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Return Migration From Russia to Kyrgyzstan: Dynamics, Causes, and Structure

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ABSTRACT

The study's significance lies in the need for comprehensive information on return labor migration from Russia to Kyrgyzstan and the profiles of return migrants, which would allow us to anticipate spatial mobility in the future. This is particularly relevant due to Russia's interest in new migrants as essential labor force to address the demographic crisis. The Kyrgyzstani government also requires these data to prevent unemployment among return migrants. This paper aims to assess return migration dynamics and its structure, uncover the causes, goals, and reasons for recurrent migration to Russia, and examine the expectations of Russia's social and migration policy during the special military operation. The empirical analytical base comprises the results of a questionnaire survey of 515 return migrants and focused in-depth interviews with 37 return migrants in Kyrgyzstan in October–November 2022, as well as a questionnaire survey of 425 labor migrants and focused interviews with 52 labor migrants in November–December 2022 in Moscow. The findings indicate that return migration is voluntary and spontaneous. The official estimate of the scope of return migration, as well as the prospects of labor migration to Russia after February 24th, 2022 and the imposition of anti-Russian sanctions, remains unclear. The structure of return migration aligns with the structure of labor migration in Russia in terms of gender, age, and employment sectors. The motivation behind the decision to return has a cumulative effect. However, most respondents cited personal and family issues as the main reasons for return migration. Approximately 30% of respondents, regardless of gender, attributed the special military operation and the worsening economic situation in Russia as reasons for returning to their

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home country. About 22% of respondents envision recurrent migration to Russia in the near future, while around 30% have not yet decided. Labor migrants seek institutional support from Russia, including assistance in preparing registration documents, social insurance provision, removal of administrative obstacles for employment, and the creation of favorable conditions for adaptation.

KEYWORDS

return labor migration, employment, demographic crisis, spatial mobility, migration dynamics

Introduction

Labor migration is a crucial necessity for Russia, stemming from the scarcity of its domestic workforce amid the backdrop of demographic crisis. Upon entry into the Russian Federation, migrants from Kyrgyzstan have sufficient competency in the Russian language, and they predominantly find employment in the sectors that are least sought after by Russian nationals. As citizens of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Kyrgyz migrants are exempt from requiring a labor license (patent) for employment (Osadchaya, 2021; Osadchaya et al., 2021).

The return migration of Kyrgyz individuals is influenced by several factors, including social migration organizations (SMOs), sanctions against Russia, coordinated economic and social mechanisms, instruments facilitating the free movement of labor force, and common standards of social and labor relations established over the past seven years by the EAEU. However, such return migration leads to a significant loss of labor resources for the receiving country (Russia) while simultaneously presenting a “challenge” to the sending countries in the fight against unemployment.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent and drivers of return migration of Kyrgyz citizens, as well as to delineate the profile of return migrants, including their social, professional, demographic, and family-related aspects. Additionally, the research seeks to evaluate the prospects and strategies of spatial mobility, explore the reasons and conditions influencing the decision to return to Russia, and evaluate what Kyrgyz migrants expect from the Russian government in case of returning to Russia again. Through this analysis, we intend to shed light on the complex and multifaceted dynamics of return migration between Russia and Kyrgyzstan. The research on return migration from Russia to Kyrgyzstan, as a pattern of mobility within the EAEU, holds significance in advancing the fields of sociological theory, migration theory, and empirical knowledge. It contributes to the development of theoretical and methodological models for understanding return migration and addresses the actual challenges associated with this phenomenon.

The research introduces a novel approach to studying return migration and contributes to sociological knowledge about migration by presenting substantiated models of migration activity among Kyrgyzstan citizens. It assesses the dynamics,

causes, and structure of return migration. The findings provide conceptual support for further empirical studies on migration in the EAEU. Additionally, the study suggests suitable instruments and mechanisms for Russia's social and migration policy to address the challenges of recurrent migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia.

Literature Review and Theoretical Assumptions

Although return migration has long been acknowledged in migration studies, various migration theories tend to overlook it or perceive it solely as either a failure or success of the migration process (Cassarino, 2004). Graziano Battistella (2018) argues that when settling abroad, migrants often harbor the intention of eventually returning to their home country. However, in reality, the majority of migrants end up staying overseas, which is reflected in the term "the myth of return," encompassing various situations (Carling et al., 2015) and emphasizing the infrequent occurrence of actual return migration.

Interest in researching return migration gained prominence in the 1980s when temporary migration programs to Western Europe came to an end, and European countries sought to encourage migrants to repatriate. A well-known study conducted by Massey et al. (1993) concluded that no single theory fully explains this phenomenon, as multiple causal processes operate simultaneously at different levels. Extensive analyses of the literature in this field were carried out by Carling et al. (2011, 2015). Some researchers, like Stark (1993), link migrants' decision to return to family situations. However, the multitude of possibilities hinders the formulation and testing of clear hypotheses regarding why and when a migrant will return, either permanently or temporarily.

