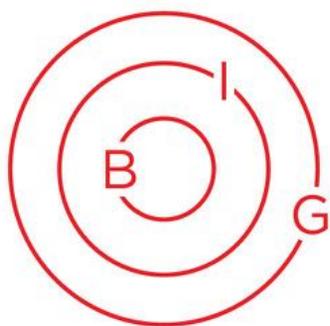




**BORDERS IN
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Borders in Globalization Research Project 65

International Organizations and Regional Migration Management: Reacting to Changes in Labour Migration in the Russian Federation

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Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has emerged as a prominent destination for prospective migrants of the former Soviet republics, particularly from Central Asia. However, a substantial proportion of Central Asian labour migrants continue to remain undocumented despite previous efforts of policy reform implemented by the Russian government. As a result, this migratory phenomenon raises inquiry into the role played by international organizations (IOs) in managing and facilitating the labour migration process. An analysis of existing policies implemented by the Russian state, including the imposition of quotas on working permits and limiting the working capacity of NGOs and IOs, suggests that these efforts have failed to curtail the incentives or demand of prospective labour migrants. Furthermore, while the holding of knowledge-based activities by international organizations such as studies, conferences and information sessions have shed light on the problems affecting migration in the region, they have arguably taken for granted the level of absorptive capacity of the institutions and individuals with whom they are dealing. The current economic crisis is likely to produce similar results to those of 2008 global economic crisis, whereby an ailing Russian economy signifies more labourers returning to their country of origin, as well as increasing impetus for protectionist measures, despite the fact that the demographic and labour market issues in Russia persist. In this regard, IOs can play an important role in terms of policy implementation and coordination between countries, securing safe channels for remittances and ensuring their developmental potential is maximized, as well supporting measures to increase social tolerance that national actors alone might neither have the interest or the authority to pursue.

Introduction

The rise of international labour migration in recent decades as a response to the increasingly globalized nature of the world economy has presented numerous opportunities, as well as challenges, for states and international organizations (IO) alike. In spite of growing recognition that economy-driven migration may serve as an important tool for development in both migrant sending and receiving countries, the dynamic and complex nature of this phenomenon has equally led states and IOs to pursue policies and programs that seek to ‘manage’ such flows in accordance with their respective strategic interests.¹ Within the context of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the lasting implications of the Soviet Union’s demise have proven to be lasting in promulgating an ongoing process of large-scale migratory flows from the states of Central Asia to Russia.² Particularly in the immediate post-Soviet period, ineffective border control coupled with a visa-free entry regime between the majority of the former republics granted individuals triggered by crisis, military conflict and ethnic-based pressures a significant degree of freedom in movement. In contemporary terms, economic motivations have proven most dominant in dictating the flows of Central Asian migrants pursuing employment opportunities abroad, primarily in the Russian Federation.³

Notably, however, a substantial proportion of Central Asian labour migrants continue to remain undocumented despite previous efforts of policy reform implemented by the Russian government. In turn, their illegal status deprives them of essential rights and renders them

¹ Martin Geiger and Antoine Pécoud, “International Organisations and the Politics of Migration,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 6 (2014): 867.

² Galina Karpova and Maria Vorona, “Labour Migration in Russia: Issues and Policies,” *International Social Work* 57, no. 5 (2014): 534.

³ According to an IOM study conducted among Central Asian migrants in 2010, cumulatively 98.4 per cent of respondents cited poverty and unemployment as their primary reason for choosing to emigrate. Khojамuhammad Umarov, “Tajik Labour Migration during the Global Economic Crisis: Causes and Consequences,” *International Organization for Migration* (Research Report – 2010): 14, <http://www.iom.tj/pubs/globalcrisis.pdf>.

particularly vulnerable to discrimination, corruption and clandestine employment opportunities.⁴ Moreover, this reality has increasingly sparked fears that increased flows of migration could drastically alter Russia's already diverse ethnic makeup and lead to amplified social tensions.⁵ Thus, in conjunction with the currently deteriorating Russian economic climate as a result of internationally imposed sanctions and falling oil prices, this state of affairs raises inquiry into the role played by IOs in managing and facilitating the labour migration process in the CIS region, as well as the significance of these initiatives on efforts of policy reform by the Russian state. In essence, the activities of IOs, in particular those of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), have had limited success in addressing the root causes of undocumented migration in Russia and the negative consequences thereof, as they remain fundamentally constrained by structural political factors. The functioning of IOs in the CIS region has generally proven to be both restricted and shaped by the political desires of the Russian state, while at the same time bearing an overwhelming focus on technical assistance and information-based programs, which have proven insufficient in promoting long-term capacity building that may lead to more sustainable development. The generally competitive nature of IOs in this regard furthermore contributes to their limited impact as a result of often overlapping scopes of activities.⁶

The Nature of Labour Migration in Russia: Economic Benefits and Political Drawbacks

Given the major transitional and structural changes endured by Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in conjunction with the period of vast economic growth in the early 2000s, the

⁴ According to the Russian Federal Migration Service, there were approximately 4.5 million citizens from the former Soviet republics of Central Asia residing in Russia as of December 2014. Yet, the actual number has been estimated to be as high as 8 million, factoring in undocumented migrants. Irina Malyuchenko, "Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia: Economic and Social Impact on the Societies of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan," *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs* 21 (Policy Brief - 2015): 4.

⁵ Esther Tetrushvily, "How Did We Become Illegal? Impacts of Post-Soviet Shifting Migration Politics on Labour Migration Law in Russia," *Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia* 1, no. 1 (2012): 56.

