

# ROLE OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS AND RUSSIAN FEDERATION

*Sergey V. Ryazantsev*

## **Abstract**

*This research paper presents an analysis and interpretation vis-à-vis the contribution of labour migration in the development of Russian Federation and former Soviet Union republics. Altogether, it is demonstrated that labour migration fills an important niche in economic and political integration of the region, however, this alliance could be even stronger, if the undocumented and illegal migration is prevented and a common consensus is made among partner countries to view labour migration as a strategic resource.*

## **Keywords**

Labour Migration, Russian Federation, Central Asian Countries, Former Soviet Union Republics, Immigration Policy, CIS, Illegal Migrants, Vocational Structure, Pull-Push Factor, Remittance, Host Country, Allowing Documents, Migratory Research Centre.

## **Introduction**

The Russian Federation accepts a significant amount of temporary migrant workers, particularly, from neighbouring Central Asia countries. Here departure of a significant number of able-bodied population is stimulated by the typical “pushing-out” factors: output gap, low level of salary, high level of unemployment, lack of workplaces, poverty, surplus of workforce etc. Given these factors, and the Russia’s need of workers for many industries, there is a large migratory subsystem, which centres the Russian Federation, and the Republic of Kazakhstan attracting labour migrants from the countries of Central Asia, Transcaucasia, China, Vietnam, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and some countries of Eastern Europe. On May 29, 2014, the agreement on the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) was signed, which became effective on January 1, 2015. Five countries comprising Republic of Armenia, Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation are a part of EEU. Indeed, the president of Tajikistan, E. Rahmon, in 2014 also declared need of studying economic basis and legal documents of EEU for the purpose of possible entry into this integrated consolidation.

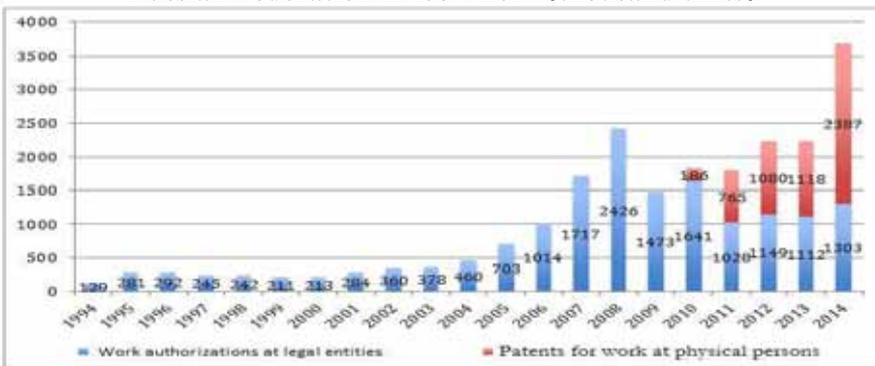
EEU is created for the purpose of comprehensive modernization, cooperation and creating conditions for stable development and increasing

living standards of people in member states. With free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour power, EEU also provides visa-free movement for the citizens of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. In fact, the visa-free entry into the Russian Federation also stands for citizens of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Moldova, while the working visa and the work authorization in Russia is necessary for citizens from the countries including Georgia, Turkmenistan, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Central Asian countries, however, provide large flows of migrant workers into Russia and in near future, will remain probable donors of migrant workers for Russia and Kazakhstan. Many of these migrants have become permanent residents of Russia as between 2001-2011 more than 1.6 million people from the countries of Central Asia became owners of the Russian nationality. But this includes also other categories of migrants like students etc. About 40% of the Central Asian migrants who have obtained citizenship of the Russian Federation in 2001-2011, come from Kazakhstan, with majority of them being the ethnic Russians. Nevertheless, in recent years Uzbeks (25%), Kyrgyz (23%), Tajik (9%) and Turkmen (3%) having obtained Russian citizenship, shows an increasing trend. Such a trend among Central Asian migrants in Russia could be considered as one of the signs of their aspirations to integrate into the Russian society. However, on account of a number of socio-political issues, amendments to the Russian legislation on citizenship rights in 2002 and 2010, considerably toughened requirements for this right, which significantly reduced the number of permanent labour migrants from Central Asian republics.

**Official Number of Migrant Workers in Russian Federation**

The official number of migrant workers in the Russian Federation is based on the allowing documents issued by the Federal Migration Service (FMS).