The renewed interest in the early 2000s regarding the link between migration and development, as well as the impact of migration on the development of sending countries, has brought attention back to return migration (Battistella, 2004; International Organization for Migration, 2018, 2022; Rogers, 1990). Battistella (2018) discusses the conceptual and political framework of return migration, considering legislative measures that influence return migrants' lives, personal factors, and the role of structural factors in both sending and receiving countries that impact the decision to return. This framework also accounts for various "types of return."

The complexities of return migration necessitate a conceptual framework that encompasses different situations and decisions to return (voluntary and involuntary) (Battistella, 2018). These diverse conditions significantly influence individuals' likelihood and willingness to reintegrate (Cassarino, 2020). For successful reintegration, all stakeholders must effectively prepare for the process (Cassarino, 2014b). However, Cassarino (2014a) questions the validity of the "decision to return" variable, as it is often determined from the destination country's perspective.

The theoretical foundation of our research is based on the concept that return is not merely the termination of the migration cycle; rather, it is an element of a circular system of socio-economic relations and exchanges that facilitate migrants' reintegration through knowledge transfer, information, and membership (Cassarino, 2004, pp. 257, 262).

Schiele (2020) discussed this phenomenon in EU countries, evaluating the impact of life satisfaction on return migration to Germany among first-generation migrants from 26 countries. The study reveals that cross-country differences in estimated return rates can be explained by expected variations in life satisfaction improvement/deterioration of returning migrants.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has shown significant interest in return migration, evidenced by several reports focused on Central Asia (International Organization for Migration, 2018, 2022; Ryazantsev, 2020). One of their recent reports, *Vozvratnaia migratsiia: Mezhdunarodnye podkhody i regional'nye osobennosti Tsentral'noi Azii* [Return migration: International approaches and regional peculiarities of Central Asia], delves into the return migration issues of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This comprehensive report sheds light on return migration problems, theoretical aspects such as classification, definitions, and the intent of states regarding voluntary return migration programs. It also explores the legal basis, reintegration, and the region's potential for these programs (Ryazantsev, 2020).

Russian scholars have also contributed to the research on return migration. For instance, Abashin (2017) explores the impact of Russia's economic situation and migration policy on migrant returns to their home countries. Abashin offers a classification of circular migration models, analyzing migrants' preparedness for return, deportability, nostalgia for migration, and transnational life. Another study by Ivanova (2017) examines the emigration of Russian citizens and their return to the Russian Federation. Her research provides insights into the reasons for their departure and return, along with the socio-economic portrait of migrants, their living conditions abroad, and the reintegration process. Krasinets (2022) investigates the return migration of compatriots to Russia within resettlement programs at federal and regional levels, in particular the efficiency of mechanisms governing Russian citizens' return and their behavior in Russia, including the spatial features of resettlement processes. A comparison of successful approaches to state legal regulation of ethnic repatriation in three post-Soviet countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia) is presented in the paper by Jampeisov et al. (2020). Ryazantsev et al. (2021) examine the trends and reasons behind return labor migration from Russia to Tajikistan, as well as the challenges faced by return migrants in reintegrating into Tajik society. They point out the lack of specific reintegration programs for return migrants. Furthermore, Kuschminder (2017) discusses the role of temporality in return migration, encompassing the idea of return, decision-making about return, circular and seasonal visits, and the experience of return and reintegration, using examples from Albania, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Additionally, Sivoplyasova, Voinov, and Pismennaya (2022) examined gender aspects of return migration from Russia to Central Asia. Makhmadullozoda (2019) investigates the legal and economic facets of reintegration for returned labor migrants in Central Asian countries. The study analyzes the statutory regulations of Central Asian countries in this area, identifies trends, factors, and prerequisites for the return of labor migrants from abroad, and proposes potential solutions to address this issue.

The literature review indicates that return migration from Russia to Kyrgyzstan remains underexplored due to challenges related to statistical undercounting, empirical

measurements, and estimation of these processes amid a fast-moving social, political, and economic landscape. The complexity of causality, involving multiple factors and actors, further highlights the need for further investigation in this field.

Method and Its Justification

In our study, we define “return migration” as the movement of individuals back to their country of origin after leaving their temporary residence abroad and crossing an international border (Sironi et al., 2019). We also use the term “recurrent migration” to describe patterns of cross-country mobility that may or may not happen again. Our research focuses on evaluating the possibility of repeated labor mobility abroad, excluding the study of circular and seasonal movements as types of labor migration.

We believe that recurrent migration can result from cumulative life circumstances. The reasons for returning to the country of origin vary, including successful goal achievement or an unsuccessful migration experience, personal or family circumstances, and prospects for successful professional activity in the home country. The study of return migration necessitates assessing and understanding the social and economic relations between host and home countries, as well as connections with previous places of residence. It also involves exploring resources for returning home, models of interpersonal relations, migration experiences of returnees in terms of time spent abroad, resource deployment, legal status, reasons, and projects. We recognize that return migrants form heterogeneous groups, and their potential to influence sending and receiving countries differs respectively.