⁶ Geiger and Pécoud, "International Organisations and the Politics of Migration," 871.

issue of labour shortage has recently emerged as a particular concern for the Russian economy. As the country's rapid development has caused an increasing number of citizens to pursue employment opportunities requiring higher qualifications, the demand for labour from foreign nationals in low-skilled industries who make less claims for high wages, safe working conditions or social insurance, remains high and to the benefit of Russian employers.⁷ This demand derives moreover from demographic considerations, as well as the socio-economic status of the CIS region more broadly. In demographic terms, Russia suffers from both a declining and aging population, thus signifying a shrinking of the domestic labour force. In contrast, due primarily to steadily high fertility rates, the size of the employable population among the Central Asian republics continues to rise.⁸ Additionally, the fact that a significant portion of the labour forces of Central Asian states seek employment opportunities abroad may be interpreted as a reflection of their domestic economic uncertainty. As largely agrarian-based economies with minimal extractive sectors, facing general political instability and rampant corruption, potential income earnings and living standards among the Central Asian states remain far below those of Russia.⁹ Thus, a high level of international labour migration may be in fact deemed as a stable trend in the CIS region that contributes to correcting demographic and economic imbalances between countries, while helping foster social stability through poverty reduction, as well as further political integration. The presence of large pan-Soviet diaspora communities, cultural and

⁷ The distribution of migrant workers by industry shows that the construction sector employs the highest number (over 40 per cent), corresponding to trends found in most receiving countries (IOM 2008). Moreover, in 2009, Konstantin Romodanovskiy, Director of the Russian Federal Migration Service, noted that migrant labour from CIS countries created approximately 8 per cent of Russia's GDP. International Organization for Migration, *The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Migration Trends and Migration Policy in the Russian Federation and the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Area*, Analytical Report – Moscow, Russia (2009): 17.

⁸ Sergey Ryazantsev and Oleg Korneev, "Russia and Kazakhstan in the Eurasian migration system: development trends, socio-economic consequences of migration and approaches to regulation," *Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration* 44 (2013): 8.

⁹ Nearly a quarter of Uzbek households have at least one family member working abroad. Meanwhile, the average income of migrant workers is 5 to 10 times higher than other sources of household income. International Organization for Migration, *The Impact of the Economic Crisis*, 37.

linguistic similarities, as well as visa-free entry have also proven pertinent in attracting prospective labour migrants from the Central Asian republics to seek employment in Russia.¹⁰

These trends appear to be mutually beneficial and self-correcting as Central Asian labour migrants obtain higher earnings while filling many non-prestigious gaps in the Russian labour market. Consequently, several particularly important benefits may be deemed to emanate from these trends. For one, remittances have proven vital in the promotion of economic development and societal stability in Central Asia. These funds remain crucial to the improvement of living standards and revival of local economies through increased rates of consumption and domestic investment.¹¹ It is worth noting that the staggering figures of remittance transfers from Central Asian labour migrants residing in Russia consider only funds sent through official channels, while transfers through unofficial private intermediaries remain unaccounted for.¹² Although the outflows of migrant remittances have been occasionally deemed by Russian politicians as financial losses for the country, these statements do not take into account for the fact that the value produced by labour migrants often far exceeds the salaries they are paid, particularly in the absence of employer benefits such as social insurance.¹³ A challenge in this regard remains that a large share of remittances is often spent on consumption, while a more sustainable use of the funds in terms of investment is either not feasible or not desired.¹⁴ This consequently leaves households in a seemingly perpetual state of dependency on the steady inflow of funds from family members abroad, thus strengthening the importance of ensuring an adequate framework

¹⁰ Karpova and Vorona, "Labour Migration in Russia: Issues and Policies," 536-538.

¹¹ Malyuchenko, "Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia," 13.

¹² For instance, in Tajikistan as of 2013, remittances account for more than 35 per cent of GDP. L. Gotovtseva et al. "Financial and Economic Characteristics and Trends of Interstate Labour Migration," *Studies on Russian Economic Development* 23, no. 4 (2012): 385.

¹³ International Organization for Migration, *The Impact of the Economic Crisis*, 24.

¹⁴ Malyuchenko, "Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia," 7-8.

from which the migration process may be facilitated and managed in a mutually beneficial manner.

Furthermore, the Central Asian labour migration phenomenon results in lower unemployment rates in respective national labour markets, thereby improving macroeconomic indicators. By lowering the domestic unemployment rate, this may help to ease existing economic pressures and the strain of government resources, as well as may help to foster greater social stability as a result of higher standards of living.¹⁵ In addition, upon return to their country of origin on either a temporary or long-term basis, Central Asian migrants tend to bring back various social benefits such as new skills and contacts, which may be considered as vital assets in an increasingly knowledge-based economy.¹⁶ Ultimately, Central Asian migrants in the Russian labour market improve the competitiveness of many large and small companies, promote the development of new businesses, and induce economic benefits for both Russia and their countries of origin.

On the other hand, the very politicization of the phenomenon is equally a testament to its less desirable consequences. For one, the fact remains that with a significant portion of their workforce abroad, Central Asian societies face severely diminished tax revenues, which in turn hampers the ability of the government to execute its functions.¹⁷ Similarly, the prevalence of undocumented labour migrants in Russia signifies that these labourers do not pay taxes on their income, thus leading to lost revenue for the Russian government as well.¹⁸ This reduction in revenue thus places a strain on government capacity in both the receiving and sending states.

¹⁵ Mizosaid Sultonov, "The Macroeconomic Determinants of Remittance Flows from Russia to Tajikistan," *Transition Studies Review* 19, no. 4 (2013): 419.

¹⁶ Global Commission on International Migration, *Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action* (2005): 23. http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/cim/GCIM_Report_Complete.pdf

¹⁷ International Organization for Migration, *The Impact of the Economic Crisis*, 21.

¹⁸ Irina Ivakhniouk, "Illegal Migration: Russia." *European Security* 13, no. 1 (2004): 40.

Undocumented labour migrants additionally lack access to services such as the social security system, thereby constituting a much higher risk and vulnerable category of migrant.

