



## THE EVOLUTION OF MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA: MAIN STAGES, FACTORS AND CHARACTERISTICS (ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL RUSSIAN STATISTICS)

**Konstantin Yevgenievich Meshcheryakov**

Doctor of History of International Relations,  
Department of Post-Soviet Studies, School of International Relations,  
Saint Petersburg State University - Russia  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7275-3074>  
[kmesheryakov@spbu.ru](mailto:kmesheryakov@spbu.ru)

**Dinara Abdigaliyeva**

Master of International Relations,  
National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan - Kazakhstan  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7577-8170>  
[marsdiko@mail.kz](mailto:marsdiko@mail.kz)

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The article traces the evolution of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia over the course of 30 years (from the collapse of the USSR to the present).

**Methods:** In the course of the research, the authors simultaneously use the methods of historical science (the chronological approach, the principle of historicism, the historical-genetic and historical-comparative methods), political science (the comparative-political, systemic and structural, culturological approaches), and a statistical method. **Results:** The research creates a set of statistical data reflecting the number of people who came to Russia from Central Asia and left Russia in the opposite direction during the period 1991-2020. It estimates the total number, annual number, and number of immigrants and emigrants by country. **Conclusion:** The paper shows the main stages in the development of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia, defines their geographical directions, and names the ethnic and social affiliation of migrants. Finally, it identifies the main reasons that provoke the migratory movements.

**Keywords:** Migrations. Russia's Foreign Policy. Central Asia. Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan. Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan.



## A EVOLUÇÃO DOS MOVIMENTOS MIGRATÓRIOS ENTRE A RÚSSIA E A ÁSIA CENTRAL: PRINCIPAIS ETAPAS, FATORES E CARACTERÍSTICAS (SEGUNDO ESTATÍSTICAS OFICIAIS RUSSAS)

### RESUMO

**Antecedentes:** Este artigo traça a evolução dos movimentos migratórios entre a Rússia e a Ásia Central ao longo de 30 anos (desde o colapso da URSS até o presente). **Métodos:** No decorrer da pesquisa, se utilizam simultaneamente os métodos da ciência histórica (a abordagem cronológica, o princípio do historicismo, os métodos histórico-genético e histórico-comparativo), da ciência política (as abordagens comparativa-política, sistêmica e estrutural, culturoológica) e da estatística. **Resultados:** Os autores criam um conjunto de dados estatísticos que refletem o número de pessoas que vieram para a Rússia da Ásia Central e deixaram a Rússia na direção oposta durante o período 1991-2020. Estimam o número total, o número anual e o número de imigrantes e emigrantes por país. **Conclusão:** Mostram as principais etapas do desenvolvimento dos movimentos migratórios entre a Rússia e a Ásia Central, definem suas direções geográficas e nomeiam a filiação étnica e social dos migrantes. Por fim, identificam os principais motivos que provocam os movimentos migratórios.

**Palavras-Chave:** Migrações. Política Externa da Rússia. Ásia Central. Cazaquistão. Quirguistão. Tadjiquistão. Turcomenistão. Uzbequistão.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2021, the former Soviet republics celebrated the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the USSR. During this period, the migration agenda has taken an important place in the system of relations between Russia and the five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The article traces the evolution of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia over the course of 30 years (from the collapse of the USSR to the present) based on the official Russian statistics. First, it creates a unified set of statistical data reflecting the number of people who came to Russia from Central Asia and left Russia in the opposite direction during the period 1991-2020, broken down by year and country. Second, it estimates the total number, annual number, and number of immigrants and emigrants by country. Third, it shows the main stages in the development of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia. Fourth, it defines the geographic directions of migrations. Fifth, it names the ethnic and social affiliation of migrants. Sixth, it identifies the main reasons that led to the migratory movements.



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The migration processes in Central Asia attract the attention of numerous researchers who have published hundreds of scientific papers on the subject.

