

Refugees as a new emigration channel from Tajikistan to Western and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The article examines the situation with refugees during the civil war in Tajikistan after the collapse of the USSR. The factors and scale of refugees and features of asylum seekers from Tajikistan are considered. The scale and prospects for the development of the flow of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to Western and Eastern Europe are investigated. Every year, a huge number of people leave their homes due to armed conflicts, wars, poverty, and persecution on various grounds. One of the reasons for the refugees influx from Tajikistan to other countries is the civil war in the republic. After the collapse of the USSR, a power struggle between nationalists and Islamists began in Tajikistan that led to a civil war. The emergence of the refugees flow from Tajikistan to other countries is related with the civil war in the republic. Another reason is the ban by the Tajik authorities of two major opposition organisations – the Group of 24 and the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Among the Tajik political refugees who received asylum in European countries, there are also former migrant workers who worked in Russia. Deportations, decline in earnings after the 2015 currency crisis, and tightening of Russia's migration policy towards migrants from Tajikistan forced some migrants to reorient themselves in other countries, primarily in European countries, the United States and Canada. There are cases of deliberate destruction of their passports by Tajik migrants when moving to Germany, followed by an appeal to the authorities under the guise of refugees from Afghanistan (since both Tajiks and Afghans speak Farsi (Dari)) to obtain refugee status and corresponding benefits in Germany. Among asylum seekers from Tajikistan in European countries, political asylum is the most popular. The purpose of the article is to identify trends and prospects for the development of asylum as a new emigration channel from Tajikistan to the countries of Western and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: refuge, Tajikistan, Western and Eastern European countries, political refugees, migration, labor emigrants, Russia, UN

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Беженство как новый канал эмиграции из Таджикистана в страны Западной и Восточной Европы

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Аннотация

В статье рассмотрена ситуация с беженством в период гражданской войны в Таджикистане после распада СССР, факторы и масштабы вынужденной эмиграции, а также характеристики лиц из Таджикистана, ищущих убежища. Исследованы масштабы и перспективы развития потока беженцев и лиц из Таджикистана, ищущих убежища, в страны Западной и Восточной Европы. Каждый год огромное количество людей покидает свои дома из-за вооруженных конфликтов, войн, нищеты и преследований по различным основаниям. Одной из причин притока беженцев из Таджикистана в другие страны является гражданская война в республике. После распада СССР, в Таджикистане началась борьба за власть между националистами и исламистами, которая привела к гражданской войне. Таким образом, возникновение потока беженцев из Таджикистана в другие страны связано с гражданской войной в республике. Другая причина — это запрет таджикскими властями двух крупных оппозиционных организаций — «Группа 24» и «Партия исламского возрождения Таджикистана» (ПИВТ). Среди таджикских политических беженцев, которые получили убежище в европейских странах, есть и бывшие трудовые мигранты, которые работали в России. Депортации, снижение зарплаток в результате валютного кризиса 2015 г., а также ужесточение миграционной политики России в отношении мигрантов из Таджикистана вынудили часть мигрантов переориентироваться на другие страны, в первую очередь, европейские, США и Канаду. Известны случаи умышленного уничтожения своих паспортов таджикскими мигрантами при переезде в Германию с последующим обращением к властям под видом беженцев из Афганистана (поскольку и таджики, и афганцы говорят на фарси (дари)) для получения статуса беженца и соответствующих льгот в Германии. Среди лиц, ищущих убежища из Таджикистана в европейских странах, политическое убежище является наиболее популярным. Цель статьи — выявление тенденций и перспектив развития такого нового канала эмиграции из Таджикистана в страны Западной и Восточной Европы, как убежище.

Ключевые слова: убежище, политические беженцы, миграция, трудовые эмигранты, Таджикистан, Западная и Восточная Европа, европейские страны, Россия, ООН

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Introduction

Millions of people annually cross state borders in search of a new place of residence, fleeing from political, national, racial, religious and other forms of persecution [Jaeger, 2001]. In the XX century, the world community came to understand the need to pay the most serious attention to the ever-growing migration of the population forced to leave their places of permanent residence due to wars, ethnic conflicts, and similar reasons [Marfleet, 2007].

After the First World War¹ and the subsequent collapse of the Russian² and Ottoman Empires³, it became necessary to resolve issues related to the provision of international protection to refugees from these states. The signing of international treaties concluded within the framework of the League of Nations is considered the beginning of legal regulation of issues related to the status of refugees at the universal level. It was this organisation that convened *epу Kкагпuy Cщтаукyтcy* in 1921.