The analysis of return migration dynamics, structure, and reasons from Russia to Kyrgyzstan is based on research conducted by the Institute for Demographic Research of FCTAS RAS and Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University (Project leader: G. I. Osadchaya). The study involved 515 return migrants (questionnaire survey) and 37 return migrants (focused in-depth interviews) and was conducted in Kyrgyzstan from October–November 2022. Additionally, 425 labor migrants (questionnaire survey) and 52 labor migrants (focused in-depth interviews) were interviewed in November–December 2022 in Moscow. .

In Kyrgyzstan, respondents were selected using nonrandom sampling through one-attribute targeted selection, including labor migrants who had returned from Russia. The informants for in-depth interviews in Kyrgyzstan were selected using the “snowball” method among labor migrants who had returned from Russia. In Moscow, respondents were chosen through nonrandom sampling using two-attribute targeted selection: citizens of Kyrgyzstan working there. The informants for in-depth interviews were also selected using the two-attribute “snowball” method among citizens of Kyrgyzstan working in Moscow.

In preparing this paper, an analysis of scientific literature and statistics related to the research topic was conducted. The combination of chosen methods for data collection and problem analysis enhances the reliability of our findings.

Research Results

Dynamics of Return Migration From Russia to Kyrgyzstan

The assessment of return migration, along with the prospects of labor migration from post-Soviet countries to Russia, following the start of the special military operation in Ukraine and sanctions against Russia, remains ambiguous. Thus, according to the Rosstat [Federal State Statistics Service], after the migration gain in Russia in 2021 (in comparison with the “COVID” year of 2020),¹ a migration outflow was observed in October 2022, which was –20.6 thousand people.² The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia has not registered the migration outflow. For example, during January–December 2022, the number of migration registrations of non-citizens in Kyrgyzstan reached 1,184,469 people, while the number of non-citizens whose registration was terminated, and they left the country was 1,003,155 people. In 2022, there was a 21% increase in decisions made to issue residence permits (primarily), while the number of individuals obtaining Russian citizenship (reception, restoration, and recognition) increased by 18% (Table 1). However, experts acknowledge the incompleteness of the data available from the Ministry.

Table 1

Data on Migrants From Kyrgyzstan in Russia in January–December 2021 and 2022

	MIGRATION REGISTRATION		TEMPORARY RESIDENT PERMIT		RESIDENT CARDS		Number of individuals to receive Russian citizenship (citizenship reception, restoration, and recognition)
	Non-citizen migration registration cases	Non-citizen migration deregistration cases	Positive decisions on temporary resident permits	Number of non-citizens with valid temporary resident permits, as of the end of the reporting period	Number of decisions on resident cards (primary)	Number of non-citizens with valid resident cards, as of the end of the reporting period	
January–December, 2021							
Kyrgyzstan	1,063,928	696,658	7,141	8,238	10,072	14,289	19,241
January–December, 2022							
Kyrgyzstan	1,184,469	1,003,155	9,675	8,516	12,771	14,582	23,496

Opinions of Kyrgyzstani citizens, who are participants in the migration process themselves, do not fully clarify the situation. When asked about the returns of labor migrants to Kyrgyzstan, more than half of the respondents (21 out of 37) who had returned to their home country mentioned that many of their compatriots left Moscow after the imposition of sanctions against Russia.

¹ Total migration gain in 2020 was 106,474 people and 429,902 in 2021. See Rosstat (2022a).

² See Rosstat (2022b).

The most common responses provided by return migrants are as follows:

I think there has been an outflow of labor migrants after the imposition of sanctions against Russia ... several people among my acquaintances and friends who had left for work returned. They worked in markets in Russia, and upon their return they have also been working in local markets. (Diana, 24, general secondary education, service sector)

Yes, some have returned. Builders, installers, mostly workers. They plan to move to England and South Korea from Kyrgyzstan. (Melis, 46, secondary professional education, construction sector)

There were those who had Russian citizenship, they were afraid that they would be called up for military service and they returned to Kyrgyzstan. They were people with dual citizenship. By profession they traded in the market. (Rinat, 25, secondary professional education, delivery service)

More than half of those Kyrgyzstani migrants who stayed in Moscow (29 of 52 people participating in our in-depth interviews) noted that the special military operation and sanctions against Russia did not affect the labor migration and did not create outflow.

All my friends work in Russia because they need money and they have settled down quite well. (Fatima, 35, salesperson)

There are no such people among my friends, everyone remains in his or her place, no one has left for other regions of Russia or have gone back home, to Kyrgyzstan. Someone works as a picker, someone drives a taxi, but everyone remains in Moscow. (Samat, 25, salesperson)

Nothing has changed among my friends. Everybody, in principle, remained where they were, and they see no reason to return. They return home only for personal reasons: a wedding or just for a vacation, or because of a relative's illness. They have all settled down well enough, received a registration. (Aziza, 27, service sector)

In our opinion, contradictions in the evaluative judgments of migrants can be attributed to their personal psychological characteristics, the influence of reference groups, their level of success in settling in Moscow, and their assessment of the prospects of readaptation in Kyrgyzstan.

