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Trends and strategies of labor emigration from Tajikistan to OECD countries

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Abstract. The article discusses the trends and strategies of labor emigration from Tajikistan to OECD countries. Waves and types of emigration from Tajikistan, adaptation of emigrants from Tajikistan to OECD countries. As well as the migration policy of the OECD countries in relation to immigrants from Tajikistan. Tajik labor migrants are becoming increasingly brighter than the prospect of getting a job not only in the CIS countries, but also in Europe, Asia and North America, where working conditions are better, and wages are much higher than in Russia and Kazakhstan. The OECD countries can rightfully be considered as new directions of Tajik emigration. An important feature of the tendency and strategy of labor emigration as a result of our research would be to note the combination of educational and vocational qualifications, resettlement and seasonal labor, labor migration — mostly unskilled and skilled with retraining and internship of labor migration from Tajikistan. Adaptation of immigrants is accompanied by some difficulties. The main one is job searches, which usually take several months. For the most part, the emigrants of Tajikistan consider Eastern Europe and Greece as countries of temporary residence, their main goal being moving to Western Europe (Austria, Germany, Scandinavian countries, etc.). There are cases of intentional destruction of their passports by Tajik migrants when they move to Germany with subsequent appeal to the authorities under the guise of refugees from Afghanistan, since both Tajiks and Afghans speak Farsi (Dari) to receive refugee status and corresponding benefits in Germany. In the OECD countries, new Tajik communities are being formed, which may become, in the near future, networks of attraction for new migrants from Tajikistan.

Keywords: labor migrants; emigration; Tajikistan; Russia; OECD countries; migration waves; migration policy

Waves and types of emigration from Tajikistan

The prerequisites for large-scale emigration in Tajikistan began to form in the Soviet era. In the 1980s in Tajikistan there was a “demographic boom” — in terms of fertility rates and natural population growth, Tajikistan in the scale of the former USSR ranked first. And although after the collapse of the USSR, the birth rate and natural population growth decreased, but the corresponding coefficients remained the highest in the post-Soviet space. In the years 1975—2003 annual population growth rates were 2.5% in Tajikistan, compared to 2.2% in Uzbekistan, 1.6% in Kyrgyzstan, 1.3% in Azerbaijan,

0.4% in Belarus, Russia and Armenia — by 0.3%, in Kazakhstan — 0.2%, in Ukraine — -0.1%¹.

The first wave of emigration from Tajikistan began during the 1992—1997 civil war. These were refugees, mainly ethnic Russians and representatives of the peoples of Russia. The main part of the Russian-speaking population migrated to Russia, Kazakhstan, Israel, Ukraine, Germany and some other countries. According to rough estimates, as a result of this wave of emigration of Tajikistan, human capital losses exceeded \$ 5.5 billion.

In the 2000—2010s forced emigration gradually transformed into the form of labor emigration of ethnic Tajiks to Russia and Kazakhstan, becoming the main emigration flow from Tajikistan. Since 2003, from 1 to 1.5 million people annually went to work outside Tajikistan, including 780 thousand men and about 140 thousand women of working age, 80 thousand men younger than working age (mostly adolescents from 16 to 18 years), 7 thousand men older than working age. The ethnic composition of the emigration flows is dominated by ethnic Tajiks (88%), Uzbeks (10%), Russians (1.2%) and other peoples (0.8%) are also represented. About 19% of emigrants have higher and incomplete higher education, 28% — special secondary education, 34% — secondary general education, 19% — incomplete secondary and primary education².

The flow of labor emigrants clearly distinguishes two parts by level of education: the first is young people with secondary or special secondary education, and very rarely with professional education. The second group is people of middle and older age, skilled workers and specialists with secondary special and higher education. The main areas of employment of labor migrants from Tajikistan are rural and housing construction (51%); trade, shuttle business and services (34%); oil and gas fields, industrial enterprises (6%); agriculture (6%); education and medicine (3%). More than two thirds of labor migrants from Tajikistan are “seasonal workers”: 25% work up to six months, 53% — from seven to twelve months, 22% — more than a year. A small proportion of migrants remain in work in the host country for more than three years.

The geography of labor emigration from Tajikistan has a pronounced orientation toward Russia: according to sociological surveys, about 94% of labor emigrants from Tajikistan worked in Russia. Approximately 1.5% in Kazakhstan, 1% in the United Arab Emirates and 0.6% in Ukraine. However, studies show that gradually emigration from Tajikistan to the OECD countries is becoming more and more noticeable: Austria, Germany, Greece, Canada, Poland, the USA, Turkey, South Korea and Japan. The OECD countries can rightfully be considered as new directions of Tajik emigration.

