

Labour Migration in Tajikistan

A Sociological Analysis of Internal and External Trends

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Abstract

Migration is an important event of 21st century and has changed the dynamics of many societies. Throughout human history migration has reflected people's yearning and attitudes to have a comfortable life. The growing scale of international migration is a response to the constant demand of workers in labour market of receiving countries. Migration has resulted in the economic and social development of developing countries. Labour migration is a boon to Central Asian economies and plays a conclusive role in keeping their economies afloat especially of Tajikistan as Tajikistan's current trajectory, is not able to do enough to remediate its citizen's abrasive socio economic plight. Tajikistan is the origin country of labour migrants and agile participant of global migratory process. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the nature and potent of such an substantial migratory flow in order to assess its influence, together with other internal trends on the future of the country. Moreover, it is an attempt to comprehensively explain and analyze these trends of migratory flow.

Keywords

Central Asia, Tajikistan, Migration, Labour Migration, Emigration, Immigration.

Migration in Human Societies

Migration has been indispensable part of the human history since its very beginning. People have migrated across continents, civilizations and states or within their own boundaries. Thus, migration is a process of moving either across an international border, or within a state, encircling any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes, it includes refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people and economic migrants. Thus, migration has played a decisive role in shaping the world as we know it today. The phenomenon of migration has been imperative to human histories, cultures and civilizations and has played a obligatory role in proliferating different religions around the globe. For example Christianity, the Catholicism was scattered by the migration of Portuguese and Spanish during the 11th and 12th centuries.

To a large extent migration has shaped the demographic, social and political dynamics within pre modern civilizations and was a major medium of interaction between civilizations and their external environments. Patrick Manning distinguishes three types of migration labour migration, refugee migration and urbanisation. The phenomenon began in Britain in the late 18th century and spread around the world and continues to this day in many areas. Industrialisation encouraged migration wherever it appeared. The increasingly global economy globalised the labour market throughout the world. The Atlantic slave trade declined sharply after 1820 which gave rise to self bound contract labour migration from Europe and Asia to plantations (human migration). Overpopulations, open agricultural frontiers and rising industrial centres attracted voluntary migrants. Moreover, migration was remarkably made easier by new enhanced transportation techniques. Romantic nationalism also arose in 19th century and with it ethnocentrism. The great European industrial empires also arose. Both factors subscribe to the migration, as some countries favoured their own ethnicities over outsiders and other countries appeared to be considerably more welcoming for example the Russian empire associated with eastern orthodoxy, and restricted Jews who were not eastern orthodox to the pale of settlement and inflicted restrictions. Violence was also a problem. The US was fostered as a better location, “a golden land” where Jews could live more openly. Another effect of imperialism, colonialism led to the migration of some colonizing parties from home countries to the colonies and eventually the migration of the people from colonies to home countries (Hugh,1911). Transnational migration reached to the peak of three million migrants per year in the early 20th century Italy, Norway, Ireland and the Guangdong region of China were regions with especially high emigration rates during these years. These large migration flows affected the process of nation state formation in many ways. Migration restrictions have been developed as well Diaspora cultures and myths that reflect the importance of migration to the foundation of certain nations like the American melting pot. The transnational migration fell to a lower level from 1930s to the 1960s and then bounced back. Migration bounced back as two great wars in the first half of the century and many smaller wars throughout country caused millions more to flee the battlefields and seek refugee movements sometimes in camps but preferably in cities. Both refugee migration and labour migration subscribed to the third major type of

migration of the twentieth century i.e. urbanisation. Stimulation of human movements of the last century leads to the embellishment of existing cities, emergence of new cities and genesis of various forms of suburbs within reach of the cities. By 1990 half of human population nearly three billion persons had come to live in urban agglomerations of more than about 20,000 persons (Manning, 2005:157).

Patterns of Migration

Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries of Central Asia and is the most remittance dependent country. So, to overcome the crippling economy the young generation of Tajikistan migrated in large amounts following the breakup of U.S.S.R. in 1991. Labour Migration surged in 1994 and 1995 as a result of deprivation caused by the country's civil war and the slump of previous areas of employment during the transition to a market economy. No sector of economy has remained immune to it. The economic and demographic imbalances are the causes of expanding internal and external migration flows. The loss of subsidies and guaranteed access to markets are major contributors to the ensuing economic decline. There was a sharp decline in production across all sectors and resulted a severe decline in living standards of the populations.

