



# THE FRAGILE POWER OF MIGRATION:

the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan  
and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration

# 2018



Government of the United States



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
The UN Migration Agency



**Report: “THE FRAGILE POWER OF MIGRATION: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration, 2018”.**

This research on the needs and rights of women and girls affected by migration from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan was prepared by a team of experts from PIL Research Company with the support of the IOM missions in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The IOM Mission in Kazakhstan – the IOM Sub-regional Coordination Office for Central Asia (IOM Central Asia) – provided overall guidance and coordination for the project.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction.....5
  - The aim of this project ..... 5
  - Research methodology ..... 6
  - Research methods..... 6
  - Limitations of the research..... 7
  
- Chapter 1. The context of Central Asian labour migration and gender aspects..... 8
  - 1.1 Economic aspects of labour migration and gender specificity ..... 8
  - 1.2. The political aspects of labour migration and gender specifics..... 12
    - 1.2.1. Discourse on security ..... 12
    - 1.2.2. Media discourse ..... 15
    - 1.2.3. The documentation of children and women..... 16
  - 1.3. Social and cultural aspects of labour migration and gender specifics..... 18
  
- Chapter 2. Migration infrastructure..... 20
  - 2.1. Regulatory (components of) infrastructure ..... 21
  - 2.2. Commercial (components of) infrastructure..... 25
    - 2.2.1. Employment..... 25
    - 2.2.2. Housing..... 26
    - 2.2.3. Documentation ..... 27
    - 2.2.4. Bakchy kyz (girl nannies)..... 28
  - 2.3. Technological (components of) infrastructure..... 29
    - 2.3.1. Information and communications technology as migration infrastructure ..... 30
  - 2.4. Humanitarian (components of) infrastructure..... 31
  - 2.5. Cultural (components of) infrastructure..... 33
  
- Chapter 3. The social capital of migrants..... 34
  - 3.1. Social networks, before, during and following migration..... 34
  - 3.2. Marriages and marital strategies. Divorces ..... 40
  - 3.3. Violence in families ..... 45
  - 3.4. Trust..... 49
  
- Chapter 4. Integration and reintegration..... 51
  
- Research findings..... 55
  
- Recommendations of the study..... 59
  
- Appendices..... 60
  - Appendix 1. Bibliography..... 60
  - Appendix 2. Study tools..... 64

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
FIDH	International Human Rights Federation (French acronym)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ORT	National university entrance examination (Russian acronym)
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

# INTRODUCTION

The concepts of migration, integration, multiculturalism and return migration, along with other terms, arrived in our lives not very long ago. However it seems as though we have known them all our lives and understand their meanings, and what is more we often use them to describe real life. For example, young residents of Bishkek and Dushanbe<sup>1</sup> alike today react fervently to how rapidly their cities are being filled with migrants from rural areas and how these migrants are negatively changing the faces of the capitals, and not for the better. In doing this they forget that in the last decade of Soviet history, the 1980s, the so-called titular ethnic groups made up 22.9 per cent and 31.6 per cent respectively of the populations of these cities, and that most of today's "urban residents" arrived in large numbers only recently.

In his book *"Integration of migrants: Concepts and Practices"* Russian academic V. Malakhov subverts key migration terms, speaking about the ambiguity of each of them.<sup>2</sup>

Researcher I. Plyugin's position entirely accords with this: he states that the term *migrant* has not yet been defined in international law, and that law enforcement practices in various countries around the world use three main criteria to define a migrant: place of birth, citizenship and place of residence. Each of these criteria is also problematic and changeable. This can easily be seen from the status of Kyrgyz and Tajiks (over 30 years of age) in Moscow: citizens of the two sovereign states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, who had been born in a single state called the Soviet Union, are now immigrants in the former capital of their homeland.

In their article *"Who is a migrant? Once again to the issue of basic sociological characteristics"*,<sup>3</sup> researchers P. Lisitsyn and M. Ermakova sum up their analysis with the conclusion: "migrants are not entities in the world; 'migrant' is a perspective of the world." From this starting point, it becomes clear that migrants should be researched not as a group but as a category, and the key research questions should be: "Who makes up this category?", "How and why was this category created?", "How is the category institutionalized?" and "What does this institutionalization result in?"<sup>4</sup>

**THE AIM OF THIS PROJECT** is to research the situation of women and girls affected by migration in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and to determine and analyse their vulnerability and needs – as well as the institutional, political and social environment that they find themselves in – in order to further develop policies and programmes of activity for countries participating in migration. A particular focus of the study is to explore the challenges of reintegrating women and girls who have experienced migration after their return to their homelands, and the problems that women and girls from migrant families find in adapting after returning to their homeland.

How and why did it become necessary to distinguish the category of "women and girls affected by migration from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan"? How justified is it to include women and girls who have had personal experience of migration in this category with those who were members of families of labour migrants but stayed at home? Is it possible to see similar needs and problems, achievements and opportunities behind the separate trajectories and different destinies of the women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan affected by migration? These and other critical issues formed the basis of this publication.

In order to answer the research question, this report reviews trends in the situation and needs of women and girls affected by migration from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and examines the impact and role of migration infrastructures on the fates of women and girls.

1 Bishkek is the capital of Kyrgyzstan and Dushanbe the capital of Tajikistan. [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2016/0677/analit04.php#\\_ftn-ref](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2016/0677/analit04.php#_ftn-ref); Dinorshoev, M.D. (ed.), *Entsiklopediya [Encyclopaedia]*, 2004.

