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## Labour Integration of the EAEU Member States

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### Abstract

*While there is a great deal of literature on migration and labour integration in Europe, studies on Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) are scarce despite the sheer volume of migration in the region. This study aims to describe the issues of global labour integration and implications in the EAEU. The main research methods are the historical method and the method of analysis. The article provides a brief analysis of modern processes of labour integration around the world, analyses the experience of some associations in this area, and describes the processes of labour migration in the EAEU from multiple perspectives. The study will be useful for understanding trends in labour integration and migration in the EAEU and its member states.*

**Keywords:** *Migration processes; Eurasian Economic Union; interstate integration; economic space; labour resources*

### Introduction

Migration plays a significant role on the global stage. At its core, migration is a complex socio-economic phenomenon that is controversially connected with various aspects of the economic and socio-political domains and the formation and manifestation of trends in their change (Akaev, 2017; Pityulych and Hoblyk, 2020). It can manifest itself in different forms since both types and purposes differ. Nevertheless, one of the significant types of migration is labour migration: There are over 100 million migrant workers worldwide, who, together with their families, constitute the majority of international migrants, currently estimated at over 230 million people (UN, 2021). Nevertheless, while regarding the other factors of production, the borders between countries are becoming less and less clear, in regard to migration, they are becoming increasingly insurmountable. This is primarily due to the country's desire to protect itself from substantial migrant flows. Thus, in general, migration has an ambiguous impact on the economy: on the one hand, it attracts a well-educated population from other countries or a population that will offset the lack of jobs for unpopular professions; on the other hand, excessive migrant flows, and the lack of jobs for them create an unfavourable social situation in cities (Smailova et al., 2017). It is important to note that labour migration began to play a leading role throughout the Covid-19 crisis, during which

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migrants began to play an important role in the continuous functioning of basic services, in particular, health services, social assistance and food supply chains (Anderson et al., 2021).

However, although it significantly depends on labour migration, the concept of labour integration is a different phenomenon in its essence. Labour integration shows what differences exist between citizens and non-citizens of the country in terms of employment, unemployment rate, labour force activity level, wage convergence, levels of self-employment, working conditions and types of labour (Lukhmanova et al., 2018; Dudu, 2022). Such differences exist in all countries and inter-state groupings without exception, even groupings of highly developed countries such as the EU (European Union). In some cases, migrant workers earn little more than the subsistence rate and are the most vulnerable segment of the population, which is particularly exposed to various kinds of shocks (Privara et al., 2019; Khanna, 2020).

Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is an international organisation for regional economic integration. Currently, there are 8 countries taking part in the EAEU: Russian Federation, Belarus, Armenia, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Cuba, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. As active integration into the EAEU is currently taking place, it is important to consider the labour integration processes occurring within the boundaries of this association. And therein lies the relevance of this study. The study's main purpose is to analyse labour integration in the EAEU and its possible and existing problems and prospects from different perspectives. The object of the study is labour integration in the EAEU countries. The novelty of this article is due to the fact that earlier studies of the presented topic in the aspect of international labour migration of the EAEU were not carried out. Labour integration in the EAEU is a little-studied phenomenon that may be of scientific interest in a wide range of studies.

The study is focused on analysing labour migration and integration in the world with a focus on the EAEU. A large number of sources were analysed during the investigation: articles, reports, documents, and other publications. The official websites of the EAEU, especially the Eurasian Economic Commission, which is the supranational regulatory body of the EAEU, have been an important source. All types of labour integration were covered: legal, economic, social, and cultural (Medukhanova, 2013). The analysis here intends to offer comparisons between global processes and those in the EAEU. Migration processes are considered from various perspectives: types of migration and their causes; the importance and danger of migration processes for economic development; differences in the migration policy of states depending on their level of development; analysis of the impact of the crisis caused by Covid-19 on migration processes (Eurasian integration in the era of..., 2020).

## **Results and Discussion**

Migration is a very difficult and complex phenomenon. It is influenced by a whole host of social, economic, climatic, political, and even technological factors. It is through the changes in all these variables that people move from one region to another. Therefore, it is often difficult to predict in which states migration processes will begin to occur. However, it is most likely that sub-Saharan Africa will be the future hotspot for migration. In these countries, the last decades have seen significant population growth and a very low standard of living. Significant population outflows are also observed in the Middle East. Migration for the advanced man is generally not a simple procedure, not even counting the presence of state



borders. The reason for this is cultural, linguistic, and social barriers (the attitude of the local population to migrants and vice versa: migrants to the local population).

