in Hungary suffer from severe labour force shortages. In 2023, there were over 60,000 unfilled vacancies in the competitive sector in Hungary, with the most affected sector to be processing industry, where labour shortage was 23,000 people.²⁸ There are currently more than 70,000 foreign workers officially employed in Hungary. The majority of foreign workers are employed in competitive sectors, including industry.

In March 2024, Hungary enacted several amendments to its immigration law, including stricter rules on the current policies for third-country nationals.

According to these amendments, only foreigners from listed countries working for particular employers and holding particular jobs will be granted a foreign worker residence permit by law.

Moreover, foreign workers can have their work permits extended for a limited period, with a maximum total duration up to three years. According to the Hungarian authorities, these measures have been taken in response to increased migration.

It is expected that there will now be two separate categories of work permits:

- Permit for skilled workers: this permit will allow eligible skilled applicants to reside in Hungary for up to three years;
- Permit for Guest Workers: the number of authorised guest workers will correspond to the number of vacancies available in Hungary, and the owners' stay in Hungary will be limited in time. They will not be eligible to apply for a permanent residence permit and will not be able to provide family members. In addition, the sponsoring Hungarian company will need to pass a labour market residency test.

The Slovak Republic is getting more and more popular among migrants. According to the Slovak Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (ÚPSVaR), the number of employed foreigners in the country reached an all-time high of 97,263 people in June 2023, which is impressive compared to 57,998 in June 2018. Three out of ten foreigners in Slovakia worked in Bratislava, according to August 2022 data. Despite the influx of foreigners, Slovakia is currently facing a labour force shortage, especially in the automobile and agricultural industries, as well as in nursing, healthcare, transport, warehousing and plumbing. Therefore, the country's authorities are interested in employing foreign workers. Language skills are not required in some occupations, giving migrants from Kyrgyzstan the opportunity to work in this country. In 2022, the average salary in Slovakia was € 1,296. This is somewhat lower than in some neighbouring countries; however, given the relatively inexpensive cost of life in the country and a slightly less competitive environment, it is quite attractive for migrants. A labour contract and permit are required to work in Bratislava, Košice, Prešov and other cities in Slovakia. Some jobs require a recognised diploma in Slovakia. Foreigners often come to the country for seasonal work, such as farming and harvesting, with a 180-day permit or for a long-term period of up to 2 years if a temporary residence permit is obtained.

Bulgaria has been one of the most attractive destinations for Kyrgyzstan nationals for the last two years. In 2023 until 17 November, Bulgaria registered the arrival of 6,837 people from outside the EU for up to 90 days of seasonal work. Of these, 2,033 came from Kyrgyzstan and were employed in the hotel and restaurant business, as well as in agriculture, forestry and fishing. They mainly worked in Sunny Beach, Golden Sands, Albena, Nessebar, Bansko and Razlog resorts.²⁹

PEAS' ROLE IN LABOUR DIVERSIFICATION

The current situation in Ukraine has seen an unprecedented growth in the number of private employment agencies due to the backdrop of the war against Russia. They are now catalysts for new employment opportunities and can make a significant contribution to improving labour conditions.

²⁹ According to the Bulgarian Employment Agency, 2023.

²⁷ Data from the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, <https://www.bmas.de/EN/Home/home.html>

²⁸ MENEDÉK Hungarian Association for Migrants, <https://working-right.hu/>

Today, PEAs play an important role in the labour market. In 1997, the International Labour Organization adopted the Private Employment Agencies Convention No. 181, giving greater recognition to PEAs. The Convention establishes basic principles for private employment agencies to regulate labour force recruitment. The ILO, through this Convention, seeks to assist member States in developing specific policies, legislation and mechanisms to effectively register and license PEAs.

As noted earlier, the role of PEAs in improving migrant workers' access to legal channels for employment abroad remains key.

However, it is important that the law regulating PEAs is properly developed, allowing, on the one hand, business development and, on the other hand, monitoring the PEAs' activities.

The General principles and operational guidelines for **fair recruitment** developed by the ILO (2016) recommend not to charge migrants for labour recruitment services and to collect these fees from employers. Laws in the Kyrgyz Republic provide for PEAs to charge a one-off fee for services provided (not exceeding 50% of the monthly wage established in the labour contract). The KR should gradually shift to international practice and encourage migrants to be exempted from paying any fees for labour services.

Moreover, the Regulation on the Procedure for Employment of the Kyrgyz Republic Citizens Abroad³⁰ (hereinafter referred to as the Regulation) does not provide any details on what specific types of services are recognised as employment assistance. When considering employment through PEAs, the ILO in its recommendations specifies such concepts as 'recruitment fees', 'related costs' and 'illegal costs'. Clearly defined terms shall ensure that any fees that migrants have to pay are transparent and accountable.

