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**THE ADAPTATION AND
INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS
FROM CENTRAL ASIA IN THE
LABOUR MARKET OF GULF
COOPERATION COUNCIL
COUNTRIES**

**МУТОБИҚСОЗЎ ВА
ХАМГИРОИИ МУҲОЧИРОН АЗ
КИШВАРҲОИ ОСИЁИ МАРКАЗӢ ДАР
БОЗОРИ МЕҲНАТИ КИШВАРҲОИ
ШУРОИ ҲАМКОРИИ ДАВЛАТҲОИ
АРАБИИ ХАЛИҶИ ФОРС**

**АДАПТАЦИЯ И ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ
МИГРАНТОВ ИЗ СТРАН
ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ НА РЫНКЕ
ТРУДА СТРАН СОВЕТА
СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА АРАБСКИХ
ГОСУДАРСТВ ПЕРСИДСКОГО
ЗАЛИВА (ССАГПЗ)**

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The purpose of the article is to identify the strategy of adaptation of labor migrants from Central Asian countries in the labor markets of the GCC countries, as well as the factors of migrants' reorientation to a new direction of labor migration. It is noted that every year million citizens from Central Asian countries come to Russia for employment. But every year the number of migrants from Central Asian countries in the Russian labor market began to decrease in favor of non-CIS countries. The reasons for the outflow of migrants from the Russian labor market are considered to be various economic crises, as well as annual changes in Russia's migration policy. The reasons for emigration to non-CIS countries from Central Asian countries, including the countries of the Council of the Commonwealth of Arab States of the Persian Gulf (GCC), bypassing Russia, can be divided into three stages. The first stage is the period of introduction of labor patents for foreign citizens. During this period, migrant workers began to leave part of their wages for the purchase of a labor patent. The second stage of emigration occurred during the period of the currency crisis in Russia. In addition to paying for a mandatory labor patent, migrants lost half of their wages due to the fall in the exchange rate of the Russian ruble against the US dollar. The third stage of emigration of citizens of Central Asian countries began after February 24, 2022, when the EU and the United States imposed new sanctions against Russia due to the situation with Ukraine. During this period, migrant workers lost their jobs due to the departure of foreign companies and firms, and their wages began to decline due to new economic sanctions by Western countries against the Russian ruble. It is concluded that these crises have led to an outflow of migrants from the Russian labor market in favor of foreign countries, primarily to the GCC countries.

Key-words: labor migration, GCC, Central Asia, adaptation, MIPEX, emigration, Russia, integration, labor market

Мақсади мақола муайян намудани стратегияи мутобиқиавии муҳочирони меҳнати кишварҳои Осиеи Марказӣ дар бозорҳои меҳнати кишварҳои Шӯрои ҳамкориҳои давлатҳои

араби халичи Форс, инчунин омилҳои бозгардонидани муҳоҷирон ба самти нави муҳоҷирати меҳнатӣ мебошад. Гуфта мешавад, ки ҳамасола як миллион нафар аз кишварҳои Осиёи Марказӣ барои дарёфти кор ба Русия меоянд. Аммо ҳамасола шумори муҳоҷирон аз кишварҳои Осиёи Марказӣ дар бозори кори Русия ба нафъи кишварҳои ИДМ коҳиш меёбад. Сабабҳои хуруҷи муҳоҷирон аз бозори кори Русияро буҳронҳои мухталифи иқтисодӣ, ҳамчунин тағйироти ҳарсола дар сиёсати муҳоҷирати Русия медонанд. Сабабҳои Русияро сарфи назар карда, ба мамолики хориҷии дур, аз ҷумла ба мамолики кишварҳои Шурои ҳамкориҳои давлатҳои араби халичи Форс муҳоҷират кардани қувваи кориро аз мамолики Осиёи Марказӣ метавон ба се марҳила ҷудо кард. Марҳилаи аввал давраи ҷорӣ намудани патентҳои меҳнатӣ барои шахрвандони хориҷӣ мебошад. Дар ин давра муҳоҷирони корӣ як қисми маошашонро барои харидани патенти меҳнатӣ сарф мекунанд. Марҳилаи дуюми муҳоҷират дар давраи буҳрони асфдор дар Русия рух дод. Муҳоҷирон бар иловаи пардохти патенти меҳнатии ҳатмӣ, бар асари поин рафтани қурби рубли русӣ дар баробари доллари амрикоӣ нисфи маоши худро аз даст доданд. Марҳилаи сеюми муҳоҷирати шахрвандони кишварҳои Осиёи Марказӣ пас аз 24 феввали соли 2022, замоне оғоз шуд, ки кишварҳои Иттиҳодияи Аврупо ва ИМА ба далели авзоъ дар Украина таҳримҳои нав алайҳи Русияро ҷорӣ карданд. Дар ин давра муҳоҷирони корӣ ба далели хуруҷи ширкату фирмаҳои хориҷӣ ҷои кори худро аз даст доданд ва маоши онҳо дар натиҷаи таҳримҳои нави иқтисодии кишварҳои ғарбӣ алайҳи рубли русӣ коҳиш ёфт. Хулоса шудааст, ки ин буҳронҳо боиси хуруҷи муҳоҷирон аз бозори кори Русия ба нафъи кишварҳои хориҷӣ, пеш аз ҳама ба кишварҳои узви Шурои ҳамкориҳои кишварҳои араби халичи Форс шудааст.

Калидвожаҳо: муҳоҷирати меҳнатӣ, кишварҳои халичи Форс, Осиёи Марказӣ, мутобиқсозӣ, MIPEX, муҳоҷират, Русия, ҳамгирой, бозори меҳнат

Цель статьи - выявить стратегию адаптации трудовых мигрантов из стран Центральной Азии на рынках труда стран ССАГПЗ, а также факторы переориентации мигрантов на новое направление трудовой миграции. Отмечено, что ежегодно миллион граждан из стран Центральной Азии приезжает на трудоустройство в Россию. Но с каждым годом количество мигрантов из стран Центральной Азии на российском рынке труда стало уменьшаться в пользу стран дальнего зарубежья. Причинами оттока мигрантов с российского рынка труда считаются различные экономические кризисы, а также ежегодные изменения в миграционной политике России. Причины эмиграции в страны дальнего зарубежья из стран Центральной Азии, в том числе в страны Совета Содружества арабских государств Персидского залива (ССАГПЗ) в обход России, можно разделить на три этапа. Первый этап – период введения трудовых патентов для иностранных граждан. В этот период трудовые мигранты начали оставлять часть заработной платы на приобретение трудового патента. Второй этап эмиграции пришелся на период валютного кризиса в России. Помимо оплаты обязательного трудового патента, мигранты потеряли половину заработной платы из-за падения курса российского рубля по отношению к доллару США. Третий этап эмиграции граждан центральноазиатских стран начался после 24 февраля 2022 года, когда страны ЕС и США ввели новые санкции в отношении России из-за ситуации с Украиной. В этот период трудовые мигранты потеряли работу из-за ухода иностранных компаний и фирм, а также их заработная плата начала снижаться из-за новых экономических санкций западных стран в отношении российского рубля. Сделан вывод, что эти кризисы привели к оттоку мигрантов с российского рынка труда в пользу зарубежных стран, в первую очередь в страны ССАГПЗ.