Furthermore, high rates of labour migration signify that the workforces of rural areas of nations such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are sharply reduced, leading often to a lack of qualified labour to sustain local industries.¹⁹

In social terms, Central Asian societies have faced drastic tears in domestic fabrics as a result of an alarmingly high rate of divorces, due primarily to migrant men permanently settling abroad.²⁰ Social fabrics in Russia have equally come under pressure, as the the influx of Central Asian migrants has stirred the ethnic composition of the state and has led to a significant rise in xenophobic tendencies, which far-right politicians have been adamant in using to their advantage. Particularly in light of the 2008 global economic crisis and the omnipresent threat of unemployment for Russian citizens, migrant workers have become among the primary targets for Russian nationalists.²¹ The Russian media and political rhetoric has been continually witness to statements that advocate the role of migrant workers in promulgating criminal activity in the country.²² This is noteworthy, as the belief that job loss necessarily leads to an increase in criminality among migrant workers, whether real or merely perceived, may pose as a significant impediment to social stability in Russian society, which already suffers from often less than adequate law enforcement authorities.²³ Several of the major IOs dealing in migration, including the IOM, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations High

¹⁹ International Organization for Migration, *The Impact of the Economic Crisis*, 19.

²⁰ According to the IOM, approximately 1/3 of migrants' wives have been abandoned by their husbands due to them permanently settling in the host country. Malyuchenko, "Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia," 11.

²¹ Tetrushvily, "How Did We Become Illegal?" 58.

²² *Ibid*, 63.

²³ The Levada Sociological Monitoring Centre in 2005, during the economic boom of the country, found in a survey that 31 per cent of those respondents felt that migrants play a catalytic role in upsurge of criminal. The same centre in 2009 December survey, at the time of economic crisis, highlighted that 61 per cent favoured restriction on immigrants. Nalin Mohapatra, "Migration and Its Impact on Security of Central Asia," *India Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2013): 146.

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have expressed concerns, particularly since the 2008 global economic crisis, that discriminated-against labour migrants may be more prone to join the shadow economy or face unemployment upon return to their country of origin.²⁴

Lastly, it is worth noting that foreign labour migrants in Russia are not equally distributed across the Russian regions. For instance, the Central Federal District (including the city of Moscow) as of 2013 accounted for nearly 43 per cent of all officially employed foreign workers; however, in reality the figure is much higher as undocumented workers typically rely on contacts and opportunities that are available predominantly in the largest agglomerations.²⁵ This in turn exacerbates the already prominent regional disparities among the Russian regions and fails to contribute to more equitable economic growth for the country as a whole. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is not unique to Russia and may in fact be exhibited in all major migrant-receiving states. As of 2011, nearly 70 per cent of all migrants to Canada settled in the largest metropolitan areas (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver), whereas more than half of all migrants to the United States resided in just two states: California and New York.²⁶ As aforementioned, this may largely be attributable to the fact that greater employment opportunities, as well as larger diaspora communities tend to lead labour migrants to concentrate in major cities and regions.

Ultimately, in spite of the practical and theoretical economic benefits to large-scale flows of labour migrants from the Central Asian republics finding employment in Russia, several negative externalities remain an unquestionable by-product. Notably, many of these negative effects stem from the fact that a significant part of the foreign labour force in Russia continues to

²⁴ International Organization for Migration, *The Impact of the Economic Crisis*, 9.

²⁵ Mikhail Klupt, "Strategic management of international labor migration in Russia: Regional aspect," *Regional Research of Russia* 2, no. 1 (2012): 56.

²⁶ Tatiana Yudina, "Labour Migration into Russia: The Response of State and Society," *Current Sociology* 53, no. 4 (2005): 583; "Immigration and Ethno cultural Diversity in Canada," *Statistics Canada*, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm>

remain undocumented. The literature has repeatedly noted that often, undocumented labour migrants enter Russia legally with valid passports under the visa free regime, and subsequently become illegal after staying beyond the 90 day period granted under the regime in the absence of an official work permit.²⁷ As a result, it may be stated that the root cause of the illegal migration phenomenon in Central Asia may be deemed as a complex mix of the aforementioned economic motivations in conjunction with Russia's relatively lax approach to sovereignty in the post-Soviet space. Consequently, this places into question the capacity of the Russian government, as well as of IOs to 'manage' these flows in a way that best suits both of their strategic interests.

The Role of the Russian State and the Evolution of Policies on Migration Management

As outlined in the Global Commission on International Migration's (GCIM) 2005 report, the ability of states to maximize the positive impact of labour migration depends on policy formation at the national, regional and global levels of development strategies.²⁸ Yet, as sovereign actors, states have continually devoted significant attention and resources in seeking to defend their sovereignty and security by curtailing irregular migration, albeit with limited success. Several key challenges in this regard include lack of policy coherence and cooperation, as well as capacity.²⁹ In essence, the prevalence of undocumented migration may be linked to a lack of regular migration opportunities available, which are regulated by state policy. Consequently, irregular labour migration becomes facilitated by criminal networks that benefit from activities such as human trafficking.³⁰ In its efforts to reduce irregular labour migration, among the most significant first steps in the Russian government's reforms have included the implementation of

²⁷ The United Nations Secretary-General launched this initiative in 2003 as the first-ever global panel addressing international migration. Ivakhniouk, "Illegal Migration: Russia," 44.

²⁸ Global Commission on International Migration, *Migration in an Interconnected World*, 24.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 74.