Article 17 of the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On External Labour Migration' (2006) stipulates that the labour relations between a migrant worker and an economic entity shall be subject to a labour agreement (contract), which shall be concluded in writing in the state or official language of the Kyrgyz Republic and in the native or acceptable language of the migrant worker. The law also defines the minimum requirements for such contracts and establishes that a migrant shall have this contract before travelling abroad. The Regulation on the Procedure for Employment of the Kyrgyz citizens abroad also stipulates that PEAs shall provide the Kyrgyz citizen employed abroad 'one copy of the labour contract and the agreement on employment assistance agreed upon and registered by the authorized body before his/her departure to the state of employment.' However, the Regulation does not specify the language of the labour contract copy the migrant receives. The ILO recommends that labour contracts containing the terms and conditions of

³⁰ Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 175 of 16 April 2019 'Regulations on the Procedure for Employment of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic Abroad' <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/13565/edition/1121547/ru>



employment shall be issued in a language that the worker understands, and States shall ensure that measures are in place to prevent contract substitution. To improve this practice, it is necessary to harmonise the Regulation with sectoral law and international standards. The Regulation also stipulates that the sender is obliged to provide, free of charge, pre-departure training for workers, according to an approved programme prior to the his/her departure from the Kyrgyz Republic. The aspects to be included in the training programme are important and necessary. It is clear, however, that PEAs will need assistance in implementing this legal requirement to meet the needs of



migrants and the requirements of destination countries.

Meanwhile, of particular concern is the emerging illegal and

fraudulent employment agencies or agencies that once they receive money from job seekers, fail to meet their obligations in the labour market. Advertising and promotion of companies offering employment abroad or assistance with visas is widespread in Kyrgyzstan. If you Google 'Work in Europe' you can find many sites that offer jobs with high salaries and simple employment. Our compatriots who do not have enough information or knowledge to verify the legality of these agencies become victims of fraud. Below we provide links to sites which, according to labour migrants, are open sources, and have deceived them: www.dhrinetrational.org, www.uklame-dait.org, www.limpialimited.com, www.pprecruiting.org, www.Vpotechltd.com, www.Vsaconsult.me, www.dynamicstart.work. There are a plenty of these 'short-lived' sites. These sites have fraudulently taken USD \$200 to USD \$600 from potential job seekers, but have failed to do their job. It is hard to say if their operations are legal or not.

In the summer of 2024, the activities of several agencies offering employment and visa to European countries and the U.S. failed to fulfil their obligations.³¹ The services of these companies ranged from USD 2,000 to USD 7,000 per person. Recently, the MIA and MLSSM KR conducted a raid and declared that they shut down the agencies involved in illegal employment of citizens abroad. A three-day inspection revealed 411 violations, reports were drawn up, and 11 violations resulted in criminal proceedings.³²

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT

The manner of employment process often tells a lot about what the workers shall expect in the future. An unfair recruitment process rarely yields decent work or job; however, it often increases the risk of forced labour. The most common forms of abuse or exploitation that may occur at any stage of the recruitment process are summarised below:

- Charging workers recruitment fees;
- Threats and intimidation, including verbal and psychological abuse;
- Fraudulent contracts, false working and living conditions, and failure to provide relevant information;
- Restriction of freedom of movement;
- Seizure of identity documents to control job applicants;
- Physical and sexual abuse;
- Employment of persons below the working age;
- Engaging workers in hazardous or unhealthy work.

The combination of these abusive recruitment practices can result in forced labour and trafficking, with exploitation being the ultimate result of recruitment. Women, and especially migrant women, are disproportionately at risk of experiencing abusive recruitment practices, whether in the country of origin, in transit or in the country of destination. Travelling with an agent or an escort, migrant women may be abandoned if the agent has any problems en route or upon arrival in the country of destination. Once at destination, migrant women may face multiple forms of discrimination or exploitation on the grounds of gender, race or ethnicity.

The risk of abuse is higher when workers are dependent on intermediaries or other actors. PEAs in countries of origin and countries of destination may vary in size, expertise and mode of operation. Conscientious agencies seek to provide adequate and accurate information to workers and employers. Unscrupulous ones recognise they can make huge profits by charging fees both to employers and PEAs in destination countries, and also to migrants who are willing to pay fees to get recruited or fast-tracked - despite the fact that international labour standards prohibit recruitment agencies to charge fees to workers. In practice, however, this international norm is often ignored.

Although there is no internationally agreed term 'fair recruitment', it is generally understood as recruitment in accordance with the law, in line with international labour standards, respecting human rights, and without any discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, nationality or legal status. It shall not impose high costs on workers, and shall protect them from exploitation.

This means that governments shall harmonise their laws and regulations with international standards, and effectively implement and enforce them. Particularly vulnerable population, including women workers, migrant workers, domestic workers, informal economy workers and others, shall be ensured additional protection from abuse. Fair recruitment shall also imply due respect for human rights, and access to dispute resolution mechanisms and remedies where alleged abuse has occurred.

