



CENTRAL ASIA

REGIONAL STRATEGY
2021-2025

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ACRONYMS

BRI:	China's Belt and Road Initiative
CA:	Central Asia
EAEU:	Eurasian Economic Union
EU:	European Union
GCM:	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
GBV:	Gender-based Violence
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IBCs:	Issue Based Coalitions
IOM:	International Organization for Migration
MGI:	Migration Governance Indicator
NGO:	Non-governmental organization
PoE:	Points of Entry
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goal
TB:	Tuberculosis
UNCT:	United Nation Country Teams
UNDAF:	UN Development Assistance Framework
UNFCCC:	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNNM:	United Nations Network on Migration
UNSDCF:	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WHO:	World Health Organization

FOREWORD

We are delighted to present the IOM Central Asia Strategy to you. This strategy is a key tool in clearly articulating trends and challenges and how IOM will work with governments, migrant communities and our many partners to achieve a positive impact over the course of the next five years. The strategy affirms IOM's mandate and core priorities as laid out in its Strategic Vision and related governance documents.

This strategy is anchored in IOM's Regional Strategy for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia which further refines the global priorities and tailors them to the regional context. It lays out IOM's commitment to empower migrants and communities and to address drivers of migration. IOM is advancing positive, sustainable, and innovative development outcomes that are responsive to regional migration trends. In addition, IOM strengthens cooperative development and implementation of evidence-based and inclusive migration governance.

This strategy highlights the current and future migration trends in Central Asia and sets out the context in which IOM carries out its activities. It outlines the challenges and opportunities relating to migration in the country and identifies the strategic priorities to address them in an effort to strive towards fostering safe, orderly and regular migration.

In Central Asia, migration continues to be an essential driver of the region's sustainable development. Millions of labour migrants move to different countries within Central Asia and beyond to look for work opportunities. Through the IOM Strategy for Central Asia 2021-2025, IOM aims to contribute to building resilience of migrants, communities, and relevant stakeholders, leverage and regularize mobility and promote migrant-inclusive governance. IOM has been active in Central Asia since 1992 and has established itself as a reliable and competent counterpart for migrants, governments, international organizations, and civil society. As the region faces various migration-related challenges, which are further exacerbated by the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic, IOM's active engagement in addressing migrants' vulnerabilities is needed more than ever before.

We are very grateful to IOM staff – particularly at the regional and country level – for their diligent and insightful work in developing this strategy and in their commitment to its successful implementation. The strategy is particularly timely given the operational needs on the ground, with a particular emphasis on response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic and our collective commitment to build back better.

This strategy affirms IOM's commitment to support governments and stakeholders in upholding migrants' rights, regardless of their migration status and across all stages of the migration cycle. With this strategy, and in cooperation with our numerous and diverse partners, we will continue to respond to the needs and aspirations of migrants, building societies fit for a modern, mobile and interconnected world. IOM looks forward to strengthening its partnerships in Central Asia and joining efforts in fostering migration for the benefit of all.



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1.

INTRODUCTION



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABOUT IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the UN's leading agency on migration and the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration, working closely with its key stakeholders - migrants and Member States - to promote humane, safe, and orderly migration. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants from an integral and holistic perspective, including links to development, in order to maximize the benefits and opportunities of migration and reduce its challenges. Established in 1951, IOM now has more than 170 Member States, offices in over 400 field locations and more than 14,000 staff - 90 percent of IOM's staff being deployed in the field. In the South Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, IOM has 19 missions. In Central Asia, IOM has 7 field offices and over 70 staff.

As recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, human mobility is indivisible from sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and the commitment to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind – will not be achieved without due consideration of migration. Additionally, the Global Compact for Migration is grounded in the 2030 Agenda, and promotes the principles of having a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to address this intrinsic link. This Strategy will support the Member States to achieve this, ultimately leveraging the potential of migration through a whole-of-government approach to achieve sustainable development outcomes for all. It is a direct contribution to the Decade of Action to fast track progress for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. It brings greater coherence and development impact to IOM's activities and allows for a joined-up approach to the way the Organization designs and delivers its operations, as called for in IOM's Strategic Vision.

