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How and Why Emigration Matters: Examining the Emergence of New “Emigration Regimes” and its Impact on Public Administration in Kyrgyzstan

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Most immigration studies have focused on migrant receiving states. By contrast, little attention has been paid to the emigration policies of sending states. This article examines several administrative reforms implemented in Kyrgyzstan to regulate emigration. Our findings regarding the actual outcomes of these strategies are mixed. If some progress has been made in defending the rights of Kyrgyz workers abroad and guaranteeing the flow of remittances, several negative impacts can be identified. These include the reliance on remittances and the disruption of the social fabric, especially in rural communities. We also find that the growing “culture of emigration” undermines civic and public service values, especially among the country’s young generation.

New patterns of migration have emerged during the last two decades. First, there are more international migrants in the world today than ever previously recorded. The UN reports that 232 million people resided abroad worldwide in 2013, which is up from 154 million immigrants recorded in 1990 (United Nations, 2013). This trend is growing despite the decline in job opportunities in destination countries resulting from the global recession and the adoption of restrictive immigration measures by the key receiving countries (USA and Western European countries). Second, former sending countries, such as South European countries, have become receiving states, while new sending countries have emerged — especially in Eastern Europe. Third, there is a growing number of transit countries, both receiving and exporting workers—as illustrated by the situation in the MENA region and in Eastern Europe. All these trends have been extensively documented...
although mostly from the perspective of receiving countries. When emigration is examined, the main assumption is that sending states have little control of the global economic pull factors, either at the macro or micro level. Neo-classical studies emphasize differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries, geographic differences in the supply of and demand for labour, as well as cost-benefit calculation by potential migrants (Harris and Todaro, 1970; Todaro, 1979 and 1989; Borjas, 1999). The likelihood of emigration is also related to the development of migrant networks (Fawcett, 1989; Gurak and Caces, 1992; Hugo, 1981; Portes and Walton, 1981; Taylor, 1986), as well as the role of private actors (ranging from migrant-supporting NGOs to people smugglers). Lastly, the theory of cumulative causation argues that migration tends to sustain itself over time (Massey, 1990), leading to the emergence of permanent international flows independent from migration policies implemented by both sending and receiving countries.

Against this theoretical background, some scholars suggest to pay more attention to the political dimension of migration. Myron Weiner critically evaluates the traditional economic perspectives by noting they neglect two crucial political factors: first, “international population movements are often impelled, encouraged or prevented by governments or political forces for reasons that may have little to do with economic conditions,” and second, “it is governments that decide whether their citizens should be allowed to leave and governments that decide whether immigrants should be allowed to enter.” (Weiner, 1992/93, 96). In the same vein, Aristide Zolberg notes that macro-analytical push-pull studies “reduce migration to a unidimensional process of uneven economic exchange between states of origin and destination.” Emphasizing the significance of political boundaries, he thus argues “it is the political organization of contemporary world space into mutually exclusive and legally sovereign territorial states which delineates the specificity of international migration as a distinctive process and hence as an object of theoretical reflection” (Zolberg, 1981, 3-4).

Scholars who share a similar interest for the role of the state in international migration mostly focus on policies designed and implemented by receiving states, as well as the theoretical challenges raised by the changing dynamics of immigration (Meyers, 2000; Portes, 1997; Zolberg, 1999, 1989). By contrast, little attention has been paid to sending-states emigration policies, implying they either do not exist or do not matter. This lacuna is puzzling for at least three empirical reasons. First, emigration policies matter equally, if not more, than immigration policies. Although it is the policies of receiving countries that determine whether migration can take place, these policies are framed in response to migration flows that obviously depend on the policies pursued by sending countries. Exit and entry policies are two sides of the same coin. Second, the increasing number of illegal immigrants in some parts of the world clearly illustrates the limitations of immigration policies. Contrary to what Bhagwati (1984) has predicted, “disincentives” imposed by the destination countries affect emigration “incentives” less than expected. Third, there is evidence of a growing number of countries that are implementing a pro-active strategy of manpower export while attempting to limit illegal flows. As acknowledged by the UN General Assembly, “many countries have developed innovative policies and programs to engage their expatriate communities in the development process, to enhance regional collaboration and consultation and to reduce the transfer costs of remittances” (UN, 2011, 2). This trend is fuelled by the policies and politics of emigration in sending countries. It is worth noting that the proportion of governments wishing to decrease emigration has remained virtually unchanged since 1986. By contrast, in 2006, eleven countries reported
their plans to increase emigration\(^1\) while only four countries were concerned about the loss of highly skilled workers (UN, 2006). As Nancy Green notes, all these trends suggest the necessity of “reversing the immigration paradigm” by focusing on the “politics of exit.” (2005) Aristide Zolberg reaches a similar conclusion in his analysis of the “exit revolution.” (2007)