Ключевые слова: трудовая миграция, ССАГПЗ, Центральная Азия, адаптация, МІРЕХ, эмиграция, Россия, интеграция, рынок труда

Labor migration from Central Asian countries represents one of the largest migration corridors in the world. The Russian Federation is a global center of attraction for migrants along with Western European countries, Saudi Arabia and the United States. Before the crisis of 2020, 15-16 million foreign citizens visited the Russian Federation annually. At least 30% of them came to the country for the purpose of employment. This has created a peculiar and extremely significant factor for the Central Asian countries of dependence on remittances from migrants. Thus, for Kyrgyzstan, migrant transfers are more significant than the entire state budget, they form over 30% of GDP. Transfers from the Russian Federation also play an important role for other countries in the region.

Over the past decade and a half, labor migration to Russia has undergone significant changes both in terms of the number of migrants and in the ranking of the main donor countries of migration to the Russian Federation. The number of documented labor migrants has changed especially noticeably – for example, the number of labor migrants who had official documents to work in the Russian Federation increased from 200 thousand in the early 2000s to 3.7 million in 2014. The current economic situation in Russia since the end of 2014 could not but affect the behavior strategies of foreign workers. At the same time, migrant workers from different countries behaved differently. Migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan began to partially refuse to travel to Russia to work, and migrants from the EAEU member states who received benefits in the labor market, on the contrary, began to increase their presence in the Russian Federation. At that time, migrants from other Central Asian countries began to focus on other emigration channels, primarily to the GCC countries. [1].

The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, also known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional, intergovernmental, political, and economic union comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Charter of the GCC was signed on 25 May 1981, formally establishing the institution⁴.

Cooperation between the GCC countries and the countries of Central Asia has been expanding in recent years. In October 2021, a session of the strategic dialogue between the GCC countries, which consists of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman, and the countries of Central Asia was held in the presence of the Secretary General of the GCC, as well as representatives of the countries of Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. At the end of the session, two memoranda of understanding were signed between the GCC and the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, which included a mechanism for cooperation and consultations in the political, economic, trade and investment spheres. The GCC Secretary General stressed that the signing of the two memoranda of understanding takes place within the framework of a constant desire to develop GCC relations with countries and global blocs in various areas of cooperation and is aimed at achieving the common interests of all parties⁵.

The paper examines the reasons for the emergence of a new direction of migration from the

⁴ "Charter of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)". // International Relations and Security Network. Retrieved 2 March 2017. URL: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125347/1426_GCC.pdf (accessed on 06.08.2023)

⁵ Conclusion of the session of the strategic dialogue between the states of the Cooperation Council and the Central Asian states and the signing of two memorandums of understanding between the general secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab states of the Gulf and the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, October 2021. [site]. URL: <https://www.gcc-sg.org/ar-sa/MediaCenter/NewsCooperation/News/Pages/news2021-10-12-3.aspx> (accessed on 04.02.2022)

countries of Central Asia (CA) in the period from 2015 to the oil-rich countries of the GCC. The features of the Kafala system, the main system regulating the presence and working and living conditions of migrant workers in the GCC countries, and its impact on the processes and opportunities for adaptation and integration of migrants in host countries, are also considered. Although each of the GCC countries has its own specifics, from the point of view of migration policy, the council countries have a number of structural similarities, including, according to migration expert and former director of the Mediterranean Migration Observatory Baldwin-Edwards, “low overall level of participation and employment of citizens; extreme segmentation of the labor market – especially public/private and national/emigrant workers; rising unemployment rates, the importance of Kafala, or sponsorship system, for a flexible supply of “temporary” foreign labor (which is actually more permanent)” [2, p.12].

Research methods

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used to identify the level of integration of migrants into the GCC countries. The quantitative method used in this work is the analysis of the indicators of the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) for the UAE and Saudi Arabia in order to identify the impact of adopted policies in various fields on the integration of migrants in the oil-rich monarchies of the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the paper presents the results of a sociological survey conducted among migrants from Central Asia currently living and working in one of the GCC countries. The survey was conducted online by the authors in April 2022. The questionnaire was posted on social networks of migrants from Central Asian countries to the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The sample includes 35 respondents, of whom 19 (54.3%) are men and 16 (45.7%) are women. The youngest respondent is 22 years old, and the oldest is 58 years old. The average age of the respondents was 34 years.

The topic of adaptation and integration of migrants from Central Asia into the GCC has not been sufficiently studied, although several works have been devoted to the topic of adaptation and integration of migrants from South Asia [3], [4]. Moreover, there are no statistics on the scale of labor migration from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries. For these reasons, it was impossible to create a representative sample. Accordingly, our study is descriptive in nature due to insufficient knowledge of the situation of migrant workers from Central Asia to the GCC countries. The purpose of our survey was to identify:

- the reasons for the reorientation of migrants from the Russian labor market to a new direction of labor emigration to the GCC countries;
- channels of emigration from Central Asia to the GCC countries;
- Sectoral employment of migrants from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries;
- Obstacles to the adaptation and integration of migrants in the labor market and society of the GCC countries.

Review of scientific literature

The problems of migration from Central Asian countries have always taken place in the works of domestic and foreign authors. Currently, migration processes from Central Asian countries to a new direction of labor migration to the OECD countries and the Persian Gulf are contained in the works of S. V. Ryazantsev [5], A.H. Rakhmonov [6], Sh.Yu. Akramov [7], V.Yu. Ledeneva [8], A.A. Kocherbaeva [9], M.N. Khramovoy [10], D. A. Zhampeisova [11] and others. The study of A.H. Rakhmonov, which reveals the factors, channels and scale of emigration from Tajikistan to the Persian Gulf countries, is essential [6]. The reasons for the reorientation of migrant workers from the Russian labor market to a new direction of labor emigration in the OECD countries are revealed in the works of S. V. Ryazantsev [12]. New aspects in the consideration of dynamics and trends are discussed in the work of V. Yu. Ledeneva [8].

Results

Features of emigration from Central Asia in the countries of the Council of the Commonwealth of Arab States of the Persian Gulf (GCC)

Among the main factors attracting migrants from Central Asian countries in the countries of the Council of the Commonwealth of Arab States of the Persian Gulf (GCC), first of all, is the active policy of the GCC countries to attract migrants, including from Central Asian countries, as well as factors such as a common religion - "Islam", deportation in Russia, good wages, economic crises in Russia, the popularization of some Persian Gulf countries among citizens of Central Asian countries [13]. As Table 1 shows, according to the human development index, the GCC countries are ahead of the Central Asian countries by an order of magnitude higher. In particular, the countries of the UAE and the KSA are two times ahead of the main country of "traditional emigration" for migrants from Central Asia, Russia, in terms of the human development index.

