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MIGRATION SITUATION REPORT

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KYRGYZSTAN

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)
MOBILITY TRACKING MATRIX (MTM)



IOM
UN MIGRATION

GLOBAL DATA INSTITUTE
DISPLACEMENT
TRACKING MATRIX

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Introduction

The report aims to present migration dynamics in Kyrgyzstan, drawing upon data from 2022 and 2023 from national and international datasets on migratory movements. It covers recent major global and regional developments which will continue to have an impact on internal and international migration in the country. Collection and analysis of migration data is one of the action points of the Mid-Term Work Plan for 2022-2025 to implement the [Concept of State Migration Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021-2030](#). Specifically, action point No. 27 stipulates that a national system of collection of migration-related statistical data shall be developed at the local and national levels. To support the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to implement this task and contribute to evidence-based migration management IOM Kyrgyzstan Mission has established a Mobility Tracking Matrix team (MTM) in 2022.

The [MTM](#) is adapted to Kyrgyzstan context from the global DTM methodology and it is a system that tracks and monitors displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs

Methodology

The compilation of this report was done through desk research, literature review and statistical analysis of relevant primary and secondary sources. The MTM team collected and processed statistical data, including all those relevant for the analysis of mobility outflows and inflows to the country in the last two years.

The research has been conducted through a scientific literature review of the results of research done by international organizations, national research centres and authors of interest in the Central Asia (CA) region. The following providers were the main data sources for this report:

- Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic (MLSSM)
- National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic (NBKR)
- National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (NSC)
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- World Bank (WB)

Limitations

The research presented in the report does not aim to cover all migration topics rather, the report focuses on the most relevant migration topics for Kyrgyzstan, including the international migrant stock and flows, the permanent residence permits in the country, the emigrant stock and flows from Kyrgyzstan to the main destination countries and remittances.

For this purpose, different sources have been used, some of which (1) may not have available data for 2021 through 2023, (2) may not have disaggregation or breakdowns that are compatible with other data, or (3) may not have their methodology publicly available. For more information, please refer to the sources listed in the bibliography at the end of the report.

International and internal migration stock and flows

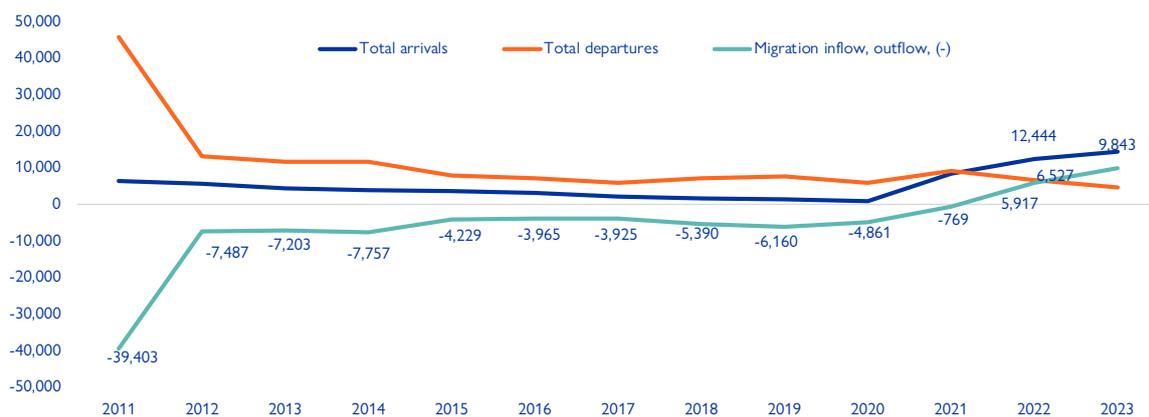
In 2022 National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyz Republic conducted census of population and included questions on migration. Census revealed that 16% of the total population of Kyrgyz, 1 million 94.5 thousand people were temporarily¹ absent from their permanent residence, where 876, 883 (80% of absent population) migrated abroad and the rest (271,631) reside within territories of Kyrgyzstan (NSC KR, 2024). The majority of Kyrgyz citizens migrate abroad for the purpose of employment, regardless of gender, while the rest left for family reasons, study and other reasons. The regions most significantly affected by outmigration, encompassing both internal and external movements, are Batken, Jalalabad, and Talas. Approximately 40% of the working-age population in these areas is absent due to migration.