The most important scientific works, having the format of dissertations, were written in different years by Filipp Goniukov (Goniukov, 2003), Nataly Goose (Goose, 2007), Igor Majinov (Majinov, 2007), Dmitry Serdiukov (Serdiukov, 2011), Alina Veshkurova (Veshkurova, 2011) and Jovid Ikromov (Ikromov, 2017), the researchers from Russia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan studying in depth the political and economic aspects of migration cooperation between Russia and the Stans.

The smaller publications, which deal only with specific issues of migrations in Central Asia and have the format of scientific articles and reports, number in the hundreds and can be divided into several groups. To the first one, belong the studies, examining different questions of international relations in Central Asia, domestic and foreign policy of the local states without paying special attention to one subject or country (see the articles by Emre İşeri (İşeri, 2009), Alexandr Kazantsev (Kazantsev et al., 2021), Andrei Manakov (Manakov, 2021), Olga Timakova (Timakova, 2021). The second one is represented by the papers on various aspects of the life of any one Central Asian state (see the analytical reports and articles by Anatoly Khazanov (Khazanov, 1995), Timothy Edmunds (Edmunds, 1998), Michael Fergus (Fergus, 2003), Nargis Kassenova (Kassenova, 2005), Sébastien Peyrouse (Peyrouse, 2007, 2008), and Zharmukhamed Zardykhan (Zardykhan, 2016) about Kazakhstan; Radis Abazov (Abazov, 1999), Anders Åslund (Åslund, 2005), Shairbek Juraev (Juraev, 2008), Vicken Cheterian (Cheterian, 2010), Andrew Wachtel (Wachtel, 2013), and Erica Marat (2016) on Kyrgyzstan; Shahram Akbarzadeh (Akbarzadeh, 1996), Idil Tunçer-Kilavuz (Tunçer-Kilavuz, 2009), and Doug Foster (Foster, 2015) about Tajikistan; Yusin Lee (Lee, 2014), Charles Sullivan (Sullivan, 2016), Erin T. Hofmann (Hofmann, 2018), and Utku Yapıcı (Yapıcı, 2018), and on Turkmenistan; James Bell (Bell, 1999), T. Dadabaev (Dadabaev, 2004), Fiona Hill and Kevin Jones (Hill & Jones, 2006), Deniz Kandiyoti (Kandiyoti, 2007), Martin Spechler (Spechler, 2007) and Bekzod Zakirov (Zakirov, 2021) about Uzbekistan). The third one consists of the studies focusing on the features of Russia's Central Asian policy (see the articles by Vyacheslav Belokrenitsky (Belokrenitsky, 1994), Ronald Dannreuther (Dannreuther, 2001), Gregory Gleason (Gleason, 2001), Catherine Poujol (Poujol, 2003), Roy Allison (Allison, 2004), Charles Ziegler (Ziegler, 2006), Anna



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Matveeva (Matveeva, 2007), Matthias Schmidt and Lira Sagynbekova (Schmidt & Sagynbekova, 2008), Sergei Dorofeev (Dorofeev, 2013), Michael Rywkin (Rywkin, 2013), Bakyt Baimatov (Baimatov, 2014), Konstantin Meshcheryakov (Meshcheryakov, 2014a, 2014b), Sharif Akramov and Furqat Akramov (Akramov S.Y. & Akramov F.S., 2015), Maximilian Hess (Hess, 2020), José Antonio Peña-Ramos (Peña-Ramos, 2021).

The above works are extremely important for a correct understanding of the political and socioeconomic situation in Central Asia, the diplomacy of the Stans, and the regional system of international relations. However, they do not provide an integrated overview of the evolution of migratory movements between Russia and the Stans, especially over the entire 30-year period since the collapse of the USSR. First, most of the articles have a narrow chronological framework and are devoted to a specific period in the modern history of Central Asia. Second, the vast majority of Western authors who do not have sufficient knowledge of Russian and Central Asian languages usually base their research on secondary sources of information – in particular, they ignore official statistics or use them in a fragmentary or distorted form. Third, almost all of these works are narrowly limited by their methodology (for example, economists study migration issues from the perspective of economics, political analysts – on the theoretical basis of political science, etc.). As a result, the reader does not get a proper idea of the complexity of migration processes in Central Asia and does not have the opportunity to understand them as a kind of continuous process divided into several stages, as well as a system, which has its own peculiarities in each individual state. This article aims to fill the corresponding gap in the studies of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia.

