

What are the characteristics, behaviors and problems for families and children? Case stories: Central Asia

Jana Costachi

INTRODUCTION

Migrant workers bring an enormous contribution to the development of the Central Asia (CA) region by providing skills that fill labour market needs in countries of destination, and by providing remittances, return of talent and enhanced commercial activity in their countries of origin, i.e., Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan.

International labour mobility has become increasingly important in CA over the past two decades. The collapse of the Soviet Union and centralized employment system has entailed considerable changes in labour markets and growth of internal and external labour migration. The regional migration has affected all population strata, all age categories, men and women, various occupations and social groups in CA. Migration has strengthened economic linkages between actors in the regions as well as increased the development of speed gaps between various countries.

According to the Central Asia Human Development Report (UNDP), just within the period from early 1989 to early 2002, nearly 3 million people, or over 20% of the population, migrated from Kazakhstan; 694,000 people (11% of the population) from Tajikistan; over 1 million people (4%) from Uzbekistan, and 360,000 people (7%) from Kyrgyzstan.

Since the early 2000s, the labour migration-related issues have become especially topical. Before that time, migration was of a predominantly ethnical nature and was related to departure of non-titular ethnic groups to their countries of origin (Russia, Ukraine, Israel, and Germany) or to industrially-developed Western countries (USA, Canada, Western Europe). Meanwhile, in the recent decade, migration flows have undergone considerable changes. During the 2000s, the former Soviet Union countries witnessed the emigration of many of their most educated and enterprising people.

Since the economic growth in Russia and Kazakhstan, the increasing number of labour migrants—members of the regional indigenous populations of Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz people—have left for these countries in search of a job. A regional migrant's profile has drastically changed. The migrants—urban residents with rather high educational attainment—have been substituted for a number of indigenous labour migrants, the majority of whom are villagers with quite a low level of education and qualifications.

Director, Centre for Prevention of
Trafficking in Women

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/qproc.2013.fmd.9>

© 2013 Costachi, licensee
Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation
Journals. This is an open access
article distributed under the
terms of the Creative Commons
Attribution license CC BY 3.0,
which permits unrestricted use,
distribution and reproduction in
any medium, provided the original
work is properly cited.

Kazakhstan—only recently a country of origin for labour migrants—has become a major country of destination for foreign workers. This has been largely due to economic growth, which began in Kazakhstan in the 2000's and the resultant increase in the number of jobs, wage hikes and the generally higher income of the population.

Various informal evaluations of the number of Kyrgyz migrant workers abroad vary between 170,000 and 700,000 people. Kyrgyzstan is the third largest Central Asian supplier of labour migrants to Russia (after Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). The Russian Federation and Kyrgyzstan are the main destination countries. Of labour migrants, 20-30% go through organized channels (recruitment agencies or the state), while 70 to 80 % of labour migrants do not use formal intermediaries.

According to official data, there are currently over 730,000 Tajik citizens working abroad. About 89% of emigrants regularly send remittances to their relatives. Tajik migrant workers, who are mainly working in Russia, sent nearly 2.29 billion dollars to Tajikistan last year –49% of GDP in 2008 (National Bank).

Along with the Russian Federation, European countries are increasingly becoming migration destinations, receiving, among others, migrants from former Soviet Union countries, in particular from Moldova, Ukraine. Although the European Union has introduced extensive controls in recent years, southern European countries, especially, still see substantial clandestine migration.

Migration patterns are not purely economically driven, however. They tend to follow inter-country networks based on family, culture and history. People may move between countries to find work, but they do so more easily between countries with historical links, where they know they will find compatriots, or to which family or friends have already migrated and have become established enough to help them.

In addition to economically-driven 'voluntary' migration, other and quite different forms of population mobility also take place in the region: refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced. Another category that is increasingly important today is transit migration. Undocumented migrants also continue to be in considerable demand. Indeed, industries have emerged to facilitate such flows—a plethora of public and private agencies in both developing and developed countries have materialized to recruit workers for employment abroad. The question of return migration is receiving more attention, as it is becoming apparent that migrants frequently go back to their home countries, both for visits and to return permanently after they have lived and worked in other countries. Circular seasonal migration between the boarding regions is receiving considerable attention in particular and also often for part-time or irregular work such as that of petty traders or construction workers.

Migration is a complex process, which includes all possible forms of migration, the largest component, however, being labor migration. For some of migrant workers, temporary international migration is becoming a permanent way of life. They return home only to migrate again. Rather than returning to the cultures from which they came, or integrating into the one in which they are living, such migrants develop 'transnational' lifestyles and perspectives, from which they live 'between' or 'across' two countries, economies and cultures. Many migrants maintain ties across borders: economically as they send money home or run businesses in two different places; politically as migrants may vote or even run for office in more than one state; socially as they maintain ties with friends and family, sometimes across great distances; culturally, and in religious communities that transcend space.