According to the [Institute for Statistics \(UIS\)](#), in 2022 Kyrgyzstan welcomed 71.7 thousand students from abroad majority from Uzbekistan (40,282), India (15,306), Pakistan (8,407). In 2021, more than 13,000 Kyrgyz students were studying abroad, mainly in the Republic of Türkiye (1,792 students), Kazakhstan (1,161), Germany (515), the USA (339) and the Republic of Korea (246) (UIS, 2023).

According to estimates provided by key informants in the baseline mobility assessment conducted by the MTM in Kyrgyzstan (IOM, 2024), data for the period from 2020 to 2023 indicate that a total of 46,370 international migrants are actively engaged or previously engaged in paid activities in the country. Among this cohort, 23,723 international labour migrants (Russian Federation 9,995, Uzbekistan 7,400 and Kazakstan 2,163) were registered in 2023, 13,060 in 2022, 6,110 in 2021 and 3,477 in 2020, all of whom had been residing in Kyrgyzstan for at least one month. As of mid-June 2023, there were around 253 refugees and 775 asylum seekers in Kyrgyzstan mainly from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Republic of Türkiye, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine (UNHCR, 2023). Around 3,334 refugees and 5,569 asylum seekers from Kyrgyzstan were registered worldwide. Kyrgyz refugees are mainly hosted by the USA (1,626), France (535) and Germany (530), while Kyrgyz asylum seekers are mostly in the USA (4,389), the Republic of Korea (308) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain (UK - 327) (UNHCR, 2023).

In addition to the migration flows and stocks in Kyrgyzstan, the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic annually publishes data on the "arrivals"² and "departures"³. Prior to 2022, the migration balance consistently remained negative, indicating that more individuals departed from Kyrgyzstan than arrived, as per registration records. In 2023 Kyrgyzstan registered 14,453 total arrivals from abroad and these may include nationals of other countries who arrived in Kyrgyzstan for permanent residency. Most arrivals come from the Russian Federation (77%), followed by Tajikistan (7%), Kazakhstan (4%) and Uzbekistan (3%). In the same year, Kyrgyzstan registered 4,610 departures abroad (NSC KR, 2024a). Most of those who left Kyrgyzstan for another country were heading to the Russian Federation (66%) and to Kazakhstan (24%). The number of departures exceeded the number of migrants arriving between 2011 and 2021. Over this 10-year period, although the difference between the two annual totals fluctuated, the volume of arrivals slowly approached that of departures. In 2022, for the first time in the last ten years, the number of arrivals exceeded the number of departures, leading to a positive balance of 5,917 individuals with permanent residency⁴, in 2023 positive balance reached even 9,843 (NSC, 2024).

Figure 1 - Migrant flows to Kyrgyzstan, 2011-2022 (absolute values)



Source: National Statistics Committee (NSC) of Kyrgyzstan, 2023

¹ Persons temporarily absent from Permanent (Usual) Residence refers to individuals who were, at the time of the population census, outside of the territory of the settlement of their permanent residence: persons who left for temporary or seasonal work, persons who are temporarily travelling for work, leisure, internship, family or friend visitation within or outside the Kyrgyz Republic, provided that the duration of such absence does not exceed 1 year. Exceptions to the definition above are the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic who were away on long-term (one year or more) work trips to work in diplomatic, trade and other missions of the Kyrgyz Republic overseas, as well as members of their households residing with them (NSC KR, 2024).

² Arrivals are the absolute number of persons entering the territory from outside the territory. It is determined as a result of compilation of statistical records of arrivals compiled in the course of registration (propiska) of the population at the place of residence (NSC KR).

³ The number of departures is the absolute number of persons who left the territory for other countries. Determined as a result of statistical record of departures, compiled when the population is discharged (deregistered) at the place of residence (NSC KR).