### 3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary sources of the research are the materials of the official Russian statistics, which reflect the quantitative indicators of migration exchange between Russia and each of the Central Asian states. The relevant data are published annually in the Russian Statistical Yearbooks edited by the State Statistics Committee of Russia (1992-2003) (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, 2001) and the Federal State Statistics Service of Russia (since 2004) (Rosstat, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021). It should be noted, however, that each yearbook provides information only for the most recent years and there is currently no unified dataset containing statistics on the evolution of the number of migrants in Russia



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over the entire 30-year period.

In the course of the study, we will use several scientific methods.

First, there are some standard methods widely used in all social sciences (analysis and synthesis, description and explanation, induction and deduction, generalization and conceptualization, etc.).

Second, there are the methods of historical science. The article is based on a chronological approach: it examines various phenomena, facts and events in the order of their occurrence, from earlier to later. It follows the principle of historicism and considers the events and facts reflecting the peculiarities of the political and economic situation in Central Asia in the context of the temporal, social, economic and political conditions in which they took place. The historical-genetic method makes it possible to identify the features and tendencies of migration processes in the course of their development, which ensures the most accurate reconstruction of their evolution. The historical-comparative method involves the use of various “horizontal” and “vertical” comparisons (in space and time), which are necessary for a more detailed analysis of migrations in Central Asia.

Third, there are the methods of political science. The comparative-political approach allows for a comparative analysis of the political systems, regimes, cultures, and processes that exist in Central Asia. The systemic and structural approach allows us to present the migration interaction between Russia and the Stans as a single and integral system consisting of numerous elements and links between them. The culturological approach makes it possible to analyze the migration processes taking into account the political culture and psychology of the Central Asian nations.

Fourth, there is a statistical method that allows us to process and analyze the data containing quantitative indicators of migration exchanges between Russia and Central Asia.

Only the simultaneous application of all the listed methods allows us to obtain a complete picture of the evolution of migration flows between Russia and Central Asia.

## 4 RESULTS

We have worked with the materials of the official Russian statistics and created a unified dataset for the period 1991-2020, which consists of two tables. The first one reflects the number of immigrants from Central Asia in Russia, broken down by year and country. The second one shows the number of emigrants leaving Russia for the Stans, divided by



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year and country. Both the tables are presented below.

**Table 1.** The number of immigrants from Central Asia in Russia, by year and country (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, 2001; Rosstat, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021).

Years	Countries					Total for region
	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	
1991	128,906	33,707	27,808	13,118	69,149	272,688
1992	183,891	62,897	72,556	19,035	112,442	450,821
1993	195,672	96,814	68,761	12,990	91,164	465,401
1994	346,363	66,489	45,645	20,186	146,670	625,353
1995	241,427	27,801	41,799	19,129	112,312	442,468
1996	172,860	18,886	32,508	22,840	49,970	297,064
1997	235,903	13,752	23,053	16,501	39,620	328,829
1998	209,880	10,997	18,396	10,509	41,800	291,582
1999	138,521	10,370	12,116	7,998	41,615	210,620
2000	124,903	15,536	11,043	6,738	40,810	199,030
2001	65,226	10,740	6,742	4,402	24,873	111,983
2002	55,706	13,139	5,967	4,531	24,951	104,294
2003	29,552	6,948	5,346	6,299	21,457	69,602
2004	40,150	9,511	3,339	3,734	14,948	71,682
2005	51,945	15,592	4,717	4,104	30,436	106,794
2006	38,606	15,669	6,523	4,089	37,126	102,013
2007	40,258	24,731	17,309	4,846	52,802	139,946
2008	39,964	24,014	20,717	3,962	43,518	132,175
2009	38,830	23,265	27,028	3,336	42,539	134,998
2010	27,862	20,901	18,188	2,283	24,100	93,334
2011	36,474	41,562	35,087	4,524	64,493	182,140
2012	45,506	34,597	41,674	5,442	87,902	215,121
2013	51,958	30,388	51,011	5,986	118,130	257,473
2014	59,142	28,543	54,658	6,038	131,275	279,656
2015	65,750	26,045	47,638	6,539	74,242	220,214
2016	69,356	28,202	52,676	7,242	60,977	218,453
2017	71,680	41,165	63,467	8,734	64,073	249,119
2018	72,141	44,408	67,929	10,509	55,378	250,365
2019	86,311	53,810	89,553	14,632	60,796	305,102
2020	64,493	45,676	93,335	12,930	50,188	266,622



