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## Central Asians as Foreign Workers in Russia: Implications on Russia's Demography, Economy and Cultural Diversity

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### ANNOTATION

The influx of Central Asians in Russia has affected the country's social and economic landscape. The article tends to focus on the migration of Central Asian population towards Russia and how it has impacted Russian demography, Economy and Cultural diversity because this migration can be seen as a multifaceted as its impacts can be seen on Central Asian states and Russia as well. This migration has mitigated the affects of ageing population of Russia besides this the contribution of migrated people towards various sectors of Russian economy. Historically being a part of U.S.S.R the infusion of culture and traditions is clearly visible. The article sheds light on the interplay of factors that define the impacts of Central Asian workers on Russian demographic changes, economy and cultural diversity.

Central Asia also referred by Russia as its "near-abroad" and generally called as the "Heartland of Eurasia" has been important for major powers in the past and in the present as well. This region is known for its massive energy resources and raw minerals which are vital to for country's economic development. The Demographic landscape of Russia has undergone various changes as prior to the Chinese economic boom the population of central Asia has always seen Russia as a major economic power in the region. But the significant change which Russian Federation has seen is the migration and settlement of Central Asians. The proximity of Russian towards this region act as a magnate due to several reasons. This research paper tends to focus on the historic, socio-economic impacts, and political factors which are behind this migration and will analyze that what are the implications on Russian demography, society and Economy.

### Historical Context: -

The migration of people from the Central Asian region can be traced back to U.S.S.R when it started to expand its influence in the Central Asian states. This migration was not in search of economic resources but the major factor which caused this migration was political and territorial expansion. These states have been under Russian control for about half a century as socialist republics under the U.S.S.R. The industrialization efforts by Soviet Union after the World War II required extensive labor so the migration was encouraged by the Soviet Authorities. Many Central Asian families were resettled in Russia mostly in the fields of agriculture, labor and construction. This resettlement was vital for Soviet economy which was modelled on a centralized economic system. After its disintegration Russia has engaged with these states via formation of

Eurasian Economic Union<sup>1</sup> for trade subsidies Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for safeguarding regional security and threats emerging to mainland Russia<sup>2</sup> and by providing educational scholarships through state funded quotas. According to an estimate about 180,000 Central Asian students are in Russia. Being a part of U.S.S.R for almost half a century these people naturally adopted the Russian language as their primary source of conversation with each other and to this day Russian language has been widely used as a means of communication, diplomacy and taught across the region widely.

### **Contemporary Central Asian Migration: -**

After the disintegration of U.S.S.R the newly formed Russian Federation saw its economy declining as it now wanted to shift its economic model towards the prevalent capitalist model. But in the coming years around early 2000's Russia begin to emerge as a major economic power and as it further opened up its economy to foreign investors more and more foreign workers were attracted towards it to try their luck. While on the other hand the central Asian states were also facing difficulties in order to transform themselves into a new economic system. As the Russian economy expanded the Central Asian population saw this opportunity because they were already familiar with the Russian culture as they have lived in U.S.S.R and were fluent in the Russian language as well. Russia has engaged with these states via formation of Eurasian Economic Union for trade subsidies Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for safeguarding regional security and its threats emerging to mainland Russia and by providing educational scholarships through state funded quotas. According to an estimate about 180,000 Central Asian students are in Russia<sup>3</sup>. Being a part of U.S.S.R for almost half a century these people naturally adopted the Russian language as their primary source of conversation with each other and to this day Russian language has been widely used as a means of communication, diplomacy and taught across the region widely. According to latest estimates there are about 350,000 Tajiks, 630,000 Uzbeks and 173,000 Kyrgyz workers were present in Russia and these people contribute a large chunk towards their national GDPs via remittances as Tajik diaspora's total remittances contributed 51% of its total GDP, 21% to Uzbek economy and 31% to Kyrgyz economy<sup>4</sup>. The major challenge which Russia faces is the decline on Russian Population and an increase in foreign workers because due to war in Ukraine and Western sanctions have negatively contributed towards economic projections. With its own population to feed these sanctions have also threatened the thousands of central Asian migrant workers who had left for Russia in order to earn a better living.