Few models of emigration dynamics have been developed and some of them include political factors (Ostergaad-Nielsen, 2003; Schmitter Heisler, 1985). Yet, very little has been written about the explicit role of the state in sending countries. Among the few notable exceptions, Laurie A. Brand explores the relationship between the government of four sending states in the Middle East (Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan) and the out-movement of their citizens. She frames her research design around one key issue, the role of sovereignty in explaining sending state behaviour, and finds that the “nature of sovereignty in the international system is being reconfigured … by the presence of substantial expatriate communities actively leading transnational lives” (2006, 222-223). Analyzing Arab migration to Europe, Philippe Fargues provides some evidence that Arab sending countries are not “just passive witnesses in the face of their own citizens' emigration” (2004, 1349). David Fitzgerald examines the case of Mexico and demonstrates that for most of the twentieth century, the Mexican federal government had a clear, if ineffective, policy to control what types of people left, where they came from, when they left, and the conditions of their exit and return (2006, 282).” Other recent studies that account for the role of emigration policy include countries as diverse as Lithuania after its accession to the EU (Thaut, 2009), and China (Biao, 2003).

Beyond their different perspectives, all these studies assume emigration matters. Processes of emigration control have been developed, using either positive or negative incentives, and have included both unskilled and skilled workers. Extending on these studies, we seek to identify the key components of an “emigration regime.” Such a regime, as illustrated by Table 1, includes some basic elements like permission to travel (through the deliverance of passports and exit visas), and institutions dealing with expatriate community affairs, such as embassies and consulates. In addition, and more importantly from our perspective, an emigration regime encompasses a pro-active labour export dimension allegedly designed to meet a destination country’s demand for labour and to address domestic socio-economic issues, such as a high level of unemployment and poverty.

On that basis, we evaluate the impact of such a regime through the particular example of Kyrgyzstan. The study of the Kyrgyz governmental policy of exporting labour force provides useful insights about the motives and strategies of sending countries in their effort to maximize the benefits of migration. The case study of Kyrgyzstan is important for emigration research for at least two reasons. First, a large portion of its economic survival relies on remittances, providing a strong incentive for the government to pursue an “active” policy of emigration. Second, Kyrgyzstan is a young democracy trying to consolidate its public and political institutions while experiencing an accelerating emigration process. This raises the question of whether these two goals are conflicting or not. We argue that Kyrgyzstan has significantly improved its management of labour export. Yet, our findings regarding the actual outcomes of this strategy are mixed. If some progress has been made in promoting the rights of Kyrgyz workers abroad and guaranteeing the flow of remittances, several negative impacts can be identified. We analyse specifically four issues: the effect of

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\(^1\) The list included: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Viet Nam and Yemen.

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“brain-drain;” the addiction to remittances; the disruption of social fabric in rural communities; and domestic political tensions caused by emigrants.

**Table 1. Key Components of an Emigration Regime**

| Exit control | - passport regulation  
| - visa system  
| - bilateral agreements with countries of destination  
| - domestic legislation designed to manage emigration (including dual citizenship) |
| Institutions | - public institutions  
| - private agencies controlled by the state |
| Labor export strategy | - training  
| - marketing workers abroad |
| Actions abroad | - relationship with expatriates  
| - return packages |

**Kyrgyzstan: From unregulated emigration to selective emigration**

Kyrgyzstan, like many former Soviet republics, has become a sending country during the 1990s. The first wave of emigration took place in 1991 after its independence. High-skilled workers of German descent migrated to the newly re-unified Germany, while Russia became the destination of Slavic ethnic minorities. Emigration flows decreased between 1995 and 1999, mostly as a result of the economic and financial crisis in Russia. After a sharp decline in 2001, emigration flows increased again and remained mostly unregulated despite the presidential decree on the Border Control Agency of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1999, as well as the adoption by the parliament of the 2000 Law on External Migration. These measures were security-driven, targeting terrorist transnational activities as well as illegal immigration and human trafficking, and did not address the problem of labour emigration. In 2006, the Kyrgyz government began the process of issuing a new type of passports that could meet international security standards, such as biometrics identifications. The use of new passports was further justified by the necessity to combat criminal groups engaged in human trafficking. Legal emigration, actually, reached a new peak in 2007 (Figure 1). Since then, Kyrgyzstan has actively supplied a labour force to Russia, Kazakhstan and other countries, as well as Turkey and South Korea. According to various estimates, more than 500,000 citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic are working abroad (either legally or illegally); more than a half work in Russia; 50,000 to 80,000 work in Kazakhstan, while the rest work in other countries.