Albeit, several significant social and economic steps have been taken since the signing of the peace accords in 1997, according to World Bank estimates the poverty rate in Tajikistan has dropped from over 72 percent in 2003 to just 40% percent in 2012 (CIA Fact Book, 2013). Indeed until recently the country remained the least developed in the world. According to human development report 2015, the HDI value of Tajikistan is 0.624 in 2014. That said, development initiative in Tajikistan continues to be hampered by the difficult terrain and paucity of infrastructure with majority of the populations even poorest as compared to other countries of the region. In this context, out migration has emerged as one of the sensible strategies for most of the families in order to sustain their lives. Precisely, temporary and seasonal labour migration from Tajikistan has become important factor in the economy of Tajikistan, with every 3rd household in the country having at least one member working abroad. In fact some scholars hold that the pioneers of mass labour migration from Central Asia have been the inhabitants of Tajikistan. Specifically, the labour migrants of Tajikistan are mainly (almost 97 percent) aligned towards the Russian Federation, where

they work in construction, trade, industry, agriculture and other sectors. The labour migration from Tajikistan has adapted the conditions of the labour market of the Russian Federation. The climatic condition explains the seasonal prevalence of labour in Russia. The specificity of both the living conditions and the job of the seasonal laborers' at home in Tajikistan contribute to the formation of large scale seasonal migration. Low wages of the migrants in Russia is preventing the workers to bring their families with them. A Tajik labourer is always remembered when one needs to hire a person on less money for a temporary job at cheap rate (United Nations Report, 2003). In the eyes of Russians, Tajik is a person of second category, low status and deprived of rights, without any claim for a place in the social hierarchy, ready for any job, on the whole, anything for the sake of earnings. He is not even at the bottom of the social ladder (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

Such a deteriorated status of Tajik migrants in Russia has created a phobic complex, i.e. the Tajik migrants in Russia are accused of mass criminalization. Even Tajik migrants in Russia are frequently linked with the threat of "Islamic Extremism and Terrorism" however, it has not received any warm response from the common man (United Nations, 2009).

Despite all these complexities, labour migration has become a structural feature of the economic and social life of Tajikistan. Within the span of 2010 to 2014 the volume of remittances transferred by the labour migrants to Tajikistan increased from 2,305,826,625 to 3,853,539,565 US dollars (World Bank, 2015). According to World Bank indicators the volume of remittances in 2014 amounted to 41.7 percent of the GDP of the country that year which is a fall from previous year which was 49.6 percent of the GDP of the country. Thus, we see that labour migration is important for the socio economic development of Tajikistan and plays an important role in restraining the unemployment in Tajikistan.

Theoretical Perspective

Migration is effectively examined by using "push-pull" model by Everett Lee (1966). There are several 'push' factors responsible for Tajik labour migration. This model usually identifies various economic, political, environmental and demographic factors which are assumed to push migrants out of the places of origin and lure them to destination places. The fall of the Soviet Union caused economic crisis, while the civil war resulted in even more desolation and unemployment.

With a fragmented infrastructure, little industrial development, and scarcity of arable land, many families had little choice but to send at least one member out as a migrant labourer. The people of Tajikistan choose Russia as their host destination because migrants often reckon on previously established ties to countries, employers, and other migrants. This explains why such large numbers of labour migrants are found in a particular receiving country and often predominately within certain regions, cities or even communities. Financial costs of migration, which are usually very high, are cut down when one is able to move with the help of a community member already living in the receiving country. Furthermore, social costs are also reduced as the difficulties and stresses of trying to live and work in a foreign place are alleviated by the presence of one's fellow nationals. Tajik migrants were initially able to travel visa-free to Russia. Population of Russia is currently rapidly aging and declining and is estimated to fall in coming years. At the same time, the populations of the nearby Central Asian and Caucasus regions are expected to grow. This becomes the main reason for the decision to migrate. So, in addition to the many push factors in Tajikistan which help explain why this country experiences such enormously high rates of labour out-migration, there are also pull factors emerging from Russia which also explain labour migration from the whole region to Russia in particular.