Also, flows of emigrants from among Tajik youth have been formed, which seeks to get a higher education and a promising profession in Russia, Germany, the USA, the UK, France, and Canada. In the 1990s — 2000s, Tajikistan experienced a boom in higher education: young people sought to get a higher and second higher education in economics and law. The country has several state and private universities, branches of foreign universities: the Tajik National University, the Tajik Technical University, the Tajik State

¹ The United Nations Development Programme. (2004). *Dvizheniye lyudskikh potokov: mnozhestvennaya samobytnost' grazhdan mira* [The movement of human flows: the multiple identity of the citizens of the world]. *Doklad o razvitii cheloveka* [Human Development Report]. Moscow: Ves' Mir Publ. (In Russ.)

² *Migratsionnyye protsessy v sovremennom Tadjikistane* [Migration processes in modern Tajikistan]. <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2005/0223/analit05.php> (accessed: 01.10.2005).

University, the Russian-Tajik Slavic University, the Tajik State University of Law, Business and Politics and others. At least once tried to get a job in their specialty in Russia and economically developed countries. It should also be noted that various forms of emigration from Tajikistan to Russia and the OECD countries, as a rule, are accompanied by citizens of Tajikistan receiving another education or retraining, recognition of Tajik diplomas, passing the relevant courses in OECD countries¹.

Table 1

Geography of labor emigration from Tajikistan in 2010, %

Country	The proportion of countries
Russian Federation	94.0
Kazakhstan	1.5
United Arab Emirates	1.0
Ukraine	0.6
Uzbekistan	0.5
Iran	0.4
Kyrgyzstan	0.2
Other countries (including Afghanistan, Belarus, Germany, Yemen, China, Saudi Arabia, USA, Turkmenistan, Turkey)	0.9

Source: Migration and Development in Tajikistan — Emigration, Return and Diaspora, ILO, 2010.

Table 2

The scale of emigration from CIS countries for permanent residence in Germany, Israel and the United States in 1992–2010, thousand people

CIS countries	Germany		Israel		USA	
	1992–2001	2002–2010	1992–2001	2002–2010	1992–2001	2002–2010
Azerbaijan	12.5	4.5	19.5	2.8	16.2	10.6
Armenia	12.6	–0.5	1.6	0.2	28.4	28.2
Belorussia	15.1	9.9	29.9	5.2	31.8	22.8
Georgia	13.1	3.4	18.1	2.9	6.1	12.2
Kazakhstan	776.6	116.1	15.4	2.5	9.9	16.3
Kyrgyzstan	60.4	10.8	3.2	0.6	2.5	5.0
Moldavia	15.5	6.6	19.4	3.2	16.3	18.6
Russia	681.0	214.4	195.2	40.2	148.1	119.4
Tajikistan	11.1	0.4	5.5	0.1	3.3	1.9
Turkmenistan	4.3	1.2	2.2	0.7	0.8	1.7
Uzbekistan	27.8	7.6	42.4	6.6	24.9	33.9
Ukraine	126.8	59.0	197.5	26.4	161.9	128.4
USSR (not indicated by others)	224.7	—	14.9	0	49.5	34.8
Total	1981	433	565	91	500	434

Note: for the USA and Israel, estimates of the number of residence permits issued; for Germany, estimates of net migration.

Finally, emigration for permanent residence or “resettlement emigration” to economically developed countries has become a new trend. There are four main channels here: firstly, a “temporary” departure for study and work, followed by obtaining a residence

¹ Migration and Development in Tajikistan — Emigration, Return and Diaspora, ILO, 2010.

permit and citizenship (recently, South Korea and Japan have been increasingly active in selecting migrants in Central Asia labor migrants (Turkey and the Gulf countries); secondly, family and marriage emigration; thirdly, the flow of political emigrants who receive refugee status (mainly in the United States, Canada, Israel, Germany, Sweden, etc.); fourth, participation in various immigration programs implemented by the OECD countries (the Green Card lottery in the USA, the point system in Canada and Australia), the scale of emigration from Tajikistan compared to other CIS countries to the post-Soviet permanent residence in Germany, Israel and the United States are presented in Table 2.