³⁰ Andrei Korobkov, "Migration Trends in Central Eurasia: Politics versus Economics," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 185.

federal laws no. 109 and no. 115 in 2007.³¹ Essentially, these pieces of legislation laid the foundation for migrants to register residence and receive work permits through the introduction of a simplified employment authorization procedure.³² This initiative may be largely interpreted as a response and acknowledgement by the state of the need for foreign labour as a result of high levels of economic growth experienced in preceding years along with the ever-present demographic crisis, prior to the effects of the 2008 global economic crisis. While these efforts succeeded in reducing the number of undocumented labour migrants, thus effectively decreasing and reversing the some of the effects created by the bureaucratic barriers of the former 2002 legislation, this liberal change in policy did not succeed in sustaining its momentum.³³ Upon the advent of the global crisis, it became clear that nationalism and xenophobia emerged as powerful forces in shaping the national Russian migration policy. Furthermore, in spite of rendering the process easier for obtaining a work permit, the cost has remained expensive for prospective migrants who may lack the means to obtain one prior to departure.³⁴

As such, by 2009, Vladimir Putin advocated in favour of a double reduction in foreign workforce quotas.³⁵ This protectionist measure may be seen as a form of appeasement to far-right politics and nationalist sentiment, as it was justified in the sense that for Putin, unemployed Russians should obtain positions before any foreign worker would be able to do so.³⁶ Yet, at the same time Russian citizens proved mostly unwilling to occupy low-skilled and poorly paid jobs previously held by migrant workers. It remains self-evident that both citizen perceptions and the

³¹ Federal Law No. 109, "On Recording the Migration of Foreign Nationals and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation," and an amended version of Federal Law No. 115, "On the Legal Status of Foreign Nationals and Stateless Persons." Tetrushvily, "How Did We Become Illegal?" 56.

³² International Organization for Migration, *Migration in the Russian Federation: A Country Profile 2008* (2008): 55. http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/russia_profile2008.pdf

³³ At the outset of the legislation's first year of ratification, the mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov, decried the legislation as a "serious mistake." Tetrushvily, "How Did We Become Illegal?" 57.

³⁴ Ryazantsev and Korneev, "Russia and Kazakhstan in the Eurasian migration system," 33.

³⁵ This reduction dwindled available work permits from 4 million to 1.9 million. *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

Russian political climate have played an enormous role in shaping labour migration policies.³⁷ In conjunction with these trends towards the adoption of more protectionist policies of migration management, the list of foreign citizens with re-entry bans to Russia had reached more than 300'000 entries by 2012.³⁸ This is significant in several respects: for one, it indicates that the Russian government has been pursuing a proactive and relatively successful effort in seeking out and punishing undocumented labour migrants. Moreover, this statistic speaks to the alarming nature of informal contracts that characterize the labour migration process as a whole. According to an IOM survey conducted in 2014 among Tajik migrants, more than 80 per cent of respondents had mere oral agreements with their employer, thus rendering them without a formal contract or proper documentation more prone to various forms of exploitation and abuse.³⁹ There is a general consensus among scholars that Russia lacks a clear justification to manage, or rather fix, the process of labour migration.⁴⁰ The quota system fails to capture the dangers of the demographic crisis, while at the same time the mechanisms and methods for determining the rate of quotas lack transparency and fail to reflect the actual need for foreign labour.⁴¹ As a result, these policies take a toll on remittances and contribute to worsening economic conditions in Russia's periphery, and subsequent rising societal tensions in countries of origin.

Based upon on these observations, it may be claimed that the labour migration phenomenon from the Central Asian republics to Russia embodies two opposing conceptions of sovereignty. On the one hand, the Russian state has proven adamant in upholding its state sovereignty through recent developments in its foreign policy, as well as in domestic efforts such

³⁷ Tetrushvily, "How Did We Become Illegal?" 60.

³⁸ International Organization for Migration, *Tajik Migrants with Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation* (2014): 5. <http://www.iom.tj/files/entryban.pdf>

³⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

⁴⁰ Vitaly Bozhenko and Sergey Ryazantsev, "New Approaches to Managing Labor Migration under Integration in Eurasec," *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 20 (2014): 197.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 198.

as the “foreign agents” law adopted in 2012, which requires non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to register as so called foreign-agents if they engage in political activity or receive funding from abroad.⁴² This mistrust towards NGOs is equally reflected to a lesser extent towards IOs more generally. In this respect, it is worth noting that Russia is in fact not a member of the IOM, but rather an observer state. As such, the activities of the IOM face far more restrictions in the Russian context than they do in member states such as Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan.⁴³ Yet, on the other hand, Russia has adopted a much more lenient approach to the notion of sovereignty within the post-Soviet sphere. In addition to the visa-free regime implemented with the majority of the former Soviet states, the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in January of 2015 signified the creation of an integrated single market, as well as a regime for the free movement of people across borders for the purpose of employment, as is the case in the European Union (EU).⁴⁴ However, in contrast to the EU, the economic benefits of the EAEU are less evident as a result of the similar industrial bases of the member states, largely a by-product of the Soviet era.⁴⁵ As a result, the project may be deemed as fundamentally political in nature as Russia seeks to retain influence in its periphery, in spite of the economic benefits it may produce. In this regard, a comparison to the eastward expansion periods of the EU may be drawn. The absence of Tajik and Uzbek membership in the EAEU thus far may be at least in part attributable to fears of large-scale labour migration that the Russian state has attempted to limit, just as certain Western European powers expressed initial weariness towards eastward expansion for similar reasons.⁴⁶ The EAEU nevertheless demonstrates Russia’s

⁴² Geir Flikke, “Resurgent authoritarianism: the case of Russia’s new NGO legislation,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2016): 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁴ Caress Schenk, “Labour Migration in the Eurasian Union: Will Freedom of Movement Trump Domestic Controls?” *PONARS Eurasia*, no. 378 (2015): 2.

