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Reasons for choosing Russia as the main direction of labor migration from Tajikistan in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and sanctions

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Abstract

The article examines the impact of the currency crisis and the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic on labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia, the impact of new anti-Russian sanctions by the European Union and United States of America on Tajik labor migrants, as well as the repulsive factors of the reorientation of migrants from Tajikistan to a new direction of labor emigration to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and the Persian Gulf. Russia is the main migration channel for labor migrants from Tajikistan. During the entire period of their stay in Russia they face various crisis phenomena in the country along with the local population. Each crisis in Russia has had a different negative impact on the situation of Tajik labor migrants. During the currency crisis in 2014–2015, Tajik migrants lost their income by twice due to the fall in the Russian ruble exchange rate. During the COVID-19 period, because of the introduction of a self-isolation regime in Russia, since the end of March 2020, the Russian labor market has been compressed, many Tajik labor migrants have lost their jobs. The new anti-Russian sanctions have already affected Tajikistan. Due to the European and the United States sanctions against Russia, the total flow of labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia has decreased. The aim of the article is to identify the attractive factors of the orientation of Tajik migrants to labor emigration to Russia and the repulsive factors of the reorientation of Tajik migrants to a new direction of labor emigration to the OECD and Persian Gulf countries.

Keywords: labor migration, currency crisis, COVID-19, anti-Russian sanctions, Russia, Tajikistan, USA, remittances, OECD, Persian Gulf countries

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Причины выбора России как основного направления трудовой миграции из Таджикистана в условиях пандемии COVID-19 и санкций

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Аннотация

В статье рассматривается влияние валютного кризиса и последствий пандемии коронавируса COVID-19 на трудовую миграцию из Таджикистана в Россию, влияние новых антироссийских санкций со стороны Европейского союза и Соединенных Штатов Америки на таджикских трудовых мигрантов, а также отталкивающие факторы переориентации мигрантов из Таджикистана на новое направление трудовой эмиграции в страны Организации экономического сотрудничества и развития (ОЭСР) и Персидского залива. Россия является основным каналом для трудовых мигрантов из Таджикистана, которые в течение всего периода пребывания в России сталкиваются с различными кризисными явлениями в стране наряду с местным населением. Каждый кризис в России по-разному негативно сказывался на положении таджикских трудовых мигрантов. Во время валютного кризиса 2014–2015 гг. из-за падения курса рубля мигранты из Таджикистана потеряли доход в два раза. В период пандемии COVID-19 в результате введения в России режима самоизоляции с конца марта 2020 г. произошло сжатие российского рынка труда, многие таджикские трудовые мигранты лишились рабочих мест. Новые антироссийские санкции уже отразились на Таджикистане. Из-за санкций стран Европейского союза и США в отношении России уменьшился общий поток трудовой миграции из Таджикистана в Российскую Федерацию. Цель статьи – выявить притягивающие факторы ориентации таджикских мигрантов на трудовую эмиграцию в Россию и отталкивающие факторы переориентации таджикских мигрантов на новое направление трудовой эмиграции в страны ОЭСР и Персидского залива.

Ключевые слова: трудовая миграция, валютный кризис, COVID-19, антироссийские санкции, Россия, Таджикистан, США, денежные переводы, ОЭСР, страны Персидского залива

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Introduction

Tajikistan is one of the most dependent countries on labor migration in the world [Khramova et al., 2020]. The key export destination of the republic's labor force is Russia, where more than a million Tajiks migrate annually [Rakhmonov, 2020]. Various crises in Russia have affected both labor migrants in Russia and labor emigration from Tajikistan.

In spring 2020, when COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp decline in economic activity in the world, many migrant workers were suddenly left without work and unable to go home [Krasinets, 2021]. Tajik families whose members work in Russia have proved to be “more resilient in the face of a pandemic.” [Shimizutani, Yamada, 2021, p. 40] Migrant workers ensure the economic security of Tajik families. In early 2021, after restrictions on entry to Russia were eased and direct flights resumed, some Tajik families sold everything they could – including livestock and furniture – to buy tickets [Ryazantsev et al., 2020b].

