Assessment of educational migration potential from Central Asia to the Sverdlovsk Region

Olga Kozlova[1], *Natalia* Neklyudova[1*], and *Elena* Bedrina[1,2]

[1]Institute of Economics of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 29 Moskovskaya St., 620014 Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation
[2]Ural Federal University, 19 Mira str., 620014 Ekaterinburg, Russia

Abstract. The article analyses and assesses the prospects of educational migration of young people from Central Asian countries to the Sverdlovsk Region as one of the Russian regions with a developed educational infrastructure. Based on the results of a sociological survey of labour migrants in the Sverdlovsk Region, conducted by the authors in 2023, it is concluded that the level of professional education of labour migrants is quite low and does not meet the current needs of the Russian labour market. In the future, the observed population growth in Central Asian countries, including its youth contingent, may contribute to an increase in the flow of educational migration to Russia and its regions. In this regard, it will be necessary to adapt the entire educational system and, first of all, the system of vocational education and training to this process. Keywords: educational migration, labor migrants, vocational education and training, vocational education system

1 Introduction

The educational migration of Central Asian youth to Russia presents both opportunities and challenges. Kuznetsova [1] highlights the significant growth in educational migration to Russia, with Central Asian countries being major contributors. Ryazantsev [2], who emphasizes the potential for educational migration from Southeast Asian countries, including those in Central Asia, further supports this trend. Almanova [3] and Beschasnaya [4] both underscore the role of educational migration in shaping the future of both the migrants and the host country, with the former focusing on the specific case of Kazakh youth and the latter on the impact on Russian cities. These studies collectively suggest that educational migration from Central Asia to Russia is a complex phenomenon with potential benefits for both the migrants and the host country, but also with implications for the development of the sending and receiving regions.

Educational migration from Central Asian countries to Russia has huge potential and benefits for both students and educational institutions in both countries. Firstly, Russian universities offer a wide range of study programmes at different levels, from bachelor's to doctoral level, which allows students to choose the most suitable course and specialisation

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* Corresponding author: neklyudova.np@uiec.ru

for them. In addition, Russian education is known for its high quality and internationally recognised status, making it attractive to students from Central Asia seeking a quality education and improved career prospects. For Central Asian students, studying in Russia also represents an opportunity to immerse themselves in a new culture, language and way of life, which contributes to their personal development and broadening of horizons. Thus, educational migration from Central Asian countries to Russia has great potential for both sides and can contribute to strengthening cultural and educational ties between these regions.

The Sverdlovsk Region is traditionally one of the regions with high intensity of migration processes; at the same time, natural population loss and loss due to exchange with other Russian regions are partially compensated by foreign migration.

Due to the limited statistical information on the number of educational migrants and their distribution among educational institutions, it is possible to estimate the nature and volume of potential flows of educational migration to the region with a certain degree of conventionality by taking into account the results of sample sociological surveys. In March-May 2023 the Institute of Economics of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, with the assistance of specialists from the Department of Internal Policy of the Sverdlovsk Region, the Migration Department of the Main Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia in the Sverdlovsk Region, and national diasporas in the Region, conducted a survey of labour migrants from Central Asia on the topic "Quality of life of labour migrants and their family members in the Sverdlovsk Region and the city of Ekaterinburg". The results of this study are of some interest for assessing the nature of foreign migration flows to the territory of our region and make it possible to evaluate the prospects for the formation of the contingent of educational migration on a quantitative basis.

2 Materials and Methods

According to the data of the Main Department of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Sverdlovsk Region, 199,020 foreign citizens entered the territory of the region in 2023. The main migration flows were citizens of Tajikistan (41.1 %), Uzbekistan (24.4%), Kyrgyzstan (18.4 %), Kazakhstan (4.9 %), Azerbaijan (3.9 %) and Armenia (2.7 %) (News Agency URA.RU. URL: https://ura.news/news/1052727561 (Accessed 09.03.2024)).

Up to 70 per cent of the migration flow is concentrated in Ekaterinburg and its satellite towns: Verkhnyaya Pyshma, Berezovsky, Sysert and Zarechny.