Women now make up nearly half of all international migrants across the various categories of migrants. Women are also increasingly labour migrants. "Fifty percent of labor migrants

from Kyrgyzstan are women,” the President Almazbek Atambayev stated at a solemn ceremony in honor of International Women’s Day. According him, children of labor migrants, around 20 thousand, grow up without mothers. “When girls are early given in marriage—kidnapped—this has negative impact on image of the republic. Two thirds of children are born into families not registered their marriage,” said Almazbek Atambayev.

Migration can provide a vital source of income for migrant women and their families, and earn them greater autonomy, self-confidence and social status. This happens by giving access to financial resources, or permitting women from traditional societies of origin to discover new norms regarding women’s rights and opportunities at destination.

A few studies are beginning to explore women’s motivations for migrating. A first reason is economic. Some women also migrate to become modern and to be independent, or to escape discrimination and oppression from family members. Very often, migration of women is the result of decisions that are made not by individuals, but by families. Migration is a ‘family project’—the expected outcomes are not for the individual migrant, but for other family members, including descendents. Decisions about which specific family member is to move are made on the basis of age, birth order and gender, in ways that are highly determined by cultural norms, particular skills and attributes. Households deliberately choose the particular family members who are most likely to provide net income gains. Other families may also use migration of selected members as a sort of insurance, as a way of diversifying their activities in order to minimize risk.

However, migration can also entrench traditional roles and inequalities and expose women to new vulnerabilities as the result of their precarious legal status, exclusion and isolation. Female migrants, especially if they are irregular migrants, can face stigma, gender discrimination, poverty and violence, poor housing and encampments, sex-segregated labour markets, low wages, long working hours, insecure contracts and precarious legal status. And upon return to the source country they may be faced with broken families, illness and poverty.

EFFECTS OF MIGRATION ON FAMILY RELATIONS

Concerning families in general migration may have positive consequences for families and for children. Migration can mean positively changing roles and responsibilities within families; increased economic wellbeing; educational opportunities and social capital, and increased autonomy, learning, and pride in achievements. In sum, migration can bring the potential strength of transnational identities and build resilience.

But this is not the only positive effect. One of the most negative impacts of irregular migration on family is the social costs of such migration. Awareness of the value of family relationships was heightened, the need for closer communication was felt, attitudes regarding the role of women had changed, and international awareness was widened. Migration may then start a virtuous or a vicious spiral for families and for children. It can have disastrous consequences such as emotional distancing, undesired destruction of the family unit, physical and mental health problems, dropping out of school, alienation, drug use and prison stays—a whole series of problems that may or may not be directly due to the migration but that are certainly interlinked with it.

Migration profoundly modified family relations. Even under favorable circumstances—when an international move is voluntarily, social and economic difficulties are minor and cultural differences are subtle rather than flagrant—migration can destroy the family unit. Migration to a different culture can additionally give rise to intergenerational tensions.

Roles within families shift after migration, especially when only one parent migrates. While husbands and fathers who migrate alone maintain their role as breadwinners in their families,

the women and children who have remained behind take over the tasks traditionally done by the absent family members. The women remaining at home may face a variety of difficulties such as raising children as a single parent; dealing with their own emotional, psychological and sexual needs; conflicts with in-laws concerning management of resources; avoiding sexual violence, and abandonment of husbands who establish new families in other countries.

On the other hand, migration causes problems for families, and especially for the children left behind. Children become estranged from their parents, who are overseas workers. Reports show that children see their parents only as sources of gifts and money and blame parents absence for problems such as delinquency, drugs, and premarital sex. Many children become quarrelsome and have difficulties developing healthy friendships with other children. In some cases, their grades in school decline. The lack of effective and regular communications leads to the family's growing apart. The pressure to provide the family with money sometimes causes migrants to avoid visiting home. Distance and poor communication weakens relationships.

Dependency on migrant workers' incomes has grown, and families often do not engage in alternative income-generating activities. Migrants working in other countries consider their migration to be temporarily—they fully intend to return to their home communities, where they have left children to be safely cared for by grandmothers or other family members. If the returnee finds a job, the wages are usually not enough to provide for the needs of his/her family. The few labour migrants who manage to save money and attempt to set up a business upon return often fail because of poor business education, lack of training and lack of information on business conditions. This is the case for Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. All these circumstances frequently leave returning migrants workers with no choice other than to migrate again.