2 [http://www.liberal.ru/upload/files/Malahov\\_pp1-40.pdf](http://www.liberal.ru/upload/files/Malahov_pp1-40.pdf)

3 *Sovremennyye problemy transnatsionalizma i migratsii [Modern Issues of Transnationalism and Migration]*, Volume 2, p.28, <http://tandem.spbu.ru/publications/>

4 Ibid.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main methodological framework of the study was the theoretical approach of migration infrastructure, which means systematically interconnected technologies, institutions and entities that create and provide conditions and regimes of mobility for different categories of people. That is, the approach is intended to demonstrate how different components of migration infrastructure specifically affect the migration behaviour and practices of various women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan affected by migration.

The most valuable thing about this theoretical approach is the understanding that the migration strategies of men and women from different countries and strata do not emerge from their will and desires, or from rational choice. On the contrary, the trajectories of mobility and the fate of migrants – women and men – are determined by specific complex configurations of this migration infrastructure: legislative systems and procedures for documenting citizens and non-citizens, communications and transport infrastructure, migration brokers of all types and statuses, cultural practices and social networks.

## RESEARCH METHODS

In order to ensure the collection of complete and reliable data, a methodology was designed that included qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. In particular, the following methods were used: (a) desk review; (b) policy analysis; (c) expert interviews; (d) focus group discussions; and (e) content analysis.

The aim of the desk review was to identify gaps in the field of the rights, needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls affected by migration in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan by analysing documents and statistics. The policy analysis component of the research included analysis of state policies, strategic programmes, national action plans, state expenditure and regulatory documents in relevant sectors. A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted (15 in each country) with representatives of state institutions and local government, civil society organizations, international organizations, trades unions and other relevant structures. The expert interviews revealed the opinions of experts about gaps in services and programmes, and provided recommendations for actions at local, national and regional levels to reduce the vulnerability of women and girls.

During the research, 40 focus group discussions were held (20 in each country) in settlements with high levels of external migration. The focus groups enabled the collection of in-depth information about the needs and rights of women and girls from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan who are migrants or affected by migration, and also about the types of support services and programmes that they have used, are currently using and/or would like to use. A total of 203 people took part in focus groups in Kyrgyzstan, and 164 in Tajikistan. The number in each focus group varied between 6 and 12. The interviews allowed for full information to be received about the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls who were migrants or affected by migration, and also a subjective perspective on the factors influencing this vulnerability. Extended interviews allowed in-depth information to be received about the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls affected by migration, as well as a subjective understanding of the factors influencing their vulnerability. A total of 10 in-depth interviews were conducted: 5 in each country.

The research included a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis of mass media articles published in key media in both countries. The research group analysed media products from six leading online informational agencies in Kyrgyzstan ([www.24.kg](http://www.24.kg), [kaktus.media](http://kaktus.media), [akipress.org](http://akipress.org), [www.kabar.kg](http://www.kabar.kg), [www.azattyk.org](http://www.azattyk.org), and [www.sputnik.kg](http://www.sputnik.kg)) and five in Tajikistan ([avesta.tj](http://avesta.tj), [sputnik.tj](http://sputnik.tj), [www.asiaplus.tj](http://www.asiaplus.tj), [muhojir.info](http://muhojir.info) and [rus.ozodi.org](http://rus.ozodi.org)) published between 1 May 2017 and 31 May 2018. Analysts conducted the content analysis in several languages – the original languages of publication and Russian.



**Figure 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in Kyrgyzstan.

		Experience of migration		No experience of migration	
		Worked	Did not work	Wives / carers	Daughters
Total		105	20	59	19
Age (mean)		39	41	45	18
Family status	Single	19	2	1	18
	Married	58	15	53	1
	Divorced / widowed	28	3	5	0
Financial situation of the family	Enough for food and clothes	42	11	24	3
	Not enough to buy expensive things	56	6	32	16
	Can buy expensive things	7	3	3	0
Educational attainment	Secondary (including unfinished)	37	4	25	12
	Specialized secondary	30	6	13	4
	Higher (including unfinished)	38	10	21	3

**Figure 2.** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in Tajikistan.

		Experience of migration		No experience of migration	
		Worked	Did not work	Wives / carers	Daughters
Total		86	14	51	13
Age (mean)		40	45	44	24
Family status	Single	4	0	1	3
	Married	47	10	44	9
	Divorced / widowed	35	4	6	1
Financial situation of the family	Enough for food and clothes	53	10	25	9
	Not enough to buy expensive things	27	3	23	4
	Can buy expensive things	6	1	4	0
Educational attainment	Secondary (including unfinished)	37	7	30	5
	Specialized secondary	17	4	10	5
	Higher (including unfinished)	32	3	11	3

## LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study is based on a qualitative strategy for data collection and does not fulfil the requirements of representativeness. Most of the survey respondents spoke of their experience of labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan. The information sources (the statistics and research data) also mainly cover the migration context and the situation of labour migrants from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in these destination countries. The experience of citizens of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the expanding range of destinations of labour migration (Turkey, the Republic of Korea, Italy, the United Arab Emirates and other countries) is still very poorly represented in academic literature and statistics.

For this study, thanks to the forum on Kyrgyz diasporas held in June, we were able to conduct several interviews with labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan from all over the world. However, for the most part these interviews reflect the interests of diaspora leaders. In addition, the researchers did not have the opportunity to conduct interviews with representatives of Tajik diasporas.

The limitations of the study could also include the non-systematic approach to the study of public discourse on labour migration from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in Russia.