

# Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia

Root Causes, Social and Economic Impact  
of Return Migration

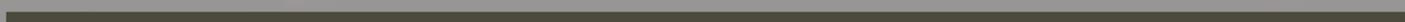
Regional Field Assessment in Central Asia  
2016

## Executive Summary



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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



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This report is the fruit of a collaborative effort of Government officials, international and national experts and IOM mission focal points from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM or its Member States. The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the work do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CVE	Countering violent extremism
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KR	Kyrgyz Republic
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PVE	Preventing violent extremism
RF	Russian Federation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar
USTEM	Unified System for Tracking External Migration

# INTRODUCTION

Migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have played a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainable livelihood of households and communities in regions where other sources of income are hard to come by. Social networks established by migrants helped them overcome a range of difficulties on the Russian labour market, such as the steep economic downturn of the Russian economy after 2008, strong competition in sectors of employment and vulnerability to sanctions due to irregular work status. However, the additional stress factors operating since 2014, such as the prolonged contraction of the Russian economy, devaluation of the ruble as well as of the Central Asian currencies and large-scale imposition of sanctions, in particular re-entry bans, have all made the migrants' position unstable. This has exposed a large number of them to new or deepened vulnerabilities, ranging from the loss of financial resources to a sense of desperation and lowered self-esteem.

The failure of the established long-term strategies has pushed some of the more vulnerable migrants toward a search for new ways of coping with these challenges. Over the past two years a number of reports (official statements, policy research and media) have begun to associate the growing socioeconomic vulnerability of migrants with the risk of exposure to radical religious propaganda and, in isolated cases, involvement in extremist activities. However, the reports could not be firmly verified as little was known about the extent and mechanisms of radicalization in this group. The issue was framed in security terms and reliable testimonies from within the migrant community and migrants' families could not be collected as they were reluctant to discuss the issue. As a result, the link between migration and radicalization was tenuous, based mainly on anecdotal evidence. This made it difficult for the authorities, international community and non-governmental organizations to define the problem and target prevention activities properly.

The Central Asian governments and international donors came to acknowledge the need to identify the specific factors and circumstances that can potentially trigger radicalization among migrants and to establish the links between migrants' broader socio-economic vulnerabilities and the radicalization risk. At the request of USAID and with the support from the Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Sub-regional coordination office for Central Asia undertook a regional field assessment that aimed to fill the gaps in knowledge on the scenarios of radicalization among Central Asian migrant workers who returned to their countries of origin or were in transit in Kazakhstan after receiving bans on re-entry to Russia. The regional assessment, covering Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan built on the results of IOM's fieldwork among Tajik re-entry banned migrants in 2014 and on the rapid field assessment in 2015, carried out in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>1, 2</sup>

The regional field assessment fills an important gap in addressing the socio-economic roots of radicalization from a right-based perspective. It acknowledges the various initiatives of the Central Asian governments at preventing and countering extremism (PVE and CVE) in the region while noting the need to complement the predominant security approach with a broader approach that tackles the long-term grounds for radicalization. It also identifies women as the particularly important group among migrants and in their communities for defusing radicalization potential, which so far received relatively little attention in this context. Finally, it demonstrates that migrant diasporas and informal support networks play a decisive role in preventing the onset of radicalization.

This executive summary provides an overview of the dynamics of human mobility and in particular of labour migration within and out of Central Asia, demonstrating multiple consequences of the current economic downturn and application of re-entry bans in Russia. It reflects on the socioeconomic impact of the precarious position of Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek migrant workers on the Russian labour market and outlines some of the coping mechanisms: return, irregular stay and search for alternative destinations, in particular Kazakhstan. The regional field assessment relies on a combination of interviews with government and non-government stakeholders, experts and migrants, it points to some specific vulnerabilities, affecting certain categories of migrants, taking into account the deterioration of their legal, economic and social status. Finally, it relates these vulnerabilities to the potential for social and ideological radicalization, outlining a number of scenarios that could come into being should the vulnerability factors remain unaddressed.

1 Tajik Migrants with Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation. IOM: Dushanbe 2013

2 "Returning Central Asian Migrants: Between Radicalization and Re-integration" IOM Central Asia Field Assessment in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, August/September 2015

# 1. REGIONAL CHAPTER

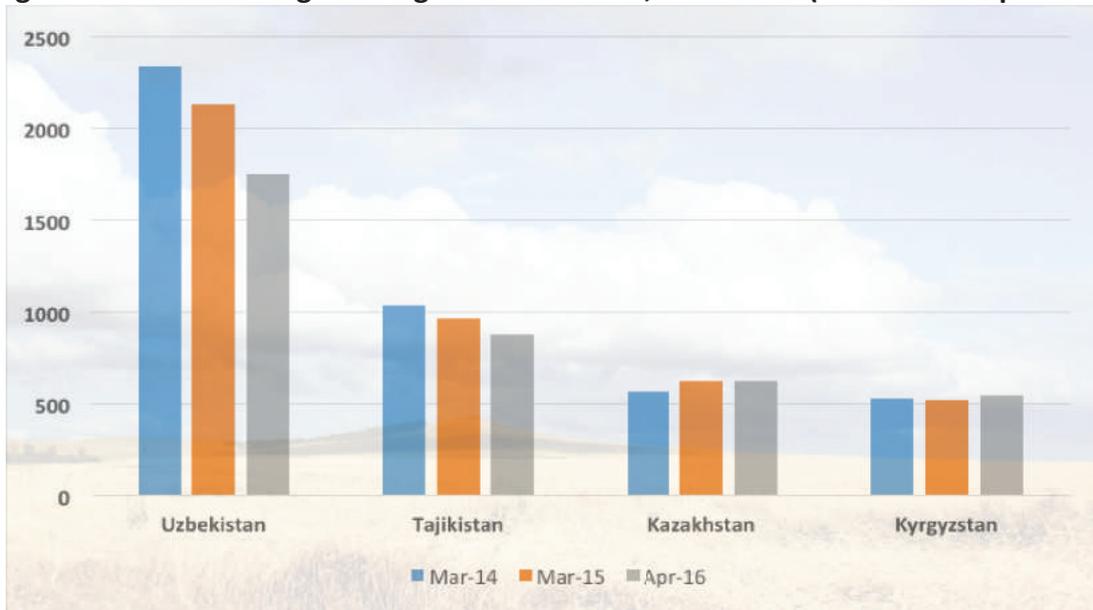


## 1.1 MIGRATION TRENDS AND IMPACT

Russia's economic downturn over the past two years in combination with a more stringent migration policy has impacted on migration flows and mobility from and within Central Asia, the predominant region of origin of migrant workers in the Russian Federation. Decreasing demand for foreign labour in a worsening economic climate has made Russia less of an attractive destination for Central Asia's working-age population seeking employment abroad. In addition, the introduction of bans on re-entering Russia for foreigners who committed administrative infringements is preventing more than 1.5 million individuals, most of whom are Central Asian migrant workers, from returning to Russia for a period of up to five years. Official Russian migration statistics show that the overall number of Central Asian migrants in Russia has decreased over the past two years, with a particularly strong decline among the migrant population from Uzbekistan that dropped from 2,343,000 individuals in 2014 to 1,756,000 individuals in 2016 (Fig. 1). There has been a similar, albeit less expressed decrease in migration from Tajikistan, declining from 1,034,000 registered migrants in 2014 to 879,000 migrants in 2016. Mobility from Kyrgyzstan in the wake of its accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) has remained more stable, showing a slight increase from 526,000 persons in 2014 to 547,000 persons in 2016.

The changing economic and regulatory framework in Russia has led to shifting migration flows within Central Asia, too. Kazakhstan is increasingly becoming a country of transit and destination for migrant workers from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan seeking for alternatives to employment in Russia. In 2015, almost 950,000 citizens from these three Central Asian republics have temporarily resided in Kazakhstan, signifying a sharp increase from the ca.

**Fig. 1. Central Asian migrants registered in Russia, 2014-2016 (thousands of persons)**



Source: Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, available at [https://звсм.мөд.рф/about/activity/stats/Statistics/Statisticheskie\\_svedeniya\\_po\\_migracionno](https://звсм.мөд.рф/about/activity/stats/Statistics/Statisticheskie_svedeniya_po_migracionno)

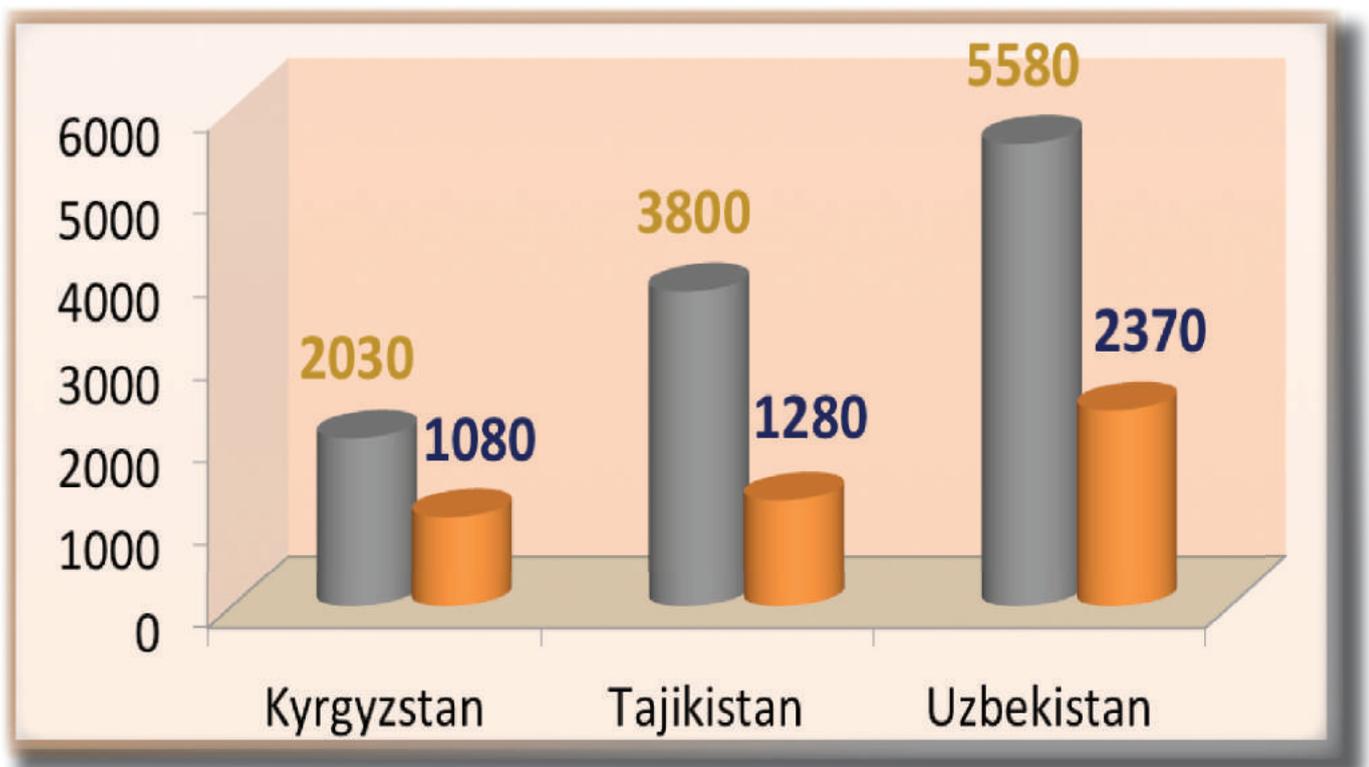
## 6 MIGRANT VULNERABILITIES AND INTEGRATION NEEDS IN CENTRAL ASIA

500,000 temporary residents in 2011. Uzbek citizens make up the by far largest subgroup among this population, having increased from 530,683 individual migrants in 2014 to 797,982 migrants in 2015. Migration from Kyrgyzstan is less pronounced, although a growing number of citizens of these two countries have taken up employment in Kazakhstan over the past two years, leading to the assumption that Kazakhstan is becoming an alternative destination for Central Asian migrant workers who are unable to return to or find employment in Russia.