IOM's Strategic Vision, presented to IOM Member States in 2019, spans the period of 2019 to 2023. The Vision articulates how IOM plans to meet its new and emerging responsibilities, including IOM's mandated role as Network Coordinator. It sets out the 'direction of travel' for IOM, is forward looking and encourages 'joined up thinking'. This Strategy is aligned with the Vision, its corresponding Regional Strategy for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (the sub-regional strategies where applicable) and the IOM Strategic Results Framework, which are anchored in the overall framework of the 2030 Agenda (and the Global Compact for Migration).

1.2 IOM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia (CA) remains a region reliant on mobility, with millions on the move in search of better work and life opportunities. Migration is recognized as an undeniable source of prosperity, innovation, and sustainable development, becoming a major contributing factor to economic development. At the same time, this mobility creates challenges and risks for the countries of origin, transit and destination, and

for the migrants themselves. As the UN Migration Agency, IOM works with its member states in the region - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - to maximize the positive impacts of good migration governance. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), a milestone in the history of the global dialogue and international cooperation on migration, expresses the collective commitment by more than 150 governments to improve the governance of migration, to strengthen the contribution of migrants and migration to sustainable development and to overcome the associated challenges while reaping the benefits of international migration.¹ In May 2018, the Secretary-General decided to establish the United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) as a collaborative community of United Nations entities coming together to ensure effective and coordinated system-wide support to Member States in the GCM implementation, where needed. In its creation, the Secretary-General gave IOM Director General Mr. António Vitorino the role of the Network's Coordinator.

The following strategy will guide IOM's engagement in Central Asia until 2025². It is anchored in the IOM Strategic Vision and related governance documents as well as the IOM Regional Strategy for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It provides an overview of the migration situation in Central Asia and identifies key trends which are expected to shape the regional migration landscape in the years to come. The priorities and objectives for the IOM Sub-Regional Coordination Office for Central Asia and IOM country offices can be summarized as follows:

1. IOM will focus on assisting migrants in vulnerable situations, their families and communities in the Central Asian region, building their **resilience**, in particular to exploitation and abuse, migration-related health impacts, changes in remittance flows, as well as environmental and climate change impacts.
2. IOM will work to build regular, safe and dignified migratory channels, particularly to key destinations for migrant workers such as the Russian Federation, and leverage **mobility**, including the economic benefits and skills of migrants and diaspora, to support sustainable development at national and community levels, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. IOM will support the governments of Central Asia to introduce effective, coherent and inclusive **migration management policies** based on evidence, 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approach and human rights centred principles in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the GCM and state-led regional priorities and processes.

To implement this strategy and ensure coherence and long-term sustainable solutions, IOM will prioritize complementary actions, including alignment with United Nations country approaches. The regional strategy for Central Asia will guide IOM's active engagement in the UN Development System in the region and hinges on building stronger partnerships within the UN system and beyond. IOM maintains strong

1. While the region of Central Asia Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have voted in favour of the GCM and adopted by the United Nations on 19 December 2018. Kyrgyzstan also supports the GCM and is currently in the process of joining it formally.

2. While the Strategy is intended for the 2021-2025 period, it is flexible and subject to periodic review, allowing to adjust to new realities and emerging issues.

partnerships with governments, donors, civil society organizations, academia, private sector and other stakeholders.

IOM is responding to regional needs through a national and operational presence in each Central Asian country, coordinated through a Central Asian hub in Nur Sultan, Kazakhstan which guides IOM's field presence in all five member states, and is supported by the Regional Office in Vienna. This unified management approach aligns country efforts and creates a competitive advantage through increased regional capacity and decreased operational costs. It makes IOM more efficient and effective and prevents duplication of efforts. IOM has a strong focus on teamwork, with seven IOM offices and over 75 staff collaborating on regional projects. IOM's long-standing presence in the region has consolidated extensive knowledge and expertise on the geo-political, cultural and socio-economic dynamics of Central Asia. Finally, IOM's regional programming improves co-ordination and coherence on cross-border issues and promotes close coordinated co-operation with the key stakeholders.

Given the broad nature of the impacts of migration, leveraging institutional technical skills in migration management and emergency preparedness and response is important across the region. IOM provides member states with support in migration management efforts, in close cooperation with the IOM office in Moscow, ensuring a coherent approach along the migration corridor. The region also works closely with IOM offices in other IOM regions, such as IOM Afghanistan, on community stabilization, immigration and border management projects.

