

# THE EFFECTS OF MIGRATION IN THE POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: CASE OF KAZAKHSTAN

The issue of human migration in Kazakhstan is an interesting topic not only because of its landlocked geographic location, but also because it was considered as a cradle of nomadic lifestyle for centuries.

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This research examined the effects and challenges of migration in Central Asia specifically in Kazakhstan after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the 1990's. It is clear that migration is a complex and an important issue that plays a relevant role currently in global affairs. It provides a good opportunity to understand the increasing problems, especially the influx of migrants within and outside the region, after Kazakhstan gained its status as an independent state. Central Asia consists of five different diverse countries namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The issue of human migration in Kazakhstan is an interesting topic not only because of Kazakhstan's landlocked geographic location, but also because it was considered as a cradle of nomadic lifestyle for centuries. The study puts emphasis on recognizing the importance of the role of international institutions like the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Bank regarding migration issues. In 2011, the Almaty Process was adopted during the first Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration that was held in Kazakhstan with the support of IOM and UNHCR. It is a series of consultative meetings and ministerial conferences that aims to be a platform for policy dialogue and cooperation in Central Asia on migration and refugee protection issues. Lastly, this study examined the current situation in Kazakhstan and the contributions of IOM and UNHCR as inter-governmental organizations working with migrants and governments to give practical advice and solutions to migration problems.

## **Introduction:**

After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, the newly independent Central Asian states were vulnerable to internal problems such as ethnic and religious conflicts, famine, labour shortages and increased migration issues. That is the time where many people in the region migrated to other places seeking better opportunities for themselves and for their families back home. My paper discussed more about the effects of migration issues in Central Asia particularly in Kazakhstan and its challenges to be faced in the future. Migration is not only an internal issue among countries in the region but also an external one that draws international public attention. As an item on international agenda it directs policy makers to discuss possible solutions to migration issues.

Central Asia was the trade route of the ancient Silk Road and migration in the region has been the way of nomadic lifestyle for centuries. But, the impact of globalization made a serious effect on the lives of the people and migrating to another place for better opportunities became a norm. That is why we can consider that this phenomenon was the result of a changing society due globalization. This paper discussed the effect of migration in Kazakhstan since Kazakhstan has been considered as a receiving, sending and a transit country within Central Asia and outside the region. The statistics has not a prepondering emphasis because the lack of data is one of the challenges to solve. Thereby, findings of this research are through publications and other work produced by IOM, UNHCR as well as by migration experts.



According to IOM, international migration is a complex phenomenon that touches on economic, social and security aspects that affect our daily lives in a globalized world. It is important to understand international migration and its various manifestations in order to effectively address evolving migration dynamics, also because migration is increasingly seen as a high-priority policy issue by many governments and the broader public around the world. It has been reported that the current global estimate is that there were around 244 million international migrants in the world in 2015, which equates to 3.3 percent of the world's population<sup>1</sup>. The post-Soviet world has been largely overlooked by major international studies on migration and it seems that it has been neglected by mainstream media which have instead focused primarily on the migration issues and routes from the area south of the Mediterranean basin to Europe, and from Latin America to the United States. However, migration in the post-Soviet space has taken place on a massive scale and these post-Soviet states are simultaneously sending, receiving, and transit countries of migrants. In fact, they are called crossroads countries which are situated along a migration route from Asia towards Europe, from the south towards the north. Central Asia occupies a crucial place in human migration for many centuries. Since the beginning of the 1990s it has been the main supplier of migrants due to the majority of Russian-speaking populations but also large-scale labor migration within the region. The rise of the market economy in post-Soviet Central Asia has proven a phenomenon in pushing people to relocate. Today, Central Asia is experiencing large-scale patterns of migration