Due to the new anti-Russian sanctions of the European Union (EU) countries and the United States, labor migrants who arrived in Russia from Tajikistan are at a loss. In February–March 2022, the national currency, the somoni, rose significantly against the Russian ruble. Labor migrants had to send money home already at the new rate. They began to lose part of their earnings when exchanging currencies. But since the beginning of May 2022, the exchange rate of the Russian ruble has begun to grow in Tajikistan. Despite all the difficulties, it is safe to say that labor migrants from Tajikistan will continue to focus on working in Russia.

Research methods

Two methods were used in this research. Firstly, the economic and statistical method. This approach made it possible to establish how much migrants' remittances affect the macroeconomic situation in the countries of migrants' origin. Secondly, the sociological method: the results of sociological surveys and expert interviews were analyzed (secondary analysis of sociological data).

The article used statistical data on the number of labor migration from Tajikistan, the volume of remittances over a number of years. The data are provided by the World Bank, the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (Rosstat), the Main Directorate for Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Agency for Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

The currency crisis in the Russian Federation (2014–2015) and its impact on labor migrants from Tajikistan

In late 2014–early 2015, the currency crisis has broken out in Russia. The immediate cause of the currency crisis in Russia is the fall in oil prices [Dubinin, 2015]. The fall in the Russian ruble exchange rate has resulted in a loss of income and opportunities for labor migrants from Tajikistan, whose lives depend on the situation in Russia. Around this time, the Russian ruble, which had been slowly depreciating throughout the year, began to fall more and more sharply [Viktorov, Abramov, 2019]. At the beginning of 2014, the exchange rate of the Russian currency was about RUB 33 per US dollar, but after the effects of international sanctions imposed due to the Ukrainian crisis began to take effect, it reached RUB 40 by the end of September, fell to RUB 50 in November and collapsed to a record low – almost RUB 80 in December 2014.¹

According to a migrant from Tajikistan, who had to close his market stall in the South Western of Moscow, where he had been selling clothes for four years: “My income is in the Russian rubles, but I need to send US dollars home. I received RUB 30 thousand a month, at best – about one thousand US dollars. After paying for food and meals, I regularly sent home USD 400 until September, in December my income was equal to USD 375.”²

As Figure 1 shows, the number of migrants from Tajikistan began to fall down in 2014, there was a big decline in 2015. In comparison with the non-crisis period – year 2013 – in 2015 the number of migrants from Tajikistan decreased by 350 thousand people.

In addition to the currency crisis, the number of migrants from Tajikistan was also affected by the entering into force a new Russian law, which obliges labor migrants to take a paid test for knowledge of the Russian language and history³. According to the chairman of the Tajik Diaspora in Russia, Karomat Sharipov: “There is such a trend, and it is not only related to the

¹ TASS (Wednesday 8 Apr. 2015), *Dynamics of the Russian ruble exchange rate against the USD and euro in 2014–2015*, available at: <https://tass.ru/info/1889272> (accessed 20.03.2023). (In Russian).

² Avesta (Friday 13 March 2020), *Expert: The fall of the Russian ruble exchange rate hits labor migrants*, available at: <https://avesta.tj/2020/03/13/padenie-rublya-bet-po-byudzhetu-semej-trudovyh-migrantov-ekspert/> (accessed 13.03.2023). (In Russian). Further – Avesta.

³ Groene K., Hett F. (2015), *The Russian crisis and its fallout: The impact on the Eastern Partnership States and Central Asia*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/11330-20150427.pdf> (accessed 13.03.2023).

Russian ruble exchange rate against currencies. Many people cannot afford the requirements that will be introduced from January 1, 2015.”⁴

The currency crisis also had a negative impact on migrant remittances⁷, according to the World Bank, in 2015 there were USD 1.7 billion in remittances to Tajikistan (Fig. 2), compared to 2013, the volume of remittances

⁴ Avesta.