**Fig.-I**  
**Number of the allowing documents issued to migrant workers in the Russian Federation in 1994-2014 (thousand units)**



In 2014, 3690 thousand allowing documents, including 2387 thousand patents and 1303 thousand work authorizations were issued. While from January to July 2015, 1406 thousand allowing documents were issued to migrant workers, including 1265 thousand patents and 141 thousand work authorizations.

The system of allowing documents for migrant workers in the Russian Federation, amended almost annually, and as of September 1, 2015, includes three types of procedures for obtaining these documents, depending on nationality of migrant workers (Table-1).

**Table-1**  
**Types of procedures of receipt of allowing documents of migrant workers in the Russian Federation depending on their nationality (as of September 1, 2015)**

<b>Nationality of migrant workers</b>	<b>Documents for entry into Russia</b>	<b>Type of allowing documents for work in Russia</b>	<b>Key procedures</b>
EAEC countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan)	Foreign Passport, migration card	Not necessary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Registration of the migrant worker on residence (within 5 working days after entry into Russia);</li> <li>2) The notification of the employer about the conclusion (termination) of the contract with the migrant worker (within 3 working days from the moment of the end of the contract)</li> </ol>
The countries of the former USSR with a visa-free regime (Azerbaijan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan)	Foreign passport, migration card	Patent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Registration of the migrant worker on residence (within 5 working days after entry into Russia)</li> <li>2) Receipt of the patent by the migrant worker (within 30 days from the moment of entry into Russia)</li> <li>3) The notification of FMS employer about the conclusion (termination) of the contract with the migrant worker (within 3 working days from the moment of the end of the contract)</li> </ol>

The Countries of the former USSR with a visa regime (Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Turkmenistan, Estonia) and other States	Foreign passport, visa, migration card	Work authorziation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Registration of the migrant worker on residence (within 5 business days after entry into Russia)</li> <li>2) Obtaining permission the employer on involvement of the foreign worker to Russia</li> <li>3) Receipt of the work authorization by the migrant worker (within 30 days from the moment of entry into Russia)</li> <li>4) The notification of FMS employer about the conclusion (termination) of the contract with the migrant worker (within 3working days from the moment of the end of the contract).</li> </ol>
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In 2014, the majority of work authorizations were issued to the migrant workers from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, China and Kyrgyzstan, whereas in 2014-15 majority of work authorizations in Russia were issued to the citizens of Kazakhstan (362 hundred thousands) and Belarus (19 hundred thousands) while Armenian received 46 hundred thousand work authorizations. Taking into account the vocational structure of these migrant workers, data provided by FMS in 2012 reveals that, a half (51%) are consisted as skilled workers. Approximately, the third part (31%) of them was unskilled workers. Nearly 8 percent comprised specialists of average qualification and only 5 percent were qualified professionals.

By and large labour migration into Russia comprises unskilled workers. From 2010 to 2012, only 257 thousand work authorizations were issued to highly skilled specialists. Nevertheless, majority of these specialists were working under the intra-corporate contracts i.e., with multinational corporations operating in the territory of Russia. Nearly 28.1 percent of these highly skilled specialists were engaged with real estate transactions, 21.5 percent with wholesale and retail trade, 13.7 percent with the processing productions, 9.8 percent with construction, 8.6 percent with financial activities and 7.6 percent were with mineral extraction. It is noteworthy here that in 2010-2012, majority of highly qualified specialist worker migrants in Russia were from China, Turkey, France, Germany and Great Britain, while in 2014 China, Vietnam, Philippines, Turkey, Serbia were the top sending countries. Strengthening of political and economic interaction of Russia with the East and Southeast Asian countries is considered the possible backup for this trend.