2.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS



2. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

2.1 POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL OUTLOOK

Migration is an important issue for Central Asia. Between 10% and 16% of the economically active population of Central Asia is living outside of their country of origin, primarily in the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan³. Therefore, the political importance of migration cannot be understated, it makes migration a pertinent subject and a tool for political leverage. The Central Asia-Russian Federation migration corridor is one of the most significant labour migration corridors in the world, accommodating an estimated 6.6 million international migrants from Central Asia in 2020⁴. People from Central Asia also migrate to Europe and an increasing number of Central Asians are moving to destinations such as Turkey and the Republic of Korea through organized labour migration programs. Central Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change, with warming levels projected to be higher than the global mean⁵, leading to more heat extremes⁶. Migration – in its different forms – is and will continue to be shaped by climate impacts and environmental degradation.⁷ At the same time, when enabling conditions are present, migration can support climate change adaptation and build climate resilience.⁸ These mobility related issues extend beyond national boundaries and need to be addressed regionally. In addition, internal migration in some countries of Central Asia, particularly rural-to-urban migration, is increasingly contributing to urbanisation. There is a growing demand for public services (e.g., health, education, employment etc.) and amenities in larger cities. For example, in Kyrgyzstan internal migrants comprise 18% of the population⁹. It is important to note that internal migration can be a significant development factor.

As recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and outlined in IOM's institution-wide approach on Migration and Sustainable Development, human mobility is inextricably linked with sustainable development. As a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, IOM has a clear responsibility to articulate its activities and mandate in relation to the 2030 Agenda, to report on its activities to support member states in achieving the commitments therein and to contribute to regional discussions on migration and sustainable development.

IOM follows a people-centered approach that is gender- and child-sensitive. The Organization is committed to supporting governments and partners in upholding

3. IOM, 2020 "Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the situation on migrants and remittances in Central Asia".

4. Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation, Selected indicators of the migration situation in the Russian Federation for January - December 2020 with distribution by countries and regions <https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/item/22689602/>.

5. Hoegh-Guldberg, O., and Coauthors, 2018: Impacts of 1.5°C Global Warming on Natural and Human Systems. Global warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, V. Masson-Delmotte et al., Eds., World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland.

6. Reyer, C.P., Otto, I.M., Adams, S., Albrecht, T., Baarsch, F., Carlsburg, M., ... Stagl, J. (2017). 45 Climate change impacts in Central Asia and their implications for development. *Regional Environmental Change*, 17(6), 1639–1650. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-015-0893-z>

7. Making Mobility Work for Adaptation to Environmental Changes: Results from the MECLEP global research: <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/making-mobility-work-adaptation-environmental-changes-results-meclep-global-research>

8. World Migration Report 2020 - Chapter 9 Human Mobility and Adaptation to Environmental Change <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2020-chapter-9>.

9. <https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/sites/kyrgyzstan/files/publication/Internal%20Migration%20in%20Kyrgyzstan.pdf>

the human rights of migrants, regardless of their migration status, across all stages of the migration cycle, while endeavoring to eliminate all forms of discrimination against migrants and their families. IOM understands that persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups. It is further recognized that a person's sex, gender and age shape every stage of the migration experience, whether forced, voluntary or somewhere in between. The roles, expectations, relationships and power dynamics associated with one's gender significantly affect all aspects of the migration process. It is therefore crucial to understand how gender interacts with migration and to respond accordingly. Given the gender-specific nature of migration, the following are central to the work of IOM: advocating for equal rights under the law in employment and mobility; addressing discriminatory migration practices; understanding how gender affects the type of migration undertaken; responding to how gender influences access to social services; economic growth, capacities, risks and vulnerabilities; promoting institutional reform; ensuring diversity and inclusiveness in consultations and participation in activities; and addressing how migration influences gender roles and relations.