**Components of the Kyrgyz emigration regime**

Extending work from previous studies, we identity the key motives of what constitutes today an emigration regime; these are listed in Table 2.

Confronted with the inevitability of workers’ outflows resulting from the national economic

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2 Under the terms of the 1999 presidential decree, the Border Control Agency became a part of both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of National Security. Its main responsibilities, according to the Law on National Borders and the Law on External Migration, include the prevention of illegal border crossing, and the protection of the territory from military intrusion and terrorist activities.
conditions and political instability, the Kyrgyz government tried to regulate it in order to increase the benefits of emigration for both the state and migrants. Hence changes have been introduced in exit and entry management, as illustrated by a series of bilateral agreements concluded with countries of destination. In 2007, a special commission for the “optimization of managing migration” was created as a result of the cooperation between the Kyrgyz government and the Federal Migration Agency of Russia. Working quotas for the Kyrgyz migrants in Russia are negotiated at the government level. Working visa programs were advanced with the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of South Korea. These programs are managed by the Center on Kyrgyz Citizens Employment Abroad, which has several regional offices where Kyrgyzstani nationals are selected and trained for improving their skills for the labour markets of foreign countries.3

![Figure 1: Emigration from Kyrgyzstan from 1995 to 2010](source)

Source: The National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2011a)

### Table 2. Motives explaining the development of an emigration regime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Socio-economic</th>
<th>Political</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3 Under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration (MLEM), the Center works in cooperation with the Korean consulate since March 2011. It conducts Korean language proficiency exams and two-weeks training program for the selected candidates. The cost of the program is U.S. $24. The participants are required to go through a proficiency exam. After passing the exam, candidates have to qualify for a work contract under the bilateral program. All participants require medical examination as well. According to the MLEM, a total of 1,141 workers were selected to work in South Korea from 2007 to 2011. See [http://www.24kg.org/community/96434-s-nachala-2011-goda-v-yuzhnuyu-koreyu-vyexalo.html](http://www.24kg.org/community/96434-s-nachala-2011-goda-v-yuzhnuyu-koreyu-vyexalo.html).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Alleviate socio-economic pressures (demographic growth, high unemployment, poverty)  
- Secure remittances flows                                               | - Protect rights of migrants abroad                      |
|                                                                         | - Secure employment for migrants abroad                  |
|                                                                         | - Partnership with countries of destination              |
|                                                                         | - Fight against illegal immigration                       |
|                                                                         | - Fight against human trafficking                        |
|                                                                         | - Management of border controls                          |
|                                                                         | - Assertion of state control over expatriates            |

In addition to bilateral partners, international institutions, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), assists the Kyrgyz government in regulating emigration. These bilateral and international initiatives are part of a new pro-active strategy designed to achieve efficient implementation of policies of labour migration. In its 2010-14 State Program on Decent Labour, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration (MLEM) highlights that given the high level unemployment rate in Kyrgyzstan, the only feasible solution to accommodate the growing population is to conduct a well-organized policy by improving relations with the countries of destination. The Ministry highlighted two main objectives: a) to increase opportunities for emigration by improving skill competitiveness and diversifying the geography of migration destination; and b) to develop state sponsored social and economic programs to assist Kyrgyzstani nationals residing abroad.

Institutional reforms, both in the public and private sectors, have been implemented in order to achieve these goals. In addition to public institutions recently created (such as the Centre on Kyrgyz Citizens Employment abroad), the MLEM has reorganized its priorities, which now include monitoring the labour markets overseas and developing contracts with employers in companies overseas, among other responsibilities. Kyrgyzstan is also developing new instruments designed to market its human resources and to identify the needs of the labour markets of receiving countries. Efforts to train competitive workers are part of the reform of the vocational education system conducted with the support of receiving countries. In 2011, for example, the Russian Technological University of Kazan created a “teaching division” in a Kyrgyz school of vocational training located in Kant. The division offers a vocational training for students based on the Russian standards. In addition, in 2011, the Kyrgyz government signed an agreement with the

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4 See http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/kyrgyzstan.
5 The Country Program of the Kyrgyz Republic on Decent Labor (Национальная Программа Кыргызской Республики по Достойному Труду на 2010-2014 годы)
6 See http://www.mz.kg/ru/program/.
7 In addition, there are private employment agencies, which collect information about foreign labor markets; yet, their resources are still insufficient to play an important role as intermediaries in the labor market (Musabaeva, 2008 104).
Rossotrudnichestvo\(^8\) on vocational schools designed to train potential emigrants in seven regions in Kyrgyzstan.\(^9\) Furthermore, the Kyrgyz government develops on-site services and resource centres abroad, as well as works closely with private employment agencies. For example, in 2009, about 15 private agencies received accreditation by the MLEM.