In conclusion, migration helps to improve the quality of life for many migrants and their families. Nevertheless, many migrant workers and their families are subject to labour exploitation, abuse and discriminatory treatment. The benefits of migration are not evenly distributed, with the social costs being highest for unskilled migrants—the poorer households are the least able to maximize the benefits of migration, especially as they had difficulty effectively managing suddenly larger flows of income.

Why it is so difficult to find solutions to regulate migration flows, which would considerably reduce the social costs of migration in the region?

1. Change in stereotypes. The difficulties in solving the labour migration-specific issues in CA are the legacy from the Soviet era. In Soviet times, the individual migration was considered as a “vestige of capitalism”; only “planned” migration directed by the authorities was admitted. The labour migration outside the home country was also considered inadmissible. Naturally, such stereotypes cannot vanish at once; however, the perception of the labour migration, as something negative and undesirable should be overcome as it meets neither economic nor demographic realities of the current stage of development in Central Asia states. Another stereotype concerning the labour migration is that it is considered to be not typical of traditionally sedentary Central Asia population, primarily, Uzbeks and Tajiks.
2. External factors—especially a migrant family's legal status and regulations about family reunification—strongly determine the way in which families will be affected by migration. Formal restrictions made it impossible for migrant families to live together. In other instances, and in numerous places today, low wages, poor employment conditions, and limited space may limit migrant workers ability to live with their families. The importance of legal status gives the right to health care and education, as well as to some protection from exploitation. Two contradictory tendencies can be noted concerning family reunification, in particular. On one hand, the universalization of human rights—including the right to choose a spouse and to live in a family

household—has drastically decreased the legal base for restrictions to family migration. On the other hand, enhanced border controls and strict migration policies limit entry of accompanying family members to many countries. It is difficult to estimate the number of families involved worldwide since, although migration data now more often includes information about gender and age; data about family units entering or leaving countries is rarely recorded as such.

3. A thorough, cross-national comparative review of the effects of migration on children or on families has not been done. It would require examining the short- and long-term psychological and economic effects of such migration, taking into account the levels of development of countries of origin and of destination, the family's socioeconomic and other resources, the reasons for the migration and its duration, cultural factors, and the various configurations in which families may migrate. It would also require looking not only downward, at effects on children, but also upward, at effects on the parents whose children have migrated.
4. The fundamental policy challenge to be addressed is facilitating international labour mobility to meet employment and skill needs and enhance economic performance, in order to realize development and social welfare benefits from migration.
5. Theory, policy and practice that link gender equality concerns with migration from a development perspective are rare. Migration is still primarily seen as the concern of the state, and migration as a development issue is only just emerging, with limited attention being paid to gender. While there is increasing recognition that women are also migrants and that the causes and impacts of migration are gendered, attempts to mainstream gender issues into policy are patchy. Work has focused primarily on “adding women” as a discriminated and vulnerable group, particularly in relation to displacement due to conflict and trafficking for sexual exploitation. The many women-focused policies and programmes initiated by NGO and civil society organisations largely focus on empowering, protecting and supporting female migrants.
6. Data on migration has become a key arena for determining how migration and migrants are perceived and how migration is governed. There is little data or study made available that describes and characterizes migration and migrants in terms of labour force participation, employment distribution, skills insertion, ages and social status of migrants, family construction etc. In consequence, international dialogue and public debate are generally focused on migration as threat and as phenomena requiring control and policy responses.
7. In order to assess the need for foreign labour, evidence should include data on gender and more detailed information on specific labour market sectors to understand gender distribution. The needs assessment should not overlook domestic work and private care-related services so that admission policies would better reflect the actual need. Such measures would also help reduce the number of female migrants working in irregular employment situations. Much data currently collected, disseminated and applied to policy is data that describes migration as population movements with specific reference to border crossings, legal status and often criminality, to national security and territorial and population control.
8. Despite the fact that CA countries have developed national policy and implementation plans on migration, international instruments for protection of migrant workers' rights remain insufficiently effective. Insufficient efficiency of international instruments for regulation of labour migration and protection of migrants' rights, and the necessity of more specific consideration of regional and country peculiarities, determine the practice of concluding multilateral (generally, regional) and bilateral agreements in this sphere.
9. Bilateral labour agreements should include two different types of provisions that can benefit female migrant workers: (a) general good practices that have a positive impact on women, including families members, such as protective provisions in sectors not covered by national labour law, e.g., domestic services; and (b) gender-specific provisions