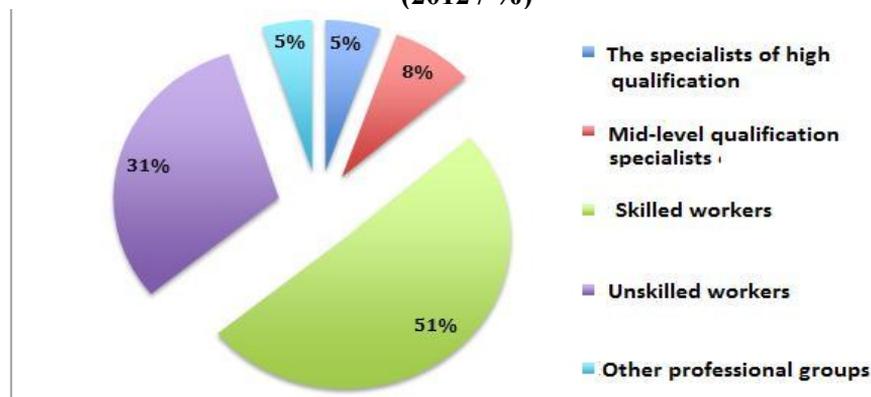
### **Undocumented Migrant Workers in Russia**

The issue of undocumented migrant workers in Russian Federation has been widely debated and discussed both at political and academic levels. In 2006, the Director of FMS, K. O. Romodanovsky stated in an address, “we conducted research, thought up a formula that is based on the ‘illegality coefficient’, increased by a number of legally working citizens, giving a figure of 10.2 million illegal migrants in Russia.”<sup>1</sup> At times, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) determines the number of ‘illegal migrants’ at 10 million, while some politicians put it at 15 million. However, these figures raise serious doubts, as they are not based on results of scientific researches. And may be, these figures could be much higher, because majority of the influx of migrant workers into Russia is from visa-free CIS countries, which don’t need a registration or allowing documents for work in Russia. At times Russian government framed certain procedures to possibly reduce the number of illegal migrant workers as the availability and simplification of registration procedures and methods to issue work authorizations were brought in. In this respect two campaigns were started to allow undocumented migrant workers to legalize their stay in Russia. First campaign started in 2007, allowing simplification of registration to foreign citizens through postal departments. Second campaign of 2010 introduced issuing patents for work permissions to migrant workers. In 2010-2013 about 3 million migrant workers from CIS countries received patents in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite these efforts by government institutions, there are still a huge number of undocumented labour migrants in Russia. By 2015 there were nearly 3 million undocumented labour migrants in Russian labour market.<sup>3</sup> Reasons for this phenomenon are many, but the dominant factors pertain to corrupt government officials and irresponsibility on the part of employers, who exploit unregistered migrant workers by paying them less than the fixed wages. Indeed, report of the US State Department on human trafficking for 2012 included Russia in the category of the countries where ‘the absolute number of the victims of malicious forms of human trafficking is very great or significantly increasing.’ While the Centre for Migratory Research, estimates that 1 - 1.5 million labour migrants in Russia work in slaves like conditions,<sup>4</sup> assessments by non-governmental organizations in Russia put it at 4 million.<sup>5</sup> The recent research findings for the year 2013 testify that the number of labour migrants, who are in a situation of labour operation in the Russian Federation can make 500 thousand to 1 million.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the figures may be, such cases are mostly reported with labour migrants from the countries of Central Asia, who work in deteriorated conditions. Given such issues, Russian authorities toughened the approach with 13 new laws framed to counteract illegal migration. In 2014 around 600 thousand labour migrants were not allowed to enter into Russia<sup>7</sup> and by the mid 2015 this figure increased to 1.3 million. Obviously, this approach solved a problem of undocumented

migration to some extent. So far the percentage share of specialists, unskilled and other professionals are concerned, it is clear from Fig.-II that about 82% is dominated by only 2 vocational structure parameters.

**Fig.-II**  
**Vocational structure of migrant workers in the Russian Federation**  
**(2012 / %)**



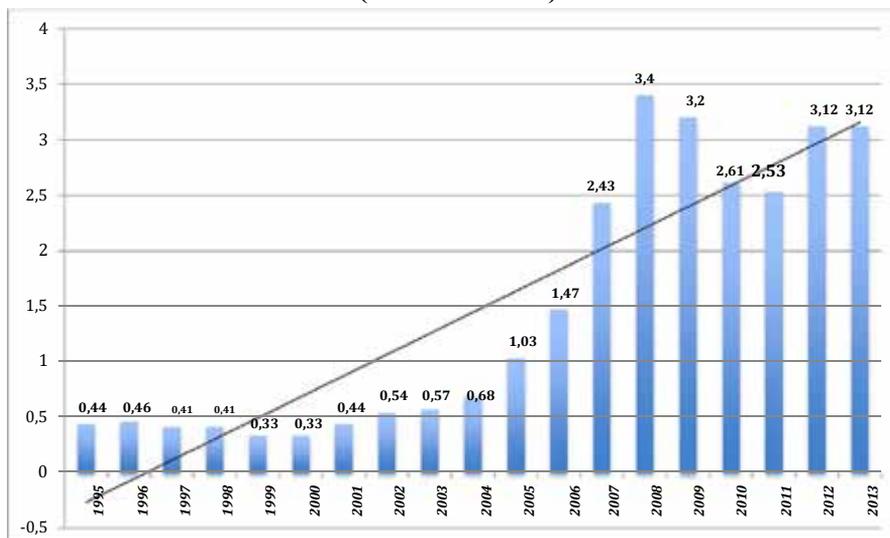
### **Economic Effects of Labour Migration (Employment and GDP)**