2.2 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Migration remains one of the key development factors for all Central Asian governments that is linked to addressing challenges such as demographic shifts, large scale irregular migration, skill gaps, climate impacts, hazards, political and a changing donor landscape. In this context, particular opportunities for IOM include:

- The governments and the United Nations System recognize the importance of migration. In Central Asia, IOM has established country platforms to mirror the UNNM, bringing together all relevant stakeholders for collective commitment to improve cooperation on international migration and advance the GCM. The GCM has received support from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The framework of the GCM provides an opportunity for a joint United Nations action on migration toward a clear framework on the implementation of the GCM and presents an opportunity for states to demonstrate their efforts globally. For IOM as a leading UN Agency on migration, the GCM is one of the entry-points to provide assistance to the Central Asian states both in terms of its implementation as well as in developing voluntary reviews.
- Initial steps taken as part of the Almaty Process have created a useful space for technical discussion but require further commitment and investment from the states at a decision-making level. The process represents an opportunity for IOM to support a stronger, coordinated, state-led, regional action on migration.
- Region-specific opportunities include the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU¹⁰), China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the New European Union (EU) Strategy on Central Asia¹¹. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan's proposed membership in the single labour market of the EAEU creates a favourable environment for labour migration and streamlining of migration processes, reducing the irregular labour market and maximising the benefit of labour migration. Central Asia is an important land route of China's BRI, which has and will continue to result

10. EAEU comprises Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation.

11. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/17/central-asia-council-adopts-a-new-eu-strategy-for-the-region/#>

in investment in the region. Consequently, to effectively manage migration associated with BRI projects, IOM stresses the need for interventions in areas such as reforms in visa policies, skills-recognition, pre-departure orientation, and integration of labour migrants. The EU Strategy on Central Asia, adopted in 2019, aims to support the region's development as a more resilient, prosperous, and connected economic and political space, focusing on climate action, new jobs for youth, and fighting against organised crime and trafficking. In terms of migration, the new EU Strategy aims to address management of migration and mobility more broadly within Central Asia, including readmission and reintegration, root causes of irregular migration, legal channels, trafficking in human beings, international protection, development of national migration policies, and regional and multilateral cooperation on migration governance.

- While the high ratio of remittances to GDP in Central Asian economies is often identified as a vulnerability, it also represents an opportunity for future economic growth, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and realization of the SDGs. But only if remittances can be leveraged for investment into individual, community, and national action for sustainable development. IOM is well-positioned to support states in policy development and programming to shape and improve opportunities and decision-making on remittances to support sustainable livelihoods and development for migrants' families and their communities.
- Given the ongoing development focus on building the private sector in Central Asia, partnerships with private sector actors on activities such as information exchange, financial support of projects and capacity building, particularly on promotion of ethical recruitment, corporate social responsibility, and safeguarding the rights of migrants are an opportunity and future priority.
- IOM sees the opportunity to engage with newly emerging and non-traditional donors, including China and the Russian Federation. China borders Central Asia, and growing numbers of Chinese migrants in the region suggests existing and developing opportunities for fruitful cooperation. The Russian Federation is finalizing the procedures of joining IOM as a member state, the IOM representation in the Russian Federation is building relationships with what is already a large-scale donor with an interest in governance of migration from Central Asia. Additional donors present in Central Asia include the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, and Germany. Finally, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, as upper middle-income countries in the region, may also become donors for migration-related projects in the future.

2.3 MIGRATION OUTLOOK

Migratory movements occur in large part as out migration, and most noticeably to the Russian Federation, while intraregional migration is also becoming easier and more common. With significantly higher wages and better employment opportunities, as well as historical links that facilitate communication and networking, the Russian Federation is a preferred destination for migrants from Central Asia; today 6.6 million Central Asians live in the Russian

Federation¹². While the majority are lower-skilled labour migrants, there are also highly skilled labour migrants, for example migrants from Kazakhstan are largely composed of students and highly skilled professionals. Central Asians also migrate to Europe and to China, where work and family ties are relatively strong. An increasing number are moving to Turkey and the Republic of Korea to find work, facilitated by labour agreements with governments in the region. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are all seeking to diversify migration destinations by signing bilateral agreements, such as the one between Uzbekistan and Japan. Within the region, Kazakhstan is predominantly a country of transit and destination, attracting skilled workers and becoming a destination for lower-skilled migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In recent years, policies have been developed regulating intraregional migration, including bilateral agreements on entry and readmission and cooperation on management of mixed migration flows, border management, return migration, migrants' rights and protection and irregular migration.

Labour migration and international remittances play an important role in Central Asian economies, especially for the less developed countries in the region.