Although migrants' strategies seem to be adapting to the new realities, the economic downturn in Russia nevertheless has taken a toll on a region that depends to a significant extent on migrants' remittances. These have seen a sharp decline from 2014 to 2015, thus slashing the disposable income of many Central Asian households. According to data from the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, remittance levels to Kyrgyzstan have decreased by 47% in US dollar terms, remittances to Uzbekistan fell by 58% over the same time span while personal money transfers to Tajikistan have dropped by 66% (Fig. 2).

Even though the real decline in purchasing power is much weaker than these numbers suggest, because Central Asian currencies have seen a devaluation to the US dollar similar to that of the ruble, households with family members working abroad face a worsening of their living standard that might even push some into poverty due to the decrease

**Fig. 2. Remittances to Central Asian countries from Russia, 2014-2015 (million USD)**

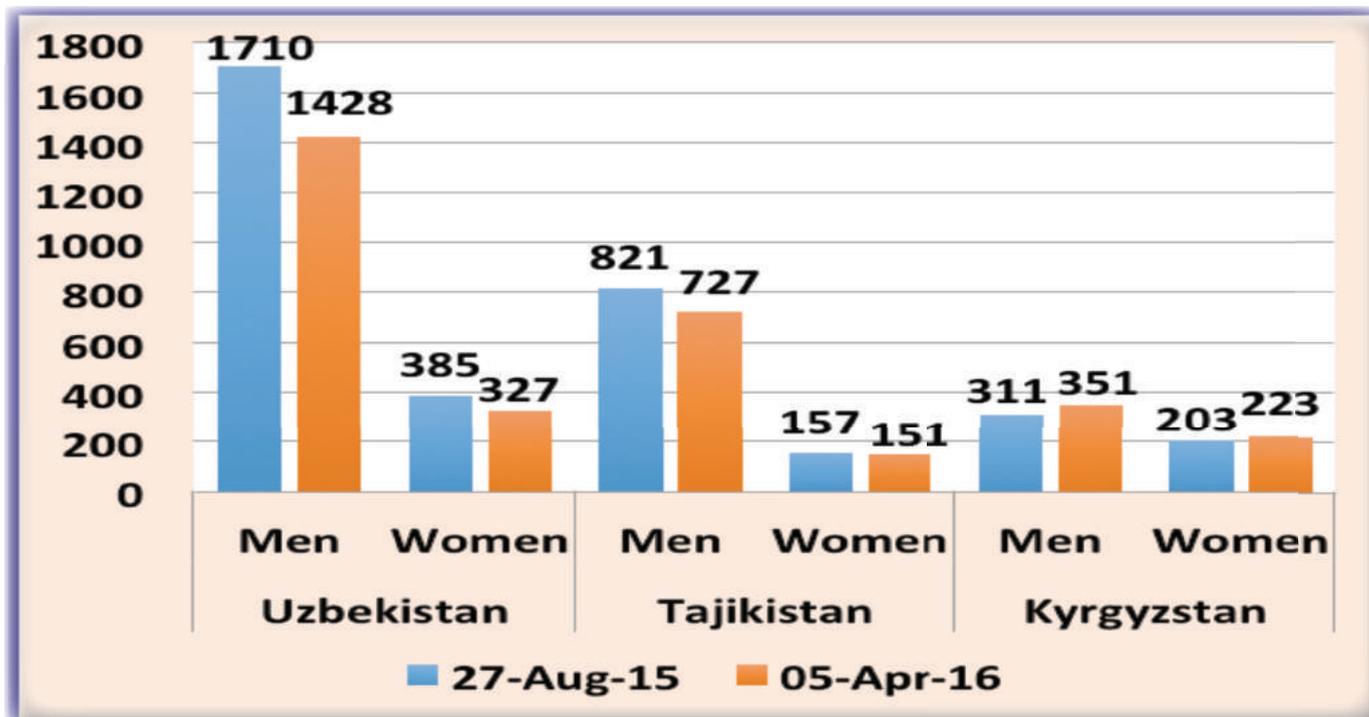


Source: Central Bank of the Russian Federation, available at [http://www.cbr.ru/statistics/CrossBorder/C-b\\_trans\\_countries\\_15.xlsx](http://www.cbr.ru/statistics/CrossBorder/C-b_trans_countries_15.xlsx); [http://www.cbr.ru/statistics/print.aspx?file=CrossBorder/C-b\\_trans\\_countries\\_14.htm](http://www.cbr.ru/statistics/print.aspx?file=CrossBorder/C-b_trans_countries_14.htm)

in money transfers. This issue is further exacerbated by a shortage of provisions to accommodate returned migrants' needs and further their potentials.

Analysis of the dynamics of Central Asian migration to Russia suggests that the economic crisis and re-entry bans induced a change in the gender composition of labour migration flows. (Fig. 3) Between August 2015 and April 2016, the number of Uzbek men registering their residence in Russia dropped by around 290,000, and nearly 100,000 fewer Tajik men migrated to Russia over that period. The decline among Uzbek women was less pronounced while it was minimal among Tajik women. While both the Uzbek and Tajik labour migration to Russia consists mainly of men, these changes may point to certain shifts in the strategies of migrant households, which can no longer rely on the steady and sufficient source of income in the form of remittances sent by man alone.

Fig. 3. Gender distribution of Central Asian migration to Russia, 2015-2016



Source: Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, available at: [https://zen.mvd.pf/about/activity/stats/Statistics/Svedeniya\\_v\\_otnoshenii\\_inostrannih\\_grazhd/item/5850/](https://zen.mvd.pf/about/activity/stats/Statistics/Svedeniya_v_otnoshenii_inostrannih_grazhd/item/5850/)

## 1.2 INTEGRATION OF RETURNING MIGRANTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

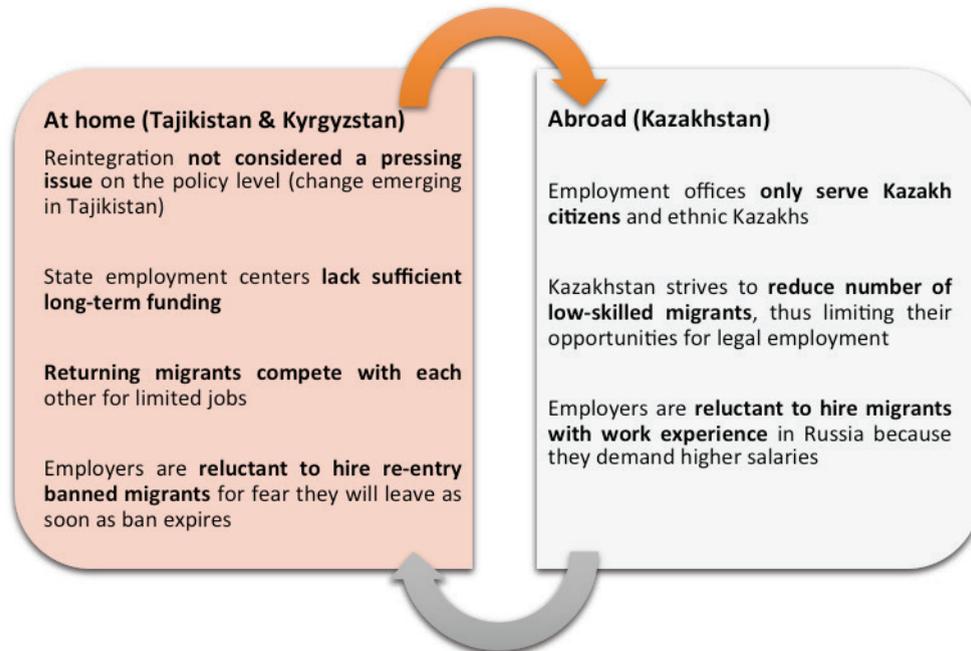
The impact assessment of the re-entry bans on Central Asian migrants’ welfare, review of the measures facilitating their integration in home and transit countries as well as links between vulnerabilities and potential for radicalization have been conducted with reference to legal and strategic documents, existing surveys and studies as well as interviews carried out by the IOM expert team with 55 officials and 36 experts in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, national statistics were received from state authorities through IOM’s official request. This section presents general regional trends with regard to the challenges and opportunities for the integration of returning migrants. The legal and institutional developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are treated in respective sections of the country reports below.

According to the data of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, a total of 1,607,000 re-entry bans were issued between 2013 and 2015 and as many as 513,300 foreigners were expelled from Russia in that period. At the beginning of 2016 the total number of persons subject to the ban reached 1,650,000. An overwhelming majority of those affected have been citizens of Central Asian states – an estimated 1,000,000 Uzbeks, 330,000 Tajiks and 108,000 Kyrgyz citizens. Moreover, it is estimated that around 2,200,000 persons are at risk of falling under the ban while crossing Russia’s border. Since by most accounts the majority of re-entry banned migrants chose to stay in Russia, the primary challenge is to protect their rights and cater to their vulnerabilities in the workplace, vis-à-vis the authorities and the host community.

A major issue with regard to the protection of re-entry banned migrants’ rights is the fact that especially in the initial period of application of the bans, many were unaware of being subject to them. The grounds could involve failure to comply with administrative procedures (late residence registration or receipt of work permits and submission of in-

<sup>3</sup> Respondents were selected from among representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Economy and Finance, Migration Police/Service, Border Guards, Prosecutor’s Offices, Agencies for Religious Affairs, Regional Employment Centers as well as officials at the Presidential Administration, the Parliamentary Committees, the Ombudsman’s Office and the National Bank. Experts dealt with either the socio-economic impact of migration or the link between migration and radicalization.

Fig. 4. Barriers to integration of re-entry banned migrants



Source: IOM interviews with state officials and experts, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, February-June 2016

correct documents), often due to the negligence or fault of an intermediary. Thus, the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sought in the first place to minimize the impact of re-entry bans by reducing the duration of the sanction for a significant part of its nationals. Through bilateral agreements, the number of Kyrgyz re-entry banned migrants was lowered by 39% by April 2016 while as many as 103,440 Tajik migrants saw their ban term expire in 2016 (in 2014 about 10,000 expired; in 2015 about 22,000 expired). Nevertheless, the number of the persons subject to the bans is not likely to drop significantly as new bans continue being issued to Central Asian migrants and both officials and experts expect a more restrictive turn of the Russian migration policy in the coming years.

Re-entry bans have a seriously disruptive character, reducing migrants' ability to deploy their usual strategies of coping with their precarious legal, economic and social status. Interviews with experts and interviews and focus groups with returning migrants confirm that the re-entry banned persons face primarily the challenge of re-establishing their economic standing, on which their community status and self-esteem are directly dependent. As Fig. 4 summarizes, this often proves difficult as migrants need to compete for scarce jobs. Although some successful precedents exist for integration programmes (e.g. work with returning ethnic compatriots) and local NGO initiatives have provided information on migrants' rights and employment opportunities, systemic solutions have not been put in place. The issues range from absence of dedicated definitions and mechanisms through insufficient or lacking funding to low awareness among migrants.

Both the review of legislation and strategic documents and interviews with experts, officials and migrants confirm that returning migrants have so far not been the target of dedicated measures, which appear to be necessary given that this group faces re-integration difficulties on the legal, administrative and economic levels. This is an especially urgent issue in the new destinations selected by the returnees (such as industrial centers of Kazakhstan but also the urban centers of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) where there has been little experience of active integration measures for newcomers. Both the interviews with experts and sociological findings testify to the crucial role played by ethnic diasporas, which offer a variety of services—ranging from economic assistance through legal counseling to psychological and cultural support. Some of the successful initiatives, launched by governments of migrant-sending countries, have involved ethnic diasporas in providing migrants with legal information and running cultural activities. Nevertheless, the respondents admit that effective management of return migration and protection of migrants' rights requires elaboration of dedicated policies in this field and sustained state support.

### 1.3 RADICALIZATION, PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Interviews with experts and officials who work on preventing and countering radicalization as well as sociological research carried out among returning Central Asian migrants (especially re-entry banned ones) reveal a complex relation between migration and radicalization. The findings suggest that the link between labour migration and radicalization is not direct, but rather presupposes the co-existence of several vulnerability factors: deterioration of economic status and a resulting diminished sense of self-worth accompanied by the alienation from both state institutions and from the own community. While it has not been shown that migration is in itself sufficient to account for cases of radicalization of migrants, the study points to the impact of the economic downturn, the presence of radical messages in religious communities in both the country of destination and origin and the sense of social injustice and desperation, felt by certain migrants when faced with the loss of legal status and an uncertain economic future.