Immigrants from Tajikistan in OECD countries: immigration and adaptation

The first wave of Tajik immigrants in the United States and Canada was noted in the 1970s, during the Cold War. From the former Soviet Union, a small number of emigrants from Tajikistan were in the Jewish wave of emigration: Tajik, Bukharan Jews (Tajik Jews whose native spoken language was Tajik), representatives of other Russian-speaking population. The second wave of migrants arrived in the United States and Canada in the 1980s after the start of “perestroika”. The third phase of emigration in the United States and Canada began in 1992, when civil war broke out in Tajikistan. The fourth wave of emigration to the United States and Canada began in 2000 and was overwhelmingly economic and employment nature.

The USA has become a country of reception of immigrants from Tajikistan. The lottery “green cards” in 2013 was attended by 24.5 thousand citizens of Tajikistan, 2014 — 28.8 thousand, and in 2015 to 34.7 thousand people. For entry into the United States to citizens of Tajikistan in 2014 were issued only 1.4 million and in 2015 — by 1.7 thousand visas¹. Immigrants from Tajikistan to USA moving in or getting a “green card” or passing contests for linguistic and educational programs under projects of the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan. Immigrants from Tajikistan are engaged in business, working in the field of services and trade, culture and science in the United States. For example, in the US lives a famous dancer, people’s artist of the Tajik SSR M. Kalontarov. In the US migrants from Tajikistan help newly arrived compatriots to adapt, finding housing and employment. In NYC, in restaurants in Brighton beach, one of the authors observed “displacement” Russian waiters for immigrants from the countries of Central Asia, including Tajiks and Russians from Tajikistan². Many immigrants from Tajikistan find employment in the “Russian economy” of the United States. It should also be noted the large number of communities of Bukhara (“tajik-speakers”) of the Jews in New York and the state of Iowa. In General, outside the CIS (primarily in the United States, Canada and Israel) has about 400 thousand Bukharian Jews³.

¹ Russian-America channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BphyBfEhEXI> (accessed: 16.10.2016).

² Tajik-American community. <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/interview-tajik-american-community-and-other-central-asian-diasporas-in-the-united-states/> (accessed: 26.04.2016).

³ The Tajiks community of Canada. <http://tajikscanada.yolasite.com/english.php> (accessed: 23.09.2008).

Table 3

**Immigrant visas issued (by foreign state of chargeability or place of birth)
in the period 2000–2017**

Years	Immediate relatives	Returning residents and armed forces special immigrants	Family preference	Employment preference	Diversity immigrants	Total
2000	11	0	3	1	78	93
2001	11	0	0	0	25	36
2002	23	0	4	1	62	90
2003	23	0	7	0	33	63
2004	27	0	0	0	57	78
2005	30	0	7	1	28	66
2006	37	0	3	6	27	73
2007	28	1	4	10	32	75
2008	27	0	5	2	66	100
2009	28	0	6	1	73	108
2010	29	1	18	14	110	172
2011	33	0	8	21	169	231
2012	33	0	15	4	141	193
2013	32	0	25	19	200	276
2014	31	2	25	23	239	320
2015	43	3	20	36	333	435
2016	38	1	23	12	231	305
2017	61	4	26	5	413	509
	545	12	199	156	2317	3223

Source: compiled by author based on (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics.html>) (accessed 10.10.2018).

Migrants from Tajikistan to *Canada* are resettled on the basis of immigration applications. The ballroom system operating in Canada takes into account age, knowledge, education, work experience, knowledge of languages. The number of immigrants from Tajikistan in Canada is about 5 thousand people. About 500 families of ethnic Tajiks from Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Russia and Israel live in the province of Quebec. They mainly live in Montreal (more than 250 families), as well as in the cities of Quebec City, Sherbrooke and Granby (30 families). Also, more than 500 Tajik families live in the Toronto area. About 250 Tajik Bukharan Jewish families are located in Forest Hill in Toronto. Another 200 Tajik families live in the Calgary and Vancouver areas¹. The Tajik communities in Canada can be divided into four branches: (1) Persian-speaking and Russian-speaking Tajiks, who arrived from Tajikistan; (2) Tajiks from Afghanistan; (3) Tajiks, including Bukhara Jews from Uzbekistan; (4) the Tajiks are Bukhara Jews and Ashkenazi Jews who arrived from Israel and Russia.