### **Impacts of Central Asian Migration on Russia:**

#### **Demographic Balance:**

The phenomenon of migration dates back to centuries when people use to herd their animals from one region to other in search of better pastures and this type of nomadic lifestyle is still present in the various areas of the world mostly among native people i.e. arctic reindeer herders and in the deserts of Africa. In contemporary era this migration has changed its shape as skilled people migrate from their native states to other parts of the world in order to achieve a better living standard. According to estimates the Russian population will decline to 130 million in 2050 from 145 million which will affect the Russian economy and society. Similarly, the

<sup>1</sup> Евразийский экономический союз (ЕАЭС). Last modified 2023. <https://www.eaeunion.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Collective Security Treaty Organisation. Accessed November 18, 2023. <https://en.odkb-csto.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Eurasia, Ponars. "Central Asian Students Between Russia and the West." PONARS Eurasia – New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia. Last modified April 23, 2014. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/central-asian-students-between-russia-and-the-west/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ozat, Meray. "Central Asian Labor Migration: Exploring New Destinations Amid Geopolitical Tensions." Caspian Policy Center. Last modified October 4, 2023. <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/energy-and-economy-program-eep/central-asian-labor-migration-exploring-new-destinations-amid-geopolitical-tensions>.

migration of workers from Central Asian has contributed in a very positive way because there has been a continuous down trend in Russia's demographic balance. There has been a debate among scholars that cultural integration, competition for jobs and language barriers have sparked debates about the social implication of migration. Besides these challenges there are also positive impacts of migration i.e. they fulfill the worker shortages and increase the industrial capacity besides this with so many ethnicities the social fabric of a state also becomes multicultural. These foreign workers tend to migrate towards major cities commonly Moscow and St. Petersburg<sup>5</sup>. This migration has balanced the work force which otherwise was decreasing due to declining birthrate and aging population. The central Asian population have become a source for provision of domestic services.

### **Economic Contribution:**

People from Central Asia have contributed substantially towards the Russian economy due to their active participation in various sectors. Workers from Central Asia are skilled and mostly these workers tend to work in construction, agriculture and services sectors. These workers are hired on affordable wages which benefits mutually towards the employer and employee. The critical labor gaps which are present in Russian economy are fulfilled by these workers which enable smooth completion of various infrastructural projects thus contributing towards the economic growth and small businesses have benefited the most from this migration as these workers are a reliable working force.

According to the Federal budget Russia has allocated over 760 billion rubles will be channeled into carrying the socioeconomic development initiatives over the coming years<sup>6</sup>. This means the government had plans to invest on infrastructural projects which can help the foreign workers to sustain their jobs in Russia despite the economic crunch due to the sanctions from United States and West. In 2021 the remittances transferred from Russian to Uzbekistan stand at 55% and 51% towards Kazakhstan<sup>7</sup>. Besides this these people also send remittances towards their families in their home countries which also facilitates the economic conditions of native states. These remittances are a vital source of income for the Central Asian households as they have helped to alleviate poverty and have improved living standards in their country. This migration is multifaceted because at a time it has numerous benefits for the workers home country and their host country.

### **Cultural Diversity and Integration:**

The Central Asian workers originate from different regions of Central Asia and all of them are having different traditions, workplace ethics and unique skills for tackling the problems. The diversity and exchange of skills have fostered a multicultural environment in the workplace which is inclusive and dynamic but has also increased the productivity<sup>8</sup>. The cultural exchange between the different ethnicities provide an environment where all people can learn about the tradition and culture of other states. Russian language is widely used in the region and in daily lives the Central Asian migration has led to increased cultural diversity in Russia. The linguistic similarity can act as a catalyst to facilitate the communication on a broader scale and a valuable in this globalized world<sup>9</sup>. The huge number of people from Central Asia has resulted positively

<sup>5</sup> Kamalakaran, Ajay. "Central Asians are central to Russia's economy." Gateway House Indian Council on Global Relations. Last modified September 8, 2022. <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/central-asians-central-russia-economy/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Government Meeting." Правительство России официальный сайт. Accessed November 18, 2023. <https://government.ru/en/news/49572/>.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Cordell, Jake. "Falling Ruble Dents Russia's Image Among Central Asian Migrant Workers." The Moscow Times. Last modified September 13, 2023. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/09/13/falling-ruble-dents-russias-image-among-central-asian-migrant-workers-a82418>.

<sup>9</sup> Bifulchi, Giuliano. "Geopolitics of Russia's Language Schools in Kyrgyzstan." SpecialEurasia. Last modified September 18, 2023. <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2023/09/18/russia-language-kyrgyzstan/>.

between the regional states and Russia because the cultural exchanges have increased and Central Asian culture has been successfully integrated in Russian traditions. With different barriers and stereotypes still present there the efforts are underway to promote cultural awareness and mutual understanding are essential to overcome these challenges. With so many cultures Russia can be considered as a vibrant state.

### Conclusion:

The migration from Central Asia has become an integral part of Russia's demography. These migrants contribute towards Russian economy, skilled workers force and culturally diverse. These workers should be provided with job security and although there has been no incident reported of discrimination, socio-economic disparity between Russian population and Central Asian workers because they are non-native the State authorities the Russian government should work to minimize such incidents because these workers play a major role in Russian economy. It is very vital for a country to understand the importance of these individuals because these people are not just there to change the demographic statistics but they have also come there with dreams and aspirations as they believe that they are capable to contribute towards their hosts country's economy and growth.

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