⁴ Permanent residency is a person's legal resident status in a country or territory of which such person is not a citizen but where they have the right to reside on a permanent basis. This is usually for a permanent period; a person with such legal status is known as a permanent resident

Internal migration

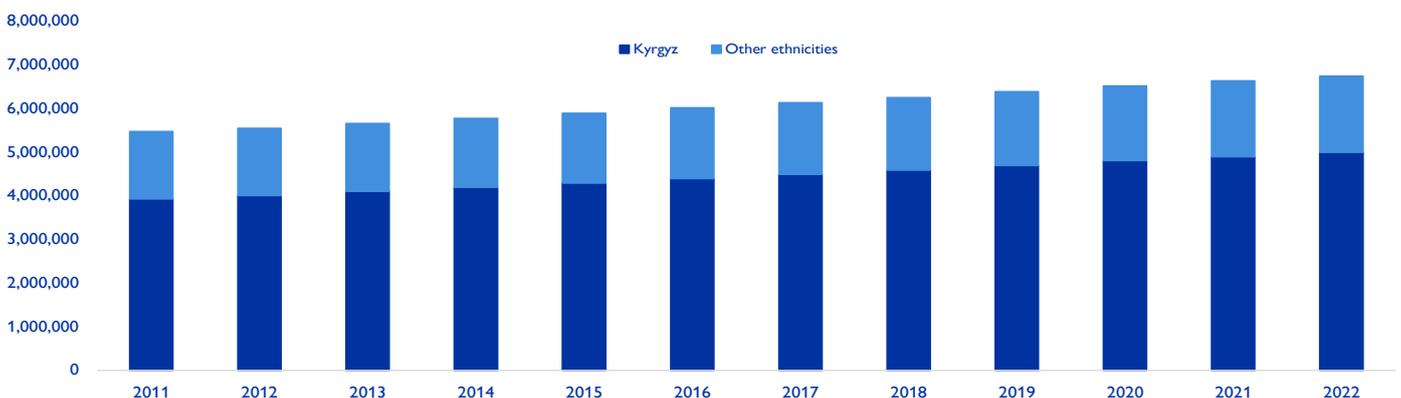
The 2022 National Census showed that 1.1 million citizens were temporarily absent from their usual place of residence, with 80 per cent of them (876,883) abroad and the remaining 20 per cent (217,631) living within the country (NSC KR, 2024). Internal mobility is mainly driven by employment for both men and women. However, family-related issues also play an important role, especially motivating women to migrate internally (39.9 % work and 36.2 % family respectively). In addition, 21.4 per cent of women move for educational reasons. In contrast, for men the main motivation is work: 67 % migrate for work-related reasons, followed by family matters with 26.4 %, and a comparatively smaller percentage, 17.4 %, move for educational reasons (NSC KR, 2024).

In 2022, overall, 166,333 people were displaced within the country due to conflicts and disasters (of them, 166,329 internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflicts and four IDPs due to natural disasters). By end of 2022, majority of these people were returned back home. However, at the end of 2022, there were still around 4,000⁵ internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country due to conflicts and disasters (IDMC, 2023).

Composition of the population and voluntary relocation of ethnic Kyrgyz

Kyrgyzstan has a population equal to 7.1 million people, consisting of 74 per cent Kyrgyz ethnicity and 26 per cent other ethnicities. This composition has been consistent for the last eleven years (NSC, 2023).

Figure 2 - Kyrgyzstan population by ethnicity, 2011-2022 (absolute numbers)



Source: National Statistics Committee (NSC) of Kyrgyzstan, 2023

Among the non-Kyrgyz population, the five main ethnicities are Uzbeks (999,300 or 14% of the total population), followed by Russians (335,237; 5%), Dungans (76,573; 1.13%), Tajiks (61,033; 0.9%) and Uyghurs (61,000; 0.9%) (NSC, 2023).

After its independence at the end of 1991, many ethnic Kyrgyz from neighbouring countries, mainly Tajikistan and Afghanistan, have voluntarily relocated to Kyrgyzstan (Temirbek uulu, 2018). The first large wave of relocations in 90s (more than 20 thousand refugees) was triggered by civil war in Tajikistan in the mid-1990, where mostly Kyrgyz ethnicities resided in Pamir (TNH, 2001). In order to support the government to protect and find solutions for refugees, UNHCR opened its representation in Kyrgyzstan in 1995 (UNHCR, 2022). Since then, the Kyrgyz government ratified law on refugees and then implemented law on ethnic Kyrgyz in 2007 (Ministry of Justice, 2023). The law, established two terms “ethnic Kyrgyz” and “kairylyman⁶”. Kyrgyz government implemented the program for assistance to ethnic Kyrgyz resettling in the country from 2017 to 2022 (Ministry of Justice, 2016). Ethnic Kyrgyz who have returned to their historical homeland first receive permanent residency and can later apply for citizenship of Kyrgyzstan in a simplified manner.