Table 1

Ranking of countries according to the Human Development Index (HDI) in 2021

Position in the rating of the Countryindex	Country	Index
26	UAE	0.911
35	Saudi Arabia	0.875
42	Qatar	0.855
52	Russia	0.822
56	Kazakhstan	0.811
101	Uzbekistan	0.727
118	Kyrgyzstan	0.692
122	Tajikistan	0.685

Source: compiled by the author based on data from the Human Development Index⁶

Another indicator that became the reasons for the reorientation of migrants from the Russian labor market to the GCC countries was GDP per capita at purchasing power parity. In 2021, GDP per capita in the GCC countries was higher than in Russia and other Central Asian countries. (Table 2).

⁶ List of countries by Human Development Index // Russian Society of Knowledge [site] URL: https://znanierussia.ru/articles/Список_стран_по_индексу_человеческого_развития (accessed: 12.10.2023)

Table 2

Ranking of countries by GDP per capita (by purchasing power parity) in 2021

Position in the rating of the Countryindex	Country	GDP per capita, USD
4	Qatar	93 521
10	UAE	66 766
26	Saudi Arabia	49 551
58	Kazakhstan	28 600
122	Uzbekistan	8 497
140	Kyrgyzstan	5 288
147	Tajikistan	4 288

Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the “Ranking of countries by GDP per capita (PPP)”⁷

In terms of the average salary of the GCC countries, in 2022 it is on average 11.1 times higher than in Russia and Kazakhstan, the main countries of emigration for migrants from Central Asia. Also, the average salary in the GCC countries is about 24 times higher than in the countries of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) (Table 3).

Table 3

The level of salaries in the countries of the world at the beginning of 2022

Name of the State	The level of the average salary per month, USD	The level of the average salary per year, USD
UAE	5336	64032
Saudi Arabia	4451	53412
Qatar	4312	51744
Russia	788	9456
Kazakhstan	486	5832
Kyrgyzstan	253	3036
Tajikistan	155	1860
Uzbekistan	184	2208

Sources: compiled by the author based on the data: Average Salary in United Arab

⁷ Ranking of countries by GDP per capita (PPP) // nonews [site] URL: <https://nonews.co/directory/lists/countries/gdp-per-capita-ppp> (accessed: 12.10.2023)

*Emirates*⁸; *Average Salary in Saudi Arabia*⁹; *Average Salary in Qatar*¹⁰; *How good is it abroad or the average salaries in the world*¹¹.

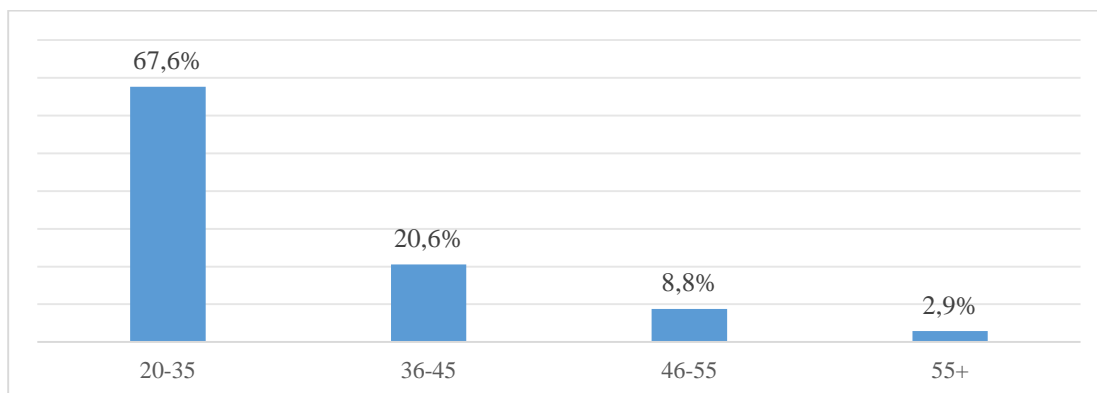
The average monthly wage among the Central Asian countries, the highest is in Kazakhstan - \$486, the lowest is seen in Tajikistan - about \$155. This proves that among the Central Asian countries, the lowest level of labor migration abroad is observed in Kazakhstan, and the highest level of labor migration is in Tajikistan. That is, in 2022, the majority of migrants went into labor emigration from Tajikistan, least of all from Kazakhstan.

Adaptation and integration of migrants from Central Asian countries in the GCC countries: results of a sociological survey

One of the main goals that we set for ourselves in conducting the sociological survey is to identify all the mechanisms of adaptation and integration of migrant workers in the labor market of the GCC countries, to determine the socio-demographic structure of migrants, as well as the reasons for reorientation from the Russian labor market. According to the results of our sociological survey, the main flow of migrants from Central Asian countries is young people aged 20 to 35 years. What is said is that the emigration of young people always has a negative impact on the development of the economy of any country, including the development of the economies of Central Asian countries (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1.

The age structure of migrants from Central Asian countries in the GCC countries.



Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

The distribution of migrants who passed our citizenship survey shows that the majority (42.8%) of migrants came from Uzbekistan, 22.8% from Kazakhstan, 17.1% from Kyrgyzstan and 17.1% from Tajikistan. On the question “In what year did you migrate to the GCC countries?”, the majority of migrants (about 80%) from Central Asian countries indicated in the period 2015 and 2022, which is associated with the currency crisis in Russia (Fig. 2).

⁸ Average Salary in United Arab Emirates [site]. URL: <http://www.salaryexplorer.com/salary-survey.php?loc=227&loctype=1> (accessed on 02.10.2023)

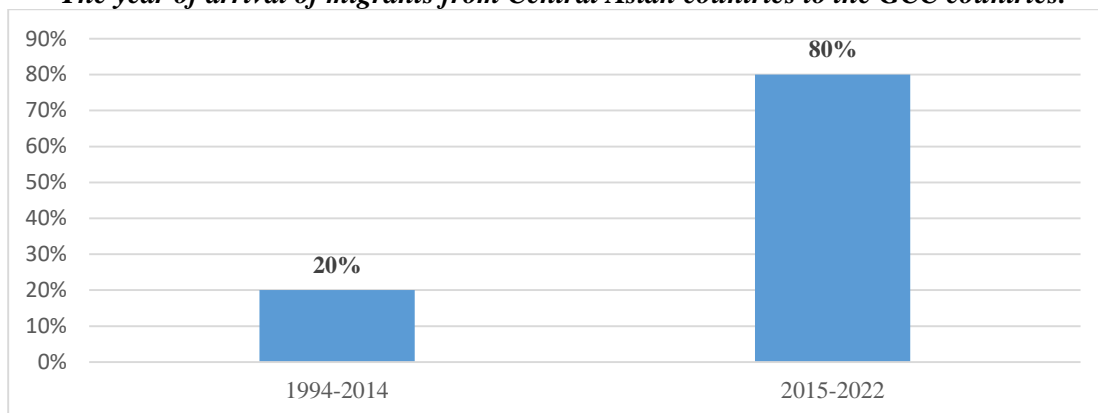
⁹ Average Salary in Saudi Arabia [site]. URL: <http://www.salaryexplorer.com/salary-survey.php?loc=191&loctype=1> (accessed on 02.10.2023)