On the date of the sociological survey the general population of the study was about 146 thousand people. The sample size of the questionnaire survey was 513 respondents, the method of its formation was spontaneous due to the fact that migrants prefer to keep "in the shadows" and are quite reluctant to make contact. The control attribute is the distribution of migrants from Central Asia by country of origin. The sample on this attribute is representative and its margin of error is no more than 5%.

The questionnaire was translated into Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz to enable foreign citizens with poor Russian language skills to participate in the survey. Data collection was conducted in mosques in Yekaterinburg, Verkhnyaya Pyshma and in the Universal Migration Centre of the Sverdlovsk region in Yekaterinburg.

3 Results

According to the results of the survey, migration from Central Asian countries prevails in the Sverdlovsk Region, as well as in Russia as a whole. A significant share in migration flows from these countries are citizens of Tajikistan. An important characteristic is the age of migrants (Fig. 1).
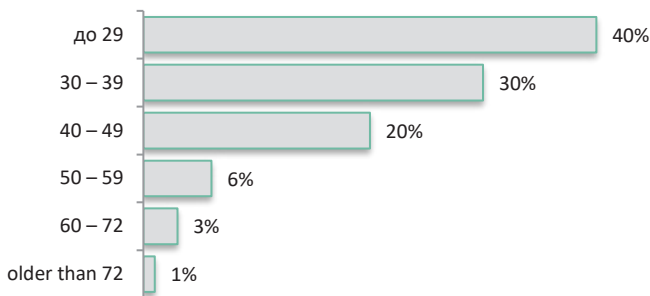
Fig. 1. Age of respondents who participated in the survey.

The age distribution generally corresponds to the typical pattern of international migration, where the majority of labour migration flows consist of young people under 29 years of age. However, it is possible that the number of respondents in this age group in Sverdlovsk Region is somewhat higher than in other regions and on average in Russia. This may be due to the development of the educational environment in the region, in connection with which some migrants came to the region to study, and at the time of the survey had the status of 'student' at various universities in the city of Ekaterinburg. In the context of our research, we are interested in the purpose of foreign citizens' arrival (work or study) and their level of education.

The results of the sociological survey showed that some migrants do not have special professional education, 17% do not have general secondary education. At the same time, the share of persons with higher education was comparable to the share of persons with higher education among the permanent population of the region, which amounted to 28% (Fig. 2).
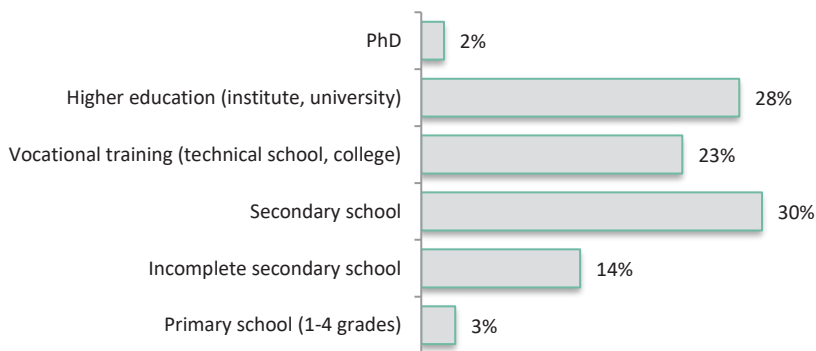
Fig. 2. Education level of foreign migrants.

The survey results indicate that migrants arrive in Russia and the Sverdlovsk Region not only for economic reasons such as earning money, improving living standards, and organizing business, but also for educational purposes, which accounted for approximately 13% of the sample (Fig. 3).
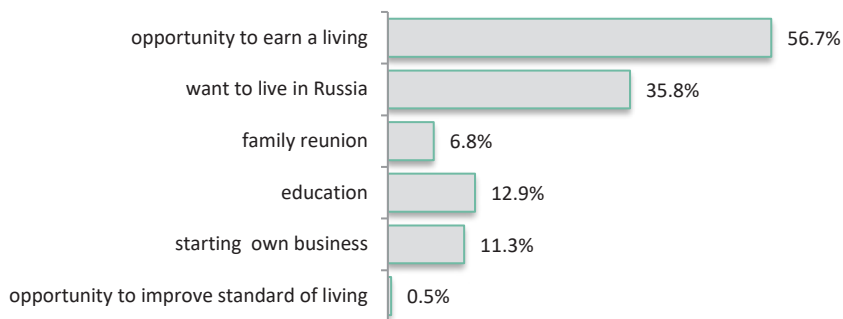
Fig. 3. Purpose of foreign migrants arriving in the Sverdlovsk Region.