Labour migration has become an alternative to the lack of employment opportunities at national level and thus an opportunity to raise the standard of living of migrants and their families and support economic reform. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are two of the world's most remittance-dependent countries¹³, and the region recorded USD 9.8 billion in remittances in 2019¹⁴. Unfortunately, weak oil prices and lockdown restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic are expected to reduce remittances by an estimated 16%¹⁵, potentially reversing the progress made on poverty reduction as many migrants have lost their jobs and are unable to financially support their families at home. Benefitting from the lowest transfer costs¹⁶ worldwide (2.1 per cent for the Russian Federation-Central Asian corridor) and well below the 10c SDG target of 3 per cent¹⁷, the development value of remittances (e.g., investments, savings, etc.) could be further enhanced if migrants' (and their families') financial literacy and inclusion would be prioritized. Further, Central Asia has a deficit of skilled professionals in healthcare, education, manufacturing, and IT sectors. Thus, though challenging, the return or labour migrants due to the COVID-19 pandemic may also present an opportunity in terms of training and up-skilling to cover particular labour shortages. Decreasing quality of education and mismatches with labour market demand in the region have resulted in a growing trend of educational migration for young people to the Russian Federation, China, Europe, North America, and East Asian countries. Many of them do not wish to return due to the lack of economic prospects, social mobility and perceptions of corrupt political systems at home¹⁸.

12. www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp

13. www.knomad.org/publication/migration-and-development-brief-31.

14. http://www.cbr.ru/statistics/macro_itm/svs/

15. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/29/covid-19-remittance-flows-to-shrink-14-by-2021>

16. https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/R8_Migration%26Remittances_brief32.pdf

17. <https://remittanceprices.worldbank.org/en>

18. https://kazakhstan.iom.int/sites/kazakhstan/files/documents/External%20Youth%20Migration_ENG_2019_1.pdf.

Volume and composition of irregular migration is hard to estimate and improving the collection of data from all relevant government agencies is an immediate priority.

Irregular movement in Central Asia mainly consists of overstaying or unauthorized employment. Undocumented migration or irregular crossing of borders in Central Asia is relatively rare. Problems related to unregistered employment include inadequate protection of migrant workers' rights due to the absence of written work contracts (e.g., withholding or delays in payment of wages, unlimited working hours, insecure working conditions). Essential to developing effective policies for regulating various migration flows is the introduction of mechanisms for identifying and monitoring cross-border movement and establishment of systems for collection, processing, analyzing, sharing and use of this information for improvement of such policies.

The protection of migrants vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation, including trafficked persons is a widespread need.

Irregular migration exposes migrants of all genders to risks of violence, abuse and exploitation, including trafficking in persons. Internal trafficking also constitutes a particular concern in Central Asia, and thus demands targeted action. Besides, unregulated recruitment processes, high level demand of cheap labour force especially in some sectors and surplus of labour supply, as well as community and family violence and inequality patterns can function as additional triggers for unsafe migration and expose people to the risk of trafficking.

Central Asia faces many migration-related public health challenges,

including an increasing burden of infectious and chronic diseases; out-migration of health workers; under-resourced health systems and medical institutions; and lack of public health and epidemiological data on migrants to support programming and policy development. According to WHO Europe all countries in Central Asia remain among the top countries due to their high number of new tuberculosis (TB) cases and deaths^{19, 20}. Efforts to end TB infection by 2030, particularly multi-drug resistant TB in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as Turkmenistan in high-risk populations, including migrants, have been intensified. Likewise, HIV infection that has reached an epidemic proportion has been shown to be higher among migrants compared to the general population in some surveillance data and studies conducted in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan^{21, 22}. Irregular or undocumented migrants travelling within the regions are considered particularly vulnerable to TB and HIV because of their potential risk of exposure, inability to access health care services, poor living and working conditions and, above all, poverty²³. Overall, migration's impact on a person's health can be significant and negative. The inability and/or unwillingness to obtain healthcare services in host countries often lead to practices of self-treatment and self-medication, which in the absence of sufficient medical knowledge can bring about negative health outcomes. The migration of healthcare professionals, such as physicians and nurses, is an issue in the region.

19. ECDC/WHO (2019): TB surveillance and monitoring in Europe 2019.

20. WHO (2019): Global Tuberculosis Report 2019, https://www.who.int/tb/publications/global_report/en/.

21. UNAIDS (2019): UNAIDS data 2019, <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2019/2019-UNAIDS-data>.

22. UNFPA (2018): HIV and migration in Central Asian countries and the Russian Federation, https://kazakhstan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/HIV%20REPORT_ENG_FIN.pdf.

