Extent Abstract
Female Migration from Central Asia to Russia: Does It Impact on Gender Equality, Migrants’ Capabilities, and Economy?

Abstract. Female labour migration from Central Asia to Russia requires thorough gender analysis due to its relatively poor visibility (migration is poorly represented in official statistics since it is women who are employed in the informal sector more often). In their report the authors analyse the dynamics and structure of the migrants’ employment sector, contribution of female migration to the Russian economy and to gender equality development, aspects of female migrants’ rights infringement, as well as positive and negative consequences of migration for female labour migrants themselves using the opinion poll data. Data of three surveys concerning female migrants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and official statistics is used in the article. They were carried out in 1999, 2015 and 2016. The research results prove the growth of the share of women from CA in labour migration, the change of the labour application areas, the existing practices of female migrants’ labour rights infringement, different trajectories in the labour market, depending on the peculiarities of patriarchate practices in female migrants’ home country, knowledge of Russian language and political international programmes on market labour. The contribution of female migrants’ labour to the Russian economy proceeds in respect of their participation in the growing services sector and in the growing care economy under the conditions of ageing of population. An important conclusions is the presence of an oppositely directed contribution to the decrease of gender equality in Russia – growth of strengthening of female migrants and conservation of patriarchal roles. Positive and negative consequences for female migrants’ capabilities also reflect the oppositely directed effect of migration on overcoming gender inequality.

Data and method. Data from three research works performed by the authors is used in the article: 1) a questionnaire survey among non-documented migrants in Russia (1999); 2) the questionnaire survey “Feminisation of labour migration from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in Russia” (2015, supported by DFID); 3) the questionnaire survey “Analysis of labour market conditions in the Russian Federation for efficient employment of labour migrants from the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan” (2016, supported by the Tien Shan Analytical Centre of AUCA). Also data from official statistics of the FMS of Russia, the Federal State Statistics Service and the Federal Labour and Employment Service is used. The authors use quantitative methods of statistical analysis.

Results.
1) Since 1990s the share of women in labour migration flows from CA to Russia increased both according to official statistics data, and according to sampling studies. According to experts, the official data underreported this index by half from 1990 till 2010.

2) The contribution of female migrants from CA to the Russian economy is twofold. On the one hand, it is an increase of participation in the growing services sector, in the service economy. And it is a positive trend, because employment of women in Russia is very high, and the potential is exhausted. On the other hand, it is the participation in the “family / work” balance for Russian women, because the housewife services sector was growing in the 2000s and 2010s, and this niche was filled by female migrants from CA. In cities the model of active involvement of grandmothers in childcare is being gradually expelled by the hired housewife model. The positive effect of supporting the “family / work” balance for Russian women is strengthened under the conditions of Russian population ageing and expansion of
the care economy, when in addition to traditional childcare the demand for elder people care in households grows.

3) The contribution of female migrants to gender equality development in Russia is both beneficial (maintaining the employment level and carrier opportunities for Russian women) and adverse (conserving patriarchal rules in Russia).

4) The origin country in CA influences the share of female migration significantly. In 2015 the share of female component among Middle Asian citizens present in Russia amounted 40% among migrants from Kyrgyzstan, 18% among Uzbeks and 13% among Tajiks. It is due to knowledge of Russian language by female migrants and forms of patriarchal practices in their home countries.

5) In Russia there is a rather large shadow employment sector and part of the migrants are self-employed because they are ready to sacrifice their social protection for the sake of earnings, and they are an attractive workforce for shadow dealers. Despite all efforts in the area of foreign workforce labour regulation in Russia, and, in particular, regulation of Middle Asian migrants’ labour, a significant part of their employment remains in the “grey” zone of the Russian labour market, that is, if not in the shadow sector. Despite all positive changes, even within the Eurasian Economic Union there are some difficulties with complete legalisation of their employment, which means their significant vulnerability and even helplessness before a dishonest employer.

6) Female migrants are women with modest income but not the poorest ones, because not all women can overcome the poverty trap. The economic cause is determined as the main cause of migration in all studies. However, over the recent years the growing motivation is the women’s wish to preserve their family, because making a second family in emigration became widespread among male migrants from CA to Russia. Also there is the motivation of making a family because due to large-scale male migration the matrimonial market in their home country becomes unbalanced.

7) Female migrant labour rights infringement in the Russian labour market is spread over several items: failure to conclude an employment agreement, absence of work permitting documents and/or medical insurance, work duration exceedance and hard working conditions, relatively low wages. Women always keep a civil passport, which decreases the risks of the total dependence on the employer. Women find themselves in non-payment of wages situations more seldom.

8) The existing system of employment via “insiders” strengthens informal employment practices and conserves the vulnerable position of female labour migrants in the Russian labour market.

9) Protection of the rights of female (and male) migrants from Central Asia is complicated due to legal nihilism of female migrants themselves as they are neither willing to legalise their position in Russia, nor apply any efforts to conclude a labour agreement considering such an agreement unimportant and unnecessary. Therefore, in case of any complex or conflict situations the female labour migrants have little chances to protect their labour rights via court, officially.

10) In female migrant’s opinion, the positive results of labour migration to Russia are raising of living standards and improvement of feeding their children, the importance of attaining business experience and potential for starting their own business in their home country, obtaining independence from the husband and parents. The negative results are health deterioration, deterioration of family relations, family disruption risk, delay of births, absence of possibility to take care of elderly parents. It shall also be noted that for the female migrants themselves there is the oppositely-directed influence of labour migration on the gender equality decrease. On the one hand, their human capital assets, independence and their own monetary funds grow, on the other hand, work in the domestic labour area or filling low-skilled niches in the services area results in conservation of the unequal position of women and patriarchal model of role distribution.