While migrant workers as a group have not been shown to be particularly prone to radicalization, they share certain broader socioeconomic vulnerabilities that affect population segments in Central Asia. Interviewed experts in the field of radicalization suggest that migrants might become more receptive to ideological messages that are actively disseminated by extremist organizations and preachers when they display a combination of economic and social vulnerabilities (Fig. 5). They indicate that ideological arguments become activated only when they resonate with the target audience's existing concerns. This may happen when the deteriorating personal and household well-being is associated with the perception of social injustice and a sense of inability to improve this situation.

**Fig. 5. Long-term grounds for radicalization in Central Asia**



Source: “Returning Central Asian Migrants: Between Radicalization and Re-integration” IOM Central Asia Rapid Field Assessment in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan - interviews with experts, August 2015; interviews with officials and experts in Tajikistan, June 2016

Interviewed experts stress that radicalization potential is highest when objective (socioeconomic) and subjective (psychological) factors act jointly on an individual who has no recourse to external sources of support (alienation from both the state and community). (Fig. 6). They point out that the personal perception of the situation as below one's expectation (relative deprivation) and failure to deal with the deteriorated welfare are more likely to fuel radicalization than actual poverty, which is accepted as a constant fact of a migrant's existence. Thus, self-assessment of the socioeconomic position is considered to be the crucial element of the radicalization process. However, as confirmed by the sociological fieldwork, of equal importance is the migrant's relation to the larger environment (both the formal institutions and his or her informal support network). In the higher-risk scenario, the migrant is alienated both from the state institutions and from the community (diaspora and/or home community).

**Fig. 6. Linking migrants' vulnerabilities and radicalization potential**

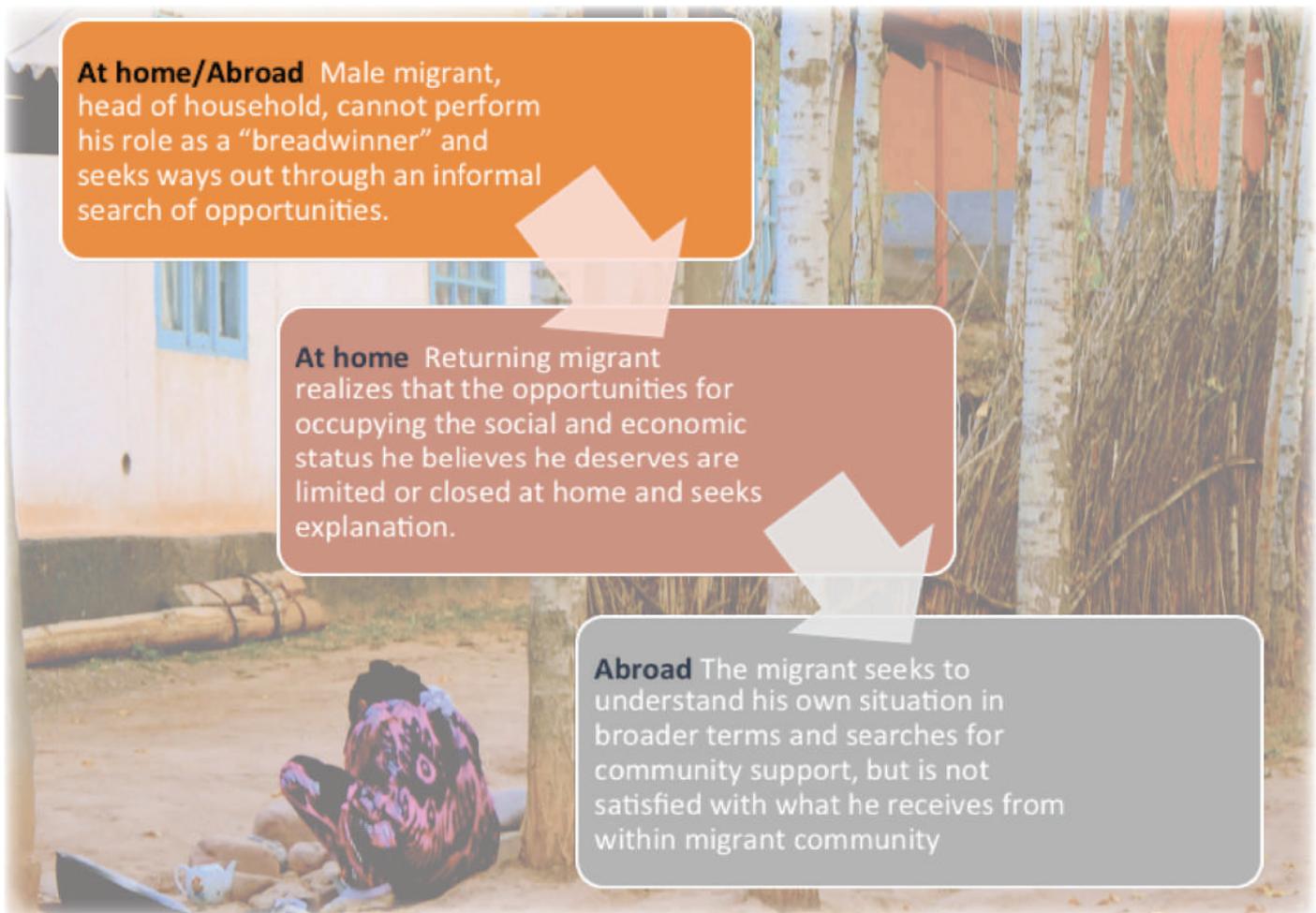


*Source: IOM Central Asia assessment team analysis February-May 2016*

Experts note that radicalization is a process that can occur at various stages of migration. They point to a crucial role played by intermediaries who either enjoy or win trust of migrants and provide a safe environment for disseminating radical ideas. Intermediaries who may be former migrants offer help out of the financial difficulties, promising aid, including facilitating trips to third countries. Those migrants who upon return home cannot locate adequate employment or otherwise are not able to support their families may then experience a sense of socio-economic and political injustice. These sentiments may then be channeled through radical interpretation of religious texts, in which authorities are viewed as hostile or uncooperative. Those migrants who become alienated from state institutions and from the community are then being tracked and given an ideological “final push”, which induces them to leave for Syria or Iraq or to join radical groups. The following diagram presents some scenarios of the process of radicalization, taking place at different stages of migration.

Interviewed experts and officials do not believe that so far the potential for radicalization among Central Asian migrant workers and their households has exceeded that of other social groups. They point out to such strong deterrents as the primacy of supporting households among married men who account for the vast majority of Uzbek and Tajik migrant workers, and the social stigma associated with failure to deliver as breadwinners. Until the onset of the current economic downturn and broad application of sanctions, these migrants clearly felt accountable to the family and community. However, they warn that two scenarios could be contemplated that could change that situation. Firstly, the sense of individual frustration with limited advancement or actual deterioration of economic standing could be

Fig. 7. Scenarios of migrant vulnerabilities at various stages



Source: IOM interviews with experts and government officials, Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan, April-June 2016

coupled with the loss of legal status and resulting shame, inducing the migrant to seek assistance from outside their own ethnic or professional community. Secondly, the sense of frustration could grip an entire migrant community and be translated into a broader perception of discrimination or even hostility from the host society. This social perception could then be given a more solid shape in the form of religious messages, in which the current socioeconomic reality could be explained through a radical interpretation of religious ideas.

Experts recognize that two general approaches have been deployed in the region to deal with the threat of radicalization. The security approach seeks to minimize the threat by eliminating the agents of radicalization (extremist groups) and concentrates on the ideological sources of the process. In that framework, the key role is played by the law enforcement agencies that seek to counter the spread of ideological messages and isolate both the agents and the intermediaries. In turn, the integration approach, applied primarily by agencies on religious issues as well as employment and social service institutions addresses the broader socioeconomic vulnerabilities, which often serve as the ground for the spread of radical messages among social groups, such as, for instance, migrant workers. The integration approach targets primarily the potential adherents of radical ideologies as well as the larger communities in which they live through identifying and responding to genuine economic needs and resulting societal frustrations. A number of experts come to the conclusion that effective work on countering violent extremism (CVE) requires going beyond the security approach and that more prominence needs to be given to the integration approach as complementary to security measures. This involves first of all activities aiming at preventing violent extremism (PVE), including long-term engagement with the vulnerable migrants, their families and home communities. Experts note the priority of countering radical messages through religious education, disseminating knowledge of traditional beliefs and values and raising awareness of extremists’ recruitment techniques. They also point to the crucial role that women play in transmitting values and shaping opinions, which might be powerful deterrents to radicalization.

# 2. COUNTRY FINDINGS

## 2.1 KAZAKHSTAN

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### 2.1.1 TRENDS AND IMPACT

Kazakhstan's migration profile differs significantly from that of its Central Asian neighbours. Steady economic growth has turned Kazakhstan into predominantly a country of transit and immigration that attracts skilled workers from various countries and, increasingly, becomes a destination for low-skilled migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Close to 950,000 citizens of these three countries have temporarily resided in Kazakhstan in 2015, up from ca. 500,000 in 2011. Uzbek citizens are by far the largest group, which disposes of the strongest migrant networks due to kin ties along the Uzbek-Kazakh border. From 2014 to 2015, Uzbek migration has increased from 530,683 to 797,982 individual migrants, which accounts for the largest part of the overall increase in migration to Kazakhstan (Table 1). Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens migrate in lesser numbers to Kazakhstan, although more pronounced migration flows from these two countries have been noted as well over the past two years.

**Table 1. Registered Central Asian temporary residents in Kazakhstan, 2011-15**

Country of Origin	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Uzbekistan	404,468	431,919	495,167	530,683	797,982
Kyrgyzstan	93,848	103,001	93,127	94,313	114,385
Tajikistan	10,915	10,193	12,917	18,463	33,036
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>509,231</b>	<b>545,113</b>	<b>601,211</b>	<b>643,459</b>	<b>945,403</b>

Source: State Migration Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan May 2016

This trend coincides with the onset of the economic downturn in Russia and the beginning of the imposition of re-entry bans, leading to the hypothesis that Central Asian migrants who cannot return to Russia for economic or legal reasons are now striving to enter Kazakhstan instead. Although no statistics on the number of migrants banned from re-entering Russia currently working in Kazakhstan exist, our research could confirm the hypothesis that many Central Asian migrants are either seeking out Kazakhstan as an alternative destination country or decide to remain in Kazakhstan upon being denied entry at the Russian-Kazakh land border.

Low oil prices and the Kazakh tenge's devaluation have taken a toll on the Kazakh economy, making it more difficult for migrants to send home savings. According to data from the National bank of Kazakhstan, between 2014 and 2015 remittances from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan fell by 15% (from 73.82 to 62.32 million USD), while remittances to Uzbekistan decreased by 17% (from 191.87 to 159.10 million USD). In contrast, private money transfers to Tajikistan increased from 11.87 million USD to 15.74 million USD over the same time span, most likely due to the strong increase in migration from Tajikistan to Kazakhstan that almost doubled from 2014 to 2015. In addition to the negative effects of the economic downturn, Kazakhstan is set to introduce changes to its migration law that is going to restrict employment opportunities for low-skilled migrant workers. These developments will likely make it more difficult for many Central

Asian migrant workers who are banned from re-entering Russia to find legal work in Kazakhstan. The increasing number of expulsion orders issued to Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens (from 2101 expulsions in 2014 to 8741 in 2015) shows that Kazakh officials are taking the issue of irregular migration seriously and are willing to protect the national labour market through prioritizing employment of their own citizens.

Kazakhstan's economic development, however, will in the long run increase the demand for both low- and high-skilled foreign labour. Growing migration numbers despite the economic downturn demonstrate that employers see a need for labour that the domestic workforce cannot fulfil. Return migration to Kazakhstan remains relatively low, with fewer than 1,000 Kazakh citizens returning to the country for permanent residence in 2015. Emigration of Kazakh citizens for permanent residence abroad remains significantly higher, numbering 33,468 in 2015 (86% of these emigrants left for Russia).

In light of these developments, it remains likely that the trend of increasing migration from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Kazakhstan will continue, especially if the Russian economy continues to stagnate while immigration regulations become more restrictive.