The influx of labour migrants has myriad and has made substantial effects on Russian economy, especially by providing the required manpower for the sustenance and development of industries, such as construction, housing and comm. services, services industry, agricultural industry, transport etc. In fact, in 2008, the Director, FMS, Russia, K. O. Romodanovsky, noted that migrant workers played a significant role in increasing Russia's GDP from 6 percent to 8 percent.<sup>8</sup> Though Romodanovsky's statement circulated widely in the Russian media and political discourses, but was exaggerated and didn't escape the criticism. To measure the role of migrant workers in Russian economy, however, the technique offered by the American Scientist, F. Martin (2007) was used.<sup>9</sup> The calculations show that in 2013 the contribution of migrant workers in the GDP of Russian Federation was around 1.4 trillion Rubles. While in 2008 it comprised 3.12 percent of GDP, it slashed down in 2011 reaching a minimum of 2.53 percent, but again recovered in 2013 and increased to 3.12 percent.

Based on the available official statistics, the calculations were made to show the impact of labour migration on the economy of Russian Federation and was established that documented and undocumented migrant workers contribute about 7 percent to the total Russian economy with maximum contributions in construction industry (nearly 30 percent). According to V. A. Iontseva and I. V. Ivakhnyuk though migrant workers actually carry the subsidiary low-skilled works like cleaning residential accommodation and repairing, subsidiary works in the trade and construction etc., which Russian

citizens reject as heavy, dirty or not prestigious works;<sup>10</sup> but their contributions are all the more important for Russian economy.

**Fig.-III**  
**Share of labour migrants in employment in the Russian Federation**  
**(1995-2013 / %)**



In 2010, migrant workers contributed near about three trillion Rubles to Russia's GDP with 9,467 million Rubles (33 %) in construction industry; 4,329 million (15%) in trade and consumer services; 3,041 (10%) in-house economy and 1,483 in the agricultural industry. These figures apply to documented labour migration only, and if the financial transitions out of undocumented labour migration are positively channelized, which the Director, FMS, Russia, K. O. Romodanovsky, reports that from more than 8 billion dollars a year, the overall contributions of labour migration in Russian economy could swell much higher.<sup>11</sup> So the prevalence of illegal and undocumented labour migration results into considerable financial losses to Russian Federation as 4 to 5 million illegal migrant workers whose total earnings are around 150-200 billion rubles a year, don't pay any taxes. While as of 2011, one and a half million foreign workers who were officially working in Russia in 2011 paid nearly 70 billion rubles as income tax.<sup>12</sup>

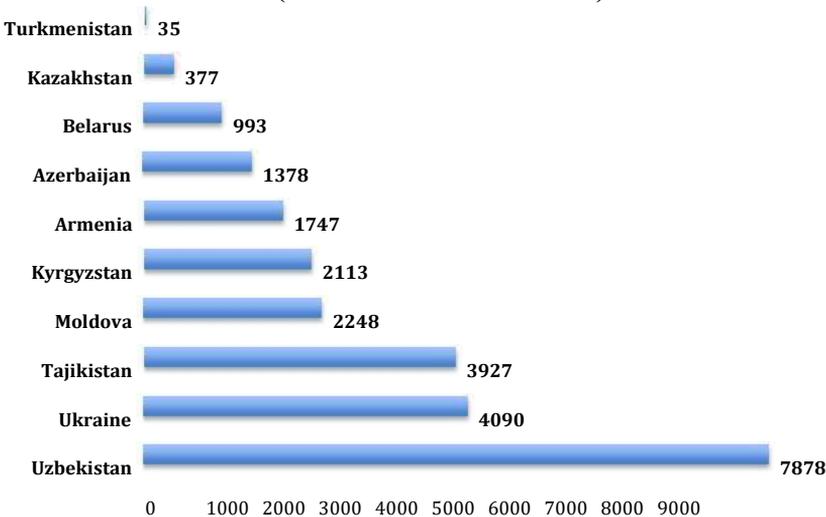
### **Impact of Labour Migration Through Consumption**