within and outside the region due to many factors that can be considered such as ethnic tensions, low wages, better employment, better healthcare and educational opportunities<sup>2</sup>. After the collapse of the Soviet Union five republics emerged in Central Asia. The problems arisen especially during the Soviet era were caused by the extensive migration of people. Which could be both forced and voluntary in nature. The newly independent Central Asian states had an unexpected statehood, there was a need for a common agenda and circumstances urged initial cooperation and collaboration over the issue of recognition of national borders<sup>3</sup>. Worldwide migration movements serve as a reflection of rapidly changing economic, political and cultural ties between countries. Migration does help to shape demographic, economic, and social dimensions and adds to the cultural diversity of many societies around the world. Since the Second World War ended, the rise of global migration issues became an important political issue in many countries<sup>4</sup>. As has been said migration is a complex issue. There is a need for prioritizing the means for intercultural dialogue and the inclusion of migrants into the economic, social and cultural life of the societies in which they live. As societies become more diverse, there are both opportunities and challenges in the lives of migrants like the opportunities to have a better life and the challenges such as exploitation of migrants<sup>5</sup>. The challenges of migration and its impact are a crucial matter in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I believe that understanding migration would help us understand our roots and how human migration affects the policies and other problems of the people in many countries around the world.

### Central Asia Map<sup>6</sup>



<https://unu.edu/publications/articles/why-migration-matters.html>.

**The Five Central Asian Republics** (*Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan*). Kazakhstan is the largest of the five nations in Central Asia that were part of the USSR before they gained their independence in 1991.

### Kazakhstan Map<sup>7</sup>



### Short Historical Background of Central Asia and Kazakhstan

According to the country profile prepared by the United States Library of Congress - Federal Research Division, the short summary of Kazakhstan's history start with the emergence of Central Asian tribes and continue until the arrival of the Russians in the eighteenth century. The history of Kazakhstan was determined by the movements or human migration, conflicts, and influence of Turkic and Mongol tribes. The Kazakhs' nomadic tribal society suffered a lot from Russian Empire and later it became part of the Soviet Union. The earliest states in Central Asia region were the Turkic Kaganate, established in the sixth century, and a state established by the Karluks in the eighth century. It was then conquered by the Mongols under Genghis Khan and during the Mongol rule, the territory of Kazakhstan broke up into several major areas known as khanates. The first leader of the Kazakhs was Khan Kasym, who ruled in the early sixteenth century. After having expanded significantly, the Kazakhs split into three groups, called the Great Horde, the Middle Horde, and the Lesser Horde. In the eighteenth century, Russian traders advanced from the north, catching the hordes between them and Kalmyk invaders from the east. When the Great Horde was forced to accept Russian protection in the 1820s, all of the Kazakh groups had come under Russian control, and the decay of the nomadic culture accelerated. When Kazakhstan was part of the Soviet Union, it had many struggles against the Russian influence which imported a big part of Kazakh cultural and ethnic diversity. The massive migration of ethnic Russians to the region resulted in uprisings among the Kazakh minority groups that resulted in ethnic conflicts which motivated the other ethnic groups to form a strong nationalistic movement against the outsiders. When Kazakhstan got its independence, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the last leader of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan became the first president of the independent Kazakhstan republic when the USSR collapsed in 1991 and was in power until recently. In the post-Soviet era, Kazakhstan remained close to Russia because it invested much in Kazakh economy and human resources but President Nursultan Nazarbayev also built closer relations with the West to balance the geopolitics of the newly independent Kazakhstan. Beginning in the 1990s, the discovery of large oil and gas fields enabled Kazakhstan's economy to develop in a fast pace ahead of its Central Asian neighbors<sup>8</sup>. Modern Kazakhstan of today stretches from China in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west, while it shares the southern borders with Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and Russia is to the north. The demographic population of Kazakhstan comprises Turkic and other ethnic minorities of Central Asian region as well as ethnic Russians. Many of the problems that Kazakhstan faced were the result of the clash of nomadic lifestyle of ethnic Kazakhs and the westernized culture of the Russian speaking groups<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan is an important

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country due to its rich history, diverse ethnic groups and geopolitical strategic location that attracted strong interest in the West and especially in Russia.