The world is currently witnessing a significant increase in migrant populations, with the number of migrants reaching 281 million in 2020 (UN, 2021). Due to the fact that the growth rate of the number of migrants is higher than the birth rate, the share of international migrants in the world is also increasing every year. This increase in the growth rate of migration is primarily due to the development of technology, since migrants, most of whom are able-bodied citizens aged 20 to 64, can more easily receive information about the desired routes of movement, and have the opportunity to keep in touch with their families easier. Nevertheless, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic reduced the number of migrants, along with the flow of remittances, which to some extent further complicated the economic situation of labour exporting countries (Rosstat, 2021). This is associated with the relative isolation of countries during the pandemic. This trend is continuing in 2021. The main countries with the highest numbers of migrants are not so numerous. These are mainly the United States of America (USA), Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United Kingdom.

There are many reasons to migrate, from economic (seeking a better way of life) to political (fleeing political or military persecution). Today, economic migration is in the first place, driven by migrants from developing countries seeking better living conditions or higher wages in developed countries; more than half of migrants live in high-income countries. Thus, migrants move to other countries and find work there, where, however, they often receive lower wages than residents of the country in similar jobs. Moreover, their wages are often even lower than the subsistence rate in the country. Labour migration can be divided into several subspecies: permanent and temporary (it can be either simply for a certain period of time or every year during a certain season, so-called seasonal migration) (Aliiev, 2015).

There is a kind of confrontation and competition between countries participating in migration processes. Thus, the sending countries, mainly developing countries, want to retain as much quality (with special skills or knowledge) labour as possible. They support countries with their diasporas by offering political and economic opportunities for investment in their home country. In addition, they closely monitor the money that migrants send back to their homeland. In some countries, such transfers account for more than 20% of GDP; the amount of all remittances transferred by migrants to their countries is about three times the amount of aid to developing countries, and the amount of remittances is rapidly increasing each year (Dimock, 2015). Furthermore, an increasing number of countries allow their citizens to vote abroad or even open their polling stations in other countries. Although, it is still increasingly difficult for countries to keep in touch with emigrants, as subsequent generations become more and more attached to their new homeland. This can be traced at least by the fact that later generations of emigrants can hardly speak or understand the language of their ancestors.

At the same time, migrant-receiving countries compete with each other to obtain the best possible skilled labour force to create as much domestic product in the country as possible. Such increasing interstate competition takes various forms. This is how Canada has established the Express Entry programme, which makes it much quicker and easier for immigrants to become Canadian citizens. In addition, dual citizenship is becoming increasingly common, which many countries accept or are forced to put up with them. However, in addition to the positive impact on the economy, migration processes, which are primarily social in nature, can cause negative political and social phenomena, and tensions, as

people in these countries express concern about jobs, social services, and cultural identity (Engler et al., 2020). This ambiguous impact of migration processes on society is the duality of migration processes. Therefore, most of the debate on migration is focused on internal tensions. In addition, the local population may also experience some of the problems that come with a large number of migrants on the market. First of all, this is a reduction in wages and job loss, since it becomes profitable for enterprises to hire migrants instead of the local population. To address these problems, states should use fiscal policy instruments and labour market regulations to support locals in the retraining phase (Voronina, 2017). The state should also take active measures for migrants, including their integration into the economic environment of the new country, which will be described later in the study.

And although countries attract highly qualified labour in every possible way, this does not mean that the borders between states become less significant. On the contrary, in many matters, they become tougher. For example, although there is a visa-free regime within the EU, which allows citizens to move more freely within the framework of the association, in relation to other countries, the rules for entering an EU member state are becoming more complicated. Moreover, after the introduction of visa-free status in Ukraine, the EU demanded that the authorities tighten the rules for entry into the country since migrants took advantage of the opportunity of entering EU states through Ukraine. A similar issue arose in the United States in the middle of the last decade with Mexican irregular migrants who tried to enter the country illegally, prompting then President Trump to build a wall between Mexico and the States, which is now known as the US-Mexican wall.

It has already been mentioned above how the Covid-19 crisis affected migration processes in the world, but it is worth mentioning this in more detail. It has become more difficult for migrants to move between countries, due to the total closure of borders. However, the situation for migrants has worsened in many countries. Many of them lost their jobs, especially those who could not fully integrate into the local environment, their already low standard of living became much worse, and many were trapped in their cities due to internal restrictions on movement around the country. This issue was particularly acute in Delhi, when tens of thousands of migrants gathered on the streets of the city, trying to walk hundreds of kilometres to their rural settlements, cities in other states or even other countries. To solve this problem, the state prepared special buses to transfer people to other states; data on these people was collected on special portals; when they arrived home, these people were quarantined for fourteen days. All this also reduced the amount of money that migrants transferred to their home countries, which worsened the standard of living not only for migrant families but also for those countries where migrants sent money (Mohylnyi, 2019; Sabluk, 2021).