¹⁰ Average Salary in Qatar [site]. URL: <http://welcomeqatar.com/how-much-money-does-a-person-working-in-qatar-make-in-2022average-salary-in-qatar-2022/> (accessed on 02.10.2023)

¹¹ How good is it abroad or the average salaries in the world // VisaSam.ru [site] URL: <https://visasam.ru/emigration/vybor/srednya-zarplata-v-mire.html> (accessed: 02.10.2023)

Fig. 2.

The year of arrival of migrants from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries.

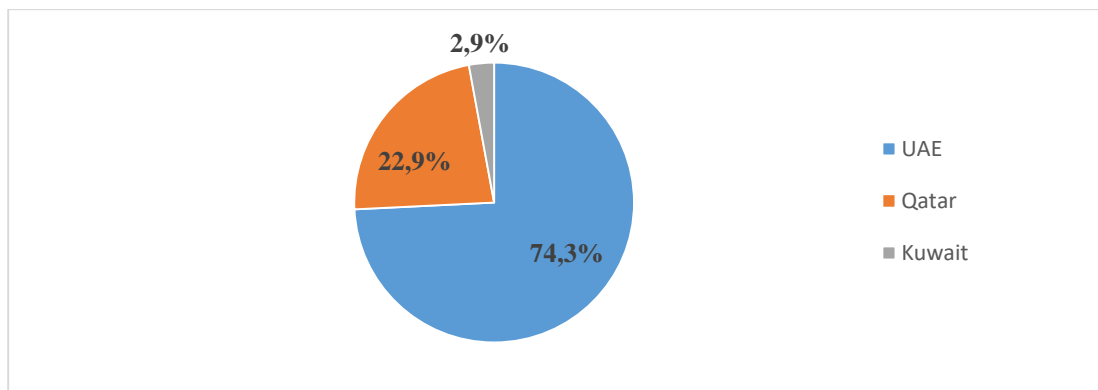


Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

Based on a sociological survey, the main areas of emigration from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries are the UAE – 74%, Qatar – 23% and Kuwait – 3% (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3.

Distribution of migrants from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries

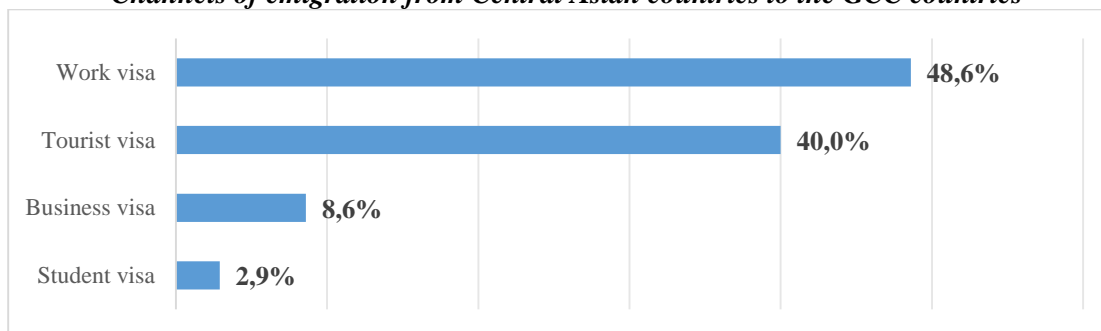


Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

Most often, migrants from Central Asian countries visited the Persian Gulf countries using the following type of visa: a work visa – 47%, a tourist visa – 40%, as well as a business visa – 9% and a study visa – 3% (Fig. 4). In many cases, those who come on a tourist visa meet with potential employers, and if they are employed, their employer draws up the necessary documents to obtain a work visa for them.

Fig. 4.

Channels of emigration from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries

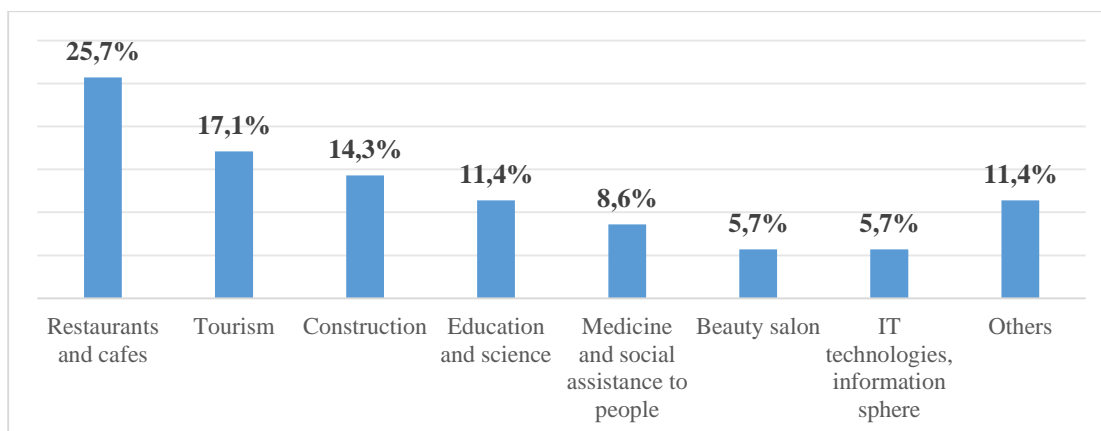


Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

The main sphere of activity of migrants from Central Asian countries after arriving in the GCC countries was the service sector (see Figure 5). On the question “In which sphere of the economy did you start working in the country of residence?”, most chose the sphere of “restaurants and cafes”, then “tourism” and the sphere of “construction” (see Fig. 5). Migrants from Central Asia also worked in highly qualified places – 29% (“Education and Science” and “Medicine or social assistance to people”). These areas indicate higher qualifications of migrants from Central Asian countries to the Persian Gulf countries. According to the survey results, 17.1% of respondents have secondary education, 48.6% have specialized secondary education, and 34.3% have higher education. It can be said that the migration flow from Central Asian countries to the GCC states is an order of magnitude higher than to the countries of “traditional emigration” (the Russian Federation).

Fig. 5.

Primary sectoral employment of migrants from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries.