⁵ Agency on statistics under President of the Republic of Tajikistan (June 2019), *Demographic Yearbook of Tajikistan*, available at: <http://stat.www.tj/publications/June2019/demographic-yearbook-2018.pdf> (accessed 13.03.2023). (In Tajik).

⁶ The World Bank (2023), Data Bank, available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org> (accessed 13.03.2023).

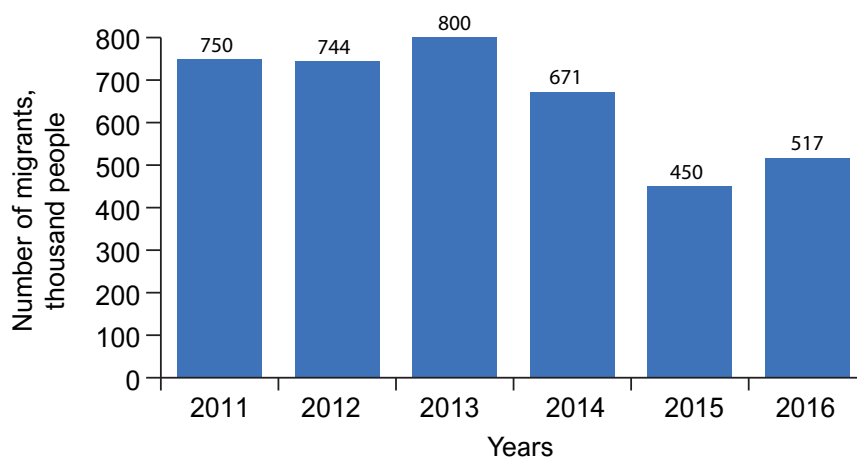
⁷ Gaidar institute for economic policy (2015), *Russian Economy in 2014. Trends and Outlooks*. Issue 36, 520 p., available at: <https://www.iep.ru/files/text/trends/2014-eng/Book.pdf> (accessed 13.03.2023).

of migrants from Russia to Tajikistan fell by USD 1.5 billion. The consequences of the crisis were also visible in 2016 (Fig. 2).

Consequences of COVID-19 pandemic on labor emigration from Tajikistan to Russia

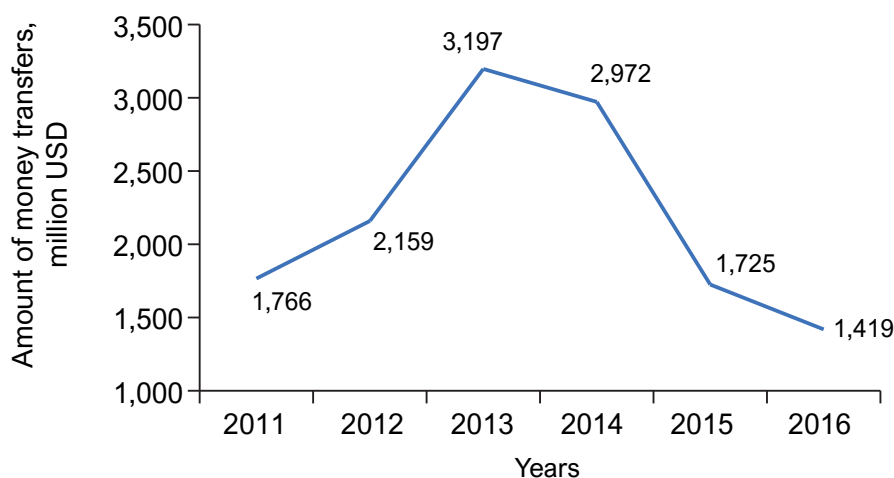
The coronavirus hit the stock markets, provoked a drop in oil and other energy prices, a decline in industrial production around the world, etc. [Denisenko, 2021]. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the economic shock from the coronavirus pandemic is stronger than the financial crisis of 2008, and the global economy will take years to recover from it [Voronina et al., 2020].