The importance of Kazakhstan in the globalizing world is an opportunity to enlarge scope of understanding in the changing society of Central Asia. The history of Kazakhstan tells us that through the past, we can foresee the new challenges that faces the country and show the way as to how it will strengthen its ties with other countries around the world.

### Migration, Problems and Challenges in Central Asia and Kazakhstan

The history of human migration begins in the Rift Valley in Africa around 1,5 million years. The first humans such as Homo erectus and Homo sapiens migrated to other continents. In the ancient world, Greek and Roman expansion depended on migration, and outside Europe also there were significant movements which were associated with the Mesopotamian, Inca, Indus, and Zhou empires. Therefore, migration is not a new phenomenon and it is associated with significant global crises such as revolutions, wars, and the rise and fall of empires that had resulted in economic expansion and political transformations among countries. Migration has mattered throughout the history, and it continues to matter today because it is being considered a growing problem in the globalizing world<sup>10</sup>. Migration is a complex issue and it tends to be considered as an umbrella concept according to the scholars and experts in the field of migration. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990's, its territory became a stage of large-scale migration processes. The former republics of the Soviet Union in Central Asia were faced with the challenge of dealing with new phenomena such as flows of forced migrants and a significant movement of minority populations. Armed and ethnic conflicts led to massive movement of the population, forming flows of refugees and internally displaced persons. This had changed by the mid-1990s, when economic and social factors of migration within and outside the region became a driving force in Central Asia which were directing the flow of migrants from countries with low living standards to a relatively prosperous Russian Federation and to Kazakhstan. These migration

movements of people coincided with new institutional challenges after the new states gained their independence. The newly independent Central Asian states faced the problems of establishing territorial borders, the national institutions and the creating legislation regulating the issues of citizenship and migration<sup>11</sup>. Central Asia represents only a fraction of the world's total migrant population, and the region's economies are influenced by migrant workers for many decades. Within Eurasia countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan are the largest migrant recipients and the numbers of migrants will grow in the years to come. Kazakhstan ranks 16th largest migrant receiving country in the world and it receives far more labor migrants than refugees. There are international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) dealing with migrant issues in the region but the Central Asian governments still regard migration as an unimportant and temporary issue. Since the mid-2000s Kazakhstan has become a new popular destination for Central Asian migrants. Hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uzbeks worked in Kazakhstan for many years now but the average monthly salaries are lower in Kazakhstan compared to Russia. Another main reason for migrants in the region to choose Kazakhstan because the local culture and language are similar which make communication easier between local employers and migrants. Kazakhstan has many roles in the migration process as it

becomes a host country for migrants, sending Kazakh emigrants and, becoming a transit hub for migrants crossing from Asia to Europe. Kazakhstan is the major recipient country of labor migrants from neighboring countries but the challenge is that unskilled labor migrants are also in demand in Kazakhstan and these migrants are often vulnerable to being deported, being exploited by employers, or abused by law-enforcement personnel. The country in the past years had weak labor migration policies that is why the Kazakh government has been neglecting the problem of unskilled labor migrants due to high volume of internal migration. Since independence, the Kazakh government has been preoccupied with integrating many ethnic Kazakh repatriates and millions of rural residents moving to urban centers. Another problem it faces is that migrants often refuse to return back home when their work permits expire. Migrants are more comfortable living in Kazakhstan, where the language is similar, discrimination is less frequent than in Russia, and the economy is better than it is in their countries. These help them a lot in sending remittances to their families back home. But the Kazakh government sees migration as a growing problem and there are many considerable migration threats within the country and outside its borders. The country became a member of international organizations and started to formulate several inter-agency programs that will deal with migration issues. The Kazakh government has another challenge to face and that is the lack of different