Labour migrants are not only producers, but also comprise a class of consumers for the host country. So a good chunk of the money that migrant workers in Russia earn, is spent to meet out their everyday needs while in Russia. Indeed, experts demonstrate that the cost of the goods and services produced by labour migrants in Russia exceeds the amount they receive in

wages and the amount of remittances they sent back home.<sup>13</sup> Even as of 2010, the Director, FMS, Russia, K. O. Romodanovsky, reported that every dollar earned by guest workers in Russia brings back about six dollars to the Russian budget.<sup>14</sup> Equally for sending countries, every dollar remitted back by migrant workers increases the purchasing power among the respective families and, thus, helps economic empowerment at household level. Data on cross-border personal and private money transfers made through official channels i.e. banks, postal departments, money transfer systems, and by transfer of cash and material values, shows that major flow of remittances from Russia go to CIS countries as in 2013, the volume of remittance by labour migrants in Russia to Uzbekistan was around 7.9 billion USD, 4.1 billion USD to Ukraine and 3.9 billion USD to Tajikistan.

The personal transfers include net compensation and private transfers. Net compensation represents part of earnings of family members abroad, which they remit back to household in native country. It is equal to a difference between wages received by migrant workers from temporary employment abroad, and their expenses incurred in a host country. Polls of migrant workers in Russia show that they usually prefer to save on everyday required stuff and buy cheapest products (like bread, milk, rice, etc.), hardly ever buy meat, fruit and vegetables, and mostly share rooms with fellow workers for accommodation.<sup>15</sup> Personal transfers include non-paid transfers from household abroad for the benefit of the household in the native country and vice-versa. In 2013, the volume of individual transfers of labour migrants in the Russia amounted to 19.8 billion USD.

**Fig.-IV**  
**Remittances from the Russian Federation to the CIS countries**  
**(2013 / million US dollars)**



The official data of Central Bank of Russia pertaining to the year 2013, reveals that money transfers through various systems<sup>16</sup> comprised 40 percent of the total volume of transfers from Russia to abroad, standing at 27.6 billion USD. And out of this amount, about 20.8 billion USD were transferred to the CIS countries alone i.e. 88 percent of the total volume of outgoing money transfers from Russia.<sup>17</sup> Country-wise distribution of money transfers show that as of 2013, nearly 74 percent of the total volume sent from Russia is received by five major countries: Uzbekistan (28%), Tajikistan (18%), Ukraine (13%), Kyrgyzstan (9%) and Armenia (7%). These growing transfers of remittances between Russia and CIS countries reflect a number of tendencies i.e. close ties between migrant workers and their households in the native countries, increase in wages in Russia and wider use of official channels for money transfers etc.

On an average, the amount of money transfer from Russia to abroad dwindled from 502 USD in 2012 to 487 USD in 2013. Nevertheless, for CIS countries it increased from 458 to 929 USD. Some of the factors responsible for this trend include, a high competition among operators of money transfer systems in Russia, which results into a tendency of charging less fees for the transaction. As per reports of the Bank of Russia, in 2013 an average size of the fee charged from the client for money transfer abroad was 1.7 percent of the total transferred amount, which is record minimum among the countries of 'Group 20'.<sup>18</sup>

The research findings conducted in 2008 by Institute of Socio-political Surveys of the Russian Academy of Sciences about the use of money transfers in the city of Khojend, reveals that nearly 65 percent of households in Tajikistan receive money transfer from abroad, particularly, from Russia once a month. However, despite comprehensive developments and availability of money transfer systems, still every tenth migrant worker transfers money back home through acquaintances. Moreover, the study demonstrated that majority of families in Tajikistan and other countries of Central Asia are highly dependent on labour migration remittances especially from Russia. Many research surveys show that money remitted back by migrant workers are mostly spent for the everyday consumption like food grains and construction / repairs of houses, which stimulates considerable growth in some industries in sending countries. The research findings demonstrate that while 74 percent of households in Khojend spend the money remitted back by their migrant workers for purchasing food grains, about 34 percent bought clothes, and 31 percent spend it for medical services and drugs. Likewise 26 percent of households invest in construction or repair of houses and about 45 percent invest in education of their children.