Structure of Return Migration From Russia to Kyrgyzstan

According to the questionnaire results, 47.2% of respondents returned to their home country between June and October 2022, and 25.4% between January and June 2022. Among the interviewed returnees, 15.0% had spent up to six months in Russia;

13.4%, from six months to a year; 31.1%, from one year to three years; 17.9%, from three to five years; and 22.6%, more than five years, indicating that on average four out of ten respondents have extensive migration experience. These respondents are primarily aged between 26 and 35. A third of those who returned have a Bachelor’s degree, while a fifth have secondary professional education. Most of them returned from Moscow and Moscow region (60.8%) and St. Petersburg and Leningrad region (25.1%) and settled mainly in Bishkek (78.6%) or Osh (11.3%). Among them, 72.4% are citizens of Kyrgyzstan, and 26.6% are citizens of Russia.

It is evident that return migrants, in their employment in Kyrgyzstan, were guided by their previous professional experience, just as they were when searching for jobs in Russia. However, the areas of employment in the labor market of Kyrgyzstan have been somewhat adjusted, with a notable increase in employment in transport, taxis, education, delivery, and courier service. Additionally, the number of unemployed has doubled (Table 2).

Table 2

Sectors Where Returned Migrants Were/Are Employed in Russia and Kyrgyzstan (% of Respondents, Quantitative Survey)

Field	Worked in Russia	Work now in Kyrgyzstan
Industry	5.8	7.2
Construction	8.9	6.8
Transport, taxi	11.3	6.8
Agriculture	3.3	3.5
Trade	19.6	19.8
Education and research	4.1	7.4
Healthcare	4.1	3.1
Services	22.7	18.6
Information technologies	5.2	6.2
Housing and utilities	1.7	0.6
Delivery service	4.1	2.7
Do (did) not work	8.0	16.1
Other	1.2	1.2

Through the analysis of stories shared by the migrants we interviewed in Kyrgyzstan regarding their work activity after returning, we gain insights into their experiences, meanings, and hopes upon coming back to their homeland. These narratives corroborate the findings of the quantitative survey. Upon return, some individuals resume their former scope of activity, while others attempt to make changes or embark on their own entrepreneurial ventures. Nevertheless, the majority still retain aspects of their migrant experience, and some remain unemployed. Informants assess their chances of success differently, reflecting varying perspectives on their future prospects.

I permanently relocated to Kyrgyzstan, and I don't have any plans to leave ... After returning, the best solution was to get a job at my old place of work, that is, where I had been working before moving to Russia. This is the driving school. Chances of success ... I can't answer, I haven't evaluated them. (Ilyas, 30, higher education—Bachelor's degree, worked in the field of education)

I moved to Kyrgyzstan for permanent residence. When I was in Moscow, my parents started working in trade, now I work with them, the prospects are good. (Camila, 29, higher education—Bachelor's degree, trade)

We moved to Kyrgyzstan for permanent residence, since our son had already grown up. I work in the same field as in Russia. Given my extensive experience as a hairdresser over the years, I believe my chances of success are quite promising. (Diana, 32, higher education—Bachelor's degree, service sector)

Salaries are not satisfactory, so I do not work. There is a chance of success, but it takes time. (Sofa, 28, higher education—Bachelor's degree, service sector)

I'm a surgeon in a private clinic. I do not plan to move from Kyrgyzstan now. The chances of success are high. (Ruslan, 33, higher education—postgraduate, healthcare)

I work seasonally, I am not working at the moment. It's hard to talk about the future. (Sania, 22, higher education—Bachelor's degree, unemployed/looking for a job)

I am currently not employed, so we are living off the money we saved during my time working in the Russian Federation. As of now, I am unsure about my future plans. (Arslan, 30, secondary professional education, unemployed/looking for a job)

After returning to my homeland, I have managed to start my own small business, and I earn money from it. I have finally decided to stay in Kyrgyzstan. Hope everything works out. (Bakyt, 32, secondary professional education, business owner)

Got a job at a construction site. Moved to Kyrgyzstan for permanent residence. Chances of success are below average. (Melis, 46, secondary professional education, construction)

I moved for good, and my family has a business, I help them now sometimes at the market. (Urmat, 32, general secondary education, trade)