### **2.1.2 REINTEGRATION AND INTEGRATION**

The economic situation, which manifested itself in the contraction of the GDP growth to a mere 0.1% in 2015, has had serious implications for the management of Kazakhstan's labour market. 2015 was the first year when unemployment rates no longer declined even though the number of registered vacancies rose from 185,000 to 287,000 compared to 2014. Although the interest in work in Kazakhstan has been on the rise among Uzbeks and Tajiks in particular, the economic downturn and the persisting unemployment of 444,000 own citizens have led to increased controls on foreign work in the country to ensure that irregular employment is reduced. The application of a more restrictive approach has resulted in the increase of the number of citizens of neighbouring Central Asian countries subject to administrative sanctions (up from 64,366 in 2014 to 78,451 in 2015) and expulsions (fourfold increase from 2101 to 8741 cases between 2014 and 2015).

Minimizing the negative impact of migration flows on the national economy and attracting migrant workers with qualifications and skills in demand have been among the long-standing principles of Kazakhstan's migration policy, as formulated in the national migration policy concept as well as basic legal acts, regulating the conditions of non-nationals' access to the domestic labour market. In recent years a number of instruments have been introduced to improve the management of foreign employment. Since January 2014 physical persons may hire foreigners for rendering domestic services but under new rules elaborated in 2016, the patents will be issued within a quota determined by local administration.

The interplay of economic (declining real wages) and administrative factors (more restrictive conditions of residence and employment) had the strongest impact on the group of migrant workers from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan who have been banned from re-entering Russia and either got stranded in Kazakhstan on the way back home or chose the country as an alternative destination for the duration of the Russian ban. While the size of this vulnerable group is not known, the mechanisms of their vulnerability are familiar to officials, experts and practitioners. Unaware of the legal requirements, stranded returnees have at times failed to register their residence within the allotted 5-day period. In turn, while the Uzbek migrants may rely on their extensive and well-established networks, the Tajiks have often lacked such support in the new destination.

Kyrgyzstan's accession to EEU has not removed all the barriers to their effective integration in Kazakhstan. This is attributed firstly to insufficient awareness of the new procedures among both migrants and their employers. Secondly, to be effective, the guarantees of equal access for Kyrgyz nationals to the labour market and to associated social rights need to be further elaborated in the Kazakhstani national legislation and in bilateral agreements.

A review of the conditions for integration of migrant workers in Kazakhstan has established barriers of legal, administrative and sociocultural types. On the legal plane, several key ILO conventions on labour migration as well as a range of technical conventions, regulating various types of labour (domestic work), remain to be ratified<sup>4</sup>. Some of the guarantees, e.g. legal counsel, cannot be easily used by migrant workers due to a lack of state assistance in this regard (free dedicated services). With regard to the administrative procedures, the State Labour Inspection lacks sufficient competence to undertake unannounced checks on the contractual terms and actual conditions of migrants' employment. Finally, most migrant workers do not seek assistance from either state institutions or local NGOs, preferring to take advantage of their own ethnic support networks. This is a symptom of low sociocultural integration, which is on the one hand a result of poor accessibility and scope of services offered by various providers (see below) and the lack of trust between migrants and the host community (see sociological findings).

Apart from the restrictive terms for legalizing one's status, other issues limiting the opportunities for the socioeconomic integration of Central Asian migrants in Kazakhstan are the accessibility and scope of services offered by various providers (Table 2). Neither the non-governmental organizations nor private employment agencies, which serve as important intermediaries between the migrants and the authorities and employers, are sufficiently accessible on account of either limited own funds (NGOs) or cost to the migrants (agencies). These shortcomings have frequently been addressed through the involvement of ethnic diasporas, which enjoy migrants' trust and have been successful in maintaining close informal ties with them.

**Table 2. Providers of integration services to migrants in Kazakhstan**

<b>Providers of integration services</b>	<b>Services</b>	<b>Accessibility</b>
<b>Migration Police</b>	- Provision of documents - Provision of information on other integration opportunities	Highly accessible due to its special authority to issue documents to migrants
<b>NGO</b>	- Provision of information on integration opportunities - Legal advice - Mediation between migrants and other providers	Moderately accessible depending on available special projects run from time to time and means of information (leaflets, stands)
<b>Private Employment Agency</b>	- Search for vacancies - Mediation between migrants and employers or migration police	Low degree of accessibility as migrants lack funds to pay for agency's services
<b>Ethnic Diaspora</b>	- Facilitation of return to homeland - Facilitation of employment through informal channels - Provision of information on integration opportunities	Highly accessible due to information being disseminated through informal networks and high level of mutual trust

*Source: IOM interviews with Government officials and NGOs, Kazakhstan, April-June 2016*

4 See e.g. Conventions No. 97 (Migration for Employment) and 143 (Migrant Workers) or 189 (Domestic Workers Convention).

## 2.2 KYRGYZSTAN

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### 2.2.1 TRENDS AND IMPACT

Labour migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia and Kazakhstan continues to play an important role for the country's economic development and the livelihoods of many households with one or more family members in migration, whose remittances are often the main source of income in rural regions with high poverty rates. As of June 2016, more than 750,000 Kyrgyz citizens were living and working abroad, the vast majority in Russia (563,000) and Kazakhstan (111,000). The ongoing regional economic downturn so far had little effect on migration levels from the Kyrgyz Republic. The number of Kyrgyz migrants in Russia remains stable, and even shows a 5%-increase from 2015 to 2016. Migration from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan has increased as well, rising from 94,313 Kyrgyz citizens temporarily registered in Kazakhstan in 2014 to 114,385 in the following year. Women play a particularly important role in Kyrgyz migration: female migrant workers make up close to 40% of the entire Kyrgyz migrant population in Russia.

Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in August 2015 is likely to be a decisive factor for ongoing migration trends despite the economic slowdown in the two main destination countries for Kyrgyz migrants. Simplified employment procedures within the EEU exempt Kyrgyz migrants from quota requirements and the obligation to obtain a work permit for employment in Russia and Kazakhstan. Strong migrant networks and the presence of Kyrgyz diasporas in these countries further contribute to the continuing trend of outbound migration from Kyrgyzstan.

Stable migration levels, however, did not spare the Kyrgyz economy and migrants' households from the negative effects of decreasing remittances. According to data from the Central Bank of Russia, remittances fell from 2.03 billion USD in 2014 to 1.08 billion USD in 2015, a sharp decline of 47%. The Kazakh National Bank's statistics on personal transfers from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan show a similar trend, with money transfers dropping from 73.82 million USD in 2014 to 62.63 million USD in 2015. Much of this decrease, however, is due to the Russian ruble's and the Kazakhstani tenge's depreciation against the dollar. In relative terms, remittances as a share of GDP in Kyrgyzstan have remained stable at 25.6% in 2015 (compared to 26.8% in 2014).

The effects of the regional economic slowdown have been felt most strongly by those Kyrgyz migrant workers who became subject to re-entry bans in Russia ranging from three to five years. Because wage levels in Russia remain higher than in Kyrgyzstan and because returning migrants face difficulties re-integrating into the local labour market, receiving a re-entry ban can threaten the livelihood of migrants and their families. Through bilateral agreements with Russia, the Kyrgyz government successfully managed to lift the ban of 76,000 Kyrgyz citizens in February 2016, leading to a decrease of the total number from 194,000 to 118,000 re-entry banned migrant workers. This agreement, however, did not exempt Kyrgyz citizens from being subject to the ban, and at the end of the first quarter of 2016 the total number increased slightly to 119,000.

The lack of statistics on return migration of seasonal migrants makes it difficult to draw conclusion about the socio-economic situation of returnees. The increasing diversification of Kyrgyz migrant workers' countries of destination, with 111,000 Kyrgyz citizens working in Kazakhstan, 14,000 in South Korea and 8,000 in Turkey, can be seen as a reaction to the economic decline in Russia and remaining hurdles of Kyrgyz citizens' access to the Russian labour market like the re-entry bans.

Continued large-scale migration has a particularly strong impact on the welfare of the more disadvantaged regions of the country. The regions of Batken, Jalal-Abad and Osh, which are characterized by the lowest gross regional product (25,300; 36,400 and 36,900 som respectively compared to 146,800 som in the capital city) and high levels of unemployment, are also major areas of origin of migrant workers (Table 3). Considering the limited opportunities for employment (either in quantitative or qualitative terms) that these regions currently offer, experts and officials do not expect major return flow of migrants to these locations.

**Table 3. External migration and unemployment rate in regions of Kyrgyzstan**

Region	External migration (November 2014–October 2015)			Registered unemployed	
	People arriving	People departing	Migration inflow, outflow (-)	Number of registered unemployed	Share of registered unemployed in Kyrgyzstan
Jalal-Abad Region	911	2,478	-1,567	12,438	21.94%
Osh Region	1,672	1,755	-83	11,463	20.22%
City of Bishkek	7,575	2,914	4,661	6,648	11.72%
Batken Region	904	1,655	-751	6,206	10.94%
Naryn Region	1,338	2,703	-1,365	5,590	9.86%
Chuy Region	5,977	3,078	2,899	5,509	9.72%
Issyk-Kul Region	1,022	2,299	-1,277	4,433	7.82%
Talas Region	389	1,311	-922	2,263	3.99%
City of Osh	1,963	3,389	-1,426	2,153	3.80%

Source: State Migration Service of the KR. Unified Report on Migration in the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek, 2015

## 2.2.2 MITIGATING MEASURES AND REINTEGRATION

In view of the continued labour migration out of the country, the key objective of national migration services has been to protect the rights of Kyrgyz citizens abroad and seek to minimize the impact of re-entry bans. Kyrgyzstan's accession to the EEU was widely expected to be a major step toward improving the position of Kyrgyz migrant workers in Russia. However, the outcome is mixed. On the one hand, under new conditions legally employed Kyrgyz nationals are put on a more solid footing (extension of the registration-free period to 30 days, ability to conclude another work contract in case of termination of previous employment and a range of social guarantees). On the other hand, interviews with experts, officials and migrants reveal that a substantial part of the workers are still employed irregularly as the onset of the economic downturn induced Russian employers to cut costs. A survey, carried out by the State Migration Service of KR between 15 August and 15 September 2015, revealed that in the conditions of reduced income, Kyrgyz migrants in Russia actually feel more vulnerable to such threats as insufficient awareness of their rights, regular police raids and ID checks as well as difficulties in securing registration and delayed wage payments. The Ombudsman reports that Kyr-

gyz nationals working abroad turn to his office in connection with issues regarding employment, personal documents, rights of migrants' children, "black list", illegal detention, slavery and human trafficking. To address these issues, the Ombudsman's office intends to post its staff in the Russian Federation. The State Migration Service considers providing information and legal assistance in the destination country through opening its representative office as according to its officials only a fraction of migrants bound for a foreign country seek advice of the Service prior to departure.

At the same time, the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the EEU provided a framework for removing a significant part of Kyrgyz migrants from the "black list" and reducing the negative impact of the sanctions. In July 2015 the Russian Federation allowed the re-entry of Kyrgyz nationals banned for three years provided their ban expired in less than 18 months. The grace period that lasted until 1 November 2015 was applicable to over 174,000 Kyrgyz migrants in Russia although data on the actual number of those who made use of the scheme are not available. Nevertheless, the bilateral agreement did not establish a permanent mechanism for terminating the bans, and each new round of amnesties requires re-launching negotiations.

National legislation does not feature "return migrants" as a separate category, but the Laws on External Migration and Internal Migration declare equal access to rights as citizens residing in the country. Although legislation places responsibility for aiding returnees on several state agencies, strategic documents on development and migration management fail to specify dedicated re-integration objectives and measures<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, these documents and key legislative acts contain norms that could form the basis for developing such programmes. Although reintegration of returning nationals is not among the legally specified competencies of the State Migration Service, a representative of the Service expressed interest in undertaking activities in this field on behalf of this institution. An essential step towards a more effective management of migration flows is the creation of a unified system for tracking external migration (ECYBM), which has been under development since 2014.

Migrants who return to Kyrgyzstan from abroad are likely to encounter integration problems similar to those experienced by internal migrants. Interviews with officials suggest that both categories have used available public services to a limited extent due to difficulties in securing residence registration and to low awareness of rights and of employment opportunities. Considering the growth of return migration (as a result of either the re-entry bans or the impact of uncertain economic situation), state activities in job creation need to be intensified – in 2015, out of the total 463,000 recipients of unemployment benefits, around 12,500 persons were provided with jobs and 6,200 undertook public work.