methods of data collection and it is difficult to provide a precise number of migrants traveling in and out of the country. The existing data is used for planning purposes by the government and in analyzing major migration trends in the country and the Central Asian region. In the regional level, Kazakhstan has developed a regional bilateral agreement with Kyrgyzstan on labor migration and established a commission focusing on implementing labor employment policies between the two countries. A collaborative agreement has also been concluded with other Central Asian states to better improve border and migration issues. At the international level, IOM and UNHCR have a direct and indirect impact in Central Asia for which the Almaty Process was declared in 2011 in Kazakhstan. It is a regional consultative process on refugee protection and international migration within Central Asia. It is also a platform for policy dialogue among Central Asian governments and their migration experts to address the multiple challenges of migration dynamics and to enhance regional cooperation in solving the complex issues of migration<sup>12</sup>. According to former Kazakh Minister of Labor and Social Protection Tamara Duisenova, who submitted the Draft Migration Policy Concept for 2017-2021 to the government to reform its migration policies, there are two factors that support the expansion of the migration policy framework in Kazakhstan. First, Kazakhstan is now becoming a large transit and migration hub country that receives, sends and transits migrants within and outside the Central Asian region. Second, the expected internal migration will impact migration processes in the country. There are thousands of foreigners who come to Kazakhstan for work and at the same time there are many people who return back home. The pace of migration activity is increasing that is why the country needs to reform its migration policies in order to improve the demographic-economic balance of the country, to build an open market of professional employees and to ensure national security against the migration related threats<sup>13</sup>. Central Asian states are known as a migration hub for migrants and Kazakhstan has been a major country destination for migrants in the region. The strategic location of this landlocked country in Central Asia have a potential to use its migration issues into an opportunity to develop its economy and strengthen relations with other countries in terms of employment and human rights protection of foreign workers. There are several types of migration but to point out the issue in Central Asia especially in the case of Kazakhstan, one should focus on labor migration. Labor migrations within and outside the borders of Kazakhstan are caused by multiple factors that include rapid economic, political and social developments in Central Asia, demographic population increases and ethnic group conflicts. The rise of easy access to the Russian and Kazakh labor markets became a driving force for many people in the region to migrate into these countries for employment. There are challenges that these states face when migration movements become a norm in the region. Trafficking of men,

women and children from rural villages to urban areas or to other Central Asian states is a serious problem. Men are being exploited for cheap labor, women and children are being trafficked to work in the sex trade by several criminal groups in the region. The widespread of human trafficking in Central Asia is one of the most disturbing common problems for origin and destination countries. The nature of migration influx in the Central Asia region was primarily due to forced migration which was a result of strong economic, political and social push factors such as discrimination of ethnic minorities, military conflicts, and economic crisis. Migrants tend to move to other countries to improve their economic status and well-being of their families, to earn enough money to pay household expenses and to receive better healthcare and educational opportunities.

Migration issues can bring risks such as human trafficking, rural-urban movements of people, loss of professional and skilled workers, ethnic tensions and broken family population. Human trafficking is the main challenge that is associated with migration and states should formulate better migration policies in the regional and international level. Better migration policies and availability of quality data are much needed in order to monitor and evaluate the migration trends and developments in the region. It is understood that migration has been influenced by globalization and it will continue to rise in the next decades to come. There are also the positive things about migration such as contribution to growth in the world economy, contribution to the development of states and enrichment of diverse cultures and civilizations. According to migration experts, the effects of international migration is an important dimension of globalization that becomes embedded in the changes taking place in global economic and social structures. In migration studies, there are terms that classify the factors which have a meaning in migration. First one is called the push factor and it refers to the dynamics of human movement within a country of origin which force people to migrate for such reasons as famine, war, ethnic conflicts and political oppression. The pull factor features the destination countries which attract immigrants for their employment needs, for their shortage of population, for their economic capacity. In today's increasingly interconnected world, migration question has been rising steadily towards the top of the international political agenda. This has necessitated policy dialogue and international collaboration on migration

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**The transformation of the former Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic from a centrally planned to a market-based economy provided opportunities for economic development in modern Kazakhstan over the last decades. Internal and external migration had become the reason for its growing population, factors like migration from rural to urban areas and the inflow of people from other parts of the former Soviet Union countries playing a major role .**

through the establishment of informal, state-owned consultation mechanisms on migration at the regional and global levels<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, migration is an old phenomenon and a process with its origins back in the early times of human settlement. The region of Central Asia and particularly Kazakhstan plays an important role in the modern migration process as it is a country that molded the migration routes of nomadic people many centuries ago.