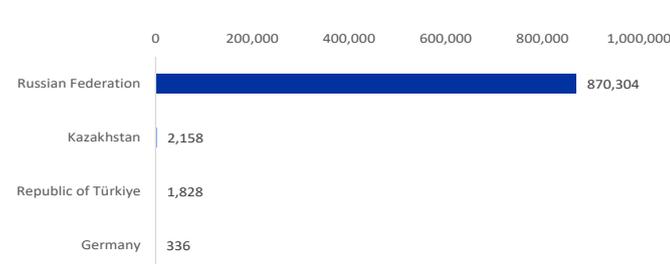
⁵ IDP's number refer to 2022 time period and therefore change over the year.

⁶ Kairylyman – an ethnic Kyrgyz who is a foreign citizen or stateless person who voluntarily resettles in Kyrgyzstan and obtains the status of a Kairylyman; Kairylyman status - a temporary legal status before acquiring citizenship of Kyrgyzstan (Ministry of Justice, 2023).

Main destination countries

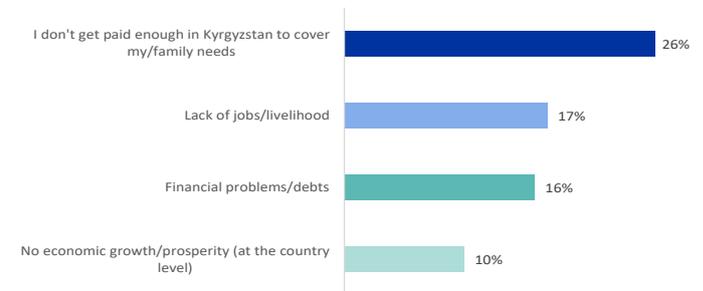
The top-5 countries of destination for Kyrgyz nationals are (international migration flows): Russian Federation (870,304), Kazakhstan (2,158), Republic of Türkiye (1,828), Germany (336) and South Korea (240) (NSC KR, 2024). According to estimations by IOM MTM⁷ 328,458 Kyrgyz nationals were residing abroad since 2020 as of 2023 (international migrant stock⁸), where 79% of them were in Russian Federation, 4.5% in Kazakhstan and 4% in Türkiye (IOM, 2024). In the context of regions significantly influenced by international migration, it is noteworthy that the southern areas, namely Jalalabad, Osh, and Batken, exhibit notable patterns in both migration flows and stock originating from Kyrgyzstan (IOM, 2024 & NSC KR, 2024). The primary drivers of migration out of the country remain dissatisfaction with wages in Kyrgyzstan (26%), lack of job opportunities (17%), financial difficulties and debts (16%), and a perceived lack of prosperity in their home country (10%) (IOM, 2024). According to the NSC, 80 per cent of migrants from Kyrgyzstan who work abroad choose countries with a similar historical background and language, and where they have a network of people from home (NSC, 2023).

Figure 3 - Top 5 destination countries



Source: NSC, 2024

Figure 4 - Primary drivers for re-migration



Source: IOM - MTM, Surveys

Beyond the Russian Federation, the Government of Kyrgyzstan is actively trying to diversify destination countries for migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, exploring opportunities in countries such as the Republic of Korea, UK, Germany, and Japan through bilateral agreements. In 2008, Kyrgyzstan signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Republic of Korea on implementing Employment Permit System (EPS) program⁹, which allows Kyrgyz citizens to be employed in the Republic of Korea with social benefits and protection (MLSSM, 2023a). Since the beginning of the agreement between countries, in total more than 5000 labor contracts have been received, most of them work at enterprises of food and paper industry, with accommodation and meals financed by employer. In 2022, 888 people were employed under the EPS system and since the beginning of 2023, 269 have been employed according to the same agreement (MLSSM, 2023a). Kyrgyzstanis have the opportunity to go to work in the UK under the approved quota, which in 2022 was 1,500 individuals, while in 2023 the quota was increased by 500 people making a total of 2,000 places for workers from Kyrgyzstan (Economist, 2023). Also, agreement with German Eduviso¹⁰ was signed in 2022 (migranty.org, 2022). An agreement with Japan was signed in 2023 (MLSSM, 2023b) and currently more than 700 citizens are being trained to work in Japan and are waiting for departure (MLSSM, 2023c).