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5 National Sustainable Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2013-2017, Program of Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic and Program of Facilitating Employment of the Population and of Regulating External Labour Migration until 2020.

## 2.3 TAJIKISTAN

### 2.3.1 TRENDS AND IMPACT

Among the countries that were studied in this report, Tajikistan was affected the most by the economic downturn in Russia and the tightening of migration regulations. Given the long history of Tajik migration to Russia that started in the 1990s and led to the establishment of widespread migrant networks and diasporas in the Russian Federation, seasonal labour migration has become one of the sources of income of mainly rural Tajik households. This strong reliance on labour migration that made Tajikistan the most remittance-dependent country in the world has come under strain following the regional economic slowdown and the decreasing demand for foreign low-skilled labour in Russia. Migration statistics reflect this trend, with the number of Tajik migrants registered in the Russian Federation dropping from 1,034,000 in March 2014 to 963,000 in March 2015 to 879,000 in April 2016.

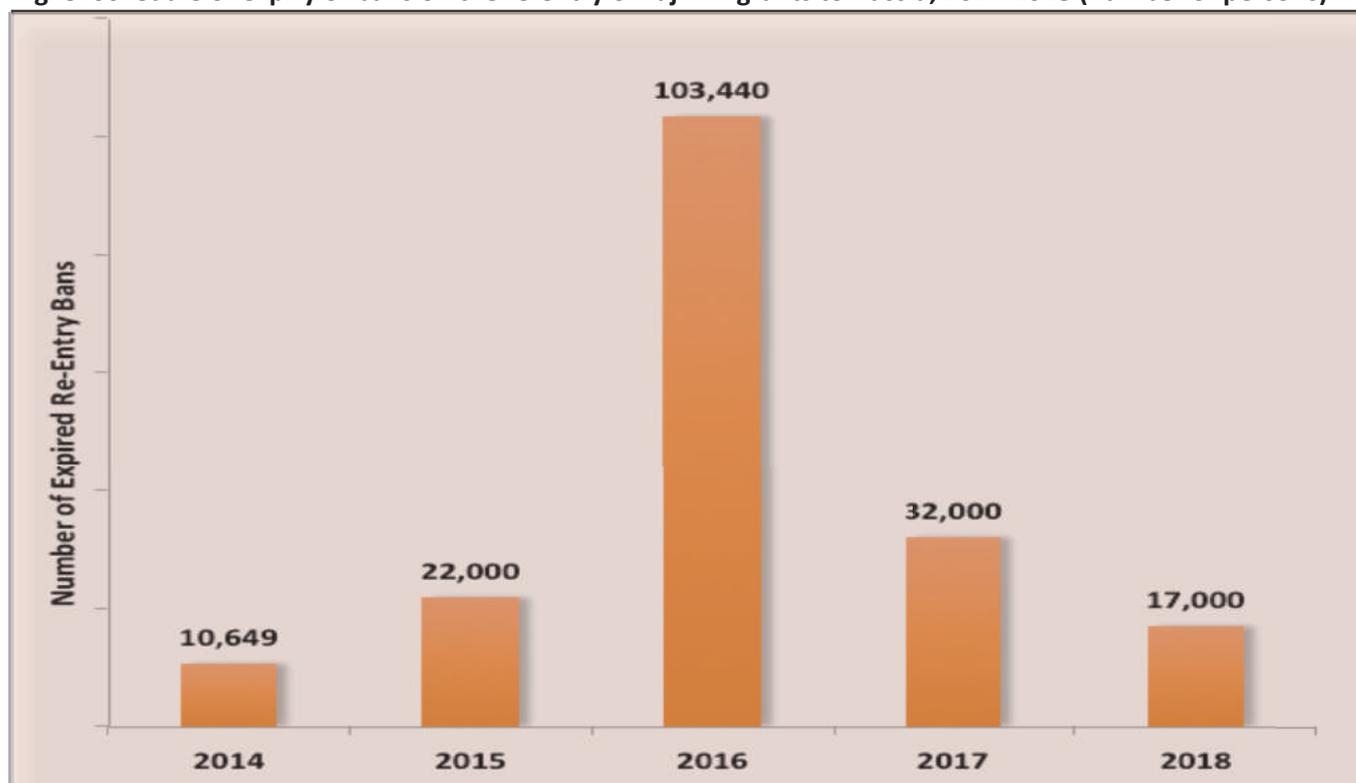
This decrease of 15% over a timespan of two years remains moderate compared to the steep decline observed among Uzbek migrants (exceeding 25%), which shows the resilience of Tajik migrant workers in the face of the economic downturn. At the same time, lack of alternatives has induced the vast majority of the Tajik migrants to continue to stay or seek to re-enter the Russian Federation, and the scale of movement has actually risen among women who either join or replace men in migration. Relatively few choose third destinations, such as Kazakhstan, which is increasingly becoming an alternative destination for Central Asian migrant workers who are banned from re-entering Russia. A lack of substantial migrant networks reduces interest in this destination. As a result, the relatively small outflow to Kazakhstan cannot make up for the loss of income by Tajiks who are unable to maintain seasonal migration to Russia due to a re-entry ban or a lack of jobs.

Migrant remittances to Tajikistan have accordingly also taken a hit. Money transfers from the Russian Federation have declined, falling in the wake of the ruble's devaluation by 66% from a pre-crisis level of 3.8 billion USD to 1.28 billion USD in 2015 according to data of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation. Although the impact is less severe due to the parallel loss in value of Tajikistan's national currency, the somoni, remittances as a percentage of GDP have dropped from 49.6% in 2013 to 32.1% in 2015. Despite continuing GDP growth that is set to rise further in 2016, many households face a decrease of their disposable income and thus their standard of living due to the decrease in money transfers from migrant workers abroad.

Loss in revenue is particularly strongly felt by Tajik re-entry banned migrants. According to the Russian Federal Migration Service, at the end of 2015 over 330,000 Tajik citizens were under the ban and were forbidden to enter Russia for a period lasting from three to five years. A large share of these bans are set to expire during 2016 (more than 100,000 according to the Tajik Ministry of Labour's estimates): between January 1, 2016 and April 1, 2016, the total number of Tajik citizens banned from re-entering Russia decreased by 2,719 — less than 1% of all banned migrant workers.

The Tajik Migration Service's statistics show that only a small share of all banned migrants return home upon receiving a ban. Only 36,000 returnees registered with the state institution, which can lead one to assume that the majority of Tajik migrants with re-entry bans is remaining in Russia irregularly to wait out the expiration of their ban. The economic difficulties of returned migrants might explain the reluctance to return home. A mere 10% of re-entry banned Tajik migrants are registered as employed in their region of origin. Low wages and the deficit of permanent jobs remain a major obstacle to the reintegration of returned Tajik migrant workers.

Fig. 8. Schedule of expiry of bans on the re-entry of Tajik migrants to Russia, 2014-2018 (number of persons)



Source: Migration Service of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Republic of Tajikistan, April 2016

### 2.3.2 MITIGATING MEASURES AND REINTEGRATION

Tajikistan remains outside the Eurasian Economic Union while being a country of origin of a large diaspora in Russia. This position has made it imperative to seek protection of Tajik migrant workers through bilateral arrangements as well as through close collaboration with the diaspora. Under the terms of the Agreement between Tajikistan and Russia, Tajik nationals are exempt from the registration requirement for stays less than 15 days long while according to the Protocol to the Agreement they may be issued work permits for a period of up to three years. Work continues on an additional four bilateral agreements, including on cooperation in labour migration and social security as well as organized recruitment of migrant workers. Tajik authorities are also seeking to prolong the period of application for patents up to 90 days and the standard duration of work permits for up to three years. To facilitate the re-entry into Russia, the joint Tajik-Russian expert group receives applications from certain categories of migrants whose ban expires in less than 18 months and who have a clean criminal record. Besides, five categories of citizens were defined for those who may qualify for a lifting of their ban. By the end of 2015, over 5,000 applicants had been granted permission to re-enter Russia under this procedure. Кроме того, определены 5 категорий граждан Республики Таджикистан, применительно к которым могут быть отменены данные запреты.

A crucial component in protecting Tajik migrant workers' rights has been the legal assistance and provision of information, carried out by the representative office of the Tajik Ministry of Labour in the Russian Federation. Good practices include reclaiming migrants' salaries from their employers, contesting unlawful court rulings on various levels and organised employment of migrants, carried out with the support of the Embassy and consular offices of Tajikistan in Russia. The office also cooperates closely with NGOs and Tajik diaspora organizations, running information and awareness-raising campaigns among migrants on the issues of legal stay and labour in the Russian Federation as well as prevention of radicalization of migrant workers. Cooperation with 81 diaspora organizations in Russia has been given a boost through the implementation of the Concept on Engaging Compatriots in the Development of Tajikistan, whose objectives include stimulation of diaspora investment in the national economy and involvement of diaspora organizations in reaching out to migrant workers.

Surveys and interviews with returning migrants indicate that while psychological and sociocultural issues posed problems to a limited number of returnees, economic reintegration proved difficult for the majority. The challenge of securing adequate and stable employment by returning migrant workers has been recognized in the draft National Strategy of Labour Migration of Tajik Citizens for 2016-2020. Key integration issues range from the shortage of vacancies in depressed regions of the country and low wages to limited social assistance. According to a survey, nearly 97% of respondents do not have access to the pension or social security scheme as they either did not contribute to the national fund or their pension capital could not be transferred back home.

Notwithstanding the difficult economic situation, in 2015, over 205,000 jobs were created (9% of which in the public sector). However, the impact on the labour market remains limited as nearly 70% of the new jobs were temporary or seasonal. This may explain the fact that among the 36,292 re-entry banned migrants who returned to the country and registered with the Tajik Migration Service, only 3,692 were officially employed. A major barrier is also the migrants' unfamiliarity with job-creation schemes. Only 21.6% of the surveyed returnees were aware of the existence of state activities in the area of job creation, and only 29.7% of those who knew these programs, made use of them. At the same time, returning migrants proved over time to be more and more capable of securing employment on their own—46.2% of all returnees were employed in Tajikistan in 2015 (compared to 19.1% in 2009).



# 3. Sociological Findings

## 3.1 VULNERABILITIES AND MIGRANT STRATEGIES: REGIONAL FINDINGS

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### 3.1.1 OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The primary objectives of the present sociological assessment are to verify the impact of re-entry bans to the Russian Federation on the strategies of Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek migrant workers, to identify the main types of vulnerabilities to which these migrants are subject, and to consider their main integration needs in the countries of origin and in Kazakhstan, serving as an alternative destination. The assessment team posed the hypothesis that re-entry bans could have serious consequences through creating one of the most vulnerable groups of Central Asian migrant workers in the medium to long term, and that especially in the mid-term of the ban period migrants would undergo a process of social isolation and alienation that would further reduce their resilience or coping ability.

For the purpose of the analysis, three countries have been assessed: Kazakhstan as a transit and alternative country of destination of migrants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as countries of origin and return. Thirteen locations across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were selected with the aid of local NGOs assisting migrants as areas of migrants' origin or transit.<sup>6</sup>

Map 1. Locations of interviews and focus groups with migrants



6 Kazakhstan: Astana, Almaty, Aktau, Petropavlovsk, Shymkent; Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek, Osh; Tajikistan: Dushanbe, Farkhor, Kulyab, Yovan, Qurghonteppa, Tajikobod

To better identify the most vulnerable and isolated groups of migrants, a qualitative approach has been used, employing semi-structured interviews, focus groups and group interviews with the total of 214 respondents (including 62 women). The majority of respondents (135) had been issued a re-entry ban to the Russian Federation between 2012 and 2015, while the remaining number (79) included migrants without a re-entry ban that had vulnerabilities in common with the first group (see below). The respondents identified by the IOM team included seasonal migrants who resided in the Russian Federation for periods ranging from 6 months to 1.5 years, and regularly returning to their country of origin for a period of 1 to 3 months while eventually leaving again. Only a small part of them had stayed in Russia for longer periods of time.

### 3.1.2 TYPES OF VULNERABILITIES

Data collected from the regional field assessment revealed that re-entry banned migrants had been affected by a range of vulnerabilities prior to the imposition of the ban. They fell in three categories: economic, legal and rights-based, and social and network related.