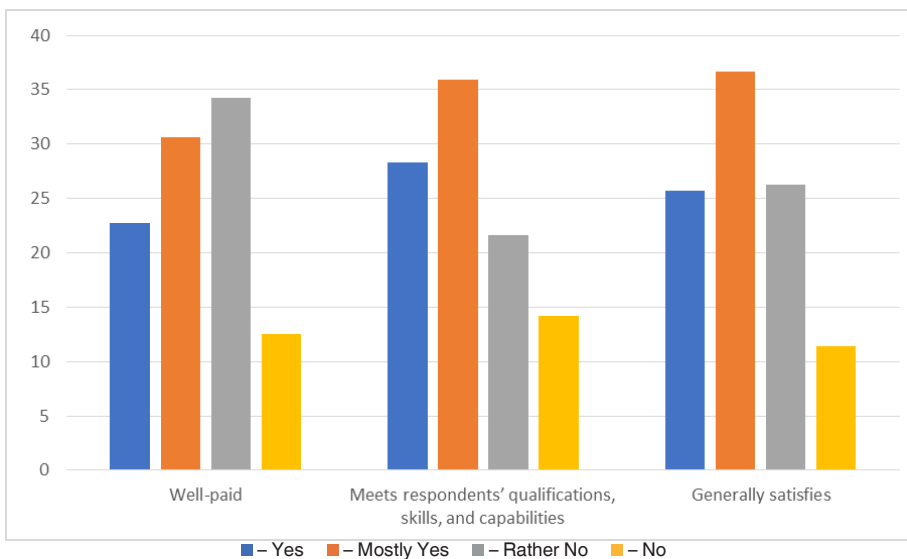
According to the positive responses from 58% of respondents (comprising 25.8% "Yes" and 32.2% "Rather Yes"), their expectations of returning to Kyrgyzstan from Russia were generally fulfilled. The share of those whose expectations were

met is 9% higher among men and 30% higher in the age group of 46–65. However, for 31.3% of respondents, their preparedness for the new social realities turned out to be insufficient. Their expectations from the return were either not fully met or not met at all, with answers such as “Rather No” at 23.3% and “No” at 8.0%. Additionally, 10.7% of respondents found it difficult to answer this question (approximately the same proportion in all age and gender groups).

These ratings strongly correlate with the satisfaction scores regarding the jobs people found in Kyrgyzstan. More than half of the respondents believe that their work is well paid (with positive responses of “Yes” at 22.7% and “Mostly Yes” at 30.6%, totaling 53.3%); the answer choice “fits my knowledge, abilities, and opportunities” received “Yes” responses from 28.3% and “Mostly Yes” responses from 35.9%, together constituting 64.2%; and the answer choice “generally satisfies” received a total of 62.45% positive responses (summing “Yes” at 25.7% and “Mostly Yes” at 36.7%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Respondents’ Opinions on Their Work in Kyrgyzstan, % of all Surveyed



Reasons for Return Migration From Russia to Kyrgyzstan

It should be noted that many migrants, facing challenging adaptation and missing their homes and families, began contemplating returning to their homeland from the early days in Russia. Despite various reasons influencing the decision on return migration, our respondents highlighted specific factors that were pivotal for them at the moment. Among the respondents, 17 out of 37 cited family and personal issues, including health conditions requiring more affordable medical treatment in Kyrgyzstan, caregiving for parents, and ensuring the education of their children who were left in Kyrgyzstan with their grandparents, as the main reasons for their return.

We lived well in Moscow; many relatives were nearby. I had some difficulties at work, it did not immediately start to work out. It was very difficult to study and work long hours at the same time. Besides, the climate was different from ours. We decided to return home because of our child. It was time to go to school and get ready. Yes, we returned after February 24th, but the situation between Russia and Ukraine did not affect us. (Angelina, 29, higher education, trade)

I came to Russia alone to earn more money. My daughter and my wife stayed home. Life in Russia was good, at first, I worked in a store, did merchandising, there were difficulties with documents, registration was very difficult, and there were eight of us living in a two-room apartment. It was difficult for me. I began to think about returning after a month there, since I was on my own, I missed my family. I have returned recently. Anyway, it's better at home, I decided to realize myself in my own country. I came back before the war, so it didn't affect me. (Rinat, 25, secondary professional education, delivery service)

I was compelled to migrate because of the lack of job opportunities. I moved alone, my beloved family stayed in Bishkek. Everything was going pretty well, I worked at Yandex Taxi, I didn't encounter any difficulties, probably because my move was not a spontaneous decision and everything was more or less thoroughly planned. I began to think about returning at the beginning of 2022, and finally made a decision closer to spring. I was largely driven by homesickness and, in general, my expectations from the move were not particularly fulfilled. The events related to Ukraine, fortunately, did not affect me in any way. (Ilyas, 30, higher education—Bachelor's degree, education)

About a third of our informants (13 out of 37 in-depth interviewed) cited the special military operation and the related economic downturn as the reason for their return.