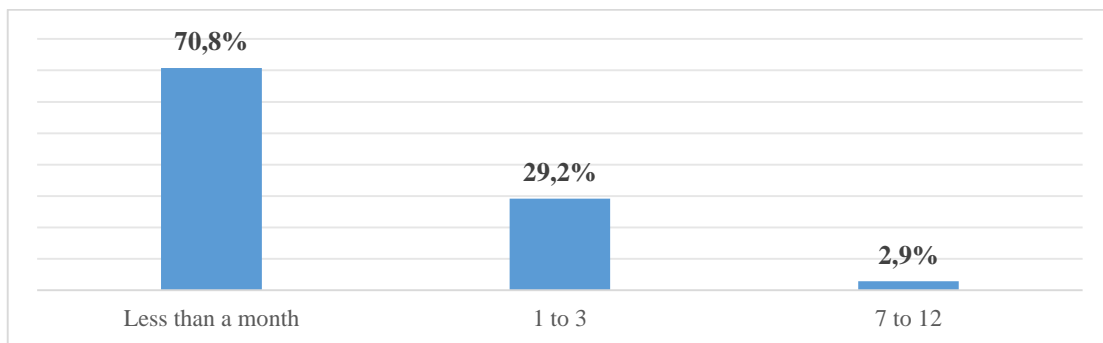


Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

After arriving in the GCC countries, migrants from Central Asian countries took “less than a month” and “from 1 to 3 months” to find work (see Figure 6). Thus, migrants from Central Asian countries quickly adapt to the labor markets of the countries of the Council of the Commonwealth of Arab States of the Persian Gulf.

Fig. 6.

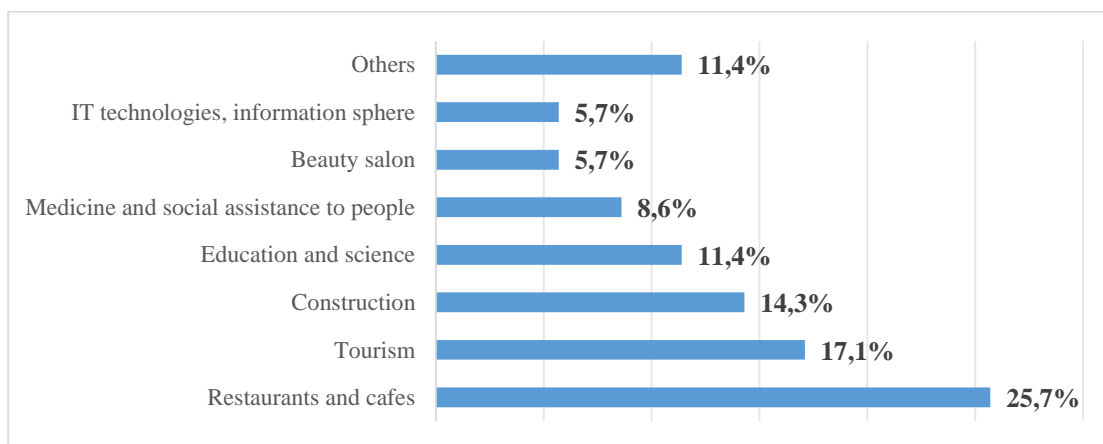
Duration of job search for migrants from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries.



Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

Fig. 7.

Sectoral employment of migrants from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries.

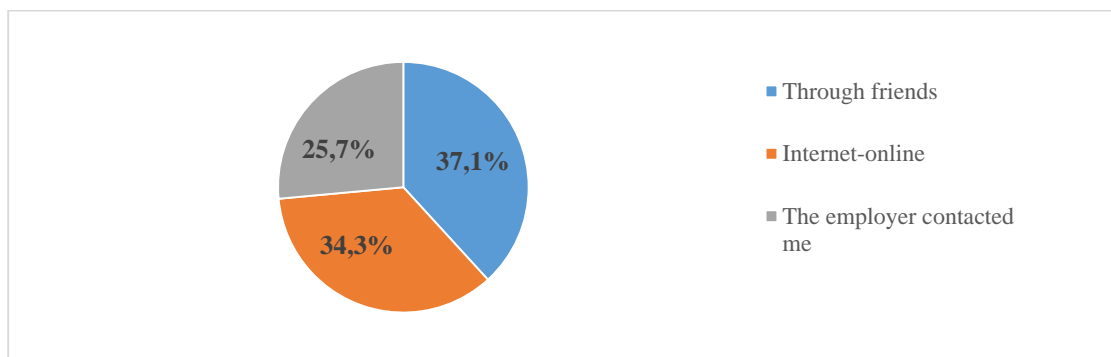


Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

When asked who they currently work for, most chose the sphere of "restaurants and cafes", "tourism" (see Fig. 7). Which, on the one hand, allows us to talk about successful integration and adaptation in the labor markets of the countries of the Council of the Commonwealth of Arab States of the Persian Gulf, since there are no changes in an industry-wide employment structure that requires highly skilled workers. On the other hand, this may also be a reflection of the Kafala system, in which a migrant worker cannot change jobs until the end of the current contract and without the help of a new sponsor, without whom it is impossible to issue or extend the necessary documents for residence in the country. Our survey revealed that, as Figure 8 shows, migrants from the Central Asian countries of the Diaspora and other compatriots who find and work in these countries primarily help migrants from the Central Asian countries to adapt to the labor market in the countries of the Commonwealth of Arab States of the Persian Gulf.

Fig. 8.

Recruitment of labor from Central Asian countries to the GCC countries



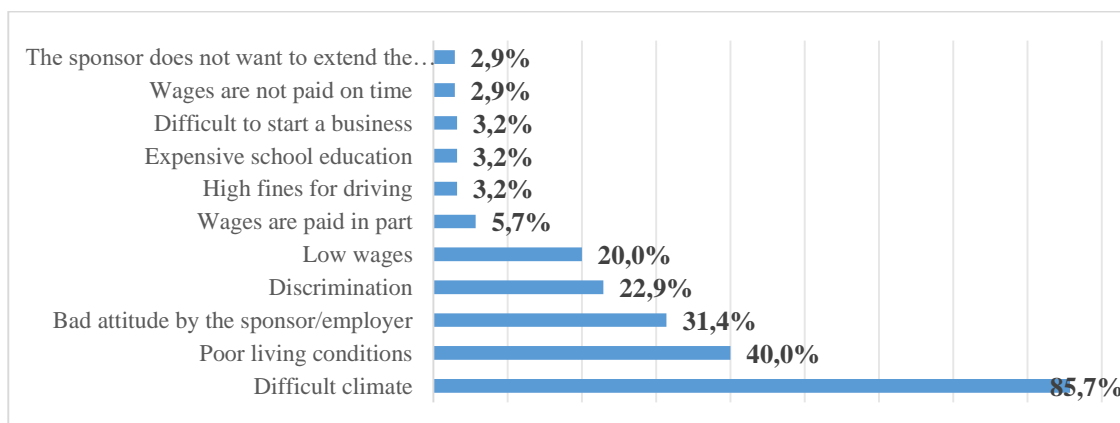
Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

The respondents included migrants who had worked in Russia in the past. According to our sociological survey, the main reason why migrants from Central Asian countries began to reorient from the Russian labor market to the GCC countries were low salaries (46%) and discrimination (43%). 26% said that they had previously worked in Russia, but they did not like the conditions of life in the country.