Protecting the rights of Kyrgyz nationals working abroad constitutes a new component of the emigration regime. This task is shared by the MLEM and other ministries.\(^10\) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs registers migrant workers and tries to monitor their situation abroad through Kyrgyz diplomatic channels -- especially in Russia, which hosts the largest number of Kyrgyzstanis migrants. The government is establishing several new consulates in Russia, and has upgraded its consulate in the Republic of Korea to the level of embassy.\(^11\) A proposal is being considered in the parliament to create a position of a labour attaché at several Kyrgyz Embassies. However, the task of protecting migrant workers is not easy to achieve, for at least two reasons. First, a large number of Kyrgyz citizens work illegally in Russia and, thus, do not enjoy either social rights from their Russian employers or diplomatic protection. Therefore, they face restrictive regulations related to illegal immigrants introduced by the Russian government (such as the 2002 Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation) with no legal assistance, notably when it comes to appeal court decisions of deportation.

Second, Russian employers often do not respect the rights of migrant workers and fail to comply with the national legislation when issuing working permits to foreigners. Kyrgyz workers, who have limited language and legal trainings, are not able to protect themselves against employers’ abusive practices (such as non-payment of wages, debt bondage, restrictions on freedom, and sexual exploitation). The Kyrgyz government, aware of its current limited capabilities of helping its nationals, is therefore encouraging the involvement of various organizations created by the Kyrgyz diaspora. According to Kginfo.ru, a website launched by the Kyrgyz community in Russia, there are about 40 organizations providing social and legal assistance to emigrants facing different types of emergencies.\(^12\) For example, the Zamandash Association, which regroups Kyrgyz nationals residing in Russia and Kazakhstan, provided legal and financial support to 80 citizens of Kyrgyzstan who have been victims of human trafficking between January and March 2011.\(^13\) The Zamandash Association also works closely with the MLEM and, in 2011, has submitted a recommendation to establish a separate committee at the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan that could deal with issues related emigration.\(^14\) The “Zamandash Journal”, created in 2004, reflects the views of the Kyrgyz diaspora worldwide on every issue related to current affairs in Kyrgyzstan (Wood, 2006).\(^15\)

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8 Rossotrudnichestvo (Россотрудничество) is the Russian Federal Agency on issues of Community of Independent States and Russian citizens residing abroad, and international humanitarian cooperation
10 MLEM has been reorganized in early 2012. The reform increased the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in dealing with migration issues. However, it is premature to evaluate the impact of this reform on the management of workers abroad.
11 See [www.mfa.kg](http://www.mfa.kg), March 27, 2011
14 Ibis
15 In general, the Kyrgyz diaspora, especially in Russia, is viewed to be better organized than...
Strengthening relations with the Kyrgyz diaspora is politically and financially motivated as well. Political parties are interested in utilizing the voting power of the Kyrgyz diaspora; in turn, Kyrgyz citizens residing abroad tend to vote for the candidates concerned about emigration problems. As a result, the political system is being increasingly influenced by both the civic mobilization of emigrants and by political parties that include the concerns of emigrant constituency into their political platform. This trend is illustrated by the evolution of Ar Namys, one of the five largest and active parties in Kyrgyzstan.\(^{16}\) Its platform for the 2010 election emphasized that given the high level of corruption and economic weaknesses in the country, many citizens of Kyrgyzstan have no choice but “vote with their feet.” Ar Namys thus suggested to create special centers that facilitate the socialization and adaptation of labor migrants and to improve bilateral agreements to assist migrants, among other things.