The remittances transferred back home in Central Asian countries are generally spent to meet-out everyday needs like purchasing food-grains, cloths, education of children, acquisition and repairing of houses, weddings

and funeral etc. In very rare instances, the remitted money is invested in the development of small scale businesses, entrepreneurship or in production of goods and services. But need of the hour is that back home families of migrant workers must think of either saving the remitted money or invest in business and small scale production of goods and services, because owing to the increasing involvement of migrant workers in “gray” and “black” economy in Russia, labour migratory movements from Central Asian countries to Russia will be more regulated and secured.

**Table-2**

**The remittances of migrant workers from Russia to the CIS countries made through money transfer systems in 2006-2013, millions of dollars**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2013
<b>CIS countries</b>	<b>4674</b>	<b>8575</b>	<b>12609</b>	<b>8919</b>	<b>11080</b>	<b>15143</b>	<b>23589</b>
Uzbekistan	866	1666	2978	2052	2845	4262	6633
Tajikistan	835	1632	2516	1725	2216	3015	4155
Ukraine	800	1377	1690	1339	1809	2360	3078
Kyrgyzstan	384	715	1157	894	1106	1547	2080
Armenia	531	943	1249	848	1018	1284	1597
Moldova	457	806	1114	746	845	1076	1261
Azerbaijan	378	653	887	661	794	1049	1232
Georgia	300	558	683	517	566	669	789
Belarus	37	71	100	96	165	151	...
Kazakhstan	73	124	187	159	247	363	...

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Russian Federation is the centre of the Eurasian migratory subsystem, with wider scales of economy and labour market. However, for its diverse economic institutions to function properly, Russia is equally dependent on neighbouring CIS countries for providing labour power. Concomitantly, Russia shows lot of interests in strengthening ties with former Soviet Union republics with a priority to the migration policy. However, emergence of the new centres of gravity (e.g. Republic of Kazakhstan) for labour migrants testify that in the near future the direction of migratory flows in the former Soviet Union could be diversified, and Russia will have to face cuts in labour power. In this context, development of strategically verified migration policy at the national level, development of the regional integration processes and inter-state mechanisms of migratory cooperation with CIS countries is the vital task for Russia. In this context the first task is to bring some reforms in the system of quoting and issuance of work authorizations. Specifically, the system needs some transparency and a proper regulation in assigning quotas to employers.

Secondly, there is a need to conduct an objective assessment of the need of foreign labour power in Russian Federation and it must be made explicit in the concept note of the Russia's migration policy that Russia needs foreign labour power and the system of its attraction needs improvement with logically taking into account the population policy of the state. Thirdly, for a viable and strategic economic integration with Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Russian Federation needs to fully prevent the system of illegal migration. Indeed, labour migration is a real form of social and economic interaction between the countries of the former Soviet Union and promotes consolidation (integration) of the states. However, for the protection of the rights of their citizens abroad, there also needs a consolidation vis-à-vis the migration policy among member states as well rather regulating it in personalized interests. Such accentuation would lessen the chances of corruption, undocumented migration and politicizing the issues of immigration.

Another area of concern pertains to the regulation of labour migration and employment of the good number of people in goods and services sector which has to be connected with commerce and investment cooperation, that can help Russian Federation and the republic of Kazakhstan to overcome illegal migration and generate employment. Since, majority of the Central Asian illegal labour migrants in Russia are operational in agricultural industry and for agricultural imports Russia is highly dependent on European Union, Turkey, Israel etc., this twin issue could simply be resolved if Russia increases and effectively makes investments in the agro-industrial fields of the main donor countries of labour migrants in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, which is a traditional sphere of employment for majority of inhabitants in these regions, but diminished after the collapse of the Soviet Union. So possibly this could reduce the inflow of illegal migrants into the territory of Russia and Kazakhstan as well. Finally, it is necessary to define local opportunities including possibility of absorption of unemployed and studying youth, re-employment of pensioners, internal migration of manpower etc. and then to designate priorities of migration policy with the partner countries in the broader context of political and economic integration for the organized delivery of labour power.

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