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MIGRATION AND ITS SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT ACROSS CENTRAL ASIA: INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMATIC SECTION

Zhanna BOLAT¹

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Migration is a central phenomenon in Central Asia's socioeconomic landscape, and its impact extends far beyond the immediate movement of people. As Cerqua et al. (2022) note, migration is a complex process: the number of migrants and their ethnic composition differ significantly across countries, highlighting migration's varied forms and consequences across regions. Shaped by various push and pull factors, migration has profound implications not only for the migrant populations themselves but also for the societies and economies the migrants leave behind and those they join. This thematic section on Migration and Its Socioeconomic Impact Across Central Asia explores the region's diverse migration trajectories, focusing on the socioeconomic challenges, opportunities, and implications they bring. The articles draw on an array of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, offering insights into how migration intersects with political, economic, environmental, and social factors.

The relevance of migration in Central Asia is strongly reinforced by scholarship demonstrating that migration has become a major political issue linked to human rights, development, and geopolitics (Zhumashbekova et al., 2023). Over recent decades, migration has been a defining feature of the region, influenced by a complex interplay of historical, political, and socioeconomic factors. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, regional conflicts, economic transitions, and environmental stressors have all contributed to the reshaping of migration patterns. Central Asia, with its unique geopolitical position and diverse sociopolitical conditions, serves as a source, transit corridor, and destination for different forms of migration. Internal migration from rural to urban areas remains significant—especially in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan—while the region as a whole continues to receive substantial numbers of labor migrants from surrounding regions. At the same time, forced displacement driven by political conflicts, environmental degradation, and economic distress adds another layer of migration, reshaping societies and

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economies. As Getman et al. (2025) emphasize, internally displaced persons are obliged to move due to political, socioeconomic, and environmental disruptions, often without crossing international borders, an important issue that resonates with the regional experiences discussed by Altybassarova et al., Amanturova et al., and Askarova et al.

The thematic section addresses key aspects of migration, highlighting both the short- and long-term impacts on societies and economies. Migration is not a one-dimensional process; it engages multiple actors, governance systems, and societal structures. As Zhumashbekova et al. (2023) observe, migration processes act as engines of progress in stable contexts, filling labor-market niches and stimulating economic activity; yet, they may also become sources of tension during crises. While migration can foster economic growth, technological diffusion, and human capital formation, poorly managed migration levels and directions risk amplifying inequalities, overwhelming public services, and intensifying social strains. The articles in this thematic section collectively underscore the need for comprehensive, evidence-based migration governance capable of addressing these intersecting pressures.

One of the central themes explored is the impact of political conflicts on migration pathways. Altybassarova et al., in their paper, examine how political instability, civil wars, and military conflicts in regions such as Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo fuel large-scale forced displacement. Their analysis echoes Raymer et al.'s (2022) observation that migrants from developing regions are often incorporated into global political economies while lacking essential economic, social, and political rights. Forced migration in such contexts is characterized by urgency, unpredictability, and heightened vulnerability, imposing considerable burdens on both sending and receiving states. Altybassarova et al. demonstrate how weakened institutions, deteriorated infrastructure, and economic decline in conflict-affected regions intensify migratory pressures, while countries receiving migrants must respond to increased demands on services and social systems. Mamaiev (2025) notes that labor migration can function as a social shock absorber by mitigating internal pressures during crises.

Another major area of focus in this thematic section is the relationship between migration and economic development, discussed most prominently by Amanturova et al. Their study on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan provides a rigorous analysis of how human capital mobility influences labor markets, technological advancement, and long-term economic trajectories. Their findings align with research showing that economically advanced states often strengthen educational systems and facilitate the swift integration of migrants into multicultural environments, thereby mitigating socioeconomic barriers (Kwilinski et al., 2023). The movement of people is thus deeply intertwined with shifts in employment, productivity, regional competitiveness, and the capacity of states to balance demographic and economic needs. However, as Amanturova et al. demonstrate, migration also increases competition in labor markets, particularly in urban centers, where both skilled and unskilled

migrants gather in search of opportunities. This, combined with the unequal distribution of technological resources and investment in research and development, shapes divergent trajectories of regional development.

