



ISSUES OF DEVELOPING UZBEKISTAN'S COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND FOREIGN STATES IN THE SPHERE OF MIGRATION

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 6 th February 2025 Accepted: 4 th March 2025	This article examines the issues of developing Uzbekistan's cooperation with regional organizations and foreign states in the sphere of migration. The article analyzes Uzbekistan's current position in the migration sphere and explores areas of cooperation with regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, European Union, Eurasian Economic Union, as well as with foreign countries. As a result of the research, proposals aimed at developing Uzbekistan's migration diplomacy and addressing practical issues in this field are put forward. The article concludes with recommendations for improving the legal framework of regional and bilateral cooperation on migration regulation.

Keywords: migration policy, regional cooperation, international organizations, Commonwealth of Independent States, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, European Union, Eurasian Economic Union, Organization of Turkic States, labor migration, migration diplomacy, international legal cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary context of intensifying globalization and integration processes on a global scale, issues related to migration have emerged as a pivotal aspect of international relations. The movement of migrants is increasing, and the geographic distribution of migration is broadening. This phenomenon necessitates the enhancement of interstate and regional collaboration in this domain, as well as the formulation of effective mechanisms to regulate migratory processes.

Uzbekistan is the Central Asian country with the largest labour force. At present, the number of citizens working abroad from the country is in excess of one million. However, the practice of diversifying labor migration flows in the country and identifying migration issues as one of the main directions of domestic and foreign policy has only emerged in the last 7-8 years [1]. The ongoing deep reforms implemented by the state have firmly established migration as a pivotal component of its overarching strategic plans.

Uzbekistan is a country with a high share of young people. Annually, approximately 650,000 to 700,000 young people graduate from general secondary, secondary specialized, and professional educational institutions. Of these, 160,000 to 165,000 will be admitted to bachelor's degree programs at higher education institutions. Consequently, an average of 700,000 young individuals enter the labor market annually, of which 63.7% are graduates of general education schools lacking specialized qualifications, which are of less interest to employers [1].

In such circumstances, it is imperative to ensure the employment of the population within the country, whilst concomitantly reducing levels of unemployment and optimising the utilisation of labour resources. This objective can be achieved through the establishment of cooperative relationships with regional organisations and foreign countries in the domain of migration.

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical underpinnings and methodological framework of the present study are anchored in the international legal infrastructure that oversees migratory processes. These legal principles are complemented by theoretical inquiries into the dynamics of migration policy, complemented further by an examination of the extant scientific literature concerning cooperation in the realm of migration with international organizations and foreign nations.

In the context of an international migration policy analysis, the present study draws upon the conceptual frameworks proposed by Volokh, Suvorova, and Shorokhova. According to these scholars, with respect to the typology of migration policy, the following primary scales of regulation can be identified:

1. At the national level, the regulation of migration policy is managed by the state. This scale encompasses legislation, directives, and regulations that pertain to the entry, exit, and stay of foreign nationals within the country's borders.
2. The regional level, on the other hand, pertains to the regulation of migration policy at the regional or provincial level. It may contain special rules for entry and stay in certain parts of the country.



3. The international level is characterized by the regulation of migration policy within the framework of international treaties and agreements between states. It may encompass reciprocal agreements between countries or regions concerning entry and exit.

We concur with the conceptual approach of these authors and posit that the international level can be divided into universal, regional, and bilateral levels. While the universal level is characterized by the establishment of strategic directives for the regulation of migration processes, the regional level is marked by the execution of pragmatic initiatives aimed at the implementation of universal standards within specific regions. Finally, the level of bilateral migration agreements specifies a particular set of obligations for the involved parties, based on universal and regional standards.

The following methods were used in the research: system analysis, comparative analysis, statistical analysis, document analysis, historical approach. System analysis was employed to examine the status of Uzbekistan in the domain of migration and its collaborative endeavors with regional entities and foreign nations as an integrated system. The comparative analysis was employed to identify the peculiarities of migration policy within the framework of various regional organizations. Statistical analysis was employed to assess labor migration indicators. International legal documents and bilateral agreements in the field of migration were thoroughly examined through a meticulous analysis of pertinent documents. Finally, the historical approach was used to identify trends in the development of Uzbekistan's cooperation in the field of migration.