In-Migration

In the early 1990s external shocks such as the disintegration of the U.S.S.R, the severance of the economic ties and civil war served as the catalyst for migration process. This process has led to the changes in the ethnic composition of Tajikistan. Between 1989 and 2010 censuses the share of Tajiks in the population structure grew from 62.3 to 84.25 percent whereas the share of Uzbeks dropped from 23.5% to 12.24% and the share of Russians decreased from 7.6% to 0.46%. A significant drop is also found in Kyrgyz 0.08% and Tatars 0.085% and others 2.17% (Ukrarians, Germans). The early 1990s were characterized by a high level of external non returning migration with changes in permanent residence. The outflow mostly affected industrialized cities where the share of non-indigenous people had been high. In general the migration level of the urban population during this period was several times higher than that of the rural population. The main migration trend of the early 1990s was replaced by labour migration by the late 1990s

and it has become key structural characteristic of economic and social life of Tajikistan in the past decades.

Table 3.1
Total, Natural and Migration Increase of the Population of Republic of Tajikistan, 1991-2007 (thousands of people)

Years	Total Increase Population at large	Natural Increase	Migration Increase
1991-1999	766.5	1373.8	-607.3
2000-2007	1246.5	1357.9	-111.4
	Urban population		
1991-1999	-50.6	291.6	-342.2
2000-2007	315.3	325.4	-10.1
	Rural population		
1991-1999	817.1	1082.23	-265.13
2000-2007	931.2	1032.5	-101.3

Source: National Human Development Report 2010, 95...Retrieved from <https://www2.uef.fi/documents/1127814/1295956/countryreport-tajikistan-migration.pdf>.

Accessed on: 25/10/2015

The trends in labour migration can be understood by looking at the changing structure of population growth in Tajikistan (Table-3.1). Here, we can see that during 1991-1999 there was a kind of decrease in urban population (-50.6), it is because during this period because of de-industrialisation, there was de-urbanisation, that is people were moving from urban areas to rural areas so the people from urban areas out migrated to rural areas. The decreased living standards of the population and unemployment have contributed to the development of such migration modes as commuting (daily trips to work or study, mainly from rural to urban areas in search of jobs or to study) and temporary external labour migration abroad.

Labour migration has two main strands: internal – mainly from rural to urban areas; external – mainly to Russia (99.3% of migrants). Dushanbe attracts people from the region of republican subordination and Khatlon region. According to the 2009 labour force survey (LFS), the number of daily commuters travelling to Dushanbe is 46 800, compared with 4 200 travelling from Dushanbe to other districts. The

numbers of commuters are highest among the employed population of the Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS) (15.2% of employed population) and Khatlon region (12.3%). In Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) the figure is 9.3%, and in 10 Sughd region 8.5%. Overall, there has been an increase in labour mobility. The volume of commuters increased between 2004 and 2009: 86 900 people were involved in commuting in 2004, while in 2009 the figure had increased to 200 900. Over 82% of these are men from rural areas (Statistical Yearbook of Tajikistan, 2011). The highest rate of external labour migration is from the DRS, at 15.1% of the population aged 15–75 years, while the lowest rate is from Dushanbe city, at 6.4%; 13.5% (21 000) of the population aged 15–75 years from GBAO are migrants; 11.2% (160 700 people) from Sughd; and 9.5% (152 000 people) from Khatlon region (Statistical Yearbook of Tajikistan, 2011). Commuting has been steadily increasing. About 70-80% of commuters are people who work in urban areas in enterprises and organisations with different forms of ownership and 20-30% are students attending classes in urban areas (Kuddussov, 2012:67). Besides, the difficult and poorly enumerated work available in rural areas doesn't attract rural residents who seek better paid employment with acceptable working conditions in cities. There is already a marked deficit of qualified workers in the cotton production industry in professions that were traditionally considered to be male oriented. Commuting and labour migration contribute to increasing the population's employment rate, decreasing unemployment and improving the living standards of Tajik population. Table-3.1 shows this trend in labour migration.