Adaptation of immigrants is accompanied by some difficulties. The main one is job searches, which usually take several months. But as a result, most migrants get employed. Many open their own business, especially those who previously had it. Comprehensive adaptation of immigrants is an essential element of Canada's migration policy. There are

¹ The Tajiks community of Canada. <http://tajikscanada.yolasite.com/english.php> (accessed: 23.09.2008).

many agencies that provide people who come here for permanent residence, social services: insurance, medical care, social benefits, legal advice, teaching English and new professions, personal growth trainings. Immigrants receive these services free of charge, and the work of agencies is financed half from municipal budgets. Projects on local immigration partnership form proposals for government agencies to improve laws and transfer initiatives to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Recruitment agencies maintain a base of current vacancies and sometimes hold informational meetings for newcomers: they tell them how and where to receive social services.

South Korea and Japan have become relatively new directions of labor emigration from Tajikistan to the OECD countries. This is a well-organized labor migration, which includes a system for selecting and pre-training workers through specially opened centers in the country of origin. Most of them come from Tajikistan and work on agricultural plantations in the areas of construction and consumer services. Despite the difficulties in obtaining a residence permit and citizenship in these countries, there are gradually forming communities of migrants from Tajikistan who remain permanently in Japan and South Korea through the marriage channel.

The countries of *Western and Eastern Europe* are also becoming an important new destination for Tajik immigrants. Sociological polls, reviews in social networks, media reports show that emigrants from Tajikistan enter the countries of Europe mainly through Russia — then through Ukraine to Poland and through Turkey to Greece and Macedonia and further to Western Europe. Considering that Turkey with Tajikistan and Russia has a simplified visa regime for staying, many emigrants from Tajikistan get relatively easy to Turkey, where some settle for employment and business, and many then try to travel to Turkey and Greece and Macedonia. For the most part, the emigrants of Tajikistan consider Eastern Europe and Greece as countries of temporary residence, their main goal being moving to Western Europe (Austria, Germany, Scandinavian countries, etc.). Considerable financial resources are necessary for settling there: visa, insurance, housing, etc. There are cases of intentional destruction of their passports by Tajik migrants when they move to Germany with a subsequent appeal to the authorities under the guise of refugees from Afghanistan, since both Tajiks and Afghans speak Farsi (Dari) to obtain refugee status and related benefits in Germany (Kulikova, 2017). Some are asking for political asylum as oppositionists in Austria and Germany, but the share of political refugees from Tajikistan in the general stream is small — a few hundred people in Europe.

It should be noted several completely new promising areas of Tajik emigration, which may emerge in the near future. In particular, the Spanish newspaper “El Pais” in the article “Polish Plumbers” described the critical situation on the Polish labor market. Including the article cited data that after Poland joined the European Union, about 500 thousand workers left for work in other EU states. And now the country is experiencing an acute need for labor, which local enterprises hope to fill at the expense of Asian migrant workers, including from Tajikistan. Polish employers consider it possible to use Tajik construction workers who have gained work experience in Russia. The Spanish newspaper cites the experience of J.W. Construction, which organizedly brought 200 workers from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Poland, as an example. The situation is similar in the Baltic countries, from where almost half of the population emigrated to work and permanent residence in Western Europe. In the near future, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia will also

use the labor of Tajik workers, many of whom speak Russian and have work experience in Russia¹.

So, before Tajik labor migrants, the prospect of getting a job not only in the CIS countries, but also in Europe, Asia and North America, where working conditions are better, and wages are much higher than in Russia and Kazakhstan, emerges ever more clearly. For example, the average salary of a labor migrant from Tajikistan in Russia and Kazakhstan does not exceed \$ 200, while in Poland it is € 250 or \$ 300. Yes, and with the security of stay, the protection of human rights, the situation is much better there. This means that Russia can significantly lose the flow of labor emigrants from Tajikistan soon, if it does not change its attitude towards migrants, does not make its migration policy more transparent and “soft”. And although the vector of labor migration from Tajikistan is mainly aimed at Russia so far, it may change in favor of OECD countries.

Conclusion

Currently, the population of Tajikistan is about 7 million people, and 12 million ethnic Tajiks live in neighboring Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. And beyond the borders of the former USSR, more than 10 million immigrants from Tajikistan work and live (mainly in the USA, Canada, Europe, the countries of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, in the countries of East and South Asia). And although Russia remains the main emigration flow from Tajikistan, OECD countries are becoming an increasingly popular destination for emigration from Tajikistan, attracting migrants with higher wages, better working conditions, and greater respect for the rights of migrant workers.