**Rights-based and legal vulnerabilities** consist in migrants' low level of awareness of their human rights, as well as low trust and awareness of the role of State and non-State institutions in providing protection and assistance. These factors increase the risks of falling into irregularity in the host country. Due to limited awareness of relevant legal requirements and procedures, the migrants often fail to comply with them and thus find themselves in a precarious situation, lacking a work permit, a written contract, and in effect are unable to enforce their rights in the workplace (such as limited working time). Additionally, the field assessment revealed that those respondents with little knowledge on how to legalize in the host country often fell prey to dishonest mediators, obtaining forged documents (the migration card or the registration document) or losing both money and identity documents that were taken by employers or mediators. Irregular status had a further effect of alienation, in which instead of turning to authorities, interviewees hid from them for fear of getting punished and as a result would not turn to them for help in redressing their wrongs.

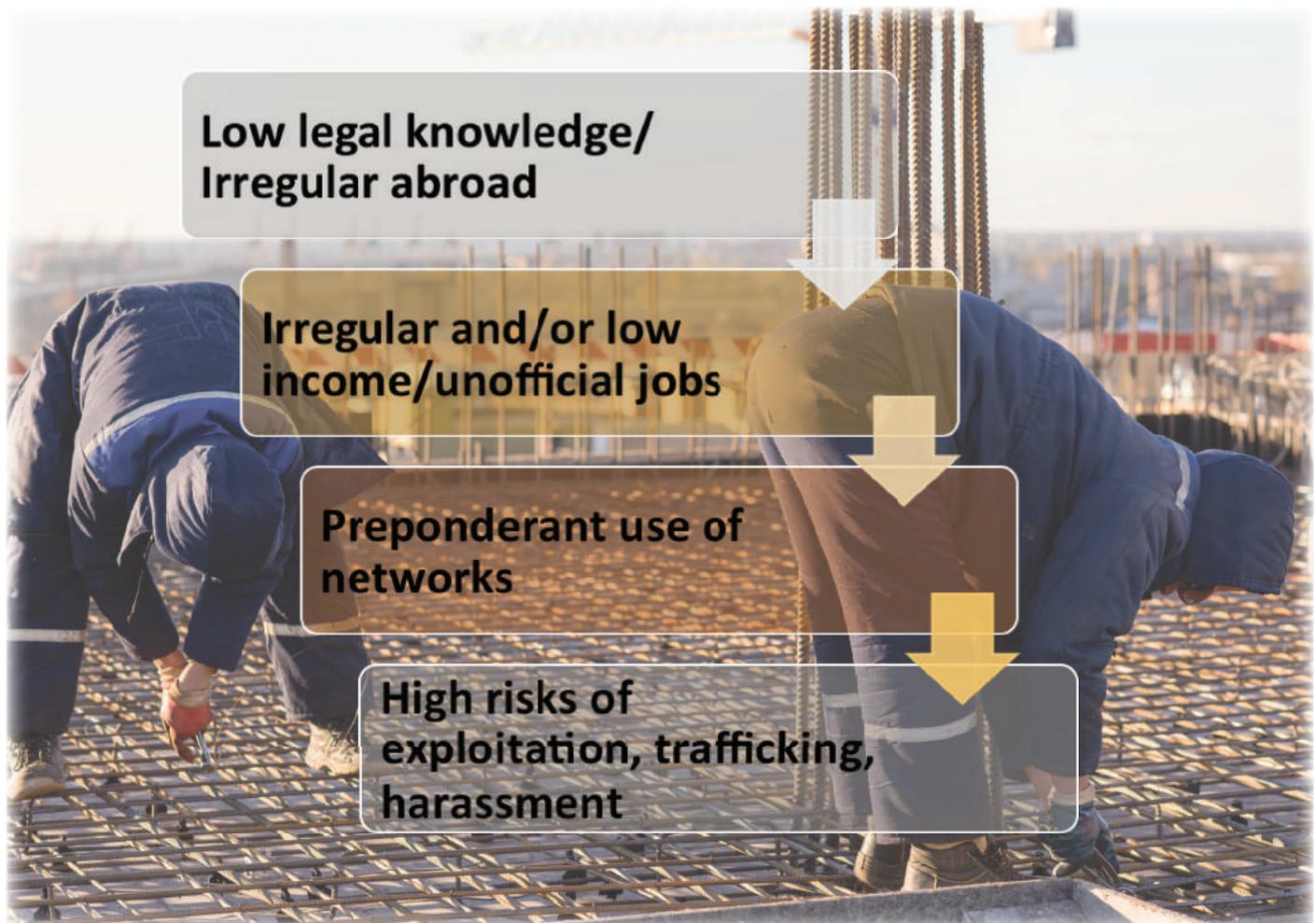
**Economic vulnerabilities** include pre-existing conditions of relative or extreme poverty and limited economic outcomes of labour migration. Findings show that migrants' critical economic situation is not the only reason for leaving but, once abroad, becomes a decisive factor for the migrants' regularization of their status. The shortage of funds discourages migrants from seeking to legalize their status as they find the procedure inaccessible (in particular, some consider it too expensive) and tend to postpone their legalization to a moment of better economic standing. It is worth noting, however, that despite low legalization costs in Kazakhstan, many migrants had neither sufficient knowledge of legalization procedures in Kazakhstan nor awareness of the advantages of residing abroad with regular documents and permissions. In particular, according to interviews, migrants failed to find information while crossing the border or along their route on how and where to legalize, as well as about their rights as migrant workers. Expert interviews with NGO representatives also confirmed that information campaigns in those target areas were able to reach out to migrants, but only for short periods of time, i.e. upon availability of funds.

**Social vulnerabilities** stemmed from the almost exclusive use of informal networks in building strategies to live and work abroad, which reduced migrants' capacity for effective protection. The use of networks was most common among migrants with limited education, coming from poor and underdeveloped areas of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Informal networks were used as the main tool to search for jobs, find accommodation and get information on how to legalize, as well as change jobs in case of conflict or non-payment of salaries from the employer, or build coping mechanisms in case they are cheated or mistreated by mediators, employers, or other migrants, or find themselves in extreme economic needs. However, for the majority of the respondents, networks failed to protect migrants against discrimination, irregularity of status, and vulnerability to exploitation, harassment or trafficking. Those among the respondents who were irregular in the host country could not rely on their extended and consolidated networks in cases of detention, lacking the necessary assistance (legal consultation, proper information). Field interviews also showed that informal networks proved to have limited and temporary effects and could not always guarantee that migrants would get safe jobs with regular salaries or be protected from harassment of police or employers.

Networks had a limited impact on migrants' economic status. Those among them who found themselves in extreme economic needs would make use of networks to raise the money required to return home, or to pay the cures for a sick family member. This kind of use had a one-time character, and migrants rarely addressed the same network again to ask for support. Although informal networks were found to bear a temporary character, they tended to be consolidated and extended over the period of stay abroad. During temporary return to the country of origin, contacts with the members of informal networks were interrupted for short periods of time and resumed soon after a new departure to the country of destination.

Results of interviews and focus groups with migrants established that the various types of vulnerabilities were inter-linked and tended to reinforce one another, leading ultimately to greater susceptibility to exploitation, trafficking and harassment (Fig. 9). These pre-existing vulnerabilities could in turn reduce the resilience of the migrants to the effects of a re-entry ban. As it will be shown below, they tended to see their social and economic situation deteriorate in a short period of time, which in the long run could diminish their ability to react and find alternative plans in order to support their families.

**Fig. 9. Inter-linked vulnerabilities prior to the ban**



*Source: IOM Interviews and focus groups with migrants, Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan, January-June 2016*

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Some groups of migrants seemed to be more prone to the vulnerabilities described above and presented the following characteristics (Fig. 10):

- Interviewees coming from weak social and economic contexts (poor and with lower education) had less effective networks.
- Interviewees with less migration experience were more prone to fail to legalize, and at higher risks of exploitation and trafficking. Young migrants tended to be in this group, and risks were enhanced in case they lacked kin networks that could support them in the first period.
- Interviewees with lower education levels tended to avoid addressing authorities or non-State organizations. Many claimed that knowing the Russian language would have helped them, but that they had no time or money to learn it. To cope with difficulties, they tended to delegate procedures such as their registration or the payment of patents to co-nationals, employers, and mediators.

**Fig. 10. Characteristics of most vulnerable migrants**

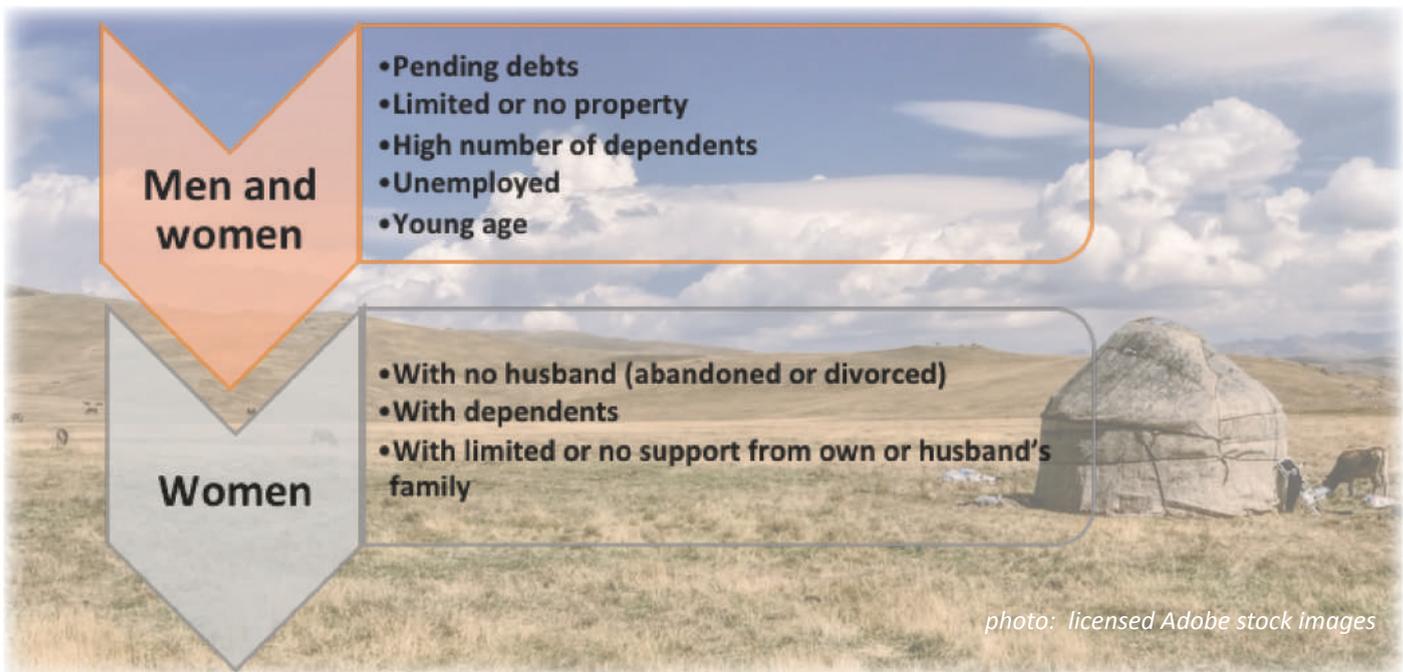


Source: IOM interviews and focus groups with migrants, Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan, January-June 2016

### 3.1.3 GENDER AS VULNERABILITY FACTOR

While the group of respondents was characterized by a range of pre-existing vulnerabilities, irrespective of gender, the assessment also sought to verify whether women migrants presented additional or different vulnerabilities. Findings showed that vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms varied according to women's marital status (Fig. 11). In particular, it became clear that divorced and abandoned women became the only breadwinners by migrating to the Russian Federation in order to make up for the lack of economic contribution by their male counterpart. They counted on very limited networks made up of their closest relatives which made it more difficult to find and/or change jobs.

Fig. 11. Relation between gender and vulnerabilities



Source: IOM interviews and focus groups with migrants, Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan, January-June 2016

Re-entry bans impacted all three levels of vulnerabilities, and the effects can be summarized as (a) economic deterioration (b) reduced self-worth (c) alienation from communities and (d) State institutions.

**(a)** In case of return due to the re-entry bans (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), long-term unemployment was the most common effect on the economic level, leading migrants' households to extreme poverty and indebtedness in a relatively short period of time.