In accordance with the 1951 International Convention, relating to the status of refugees adopted by the UN General Assembly, and the 1967 Protocol, relating to the status of refugees (hereinafter referred to as the Convention), the term “refugee” means “a person who, due to well-founded fears of becoming a victim of persecution on the basis of race, religion, citizenship, belonging to a certain social group or political beliefs, is outside the country of his citizenship and cannot enjoy the protection of this country or does not wish to enjoy such protection due to such fears; or, not having a certain nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, he cannot or does not want to return to it due to such fears.”⁴

In the former USSR, the problem of forced migration has taken particularly acute forms since the late 1980s. A few years before the collapse of the USSR, due to the aggravation of interethnic relations in several Union republics and republics within the RSFSR. Internally displaced persons from other Union republics began to arrive on the territory of the Central Asian countries. Subsequently, due to the collapse of the USSR, a power struggle began in Tajikistan between nationalists and

Islamists, which led to a civil war in the republic [Olimov and Olimova, 2000]. The Civil War was the beginning of the refugee movement from Tajikistan to other countries.

Research methods and sources of information

During our research two methods were used: statistical and sociological. The statistical method allowed us to establish statistical data on the number of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to the countries of Western and Eastern Europe for several years. The results of public opinion polls and expert interviews were analysed using the sociological method (secondary analysis of sociological data). The main sources of information on refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan are data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Refugees from Tajikistan during the Civil War in the Republic, 1991–1997

The process of resettlement or migration of peoples is always accompanied by certain stages that are associated with certain events [Nazarshoeva, 2019]. In the forced migration of citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan during the years of civil confrontation (1992–1997), the following stages can be distinguished.

1. *The first stage*: from July 1992 to May 1993. At this stage, on July 5, 1992, the Department for Refugees was established by presidential decrees, and several resolutions and decrees on the social protection of refugees and the exemption from criminal liability of persons who illegally crossed the State border were adopted.

2. *The second stage*: from autumn 1992 to the first half of 1995. During this period, the adoption of the “Refugee Law” in 1995 played an important role.

3. *The third stage*: from the middle of 1995 until January 1997. A significant event was the signing of the “Protocol on Refugee Issues” in Tehran on January 19, 1997, which provides for the return of all refugees within 12–18 months.

4. *The fourth stage*: after the signing of the “General Agreement on Peace” on June 27, 1997 – until the end of 1998. At this stage, the most massive return of refugees to their homeland was observed.

Thus, since the beginning of July 1992, under the auspices of the UNHCR, refugees began to return from northern Afghanistan to their homeland. Since the middle of 1993, internally displaced persons began to move independently, and sometimes in an organised manner,

¹ RIA News (2019), *The First World War (1914–1918)*, available at: <https://bit.ly/3yBfl1R> (accessed 07.03.2022).

² RIA News (2007), *How the Russian Empire was falling apart*, available at: <https://ria.ru/20071106/86735417.html> (accessed 09.03.2022).

³ *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, 1807–1924* (Maps), available at: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/ru/map/the-dissolution-of-the-ottoman-empire-1807-1924> (accessed 07.03.2022).

⁴ UNHCR (2005), *Determination of refugee status. Training module on determining refugee status*, 154 p.

to their abandoned homes. This process lasted until 1998 and even partially until 2000–2002.⁵

International organisations did not always provide accurate data on the number of refugees, because they did not always have access to Tajik refugees. For example, in Afghanistan, they communicated with refugees only in one region in the north of the country.⁶ The assessment of refugees in the CIS countries was also difficult, since many people who sought asylum were not registered as refugees in the host country. In addition, Russians and migrants of other nationalities were also included in the number of Tajik refugees, although many of them fled to the CIS countries, especially to Russia, because of the economic and political instability in the country, which began in the 1980s, and these people were not going to return to Tajikistan.

As a result of the civil war, according to the UN, by June 1, 1992, the number of refugees in the republic reached 83 thousand people, and on July 24, 1992, their number was 133 thousand. At the beginning of 1993, more than one million people who were forced to leave their permanent place of residence were officially registered in Tajikistan.⁷

Factors and scale of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan

The problem of seeking asylum and migration flows has existed throughout the history of humanity. The reasons for asylum may be such as wars, armed conflicts, persecution on various grounds, poverty, rampant banditry, etc. [Cohen, 2008]. A special place in recent years has been occupied by environmental causes of the influx of refugees, including illegal ones [Kostyria, 2006].