Financial motivations relate to the crucial issue of regulating remittances. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the amount of remittances to Kyrgyzstan increased from $322 million in 2005 to $715 million in 2010. Transfers have acquired a tremendous importance for the economic stability of the country (from 13 percent of the gross domestic product in 2005 to 19 percent in 2010). Hence the government is implementing policies to increase remittance flows, promote transfers through formal channels, and reduce the cost of transfers. The measures taken include improved access to banking services for senders and receivers of remittances, and cooperation with countries of destination, as illustrated by the agreement on “interest-free remittances” concluded in 2009 with the Russian Federation and the JSC UNISTREAM Bank.\(^{17}\)

According to the Kyrgyz representative at the 100th session of the IOM Council in December 2011, all these initiatives illustrate that “a distinct state migration policy is being built up and implemented in a constant interaction between government agencies, partner NGOs, media and international organizations.” The delegate noted that the “policy is based on the admittance that migration is an objective process” and that the main task is “to extract the maximum benefit for both the individual and a society as a whole.”\(^{18}\)

**Critical evaluation of the Kyrgyz emigration regime**

Yet, the Kyrgyz emigration regime undergoes severe limitations. Firstly, like many other developing countries, Kyrgyzstan lacks the institutional capacities to effectively monitor its domestic labor market, as well as the needs of foreign labor markets. Like other governmental initiatives, changes introduced to emigration policy have not produced the expected positive outcomes, at least as of 2012. In this field, as well as in other policy spaces, there is still a lack of adequate institutional frameworks, and limited capacity and

diasporas from other central Asian countries, although worse than other nationalities which have been living in Russia throughout many generations (OSCE, 2009).

\(^{16}\) During the 2010 parliamentary elections, Ar Namys received 25 seats (out of 120) in the Parliament and thus became the third largest party in 2010.

\(^{17}\) See [http://unistream.ru](http://unistream.ru).

skills to design and implement new measures (Baimyrzaeva, 2011).

Secondly, motivations to emigrate remain largely independent from official initiatives, despite the increasing involvement of the government in the management of emigration. The Development Fund of the Institute of Eurasian Studies conducted a survey among 200 migrants in 2006. Almost 56 percent of migrants reported that they learn about employment opportunities abroad from relatives and neighbours. Ruget and Usmanalieva (2010, 449) also confirmed in their study on Kyrgyz emigrants that migration is frequently a result of a network effect: “Many follow a family member, an acquaintance, and in a few other cases a recruiter.” As a result, emigration flows remain mostly unorganized. According to various estimates, more than 80 percent of migrant workers on yearly average leave the country through unofficial channels. According to the MLEM, the government needs to create a research institute in order to collect reliable data on emigration flows and conduct a door-to-door account of the population.

Thirdly, there is some evidence that governmental efforts focusing on the export of skilled workers are not producing the expected outcomes. This strategy relies on the assumption that skilled migrants are better paid, better protected from exploitation, and able to send larger amounts of remittances. According to the Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, a majority of workers who left Kyrgyzstan between 1998 and 2005 completed secondary education (as illustrated by Table 3). In 2002, about 35 percent of migrants reported to complete university degree.

### Table 3. Education levels among Kyrgyz immigrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University level</td>
<td>13.43%</td>
<td>34.78%</td>
<td>20.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete University</td>
<td>2.31%</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
<td>4.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary special</td>
<td>25.55%</td>
<td>26.85%</td>
<td>21.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>49.61%</td>
<td>24.59%</td>
<td>46.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete secondary</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic general</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>2.75%</td>
<td>3.47%</td>
<td>1.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No elementary education</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>0.69%</td>
<td>0.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>1.13%</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 Emigrants leave Kyrgyzstan both through the airport and train stations. When crossing the border at the airport, detailed information is given such as reasons for travels and passport information, although this information is often used only internally. When crossing the border by a car or the train, identification documents are checked, but this information is not recorded (OSCE, 2009, 27).
21 This view been expressed by the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration, which planned to request a funding for an in-depth study of emigration. For more information, see [http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2011/03/18/feature-01](http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2011/03/18/feature-01).
Kyrgyz workers, who are employed in Russia and Kazakhstan, remain in low-skilled, low-paid, and undervalued employment sectors. There are thus some discrepancies between the educational achievement of Kyrgyz migrants and the skills and qualifications demanded by foreign labour markets. Two interrelated factors explain this situation. First, highly skilled migrants have to compete with citizens of receiving states and are often forced to accept unskilled jobs. Second, job qualifications of Kyrgyz workers are not recognized in foreign countries due to educational differences. According to Anar Musabaeva, about 33 percent of Kyrgyz emigrants to Russia, and 19 percent of Kyrgyz workers in Kazakhstan, had to be retrained in the workplace (2008, 105).

The Kyrgyz government is aware of these limitations and intends to address them on the assumption that emigration provides opportunities for economic growth and prosperity. This assumption is supported by the 2010-2014 Kyrgyz State Program on Decent Labour. The Program notes that given current unemployment rate in Kyrgyzstan, the only feasible solution to accommodate the growing population is to conduct a well-organized policy in regulating relations with countries receiving labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan. Throughout the last five years the population of the Kyrgyz Republic has been increasing for 1.5 percent reaching over 5.2 mln. The annual pressure to the labour market ranges from 200,000 to 250,000 working age population, which is beyond the national economy’s capacity to “absorb” it (County Program on Decent Labour 2010-2014). The proportion of the working age population has increased from 57.8 percent in 2005 to 61.1 percent in 2011. As a result, throughout the last six years the supply of the labour has been exceeding the demand for labour at a rate of 32 percent.