⁴⁵ Pasquale Demicco, *When Choosing Means Losing: the Eastern Partners, the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union* (Brussels, European Commission 2015): 38-40.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-90.

willingness to act softly on its borders with several of its immediate post-Soviet neighbours. Yet, as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan make up the most significant amount of labour migrants in Russia, the effects of the EAEU are thus far limited in reducing undocumented labour migration.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the system remains far from ideal, given that employers have traditionally proven reluctant to sign contracts in general that formalize working relationships in a way that obligates them to pay taxes and social insurance. Thus, failing to tie migrants' status to formal labour contracts may make the legal status of foreign workers, even from EAEU countries, vulnerable.⁴⁸

Ultimately, Russia's migration policy exhibits several key concerns. For one, there is an inconsistency between the political forces dictating policies such as foreign labour quotas and the need to counteract negative demographic trends. Furthermore, there appears to be contradictions between the federal and regional levels of migration policy. Ryazantsev argues that although the regions should have different goals and tasks in terms of regulating migration to best suit their needs, federal migration policy leaves no scope for regional flexibility.⁴⁹ Additionally, while foreign labour is essential to the development of the Russian economy, the threat of instability that ethnic integration brings has seemingly dominated the discourse by means of politicization. Thus, given the challenges associated with Russia's nationalist approach to migration management, IOs have sought to play prominent roles in facilitating the process in order to reduce the vulnerability of all migrants through the promotion of official channels of migration and migrant-support services.

IOs, Migration Management and the Post-Soviet Space: A Theoretical & Practical Analysis

⁴⁷ Schenk, "Labour Migration in the Eurasian Union," 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁹ Sergey Ryazantsev, "Russia Needs a New Migration Policy," *Russian Politics and Law* 51, no. 3 (2013): 80.

The vast proliferation of IOs since the end of the Second World War has provoked inquiry into their significance as actors of international relations.⁵⁰ While the sovereign state has traditionally been regarded as the central institution of international politics, the rise of globalization and the subsequent notion of global governance have increasingly posed a challenge to this claim.⁵¹ A rise in multilateral practices has fostered the emergence of IOs as integral components of the international political landscape; yet, this conception of global governance has arguably undermined the notion of sovereignty as it has traditionally been understood both internally and externally.⁵² An increase in intergovernmental cooperation signifies both a decrease in state autonomy over domestic policy, as well as a loosening of the sovereign state's monopoly on international political activity.⁵³ As a result, contemporary IOs have been largely deemed as autonomous actors of world politics that often pursue their own goals and agendas.⁵⁴ While the independent effect of IOs is largely dependent on the nature of their mandate and capacity, in either case they remain significant components of contemporary interstate relations. Notably, IOs tend to experience 'mission creep' in efforts of expanding their often narrowly defined mandates.⁵⁵

The emergence of unprecedented global challenges out of the post-cold war era has accordingly demonstrated the ambivalent nature of global governance and the role of IOs more generally, particularly pertaining to issues of migration. Initial concerns over East-West migrant influxes coupled with the rise of irregular migration signified that new avenues for cooperation at

⁵⁰ Samuel Barkin, *International Organization: Theories and Institutions* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 6.

⁵¹ Chiara Martini, "States' Control over New International Organization," *Global Jurist Advances* 6, no. 3 (October 2006): 1185.

⁵² Archer Clive, *International Organisations 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001): 37.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 38.

⁵⁴ Jeffery Dunoff, "Is Sovereign Equality Obsolete? Understanding Twenty-First Century International Organizations," *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law* 43, no. 1 (2013): 103.

⁵⁵ Oleg Korneev, "Exchanging Knowledge, Enhancing Capacities, Developing Mechanisms: IOM's Role in the Implementation of the EU–Russia Readmission Agreement," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 6 (2014): 890.

the global level were equally met with conventional desires to control the movement of individuals within state borders.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, while migratory questions had been traditionally addressed on either a national or bilateral basis, states have become increasingly conscious of the fact that solutions may be found at the global and regional level in spite of divergent national interests and perceptions.⁵⁷ As a result, the legitimacy of these multilateral practices rests not only on the nature of the global environment in which they are shaped, but rather due to the explicit acknowledgement by states that migration merits attention at the international level.⁵⁸ In using discourse to frame migration issues as global initiatives, these entities seek to forge policies which maximize the benefits of migration for all involved through the delegation of fruitful and holistic objectives.⁵⁹ Thus, given its inherent complexity, the notion of migration management presents elaborate challenges to the international community in terms of governance and cooperation, arguably redefining the nature of international politics through challenging conventionally held principles of sovereignty.

In the field of labour migration, the notion ‘mission creep’ amongst IOs has been particularly evident. While the ILO has been traditionally associated with labour migration issues, the IOM has been increasingly becoming involved in competing for projects in the field and the expansion of its influence, despite the fact that it is not explicitly sanctioned in its mandate.⁶⁰ Generally, the IOM’s *raison d’être* under this pretext stems from the fact that they are able to provide migration-related services that governments may find themselves unable or

⁵⁶ Geiger and Pécoud, “International Organisations and the Politics of Migration,” 868.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 870.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 869; Jean-Marc Coicaud, “Reflections on International Organizations and International Legitimacy: Constraints, Pathologies, Possibilities,” *International Social Science Journal* 53, no. 170 (2001): 529.

⁵⁹ Piyasiri Wickramasekara, “Globalisation, International Labour Migration and the Rights of Migrant Workers,” *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 7 (2008): 1258.

⁶⁰ Korneev, “Exchanging Knowledge, Enhancing Capacities, Developing Mechanisms,” 890-891.

unwilling to carry out themselves for various reasons.⁶¹ In this regard, the post-Soviet space has been coined as “a virgin land where the IOM has been recently struggling to ensure its monopoly for providing advice...on labour migration policy.”⁶² However, scholarly evaluations have exhibited concern over the fact that ‘the IOM functions as a state apparatus in supranational guise.’⁶³ In essence, the very activities and motivations undertaken by the organization may prioritize their own influence and power relative to other IOs rather than focus on long-term capacity building.