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**Table 2.** The number of emigrants from Russia to Central Asia, by year and country (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, 2001; Rosstat, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021).

Years	Countries					Total for region
	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	
1991	99,380	15,962	10,249	8,617	33,276	167,484
1992	87,272	13,124	5,886	7,069	26,085	139,436
1993	68,703	10,142	5,898	6,165	20,545	111,453
1994	41,864	9,947	3,676	2,817	11,318	69,622
1995	50,388	9,551	3,290	1,934	15,235	80,398
1996	38,350	8,472	2,613	1,380	13,384	64,199
1997	25,364	6,296	2,474	1,532	7,370	43,036
1998	26,672	5,310	1,977	1,537	5,231	40,727
1999	25,037	3,681	1,799	1,237	5,041	36,795
2000	17,913	1,857	1,158	676	3,086	24,690
2001	15,186	1,333	993	352	1,974	19,838
2002	13,939	1,080	827	272	1,400	17,518
2003	14,017	959	922	251	1,130	17,279
2004	12,504	656	549	168	717	14,594
2005	12,437	473	434	125	595	14,064
2006	11,948	605	424	112	648	13,737
2007	10,211	668	464	111	722	12,176
2008	7,483	648	637	90	948	9,806
2009	7,232	674	610	62	677	9,255
2010	7,329	641	694	105	834	9,603
2011	6,176	976	1,070	191	2,207	10,620
2012	8,843	10,489	10,281	1,555	31,559	62,727
2013	11,802	10,576	17,362	2,165	50,864	92,769
2014	18,328	13,284	35,296	3,435	94,179	164,522
2015	30,983	16,110	36,276	4,219	94,910	182,498
2016	32,226	17,159	25,388	4,824	41,305	120,902
2017	38,944	21,810	28,828	5,861	41,906	137,349
2018	45,625	35,430	36,901	7,558	48,571	174,085
2019	47,145	38,704	41,179	8,434	41,667	177,129
2020	56,056	44,275	53,915	12,153	45,266	211,665

The official Russian statistics for the period of 1991–2020 demonstrate the following



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trends in migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia.

The total number of immigrants coming to Russia from the Stans during the entire period was 7,094,942 people; the total number of emigrants leaving Russia for Central Asia was 2,249,976 people; and net migration reached 4,844,966 people. (The indicators were obtained by using the data provided by Tables 1 and 2).

As for the individual Central Asian states, it should be noted that the largest number of immigrants to Russia over the past 30 years came from Kazakhstan (3,029,236), followed by Uzbekistan (1,829,756), Tajikistan (1,066,589), Kyrgyzstan (896,155), and Turkmenistan (273,206). As for the number of emigrants from Russia, the Stans lined up in the same order: Kazakhstan (889,357), Uzbekistan (642,650), Tajikistan (332,070), Kyrgyzstan (300,892), and Turkmenistan (85,007). (Those indicators were also derived from the data provided by Tables 1 and 2).

The dynamics of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia were as follows.