In order to identify obstacles to the integration and adaptation of migrant workers from Central Asia to the GCC countries, we also considered the main problems they face in the country of residence, the level of knowledge of the Arabic language and how much they use this language at work. According to the results of the conducted sociological survey, the main problems faced by labor migrants from Central Asia to the GCC countries are highlighted: a difficult climate (85.7%), poor living conditions (40%), poor attitude from the sponsor/employer (31.4%), discrimination (22.9%), low wages (20%). 5.7% said that wages are partially paid, while (2.9%) said that wages are not paid on time (see Fig. 9) As mentioned in the second chapter of the work, in 2015 the UAE adopted a law against discrimination, while the KSA is in the process of discussing a similar law. This indicates that there is a problem in these countries with discrimination against those from other ethnic groups or nationalities.

Fig. 9.

The main problems faced by migrants from Central Asia to the GCC countries



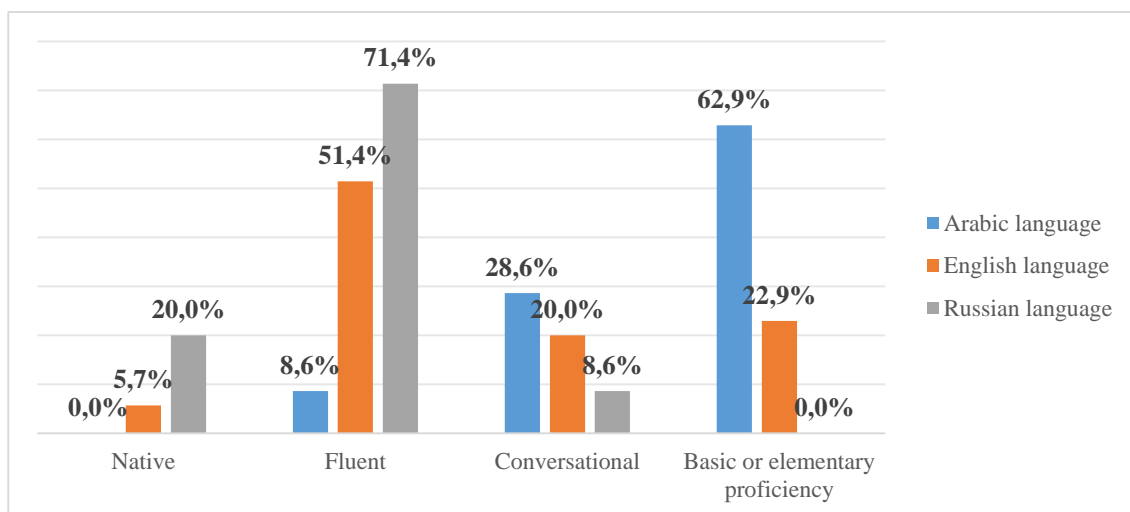
Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

The survey also revealed that the majority of migrants have a low level of knowledge of

Arabic (see Figure 10), as only 8.6% of respondents indicated that they are fluent in Arabic. On the other hand, 71.4% indicated that they were fluent in and understood Russian. Given the geographical proximity and common history of the Central Asian countries with Russia, this result is expected. Thus, from the point of view of knowledge of the local, official state language, the level of integration of migrants is not high. However, it must be said that, as noted in the second chapter, the majority of the population in some GCC member States is currently made up of migrants (see Figure 11). Accordingly, a large part of the population communicates in English or other languages native to migrants. For example, the survey showed that 22.9% of migrants use Arabic at work, while the majority 77.1% use English and 42.9% Russian at work. 8.6% said they use their native language at work. This also indicates that Central Asian migrants are not strongly integrated with other expat communities in their country of residence, but rather live and communicate with other Central Asian migrants or with those who have a common language.

Fig. 10.

The level of knowledge of Arabic, English and Russian by migrant workers from Central Asian countries in the GCC countries



Source: compiled by the author on the basis of a sociological survey

An important indicator of the level of integration and adaptation of migrants in the country of residence is whether they would like to stay in this country or leave. The survey results show that 37.14% of the respondents are satisfied with life in their country of residence and do not plan to move to another country. And 37.14% plan to work temporarily in their country of residence and move to another country. This is due to good job opportunities and integration in the labor market, as well as high salaries in the GCC countries, especially compared to Russia. 25.7% of the respondents want to temporarily work in their country of residence and return home. Of those who want to stay in the country of residence, 61.5% have higher education and 30.7% have specialized secondary education. Given that a migrant worker cannot extend his visa without his employer (Kafeel), we can assume that those who want to stay have stable jobs or are highly qualified with high chances to extend their current employment contracts or find work with another employer.

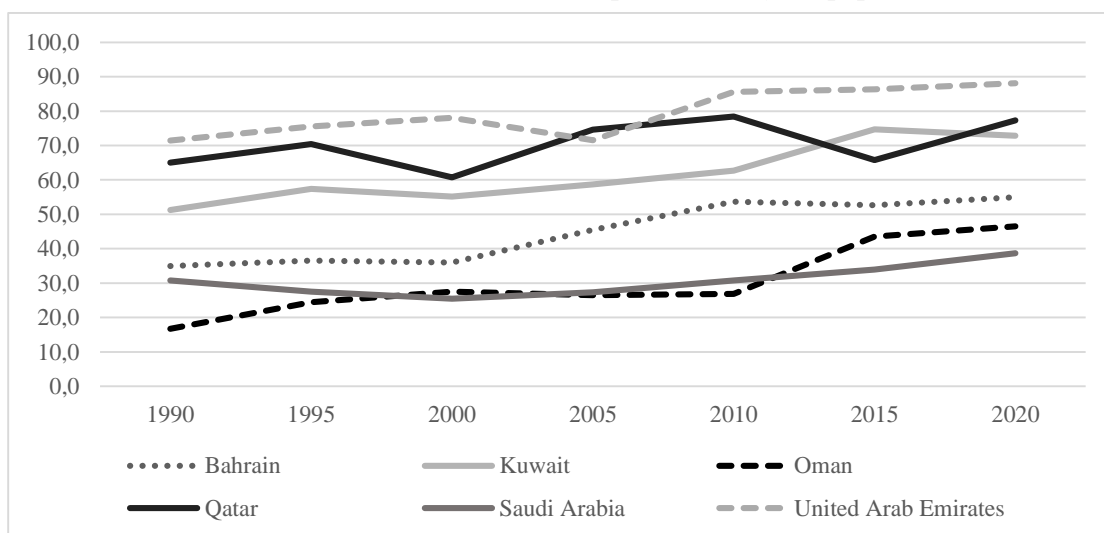
Discussion

Adaptation and integration of migrants in the labor market of the GCC countries.