Many papers have written that labor emigration has positive implications for Tajikistan at the macro- and microeconomic levels. Of course, it provides the inflow of foreign currency, which is a means of strengthening the national currency (somoni). Also, a part of emigrants' funds is “transformed” into investments at the micro level and, besides current consumption, households invest in small business, although not as actively as the authorities would like. According to forecasts, in the next five to ten years, remittances of labor migrants can be from 1.2 to 3.5 billion US dollars per year, mainly due to labor migration to Russia and Kazakhstan. Note that the volume of remittances from OECD countries is still significantly less. However, the reorientation of a part of emigration flows to OECD countries can lead to an increase in cash receipts and investments in Tajikistan from economically developed countries. The economic benefit is obvious: if now more than one billion dollars is transferred to the country, then with the European level of income of migrants, the increase in revenues can be up to 100%.

Some time ago, the idea of diversifying the directions of labor emigration arose in the scientific and political discourse of Tajikistan. At first, the idea was expressed by some experts who motivated them to economic benefits and political dividends. The former is described above, the latter consist in the rigidity of the migration policy of Russia with regard to migrant workers from Tajikistan. Benefits can be guarantees of the rights of migrant workers and the possibility of influencing Russia in terms of creating better conditions for immigrants from Tajikistan (availability of registration, medical care,

¹ Tajecconomy. <https://tajeconomy.wordpress.com/2007/07/01/Таджикские-трудо-вые-мигран-ты-отправ/> (accessed: 01.07.2007). (In Russ.)

pension insurance). In 2017, the President of Tajikistan, E. Rahmon, demanded that the necessary measures be taken to search for new countries for labor migrants from Tajikistan. His statement says: “The Ministry of Labor, Migration and Employment together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science need to take measures to diversify countries for the travel of migrant workers”¹.

It cannot be assumed that the citizens of Tajikistan will completely and quickly abandon the routes of emigration to Russia and Kazakhstan they already know in favor of OECD countries. As long as, there are significant linguistic and cultural barriers, the high cost of living in these countries, to a lesser extent the established partnership and historical and cultural community, in the coming years remain a priority in the CIS countries, mainly in Russia. However, it should be noted the active work of South Korea and Japan in the region of Central Asia in the development of a system of organized migration². And as observations show, having once worked in these countries, migrant workers are set to leave there, and not to Russia. In addition, in the OECD countries, new communities of Tajiks are being formed, which may become, in the near future, the networks of attraction of new migrants from Tajikistan. And against the background of the widespread study of English in Tajikistan itself and the reduction of the Russian language teaching system, it is quite possible to reorient some emigrants to OECD countries.

Russia has something to think about in this situation...

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¹ The President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7ASHzYvfTI> (accessed: 02.09.2016). (In Russ.)

² Report on Tajikistan with OECD recommendations. 3rd round of monitoring of Istanbul action plan on fight against corruption. <http://www.oecd.org/corruption/acn/TAJIKISTAN-MonitoringReport-RUS.pdf> (accessed: 18.04.2014). (In Russ.)

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Тенденции и стратегии трудовой эмиграции из Таджикистана в страны ОЭСР

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В статье рассматриваются тенденции и стратегии трудовой эмиграции из Таджикистана в страны Организации экономического сотрудничества и развития (ОЭСР), волны и виды эмиграции, адаптация эмигрантов в странах ОЭСР, а также миграционная политика стран ОЭСР в отношении эмигрантов из Таджикистана. Перед таджикскими трудовыми мигрантами все ярче вырисовывается перспектива получения работы не только в странах СНГ, но и в странах Европы, Азии и Северной Америки, где условия труда лучше, а оплата гораздо выше, чем в России и Казахстане. Страны ОЭСР с полным правом можно считать новым направлением таджикской эмиграции. Важной особенностью тенденций и стратегий трудовой эмиграции является сочетание образовательного и профессионально-квалификационного факторов, переселенческого и сезонно-трудового, в основной массе неквалифицированной и квалифицированной с переобучением и стажировкой трудовой миграции из Таджикистана. Адаптация иммигрантов сопровождается некоторыми сложностями. Главная из них — поиски работы, которые занимают обычно несколько месяцев. В большинстве своем эмигранты из Таджикистана рассматривают Восточную Европу и Грецию как страны временного пребывания, их основной целью является переезд в Западную Европу (Австрия, Германия, страны Скандинавии и пр.). 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

соответствующего статуса и льгот в Германии. В странах ОЭСР формируются новые общины таджиков, которые уже в скором будущем могут стать сетями притяжения новых мигрантов из Таджикистана.

Ключевые слова: трудовые мигранты; эмиграция; Таджикистан; Россия; страны ОЭСР; миграционные волны; миграционная политика

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