There is another factor that shapes the migration process in Central Asia and that is the Eurasian migration system that was formed within the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet Union. It was based on socio-economic ties between countries that speaks the Russian language as their main instrument of communication within the former Soviet Union. Migrants from the Central Asia choose to move to those countries like Russia and Kazakhstan in which there is the possibility to communicate in Russian language as well as the similarities in culture and mentality increasing their chances of employment. Nowadays, Russia is considered as the center of Eurasian migration which attracts the people from other former USSR countries especially the former Soviet Republics in Central Asia. Geographically Russia is the closest neighbor for most former Soviet countries and has direct transport connections with them. The emergence of Kazakhstan and Ukraine as new migrant routes of labor migration destinations attracted a huge amount of migration flows in the post-Soviet Central Asia. Russia and Kazakhstan have a convenient location from the standpoint of Central Asian migrants. Central Asian states have a much stronger link with Russia and Kazakhstan than with China, Afghanistan and other states in the Middle East. Another reason for migrants from Central Asia to prefer Russia and Kazakhstan is because they can reach these countries by various means of cheap transportation and in return these interconnected transportation routes have an impact in the influx of migrants within the Eurasian migration system. Central Asian countries remain the main suppliers of migrant workers

to Russia, Kazakhstan and some other states in the post-Soviet space. In fact, Kazakhstan ranks second among CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries in terms of migration attractiveness for labor migrants. But in Kazakhstan, there are significant number of labor migrants from Central Asia that have no official registration or no working permits which create the problem of illegal migrants in the country. The share of Central Asian countries in the overall structure of official labor migration in Kazakhstan is small compared to Russia. According to migration experts this unregulated labor migration has been on the rise over the recent years in Kazakhstan but it is difficult to estimate its scale for several reasons including the absence of the visa regime with most former Soviet countries and the high level of informal sector employment in trade, construction, hospitality, business and transportation. The migration trend in Kazakhstan as a receiving, sending and transit hub for migrants in Central Asia is moreover mainly moved by employment opportunities and thus resulting in labour migration. Labour migration has many positive and negative socio-economic consequences for Kazakhstan as a recipient country in the region. The positive influence of it is that migrant workers fill many non-prestigious jobs in the labor market with hard working conditions and foreign migrants are the driving force of different economic sectors in Kazakhstan's economy. But the negative consequences for Kazakhstan as a recipient country is that it stimulates the growth of black economy, brings down the wage level, transforms ethnic composition of the population, forms ethnic enclaves, and contributes to the rise in ethnic tension. Migration policy of Kazakhstan in the field of labor migration regulation is inconsistent and weak. The Kazakh authorities are moving towards legalization of undocumented migrants and there is enacted legislation to legalize labor migrants with unregulated status from the CIS countries. However, there have been no visible improvements in real life of migrant workers and there are still workers who live and work without documents in very harsh conditions thus leading to exploitation by local employers. Illegal labor migrants from Central Asia are prone to many problems in the society and it would increase social tensions in another cities of Kazakhstan<sup>15</sup>. The transformation of the former Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic from a centrally planned to a market-based economy provided opportunities for economic development in modern Kazakhstan over the last decades. Internal and external migration had become the reason for its growing population, factors like migration from rural to urban areas and the inflow of people from other parts of the former Soviet Union countries playing a major role<sup>16</sup>. Migration in Central Asia has been closely related to the regime changes that occurred in the twentieth century. When the five Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union became independent in 1991, their societies began a transition under new political regimes. Kazakhstan was a multi-ethnic country but Russians, Ukrainians, and Germans started to leave