The largest number of immigrants came to Russia from Central Asia in the first years after the collapse of the USSR. Within 3 years, the influx of immigrants registered active growth (from 272,688 in 1991 to 625,353 in 1994 (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, p. 97), after which it gradually began to decline, falling to the minimum levels for the entire post-Soviet period (69,602) by 2003 (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, p. 97; State Statistics Committee of Russia, 2001, p. 73; Rosstat, 2006, p. 122). After that, the number of immigrants began to increase again and exceeded 300,000 in 2019. At the same time, the growth of Central Asian immigration was unstable and was replaced by short-term recessions three times (2008-2010, 2015-2016, and 2019-2020) (Rosstat, 2006, p. 122; Rosstat, 2011, p. 102; Rosstat, 2013, p. 104; Rosstat, 2015, p. 95; Rosstat, 2017, p. 101; Rosstat, 2019, p. 109; Rosstat, 2021, p. 106).

The number of emigrants leaving Russia for Central Asia peaked on the eve of the collapse of the USSR (179,121 people in 1990 (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, p. 98), after which it gradually began to decline (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, p. 98; State Statistics Committee of Russia, 2001, p. 74; Rosstat, 2006, p. 123). It showed its minimum values (less than 20,000 people per year) from 2001 to 2011, while the lowest one (9,255) was recorded in 2009 (Rosstat, 2006, p. 123; Rosstat, 2011, p. 103; Rosstat, 2013, p. 105). Since 2010, the number of people leaving Russia for Central Asia has been steadily increasing and exceeded 200,000 in 2020. This trend was interrupted only once, in





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2016, when the number of emigrants slightly decreased Rosstat, 2013, p. 105; Rosstat, 2015, p. 96; Rosstat, 2017, p. 102; Rosstat, 2019, p. 110; Rosstat, 2021, p. 107).

Against this region-wide backdrop, the dynamics of migration flows between Russia and the individual Central Asian states occasionally showed some differences. For example, in the case of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the maximum inflow of immigrants to Russia was reached in 1994 and amounted to 346,363 and 146,670 persons, respectively; in the case of Kyrgyzstan, it was recorded in 1993 (96,814); in the case of Tajikistan, in 1992 (72,556); and in the case of Turkmenistan, in 1996 (22,840) (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, p. 97).

After that, the influx of immigrants to Russia was constantly decreasing: from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – until 2003 (29,552 and 6,948 people, respectively), from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – until 2004 (14,948 and 3,339 people, respectively), and from Turkmenistan – until 2010 (2,283 people) (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, p. 97; State Statistics Committee of Russia, 2001, p. 73; Rosstat, 2006, p. 122). At the same time, the four southern republics of Central Asia showed a peculiarity that was not characteristic of Kazakhstan, namely, a sharp decline in emigration to Russia in 1996–1998, after which the curve on the diagram of migrations from those countries took the form of a direct line (this is especially true of Turkmenistan, which sent less than 10,000 people to Russia annually from 1999 to 2017).

In 2003–2004, migration flows from the Stans to Russia began to show an upward trend, but it remained quite unstable until 2010. From 2010 to 2014, the number of immigrants increased significantly: from Kazakhstan, from 27,862 to 59,142; from Uzbekistan, from 24,100 to 131,275; from Kyrgyzstan, from 20,901 to 28,543; and from Tajikistan from 18,188 to 54,658. In terms of the volume of migration flows to Russia, Uzbekistan overtook all other Central Asian states (Rosstat, 2006, p. 122; Rosstat, 2011, p. 102; Rosstat, 2013, p. 104; Rosstat, 2015, p. 95).

In 2015–2016, the number of Central Asian immigrants to Russia decreased noticeably; this reduction was mainly due to Uzbekistan (up to 60,977 people), while immigration from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan declined slightly and from Kazakhstan even increased (Rosstat, 2017, p. 101).

In 2019, the number of immigrants from the Stans in Russia reached the highest level since the beginning of the 21st century. Tajikistan ranked first (89,553), followed by Kazakhstan (86,311), Uzbekistan (60,796), Kyrgyzstan (53,810), and Turkmenistan



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(14,632). In 2020, the scale of migrations from the Stans to Russia slightly decreased; the only exception was Tajikistan (93,335 people) (Rosstat, 2021, p. 106).

