

**THE ROLE OF LABOR MIGRATION IN UZBEKISTAN**

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**Abstract**

This thesis explores the dynamics of labor migration in Uzbekistan, a country characterized by significant outflows of its workforce seeking better economic opportunities abroad. The study examines the historical context of labor migration, tracing its roots from the Soviet era to the present day, and analyzes the socio-economic factors driving this phenomenon. Key motivations for migration include high unemployment rates, low wages, and limited economic prospects within Uzbekistan. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from government and international organizations with qualitative interviews from migrants and their families. Findings reveal that labor migration has profound implications for both migrants and their home communities, including remittances that contribute to household income and national economic stability. However, challenges such as exploitation, lack of legal protections, and social integration issues are also highlighted. This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of labor migration patterns in Uzbekistan and contribute to policy discussions aimed at improving the conditions for migrants and enhancing the benefits of remittances for sustainable development.

**Key words:** labor migration, socio-economic impact, remittances, economic stability, employment opportunities, post-soviet era, migration motivations, family reunification, exploitation, legal protections, social integration, mixed-methods approach, sustainable development, migration policies

**Introduction**

Labor migration has become a defining feature of Uzbekistan's socio-economic landscape, significantly influencing the lives of millions of its citizens. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan faced a myriad of challenges, including economic instability, high unemployment rates, and limited opportunities for professional advancement. As a result, many Uzbeks have sought work abroad, primarily in neighboring countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan, as well as in more distant regions like Europe and the Middle East. This migration is not merely a

response to economic hardship; it reflects deeper structural issues within the country's labor market and broader socio-economic conditions.

The implications of labor migration extend beyond individual migrants; they significantly impact families and communities left behind. Remittances sent home serve as a vital source of income for many households, contributing to national economic stability and development. However, this reliance on remittances also raises questions about the sustainability of such economic practices and the potential for dependency. Furthermore, migrants often face numerous challenges abroad, including exploitation, lack of legal protections, and difficulties in social integration.

### **Main part**

Labor migrants who experience harassment, discrimination and/or violence while abroad can gain access to legal aid to seek redress of their grievances. The decree tasks the Ministry of Employment with developing procedures and systems to implement the decree's provisions by this summer.

Authorities also want to improve conditions for the families that labor migrants leave behind. The decree instructs the National Social Protection Agency to develop a system by the end of 2024 to provide social support services and financial assistance to labor-migrant families. The decree calls for regular check-ins by social workers to ensure the well-being of children. Where the funding will come to support all the new services mandated by the president is anyone's guess. The decree glosses over finances.

Although not stated, the decree seems motivated in part by changes taking place in Russia, in particular a shift in Russians' mood toward Central Asian labor migrants since the late March terrorist tragedy at Crocus City Hall in Moscow, in which Tajik nationals are accused of killing over 140 innocent civilians. Instances of harassment and violence against migrants have spiked across Russia since then.

On one level, the decree shows the Uzbek government is interested in defending the rights of citizens working abroad. But some provisions also suggest that officials in Tashkent worry about potential consequences of rising Russian hostility towards Central Asian guest workers. Specifically, the decree exudes a sense of concern that some Uzbek migrants could become radicalized within the cauldron of hate currently bubbling in Russia.