Most countries (approximately 54%) have migration policies that aim to promote orderly, safe, legal, and responsible migration (UN, 2021). The association of five countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia), the EAEU was created in 2015 (before that, from 2001-2014 there was the EurAsEC, which was the predecessor of the EAEU). It is an international organisation of regional economic integration, which ensures the implementation of a unified policy in the economy, and freedom of movement of goods, services, capital, and labour (Kirova, 2019). With the help of this association, it is planned to increase the competitiveness of the national economies of the member states, increase the living standards of the local population, implement policies for the modernisation of member



states' enterprises, and legalise the movement of goods and labour, etc. The actions of the EAEU member states fully correspond to the global trends of group solutions to issues related to international migration. The decision of these and other states on mutual assistance was made almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). Initially, they came together under the umbrella of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), but, for various reasons, this organisation has now effectively done nothing. However, the first important action on the way to joint cooperation of countries in the migration sphere was taken here, as a visa-free travel agreement was signed between the countries in 1992. Now, in the EAEU, the department "Labour Migration" of the Department of Business Development is responsible for the movement of labour resources.

The main reason for significant labour migration between the EAEU countries is the imbalance of their national human resources. For the most part, this migration is irregular, so one of the association's top priorities is to regulate this activity from a legal perspective, provide social protection for migrants, and address the problems caused by migration processes. It is also important to note that recently there has been a trend toward an increase in the number of migrants of rural origin, who often find it even more difficult to adjust to a new country and urban life. In addition, there is a decrease in the level of education of migrants; although almost all of them are fluent in Russian, only about a third can write and fill in documents in Russian competently. Another issue caused by the illegal component of migration between the EAEU countries is that some of the migrant workers in these countries work illegally. Not only does this not bring the necessary money into the state budget and create benefits for companies that use illegal labour, but it also contributes to the shadow sector of these countries' economies. The existing methods of national and supranational levels of regulation of the entry and stay of migrants in the territory of the country do not always contribute to the solution of this problem. It is important to note that at this stage, national methods of this regulation are much better developed than supranational ones. The development of supranational methods of regulating migration issues would significantly strengthen control over the movements and actions of migrants in countries.

In turn, the majority of labour migrants in absolute terms fall on Russia and Kazakhstan. Moreover, these countries ranked high ('4th' and '16th' respectively in the International Organisation for Migration (2019) report), but the reason for this is primarily the size of these countries. In terms of shares, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia are the leaders. Nevertheless, Russia and Kazakhstan are in need of a foreign workforce and are experiencing a demographic crisis; therefore, it is particularly important for them to receive migrants from other EAEU member states. Due to their more advanced economies (better living standards and higher wages than the other member states), the labour force is directed to these countries, but this is still not enough to overcome the crisis, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Pogorelskaya, 2020). Thus, the main burden of all social issues related to labour integration and the unification of countries into a single union is observed in Russia and Kazakhstan. However, it is important to note that due to the crisis in some countries, the average salary of migrants has increased. In Russia, for example, it has risen to around 45,000 roubles in 2020, while for Russian citizens it is around 51,000 roubles (Duel, 2021). Although this raise has mostly reduced the supply of labour on the market, which has increased the price of labour. At the same time, the different level of development creates some differences in migration policy between countries. Thus, Armenia's objective is to develop public policies to encourage its citizens to return to the republic from abroad. Kazakhstan has a similar goal, the purpose

of which is to develop a mechanism for the return or replacement of highly skilled labour. However, such a policy may run counter to the goals of other member states.

In this case, a more favourable economic situation is not the sole reason for migration. Several other factors can be distinguished:

1. Cultural and historical: the similarity of the association's member countries in cultural and historical terms is that they were members of the same association – the USSR. This is also due to the absence of language barriers between countries since in all these states the majority of the populations can speak Russian fluently.
2. Infrastructural and geographical: the convenient location of the countries allows migrants to easily move by different types of transport with different price categories, which greatly simplifies the migration process.
3. Political factor: there are stable political arrangements between the states, including visa-free travel, simplified employment, and others (which are described further in the article).
4. Economic factor: has been described above in the text; it is primarily related to the significant differences in living standards and incomes between countries, and the benefits of migration processes between countries.
5. Social factor: there is a strong stereotype in these countries that a young person who has migrated is bound to become successful. Moving to Russia is seen by them as a good life experience and a great way to earn money. The reasons for this stereotype were examples of relatives and neighbours who actually became more successful after travelling abroad.
6. Demographic factor: lies in the diverse demographics of labour-exporting and labour-importing countries; for example, Russia is in need of certain types of labour, while other member states may have an abundance of this type of labour. It also depends on the country's fertility and mortality rates.