The factors of refugee from Tajikistan can be divided into two stages.

1. During the Civil War.

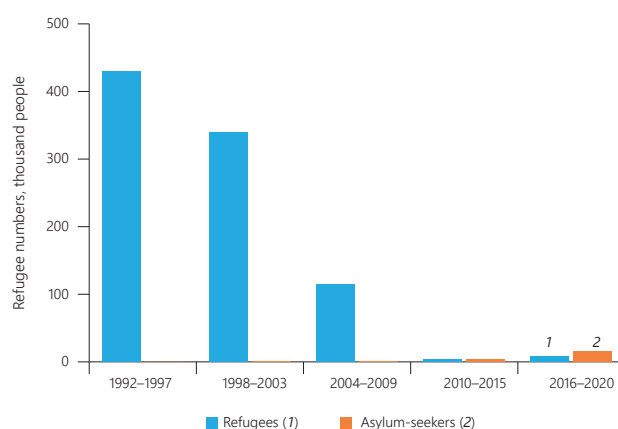
Since the spring of 1992, the conflict has spread beyond Dushanbe and spread to rural areas. From 1992 to 1997, violence engulfed Khatlon, the Karategin Valley, as well as areas adjacent to the city of Dushanbe. Civilians belonging to the opposition forces by origin were forced to flee to the border with northern Afghan-

istan and to other neighboring CIS countries [Sharafieva, 2013].

2. In 2015, when the Tajik authorities banned two major opposition organisations – the Group of 24⁸ and the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT).⁹

After the Tajik authorities banned two major opposition organisations – the Group of 24 and the IRPT. At the same time, the authorities of several countries, including Russia, began actively cooperate with Tajikistan in the persecution of oppositionists. Then supporters of the Group of 24 and the IRPT, journalists, entrepreneurs, human rights activists, and supporters of religious movements such as “Salafia”¹⁰ began to seek refuge in Europe.

During the civil war, 1992–1997, about 429.6 thousand citizens of Tajikistan became refugees around the world. And because of the consequences of the civil war, 1998–2003, about 339.8 thousand citizens of Tajikistan left their homeland for security and hunger (Fig. 1).¹¹



Source¹¹

Figure 1. Statistics of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan for 1992–2020

As can be seen in Figure 1, the number of asylum seekers from Tajikistan began to grow between 2010 and 2015, especially in 2015, after the Republic of Tajikistan

⁵ UN (1994), *Protocol on the Joint Commission on the Implementation of the Agreement on a Temporary Ceasefire and Other Hostile Actions on the Tajik-Afghan Border and Inside the Country*, available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/TJ_941101_ProtocolJointCommissionforImplementationProvisionalCeasefire%28ru%29.pdf (accessed 02.03.2022).

⁶ CAAN (2017), “Refugees of the Tajik War: dying at home and in a foreign land”, *Central Asian Analytical Network*, available at: <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/9236> (accessed 10.03.2022).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The political movement “Group-24”, available at: <https://guruhi24.net/language/en/homeen/> (accessed 20.03.2022).

⁹ INTERFAX (2021), *Tajikistan has classified the verdict of the leader of the opposition Islamic party*, available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/750039> (accessed 15.03.2022).

¹⁰ Isamova L. (2015), “The religious movement “Salafia” is recognized as extremist in Tajikistan”, RIA, available at: <https://ria.ru/20150112/1042180071.html> (accessed 07.03.2022).

¹¹ UNHCR’s *Refugee Population Statistics Database*, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics-uat/download/?url=fUZZ3q> (accessed 07.03.2022).

recognised the IRPT as a terrorist organisation in 2015.¹² Already in 2016–2020, the number of asylum seekers exceeds the number of refugees from Tajikistan.

Asylum seekers from Tajikistan mainly includes political asylum (state persecution).

State persecution includes the persecution, discrimination and torture of people who disagree with their Government, have minority religious beliefs or ethnicity [Bhatia and Wallace, 2007]. Since the conditions for oppositionists in the country are unsafe, these people are forced to migrate to safer countries. The search for asylum is a direct consequence of the outflow of political migrants from Tajikistan to European countries [Norredam et al, 2006].

Refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to Western and Eastern European countries: scales and prospects of development

Most Tajik citizens indicate in their asylum applications that they left their homeland because of the persecution of the authorities for their dissent.¹³ The Tajik authorities accuse some asylum seekers in Europe of terrorism and extremism, as well as participation in the activities of organisations banned in the country.