Based on the Kyrgyz households survey conducted by the National Statistical Committee, the unemployment rate in Kyrgyzstan reported to be at 12 percent (Table 4). But, the official rate of unemployment is often understated. For example, the survey conducted by MLEM in 2008 reports the national unemployment rate to be at 16.8 percent. MLEM survey also notes, that those who were employed reported to be working in the informal sector of the economy (67 percent) or were self-employed (Country Program on Decent Labour 2010-1214). The youth belong to 40 percent of unemployed and the residents of rural areas represent 58.7 percent of unemployed. Other institutions, which are not related to the government, report even higher unemployment figures. The US State Department, for example, estimated the 2010 national unemployment rate to be at 20 percent.

Table 4. Official unemployment rate in percent

<table>
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<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 The 2010 report of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration: http://www.mz.kg/Otchet2010
25 Please see: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5755.htm#econ
According to the National Statistical Committee, close to 93,000 residents of Kyrgyzstan were officially recorded as unemployed in 2011. However, most unemployed do not register because unemployment benefits are negligible. In 2005, the government initiated a comprehensive medium-term poverty reduction and economic growth strategy with the support of international financial institutions. Bishkek agreed to pursue a tax reform and, in 2006, became eligible for the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. GDP grew about 8 percent annually in 2007-08, partly due to increased prices for its key export commodities (such as gold), but slowed to 2.9 percent in 2009. The political crisis in April 2010 and subsequent ethnic clashes severely damaged the economy, causing GDP to contract by 1.4 percent in 2010. That year, an estimated 33.7 percent of the population still lived below the poverty line (compared with 52 percent in 2003).\footnote{See \url{http://www.undp.kg/en/what-we-do/focus-areas/poverty-reduction}.}

Despite the reduction of overall poverty level, factors affecting socio-economic development include high income distribution inequality in society; lack of public resources to implement social programs due to low revenue collection rate; and poor targeting of existing public social programs.\footnote{See \url{http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/85673/devdebates/ECA/mogilevskiy.pdf}. The global 2007/2008 Human Development Report ranks Kyrgyzstan at 122 with a Human Development Index of 0.694 noting the regional and urban/rural disparities as well as inequalities between men and women.}

Furthermore, the country is highly vulnerable to fuel prices, as well as natural disasters. Emigration cannot provide a sustainable solution to all these challenges, despite increased remittances.

As noted by the IMF, “takings of considerable cash amount from labour migrants and ‘shuttles’ from abroad are the only livelihood for many families and their relatives. These funds restrain lowering of the living standards of the population as a whole, as well as wide spreading of poverty, and serve as additional source and channel of currency flow into the republic” (p.73). Analyzing the positive linkage between remittances and development, the World Bank estimated that cash flows decreased both poverty (from 64 percent to 40 percent) and extreme poverty (from 23 percent to 9 percent) during the period 1999 to 2006.\footnote{The Kyrgyz Republic: Recent Economic Developments, December 2007, World Bank, p.6}

Other estimates indicate that a 10 percent increase in per capita official remittances may lead to a 3.5 percent decline in the number of poor people.\footnote{Ratha D, Leveraging Remittances for Development, June 2007, Migration Policy Institute retrieved at \url{http://www.migrationpolicy.org}. See also Mansoor A, Quillin, B. Migration and Remittances: Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union, WB, 2006 p. 8.} At the micro level, however, it is far from evident that remittances improve the socio-economic conditions of the poorest families, notably in terms of school enrolment and health outcomes for the children (Anderson and Kroeger, 2012). At the macro level, amount of funds received from labour migrants has begun exceeding sums necessary to cover vital necessities. However, appropriate conditions and prerequisites for using them as investments for funding economic reforms have not been created yet at the state level. Despite the initiatives included in the Financial Market Development Strategy for 2007-10, the role of the banking system in advancing the economic growth is still insignificant and rather low compared to the other countries. As a result, twenty years after gaining its
independence, Kyrgyzstan remains the second poorest of the former Soviet republics and one of the poorest in the World (World Bank, 2010).