the country in the beginning of 2000's. At the same time the economic development of Kazakhstan began to rise rapidly and, new migratory routes had been opened for migrants coming from other Central Asian states seeking employment in the country. Migration across borders occurred on a large scale also because of the rise of ethno-nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The former Soviet Central Asian Republics are still connected by common ties in infrastructure, transportation and communication systems, and have similar economic and political regimes. The Russian Federation (RF) attracts migrants from all post-Soviet states due to its economic and cultural ties with the former USSR. As stated earlier, Russian Federation and Republic of Kazakhstan have become major receiving countries for labour migrants coming from other states in Central Asia due to their favorable economic and social conditions. The majority of the population of Central Asian countries follow contemporary trends in labour emigration flows. Central Asian countries have also become transit countries for migrants from Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and other countries within Eurasia. However, the region is not only a transit labour migration route, but also high proportion of illegal migration uses the route for human trafficking activities which constitute a big concern and threat to the region's security<sup>17</sup>.

#### Population Data: Central Asian Migrants in Kazakhstan<sup>18</sup>

Country	Number of Migrants
1. Kyrgyzstan	7000
2. Tajikistan	16.000
3. Turkmenistan	1000
4. Uzbekistan	289.000

#### Population Data: Kazakh Migrants in Other Central Asia States and Russia

Country	Number of Migrants
1. Kyrgystan	13.000
2. Tajikistan	1000
3. Turkmenistan	18.000
4. Uzbekistan	13.000
5. Russia	2.562.000

**The presence of IOM in Central Asia is an important development to maximize the potential for regulating migration in order to contribute to the development and economic growth in Central Asia. Other Central Asian states had already joined IOM in the late 1990's and Kazakhstan became an IOM Member State on December 2, 2002.**

#### International Organizations and the Migration Issues

There are several international organizations that are involved in migration questions in Kazakhstan and other states in Central Asia. International organizations have been known as the mediators in the migration processes in the region due to their wide range of projects, consultancy meetings, humanitarian aid assistance, and many other activities. International organizations play an important role in shaping the migration policies of each member state in Central Asia. As defined, international organizations are being considered as institutional arrangements between members of the international system in order to achieve objectives of its member states. They are important actors in the realm of international politics with the power to mediate to solve crises, for peace keeping and for resolving problems among countries in accordance with international law. International organizations provide forums for neutral discussions in order to balance the relationships between stronger and weaker states according to their interests and knowledge of certain issues<sup>19</sup>. In Central Asia, IOM, ILO, UNHCR and World Bank have a meaningful impact on the region's migration issues. After the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990's, the newly independent Central Asian states were vulnerable to many problems and migration is one of the many issues that these countries neglected. There are regional organizations operating in Kazakhstan and other countries in Central Asia but they are more focused on trade and economic development. The absence of institutions and organizations that work on migration issues had been a problem in the past. However, the situation have changed in due course. Presently, the presence of international organizations in helping the member states in Central Asia is crucial in order to facilitate the phenomena of human migration in the region. The role of Kazakhstan in dealing with migration is important during the globalization period. The entry of Kazakhstan into the United Nations (UN) on March 02, 1992 had a great value for the country in becoming a member of many international and regional economic and political organizations. Kazakhstan is an initiator and a leader of all



integration processes especially migration issues as it has been a hub for migrants for many centuries<sup>20</sup>. There is a need of having a new and dynamic environment for international cooperation in Central Asia in order to strengthen its geopolitical stance in the world. International organizations play an important role in the process of maintaining a comprehensive security regime especially in the issues of illegal migration and human trafficking in the region. Migration is the result of global changes and that the first impact of migration is felt in the economic field. It also affects social relations, culture, national policies and international relations among states. Kazakhstan is increasingly influenced too by the changes in the global trends in the modern labor migration system in Central Asia<sup>21</sup>. I want to point out that the four international organizations namely IOM, UNHCR, ILO and World Bank are the ones who are more involved in helping Kazakhstan and other member states in Central Asia in facilitating such meetings and projects in migration issues in the region. IOM is a leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works with 172 member states around the world. The IOM has the authority and ensures humane management of migration, promoting international cooperation on migration issues, assisting policy makers on practical solutions to migration problems and facilitating reports and data on the developments of migration problems across the borders. Central Asia is a crucial region that deals with an influx of migratory flows especially as a result of the dissolution of