⁷ Kyrgyzstan | Displacement Tracking Matrix (iom.int). The MTM data covers the entire country including all regions, rayons and ayil aimaks.

⁸ International migrant stocks are estimates of "the total number of international migrants present in a given country at a particular point in time" (IOM, 2021)

⁹ EPS (Employment Permit System) program is a government-to-government program between the Republic of Korea and selected partner countries that allows foreign workers to legally work in the Republic of Korea on a temporary basis (EPS, 2015).

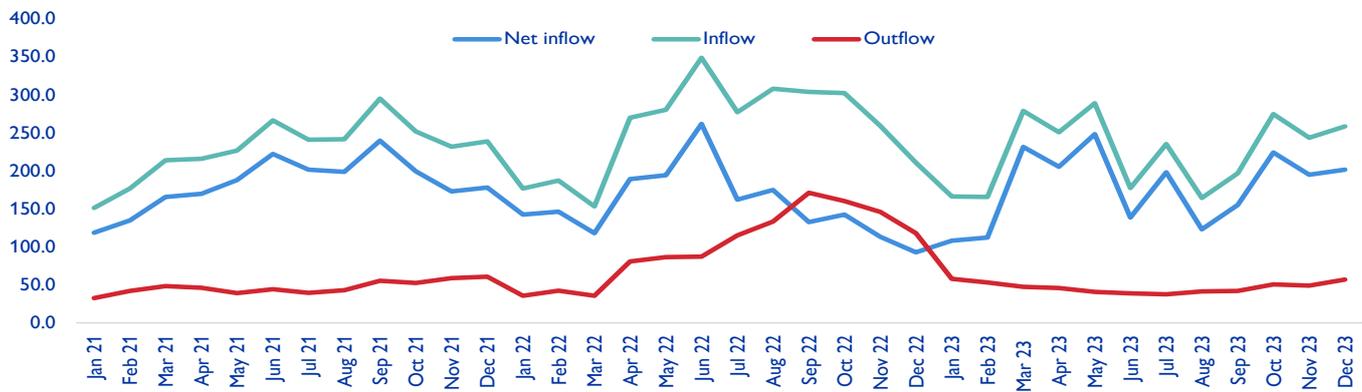
¹⁰ Eduviso is a German program of training medical workers (nurses) in Kyrgyzstan with further employment in Germany (Eduviso, 2023).

Remittances

According to the National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, the net flow of remittances decreased by 15% in 2022 compared to 2021 (2,193.5 million USD in 2021 and 1,873.0 million USD of net flow in 2022). However, in 2023, the net flow increased by 272 million USD compared to the net flow in 2022 (1,873.0 million USD in 2022 and 2,144.9 million USD of net flow in 2023).

In 2023, the share of remittances from the CIS countries comprised 94.3% (2,550.9 million USD), and remittances from far abroad or non-CIS countries comprised 5.7% (155.3 million USD). The remittances from top countries include the Russian Federation comprising 93.5% (2,531.5 million USD), the USA 2.0% (45.3 million USD), Türkiye 0.6% (1.4 million USD), and Kazakhstan 0.6% (0.2 million USD).