In the 1930s, oil resources were discovered on the territory of the GCC countries, which helped them become the richest countries in the region. However, they “possessed a small indigenous population who lacked basic education and special skills to work in the oil and gas industry or develop auxiliary infrastructure” [14, p. 412]. To solve this problem, they imported skilled, low-skilled and unskilled foreign workers, mainly from neighboring Arab and Asian countries, and thus became centers of global migration since the 1970s. This has led to migrants now making up the majority of the population in some GCC member States, as shown in Figure 11.

Fig. 11.

International migrants in the GCC countries as a percentage of the population (1990-2020)



Source: compiled by the author based on the UNDP data¹²

Moreover, most of the workers, especially in the private sector in these countries, are foreign workers. According to data published by the General Directorate of Statistics of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), in the third quarter of 2021, foreign nationals accounted for 76.4% of private sector workers. A sample survey of workers conducted by the Qatar Office of Planning and Statistics shows that in the second quarter of 2020, out of 504 unemployed Qataris surveyed, 63 people (12.5%) indicated that they did not want to work in the private sector. A study of the working-age population conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics of Kuwait in 2015 showed the following percentage distribution of employed by sector – 74.8 foreigners compared with 7.9 Kuwaitis employed in the private sector. The survey also shows that 57.5% of unemployed Kuwaitis do not want to work in the private sector. According to the National Center for Statistics and Information, in 2019, only 16.1% of Omani workers were employed in the private sector. According to Bahrain’s labor market indicators, in the second quarter of 2020, 18.1% of those employed in the private sector were Bahrainis, as opposed to 83.8% in the public sector. As for the UAE, data from the Federal Center for Competitiveness

¹² Migrant stock by age and sex. // United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019. [site]. URL: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationStock2019_TenKeyFindings.pdf (accessed on 19.12.2023)

and Statistics on the percentage distribution of employees by nationality, gender and sector show the following distribution of Emiratis in 2019: 8 in the private sector, 40.5 in the federal government and 37.7 in the local government¹³.

To regulate the influx and conditions of foreign workers on their territory, the GCC states focused on “direct and indirect control over migration, minimizing the possibility of migration integration and socio-economic rights, the practice of selective deportation, limiting ways to obtain citizenship and pursuing a policy of “nationalization” to increase the presence of the indigenous population in the workforce and to implementation of structural labor reforms limiting dependence on foreign workers” [15]. Such regulation in the state is carried out through the Kafala system, which was introduced in 1950 to regulate the activities of migrant workers in the GCC countries.

This system is based on the idea that “labor needs are determined by an individual request on a sponsorship basis, through which an employer or a caf hires employees to meet their specific needs” [16, p.412]. Accordingly, the Kafala system requires migrant workers to have a sponsor from the citizens of the destination country, who connects each employee with a kafila (sponsor) during the term of the agreed contract. At the end of the contract, a migrant cannot find another job on his own and extend a work visa without his sponsor. To get another job (from another employer), a migrant must leave the country of residence and wait for a new invitation from a new job (from a new employer). In particular, for the entire migration period, the sponsor is responsible for the financial and legal situation of migrant workers from Central Asia during their stay in the host country, as well as controls their basic needs such as housing, working hours and wages, and in some cases, especially in the case of domestic workers, their passport. Such an agreement relieves the Government of the burden of monitoring migrant workers, and grants all rights to monitor migrants to the employer. That is, an employer can deport a migrant on his own and protect his rights. Accordingly, the kafala system “leaves the regulation and monitoring of migrant workers in the hands of both non-state actors and the state, which is ultimately supported by labor legislation and laws on the entry, exit and stay of foreign workers” [15, p. 418]. As explained by the Deputy Director of Research at the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University in Qatar, Z.Babar, the Kafala agreement, which guarantees the exclusion of foreign migrants from the socio-political structure of power, can be considered as the “privatization of migration management” [17, p.124].

Thus, according to Associate Professor S.V.Sahu and graduate student M. Aarti at the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (Dubai), the Kafala system encourages short-term contracts to hire workers to prevent family reunification, limit socio-economic rights, and implement strict deportation programs to ensure that migrants leave the country at the end of the contract [14]. The rating of the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) for the KSA and the UAE indicates that the level of integration of migrants is really low, classifying it as “migration without integration”

MIPEX measures the level of integration of migrants in different countries of the world on a scale from 1 to 100, where 100 corresponds to the highest level of integration policy. MIPIX

¹³ Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons (15 years and over) by Nationality, Gender, and Sector. Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre. 2019. [site]. URL: [https://uaestat.fcsc.gov.ae/vis?fs\[0\]=3ylrqeERqvGgDtXPR7wB2m0xKJDUGMyt53hQdX%2C0%7CLabour%20For ce%23LFS_LF%23&pg=0&df\[ds\]=staging%3ASIS-CC-stable&df\[id\]=DF_LFEP_SECT&df\[ag\]=FCSA&df\[vs\]=1.9.0&pd=2019%2C2019&dq=.A.....<\[rw\]=EMP_S ECTOR<\[cl\]=CITIZENSHIP%2CGENDER](https://uaestat.fcsc.gov.ae/vis?fs[0]=3ylrqeERqvGgDtXPR7wB2m0xKJDUGMyt53hQdX%2C0%7CLabour%20For ce%23LFS_LF%23&pg=0&df[ds]=staging%3ASIS-CC-stable&df[id]=DF_LFEP_SECT&df[ag]=FCSA&df[vs]=1.9.0&pd=2019%2C2019&dq=.A.....<[rw]=EMP_S ECTOR<[cl]=CITIZENSHIP%2CGENDER) (accessed on 18.10.2021)

measures integration across eight policy categories:

1. “Access to the labor market” determines whether migrants have equal rights and opportunities to access jobs and improve their skills;
2. “Family reunification of foreign citizens” determines whether separated families will be able to reunite and settle in their new home, and how long this process will take;
3. “Education” defines how well education systems meet the needs of migrant children;
4. “Healthcare” examines how responsive the healthcare system is to the needs of migrants;
5. “Political engagement” examines whether migrants are given the right and opportunity to participate in political life;
6. The Institute of Residence Permit examines how easily migrants can become permanent residents;
7. “Access to citizenship” examines how easily migrants can become citizens;
8. The “fight against discrimination” determines whether everyone is truly protected from racial/ethnic, religious and national discrimination in all spheres of life.

Of the GCC countries included in the MIPEX study, only the UAE and the KSA are on the list. In 2020, the UAE received an overall score of 30 out of 100, which corresponds to a “slightly favorable” index rating. On the other hand, the KSA, which ranks last among the countries studied, received an overall score of 10 out of 100, which corresponds to an “unfavorable” index rating. A more detailed distribution of points for each category is shown in table 4.