I moved to Russia to earn more, I moved alone. My family consisting of mom, dad, and little brother stayed at home. At first time it was very difficult: a new city, a different mentality, cold weather, missing relatives and my native city. I worked from home, received clients in the apartment. The first difficulty was to find housing, since everything was expensive, but I was lucky and in Telegram³ I found girls with whom I rented an apartment, sharing the rent. After the events that took place after February 24, 2022 in Russia, I made the final decision to return to my homeland, since even before that I had thoughts of returning, and after the start of the events I finally decided. (Diana, 24, general secondary education, service sector)

I left for Moscow because of small wages. I moved alone. The rest of my family remained in Kyrgyzstan. In the beginning, it was difficult because of registration and job search. I had problems with my salary being delayed or not paid, but it

³ Telegram™ is a trademark of Telegram Group Inc., its operational center is based in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

got better over time. I worked in construction. After 1.5 years in Russia, I started thinking about returning to Kyrgyzstan. Eventually, I decided to go back because of the worsening economic situation in Russia and lower salaries due to events in Ukraine. (Melis, 46, secondary professional education, construction sector)

Seven respondents named the following reasons for their return: their contract ended, their goals were achieved, and they were offered a job in Kyrgyzstan.

I came with friends, and my parents wanted me to go so that I could earn well. I worked in the construction industry, and it was challenging to adapt. I missed my family and Kyrgyzstan. The events in February did not influence my return since my work contract was ending. (Max, 21, general secondary education, construction sector)

The reason for migration to Russia was the desire to earn money. I came to Russia alone. My parents, brothers, and sister remained in Kyrgyzstan. They reacted positively to my decision to move. In Moscow, I found a job, acquired a new profession and was earning money. I worked as a cook in a restaurant. There were no difficulties. For the first time, I began to think about returning to my homeland in the spring of 2022. A few months later, I decided to return. The reason is that I was offered a job in Kyrgyzstan. The reaction of relatives and friends was good. The events taking place around Ukraine did not influence my decision. (Zeine, 48, secondary professional education, service sector)

Recurrent Migration From Kyrgyzstan to Russia

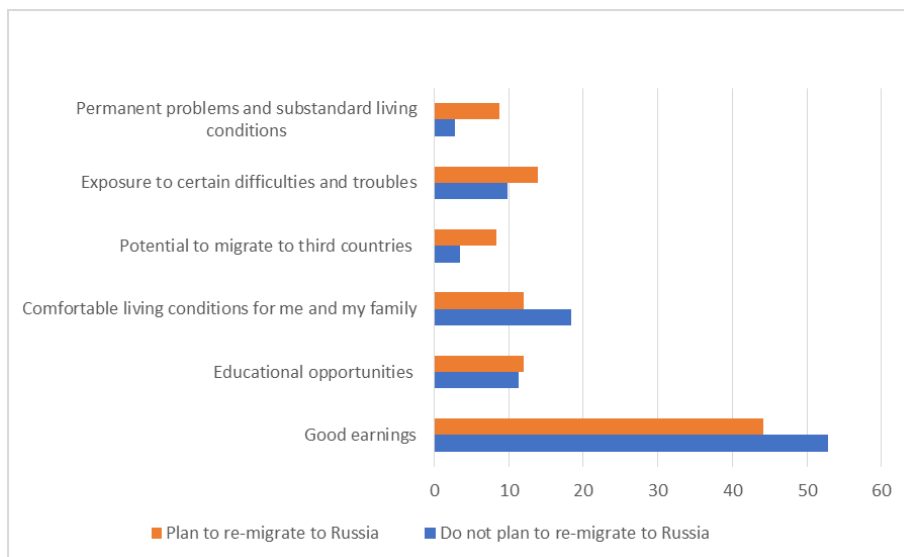
The decision of recurrent migration to Russia is influenced by the returnee's condition and status, as well as their choice to conclude the migration cycle in Russia. Approximately 22% of respondents demonstrate a model of secondary cross-border mobility, planning to return to work in Russia in the near future. This recurrent migration tendency is more prevalent among women and respondents aged 26–35. Additionally, individuals with general secondary education, a Bachelor's degree, a Master's degree, and those with Russian citizenship show a higher inclination towards this decision.

In the group of migrants whose expectations of returning to Kyrgyzstan from Russia were fulfilled, there is a 23% lower proportion of those planning to return to Russia within three months. Conversely, in the group of those planning to return to Russia, a somewhat higher proportion associates Russia with the possibility of good earnings and a comfortable life for themselves and their family members (Figure 2).

The majority of informants (30 out of 37 interviewed) stated that if they were to make a decision about secondary migration, they would return to the same cities and organizations, and plan to work in the same sphere. Four informants even mentioned that they would carefully consider and develop a detailed plan of action.

Figure 2

Expectations of the Respondents in Relation to Russia, % of Those Surveyed Planning and Not Planning Recurrent Migration



I think, if I go to Russia, this will be a deliberate and well-considered decision. This time, I won't repeat my past mistakes of going and then searching for a job. I will plan ahead, think things through, and develop a strategy to avoid difficulties. Maybe, for a while, I'll focus on enjoying my leisure time. (Diana, 24, general secondary education, service sector)

Among the primary reasons that could influence the decision-making model for secondary migration are as follows: first, the desire for good wages and a stable job (mentioned by 11 out of 37 informants); second, an attractive offer for a regular job with promising prospects, good salary, and favorable working conditions (cited by 6 out of 37 informants), and, third, concerns about destabilization, unstable politics, and unemployment in Kyrgyzstan (noted by 7 out of 37 informants).