As is known, the most characteristic feature of the Tajik economy is its dependence on external factors –



Source⁵

Fig. 1. The influx of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia in 2011–2016



Compiled by the author on the World Bank data⁶

Fig. 2. The volume of migrants' remittances from Russia to Tajikistan for 2010–2016

first, labor migration and imports [Ryazantsev et al., 2020a]. The share of imports exceeds exports by almost three times, moreover, for Tajikistan, the main importing countries are Russia, China and Kazakhstan. The dependence of the Tajik economy on labor migration means that a significant part of foreign currency enters the country through migrant remittances [Ruget, Usmanalieva, 2022]. These remittances also constitute the main source of income for many Tajik families, which significantly reduces the level of social tension in society. The purchasing power of the population of Tajikistan is formed by two-thirds at the expense of cash receipts from migrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the scale of labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia. Traditionally, it was during the spring period that labor migration processes intensified after the winter lull [Krasinets, Shevtsova, 2021]. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, in 2018–2021, the number of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia at the place of stay amounted to 9.7 million people (Fig. 3).

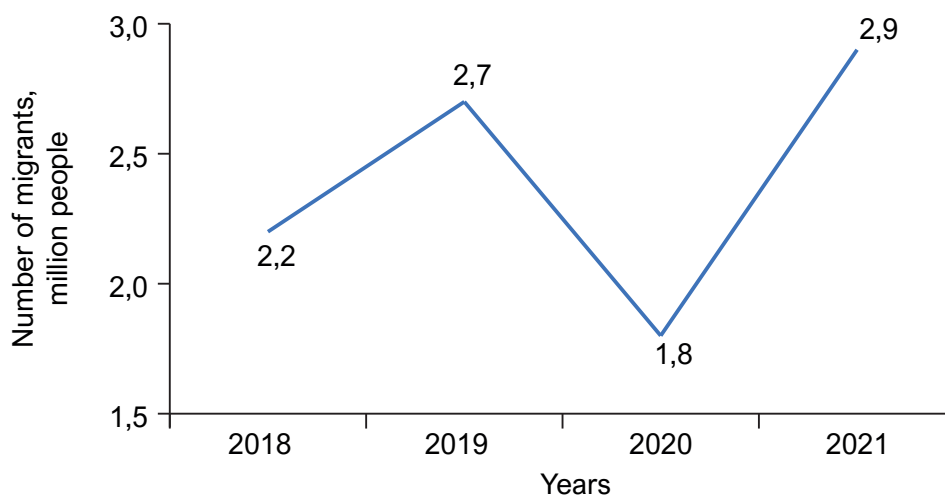
In 2018–2021, the number of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia for the purpose of work amounted to about 5.1 million people (Fig. 4). During the same period, the number of labor migrants to Russia amounted to 54% of the total number of migrants from Tajikistan.

Many citizens of Tajikistan during the COVID-19 period lost their jobs and were forced to leave Russia for

home. Some of the migrants tried to leave Russia and return to Tajikistan, but not all of them managed to do so, as Russia closed its air borders. During COVID-19, in 2020, the number of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia decreased by 800 thousand people compared to 2019 (Fig. 3). About 82% of the total number of those who left because of COVID-19 were labor migrants whose purpose was work (Fig. 4). In 2021, the number of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia at the place of stay amounted to 2.9 million people, 1.1 million more than in 2020 (Fig. 3).