Figure 5 – Total and net remittance inflows to and outflows out of Kyrgyzstan, January 2021 – December 2023 (USD million)

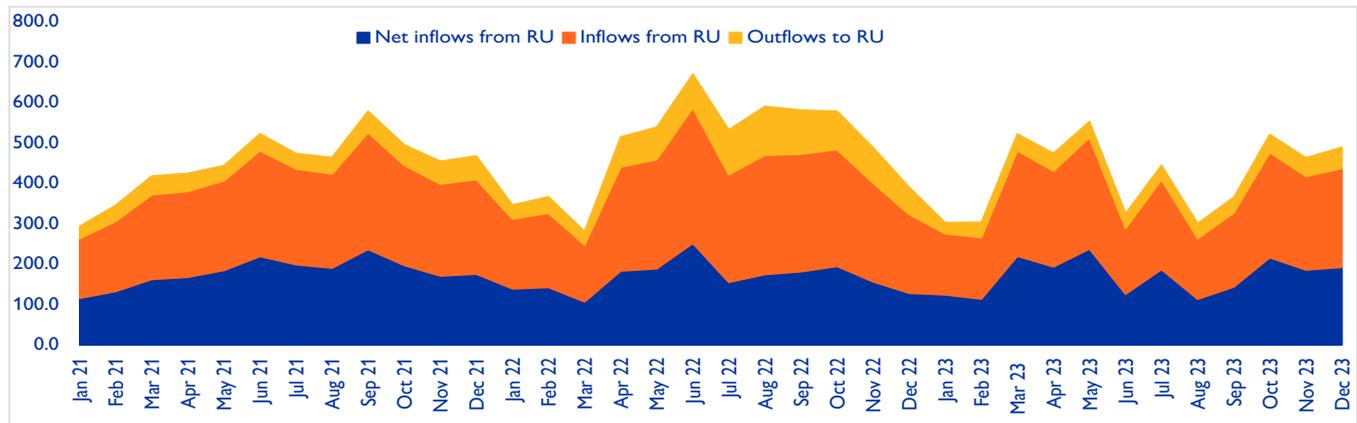


Source: National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic (2023)

In 2021, the share of remittances from the Russian Federation made up 98 per cent of total remittances, while in 2022 it was 95% and in 2023 94% respectively. The share of remittance inflow from the Russian Federation to Kyrgyzstan fell from 183.3 million USD in February 2022 to 140.6 million USD in March 2022 (from 97% of total remittance inflow to 91%). Following the initial drop, the share of remittances from the Russian Federation slowly increased, reaching 96 per cent in August 2022 (reaching 295 million USD) (NBKR, 2024). The depreciation of the Russian Ruble against the USD had a negative impact on remittances from the Russian Federation, the inflation increased twice which made costs for products and housing even higher and less accessible.

Despite the increase in 2023, remittances from the Russian Federation comprised 2,531.5 million USD, down from 2,938.5 million USD in 2022.

Figure 6 - Remittance inflows from and outflows to the Russian Federation, January 2021-December 2023 (USD millions)