**Table 5. Annual remittance transfers to Kyrgyzstan 2005-2011 (thsd U.S. dollars)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inflow</td>
<td>297.7</td>
<td>470.0</td>
<td>688.2</td>
<td>1,205.5</td>
<td>966.7</td>
<td>1,252.6</td>
<td>1,695.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS countries</td>
<td>262.8</td>
<td>436.7</td>
<td>648.8</td>
<td>1,141.4</td>
<td>894.4</td>
<td>1,199.3</td>
<td>1,639.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>262.6</td>
<td>436.6</td>
<td>641.8</td>
<td>1,113.5</td>
<td>862.9</td>
<td>1,164.3</td>
<td>1,597.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign countries</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic (2011)

Remittances continue rising as emigration flows remain high. In 2011, the amount of remittances transfer to Kyrgyzstan was the highest, exceeding one billion and a half US dollar. The largest amount of remittances originates from Russia (Table 5). As a result, remittances represent an increasing percentage of GDP, as illustrated by figure 2 – a trend that may turn Kyrgyzstan into “a potential remittance addicted” country (Ababakirov: 2008).

**Figure 2. Correlation of remittances and GDP**

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http://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/jpmsp/vol20/iss2/6
Furthermore, some studies highlight that remittances create a “culture of migration” in migrant sending countries, whereby young people would see the apparent rewards of migration and place unrealistic expectations on moving abroad, which develops a disincentive to working in their home countries. As a result, a seasonal emigration can have the potential for turning into permanent emigration (Koser, 2007, 46-47). According to a survey conducted by GALLUP in 2010, 32 percent of Kyrgyzstanis express interest in emigrating temporarily and 18 percent of Kyrgyzstanis desire to emigrate permanently. The sense of “temporariness” of living in Kyrgyzstan has a negative influence on civic commitment. Given the weak social security system in the country, an increasing number of workers seek for welfare benefits abroad and thus develop a pragmatic approach to citizenship. For example, in 2010, 270,000 Kyrgyz workers became Russian citizens in order to secure long-term gains such as pensions and health care benefits. The “culture of migration” also precludes significant progress in the reform of the public sector by undermining motivation for high performance and good governance as well as providing a fertile ground for corruption.

Another negative consequence of migration relates to outflow of migrants from certain industries and sectors. Emigration of the “best and brightest” workers may benefit the diasporas as “a source of and facilitator of trade, investment of ideas; a rich vein of remittances; and a potential stock of high human capital returnee migrants (Desai et al, 2009, 33).” However, in the long run, a country may experience a shortage of skilled workers in certain sectors. Recently, the outflow of workers from medical and education sectors has become a major source of concern in Kyrgyzstan. These occupations are still subsidized by the state; hence, there is a fiscal burden of higher taxes and lower spending on “those left behind” (Desai et al, 2009, 33), in addition to the low quality of education and provision of health care for future generation. For example, in Jalal-Abad (one of the seven regions of Kyrgyzstan) “almost 1000 teachers have left the school for external employment in 2008. That same year, 11 young specialists who arrived to the oblast within the state program which supports young professional, quitted their jobs and left for Russia and neighbouring countries” (OECE, 2009, 50). A similar situation is observed with respect to medical professionals. This is due to the fact that the wages in the health care sector is relatively low in Kyrgyzstan, while the demand for doctors has been continuously increasing in Russia (Ruget and Usmanalieva, 2010, 449)

Finally, emigration generates negative impacts on the social fabric of Kyrgyz society, notably in the rural communities. With regards to the traditional family structure, the consequences are twofold. First, emigration tends to perpetuate gender inequalities when wives of emigrants have to take up male responsibilities in the household, without the authority or respect accorded to men. Many women are left at the mercy of their husband’s parents who remain the principal recipients of remittances, as illustrated by Table 6. Second, as the rate of emigration is becoming higher for women than for men in many regions, elderly people are often in charge of the children left behind. The burden of taking care of children is not only financial, but also psychological. Addressing the issue of the

31 Despite the adoption of several anti-corruption laws, the pervasive nature of corruption remains unchanged.

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emergence of a “skipped generation” in Kyrgyzstan, Trilling (2010) notes that “old people can’t give a child what he [or she] needs for proper development. They are from a different generation...those kids will not be so prepared and educated culturally and intellectually. In the end, they may be estranged from their parents and feel morally abandoned” (Trilling, 2010).