Table 4

Distribution of points received by the UAE and KSA in eight MIPEX categories, 2020.

	UAE	Saudi Arabia
Healthcare	62	21
Family reunification of foreign citizens	52	43
Education	29	5
Access to the labor market	30	0
Institute of Residence Permit	17	0
Access to citizenship	9	0
Political involvement	0	0
Combating discrimination	38	15
General	30	10

Sources: compiled by the author based on the data Migrant Integration Policy Index¹⁴.

Data from the UAE and the KSA show that the least effective categories of policies that promote the integration of migrants are access to citizenship, the institution of a residence permit and political engagement. In order to obtain a residence permit in the UAE, migrants

¹⁴ Saudi Arabia: key findings. Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2020. [site]. URL: <https://www.mipex.eu/saudi-arabia> (accessed on 21.01.2022).

must meet very selective economic or labor requirements. Long-term visa programs are available mainly for investors or entrepreneurs. In the KSA, only Muslim migrants can obtain a residence permit. In 2019, the KSA introduced a new type of residence permit without a sponsor (“premium”). However, such a residence permit can be obtained for \$213,000, which excludes most of the migrants in the country. As for access to citizenship, in both countries, this process takes more than 10 years with many restrictive requirements that must be met. Moreover, migrants are completely prohibited from participating in public life, and “no support is provided to migrant organizations at the national level.”¹⁵.

Regarding migrants' access to medicine in the UAE and KSA countries, those migrants who arrived and work legally have access to medicine. Migrant workers who work illegally in the UAE and KSA countries, as in Russia, always seek medical help from private clinics or medical acquaintances. As for access to education, it also seems that legal migrants, including their children, have access to education in the UAE and KSA countries. Regarding family reunification, MIPEX assigns both countries a “half favorable” rating due to restrictive economic and accommodation requirements. In the KSA, migrants with low qualifications or unskilled migrants cannot apply for family reunification. To combat discrimination against migrants, the UAE adopted Federal Law No. 2 in 2015, which includes some law enforcement measures and covers discrimination based on race, ethnicity and religion, but does not cover discrimination based on nationality. On the other hand, there is no anti-discrimination policy in the KSA. However, the MIPEX report indicates that the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development is currently in the process of developing a national anti-discrimination policy¹⁶¹⁷.

According to the MIPEX index, in the UAE and KSA countries, migrant workers do not receive wages, as well as support from the governments of both countries as local residents. In fact, the GCC countries are pursuing a policy of “nationalization” of the labor force aimed at increasing the share of citizens in the labor force, especially in the private sector, by setting quota requirements for local workers in private companies, increasing the cost of hiring foreigners, imposing taxes on migrant workers and restricting the issuance of visas. In the KSA, for example, companies are assigned a rating reflecting the percentage of national employees in companies. Companies with a good rating are allowed more work visas (more foreign workers) and more work permit extensions.

Accordingly, the low level of integration of migrants in the 8 categories studied reflects the consequences of the Kafala system, which aims to ensure that migrants remain temporary and their stay in the country is linked to a temporary employment contract. Moreover, the policy of nationalization of the labor market does not promote the integration of migrants, providing advantages in terms of access to the labor market to local residents compared to migrants. It is important to note that the GCC countries have taken several steps to improve policies related to the entry/exit of migrants and their living conditions in host countries. MIPEX indicates that since 2014, the total score of the UAE has increased by 8 points, while the average change in all studied countries was an increase of 2 points. On the other hand, the overall KSA score decreased by one point. Accordingly, the requirements for job search, stay in the country and the quality of life of migrants in the country remain strict and do not contribute to integration.

¹⁵ Saudi Arabia: key findings. Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2020. [site]. URL: <https://www.mipex.eu/saudi-arabia> (accessed on 21.01.2022).

¹⁶ Saudi Arabia: key findings. Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2020. [site]. URL: <https://www.mipex.eu/saudi-arabia> (accessed on 21.01.2022).

¹⁷ United Arab Emirates: key findings. Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2020. [site]. URL: <https://www.mipex.eu/united-arab-emirates> (accessed on 21.01.2022).

Nevertheless, for the reasons mentioned in the first section, migrants from Central Asia consider the monarchies of the Persian Gulf as a new direction of migration [12].

Conclusion

Migrants from Central Asian countries mainly migrate on work, tourist and business visas to the GCC countries. In many cases, those who come on a tourist visa meet with potential employers, and if they are employed, their employer prepares the necessary documents for them to obtain a work visa.

In addition to the service sector, migrants from Central Asia also worked in highly qualified positions – 29% (such as “Education and Science” and “Medicine or social assistance to the population”). These directions point to higher qualifications of migrants from Central Asian countries to the Persian Gulf countries. According to the survey results, 17.1% of respondents have secondary education, 48.6% have specialized secondary education and 34.3% have higher education. It is important to note that the educational level of Tajik migrants in the CIS countries (primarily in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan) differs significantly: only 19% of migrants have higher and incomplete higher education, 28% have specialized secondary education, and, conversely, 34% of respondents have secondary general education, and 19 % — incomplete secondary and primary education. It can be said that the migration flow from Central Asian countries to the GCC states is an order of magnitude higher than to the countries of “traditional emigration” (the Russian Federation).

The main problems faced by migrant workers from Central Asia to the GCC countries are: difficult climate (85.7%), poor living conditions (40%), poor attitude from the sponsor/employer (31.4%), discrimination (22.9%), low wages (20%). 5.7% said that wages are partially paid, while (2.9%) said that wages are not paid on time. In 2015, the UAE passed an anti-discrimination law, while the KSA is in the process of discussing a similar law. This indicates that in these countries there is a problem of discrimination against representatives of other ethnic groups or nationalities.

The majority of migrants have a low level of proficiency in Arabic, as only 8.6% of respondents indicated that they are fluent in Arabic. On the other hand, 71.4% indicated that they are fluent in Russian and understand it. Given the geographical proximity and common history of the Central Asian countries with Russia, this result is expected. Thus, in terms of knowledge of the local, official state language, the level of integration of migrants is low. However, it should be noted that, as noted, the majority of the population in some GCC member States are currently migrants. Accordingly, a significant part of the population communicates in English or other languages native to migrants. For example, the survey showed that 22.9% of migrants use Arabic at work, while the majority - 77.1% - use English and 42.9% - Russian. 8.6% said they use their native language at work. This also indicates that migrants from Central Asia are not strongly integrated into other expat communities in their country of residence, but rather live and communicate with other migrants from Central Asia or with those who have a common language.

Despite the positive consequences of the reorientation of migrants to Central Asian countries, the labor market of the GCC countries also has its negative impact on labor migrant workers from Central Asian countries. For example, first of all, migrants from other Muslim countries, where there is a high level of radicalism, mainly migrate to the GCC countries. Accordingly, working in the labor market of the GCC countries strongly affects the level of religiosity among migrants from Central Asian countries.

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