In the Russian-EU context, Korneev argues that the IOM has managed to establish itself as an actor that has managed to significantly shape the migration dialogue due to the fact that the organization serves as a seemingly neutral intermediary in their bilateral relations.⁶⁴ As such, the organization has been selected in implementing major EU-funded programs such as the *Assistance to the Government of the Russian Federation in Establishing a Legal and Administrative Framework for the Development and Implementation of Readmission Agreements* - in this respect, the IOM has played a significant role in implementing EU norms and best practices in a manner that simultaneously retains good relations.⁶⁵ For one, in spite of its non-member status, the IOM has never outright criticized the Russian government or any of its policies; rather, as Korneev notes, the IOM’s limited involvement in Russia is largely due to the Russian state’s interest in becoming involved in the notion of migration management in order to guarantee its own survival and favourable working conditions in the country.⁶⁶ Consequently, the IOM discourse has been found to generally be framed in politically neutral terms of “informing

⁶¹ Ishan Ashutosh and Alison Mountz, “Migration management for the benefit of whom? Interrogating the work of the International Organization for Migration,” *Citizenship Studies* 15, no. 1 (2011): 22.

⁶² Korneev, “Exchanging Knowledge, Enhancing Capacities, Developing Mechanisms,” 892.

⁶³ Ashutosh and Mountz, “Migration management for the benefit of whom?” 34.

⁶⁴ Korneev, “Exchanging Knowledge, Enhancing Capacities, Developing Mechanisms,” 898-899.

⁶⁵ Raul Sagrera, “The EU-Russia readmission visa facilitation nexus: an exportable migration model for Eastern Europe?” *European Security* 19, no. 4 (2010): 571.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 576.

the Russian side about the range of possible solutions.”⁶⁷ As a result, the scope of the organization’s activities is highly limited by both Russia’s non-member status, as well as its political desire to advance certain strategic interests that may be opposing to the objectives of IOs or international principles and norms.⁶⁸

Being an organisation substantially dependent on external funding, the IOM often seeks candidacy for EU-financed projects in particular. However, by not being a member state, Russia is not entitled to any direct financial assistance from IOM.⁶⁹ This skepticism towards NGOs and IOs may be at least in part rationalized by the fact that IOs have been repeatedly deemed as not mere static sets of rules or mandates, but rather as seemingly semi-autonomous actors. Through the establishment of policy consultations and cooperation, the IOM’s significance may thus be rationalized in that the organization has the capacity to guide the behaviour of states through persuasion, in a manner that formally respects their sovereignty.⁷⁰

Among the most prominent of the IOM’s efforts in the post-Soviet space may be found in the Central Asia Regional Migration Programme (CARMP), a joint effort between the IOM, UN Women and the World Bank (including financial support of the UK Government) with the objective of increasing general livelihood and reducing poverty in Central Asia.⁷¹ The goal of poverty reduction is particularly significant insofar as it denotes the explicit acknowledgement of the migration-development nexus. This notion is further evidenced by program components such as providing information sessions to remittance-receiving households on how to most effectively

⁶⁷ Korneev, “Exchanging Knowledge, Enhancing Capacities, Developing Mechanisms,” 898-899.

⁶⁸ The IOM, by protecting its own strategic interests in Russia, tends to avoid activities that might provoke Russian discontent. “Hence, the IOM does not work on migrant rights’ advocacy, the protection and support of asylum seekers and refugees in Russia and any broader human rights-oriented activities.” Ashutosh and Mountz, “Migration management for the benefit of whom?” 22-23; Korneev, “Exchanging Knowledge, Enhancing Capacities, Developing Mechanisms,” 893.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 894.

⁷⁰ Geiger and Pécoud, “International Organisations and the Politics of Migration,” 868.

⁷¹ International Organization for Migration, *Regional Migration Programme*. http://moscow.iom.int/activities_labormigration_RMP.html

manage their funds.⁷² Through saving and investment, remittances may be used in a manner that best enhances developmental potential. Thus, in attempting to achieve these objectives, the IOM seeks to ensure that policies for managing labour migration are both evidence-based and effectively implemented, including through the collection of gender disaggregated data, as well as improved regional partnerships, dialogue and coordination on selected migration issues.⁷³ Yet, given that many of these objectives are pursued through information-based service provision and technical assistance, this presupposes to an extent the absorptive capacity of the individuals and organizations they seek to help.⁷⁴

Regardless, better policy coordination and implementation of relevant policies across all countries is necessary in addressing the developmental aspects of labour migration. Furthermore, it is worth noting that as part of CARMP, the IOM has sought to ensure that the capacity of civil society organisations is increased in order to support measures that increase social tolerance and reduce xenophobia.⁷⁵ While this objective was established prior to the implementation of the “Foreign Agents Law,” the ability of the IOM to achieve this objective in contemporary terms remains rather dubious. The reach of tools such as media campaigns, particularly during times of economic crisis when protectionist measures gain impetus, is highly limited and remains an ambitious manner of inducing tolerance.⁷⁶

In conjunction with these heavily information-based activities and programs, the IOM has equally become recently involved in managing the effects of re-entry bans. Some of the organization’s main objectives in this regard includes the provision of immediate assistance at

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Tomas Achacoso, “A long-range perspective for strengthening the migration process of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with implications for the Russian Federation.” *International Organization for Migration* (Working Paper – 2006): 3. http://www.iom.tj/publications/Recommendations%20for%20Tajikistan_Eng.pdf

⁷⁵ International Organization for Migration, *Regional Migration Programme*. http://moscow.iom.int/activities_labormigration_RMP.html.