the USSR in the 1990's. The presence of IOM in Central Asia is an important development to maximize the potential for regulating the migration in order to contribute to the development and economic growth in Central Asia. Other Central Asian states had already joined IOM in the late 1990's and Kazakhstan became an IOM Member State on December 2, 2002. Kazakhstan was a refugee sending country, but due to its economic growth it is now becoming an increasingly attractive destination for refugees around the region. IOM in Astana is working on a variety of projects such as the integration of immigrants, counter-trafficking awareness and legal assistance for migrants<sup>22</sup>. Central Asia faces critical issues in migration management which reflects the economic, political and social tensions that exist throughout the region. Central Asian countries face problems that includes the lack of inter-state dialogue on migration issues, underdeveloped legislative framework on migration policies, poor data collection and mismanagement of migration data, lack of support to protect the human rights of migrants, the rise of human trafficking resulting in the sexual exploitation of migrants. In order to support Central Asian governments and migrants within the region, the IOM established the Central Asia Regional coordination office in Astana, Kazakhstan. The coordination office will be the focal point for governments and migration experts to manage the migration issues and the projects of IOM in the region. The challenge is that political cooperation between, and among, Central Asian states on migration is-

sues remain insufficient and it can be said that these states neglected this growing issue in their own region. The Almaty Process on Refugee Protection and International Migration was declared in 2011 during the first Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration which was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. It is initiated by the Government of Kazakhstan, IOM and UNHCR. It is a regional consultative process on migration in order to address the multiple challenges resulting from mixed migration dynamics and enhance regional cooperation in Central Asia. The Almaty Process includes the following Member States: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Turkmenistan. Iran and Pakistan are Observer States. It is a platform for policy dialogue and cooperation on migration issues while ensuring human rights and international protection to migrants<sup>23</sup>. Another international organization that has an important role in improving and protecting the lives of migrants in Kazakhstan and other states in Central Asia is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR was established in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly aimed at protecting refugees and resolving refugee problems around the world. It opened its representation in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 1995 to assist the country's influx of refugees. Aside from it, Kazakhstan recognized the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol which become a key treaty in international refugee law<sup>24</sup>. The main goals of UNHCR in Central Asia are to protect refugees, to support harmonization of refugee policies, provide health, food and education assistance to ensure basic standards of living for those refugees. UNHCR has been confronted with new challenges related to a considerable increase in the number of Afghans, Uzbeks and Chechens as asylum-seekers in Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, there has been a slow but steady progress in the commitment to adopt national refugee legislation<sup>25</sup>. Another international organization that is involved in the migration process in Central Asia is the World Bank. World Bank is an international financial institution that provides loans and technical assistance to many countries around the world. Its role in improving the lives of many people in Central Asia especially migrants is through financing government, private sector and NGO based projects. The World Bank in Central Asia promotes cross-border cooperation and knowledge-sharing through dialogue and collaboration between Central Asian countries. The Migration and Remittances Peer-Assisted Learning (MiRPAL) network is a good example of World Bank's contribution to Central Asia's problem of migration. It is a platform that shares country experiences within the region in establishing dialogue on migration policy. It will help Central Asian states to facilitate its migration strategies and action plans which were approved by their own governments<sup>26</sup>. The last international organization that I consider to be involved in helping member states in Central Asia to have better policies in terms of labour migration is the International