As for the dynamics of the number of emigrants leaving Russia for the individual Central Asian states, they almost completely corresponded to the region-wide trends described above (State Statistics Committee of Russia, 1997, p. 98; State Statistics Committee of Russia, 2001, p. 74; Rosstat, 2006, p. 123; Rosstat, 2011, p. 103; Rosstat, 2013, p. 105; Rosstat, 2015, p. 96; Rosstat, 2017, p. 102; Rosstat, 2019, p. 110; Rosstat, 2021, p. 107).

Next, we turn to questions about the ethnicity and social affiliation of migrants and the reasons for migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia. Clearly, they too have changed significantly over time.

In the 1990s, mainly Russian-speaking citizens moved from Central Asia to Russia. Their migration aspirations were triggered by the negative political, economic, and social consequences of the demise of the USSR, which can be summarized to the following points. The process of “National Rebirth” began in all the Stans, where local authorities declared the Russian-speaking population “occupiers,” Russia a “colonial power,” and the autochthonous peoples “victims of centuries of colonial exploitation.” Against the backdrop of a severe economic collapse, which had begun in Central Asia during the years of Perestroika, they carried out mass layoffs of Russian-speaking employees, depriving them of their livelihoods. In all the countries of the region, the Russian language lost its official status and was pushed out of the cultural and information space, which completely disoriented Russian-speaking citizens who, as a rule, had a poor command of local languages and lost both free access to information and a sense of connection with Russia (Khazanov, 1995, p. 255-258; Bell, 1999, p. 185-188, 198-207; Dadabaev, 2004, p. 144-145; Ziegler, 2006, p. 108-115; Peyrouse, 2007, p. 481-494; Peyrouse, 2008, p. 106-118; Schmidt & Sagynbekova, 2008, p. 115-116). In addition, dozens of political parties emerged in all of the newly independent states, propagating xenophobic ideas and inciting hatred towards Russians. In some cases, those activities led to pogroms and, in Tajikistan, where the civil war broke out in 1992, to outright genocide of the Slavic population (Belokrenitsky, 1994, p. 1094-1096; Khazanov, 1995, p. 253-255; Akbarzadeh, 1996, p. 1108-1114; Gleason, 2001, p. 79-82; Poujol, 2003, p. 100-108; Foster, 2015, p. 355-360).

As for the emigrants from Russia to Central Asia, during that period they were mainly high-ranking cadres who had previously belonged to the so-called “Soviet party



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nomenklatura” and national political and cultural elites. Their return to the Stans was done out of political and economic expediency, as they could no longer count on maintaining their former status in the “new democratic Russia” (Khazanov, 1995, p. 252-253).

By the mid-1990s, it became clear that Russia, which had fallen into a severe economic crisis and was unable to meet the minimum needs of its own citizens, was not in a position to absorb millions of immigrants pouring into its territory from all the outlying regions of the former USSR. Here, the situation of its compatriots who de facto became displaced persons from Central Asia was hardly better than in the countries from which they came. Meanwhile, the authorities in the Stans realized that the massive exodus of Russian-speaking specialists was further exacerbating the economic crisis in their republics (Abazov, 1999, p. 204-211; Fergus, 2003, p. 112-114) and eased the pressure on the Russian minority. All this set in motion a process of partial return of Russians to Central Asia, but it was very limited and short-lived (Peyrouse, 2007, p. 494-498; Manakov, 2021, p. 186-187).

By the early 2000s, virtually all Russian citizens of the Stans who wished to return to their historic homeland had already fulfilled their migration wishes, while their compatriots who chose to remain in Central Asia gradually began to adapt to their new living conditions. In the meantime, the Russian Federation significantly tightened its migration laws, so that the majority of Central Asian immigrants could no longer freely enter its territory (Ikromov, 2017, p. 56-58).