23. Kazatchkine, Michel: The shifting diplomacy around migration, HIV/AIDS and TB in Central Asia, <http://mv.ecuo.org/en/the-shifting-diplomacy-around-migration-hiv-aids-and-tb-in-central-asia/>.

The health workforce in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, particularly among the Russian-speaking population, is severely impacted by emigration. Kazakhstan, as both sending and receiving country for healthcare workers, has also reported loss of health professionals to the Russian Federation and Western Europe.²⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic poses both challenges and opportunities for IOM in Central Asia. The COVID-19 measures imposed by governments will negatively impact economic development in Central Asia²⁵. Countries lack sufficient protocols and resources to contain the disease at the Points of Entry (PoEs), assist migrants stranded by border closures and raise migrants' awareness about their rights and available assistance. Many migrants have suffered from disrupted travel plans, loss of income, or illness as a result of the crisis, and may be pushed into vulnerable or exploitative situations. Many youth migrants suffered also from the disruption of their education. It is imperative to support critical protection mechanisms and responses to those in need of specific care and protection, such as persons at risk of or survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), persons with disabilities, unaccompanied or separated children, elderly, and disaster-induced displaced persons. Despite restricted movement, IOM can leverage extensive experience in supporting governments and communities to prevent, detect and respond to health threats along the mobility continuum while advocating for migrant-inclusive approaches that minimize stigma and discrimination. IOM also works with the Member States and governments to identify appropriate border management practices inclusive of health measures that allow for the gradual and safe establishment of mobility measures and support governments to safely re-open borders in the future.

Return and reintegration continues to be an important topic in the migration agenda of Central Asia. The COVID-19 pandemic also resulted in return migration in large numbers. Due to the impact of the pandemic, many labour migrants have lost their jobs in the country of destination and had to return to their country of origin (e.g., according to official government sources, since the beginning of the pandemic, over 500,000 migrants returned to Uzbekistan alone). The returned migrants often have limited opportunities to access decent jobs due to challenging economic situations that can create tremendous difficulties for them in meeting basic needs for themselves and their families. The absence of sustainable reintegration may increase the likelihood of returned migrants falling into poverty and engaging into secondary, oftentimes rural-to-urban, migration. In contrast, if provided with a proper reintegration support, returnees can facilitate the transfer of qualifications and skills to their countries of origin as they bring back skills, experience and entrepreneurship abilities which can help countries to rebuild better. Provision of income-generating opportunities for both returnees and communities in areas of return might help the overall reintegration process and local socio-economic development.

Limited services for returning migrants fail to sufficiently address the economic, social and psychosocial reintegration needs of returnees. Moreover, COVID-19 is exacerbating these conditions, with increasing numbers of migrants who are finding themselves destitute, overstaying their terms of entry or stranded without jobs.

24. <https://migrationhealthresearch.iom.int/migrants%E2%80%99-right-health-central-asia-challenges-and-opportunities>.

25. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/20200302_COVID19.pdf.

IOM advocates the adoption of sustainability-oriented reintegration policies that respond to the economic, social and psychological needs of returning migrants, while also benefitting the concerned communities and addressing structural challenges to reintegration.²⁶

Environmental and climatic change impacts shape different types of migration: The rising temperature, changes in precipitation patterns and changes in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events modify ecosystem services, which, in turn, adversely affect the lives and livelihoods of people (e.g. crop production, livestock herding, availability of non-timber forest products, water availability, etc.).²⁷ Climate change impacts will accelerate and influence the migration drivers, often by exacerbating environmental degradation in the region's vulnerable ecosystems, including the Aral Sea, Caspian Sea, Tien Shan and Pamir mountains, and Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins. Different types of migration are sensitive to these changes. The increases in precipitation variability and drying associated with rising temperature adversely affect water availability, which, in turn, negatively affects the pasture productivity and water available to livestock.²⁸ Thereby disrupting traditional pastoralism practices. The loss of place of residence or economic disruption due to extreme weather events results in population displacement. In 2019, 4,800 new displacements due to disasters were recorded in Tajikistan²⁹. Labour migration has been a traditional risk management strategy for families across this region. Investment of remittances in planned adaptation measures remains limited³⁰ due to a lack of enabling conditions. It is important to note that, those with the fewest resources are least able to move away from environmental shocks and stressors, while being simultaneously the most vulnerable to the impacts of such stressors. People could be 'trapped' in environmentally fragile areas and unable to move, lacking the resources or opportunities for migration. Planned relocation can be a last resort strategy to move people from environmentally fragile areas.