To determine the potential number of students enrolled in VET programmes, we can use information on the correspondence between a labour migrant's existing specialisation and the professional activity they are engaged in on the host territory.

Analysis of the employment structure of migrants confirms the all-Russian trend: the largest share of migrants are employed in construction, accounting for 36%. Trade occupies the second place in terms of demand for migrant labour at 17%, followed by industry at 11%. The percentage of migrants employed in the social sphere, including catering, medicine, and education, was relatively low at 16%. Table 1 shows that 60% of respondents did not have professional education or their education did not correspond to the required qualification or speciality at the time of the survey, in response to the question about the correspondence of employment to their obtained speciality.

Table 1. Relevance of employment to vocational training received.

Question: "Does your work in Russia correspond to your education?"	Frequency	Percent
yes, it does	158	40
no, it doesn't	135	34
I don't have a specialisation yet	103	26
Total:	396	100

4 Discussion

In summary, it is worth noting that migration from Central Asian countries has the potential to create a group of students enrolled in VET programmes [5-7]. This group may include not only young people aged 15-18 years old but also older individuals who need to improve their skills or obtain a speciality necessary for work.

Several studies [8-13] have been conducted on educational migration to Russian universities. According to these studies and the current analysis, the proportion of foreign students in VET institutions in both the Urals Federal District and Russia as a whole remains very low. However, this proportion has increased in recent years. Between 2010 and 2015, the proportion of students studying in the Russian VET institutions increased from 0.4% to 1.2%. Additionally, the percentage of foreign nationals from CIS countries increased by 2% [14]. Currently, 98% of foreign students studying at VET institutions are CIS citizens, likely due to the historical ties between these countries and Russia.

The UN report *World Population Prospects, 2022* predicts that Tajikistan's population will grow from 8.48 million to 11.2 million by 2030, 14.2 million by 2050, and 18.5 million by 2100. The UN forecast also predicts population growth in other Central Asian republics by 2100. Kazakhstan has a population of 25 million people (17.6 million in 2015), while Kyrgyzstan has a population of 9 million (5.94 million in 2015), Turkmenistan has a population of 5.6 million (5.37 million in 2015), and Uzbekistan has a population of 32 million (29.89 million in 2015) (https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/World-Population-Prospects-2022).

Therefore, it is quite possible that there will be a mass educational migration to secondary vocational education institutions in the Russian Federation and its regions in the medium and long term.

The economies of Central Asian countries, which have sufficiently high population growth rates, are unlikely to be able to create jobs that satisfy the labour market supply. As a result, both labour and educational migration from these countries to Russia will only increase.

However, implementing the strategy of exporting educational services within secondary vocational education institutions and at the state-SVET communication level presents several major challenges. The challenges faced by potential entrants include poor knowledge of the Russian language and unpreparedness of vocational education institutions to teach in other languages. Additionally, entrants from CIS countries receive inadequate school training, and their school curricula differ from that of the Russian Federation [15].

To assess the potential of the contingent of students in the VET system, the authors analysed demographic projections of the population of four Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan by age groups 15-16 and 17-18, updated in 2022 by the United Nations Population Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs (URL: https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/MostUsed/ (Accessed: 20.12.23)).

According to our sociological survey of migrants from Central Asia who arrived in the Sverdlovsk Region, the estimated potential contingent of students in the VET system is 10%. This figure is based on the results of the survey, which found that educational migration accounted for approximately 13% of the respondents. However, it is important to note that currently, the proportion of study migrants from Central Asian countries participating in VET programmes is just over 1%, as indicated by the analysis of study migration in some regions. Therefore, we anticipate a gradual increase in the proportion of potential students in the VET system, estimated to be around 1-2% per analysed period (2024-2026 -1%; 2026-2031 - 3%; 2031-2036-5%; 2036-2041 -7%; 2041-2046 -8%; 2046-2076 - no more than 10% (Table 2).