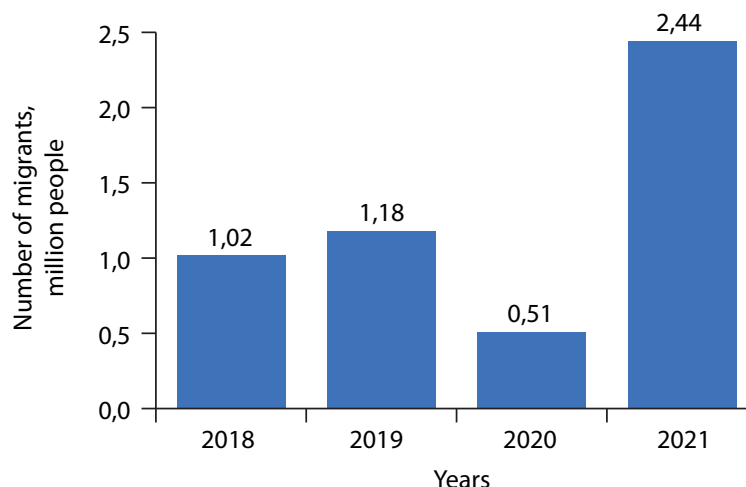
In 2021, the number of labor migrants amounted to 2.44 million people, which is 2.1 times (1.26 million people) more than in 2019 (Fig. 4). This shows how dependent labor migrants from Tajikistan are on the labor markets of Russia. Based on Fig. 4, it can be said that the closure of the border between Tajikistan and Russia during COVID-19 proved that Tajikistan is not ready to provide work for so many of its labor migrants who are in Russia, and for Tajikistan it was a big blow to its economy, and that labor migration is the only source of income for many citizens of Tajikistan. For this reason, the number of Tajik citizens seeking employment in Russia in 2021 has increased so much.

⁸ Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation (2022), *Selected indicators of the migration situation in the Russian Federation for January–December 2021 with distribution by country and region*, available at: <https://мвд.рф/dejatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/item/28104344/> (accessed 20.03.2023). (In Russian).



Compiled by the author on the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation⁸

Fig. 3. The number of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia by place of stay, 2018–2021



Compiled by the author on Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation data⁹

Fig. 4. The number of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia with the purpose of work, 2018–2021

The impact of anti-Russian sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States on labor migrants from Tajikistan

The new anti-Russian sanctions have already affected Tajikistan. Due to Western sanctions against Russia in 2022, the overall flow of labor migration from Tajikistan to the Russian Federation has decreased. According to the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Employment of Tajikistan, 60.3 thousand labor migrants returned to Tajikistan from Russia in the first quarter of 2022, which is 2.6 times more than in the same period of 2021. Of these, about 52 thousand men, which is 2.8 times more, and 8.5 thousand women, which is 77% more than last year.¹⁰

The number of returning Tajik migrants increased by more than 2.6 times against the background of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The current situation has had a significant impact on the situation of migrant workers. In particular, as a result of the sanctions of European countries against Russia, many leading commercial companies have ceased their activities in the country. As a result, migrants who lost their jobs also suffered.

At the end of March 2022, there was a sharp depreciation of the Russian ruble against the somoni¹¹, which negatively affected the situation of migrant families. Although the Russian ruble has been strengthening

recently, however, migrants complain of problems with employment. In the current conditions, many migrants have been left without work.

Tajik public associations are effective in Russia. And so, together with the Tajik authorities in the current conditions, they could quickly organize a network of farms, the production of agricultural products, meat and dairy products, which are now in great demand. In this case, tens of thousands of jobs could appear in Russia itself.

Also, another reason that influenced the outflow of Tajik migrants from Russia is inflation in the country, which led to large expenses for migrants (food and accommodation costs). In annual terms, inflation accelerated to 16.69% in March 2022 (the maximum since March 2015) from 9.15% in February, 8.73% in January and from 8.39% in December 2021. In January–March 2022, prices in Russia increased by 9.95%. Food products in March jumped in price by 6.73% (in annual terms – an increase of 17.99%), non-food products – by 11.25% (20.34%), services – by 3.99% (9.94%).¹²

However, not all migrants hurried to return to their homeland, but changed their field of activity or began to leave Moscow for other Russian cities. According to the president of the Migrants' Federation Vadim Kozhenov: "The organization does not observe a significant outflow of citizens of other states from the Russian Federation. It is not profitable for foreigners to leave Russia because of expensive air tickets."¹³

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Erozbek D. (Friday 8 Apr. 2022), "Since the beginning of 2022, more than 60 thousand migrants have returned from Russia to Tajikistan, 133 thousand to Uzbekistan", *Kommersant*, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5303523> (accessed 06.03.2023). (In Russian).