³¹ CECA press service data, <https://www.migrant.kg/kg/about/news/11-ti-chastnym-agentstvam-zaniatosti-zapreshcheno-trudoustroistvo-v-11-stranakh/>

³² BBC interview, August 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/kyrgyz/articles/cy8x00jl45zo>

CONCLUSION

The issue of diversifying labour flows is becoming increasingly relevant both for Kyrgyzstan and for neighbouring countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. European countries are among the top five attractive destinations. Kyrgyzstan is making active efforts to open new labour markets for its citizens in Europe through diplomatic missions and the private sector. However, its tempo is very slow and the scale is rather small. If we do not expand labour flows to new countries in the near future, migrant workers will be forced to stay in Russia and keep suffering discrimination, exploitation, harassment and systematic violation of fundamental rights.

Over the last few years, labour migration to European countries has gained more popularity. While previously labour migrants mainly travelled to Italy, Germany and Hungary, nowadays they are gradually starting to migrate to Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. However, Germany remains the most attractive country among the respondents. The main factors that make Germany particularly attractive are good working conditions, an adequate ratio of labour remuneration to the cost of living, stability and security. However, there were no ex-Russian labour migrants in Germany among the respondents. The main reasons for that are high requirements to labour migrants, including language skills and professional education. Only this year German migration law has been eased to allow labour migrants fleeing Russia to work in Germany. Labour migrants who returned from Russia mainly travel to Europe through PEAs registered in Kyrgyzstan; the CECA; and to a lesser extent they use foreign PEAs (Russian, Kazakh, Ukrainian, etc.); they rarely go on their own in search of work.

The increased interest in new countries among labour migrants triggered a rapid growth of private employment agencies. Over the last few years, they have doubled in number. Although PEAs have long complemented the traditional labour market, they are now viewed as a catalyst for new forms of human resource management and can contribute significantly to improving labour and employment conditions. The role of PEAs in improving migrant workers' access to legal channels of employment abroad remains key. However, on the other hand, it is quite common for PEAs and foreign companies recruiting migrants from Kyrgyzstan to fail in fulfilling their obligations



to job seekers for various reasons, including gross deceit and fraud. In this regard, it is necessary to enhance the legislation regulating PEAs' operation. The study revealed that the cost of labour migration to European countries is very high. Labour migrants have to take out loans or borrow money to get to their desired jobs. Frequently, the cost of PEA services and other travel expenses exceed the amount of several months' future labour remuneration. This trend is of great concern, as it becomes a significant barrier for migrants to lift themselves out of poverty, given the resources and costs involved, as well as the risks associated with international labour migration.

According to our survey, labour migrants have a more responsible attitude towards pre-migration training when migrating to European countries. As many as 71% of respondents said that they were prepared for migration. The main players in providing pre-migration training were the CECA, PEAs, NGOs, and self-preparation through Internet resources. However, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of pre-migration training, since only half of the victims of labour rights violations seek help or advice.

34% of respondents working in Europe encountered some form of violation of labour rights, only half of them sought help or advice. In the first place, migrants turn for assistance to the employer, then to PEAs, Embassies and Consulates, the CECA, diasporas and finally to the labour inspectorate. The reasons for not seeking assistance include lack of language skills, lack of knowledge of the host country laws and lack of information where to turn for help. Those who did seek assistance reported their satisfaction with the services of private lawyers, the CECA, Embassies and Consulates, PEAs and direct negotiations with the employer. It is disappointing that labour migrants appear to be excluded from the local trade unions in the host country, which could effectively protect their interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Continue to actively diversify migration routes and countries of destination to provide more opportunities for migrants and reduce dependence of traditional labour resources' recipients in Kyrgyzstan on the economy and labour market;
2. Strengthen efforts to promote organised recruitment of labour migrants from the Kyrgyz Republic willing to work outside the country;
3. Establish an effective system of statistical records of migration flows from Kyrgyzstan;
4. The government shall mainstream international standards on migrant employment into efficient laws and regulations, as well as effectively implement and enforce them. Particularly vulnerable segments of the population, including women workers, migrant workers, domestic workers, workers in the informal economy, and others, shall be provided with enhanced protection from abuse.
5. Ratify Private Employment Agencies Convention No. 181 of the International Labour Organization, adopted on June 3, 1997. Accession to the Convention will contribute to establishing the legal and regulatory framework related to PEAs' operations for the employment of citizens abroad, which can improve the quality of services provided by PEAs and promote ethical and fair recruitment standards. Ratification of the convention will facilitate human trafficking and forced labour prevention, provide a platform for the safeguarding of workers' rights, including against fraud during the recruitment process (in particular, during the selection stage, transportation, accommodation in the host country and the return to the home country). It will also address the cost of labour migration, which is currently very high and unaffordable for many citizens.
6. Ensure access of labour migrants to consular assistance by expanding diplomatic representations and informing on ways of communication (call centres) to receive their services. Regularly strengthen the capacity of Kyrgyz diplomatic mission staff in new labour markets to provide timely and quality protection to migrants and their families.
7. Establish a mechanism for prompt response of the authorised KR bodies to emergency situations in the countries of our migrants' employment (political crisis, pandemic, climate change leading to emergencies, increased xenophobia against migrants, etc.) in order to ensure timely protection of migrants and their families.
8. Conduct broad information campaigns among groups vulnerable to migration, as well as migrants returning from Russia, regarding available employment services both outside and inside the country.
9. More actively lobby to soften migration procedures in Russia within the framework of integration and harmonisation of EEU legislation on labour migrants.
10. Strengthen engagement with local actors that can assist in protecting the labour rights of migrants, such as local trade unions, shelters, integration centres, etc.

