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LABOR MIGRATION IN UKRAINE AND THE POST-SOVIET SPACE

Zhanna Bolat¹

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The migration movement of the population to other countries is often due to the presence of a high quantity of labor potential that is not in demand in the domestic labor market. Labor migration is currently one of the largest migrations worldwide (Sabluk, 2021). The globalization processes taking place worldwide coupled with each country's economic, political, domestic, and national issues, are among the factors contributing to this high level of migration. After post-Soviet countries gained independence, their citizens could travel to other countries, particularly for employment. Increased labor migration to other countries was noticed in Ukraine, especially after the start of hostilities in the country's east (Babets & Ruda, 2020; Kadriu, 2023).

This themed section of *Dve domovini / Two Homelands* illuminates significant contemporary migration and labor migration trends in the post-Soviet space. Ukraine has experienced substantial emigration in recent decades, spurred by economic uncertainties and the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014. Labor migration is a major phenomenon, partly facilitated by Ukraine's visa-free access to the EU, which provides more opportunities for temporary work abroad (Kortukova, 2021). However, large-scale emigration of working-age Ukrainians poses risks of "brain drain" and other socioeconomic impacts (Spanger & Andersen, 2023). Kazakhstan has also seen substantial emigration and immigration, mainly to and from neighboring countries like Russia and Uzbekistan, for economic reasons. Newly restrictive residence permit regulations in Kazakhstan may alter these longstanding migration dynamics within the region. Japan is gradually easing some of its previously strict immigration policies to fill acute labor shortages in the construction, home health-care, and agriculture sectors. However, tensions remain around the integration of migrants into Japanese society. Public attitudes do not always align with government efforts to accept more foreign workers (Liu, 2023). Meanwhile, many Tajiks engage in temporary cyclical labor migration to Kazakhstan, working in trade sectors like markets or transportation. Their collective family-based migrant enterprises demonstrate resilience in the face of challenging conditions, though restrictive and unpredictable migration policies in Kazakhstan create precarity.

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Complex economic, social, political, and demographic drivers shape migration patterns and experiences in the region. These countries address migration management through evolving legal frameworks to ensure migrant rights and sustainable development. The multifaceted factors influencing migration decisions and migrants' lives resist straightforward policy solutions (Merho, 2019). More research and policy dialogue are needed to develop holistic, evidence-based approaches.

Thus, this themed section aims to provide diverse scholarly perspectives on labor migration patterns in Ukraine and neighboring countries, highlighting migrants' lived experiences and policy frameworks shaping the evolving regional migration system. The section contains six articles that raise and try to answer important questions. Marusiak et al. provide a critical analysis of the drivers of labor migration, specifically relating to education reforms, and examine broad trends and impacts of labor migration. Their paper outlines relevant sociological theories related to the social functions of education and its transformation, including from Durkheim, Weber, and Parsons. A comprehensive historical overview of migration periods in Ukraine, focusing on identifying the drivers and nature of each period, is provided. It discusses how issues like the transition to distance learning and homeschooling may relate to emigration attitudes and draws meaningful connections between educational reforms, quality, and labor migration trends.

"Social-Economic Integration of Kazakh Migrants in Turkey" and "Ethnic Entrepreneurship of Tajik Migrants: Strategies for Running a Family Business (on the Example of the 'Green Bazaar' in Almaty)" provide insights into the lived experiences of migrants and their economic and social integration. Abuova et al. examine the integration experiences of the Kazakh diaspora community and provide historical context on the migration of Kazakhs from Xinjiang to Turkey, outlining the key factors driving their exodus. The high mortality rate highlights the journey and hardships the migrants face. The Kazakhs' economic integration into Turkish society via leatherwork and manufacturing shows their adaptability. In contrast, Imasheva provides an in-depth look at Tajik migrant entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan, highlighting the collective family business strategies. The author outlines the historical context and prior research on post-Soviet Tajik migration patterns and experiences. Examining the collective, family-based nature of many migrant enterprises showed their resilience and shed light on an important migrant community. This manuscript makes a solid contribution to the section's theme by delving into the integration experiences of a key migrant group.

Most articles also relate to migration policies, laws, and rights in various contexts. Yaroshenko et al. provide a timely comparative analysis of migrant rights in Ukraine versus other European nations (Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic) during the war. Their article discusses the concrete issues internally displaced persons (IDPs) face, like access to housing, employment, and education. Statistical data on migration since 2014 helps frame the issue and current crisis. Tables/charts help visualize the data. Adilgazinova et al. offer an interesting examination

of contemporary immigration policies and migrant adaptation in Japan, providing an insightful comparative perspective. The authors describe the structure and roles of key immigration institutions in Japan. They also discuss the relevant economic factors driving demand for migrant labor in Japan, such as labor shortages in specific sectors, and cover social security, health insurance, and education regarding migrant experiences in Japan. Finally, Kappassova et al. broadly examine overall migration patterns, issues, and policy implications in Kazakhstan, outlining relevant historical migration periods and contemporary data. The conceptual framework from the UN distinguishing different categories of migrants is helpful for analysis. Discussion of recent scholarly perspectives on migration governance and policy effects adds useful theoretical grounding.

While each country grapples with unique dynamics, several common threads emerge. Economic uncertainties, conflicts, and demographic pressures drive high levels of both emigration and immigration in the region (Pityulych & Hoblyk, 2020; Chernobay et al., 2021). Migrants seek improved livelihoods and opportunities abroad, yet often face integration barriers and precarious legal status. Restrictive policies attempt to curb migration but frequently fail to address underlying structural causes or protect migrants' rights. These complex challenges resist simple solutions. As demonstrated by the articles' diverse methodologies—from legal analysis to qualitative interviews—understanding contemporary regional migration requires examining it from multiple academic vantage points and centering on migrants' voices. This themed column provides a stepping stone to more nuanced perspectives and policy dialogues. Key priorities include developing evidence-based, humane approaches to managing migration, ensuring education access and labor rights for migrants, and facilitating social integration. As migration transforms communities and reshapes the post-Soviet space, inclusive policies that promote development for all represent the path forward. Much work remains, but constructive responses can emerge through insightful scholarly contributions and shared commitment to human dignity.

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