RESULT

Current situation of Uzbekistan in the field of migration

According to the Ministry of Employment of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the unemployment rate was 5.8 percent by the end of 2024, which is a better indicator compared to 6.8 percent in 2023. Statistical data indicates that 14 million 213 thousand individuals are gainfully employed, constituting 94 percent of the economically active population. Conversely, it is estimated that approximately 900,000 individuals are seeking employment. Furthermore, by the conclusion of 2024, it was estimated that 1.9 million citizens were engaged in foreign employment [1].

In the contemporary era, the majority of migrants are employed in sectors such as construction (51.6%), agriculture (12.3%), industry (9.2%), and trade (8.5%). Notably, during the initial three months of 2023 alone, the number of Uzbek citizens who departed their country for employment purposes reached 486.1 thousand. The geographical distribution of these migrants is predominantly concentrated in several

countries, namely Russia (70.2%), Kazakhstan (13.4%), Kyrgyzstan (8.7%), Turkey (3.8%), Afghanistan (1.1%), Korea (0.6%), and the United Arab Emirates (0.4%) [1].

It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of workers who have received low-level qualifications and specialized secondary education are those who primarily depart from Uzbekistan. This phenomenon underscores the necessity to prioritize the training of skilled personnel and the diversification of labor migration flows within the nation's migration policy framework.

Cooperation in the field of migration within the Commonwealth of Independent States

Among the interstate associations, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), established in 1991, is of particular significance. The Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States stipulates the establishment of a unified economic space grounded in market relations and the unencumbered flow of goods, services, capital, and labor (Article 19).

It is the considered opinion of experts that Uzbekistan is collaborating actively with the relevant migration authorities of the Commonwealth of Independent States with the objective of protecting and ensuring the rights of migrants and creating conditions for safe and organised migration. In particular, the coordination and resolution of issues in the field of migration policy are ensured within the framework of cooperation with the Council of Heads of Migration Authorities of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States [2]. In its activities, the Council is guided by the main documents of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the field of migration. These documents include the Agreement «On Cooperation in the Field of Labor Migration and Social Protection of Labor Migrants» of 1994, the Agreement «On Cooperation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Combating Illegal Migration» of 1998, the Agreement «On Cooperation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Combating Trafficking in Persons, Human Organs and Tissues» of 2005, the Agreement «On a Unified System of Registration of Third-Country Nationals and Stateless Persons Entering the Territory of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States» of 2011 and other documents [3].

In 2021, our country, in accordance with the ongoing commitment to regional cooperation in this domain, acceded to the Agreement «On Cooperation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the Field of Promoting Employment»[4].

These documents delineate the primary objectives of cooperation in the domain of migration, encompassing the following: the establishment of conditions conducive to the implementation of a coordinated migration policy; the management of labour migration in accordance with



the regulation of migration flow volumes, directions, and structure, in alignment with the interests of migrants, while taking into account the legislation of the host nation; the integration of immigrants into society and the cultivation of respect for the legislation, language, and culture of the host nation among citizens of the CIS member states; the continuation of efforts to combat human trafficking; and the conclusion of readmission agreements, among other provisions.

The resolution of questions pertaining to cooperation between the migration authorities of the Commonwealth of Independent States is to be conducted within the framework of Council meetings. Uzbekistan plays an active role in these processes. For instance, the twenty-seventh meeting of the Council was convened in Tashkent on 28 September 2023. The agenda of the meeting encompassed a range of issues, including the migration situation within the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, legislative developments in the field of migration and law enforcement practice, the experience of competent authorities in implementing preventive, operational and investigative measures, and special operations against illegal migration [5].

Cooperation in migration within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

In the analysis of the system of management of regional migration processes, particular attention must be directed towards the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a permanent regional international organisation that was established in June 2001.