¹¹ National Bank of Tajikistan (2023), *Currency exchange rate*, available at: <https://nbt.tj/ru/kurs/kurs.php?date=03.03.2022> (accessed 19.03.2023).

¹² Interfax (Friday 8 Apr. 2022), *Annual inflation in Russia accelerated to 16.7 %*, available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/833991> (accessed 07.03.2023). (In Russian).

¹³ Sputnik Tajikistan (Saturday 23 Apr. 2022), *Expert: Western sanctions against Russia have also affected Tajikistan*, available at: <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/20220423/sanktsii-zapad-russia-tajikistan-1047884484.html> (accessed 12.03.2023).

As for the impact of sanctions on the further growth trend of Tajik migrants to Russia, despite all these difficulties, we should not expect a mass return of Tajik migrants to their homeland. The current situation has a negative impact not only on the Russian financial and economic system, but, perhaps, it will hit the donor countries of labor resources more significantly. Because their economy is strongly tied to the cash flows of the same migrants.

On the other hand, the Russian Federation will mobilize all forces for the development of its own production and the development of agriculture and will activate the processes of creating new facilities where workers will be in demand. Accordingly, new opportunities for migrants will appear.

The repulsive factors of the reorientation of migrants from Tajikistan to a new direction of labor emigration to the OECD countries and the Persian Gulf

Labor migrants from Tajikistan during all crises in Russia become the first victims. First, they lose their jobs or go on unpaid leave. As the research has shown, despite various crises in Russia, migrants from Tajikistan are still oriented to Russia. After the currency crisis, the government of Tajikistan began to look for another channel of emigration for its labor migrants. Tajikistan has concluded an employment agreement with some OECD countries (Turkey, Poland) and the Persian Gulf countries (The United Arab Emirates, Qatar), but migrants from Tajikistan are not interested in another emigration channel – the Gulf countries and the OECD – for the following reasons.

Ignorance of the language and difficulty obtaining the EU countries and the USA visa

The problems that migrants from Tajikistan may face in a new direction of labor emigration to the EU and the USA are adaptation to new labor markets (job search, paperwork) and integration into a new society (learning new languages, new cultures).

Highly qualified citizens of Tajikistan, who are really needed by the EU countries and the USA, most often emigrate to these regions. It is difficult for low-skilled migrants from Tajikistan to enter the EU and the USA. And the main part of labor migrants who migrate to Russia are mainly low-skilled migrants. Therefore, they have no other channels of emigration besides Russia and Kazakhstan.

Another problem that prevents emigration to the EU countries and the USA is the difficulty of obtaining a visa from these countries. To apply for a job visa of most EU countries, Tajik citizens travel to neighboring coun-

tries, for example, Uzbekistan, due to the absence of many EU countries consulates in Tajikistan.

The visa-free agreement between Russia and Tajikistan, the common past history, as well as the importance of the Russian language, allow migrants from Tajikistan to migrate and find work in Russia independently. For this reason, migrants are not interested in reorienting to a new direction of labor migration to the EU and the USA.

Difficult working conditions and low wages in the Persian Gulf countries

Tajikistan has an employment agreement with the UAE¹⁴ and Qatar.¹⁵ On the basis of these employment contracts between Tajikistan, the UAE and Qatar, Tajik citizens can travel to work in these countries. In comparison with the EU and the USA, it is easier for migrants from Tajikistan to adapt and integrate into society in the Persian Gulf countries due to the fact that they have a common religion – Islam.