Radicalization to violent extremism is a challenge faced by Central Asia, as some 5,000 individuals from Central Asia have travelled to join the so-called Islamic State³¹. As Central Asia borders Afghanistan, expectations of a spillover of extremism to the surrounding countries shape the security-oriented discourse of Central Asian governments. While the extent of radicalization in Central Asia is a matter of debate³², the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their family members from abroad will require comprehensive repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts as a complement to security and criminal justice responses. Furthermore, the potential for governments to link migration to violent extremism may result in securitized responses stigmatizing and constricting the rights of migrants.

26. IOM Reintegration Handbook available here: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iom_reintegration_handbook.pdf.

27. World Bank, 2014: Turn Down the Heat, Confronting the New Climate Normal

28. https://www.ucentralasia.org/Content/Downloads/pastoralism_and_farming_in_central_asia_mountains.pdf

29. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/downloads/2020-IDMC-GRID-europe-central-asia.pdf?v=1.17>

30. Suzy Blondin (2019) Environmental migrations in Central Asia: a multifaceted approach to the issue, Central Asian Survey, 38:2, 275-292, DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2018.1519778.

31. Richard Barret (2017), Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees, The Soufan Center <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf>

32. <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28559/the-exaggerated-threat-of-islamist-militancy-in-central-asia>

Immigration and border management continues to be an area that needs further improvement in all countries of Central Asia. Increased mobility, overstaying or unauthorized employment, and large-scale mixed migration flows in recent years have demonstrated gaps and needs in immigration and border management, in particular in developing and implementing national integrated border management strategies and reforming border management institutional frameworks, training structures, standard operating procedures, information management and relevant infrastructure. Nevertheless, the region has demonstrated drive in meeting relevant international standards by implementing measures such as Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) systems. Although COVID-19 has exacerbated the issue of health-proof border management and cross-border mobility continuum, improved health management at borders can be achieved through enhanced response capacity and intersectoral and cross-border cooperation. Furthermore, there has also been a need to improve cross-border dialogue and collaboration between Central Asia and Afghanistan border guards in health-related issues in addition to border security.

3.

STRATEGIC PRORITIES



3. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

3.1 RESILIENCE

IOM will focus on assisting migrants in vulnerable situations, their families and communities in the Central Asian region, building their resilience, in particular, to violence, exploitation and abuse, migration-related health impacts, changes in remittance flows, as well as environmental and climate change impacts.

- IOM will provide direct assistance to migrants, ensuring no one is left behind by focusing on the most vulnerable. IOM will also support the capacity building of communities and duty bearers to provide services, referral mechanisms and assistance necessary to ensure that a person-centred approach is maintained, and the rights and dignity of migrants and members of their families are upheld.
- IOM will encourage pre-departure communications and awareness raising activities for prospective migrants, including youth, in order to mitigate the risks linked to irregular migration and human trafficking, as well as to promote responsible migration strategies that improve protection and enhance the development benefits of the migration experience.
- IOM will conduct trainings on the migration, environment and climate change nexus in Central Asia and advocate for stronger efforts to address migration in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. Technical support will focus on unlocking the adaptive impacts of migration, such as leveraging financial and social remittances for supporting climate action, providing financial products to enable low-income remittance-recipient households to build their adaptive capacity, and skilling migrant workers and their families (including women staying behind) to support climate resilience and a green economy. Furthermore, IOM will work with member states, 'trapped' population and host communities to improve voluntary planned relocations as a last resort and enhance opportunities for regular migration pathways in the context of climate change.
- IOM will provide governments with advice and technical support on addressing the mobility aspects of crises, including responding to disaster-induced displacement and the needs of migrants, developing national humanitarian border management capacities, national and local capacity to improve preparedness for natural hazards and resolving and recovering from displacement situations.
- By building on its 2020-2021 COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan IOM will contribute to its overall objective which encompasses life-saving assistance and response to humanitarian needs, initiatives to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on migrants and societies, as well as support to recovery and resilience integrating longer-term sustainable development planning.
- IOM will contribute to the efforts of civil society and central and local authorities in Central Asia to prevent radicalization, recruitment and inspiration of individuals to violent extremist ideologies and groups. IOM will also support governments in the repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of former foreign terrorist fighters and their dependents, where conditions meet key UN criteria for engagement and in close collaboration with relevant actors.
- IOM will respond to gender-related risks, vulnerabilities and needs of migrants through building capacity of stakeholders and IOM staff to recognise and

contribute to reducing gender inequalities in the context of migration, ensure that gender analysis is part of project design, data collection and implementation of interventions, effectively integrate gender into preparedness for crisis, address gender-specific protection and assistance needs, and prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