As N. Turdumamatov, Deputy Director of the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, has observed, the organisation's initial objectives were to coordinate mutual regional actions against terrorist acts, separatism and extremism in Central Asia[6]. In June 2002, at the summit of heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in St. Petersburg, the charter of the organisation was signed (this charter entered into force on 19 September 2003). This primary charter document delineates the objectives and principles of the organisation, its structure, and its primary directions.

In September 2003, the heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member countries signed a 20-year multilateral cooperation programme. Consequently, the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have acquired a broad economic orientation. In the long term, the establishment of a free trade zone within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's territory is envisaged, and in the short term, there is to be an intensification of the process of creating favourable conditions in the sphere of trade and investment [7].

The organisation has also recognised the importance of addressing migration issues within its broader context, particularly in terms of countering separatism, terrorism, human trafficking, arms trafficking, and drug trafficking. However, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has not yet adopted a separate document that specifically regulates these issues. The primary focus of the organisation is the combatting of trafficking in human beings.

Almaty Process and Migration Issues

Another regional platform is the Almaty Process, which was initiated in 2010. It is a regional consultative process on refugee protection and international migration in Central Asia, involving the following countries: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Turkey. The inaugural regional conference on refugee protection and international migration in Central Asia was convened in Almaty from 14 to 16 March 2011.

The conference participants recognised the necessity to develop national policies to protect persons involved in mixed migration, and called for measures to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings. They also drew attention to the importance of adopting solutions to ensure effective protection of victims and address the challenges of mixed migration [8].

The Almaty Declaration was adopted as a result of the conference. Its stated objectives are the development of regional dialogue and practical cooperation, as well as the communication of the results of the conference to the general public.

In 2012, national co-ordinators at the level of deputy ministers were appointed in the participating States, and the Regional Cooperation Framework and the Regional Action Plan were endorsed.

The official launch of the Almaty Process occurred on 5 June 2013 during the Ministerial Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration. The communiqué adopted at the conclusion of the conference noted that the participating states had agreed to respond to the numerous challenges arising in Central Asian countries due to mixed migration actions through dialogue, practical cooperation and ensuring human rights, protection of persons in need of international protection, and development of durable solutions related to refugees [9].

Uzbekistan is not a member of the Almaty Process. It is widely acknowledged that Uzbekistan has demonstrated a willingness to engage in dialogue concerning international migration and the protection of refugees, irrespective of its decision to accede to the Intergovernmental Consultative Mechanism on Refugee Protection and International Migration. For instance, in the aftermath of the crisis in Ukraine, our citizens engaged in educational pursuits or undertaking various activities therein were expeditiously evacuated to



Uzbekistan, a course of action predicated upon meticulous organisational principles. Consequently, the rights and security of our citizens were ensured, and the leaders of the European Union expressed their profound appreciation for these efforts.

Another clear example is the work carried out to return women and children from Syria to our country as part of Operation Mehr. This operation was highly appreciated by the UN and was given the status of the Tashkent experience.

Furthermore, in the initial years of Uzbekistan's independence, as well as in subsequent periods, due to crisis situations in neighbouring countries, refugees from these countries were permanently or temporarily settled in Uzbekistan, and their security was ensured.

It follows that, rather than elucidating the question of whether or not to join declarative agreements, the overarching objective should be to cultivate international legal cooperation on the basis of an analysis of migration flows.

It is evident that a considerable proportion of the migratory movements observed in the region pertain to the territories of member states of **the Organisation of Turkic States**. However, within the framework of this organisation, no agreements have been developed on the regulation of migration processes and its sustainable development, and these complex issues have not been raised in the discussions of member states.

The Uzbek side should set specific goals in this direction and, taking into account the mutual interests of the countries, promote the initiative to create a chain of integrated migration relations in the Turkic region. We believe that work in this direction can include such aspects as labor migration, educational migration, environmental migration and illegal migration.

Cooperation in migration within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is a particularly salient association within the geographical confines of the independent states. An independent section devoted to the regulation of labour migration is contained within the EAEU Treaty (Section XXVI of the Treaty «Labour Migration»). This section comprises three articles (Article 96 to Article 98). Article 96 of the Treaty states: «The Member States shall cooperate in the policy of regulating labour migration within the Union, and shall facilitate the organised recruitment of workers for labour activities on the territory of the Member States» [10].