One of the reasons that repels Tajik citizens from migrating to the Persian Gulf countries is the Kafal system. The “guardianship system” (kafala) is also called “modern slavery”. By providing travel, visa and registration of the hired person, the employer, in fact, gets unlimited power over the worker, taking away his documents and restricting the possibility of movement by prohibiting going outside the working towns.¹⁶

Another reason why Tajik migrants do not want to migrate to the Persian Gulf countries is the low wages of migrants compared to Russia. About half of the migrants in Qatar agree to work for USD 400 per month. When issuing a salary, employers deduct expenses for food and accommodation from it, as a result, a migrant receives an average of USD 200–250 out of the promised USD 400–500. The average working week for a maid in Qatar is 60 hours, for builders – 54 hours.¹⁷

The Gulf states, known for their luxury, are ready to pay good money only to highly qualified specialists – engineers, architects, doctors. And handymen without special education live and work in the rich countries

¹⁴ Znaykin N. (Thursday 19 Apr. 2018), “The UAE and Tajikistan will establish an exchange of labor”, *Business Emirates*, available at: <https://businessemirates.ae/news/uae-news/oae-i-tadzhikistan-naladyat-obmen-rabochey-siloy/> (accessed 14.03.2023). (In Russian).

¹⁵ Regnum (Tuesday 5 Feb. 2019), *Tajikistan and Qatar signed an agreement on migrant workers*, available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/2566229.html> (accessed 17.03.2023). (In Russian).

¹⁶ Karaev S. (Monday 28 Oct. 2019), “Why Tajik migrants do not want to work in Qatar?” *Asia-Plus*, available at: <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20191028/pochemu-tadzhikskim-migrantam-ne-hochetsya-rabotat-v-katare> (accessed 28.02.2023). (In Russian).

¹⁷ Ibid.

of the Middle East not much better than in Kazakhstan and Russia.

Tajikistan's economic dependence on Russia

Labor migration plays an important role for the well-being of families and the economic development of Central Asian countries and is one of the priorities in foreign policy [Jabbar, 2017]. At the same time, it should be noted that friendly relations have been established between Russia and the countries of Central Asia for centuries, which are developing in trade and economic terms, among which labor migration is of particular importance and is considered mutually beneficial for the countries receiving and sending migrants [Ivakhnyuk, 2015].

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict created the problem of departure of Tajik labor migrants from Russia. But the vast majority continue their work in Russia, and in some cases, they are retrained in other areas of the economy where there is a demand for labor. And there is an explanation for this, because if the economic situation in Russia worsens, then in Tajikistan it will become even more complicated and the financial situation of families will become critical.

Currently, the population of Tajikistan is experiencing great difficulties regarding the sharp rise in prices for basic types of food. Based on this, the provision of a family is a big problem for male heads of families, who are forced to leave their places of permanent residence for this reason and go to labor migration.

A sharp rise in food prices provokes an increase in prices for other types of goods, which creates a stir and misunderstanding among the population of the republic. It seems paradoxical that the cost of basic types of food in Tajikistan exceeds even Russian prices. So, as of March 2022, the prices per kilogram of product in Dushanbe were as follows: flour – 7 somoni, meat – 68 somoni, milk for 1 liter – 9 somoni, sugar – 10 somoni, apples – 12 somoni, potatoes – 3.5 somoni, etc.¹⁸ Comparing the cost of the same food products with prices in Moscow and taking into account the conversion of the Russian ruble into somoni, we get: flour – 5 somoni, meat – 49 somoni, milk – 5 somoni, sugar – 8 somoni, apple – 9 somoni, potatoes – 3.90 somoni, etc.¹⁹

¹⁸ Asia-Plus (Thursday 10 Mar. 2022), *Products have become more expensive in Tajikistan, a bag of flour costs 350 somoni already*, available at: <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20220310/v-tadzhikistane-podorozhali-produkti-meshok-muki-stoit-uzhe-350-somoni> (accessed 28.02.2023). (In Russian).

¹⁹ Agribusiness Expert and Analytical Center (2023), *Food prices in Russia and their changes for the year, data for March 2022*, available at: <https://ab-centre.ru/news/ceny-na-produkty-pitaniya-v-rossii-i-ih-izmenenie-za-god-dannye-na-mart-2022-goda> (accessed 02.03.2023). (In Russian).

If we take into account that the average salary in Tajikistan as of 2021 was 1,564 somoni (USD 138)²⁰, and in Russia – RUB 56,545 (USD 781)²¹, then it is quite obvious that the vast majority of the population of Tajikistan is in a very difficult food situation. It will definitely strengthen the process of external labor migration and emigration of Tajik citizens abroad, which has negative consequences for the future socio-economic development of the republic.