From 2000-2007, the outflow of rural migration is high. It can be attributed to the fact that during this period Russia experienced the construction boom and they needed a large number of low skilled labours. As a result the people belonging to rural area went for labour migration as we know that in rural areas the poverty rate is high.

Levels of outmigration and the composition of migrant population vary by region with the variations underpinned by factors such as level of poverty, and the demographic context. This is shown below in the table.

Table 3.2

Region	Population density persons per sqkm*	Poverty rate (thousandth of people)*	Emigrated Persons*
GBAO	32	197	2201
Sughd	887	2123	9355
Khatlon	10,85	2169	16356
RRS	-	1553	8338
Dushanbe	57,259	630	4054

Source :*(www.censusinfo.tj,2013);.Accessed on 20/04/2015.

Migration occurs in the region where there is relatively high level of wages which ultimately occurs in those regions where industry and finance is concentrated. These are the reasons why Dushanbe has inflow of migrants instead of outflow. Therefore, it is evident that high salaries are a factor which contributes to migration.

Numerically, from above table the largest number of migrants comes from the regions of Sughd, Khatlon and RRS, although it should be noted that these are also the most populous regions of the country and in these regions poverty rate is high. Khatlon is the poorest region of Tajikistan, so it is expected to produce the largest proportion of migrants as a share of the population e.g., although just 32.5% of the country's population live in Khatlon, the region accounts for 50% of the extremely poor (Bliss, 2010:11). Khatlon is the region most affected by the war and has subsequently been demolished by debt crisis. Migrants from Khatlon are seasonal workers working in Russia on construction sites (Jones et.al, 2007:15). Sughd is the most economically developed and politically influential region. During soviet era industries were concentrated here and level of development of urban infrastructure was high. This created a network of professional and personal connections between enterprises in Sughd and Russia. As a result the migrants from Sughd are shuttle traders or skilled workers. The other significant region of Tajikistan Rayon Republican Subordination RRS- western RRS is an area of non cotton agriculture where structural reforms and privatisation have allowed private farmers to expand and market their crops.

Dynamics reflecting the involvement of the Tajik population in labour migration is reflected in the results of the living standard surveys carried in Tajikistan in different years. Between 1997 and 1999

the number of migrants in household constituted just 1.5 percent. By 1999, according to LFS the number of migrants has increased sharply. According to LFS 2004, at the time of survey (July, when the maximum number of migrants are abroad) a total of 317,900 people or 8.5% of the working age population were working outside the country as labour migrants. Migration of well qualified specialists had indubitably impact on socio economic situation in recent years.

Graph 3.0
Showing Net Migration from Different Regions of Tajikistan



Source: Statistical Agency of Tajikistan (www.stat.tj/english/database.htm).
 Accessed on:20/01/2015

From Graph 3.0, we can see that Dushanbe is the only urban centre that experiences significant inward migration flows. Due to poor socio economic situation in other regions of Tajikistan and the inability to find work which would ensure normal living standards, most rural migrants move in the city especially to Dushanbe. The capital is changing its face-the once educational and industrial city is being transformed into a rural commercial centre. In Dushanbe life has become more expensive, while the number of people living below poverty line increases (Usmonov, n.d).

From Graph 3.0 we can see that in 2006 and particularly 2007 the number of people wishing to move abroad for permanent residence began to grow again. This can be explained by the fact that the main destination country for Tajik migrants Russia, announced the launch of a public programmes to assist with the voluntary relocation to Russia of Russians living abroad. According to unofficial figures for the period

2006-2007 alone, the number of Tajik families wishing to move to Russia for permanent residence increased several times, constituting several thousands of families. The migrants include doctors, teachers, and qualified blue collar workers. Wages for the existing vacancies, particularly in sectors of health and education, which is mostly female oriented professions don't meet the expectations of the skilled labour force. Due to global economic crisis of 2008 the situation of labour migrants in the Russian federation had worsened, and especially Tajik construction workers were hard hit. Tajik migrants lost their jobs and the employers were not giving them salaries or only part of it (Migration Profile, 2010:49). As a result of recession, Russia reduced their quotas of immigration by half in late 2008. In Moscow, the 2009 quota for foreign labour was initially set at 500,000, later it was halved to 250,000 migrant workers. The situation was same in throughout Russian Federation, even though the quota for 2009 was set at 3,946,747 work permits which was slightly higher than the quota set by the Russians government for 2008 3,384,129 work permits (ACTED, 2009:15).