- such as gender impact assessments; the inclusion of gender advisers with expertise on migration at all stages, from creation to implementation of such agreements, and gender sensitivity training for all staff involved in the process.
10. If women and men are to benefit from the empowering and development potential of migration, a shift is needed to a gendered human rights approach to migration. Immigration and emigration policies enable women as well as men to take up opportunities that safe and regular migration may offer and which foster the positive impacts of migration for the social and economic development of migrants as well as the receiving and sending countries. This would include measures to ensure sufficient regular channels for women's entry, to avoid them being pushed into more risky irregular channels and bilateral agreements between sending and receiving areas which protect women migrants' rights.
 11. A supportive institutional structure should be made more gender-sensitive through gender mainstreaming, since this is required in order to develop and implement gender-sensitive policies. Support for the acknowledgement of the rights of migrants throughout the migration process, including providing pre-departure information on legal rights, facilitating remittances, ensuring access to basic services such as housing, education and health, and supporting migrant solidarity between different migrant groups to address issues of exclusion and isolation. Different reintegration programmes serving a diverse group of female migrants should be developed to smooth the process of return, such as assistance with transfer of pensions and other social benefits obtained abroad; new employment opportunities should be offered; additional training or access to education should be made available; and assistance should be provided for social re-integration.
 12. Enhance at the regional level an inter-country consultative dialogue on further interventions for harmonization of national legislations and policies to facilitate labour migration mobility, and better govern labour migration movements and protection of labour migrants' rights, including reinforcing their right to be entitled to social security services, with a special focus of gender-related aspects. At administrative and practical levels of governance, main challenges include formulating a national policy and implementation plans focusing on improving human and institutional capacity for implementation, establishing or strengthening specialized government bodies on labour migration administration and protection of migrant workers and their families.
 13. Support trade unions and employers to make efficient contributions into labour migration governance and develop a regional dialogue on the principles of tripartism.

REFERENCES

- Boyd, M. (1989). Family and personal networks in international migration: recent developments and new agendas. *International Migration Review*
- Carling, J. (2005). Gender dimensions of international migration, Global Commission on International Migration, Geneva.
- Cassarino, J.-P. (2004). Therorising Return Migration: the Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*
- Collinson, M.A., Tollman, S.M., Kahn, K., Clark, S.J., & Garenne, M. (2006). Highly Prevalent Circular Migration: Households, Mobility and Economic Status in Rural
- Davidson, J. & Farrow, C. (2007). Child Migration and the Construction of Vulnerability, Save the Children Sweden.
- Dumont, J.-C. & Zurn, P. (2007). Immigrant Health Workers in OECD Countries in the Broader Context of Highly Skilled Migration, OECD.
- Ghosh, B. (2000). Return migration: Journey of hope or despair? *International Organization for Migration*, Geneva.
- Global Commission on International Migration (2005). *Migration in an interconnected*

- world: New directions for action: Report of the Global commission on international Migration', GCIM, Geneva.
- Haour-Knipe, M. (2001). *Moving Families: Expatriation, Stress and Coping* Routledge, London.
 - Haour-Knipe, M. (2008). *Dreams and disappointments: Migration and families in the context of HIV and AIDS*. Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS JLICA. <http://www.childmigration.net/files/2.pdf>
 - Hugo, G. (1994). *Migration and the family* United Nations, Vienna, Austria.
 - International Labour Office (2004). *Towards a fair deal for migrant workers in the global economy*, ILO, Geneva
 - Jolly, S. & Reeves, H. (2005). *Gender and Migration: Overview Report*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK
 - Kofman, E. & Meeton, V. (2008). *Family Migration*. In *World Migration 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy*, IOM, Geneva.
 - Levitt, P. & Jaworsky, N. (2007). *Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends*. *Annual Review of Sociology*
 - Madhavan, S., Collinson, M.A., Townsend, N.W., Kahn, K., & Tollman, S.M. (2007). The implications of long term community involvement for the production and circulation of population knowledge. *Demographic Research*
 - Martin, S. (2005). *2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Division for the Advancement of Women, New York.
 - Momsen, J.H. (1999). *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service* Routledge, London.
 - Nyberg-Sorensen, N., Hear, N.V., & Engberg-Pedersen, P. (2002). *The migration-development nexus: Evidence and policy options, state of the art overview* IOM, Geneva.
 - Orellana, M.F., Thorne, B., Chee, A., & Lam, W.S.E. (2001). *Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration*. *Social Problems*
 - Redfoot, D.L. & Houser, A.N. (2005). "We Shall Travel On": Quality of Care, Economic Development, and the International Migration of Long-Term Care Workers, Public Policy Institute, AARP, Washington, DC.
 - Staehelin, C., Rickenbach, M., Low, N., Egger, M., Ledergerber, B., Hirschel, B., D'Acremont, V., Battegay,
 - Stark, O. & Taylor, J.E. (1989). *Relative deprivation and international migration*. *Demography*
 - Wanner, P. (2002). *Migration Trends in Europe*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg
 - Whitehead, A. & Hashim, I. (2005). *Children and Migration: Background Paper for DFID Migration Team*.