The majority of respondents planning to return to work in Russia identify themselves as Kyrgyzstani citizens.

I perceive myself as a Kyrgyzstani resident and citizen. As a resident of Kyrgyzstan and an ethnic Kyrgyz, I comply with the Muslim canons and customs of my ancestors in a modern way. (Zeine, 48, secondary professional education, service sector)

Out of 37 informants, only seven respondents believe that migration has become an integral part of their lifestyle, and they cannot imagine their life without migration, which is why we can describe them as circular transnational migrants.

I can say yes, I don't like to sit tight, I want to try to live in other countries too, I love my homeland and will always return home, but there's always travelling. (Atay, 26, higher education—Bachelor's degree, delivery service)

I plan to move to the USA and to find a job there. I don't know, in the age of globalization, it's hard to imagine life without migration. Everybody, I think, wants to migrate, especially in our country, because life is tough here. (Rinat, 25, secondary professional education, delivery service)

Yes, migration has already become an integral part of my lifestyle. I can't imagine my life without migration, I think. I don't see any shortcomings in the migrant way of life. (Zeine, 48, secondary professional education, service sector)

Some informants strongly rejected the possibility of new migration, emphasizing its downsides.

Living as a migrant is challenging, especially in the beginning when you might feel somewhat lost. Local people may treat you with distrust or disdain, particularly if you are Asian. However, with time, you start to adapt and feel more integrated into the new culture. The most difficult moments often arise when there are job-related problems (from my own experience). Many people experience delays in their salary or even lose their job altogether. On top of that, there are expenses like rent, food, and the need to send money back home. During such times, you may feel overwhelmed as the main purpose of the journey is to earn money for yourself and your family back home, yet you find yourself struggling to meet your own basic needs. (Aibek, 27, secondary professional education, construction industry)

Yes, I can easily envision my life without migration. I haven't been a migrant for an extended period of time, and I don't wish to become too accustomed to it. Each person's experience varies. In my case, I've become more independent, but being away from family and friends has given me much to contemplate. One of the drawbacks is the challenge of finding housing, and the harsh climate has made it difficult for me to adjust. (Bakyt, 32, secondary professional education, business owner)

Maintaining connections with compatriots and/or friends who remain in Russia can influence people's decision about circular migration. In our survey, nine out of ten respondents who returned to Kyrgyzstan reported staying in touch with their fellow countrymen who are still in Russia.

Regarding recurrent migration back to Russia, our informants suggest that if the Russian government streamlined the document processing during registration, facilitated working in their respective professions, provided social insurance, and exhibited a more welcoming attitude towards migrants, it would promote the effective utilization of the labor potential of those coming to Russia.

The decision to opt for recurrent migration to Russia reflects an individual's life strategy, goals, and approach to achieving them, considering their previous

personal experiences, as well as their determination to obtain citizenship and support integration processes in Eurasia. Those who have chosen a recurrent migration strategy to Russia are more actively supportive of integration processes in the EAEU and are more inclined to seek Russian citizenship (Figure 3, 4).

Figure 3

Respondents' Support for Integration Between Russia and Kyrgyzstan Within the EAEU, % of Surveyed Migrants Who Stayed in Moscow, Return Migrants Planning Recurrent Migration to Russia, and Migrants Who Completed Their Migration Cycle