⁷⁶ Mikhail Alexseev, “Societal security, the security dilemma, and extreme anti-migrant hostility in Russia,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 4 (2011): 520.

the border for migrants who have been expelled or turned down at Russian airports, as this group remains particularly vulnerable.⁷⁷ The expensive journey to Russia for low-income migrants could signify that they lack the means to return home. Thus, the IOM assists in a form of involuntary return in order to uphold the rights of these migrant workers, who are often unaware of their non-admissible status prior to departure.⁷⁸ Yet, at the same time, the IOM has focused on providing information sessions that build knowledge of Russian laws and regulations among Tajik migrant workers in order to prevent re-entry bans and avoid irregularity. However, this knowledge-building does not seemingly address the root cause of the problem.⁷⁹ While an IOM study determined that most migrants who received a re-entry ban were under the assumption that their lack of documents would be of no consequence as long as they avoided contact with the Russian police and the Federal Migration Service, this supports the notion that the “nothing to lose” mentality is indeed driving Tajik and Uzbek migrants who would rather take their chances in Russia than face unemployment or crisis at home.⁸⁰ During times of economic crisis in Russia, the uncertainty about the success of a move further increases. As a result, migrants may try to ‘hibernate’ the crisis abroad either because they lack funds to return or because they fear later refusal of re-entry, thus perpetuation the problem of over-staying their work permit or lack thereof.⁸¹ The visa-free regime makes it easy to enter the country, but many Tajik migrant workers choose to not go through the required registration procedure and the complicated work

⁷⁷ International Organization for Migration, *Tajik Migrants with Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation* (2014): 21. <http://www.iom.tj/files/entryban.pdf>

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 19.

⁸¹ Alexander Danzer and Oleksiy Ivaschenko, “Migration patterns in a remittances dependent economy: Evidence from Tajikistan during the global financial crisis.” *Migration Letters* 7, no. 2 (2010): 192.

permit issuance process, staying and working in the Russian Federation only in partial compliance with the law.⁸²

The role of the ILO in the management of labour migration from Central Asia to Russia, of which Russia is a member state, is equally noteworthy. While the ILO is most commonly associated with the promulgation of international labour standards by means of establishing conventions, contemporarily, technical co-operation programmes account for over half of the ILO's budget, which involve training small businesses in compliance with labour rights and aiding governments with the drafting of migration legislation.⁸³ These programs are run largely in conjunction with other IOs such as the World Bank and IOM, signifying the organization's commitment to ensuring the protection and rights of workers as an integrated process of global development and economic concern.⁸⁴ As the organization states, "the ILO's main message is that migration should not be perceived only as an issue of border control, but as a key economic, human rights and labour rights issue."⁸⁵ Among their primary objectives include holding tripartite dialogue between governments, employers and workers in order to promote more effective and equitable forms of governance of migration. In achieving this, the ILO seeks to develop policies that enhance the positive impact of migration on development in countries of origin. Project partners in this regard include national governments, trade unions, and employers' organizations. Yet, these activities generally take the form of research and surveys, policy workshops, and training. As a result, vague objectives such as the "strengthening of social

⁸² "An alarming finding of the survey is that more than 80 per cent of the migrant workers only had informal contracts, that is, oral agreements with their employer. Without a formal written contract, the migrant workers were prone to various forms of exploitation and abuses of their rights, a widespread problem among foreign workers in the Russian Federation. Furthermore, 80 per cent of the migrants sampled in our survey did not know about their re-entry bans when they last left the country." International Organization for Migration, *Tajik Migrants with Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation* (2014): 8.

⁸³ Hughes and Haworth, *The International Labour Organisation: Coming in from the Cold*, 28.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ International Labour Organization. *Promoting Decent Work in Eastern Europe and Central Asia* (2013): 17. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sromoscow/documents/publication/wcms_306410.pdf

dialogue” leave the ability to measure effectiveness and impact to be ambiguous and presuppose the institutional capacity of the bodies they are training and holding workshops and consultations for.⁸⁶

In assessing the capacity of IOs in the CIS region, it must be noted that the legacy of institutional weakness in the post-Soviet sphere, brought on by the transition to a market-based liberal democracy in the 1990s, continues to pose as a central challenge in successfully executing state programs and reform.⁸⁷ As a result, IOs operating in the region have failed to an extent in acknowledging the arguably limited absorptive capacity of various government agencies and individuals for which they provide services such as technical assistance.⁸⁸ On the one hand, technical assistance projects, informational provisions and conferences have undoubtedly contributed to the intergovernmental approaches to such a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. However, the fact remains that there persists “a wide gap between what is and what ought to be.”⁸⁹ It appears that the activities of IOs that offer assistance to these countries have presupposed the level of competence of the public institutions that they deal with, and merely assume that the organizational mission and objectives of these government agencies are routinely being accomplished. Yet, in fact, many of these institutions still encounter difficulties in performing even the most basic functions in their daily operations.⁹⁰

In essence, there is a need for a coordinating agency, such as an IO, to ensure that the specific roles of various agencies are played in harmony using the same migration principles and understanding of these principles in the Russian context. In this manner, the overlapping of

⁸⁶ International Labour Organization. *Regularization and Employer Sanctions as Means towards the Effective Governance of Labour Migration Russian Federation and International Experience* (2009): 17. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_308873.pdf

⁸⁷ Ryazantsev, “Russia Needs a New Migration Policy,” 81.

⁸⁸ Achacoso, “A long-range perspective,” 18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

functions and differences in policy design and implementation should be avoided.⁹¹ But first and foremost, there must be transparency in acknowledging that Russia is in need of migrant workers, while the Central Asian republics rely heavily on the remittances received from these activities. Migration should be seen as a partial answer to both surplus labor supply in sending countries and aging and eventually shrinking domestic work forces in developed countries.⁹² However, the system of allocation of funds for projects of international organizations signifies that different organizations intervene simultaneously to organize projects that are at times overlapping or do not provide for continuity.⁹³ This dispersal is increased still further by the fact that all these bodies operate in the form of “projects”, most of them modest in size, whose main component is expert services and which have a high degree of independence in regards to project design and methods.⁹⁴ Achacoso notes that most projects do not have suitable follow-up provisions after missions so that many end up merely interred in archives after the departure of the experts.⁹⁵ Therefore, Russia requires assistance in developing the coherence of its immigration procedures to ensure that policies and programmes do not conflict either directly or through unintended consequences. Ultimately, the Russian government’s existing strategy on migration does not reflect the long-term requirements of its economy.