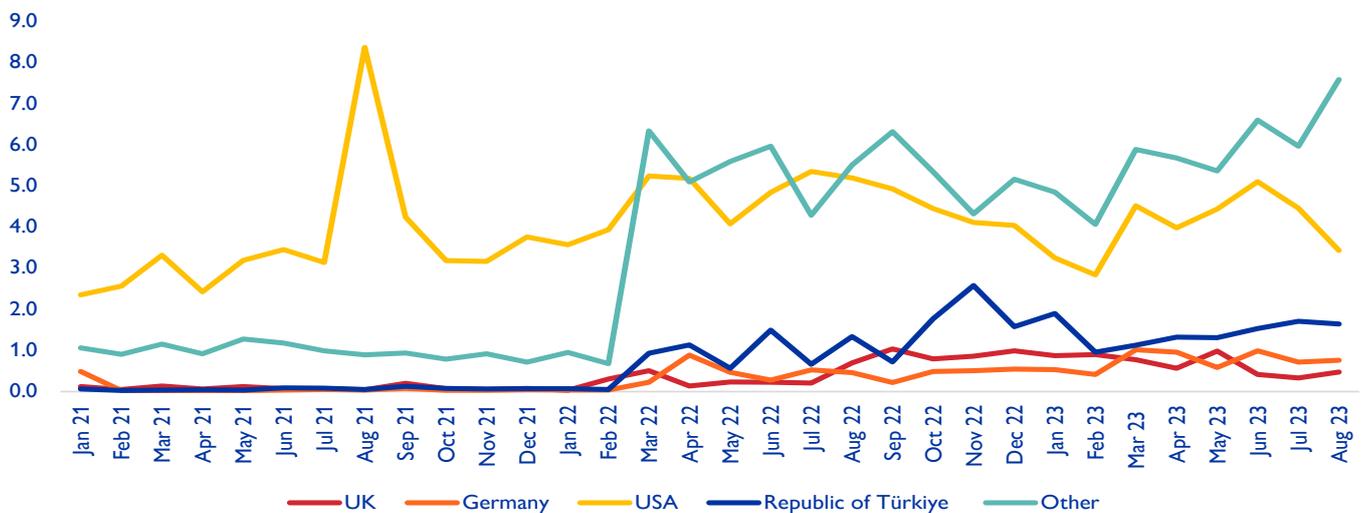


Source: National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic (2023)

Other countries that account for much smaller shares of remittances sent to Kyrgyzstan are the USA (3% of the total remittances inflows), followed by Kazakhstan (3%), Germany (1%), the Republic of Türkiye (1%), and the UK (with less than 1%) (NBKR, 2023). Remittances from the USA, the Republic of Türkiye and other countries have fluctuated drastically since 2021. The remittances from the USA reached a peak in August 2022 (8.4 million USD) and now are fluctuating again over time: since that date, the average monthly remittance inflow did not exceed 5.4 million USD (July 2022). In September 2021, the remittances from the Republic of Türkiye increased as well as remittances from other countries with non-traditional sources of remittances. For the given period, remittance inflow from the Republic of Türkiye was the highest value with 2.6 million USD in November 2022 (NBKR, 2023).

The top two non-CIS countries senders of remittances were the USA with 45.3 million USD in 2023 and Republic of Türkiye with 17.5 million USD.

Figure 7 - Total remittances inflows from non-CIS countries, January 2021-August 2023 (USD millions)



Source: National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic (2023)

Migration and human capital

National Statistical Committee revealed that in 2022 economically active population was around 2.7 million, of which 876,900 or 32% were abroad (NSC, 2024). The number of women and men temporarily absent from their place of residence and migrating abroad is approximately equal, with figures standing at 437.8 thousand and 439.1 thousand, respectively. The largest age group among both men and women who have migrated is between 20 and 40 years old (NSC, 2024).

Over a third of the surveyed returned migrant workers (38%) have attained upper secondary education, while one in four returned migrant workers (25%) have completed tertiary education, obtaining a bachelor's or master's degree. Fifteen per cent of the migrant workers have secondary non-tertiary education while 14 per cent of the migrants have completed short tertiary education. Less than ten per cent of the returned migrant workers have lower secondary education (IOM, 2024).

In this survey, most of the respondents indicated that they migrated from Kyrgyzstan in order to improve their financial situation and earn more money (36.9%), for employment and their career (15.9%), for family reasons (13%), to get better education to their children (11.6%) and to get better education (11.1%). The main fields of activity abroad are trade (17%), construction and architecture (8%), hotels and restaurants (6.9%), education and science (6.5%), logistics and warehouses (5.5%) and Information Technology (IT), programming, design (4.8%).

Two-thirds of Kyrgyz diaspora respondents (66.4%) expressed a desire to return to Kyrgyzstan and 21.5 per cent were unsure. If these relatively high-skilled migrants indeed return to Kyrgyzstan, as they desire to do, they would bring back skills and qualifications to contribute to the economy. Most respondents (87.8% of male and 74.4% of female respondents) want to contribute to development of Kyrgyzstan. The main sectors respondents want to contribute to are tourism and services (15.6%), entrepreneurship and investment (11.9%) (IOM, 2022).

The migration of Kyrgyz citizens abroad presents a complex interplay between brain drain and potential brain gain for the country. Many working migrants are highly educated and skilled, and their overseas experiences equip them with valuable expertise. As a result, there is an opportunity for Kyrgyzstan to harness this human capital by creating an environment that encourages these specialists to return and contribute to the country's development, potential boosting key sectors such as tourism, entrepreneurship, and which can lead to a more prosperous and vibrant future for the nation.

Acronyms and abbreviations

CA	Central Asia
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IT	Information Technology
KOSIS	Korean Statistical Information Service
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan
MLSSM	Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration of the Kyrgyz Republic
NSC	National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar

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