Although all factors have strong influence on migration in the EAEU, the member countries pay less attention to some of them. To achieve their labour integration policy objectives, the EEU member states have been able to agree on the possibility for their nationals to obtain equal rights to employment within the union without obtaining additional documents. In addition, they are exempt from having to register their place of residence in an EEA Member State within 30 days. All migrant workers have the opportunity to receive the right to quality medical care (the quality and conditions of which vary from country to country), and their children are entitled to free education on the same basis as nationals. As the qualifications of the association's citizens are automatically recognised in all EAEU member states in the vast majority of occupations (except for professions such as doctors and lawyers), it makes it easier to get a job. Some problems have been particularly difficult to solve, such as the issue of pension systems for citizens of member states. The drafting of the agreement took more than five years, but it was agreed to export part of a worker's pension located in another state's territory. On 1 July 2021, the Unified Search System "Jobs without Borders" was also officially launched, which provides access to vacancies in member states' information systems. It consists of five public employment services that interact with each other through standard software, API methods and a unique unified interface. In addition, migrants were allowed to



work not only under an employment contract but also a civil law contract. For workers, the established single tax on the personal income of citizens of the EAEU member states also plays an important role (Leighton, 2013; Zulfu Alili et al., 2019).

The introduction of the above rules, contracts, and projects, which were put into effect almost immediately after their adoption, heralds the foundation for the future emergence of a single labour market between countries and, in the future, of a single economic space. This also indicates an understanding among EEU members of how important the labour integration aspect is for the future successful functioning of the association and its development. They have made it possible to significantly increase the number of migrants who move between the EAEU member states. This also shows that a kind of large-scale migration subsystem already exists between countries and is successfully functioning and developing. It is also important to note that the integration of the EAEU countries takes place not only at the level of labour integration but also at other levels of the economic system. For example, Askar Kishkembayev, Head of the Secretariat of the Member of the Board (Minister) for Economy and Financial Policy of the Eurasian Economic Commission, 2020 argued for the promotion of Eurasian integration in the sphere of services liberalisation in terms of legal provision; such liberalisation would affect the living standards of population and income of businesses, thus indirectly affecting migrants and their labour integration (Single markets..., 2020).

Nevertheless, many factors do not allow for high-quality integration both in the labour market and at the level of the association. During the pandemic, these factors reappeared. It has hit countries hard, as it has significantly reduced the exports of many countries dependent on oil prices. The countries found themselves in crisis but reacted to it in different ways and pursued relatively independent policies. Another illustrative example of the lack of unification of foreign policy is the unwillingness of countries to join Russian counter-sanctions against the West. Another problem is that countries do not have clear obligations to each other, so not all development strategies and agreements adopted together are being implemented effectively.

Thus, significant progress is being observed in terms of the development of labour integration in the EAEU (Tkachenko, 2016). This is confirmed by many recent steps taken in this direction, even in recent years. However, it is worth noting that some of these solutions do not work as planned. For example, Kyrgyz workers prefer to acquire Russian citizenship rather than work with a permanent residence permit. In this respect, they are no different from workers from Tajikistan, which is not part of the EEU. Thus, there are still problems with the integration of labour in the EAEU member states, which are largely related to the worldview of the citizens of these countries. Some scientists say that such inequalities concerning migrants are already becoming the norm in the association (Poletaev, 2020). To prevent this, states should pursue a more diverse policy in the field of labour migration, which would deal not only with economic and legal warehouse migration, but also cultural. Although it is difficult to imagine the absence of employment inequalities between migrants and nationals, as they exist in one form or another in absolutely all countries, this is a state to aspire to (Lyutov & Golovina, 2018)

## **Conclusions**

The development of transport infrastructure has led to significantly simplifying the migration process. This has repeatedly increased the volume of labour migration in the world. On the

other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a migration crisis caused by the closure of state borders and widespread lockdowns of the main places of employment for migrants.

There is a certain competition between states for migrants, since they are essential for economic development in many countries despite potential social and political risks. Nevertheless, benefits of migration, particularly labour migration, paves way for liberalisation in the movement of labour between countries. For the EAEU, developing a common labour market is an important component for the objective of a single economic space. In the five years of the association's existence, many steps have been taken to foster this type of integration, from simplifying the paperwork for migrants to creating a unified system for finding employment in the association.

Although much has been done, certain issues remain. This is indicated by both the ambiguous attitudes towards labour migrants in some EAEU countries, the inefficiency of the decisions taken for the development of labour integration, the still existing illegal migration, and the lack of a unified foreign policy strategy not only in the matter of migration, which is caused by the different development levels of the countries but also in many other areas. These contradictions have become especially noticeable in recent years, during the pandemic. Thus, to further promote labour integration, the EAEU member states should continue to develop in this perspective, but in a more multifaceted and comprehensive way, at national and supranational levels; increase the level of interaction between countries and deal with integration not only in the labour market but also in other areas.

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