Conclusion

In principle, sending and receiving countries should have a common interest to explore solutions that capitalize on the gains made available by labour migration. However, in practice, migration remains a highly politicized phenomenon, which in turn limits the ability of the state as well as

⁹¹ International Organization for Migration, *Migration in the Russian Federation: A Country Profile 2008* (2008): 87. http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/russia_profile2008.pdf

⁹² Achacoso, “A long-range perspective,” 1.

⁹³ Global Commission on International Migration, *Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action* (2005): 75. http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/cim/GCIM_Report_Complete.pdf

⁹⁴ Achacoso, “A long-range perspective,” 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

of IOs to manage flows in an optimal mutually beneficial manner. As exhibited in the post-Soviet space, labour migrants may prove crucial in filling gaps in the Russian labour market while mitigating the effects of Russia's demographic crisis; however, the current Russian strategy reflects short term political considerations rather than stemming from a long-term vision. Protectionist measures put in place, such as imposing quotas on working permits and limiting the capacity of NGOs and IOs, has failed to curtail the incentives or demand for prospective labour migrants from the Central Asian republics. Similarly, as a non-IOM member state, the capacity of the organization to conduct activities in the state is heavily dependent upon the Russian government's own willingness. As such, efforts at reducing the amount of vulnerable undocumented labour migrants are either non-existent or remain highly constrained. The holding of knowledge-based activities such as studies, conferences and information sessions have undoubtedly helped to shed light on the problems affecting migration, although they have arguably taken for granted the level of absorptive capacity of the institutions and individuals with whom they are dealing. With remittance earnings forming such a substantial portion of Central Asian countries' welfare, the statistics suggest that prospective labour migrants would rather engage in the risk of working in Russia illegally rather than face economic hardship at home. Thus, measures to satisfy both parties in this instance should focus on reducing the Central Asian economies dependence on remittances and foster programs that may provide financing for the development of strategic sectors in the economy. For instance, Tajikistan wields the world's largest reserves of silver and its mountainous terrain has the potential to foster huge hydro-electric power potential from the rivers that flow through them.⁹⁶ Finding the means to develop these sectors, among others, would create more employment opportunities in the countries of

⁹⁶ N. Nuraliev, "Financial Crisis and Labour Migrants," *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 80, no. 1 (2010): 93.

origin, thereby reducing the need to risk engaging in undocumented labour migration and all of the vulnerabilities associated with it.

Under the context of the ongoing 2014 Russian financial crisis, reforms in migration management have become a controversial issue anew. The current economic crisis is likely to produce similar results to those of 2008, whereby an ailing Russian economy signifies more labourers returning to their country of origin, and increasing impetus for more protectionist measures, despite the fact that the demographic and labour market issues in Russia persist. Reduced remittances from Russia will have far-reaching economic, political, and social implications for Central Asia. As such, retaining migrant workers and attracting more business and investment is crucial. In terms of retaining much needed foreign workers as part of the overall development strategy, IOs can play an important role in terms of policy implementation and coordination between countries, securing safe channels for remittances and ensuring their developmental potential is maximized, as well supporting measures to increase social tolerance that national actors alone might neither have the interest or the authority to pursue. The current crisis, however, will ultimately be a test of their effectiveness.

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International Organizations and the Management of Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia

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Motives for Migration

Motives	Push Factors	Pull Factors
Economic and Demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Unemployment • Limited healthcare/education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chance to obtain higher earnings/ improve living standards -Professional and personal development
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict and violence • Corruption/lack of accountability/ poor political management • Human rights violations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Safety and security -Political freedoms
Social and Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persecution related to ethnicity, gender or religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Family re-unification, “ethnic motherland”

Effects of Central Asian Labour Migration to Russia

Positive

- Remittances
- Reduction in labour market gaps
- Countering Russia's declining/aging population
- Obtaining new professional skills and contacts

Negative

- Diminished tax revenues
- Lacking rural workforce
- Tears in social fabrics: divorce
- Rise of xenophobia in Russia and "otherness"

How have IOs and Federal Laws Reacted?

Examples of Federal Laws include:

- No. 109 - "On Recording the Migration of Foreign Nationals and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation," (2007)
- No. 115 - "On the Legal Status of Foreign Nationals and Stateless Persons." (2007)
- No. 121-FZ – “On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent“ (2012)
- Re-entry bans → how has the IOM become involved?

Russia's Stance on Sovereignty in terms of Labour Mig.

Hard-Line Approach

- NGO law
- Skepticism towards IOs?
(IOM – observer state, not member)
- Recent foreign policy developments
(strengthening of borders in Eastern Europe)

Soft-Line Approach

- Visa-free regime for many post-Soviet states
- Eurasian Economic Union – Integrated Single Market and the free movement of individuals for employment purposes

The role of IOs in Labour Migration Management

International Organization for Migration (IOM):

- **Aiding vulnerable migrant populations through technical assistance and service provision (e.g re-entry bans)**
- **Improving regional partnerships, dialogue and coordination on selected migration issues**
- **Increasing the capacity of civil society organizations in order to support measures that promote social tolerance and reduce xenophobia**
- **Providing remittance-receiving households the opportunity to enhance and prioritize the use of those remittances through capacitated local partners**

Are the Efforts of IOs Effective?

- Arguably, they fail to acknowledge the absorptive capacity of the government agencies they deal with (limitations of “knowledge building” activities)
- Importance of participation of all major stakeholders
- These bodies operate in the form of “projects”, most of them modest in size, whose main component is expert services – often no follow-up provisions
- “*Migration for the Benefit of All*” – is Russia buying this?

Concluding Thoughts

- Sending and Receiving countries should explore win-win solutions and cooperate on matters such as labour permits, border management etc.
- Under the context of the ongoing 2014 Russian financial crisis, reforms in migration management have once again become a burning issue
- IOs can play an important role in terms of policy coordination, securing safe channels for remittances, as well as promoting tolerance and best practices. However, their activities are ultimately limited by political will in the host country