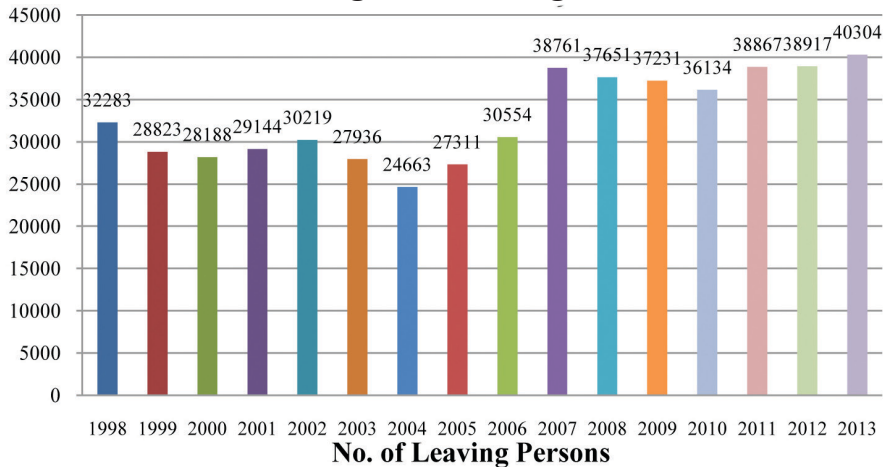
Causes of Emigration

According to the World Development Indicators, the figures of net migration in 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997 are -5749, -21870, -37962, -289263, -324793 respectively. In 1970s and 1980s it was mainly educational migration (Olimova & Bosc, 2003:11) From 1992 to 1997, we see a large increase in migration, it can be attributed to the fact that the continuous war threw the population into shock that led to economic recession, hyper inflation, unemployment, steep decline in gross output and collapse of living standards. At this time a large proportion of population almost 83% in Tajikistan lived in poverty and the countries of the region were ranked amongst the poorest in the world (UNDP, 2005:50). As a result, a large proportion of people go for migration as a survival strategy.

Graph 3.1 shows the trends of migration from different regions. From graph 3.1, we can observe that migration from 1998 is decreasing till 2000, then from 2001 to 2002 it is increasing and then from 2003 to 2004 it is declining again and from 2005 to 2007 it is increasing, from 2008 to 2010 it is declining again due to global economic crisis, when the market gets stabilised the migration flows rise again from 2011 to 2013. From 1998 to 2000 we see that there is decrease in number of leaving persons this can be attributed to the fact that Russia's difficult

economic situation and accounts of integration failures weakened the will to return of some Russians still present in Tajikistan who were not sure that they will find better living conditions in Russia.

Graph 3.1
Showing Trends of Migration



Source: Statistical agency of Tajikistan. Retrieved from www.stat.tj. Accessed on : 20/04/2015.

Then from 2001, we see that the number of people who migrate is slightly increasing up to 2002, the reason may be Russians which were still in Tajikistan send their children abroad mainly for schooling because the education system was degraded. Then from 2003 to 2004, it is declining again as we know that most of the Tajik's migrate to Russia because of their similarity in social structure and the familiarity with the Russian language but they were not treated well in Russia and were given low wages and new laws were introduced by the Russian government that complicated the immigration process especially with regard to obtaining citizenship in the Russian federation. Then, from 2005 to 2007 it has increased again, this can be attributed to the fact that the launch of important projects in Russia demanded low skilled labour force of thousands of people. So, the people from neighbouring countries especially Tajikistan move to Russia in order to earn. The repatriation program which was launched by Putin in 2006 was also responsible for the increase in number of migrants. The global financial crisis of 2008-2010 brought on a slump in manufacture, a fall in production, a slowdown in the construction sector, all of which have led to the growth in unemployment (UNIFEM, 2009:15). The consequences of the crisis have had a negative effect on various strata of society including

migrants. The migrants were forced to go back to their native country. As a result we see the migration in declining phase. From 2011 to 2013 it increases again, as we know that the world market got stabilised and the various soviet developmental programs were initiated that summoned young, educated people of the region to occupy positions of political, administrative and economic decision making.