**(b)** The majority of re-entry banned migrants had lost contacts with their networks in the Russian Federation within a year after return as they came back as they claimed that they did not feel at ease at constantly contacting them to ask for help, nor did they think that their networks were willing or able to help.

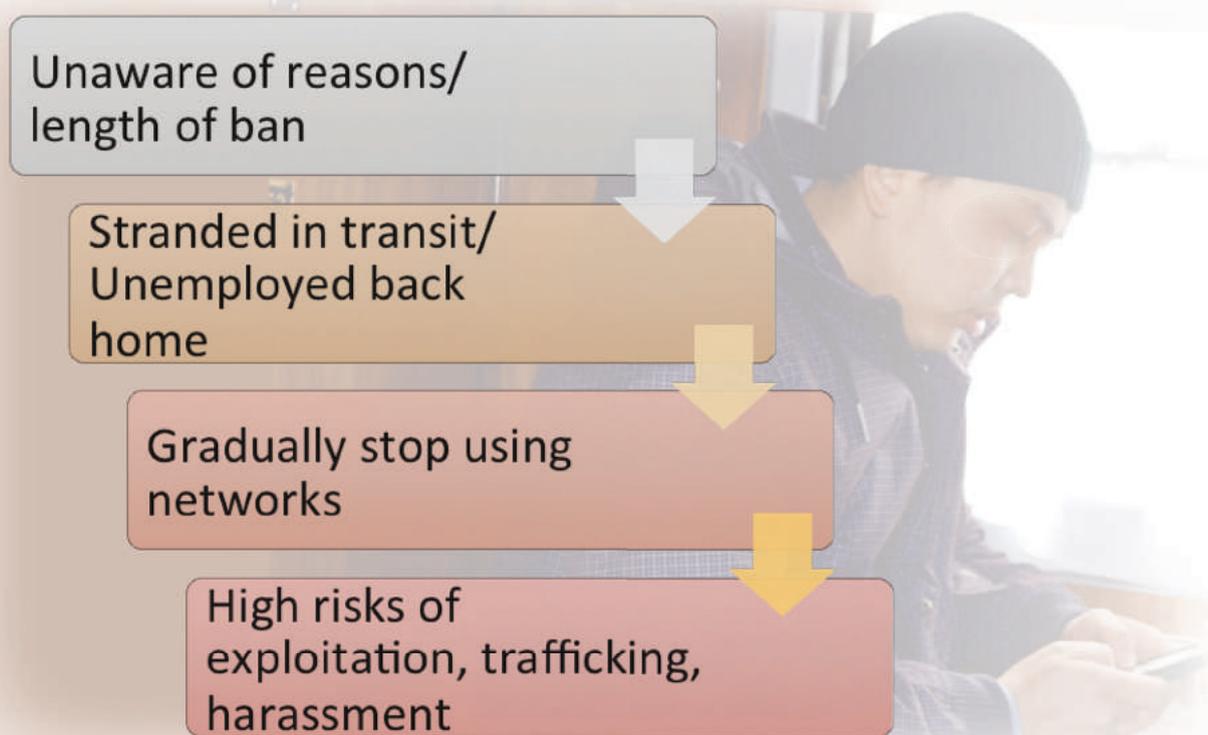
**(c)** Constant state of need, with consequent sense of loss of authority, power and self-worth, lead re-entry banned migrants to withdraw gradually not only from their networks but also from their community back home, with high risks of social isolation both from families and communities and a growing sense of alienation. Serious psychosocial consequences can be recognized in migrants with longer periods of unemployment at home, in particular lack of plans and no efforts in searching for jobs. A substantial difference was noted between men and women: re-entry bans meant for men loss of authority, economic power and status. For women the impact of the bans was felt more on the economic level. Indeed, women who migrated did not necessarily acquire status through migration. On the opposite, they ran high risks of being stigmatized back home, especially if they were not accompanied by men. Migration for them was a survival strategy and the bans seemed to limit their possibility to provide for their dependents through labour migration.

**(d)** Lack of basic knowledge of their rights and low expectations towards official entities deterred migrants from seeking help and/or information at State agencies and NGOs. Avoidance of contact with official institutions (State and non-State) made it difficult for the latter to establish the most relevant needs of vulnerable population groups. Migrants tended to address official institutions only to get information about their bans, but did not expect that they could help them find decent jobs. Alienation from State institutions was expressed through a doubtful attitude toward their role, showing that dialogue between official entities and migrants needs to be reinforced in order to create a consistent response to re-entry banned migrants' psychological, economic and social needs.

### 3.1.4 REACTION TO THE BAN

Re-entry bans were found to have a definitely negative impact on migrants' well-being, aggravating the vulnerabilities, existing prior to the ban. Figure 12 shows the interplay of various short-term effects of the ban on migrants' ability to plan their future and eventually to cope with the emerging deterioration of socio-economic status. The primary vulnerability resulting from the ban is migrants' lack of awareness as to the grounds for the ban and its terms, a circumstance observed among those who became subject to the ban early on.

**Fig. 12. Impact of the bans on migrants' ability to build coping strategies**



*Source: IOM Interviews and focus groups with migrants, Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan, January-June 2016*

In turn, the sudden and unexpected nature of the ban disrupts the economic position of the migrant, which in turn lowers his or her self-esteem, dependent on the status within the migrant network. Respondents referred to the stigma associated with the inability to deliver on the expectations from the community as a factor, which diminished their interest in seeking help from the network. The resulting isolation from the community (compounding the alienation from formal support mechanisms offered by either the state or NGOs) tends to expose the migrant to risks of exploitation, trafficking and harassment.

The combination of pre-existing vulnerabilities and the depletion of migrants' resources leads to the loss of their resilience to respond to the post-ban challenges. Results of the interviews and focus groups, carried out in the three countries under study, suggest that the ability to cope diminishes over time and for the most vulnerable migrants may result in the path, shown in Fig. 13. In the first period of several months since the ban (referred to as the stage of shock) migrants on the whole fail to overcome their problems through the use of personal strategies (as many as 70% of respondents did not have any strategy to deal with the new circumstances). Those who are unsuccessful enter the stage of anxiety when they deploy various emergency strategies to improve their economic status, which, however, tend to deepen their vulnerability – as many as 43% of the respondents took loans, 28% sold their own goods and 22% accepted lower-paid jobs.

Fig. 13. Gradual loss of coping ability over period of the ban: conceptual framework



Source: IOM interviews and focus groups with migrants, Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan, January-June 2016

The final stage is reached when the migrant exhausts all the alternatives and becomes resigned to his or her fate, finding no alternative solutions. This stage, termed here as limbo, is particularly precarious as the most vulnerable among the migrants may opt to seek assistance from outside the home or migrant community and thus become susceptible to fraud, deception and manipulation, characteristic not only of criminal but also extremist groups (see the section on radicalization above). While none of the interviewed migrants exhibited the symptoms of reaching this stage, the fact that a substantial part of the respondents have entered the second stage in the process might be a cause for concern.



## 3.2 POSITION OF RE-ENTRY BANNED MIGRANTS: COUNTRY FINDINGS



photo: licensed Adobe stock images

This section concentrates on the challenges faced by re-entry banned migrants in integration in the country of transit and alternative destination (Kazakhstan) and in re-integration in the countries of origin (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). Attention is paid to the legal and economic status as well as the use of support (both formal and informal).

### 3.2.1 KAZAKHSTAN

The sociological analysis looked at Kazakhstan as a country of destination and transit for migrant workers from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, focusing on migrants banned from re-entering Russia. Interviews and focus groups with the respondents showed that the re-entry banned group in particular faces vulnerabilities such as extreme poverty, irregular status, exploitation and social isolation.

About 52% of re-entry banned migrants took out loans to travel to Kazakhstan, which left them devoid of economic means upon arrival. Because their medium to long term unemployment back home made them prone to accept low paid jobs without written contracts in Kazakhstan, they were often at the mercy of employers and mediators (37% of respondents).

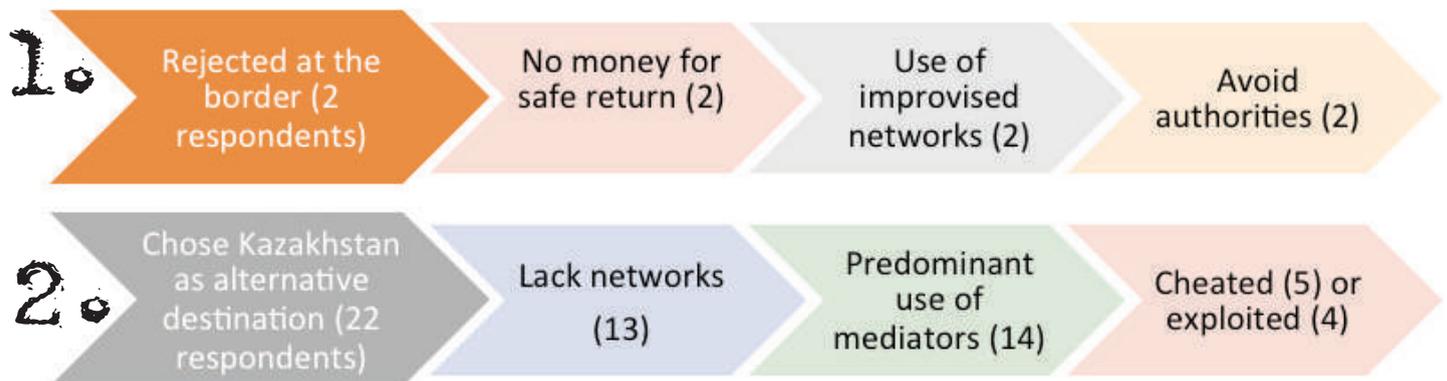
More than half of the respondents had no contact to migrant networks in the country, and the rest could only count on a few relatives for support. More than half of re-entry banned migrants interviewed in Kazakhstan made use of mediators or new contacts to find jobs and regularize their status, many of whom proved untrustworthy. As a consequence, when their rights were violated (non-payment of salary, withdrawal of passport from employers/mediators) the migrants found themselves either under strict control of the employer/mediator with limited possibilities of leaving the workplace and their place of residence, or they had difficulties in finding help through official channels. In the latter case, they were often not aware of the existence of NGOs working to support migrant workers, or were reluctant to reach out to them or the migration police, as they feared to be prosecuted rather than assisted.

Migrants with a re-entry ban were at a high risk of becoming irregular for different reasons, depending on how they entered the country (Fig. 14). Two respondents who attempted to enter Russia and were rejected at the Russian-Kazakh border failed to register within 5 days, as prescribed by Kazakh law, or did not know of the registration requirement in the first place. 62% of re-entry banned migrants who had chosen Kazakhstan as an alternative country of destination lacked networks and relied on improvised contacts on the way to Kazakhstan or on mediators and employers to regularize their status in the country. In many cases they were living and working illegally, cheated and exploited without getting a salary, and some even reported of other migrant colleagues having been beaten up by the employer.

Migrants who have come in contact with NGOs or IOM did this by chance or through word of mouth. It seems that their high dependence on employers/mediators deterred them from seeking help from outside as they did not trust official entities and feared the reaction of employers.

Among migrants in Kazakhstan who were interviewed, misperception was widespread on two levels: NGOs and IOM were believed to be State entities; and State entities were feared and seen as a source of punishment rather than a source of information and assistance, as migrants perceived themselves more as law breakers than as victims.

Fig. 14. Vulnerabilities of re-entry banned migrants in Kazakhstan: two scenarios



### 3.2.2 KYRGYZSTAN

In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, two migrant-sending countries, the analysis established re-integration mechanisms and challenges among the interviewed returned migrant workers. Interviews showed that re-entry banned migrants in general attempted to reintegrate through unofficial channels. Poorly educated migrants and women who were abandoned by their husbands working in Russia were the least successful and represented most vulnerable groups.

Migrant workers reached out to their social networks especially in the period immediately following their return home in order to ask for loans (47%) or for temporary jobs (about 70%). In case of continuing unemployment several months after their return, however, the respondents expressed embarrassment at asking their networks for support because of outstanding debts and because they did not want to be seen as needy people by their community.

Job search was conducted mainly by word of mouth and helped returned migrants to be temporary or occasionally employed, but none of the respondents had a stable job, and economic needs persisted. Only 22% of migrants managed to find a job back home.