ABBREVIATIONS

EECA – Eastern Europe and Central Asia

IDI – in-depth interview

EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union

EU – European Union

KR – Kyrgyz Republic

MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs

ILO – International Labour Organization

MLSSM – Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration

UAE – United Arab Emirates

RF – Russian Federation

CIS – Countries of Independent States

USA – United States of America

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FSB – Federal Security Service

CA – Central Asia

CECA – Centre for Employment of Citizens Abroad

PEA – Private Employment Agencies

GLOSSARY

Return migration – in the context of international migration, means movement of persons returning to their country of origin once they have left their place of permanent residence and crossed an international border.

Russian invasion in Ukraine (2022) – Russian aggression against Ukraine, Russian–Ukrainian war, ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine.

A highly skilled migrant worker is a migrant having a higher level of education or professional experience, proficiency or skill level generally required for employment in high–skilled occupations.

International (external) migration is the movement of persons who leave their country of origin or country of permanent residence to settle permanently or temporarily in another country. As such, it means the crossing of an international border.

Migrant – there is no universally accepted definition of the term ‘migrant’ at the international level. The term ‘migrant’ is generally interpreted to cover all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by an individual for reasons of ‘personal convenience’ and free from any compelling external factor. The term is therefore applied to individuals and their family members who move to another country or region to improve their financial or social conditions and better prospects for them or their family.

Migrantophobia, anti–migrant sentiment – intolerance towards migrants or those considered ‘migrants.’ Anti–immigrant sentiment can manifest itself in a variety of ways, ranging from protests, exclusion of immigrants from the local community, discrimination in employment, education, to mass deportations, killing of migrants and right–wing terrorism.

Migration is the movement of people across an international border or within the country. Migration includes any type of movement, regardless of its duration, composition or reasons; migration includes movements of refugees, displaced persons, evicted persons or economic migrants.

Mobilisation in Russia – On September 21, 2022, during Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine and shortly after the counter–offensive by the Armed Forces of Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin announced the start of ‘partial mobilisation’ in Russia.

Receiving country (country of stay) – the country of destination or a third country. In case of return or repatriation also the country of origin. A country that has agreed to accept a certain number of migrants, including refugees, on an annual basis by decision of the President, Minister or Parliament.

Country of origin – in the context of migration, the country of citizenship or former permanent residence of a person or group of persons “who have emigrated abroad”, whether they migrate regularly or irregularly.

Labour migration is the movement of people from their own country to another country for employment. Labour migration is regulated by national migration laws. In addition, some countries have an active role in regulating external labour migration and providing favourable conditions for their citizens abroad.

Economic sanctions (including trade sanctions and financial sanctions) are restrictive economic measures (sanctions) that are used by one international trade actor (a country or group of countries) against another actor (the ‘target of sanctions’) in order to force the latter to change its policy.

Employer – a natural or legal person who provides work or operates under a labour agreement (contract) or civil law agreement to perform work (render services) in the state of employment.

Sender – an individual or legal entity engaged in activities related to sending citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic to work abroad.

Labour activity – employment, other paid work, as well as activities other than employment that ensure the means of subsistence of a labourer who works, as a rule, independently or jointly with his/her family members under a contract, agreement or quota for hiring and use of labour force; or works independently in accordance with the law of the state, or under concluded international agreements that entered into force in accordance with the law of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Illegal labour migration – labour or professional activities in any country by foreign persons or stateless persons in violation of employment procedures and regulations established by the national laws of that country.

Illegal migrant worker – a person who violated employment procedures and regulations stipulated by the national law of the country with regard to foreign nationals and stateless persons.

Private employment agency – a commercial organisation that provides services to job seekers to find jobs and employment, or staff recruitment for employers, as well as providing employment information and consultancy.