The thematic section explores contemporary migration trends and socioeconomic challenges, as analyzed by Askarova et al., who highlight the effects of internal migration, cross-border labor mobility, rural underdevelopment, and policy reforms implemented between 2021 and 2024. Their findings resonate with research emphasizing that migration is inseparable from broader processes of socioeconomic transformation, labor-market restructuring, and policy adaptation (Zhumashbekova et al., 2023). The continuing movement from rural to urban areas in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan underscores persistent structural challenges, including uneven development, insufficient infrastructure, and disparities in employment opportunities. These observations raise important questions about long-term sustainability, particularly given demographic imbalances and the dependence of many families on remittances.

Migration through transit states in conflict contexts is another crucial theme, addressed by Korigova et al. Their analysis of countries such as Turkey, Italy, Greece, and Poland demonstrates how transit spaces shape migration routes, humanitarian responses, and geopolitical relations. The article underscores the complex strategic dimensions of migration, in which countries may use migration patterns to negotiate or gain leverage, and in which both local and international governance frameworks shape transit experiences. The vulnerabilities faced by women migrants underscore the need for gender-sensitive migration policies and protection mechanisms, further emphasizing the multilayered nature of migration governance.

Historical trajectories of migration also feature in this thematic section. In their study, Omash et al. offer a detailed examination of the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia from the 1920s to the 1950s, presenting the intersecting effects of famine, repression, and sociopolitical restructuring during the Soviet era. Their findings contribute to understanding how forced migration shapes long-term identity formation, political engagement, and transnational relationships. The endurance of cultural practices, communal resilience, and the continued role of diaspora communities as bridges between states illustrate the deeper historical dimensions of migration that continue to influence regional relations today.

Sarseitova examines contemporary infrastructure development shaped by labor migration, analyzing the role of remittances in shaping housing, transportation networks, and urbanization patterns. Her findings echo Mamaiev's (2025) argument that migration can reduce domestic socioeconomic pressure, yet they also reveal how remittances, though economically beneficial, often lead to imbalanced development. Urban centers flourish while rural regions lag, exacerbating internal disparities. The article's call for policies that channel remittances into sustainable, community-wide infrastructure development is particularly salient in the context of regional inequality.

Zharken et al. explore the increasingly urgent phenomenon of environmental migration by demonstrating how environmental degradation drives migration through its intersection with socioeconomic and institutional weaknesses. The lack of legal recognition for environmental migrants, highlighted in this work, reveals substantial gaps in existing policy frameworks across Central Asia, Iran, and China. Without institutional support, environmentally displaced populations remain especially vulnerable, underscoring the need for region-wide environmental governance and legal reform.

Finally, Zhi et al. address migration's sociocultural impact, emphasizing how young migrants navigate adaptation in transcultural educational environments. Their proposed model of adaptation, comprising Initial, Intermediate, Adaptive, and Final stages, provides practical insights for improving integration processes. These findings reinforce Kwilinski et al.'s (2023) argument that host countries with effective educational support systems can better facilitate migrant integration while reducing cultural and socioeconomic barriers. The article stresses the importance of language training, mentorship, inclusive policies, and interstate educational agreements in developing long-term adaptation outcomes for young people across Central Asia and China.

Collectively, the contributions in this thematic section provide a comprehensive understanding of migration trends in Central Asia. They illustrate that migration is shaped by political tensions, economic restructuring, environmental degradation, historical legacies, and sociocultural transformations, all of which are situated within broader global patterns. As Mamaiev (2025) reminds us, migration can serve as a stabilizing force, reducing poverty and alleviating labor-market tensions, while also generating new challenges when inadequately managed. The insights presented here demonstrate that Central Asian states must pursue balanced, forward-looking migration policies that integrate economic, social, legal, and environmental dimensions. At the same time, as Zhumashbekova et al. (2023) argue, international cooperation remains essential, especially in an era marked by instability, pandemics, and fluctuating geopolitical relations.

Ultimately, this thematic section underscores the need for holistic migration governance that recognizes the multidimensional realities of mobility in Central Asia. The countries of Central Asia can better capture the opportunities offered by migration while reducing its risks by strengthening the legal framework, promoting sustainable development, improving education and social support systems, and fostering regional cooperation. The studies included offer valuable pathways for future research and policy development, contributing to ongoing scholarly and practical efforts to understand and manage migration in a rapidly changing world.

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