In the 2000s, economic crisis was replaced by economic growth in both Russia and the Stans. Against this backdrop, Russia, which had experienced a drastic population decline for more than 10 years, faced a significant shortage of labor, which it could only make up for by recruiting workers from abroad. In Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, on the contrary, rapid population growth continued, resulting in a huge demographic burden as local governments were unable to provide jobs for a large proportion of their citizens. As a result, there was a radical restructuring of migration processes between Russia and Central Asia: from now on, there were no longer Russian-speaking citizens who came to Russia, but labor migrants belonging to the titular nations of their respective states – Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz (Cheterian, 2010, p. 23; Ikromov, 2017, p. 81-85). Uzbek immigrants were generally more skilled workers, often with higher education; the social status of their counterparts from Kyrgyzstan and especially Tajikistan was lower. Most labor migrants saw it as their goal not only to get a job that was highly paid by Central Asian standards, but also to settle in a new place, even to the point of naturalization in Russia. Therefore, the volume



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of return migration to the Stans remained extremely low in the first decade of the 2000s.

An active influx of migrant workers from Central Asia to Russia was supported by a foreign policy factor. Since the early 2000s, Moscow had greatly expanded its Central Asian diplomacy, trying to return to this region as soon as possible and make it its “courtyard” as it used to be before (Dannreuther, 2001, p. 250-254; Allison, 2004, p. 283-290; Matveeva, 2007, p. 43-51; Rywkin, 2013, p. 266-267; Meshcheryakov, 2014b, p. 64). This task seemed especially important in the context of the U.S. and NATO launching an anti-Taliban operation in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001 and stationing their military facilities in neighboring Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This military infrastructure could be quickly converted into full-fledged military bases if desired, which Russia viewed as a threat to its national security (Allison, 2004, p. 278-280; İşeri, 2009, p. 29-32; Dorofeev, 2013, p. 14-16; Rywkin, 2013, p. 268-269; Meshcheryakov, 2014a, p. 1749-1750). Moreover, with the sharp rise in world energy prices in the early 2000s, Moscow feared losing its role as a major supplier of oil and gas to the cash-rich European markets if the well-endowed Central Asian states built oil and gas pipelines to the West and past Russia (Rywkin, 2013, p. 268-269). Agreeing to accept large numbers of immigrants and even to grant them citizenship could therefore be seen as Moscow’s temporary compensation for the loyalty of the Stans.

However, the economic crisis of 2009–2010 forced Russia to reconsider the principles of its migration policy. The number of immigrants from Central Asia had to be reduced, and the Russian authorities began to insist on their obligatory return home after finishing their work in Russia (Ikromov, 2017, p. 62-64). Two other circumstances contributed to this fact: a reduction in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan’s cooperation with the West (Spechler, 2007, p. 196-198; Timakova, 2021, p. 8-16; Zakirov, 2021, p. 285-286) and the putting into operation of the region’s largest gas pipeline “Turkmenistan – China,” which connected all the major fields of Central Asia in a single network and reoriented the regional energy sector to long-term cooperation with China (Lee, 2014, p. 331-337; Kazantsev, 2021, p. 7), preventing Central Asian energy resources from reaching Europe.

From 2010 to 2014, when Russia began to implement a policy of budget austerity, which included freezing the growth of real wages, the demand of the Russian market for Central Asian labor rose sharply; consequently, the influx of migrant workers from Uzbekistan increased significantly. In such a situation, the most important task for Moscow was to fully ensure the return of Central Asian immigrants to their homeland (Akramov, S.Y., & Akramov, F.S., 2015, p. 233-235). Therefore, the number of people leaving Russia for



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Central Asia has been steadily increasing since 2011.

The above trends intensified in 2015–2016, when the deepest crisis since the collapse of the USSR erupted in the Russian economy (Ikromov, 2017, p. 86). It is noteworthy that in these circumstances a number of labor migrants even refused to work in Russia, which led to a sharp increase in their emigration to Central Asia. In 2017, when the situation stabilized somewhat, the number of labor immigrants from Central Asia on the Russian market began to increase again. Another factor played a role in this: from now on, Moscow attracted migrants mainly from the states that participated in the integration associations in which it took a leading position: the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Thus, immigration from Uzbekistan continued to decline, while the number of immigrants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan continued to increase.

A fundamentally new phenomenon in the period under consideration was the appearance on the Russian labor market of Turkmen citizens who tried by all means to gain a foothold in Russia. The reason for this was the sharp deterioration of the economic situation in Turkmenistan (Sullivan, 2016, p. 50), caused by a drastic fall in world prices for natural gas.