**Kazakhstan has many roles in facilitating the migration processes in the whole Central Asia. There are also a lot of challenges in facing migration problems and in my own opinion the problems that Kazakhstan and other states in Central Asia face in this present time is the lack of good quality available data in each member state; the rise of human trafficking activities like exploitation of women and children for prostitution and corrupting or bribing the officials like police, border guards, politicians or other authorities to close their eyes to illegal migration.**

Labour Organization. It was founded in 1919 and it is a UN specialized agency in which employers' and workers associations have equal voice with the governments. The Republic of Kazakhstan became a member of the International Labour Organization in 1993 and it has been actively participating in consultative meetings to ensure the right labour policies in the country. The ILO assisted the development of the draft Labour Code of Kazakhstan which was adopted in 2007. The ILO has been active in Kazakhstan also in helping the country to design and implement projects in social protection, labour safety, migration, child labour, social partnership, legislation and data gathering of the country's labor force<sup>27</sup>. Labour migration is an important social and economic phenomenon in Central Asia. Kazakhstan is a significant destination country within the region that attracts many Central Asian migrants to work in Kazakhstan. Most labour migrants often work in the informal sectors where the lack of legal protection and information about their rights make them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The challenge is to ensure the safety of every migrant and to adopt labour policies that will protect all citizens, including those foreign workers. The ILO has a strong mandate to protect workers against illegal activities, since many vulnerable migrants without any education or information on their rights are being exploited, especially men who work in informal sector jobs such as construction; women and children in prostitution. The ILO in Kazakhstan is in full support for the programs to help reintegrate returned irregular migrants, including counseling, training, job creation, and other educational or technical assistance<sup>28</sup>.

These international organizations may have a direct or indirect impact in Kazakhstan and other countries of the Central Asian region. At least they made the member

states to become aware how migration issues can change a society be it in positive or negative ways. Migration is a growing phenomena and it will continue to rise in the future due to globalization and geopolitical distress. Without these international organizations, the situation in Central Asia would be chaotic and countries having long land borders without proper border policies will not withstand the influx of people moving across the region. It still depends on the member states on how they can resolve the migration problems for being able to ensure their economic development and security in the region. Migration is a problem but it could also be an opportunity for economic development as long as States know how to handle this issue.

### Conclusion:

Migration is a global problem in the world. It is also a hot topic for many scholars or experts in this field. The focus of this paper is the Central Asia region, particularly the case of Kazakhstan. I focused my review on the background of migration, its issues, challenges and how it affects the region as a whole. For me, Central Asia is a significant region that has been neglected by others. It had not been realized that migration has been a part of the people's lives for many centuries. It was not only a trade route of the Ancient Silk Road or the strategic battleground of the British and Russian Empires in the 19th Century but it has also been the road of nomadic lifestyle in the region. I chose Kazakhstan among the other Central Asian Republics as my focal point in this paper because the country sits on the position of being an all-around country meaning that it has always been a receiving, sending and a transit hub country of migrants in the region. Kazakhstan has many roles in facilitating the migration processes in the whole Central Asia. There are also a lot of challenges in facing migration problems and in my own opinion the problems that Kazakhstan and other states in Central Asia face in this present time is the lack of good quality available data in each member state; the rise of human trafficking activities like exploitation of women and children for prostitution and corrupting or bribing the officials like police, border guards, politicians or other authorities to close their eyes to illegal migration. I also want to point out the successful contributions of the international organizations in the region namely IOM, UNHCR, ILO and World Bank. These international organizations are the guarantors of the well-being of migrants in the region. I strongly believe that these organizations are the ones who pushed and motivated the member states in Central Asia to pursue better and high quality migration policies. The findings that I have presented suggest that migration is a complex issue as well as a historical phenomenon; Central Asia is a significant migration route and wellspring of migrants; Kazakhstan is proving its economic and political role in the region, and

International Organizations are crucial to maintain peace and sustainability in the region in the face of problems arising from migration. Migration will never stop and states should do their part to educate, formulate and campaign for a good migration process. I wanted to raise awareness on this issue especially of the young people, for them to better understand migration and its challenges that will face us in the future.

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