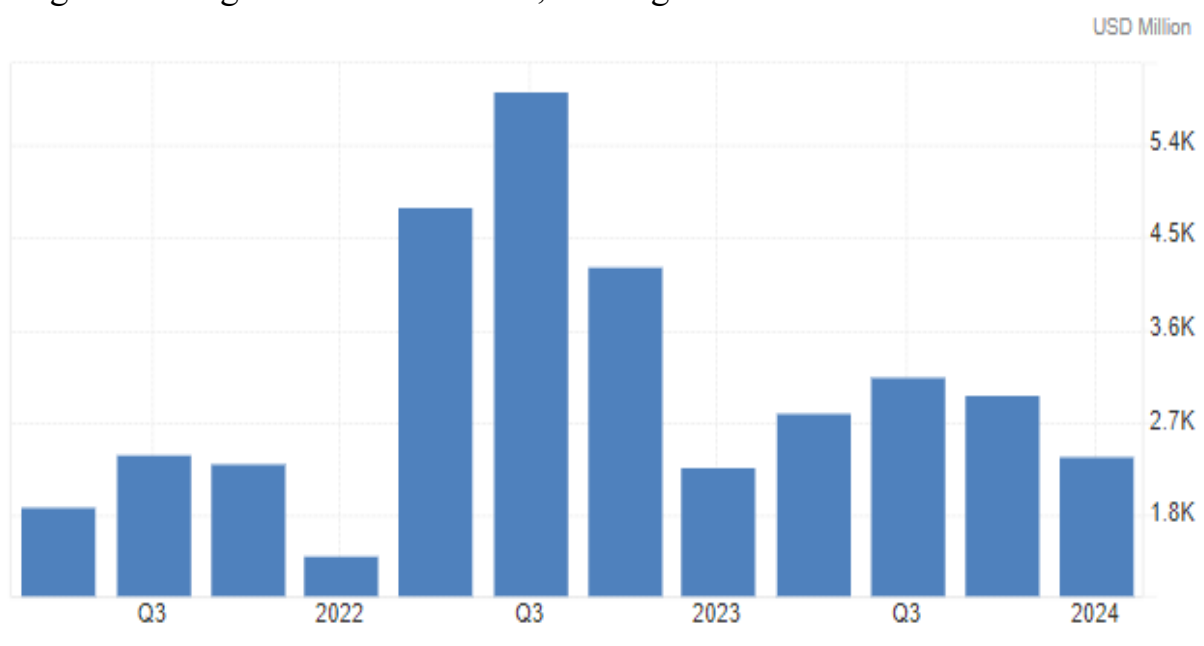
Some of the decree's provisions, especially the monitoring of children by social workers, appear aimed at providing authorities with early warning about potential radicalization candidates. Likewise, the assistance provisions for labor migrants abroad can be seen as an attempt to forestall feelings of alienation and frustration among those who encounter difficulties. Such feelings are often a precursor for radicalization, according to experts.

Analysts with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other agencies tracking labor migration say that adverse working conditions in Russia

historically have played a role in incubating radicalization among vulnerable segments of Central Asian labor migrants.

Piotr Kazmierkiewicz, an IOM expert on Central Asian migration patterns, said in an interview published by the organization that the underlying conditions enabling labor migrant radicalization tend to shift along with the changes in the political and social environments in the hosting country.

“Typically, radicalization occurs in Russia,” Kazmierkiewicz added. “Vulnerable groups include alienated youth, who have no social or community support, those with low levels of religious education and little prospect for advancement, and youngsters who get involved in crime, or hang out with criminals.”<sup>1</sup>



Remittances in Uzbekistan decreased to 2369.48 USD Million in the first quarter of 2024 from 2965.86 USD Million in the fourth quarter of 2023. Remittances in Uzbekistan averaged 1677.65 USD Million from 2010 until 2024, reaching an all time high of 5931.90 USD Million in the third quarter of 2022 and a record low of 505.70 USD Million in the first quarter of 2010.<sup>2</sup>

### **Uzbekistan Takes Major Step Towards Developing a Comprehensive Migration Strategy**

Between August 20 and 23, 2024, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Government of Uzbekistan hosted a crucial four-day training on "Developing Gender-Sensitive and Human Rights-Based Migration Policy in Uzbekistan." This training was instrumental in shaping Uzbekistan's future Migration Strategy.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-striving-to-improve-conditions-for-labor-migrants#:~:text=Upwards%20of%2090%20percent%20of,to%2021%20percent%20of%20GDP>

<sup>2</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com/uzbekistan/remittances>

**Key Highlights from the Workshop:**

- Understanding migration definitions and components
- Examining trends and case studies within Uzbekistan
- Exploring International Migration Law
- Reviewing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration
- Implementing gender-based strategies in migration management
- Engaging in hands-on data collection and analysis exercises
- Learning about the stages of policy development
- Participating in the GCM Pledging initiative
- Finalizing the draft structure for Uzbekistan's migration strategy

The workshop resulted in a detailed draft of a gender-sensitive and human rights-oriented migration management strategy. This draft follows Presidential Decree No UP-59, issued by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on April 4, 2024, on “Additional measures to improve labor migration processes and support for individuals engaged in temporary labor activity abroad”<sup>3</sup>. Participants praised the expertise of the trainers and the quality of the sessions.

With the active engagement of representatives from various government agencies and civic organizations, we are optimistic that this workshop will drive significant progress in migration policy development.<sup>4</sup>

**Conclusion**

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of labor migration in Uzbekistan, exploring its historical context, driving forces, and socio-economic impacts. By employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative data with qualitative insights from migrants and their families, this research seeks to illuminate the complexities of labor migration and its implications for sustainable development in Uzbekistan. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policy discussions that can enhance the benefits of migration while addressing the challenges faced by migrants and their communities.

**References**

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