The Treaty establishes a regulatory framework for the labour activities of migrants. Specifically, it stipulates that Member States are entitled to engage the labour of their own nationals without the constraints imposed by legislation designed to protect the labour market. Concurrently, labour migrants are not obligated to

obtain a permit from the host state to engage in labour activities.

The treaty under discussion underscores the rights of labour migrants. Specifically, the rights granted to labour migrants include the right to engage in professional activities in accordance with their speciality and qualifications, the right to own, use and dispose of their property, the right to protect property, and the right to transfer funds without hindrance.

The social rights of labour migrants are of particular concern. The aforementioned individuals, along with their families, are entitled to social insurance, medical care, education, membership of trade unions and free access to information.

Uzbekistan holds the status of Observer in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In October 2024, a three-year joint cooperation plan was signed between our country and the EAEU, which defined mutual tasks and goals in such areas as trade, transport and finance[11].

In addition, in December 2024, the Uzbek side reported on the prospects of further simplification of the entry-exit regime in our country for citizens of EAEU member states with a view to developing the tourism industry, i.e. movement on the basis of internal documents. The implementation of these plans is projected to yield economic benefits, whilst concurrently fostering enhanced human mobility within the region and strengthening inter-personal relations.

In the future, it is recommended that agreements are reached with the EAEU member states on this issue, based on mutual parity.

Prospects for the development of migration diplomacy of Uzbekistan

Emerging geopolitical conflicts at the global and regional levels, fundamental changes in international relations between countries, internal and cross-border conflicts and other negative processes generate a number of complex realities for any states. In such circumstances, the establishment of agreements between states in pivotal domains can be regarded as the paramount objective of the diplomatic sphere. In the context of foreign relations, the objectives of Uzbekistan in the field of migration can be seen primarily in the following areas:

1. The establishment of mutually beneficial labour migration and training of specialists with developed countries;
2. The establishment of guaranteed cooperation in the decent protection of the rights of our citizens in any country and region;
3. The realisation of mutual integration initiatives aimed at expanding opportunities for quality education abroad;
4. The introduction of a visa-free (or simplified visa procedure) regime between states on the basis of mutual parity.



Indeed, the aforementioned domains should constitute the foundation for Uzbek migration diplomacy. The attainment of these objectives is naturally a gradual process. In the context of contemporary geopolitical challenges, it is imperative for our nation to establish a foundation of «soft law», followed by the conclusion of international legal agreements grounded in traditional values, anchored by «soft law» [12].

In such a scenario, the parties involved in the agreement will be well-positioned to comprehend the fundamental aspects of the issue and their respective resolutions, leading to the development of mutually acceptable approaches.

Prospects for cooperation with the countries of Central Asia in the field of migration

In 2017, the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia were initiated by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Over the past period, the summits in this format have given impetus to integration processes in Central Asia and have become a real foundation for the development of the concept of «regional identity awareness». Consequently, consensus has been achieved with neighbouring states on the movement of citizens with internal documents in the entry-exit regime, thereby elevating the level of mobility between peoples to a new echelon.

Of particular significance is the joint articulation of the positions of the regional states on salient issues in the international arena, which has enabled the establishment of relations and the development of an agenda with foreign partner countries.

During the New Uzbekistan period, international summits and cooperation councils were established, including «Central Asia - Gulf Arab States», «Central Asia - European Union», «Central Asia – Germany», «Central Asia - United States», «Central Asia – Japan» and «Central Asia – India». In recent years, approximately 10 high-level dialogues in this format have been organised. These dialogues have encompassed negotiations on a range of collaborative endeavours, including trade and economic cooperation, transport and logistics, climate change and the green economy, as well as socio-political and other issues.

It is imperative to ensure that migration issues are addressed as a consolidated position of Central Asia within the framework of these cooperative platforms. Furthermore, there is a necessity to intensify a series of expert forums, conferences and dialogues at various levels (ministries, agencies, etc.). The analysis of specific migration issues, the development of shared approaches, and the clarification of future plans are all to be facilitated by such negotiations.