Results

Since the beginning of the currency crisis in Russia in 2014, the number of migrants from Tajikistan began to fall, there was a big decline in 2015. Compared with the non-crisis period – 2013, in 2015 the number of migrants from Tajikistan decreased by 350 thousand people.

During COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the number of migrants from Tajikistan to Russia decreased by 800 thousand people compared to 2019. About 82% of the total number of those who left because of COVID-19 were migrant workers. In 2021, the number of migrant workers amounted to 2.44 million people, which is 2.1 times (1.26 million people) more than in 2019. This shows how dependent labor migrants from Tajikistan are on the labor markets of Russia.

As for the impact of EU and US sanctions against Russia on the reorientation of Tajik migrants to a new direction of labor emigration, then, as previous practice has shown (currency crisis, COVID-19), it is safe to say that migration to Russia will continue to be relevant for migrants from Tajikistan and they will not reorient to another migration channel.

Russia is the main labor market for migrants from Tajikistan and no other country in the world has the opportunity to accept and employ hundreds of thousands of Tajik labor migrants at the same time. Given this situation, it is important for the authorized state authorities of the country, along with the study of new labor markets, to develop cooperation with Russian colleagues in the field of migration.

Conclusion

The consequences of the crisis affect migrants in different ways: unemployment, wage cuts, temporary layoffs and deteriorating working conditions [Galas, 2017]. During the currency crisis in Russia, the Russian ruble

²⁰ Regnum (Thursday 23 Dec. 2021), *In Tajikistan, the average salary has increased to 138 USD*, available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/economy/3460425.html> (accessed 13.03.2023). (In Russian).

²¹ GOGOV (2021), *Average salary in Russia in 2021 from Rosstat data*, available at: <https://gogov.ru/articles/average-salary> (accessed 13.03.2023). (In Russian).

exchange rate declined against the US dollar, which negatively affected the income and remittances of labor migrants from Tajikistan [Vorobyova, 2020]. During the currency crisis, part of Tajik migrants returned to their homeland to wait out the “financial storm”. However, the absence of another emigration channel, and the visa-free-regime between Tajikistan and Russia forced migrants to focus back on Russia.

The peculiarity of the migration crisis during the COVID-19 period is the fact that it was accompanied by a relatively small fall in the Russian ruble exchange rate compared to the currency crisis in 2014–2016. Consequently, the earnings of migrants were less dramatic than during the currency crisis, when they halved. In addition to economic, socio-epidemiological risks arose for migrants, and the fact that the previous practice of relatively free crossing of state borders was severely limited [Zorin et al., 2021]. Due to the closed borders around the world during the COVID-19 period, Tajik citizens had no opportunity to migrate to other countries except to wait for the opening of the border between the Commonwealth of Independent States countries, where they mainly migrate.

New anti-Russian sanctions by the EU countries and the United States have also big effected on situation

of labor migrants from Tajikistan. As for the impact of these sanctions on the direction of emigration from Tajikistan, as the history of previous crises has shown, labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia will again gain strength and gradually recover after some decline. This is due to the presence of fundamental factors that, on the one hand, push people into migration and, on the other hand, attract migrants²². These include primarily economic, historical and demographic factors: the Russian labor market is large and offers a higher level of earnings than in some OECD countries and the Persian Gulf, while the demographic situation in Russia differs from that of Tajikistan, where population growth far outstrips the growth of wages and jobs. It is impossible not to take into account the fact that mass migration, once it has begun, gains its own inertia, turns into a social norm and an accepted behavior strategy. There is no reason to believe that these factors will cease to operate, despite the crisis in the Russian Federation due to the sanctions of the EU countries and the United States.

²² Ryazantsev S.V. (Wednesday 15 Jun. 2016), “The role of labor migration in the development of the economy of the Russian Federation”, *UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)*, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/58875f1f4.html> (accessed 07.03.2023).

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