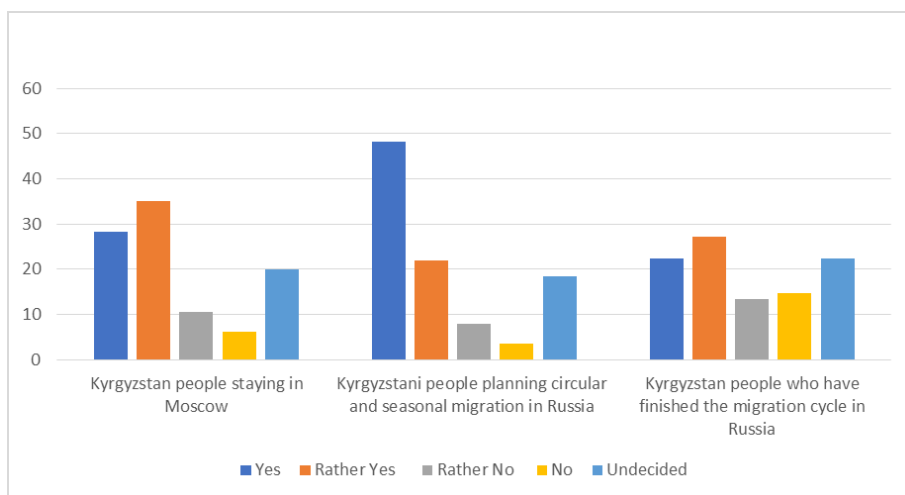
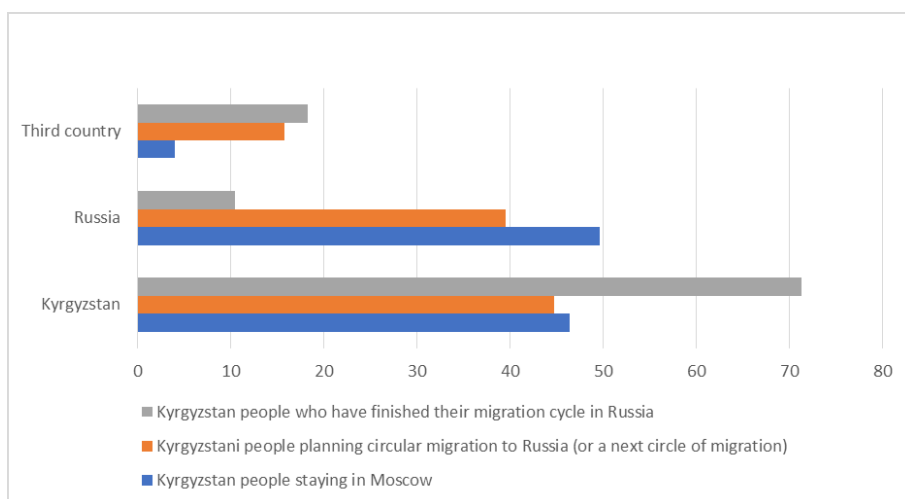


Figure 4

Citizenship Plans in Five Years (% of Surveyed Migrants)



Discussion and Conclusion

The study examines return migration from Russia to Kyrgyzstan under recent social, political, and socio-economic conditions, focusing on the reasons and motivations behind Kyrgyzstani people's decision to move back to their country of origin or their willingness to consider another migration to Russia. These decisions are influenced by various factors, including the specific locations where migrants settle, the emotions and challenges they experience during the move, and the changes in their daily lives.

The research reveals the ambiguity in both official data and subjective opinions of survey participants regarding the scale of return migration to Kyrgyzstan. Similarly, the prospects for labor migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia after the start of the special military operation and the imposition of sanctions against Russia remain uncertain.

Return migration is characterized as voluntary and spontaneous. A significant proportion of returnees settle in Bishkek (78.6%), possibly due to their previous work experiences in major Russian cities. When seeking jobs in Kyrgyzstan, return migrants draw upon the professional migration experience they gained in Russia. Interestingly, 58% of respondents feel that their expectations of returning to Kyrgyzstan from Russia have been fulfilled.

The year 2022 was characterized by a unprecedented connection between return migration and military/political issues. Approximately a third of respondents attributed their decision to return to the special military operation, while a fifth of them cited factors like contract completion, achieving migration goals, or attractive job offers in Kyrgyzstan. However, half of the respondents mentioned personal and family reasons as the primary motivator.

Among those in Kyrgyzstan, 22% consider recurrent migration to Russia, planning to return for work between December and March. Meanwhile, 49% believe their migration cycle in Russia is complete, and 29% are undecided. The decision for recurrent migration depends on migration experiences, personal traits, and aligning life conditions with their values. This group shows greater support for integration within the EAEU and a higher inclination to obtain Russian citizenship. Some informants believe that migration has become an integral part of their lifestyle, and they cannot imagine their life without it.

For those not planning to return to Russia, factors like good wages, stable job opportunities, attractive job offers, political instability, and unemployment in Kyrgyzstan influence their decision. However, should they choose to return, they intend to go to the same cities and organizations, working in the same specialties.

Regarding recurrent migration, informants expect institutional support from Russia, such as legalization assistance, social insurance provision, elimination of administrative employment barriers, and comfortable adaptation conditions. Equal pay for equal work, protection of migrants' social and labor rights, and adherence to migration legislation are essential aspects for successful integration.

This research enriches the field of migration theory and sociology, providing new insights into return migration. Our theoretical findings, specifically regarding return migration to Kyrgyzstan from Russia as a form of mobility within the EAEU,

provide a conceptual foundation for future empirical research on migration in the EAEU. These results can be utilized in developing educational courses and improvement programs focused on integration processes within the Eurasian Union, benefiting Masters, postdocs, university teachers, and specialists studying migration theory and sociology.

Furthermore, the results can help in creating favorable conditions for the integration policy of the EAEU, and in devising effective instruments and mechanisms for social and integration policies within Russia and the Eurasian Union. They can also play a crucial role in addressing issues related to return migration and return migration from Russia to Kyrgyzstan. Overall, the research contributes to migration studies within the EAEU and may be of interest to decision-makers in the sphere of migration policy and practice.

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