Russian Federal Migration Service had already reported that with the decline of the rubble, the size of the transfer of payments by migrants in Russia to their homelands had sharply fallen that will harm the economies of countries like Tajikistan from which migrants come. The collapse of the rubble and the test of the Russian language would be the reasons for the migrants to leave the nation in large numbers (Goble, 2014). The Tajiks are losing jobs because Russia is facing recession (Parshin, 2015) and as a result in future the migration would be in declining phase. The downturn in Russia has been aggravated by new federal legislation that is making life for migrants harder, too. Some of these regulations target Tajik migrants because Tajikistan has not (yet) joined the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union. Russian legislation in 2014 put 270,000 Tajik workers on the re-entry ban list as of November 2014, reducing paid work opportunities. The number of blacklisted migrants reportedly increased in the beginning of 2015. If those labour migrants return home, they are likely to stay home for up to five years. Furthermore, since January 1, 2015, biometric passports are required for all migrants entering Russia. Also, on January 10, 2015, a new law came into force that bans those found to be staying illegally in Russian Federation territory from re-entering for 10 years. These regulations exacerbate the already appalling conditions of labour migrants (Trilling, 2015). From Jan 1, 2015 new Russian legislation bans foreigners from working in trade. Russians cut migrant work permits quota to 1.5 million (Lemon, 2011).

Labour migration in Tajikistan follows certain patterns. The main outflow of labour is towards CIS countries. The immense majority go to Russia, few others go to Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and countries further abroad (Iran, Persian, Gulf States, Mongolia, Canada and U.S.A). It is distinguished by a prevalence of males. According to LFS (2004), of the total number of migrants, men constitute 94.3% and women just 5.7%. Labour migration is seasonal and returning, as family ties are strong back in Tajikistan (Kuddussov, 2009:69). Women migrant workers from Tajikistan total approximately

12 -15 per cent of the overall number of migrants from that country, although expert estimates put the number from 10 to 17 per cent (UNIFEM, 2009:21). Most migrants consider their work abroad as a temporary measure to solve the financial problems of the family to some extent. Due to recently reduced demand in the Russian Federation labour market, as well as the dubious economic recovery of the Russian Federation in the near future, the republic of Tajikistan is more willing to consolidate its cooperation on migration with other regions, including Europe, in order to safeguard working opportunities for the domestic population. Tajikistan had already taken steps to enlarge its markets for its domestic workforce by preparing /signing bilateral agreements on labour migration with several third countries including South Korea and Saudi Arabia (Migration Profile, 2010:60).

Conclusion

As recession is on the peak and several laws are passed by the host countries to curb migration throughout, the migrants would undoubtedly return to their native countries or look for other alternatives like to start a small enterprise in their home countries in order to overcome the economic crisis, this would indirectly result in increase of pressure in the social sphere. The recession and the emanating shrinking labour market in Russia where the majority of Tajik labour migrants go in search of jobs would create new set of challenges for both migrants and locals. There is a possibility of forcible return of substantial proportion of labour migrants to their native countries which would cause larger social, humanitarian and potentially political crisis in the region as the local economies in Tajikistan is not so strong to absorb them. Tajikistan is vulnerable to Russia's economic difficulties which are caused by the pressure of low oil prices, the cost of integrating Crimea and funding the wars in Ukraine and Syria and western sanctions imposed in response to Russia's hostility in Ukraine. Russia's recession resulted in the fall of remittances to Tajikistan as most of the migrants of Tajikistan work in Russia. In the long run ,Central Asian policy makers would need to strengthen social safety nets and should focus on generating employment opportunities at home but for the time being remittances will remain important to their economies. Russian authorities meanwhile should view labour migration as lifeline for their country's labour force and avoid policies forcing migrant workers especially from Tajikistan into shadows.

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