The number of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to the countries of Western and Eastern Europe in 1992–2020 amounted to about 26.4 thousand people (Table 1). In 2016–2020, about 73 % (17.1 thousand people) of the total number of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan accounted for the countries of Western and Eastern Europe (Fig. 1, Table 1). Based on our research, we can say that the countries of Western and Eastern Europe are the main destinations where refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan are trying to get asylum.¹⁴

Among asylum seekers from Tajikistan in European countries, political asylum is the most popular. About 61 % of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to the countries of western and Eastern Europe come to Germany (Fig. 2).

Among European countries, the main goal of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan is to get to Western European countries, primarily Germany and France. Also, citizens of Tajikistan use some European countries as transit to get to Western Europe.

¹² INTERFAX (2021), *Tajikistan has classified the verdict of the leader of the opposition Islamic party*, available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/750039> (accessed 07.03.2022).

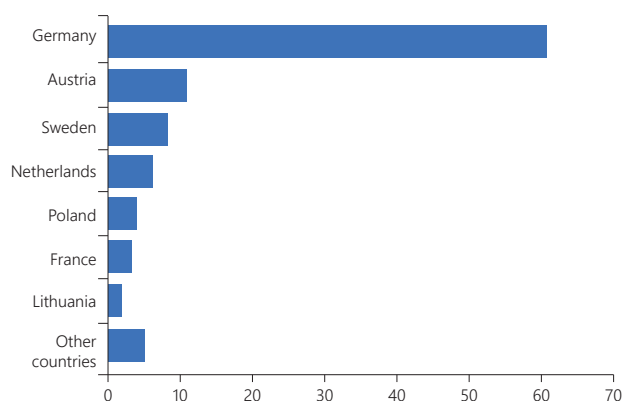
¹³ Bakozoda H. (2021), “Germany expels Tajik citizens from the country: deportation campaigns or common practice”, *Central Asian News Service*, available at: <https://www.centralasian.org/a/31437407.html> (accessed 07.01.2022).

¹⁴ UNHCR's *Refugee Population Statistics Database*, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> (accessed 07.03.2022).

Table 1
Statistics of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to the countries of Western and Eastern Europe for 1992–2020, people

Country	Years				
	1992–1997	1998–2003	2004–2009	2010–2015	2016–2020
Austria	0	148	347	986	1 387
Belgium	0	2	18	58	77
Czech Republic	0	3	3	9	9
Denmark	7	38	12	25	26
Estonia	0	0	0	6	3
Finland	0	60	112	65	42
France	0	46	141	226	438
Germany	0	600	953	2 250	12 229
Greece	0	26	39	46	58
Italy	2	10	12	12	63
Latvia	0	0	0	0	38
Lithuania	0	0	2	20	491
Luxembourg	0	0	2	3	16
Netherlands	44	490	437	360	284
Poland	4	25	6	76	931
Spain	12	23	4	4	55
Sweden	95	355	445	552	727
Switzerland	0	38	26	38	104
The United Kingdom	0	0	7	30	86

Source¹⁴



Compiled by the author based on the Table 1

Figure 2. Statistics of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to the countries of Western and Eastern Europe for 1992–2020

Also, among the Tajik political refugees who have received asylum in European countries, one can see former labor migrants who worked in Russia.¹⁵ The

¹⁵ Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (2019), *Tajik refugees in Europe: in search of a better life*, available at: <https://cabar.asia/ru/tadzhikskie-bezhentsy-v-evrope-v-poiskah-luchshej-zhizni> (accessed 09.03.2022).

main reason for their reorientation in European countries is the deterioration of the economic situation and the tightening of migration laws in Russia. There are cases of deliberate destruction of their passports by Tajik migrants when moving to Germany, followed by an appeal to the authorities under the guise of refugees from Afghanistan, since both Tajiks and Afghans speak Farsi (Dari) to obtain refugee status and corresponding benefits in Germany. Poverty is also considered one of the key factors that stimulates the trend of migrant workers under the guise of refugees.

Some Tajik citizens, despite having received asylum in European countries, were deported anyway. For example, in Germany, according to some of the asylum seekers in Germany, the deportation of Tajiks began after the Prosecutor General of Tajikistan Yusuf Rahmon paid a working visit to Germany.¹⁶

Other Tajik refugees claim that the attitude towards them changed after the German special services detained their compatriots on April 15, 2020 on suspicion of creating a terrorist cell to prepare attacks on German territory.¹⁷ The North Rhine-Westphalia's Special Forces have arrested five Tajik citizens. The target of the cell's attacks, according to official data, were to be American troops stationed on the territory of Germany.