Use of State or NGOs services was made by 68% of respondents with the only purpose of getting more information about the duration of their re-entry ban. Migrants did not expect to find decent paid jobs back home or help from State institutions.

Particularly vulnerable were abandoned and divorced young women who only in a few cases were supported by kin networks made up of close relatives. Focus groups and expert interviews with NGO representatives confirmed that together with poorly educated migrants, they formed the group with the least chances of successful re-integration.

About 80% of re-entry banned migrants reacted to the lack of jobs that pay decent salaries by ruling out the option of integrating back home. They did not ask State agencies or NGOs for support, waiting instead for the ban to expire while gradually disengaging from community life, which carries a high risk of alienation and social isolation. Interviewees reported that many re-entry banned migrants considered or already undertook illegal journeys to the Russian Federation by using forged documents.

## 3.2.3 TAJIKISTAN

As in the case of Kyrgyzstan, migrant workers returning to Tajikistan mostly made use of informal channels in an attempt to re-adapt, with low chances of success. Unlike in Kyrgyzstan, success levels were low regardless of the respondent's level of education. Even migrants with higher education faced serious challenges and vulnerabilities upon return to Tajikistan.

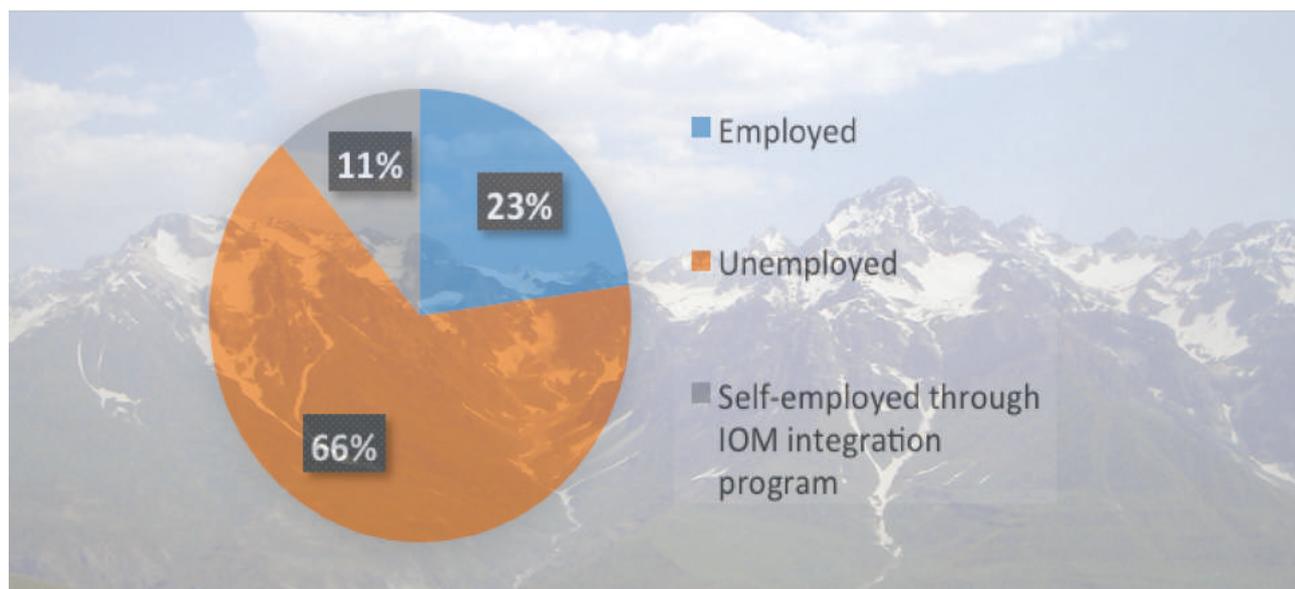
Migrants with re-entry bans dispose of few coping mechanisms. Similar to the situation in Kyrgyzstan, migrants initially made use of networks to ask for loans (43%) or for temporary jobs (about 80%). With time, however, they quit these jobs because they did not pay enough to support their families, while embarrassment about outstanding debts and increasing economic need grew.

Abandoned migrant women appeared to be among the most vulnerable and isolated group. It is important to notice in this context that in Tajikistan, stigmatization and isolation of single women seemed higher than in Kyrgyzstan. The reason is that migrants in Kyrgyzstan, even if of rural origins, tended to live closer to city centers (Bishkek or Osh), escaping from rural contexts where gender discrimination was higher, whereas women interviewed in Tajikistan were living in rural areas.

Success in integration was limited for migrants regardless of their level of education. Two-thirds of interviewed re-entry banned migrants in Tajikistan were unemployed upon return to the country (Fig. 15). Migrants searched for jobs through word of mouth and at the local bazars where underpaid day jobs as handymen are advertised. Mostly, migrants with occasional jobs were not able to provide their household with basic needs on a daily basis.

Use of State or NGOs services was rarely made. Only one surveyed migrant contacted an NGO with the sole purpose of getting more information about the duration of their own re-entry ban. Respondents who addressed NGOs mostly asked for jobs and considered State agencies (like Employment Centers or Hukumat<sup>7</sup>) of no use in helping them. In turn, migrants who were self-employed in the framework of the IOM integration programme pointed to some immediate as well as lasting benefits: the income allowed to provide for basic needs of the household and in some families, a more cooperative behavior was observed between spouses.

**Fig. 15. Employment status of returned re-entry banned respondents in Tajikistan**



Source: IOM interviews with re-entry banned migrants in Tajikistan, January-April 2016

## CONCLUSIONS

1. In recent years the situation in labour migration in and outside Central Asia has been complicated, requiring a broad range of measures to adequately respond to the emerging issues. Recent and upcoming trends in the regional development demonstrate substantial changes in this area, which should be recognized on policy level.
2. The economic downturn in Russia has left a lasting impact on Central Asia, not least through its impact on migration movements in the region. In conjunction with a more stringent migration policy vis-à-vis immigrants from outside the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia has lost some of its attraction as a destination country for Central Asia's working-age population seeking to work abroad. This is reflected in the decreasing migration numbers from all Central Asian republics, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan that joined the EEU in 2015. But even stable migration levels are no remedy for the regional economic downturn's ramifications: National Bank statistics show that remittances levels have taken a hit throughout the region. The Tajik and Kyrgyz national currencies' depreciation following the Russian ruble and the Kazakh tenge has mitigated some of the negative effects of falling wages, but dropping remittances nevertheless slashed migrants' households' disposable income. Russia's continuing imposition of bans on re-entering the country for migrants who committed administrative infringements is impacting on migration dynamics in Central Asia as well. Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz migrants who cannot return to Russia for a period ranging from 3 to 5 years are looking for alternative migration destinations due to lack of opportunities and unsatisfying wage levels at home.
3. Kazakhstan is increasingly becoming a destination country for migrants from some Central Asian countries who are seeking employment. Although there are no statistics on how many of the migrants currently working in Kazakhstan are banned from re-entering Russia, evidence from our regional field assessment shows that migrants stuck in transit who were refused entry at the Russian border are deciding to remain in Kazakhstan, while others are pursuing employment in Kazakhstan as a substitute for migration to Russia.
4. Effective integration of returning migrants, including re-entry banned ones, in their countries of origin and Kazakhstan has been hampered by three main factors. Firstly, the limited scale of returns prior to the onset of the downturn in economy and application of sanctions for a long time did not raise the question of re-integration onto the national policy agendas in the migrants' countries of origin or in Kazakhstan. Secondly, the economic slowdown has further limited opportunities for creating jobs in the Central Asian region, which would entice a significant number of returnees away from the Russian labour market. Finally, as the comparison between the Uzbek and Tajik nationals shows, sustained reorientation of labour migration flows (e.g. away from Kazakhstan to Russia) is dependent on the establishment of strong diasporas, which would provide legal, economic and social support to the newcomers.
5. The study reiterates also the crucial role that migrant community plays in mitigating the negative impact of the economic slowdown and administrative sanctions and thus indirectly deterring the emergence and spread of radical messages among vulnerable migrants. It stresses that alienation from both formal institutions (state institutions, non-governmental organizations) and the community support networks is a major contributing factor to radicalization, which fuels sense of resentment about the lower socioeconomic status. Moreover practice shows that the recruiters from religious extremist organizations target these alienated individuals among migrants with the purpose of involving them in own networks. This well-organized recruitment system often infiltrates migrant communities through intermediaries with migrant background. As mistrust is an essential barrier to receiving assistance, it becomes apparent that to reach the vulnerable migrants with aid, the governments and international donors need to engage leaders of migrant communities who enjoy the target group's trust. This engagement is most crucial in the areas of awareness-raising, dissemination of information on radicalization symptoms and risks as well as religious and ethical education. All these elements are closely linked to long-term prevention efforts.

6. Assessing the situation of re-entry banned migrants in Kazakhstan, findings show that because of lack of information about the country and of networks, they enter the most vulnerable categories of migrant workers in Kazakhstan, i.e. those coming from extremely poor backgrounds, lacking strategic networks in the host country, and failing to get duly informed about the rules in the host country. Findings show that this is due to their way of acting out of desperation and in search of quick earnings in order to face quick deprivation back home or avoid returning back home when crossing the Russian-Kazakh border. In this way, they are adding up to the number of potential victims of exploitation, as they use unverified mediators and new contacts in order to be quickly employed. At the same time, their voluntary invisibility vis-à-vis official authorities and civil society makes it difficult to grant them access to protection mechanisms and assistance. Such self-induced invisibility may expose migrants to various risks of exploitation and manipulation on the part of criminal and extremist networks, ultimately leading to their conflict with the law of the host country. At the same time, Kazakhstan, being an attractive destination for labour migration is interested in the development of inter-governmental dialogue on the regional level to seek most effective ways of legalization of status and protection of rights of migrant workers.

7. The assessment confirms that current situation in regional migration clearly has multiple and strongly negative impact on the socio-economic well-being and stable development in Central Asian countries. From the sociological perspective, the present study confirms that re-entry bans have a long-term impact on returned migrants' chances of re-integration and safe migration to alternative destinations, with the ultimate result of significantly reducing their resilience once the ban expires. An important factor regards the impact of re-entry bans not only on the returned migrants, but also on their families and, in the case of Tajikistan, on entire households (extended families and/or communities) who find themselves in extreme poverty within a year or two from the ban. Findings show that in the near future, migrants who could neither leave to other countries for work purposes during the duration of the ban, nor find a job back home, not only fail to integrate back in their society, but might also find it difficult to leave again once the ban has expired as they are at high risk of using up all their material resources for survival. Visiting and studying returned re-entry banned migrants in their countries of origin (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), it also became clear how the bans are contributing to the impoverishment of the population, especially the rural population in Tajikistan and the one that lives on the outskirts of the main cities in Kyrgyzstan. The survey has shown that re-entry banned migrants want to remain invisible from authorities and have a limited desire to integrate back home, as they see no possibilities of decent work there and feel that they are losing respect and worth among community and families.

8. The Central Asian migration situation, which was the topic of the assessment, is not static and over the coming years it is likely to evolve in response to the following factors. Firstly, the labour force supply in Central Asia is predicted to grow by up to 4 million workers over the next ten years and is expected to grow further beyond 2026. Continuing economic uncertainty in the region may thus stimulate labour migration both within and out of the Central Asian region. Secondly, mid-term forecasts do not predict a quick return to growth of the Russian economy, which might encourage further administrative controls on non-nationals' access to Russia's labour market. This in turn may bring about the growth of number of irregular and vulnerable migrants in Russia. Thirdly, an increase in legal labour migration could occur as a result of further enlargement of the Eurasian Economic Union, establishment of free-trade arrangements with other Central Asian countries and the facilitation of the conditions of access to the EEU labour market for nationals of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Finally, regional migration flows may be eased as the region becomes part of new infrastructural and trade projects (e.g. the Silk Road Economic Belt). The growing demand for workforce will certainly require proper management in order to ensure protection of migrants' rights and their effective re-integration and social assistance.

9. Regional labour migration in and out Central Asia is not a problem that could be solved only by efforts of national governments. All the aforementioned poses an important issue for the migration policy agenda for ongoing improvements of regulations, strategic approach and preceding preparations on national governments' and international organizations' levels for future changes in the region.

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*source: (Barent Goldiniar) - IOM Kazakhstan*

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