Since the beginning of 2020, migration processes in Central Asia have been influenced primarily by the pandemic COVID-2019, which has brought two opposing trends into being. On the one hand, the need of the Russian economy to attract foreign labor decreased again. On the other hand, against the backdrop of an unprecedented increase in incidence in the domestic population, Russia faced an acute shortage of labor in the basic sectors of its economy. As a result, the quotas it had set for labor immigration were revised in the direction of a further increase, causing a stream of Central Asian workers to literally pour into Russia. This time, most of them were citizens of Tajikistan.

As for Kazakhstan, it has occupied a special place in the system of migrations between Russia and Central Asia since the early 2000s. Considering the fact that the country was very close to Russia in its political and socioeconomic development and at times even surpassed it in terms of living standards of its population, Kazakhstan did not supply cheap and unskilled labor to Russia. However, during the period 2000–2020, migration flows between the two states remained significant and have even increased since 2011 (Zardykhan, 2016, p. 27). This trend was mainly caused by two factors. First, the rapid development of trade, economic and interregional cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan, which contributed to a more active movement of citizens of the two states in





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both directions. Second, Kazakhstan's participation in all Russian-led integration associations, which also promoted interaction between the two nations. Therefore, the migrants who came to Russia from Kazakhstan and left in the opposite direction were citizens who had a much higher social status than their counterparts from the southern Stans; as a rule, they pursued independent economic activities, had high qualifications, and did not intend to stay long on the territory of the partner state.

### 5 DISCUSSIONS

In this study, we have attempted a comprehensive analysis of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia both at the region-wide and bilateral levels over a long period of time. Such an approach, which involves the use of methods from various branches of modern science, allows us to create the most complete and objective picture of the processes under study and trace their evolution.

Nevertheless, we are not convinced that by analyzing official statistical data, which reflect the quantitative indicators of migration flows between Russia and Central Asia, he has obtained 100% accurate results. The problem is that the official data do not take into account the indicators of illegal migration, which was an integral part of migration processes in the post-Soviet space throughout the period under consideration. Moreover, in the 1990s, the number of people arriving in Russia from Central Asia and departing in the opposite direction was estimated very imprecisely, as these movements were largely spontaneous and without proper control by the state authorities on both sides. Consequently, there is every reason to believe that the true scale of migrations from the Stans to Russia significantly exceeded the official data throughout the 30 post-Soviet years.

### 6 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of official Russian statistics shows that the contemporary history of migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia includes five main stages.

The first one lasted from 1991 to 1998 and was characterized by the highest number of migrants moving from Central Asia to Russia and vice versa; at the same time, the number of immigrants arriving in Russia significantly exceeded the number of emigrants leaving Russia for the Stans.





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The second stage lasted from 1999 to 2003 and was marked by a decrease in migration flows in both directions to a minimum.

The third phase lasted from 2004 to 2011 and was characterized by minimal migration exchanges between Russia and Central Asia.

The fourth stage spanned from 2012 to 2014 and was characterized by a noticeable increase in the inflow of Central Asian immigrants to Russia, while the outflow in the opposite direction increased slightly; at this time, migration trends between the individual states began to show significant differences.

The fifth phase, which began in 2015 and continues to this day, is characterized by a very unstable development of migration processes and ever-increasing differences between individual countries; against this background, there has been a significant increase in both the inflow of migrants from Central Asia to Russia and the outflow in the opposite direction.

The main factors, which determined the nature, scale, and direction of migration flows between Russia and Central Asia, were: the political, socioeconomic, and demographic situation in Russia and the Central Asian states; the position of the Russian language in the region; the presence of xenophobia and ethnic conflicts in the Stans; regional features of Russian foreign policy; the severity of the international situation; and the presence or absence of global or local economic depressions and epidemics.

Therefore, the migratory movements between Russia and Central Asia are an extremely complex and multi-layered system, the development of which depends on many factors and takes place both at the region-wide (“Russia – Central Asia”) and bilateral levels (“Russia – each of the Stans”).

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