According to the BAMF press service, from January to July 2021, 194 Tajik citizens applied for asylum in Germany. The authorities considered 309 applications from Tajik citizens, 45 people were granted asylum, 127 applications were rejected; 101 applications are currently under consideration.¹⁸

The Prosecutor General's Office of Tajikistan reported that in just one week of August, the German authorities deported 8 Tajik citizens from the country.

Findings

During our research, the following scientific results were obtained:

1. The beginning of the flow of refugees from Tajikistan to other countries is associated with the civil war in the republic. The number of refugees during the civil war

in the Republic (1991–1997) according to the UN, has made more than one million people.¹⁹

2. Another reason the flow of refugees from Tajikistan to other countries is prohibited by the Tajik authorities of the two major opposition organisations of the Group of 24 and the IRPT in the period 2010–2015.

3. Among asylum seekers from Tajikistan in European countries, political asylum is the most popular. As can be seen from Figure 1, after the ban of opposition organisations in the republic, the number of asylum seekers from Tajikistan in 2016–2020 exceeded 17 times more than in 2004–2009.

4. According to the UNHCR, about 61 % of refugees and asylum seekers from Tajikistan to the countries of western and Eastern Europe come to Germany.

5. Among the Tajik political refugees who received asylum in European countries, there were also former migrant workers who worked in Russia. The reasons for their reorientation are deportations in Russia, a decrease in earnings in the Russian Federation after the 2015 currency crisis, and the tightening of Russia's migration policy towards migrants from Tajikistan.

Conclusion

Modern society is facing the problem created by international migration. For various reasons, multimillion flows of people who cross national borders, legally or illegally, form labor markets, ethnic and religious communities, political parties, criminal communities, and groups. From countries with a low standard of living, the population often moves to countries that are more economically developed. The category of refugees in international migration annually amounts to more than 20 million people [Gatrell, 2016]. The history of the Tajik people remembers a huge number of tragedies when large masses of people left their habitable places, left their native land, abandoned their acquired property, and sought refuge in another country from cruel persecution for racial, national, ethnic, religious, or socio-economic reasons [Rowland, 2005]. Every year hundreds of thousands of people leave their homes to protect themselves and their families from problems related to armed conflicts, religious persecution, natural disasters, various acts of discrimination.

The history of refugees from Tajikistan began with the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR and the civil war in the republic. The civil war in Tajikistan, which

¹⁶ Vechernii Bishkek (2021), *Refugees from Tajikistan held a protest in Cologne*, available at: https://www.vb.kg/doc/407738_bejency_iz_tadjikistana_proveli_akciu_protesta_v_kelne.html (accessed 09.03.2022).

¹⁷ Gazeta (2020), *Tajiks who were preparing terrorist attacks were detained in Germany*, available at: https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2020/04/15/n_14297719.shtml?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop (accessed 09.03.2022).

¹⁸ Vechernii Bishkek (2021), *Refugees from Tajikistan held a protest in Cologne*.

¹⁹ Erlich A. (2006), "Tajikistan: From Refugee Sender to Labor Exporter", *Migration Policy Institute*, July 1, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/tajikistan-refugee-sender-labor-exporter> (accessed 12 Jan 2022).

lasted for more than five years (1992–1997)²⁰, became one of the most tragic episodes in the history of the country and the post-Soviet space. An armed inter-clan intra-ethnic conflict between supporters of the central government and various groups represented by the United Tajik Opposition, which included the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, followed the declaration of independence of the country in 1991. Millions of citizens

of Tajikistan were forced to flee the republic, fleeing from repression and certain death, almost half of the population was left homeless [Sharafieva, 2013].

Refugees from Tajikistan to the countries of Western and Eastern Europe are associated with the ban of opposition organisations in the republic, as well as the reorientation of some former migrant workers who worked in Russia. The deterioration of the economic situation in Russia is forcing Tajik migrants to reorient to European countries under the guise of refugees. Since it is difficult to obtain visas from EU countries, many Tajik citizens are forced to choose through refugee status.

²⁰ BCC News (2016), *The Civil War in Tajikistan: Eyewitness memoirs*, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-38460797> (accessed 12.03.2022).

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