Table 6. Key Recipients of Remittances in Kyrgyzstan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipients</th>
<th>Share in Total Number of Recipients %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband/Wife</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister/Brother</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD, 2009

The disruption of family structure also affects the welfare of the children. Child poverty exceeds the average national poverty level in all CIS countries. Given the absence of parental control, children often do not attend school and lack access to basic social services (Abdrazakova, 2010). In addition, the population located in rural areas with a high rate of emigration is carrying an increasing burden of ill health associated with poverty, with a rise in the prevalence of diseases such as Tuberculosis (TB). Inadequate water supply and poor sanitary literacy among people are some of the reasons for high intestinal infection rates, particularly among children.  

Conclusion

In 2003, the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants and Members of Their Families came into force. Kyrgyzstan ratified the agreement along with many other migrant sending counties, but none of the migrants receiving countries, including Russia and Kazakhstan joined the Convention. This ultimately makes this international agreement ineffective. In order to move from a “chaotic emigration” to a more organized emigration process, Kyrgyzstan needs acting within the international migration governance framework. Some steps have been taken in the regional contest, in particular, addressing emigration issues within regional organizations such as the Shanghai Organization of Cooperation and the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty as well as bilaterally.  

The potential tension between sending countries and receiving states is problematic. A high level of dependence of the country on emigrants’ employment in third countries makes a manpower sending country even more vulnerable both in economic and political terms. Russia, the major receiving country in the region, tends to use this

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32 See the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Plan 2010-2011, p.1.
33 Please see :http://www.24kg.org/community/95482-almasbek-abytov-dve-pyatyx-naseleniya-kyrgyzstan.html
vulnerability in its relation with sending countries.\textsuperscript{34} From the economic perspective, concerns relate to sustainability of the employment opportunities in Russia on the one hand, and the effects of “brain drain” in Kyrgyzstan on the other hand.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, the implementation of an “active” emigration policy by sending countries is often constrained by asymmetric relations with the major countries of destination. The most feasible alternative for developing a sustainable emigration policy framework for Kyrgyzstan should be membership in regional organizations. All Kyrgyzstan’s neighbours are also migrant-sending countries, Kazakhstan excepted. Kyrgyzstan thus shares common interest with other immigrant sending countries in the region, which are advancing their emigration policies as well. Sharing common interests could potentially strengthen negotiating power of all immigrant-sending countries in the region if they worked in a cooperative manner. Yet, currently, there is no regional cooperation effective enough to negotiate a more sustainable migration policy with recipient countries, specifically Russia.

This article highlighted several negative effects of emigration on the social fabric in Kyrgyzstan. However, the most significant of it is the emergence of a “culture of emigration” which undermines the civic and public service values, especially among the country’s young generation. Also, a high emigration rate disenfranchises the poorest from the political process, a condition that is not conducive for addressing the problems of poor governance, corruption, and opaqueness of government operations.

The long-term effect of the current emigration policy is yet to be analyzed. What should deserve further attention in the study of the emergence of “active” emigration regimes are changes in policies and public administration agenda over time. Exporting workers in order to secure remittances while dealing with the challenges of democratic consolidation seem to fuel a series of conflicting spill-over outcomes. How Kyrgyzstan will try to better coordinate its migration management policies with other societal and institutional priorities may provide useful insights for a better understanding of the “exit revolution.” Can the development of emigration policies create triangular networks involving the connection between the government and workers abroad, the connection between workers abroad and the authorities of the receiving countries, and the relation between the Kyrgyz government and governments of receiving countries? If so, can this create a “win-win” situation for all the actors involved by helping sending countries to strengthen their negotiation power? Or does an organized labor export only become a substitute for illegal immigration? Knowing that politics fuels policies, what are the actual incentives of the Kyrgyz government to reverse brain drain – compare to the option of externalizing pressing issues such as unemployment by exporting part of its population? An alternative scenario would be to invest in job creation, education, economic growth and

\textsuperscript{34} For example, the Tajikistani authorities have imprisoned a Russian pilot in November 2011. In the same month the Russian authorities began a crackdown on and deportation of the Tajik illegal migrants. Although any connection between the case of the Russian pilot and the crackdown on Tajiks in Russia was denied, commentators suggested that the deportation was a reaction for the imprisonment of the Russian pilot. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/17/world/europe/russia-rounding-up-tajik-workers.html?page=all

\textsuperscript{35} According to some economic calculation every third of the working age Kyrgyzstanis is employed in the labor market of other countries. Please see http://www.24kg.org/economics/122801-arsen-imankulov-kazhdyj-tretij-trudosposobnyj.html
poverty alleviation – as illustrated by strategies adopted in South Asian countries in order to implement circular migration schemes. It may be worthwhile to explore these options by focusing on the links between emigration and development, emigration and democratisation, as well as emigration and “fair multilateralism” through a more integrated and comparative approach to migration.

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