Prospects for bilateral migration cooperation

In the context of bilateral cooperation on the subject of migration, Uzbekistan is expanding the scope of organised labour export schemes with foreign countries

such as Russia, South Korea, Japan, Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany. This development represents a significant aspect of the country's increased focus on migration. The objective of these initiatives is to establish secure and long-term prospects as alternatives to forms of irregular and disorderly migration.

However, the present labour recruitment programmes are not adequately addressing the rational distribution of demand for labour migration in Uzbekistan, nor have they demonstrated a full measure of effectiveness in protecting the rights of labour migrants.

In conjunction with numerous partner countries (South Korea, Germany, Russia, Japan, etc.), a series of projects are underway in Uzbekistan to enhance vocational education prospects. These initiatives encompass the establishment of vocational training centres in Tashkent and other regions of the country.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has been implementing a number of projects with the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and other international financial institutions to develop migrant skills for a modern economy.

With regard to bilateral relations, South Korea remains the most sought-after destination among Uzbeks, due to the high wages and comfortable living and working conditions it offers.

The conventional trajectory of labour migration from Uzbekistan is directed towards the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, a phenomenon that can be attributed to a confluence of historical, political, geographical and cultural factors.

Within the framework of cooperation with the Russian Federation, special attention is paid to the deployment of trained working groups to address employers' labour shortages in specific sectors of the Russian economy [13].

In accordance with the agreement with Russia, the Uzbek Migration Agency assumes responsibility for the organised selection, training and education of migrant workers. In return, Russian employers are obliged to provide housing in accordance with national standards, ensure safe working conditions and offer fair wages not lower than the national minimum wage.

The Philippines serves as a case in point illustrating the diversification of foreign labour migration. The country has demonstrated a strategic approach to the utilisation of labour migration, effectively channeling it towards the enhancement of family well-being and the promotion of societal and economic development [14].

CONCLUSION

The government of Uzbekistan has been cooperating with regional organisations and foreign countries in the area of migration. This cooperation is carried out on a



systematic basis and is aimed at resolving practical issues in this area.

Within the framework of cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union and other member countries, common migration policy directions are being developed.

It is our considered opinion that Uzbekistan's future entry into international legal relations on migration within the framework of the Council of Heads of Migration Authorities of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Organisation of Turkic States is of great importance.

It is also necessary to gradually shape the agenda on migration issues at summits and cooperation councils in the international format, such as «Central Asia - Arab Gulf States», «Central Asia - European Union», «Central Asia – Germany», «Central Asia – USA», «Central Asia – Japan», «Central Asia – India».

Within the framework of bilateral cooperation, there is considerable potential for the signing of agreements that would facilitate the organised recruitment of labour from Uzbekistan. The advantage of such agreements is that they control and forecast migration processes.

In light of the aforementioned analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Alongside the enhancement of the national legislative framework in the domain of migration, Uzbekistan is required to allocate particular attention to the advancement of international cooperation.

2. In order to strengthen cooperation in the field of migration within regional organisations, Uzbekistan should actively utilise such platforms as the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, as well as take the initiative to develop mechanisms to address migration issues within the framework of the Organisation of Turkic States.

3. In order to diversify labour migration flows, Uzbekistan needs to develop cooperation not only with traditional destinations (Russia, Kazakhstan, South Korea), but also with new promising labour markets (EU countries, Great Britain, Japan, etc.).

4. In order to establish a consolidated foreign policy position for the Central Asian region, it is imperative to enhance collaborative efforts in the domain of migration and incorporate migration-related concerns into the agenda of the «Central Asia+» formats.

5. It is imperative to enhance collaboration with foreign nations to safeguard the rights of labour migrants and enhance their social security, including the refinement of the system for the effective protection of the interests of our citizens through the ratification of bilateral and multilateral accords.

In general, the development of Uzbekistan's cooperation with regional organisations and foreign countries in the field of migration serves to ensure safe and legal migration of our country's citizens, effective management of migration processes and protection of national interests.

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