Table 2. Forecast estimation of the potential for the number of students aged 15-18 from Central Asia* enrolled in VET programmes in the Sverdlovsk Region, thousand people.

Forecast scenarios	15-16 aged			17-18 aged			15-18 aged		
	high	medium	low	high	medium	low	high	medium	low
2024	1,7	1,6	1,4	1,7	1,5	0,8	3,4	3,1	2,2
2025	1,9	1,7	1,6	1,8	1,6	0,9	3,7	3,3	2,5
2026	2,0	1,9	1,7	2,0	1,8	1,0	4,0	3,7	2,7
2030	6,6	6,0	5,5	6,6	5,8	3,2	13,2	11,8	8,7
2031	6,7	6,2	5,6	6,6	5,9	3,1	13,3	12,1	8,7

2035	11,3	10,4	9,5	11,3	10,0	5,4	22,6	20,4	14,9
2036	11,4	10,0	8,7	11,3	9,5	5,0	22,7	19,5	13,7
2040	16,0	13,4	11,2	16,0	12,9	6,4	32,0	26,3	17,6
2041	18,4	14,8	12,0	18,0	14,4	7,0	36,4	29,2	19,0
2045	18,5	14,6	11,4	18,5	14,0	6,6	37,0	28,6	18,0
2046	19,0	14,9	11,5	19,0	14,0	6,5	38,0	28,9	18,0
2050	25,0	18,9	14,2	25,0	18,2	8,1	50,0	37,1	22,3
2055	26,8	20,1	14,9	26,9	19,3	8,6	53,7	39,4	23,5
2060	28,1	20,4	14,8	28,3	19,6	8,6	56,4	40,0	23,4
2065	28,7	19,8	13,8	29,0	19,1	8,0	57,8	38,9	21,8
2070	29,3	19,2	12,8	29,7	18,5	7,4	59,0	37,7	20,2
2075	30,3	18,9	12,1	30,8	18,2	7,0	60,9	37,1	19,1
2076	30,6	14,4	12,0	31,3	18,0	6,8	61,9	32,4	18,8

* Calculated on the basis of data from United Nations Population Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs. URL:https://www.un.org/en/desa/world-population-reach-8-billion-15-november-2022 (accessed 15.12.23)

As a result of low birth rates and high mortality rates, Russia's population is declining both in general and at younger ages. This is not the case in the Central Asian countries, where the population is still growing and will continue to grow in the long term, albeit at a slower rate. The wave-like nature of demographic processes leads to a slight long-term decline in the population of these countries in the 15-18 age group, which is reflected in the medium and low scenarios of the demographic projections for the countries of Central Asia.

Nevertheless, the population dynamics remain positive and the volume of potential enrolment in VET programmes for the Sverdlovsk region is significant, as evidenced by the forecast estimates.

However, it should be noted that in contrast to the state support of educational migration to universities, there is no interest in initiating the development of a similar process in the VET system [16].

Various student exchange programmes and quotas for foreign students attract 11th-grade graduates from neighbouring countries who do not choose vocational education.

Experts note that the potential of VET institutions is currently not being fully exploited. Moreover, against the background of declining demand and prestige of secondary vocational education among domestic youth, it is important not to reduce the potential of VET institutions, but to reorient them, with the support of the state, towards training and retraining of foreign citizens, mainly from CIS countries [17].

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that the education system as a whole, as well as all areas of life, develops under the direct influence of demographic factors. The change in the number of people of a certain age is a manifestation of a wave-like demographic dynamic that cannot

be corrected by direct management measures. The long-term impact of these factors can only be predicted and taken into account in the formation of educational policy.

The potential of educational migration from Central Asian countries may remain untapped if we do not accept the challenges that currently exist in the market for educational services. First of all, there is the increasing competition among educational institutions for applicants, especially on the part of universities. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, by 2024 the number of foreign students studying at Russian universities should increase to 425 thousand people.

It should be noted that changes in education policy should be coordinated with changes in economic and migration policy, employment policy, labour market policy, social policy and foreign policy. Russian vocational education can serve as a tool for integrating migrants in Russia and for filling the Russian labour market with new middle-skilled personnel in scarce fields and specialities.

Acknowledgements

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