3.2 MOBILITY

IOM will work to build regular, safe and dignified migratory channels, particularly to key destinations for migrant workers such as the Russian Federation, and leverage mobility, including the economic benefits and skills of migrants and diaspora, to support sustainable development at national and community levels, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- IOM will support the growth of regular and safe migratory corridors and the regularization of the Central Asia-Russian Federation corridor by working with governments, employers and training institutions for safe, efficient, and effective skills development and matching systems to facilitate labour migration in response to labour market demand. IOM will encourage ethical recruitment and corporate social responsibility among potential employers and private recruitment agencies.
- IOM will work towards increased protections for labour migrants through coordinated pre-departure orientation, preparation of youth for migration, support for bilateral agreements and ethical recruitment agreements with employers in the Russian Federation and new destinations, as governments and recruitment agencies try to diversify migration routes.
- IOM will encourage innovative efforts of national governments to attract and utilise the transnational professional networks and financial and human capital benefits of migration and diaspora to further the achievement of SDG targets and development of national economies.
- IOM will encourage inter-state dialogues and advocate for policy improvement, including the use of the Migration Governance Indicators (MGIs) and MGI Elements to strengthen legal protections for migrants in the countries of origin, transit and destination and engagement with civil society organizations, diaspora, business entities and individual experts, where applicable.
- IOM will support immigration and border management agencies in their capacity to facilitate cross-border movement of bona fide passengers and goods, while at the same time preventing entry, transit and departure of illicit travelers and commodities and countering transnational organized crime. IOM will do so through drafting and/or implementation of national integrated border management strategies (where they exist), further development and/or implementation of the immigration and border security legal framework, support to ongoing institutional reforms, standard operating procedures, training, information management and finally, border equipment and infrastructure. IOM will specifically focus on implementing passenger data systems (API/PNR), strengthening identity management and document security, including capacities to detect document fraud, support to the implementation of readmission agreements, and promotion of cross-border trade.
- IOM will also support preparedness of Points of Entry (PoE) to respond to

the COVID-19 pandemic and similar scenarios through targeted training, development of Standard Operating Procedures, technical support, data collection and awareness raising.

- IOM will invest in healthcare delivery and continuity of care for migrants and their families, promoting coordination for cross-border and regional policy development on health, including managing the migration of health care workers and portability of health insurance.
- IOM will work with member states to assess labour demands and skill requirements for transition to a green and carbon neutral economy, including the development of skills partnership programmes, entrepreneurship development and advisory services for migrant workers, returnees and families staying behind (including women). IOM will also work with member states to strengthen social protection measures and provide reskilling opportunities to those employed in the extractive and resource-intensive sectors. These initiatives will pay special attention to people living in vulnerable ecosystems (e.g., mountains, coasts, river deltas, semi-arid and arid areas) and employed in the informal sector in urban areas.

3.3 GOVERNANCE

IOM will support the governments of Central Asia to introduce effective, coherent and inclusive migration management policies based on evidence, ‘whole-of-government’ and ‘whole-of-society’ approach and human rights-centered principles in line with the 2030 Agenda, the GCM and state-led regional priorities and processes.

- IOM will strengthen national and regional efforts for the collection, analysis and dissemination of accurate, reliable and comparable data, disaggregated by sex, age and migration status, while upholding the right to privacy and data protection under international human rights law. IOM will ensure that this data fosters research, guides coherent and evidence-based policymaking and well-informed public discourse and allows for effective monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of commitments over time. IOM will also focus on engagement of the government and civil society in a ‘whole-of-society’ approach to migration policy development.
- IOM will support national governments to engage in, respond to, and report on international commitments such as the GCM, the SDGs, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction. IOM will assist member states to contribute to the human mobility work program under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (e.g., a national policy review exercise, national assessments, awareness-raising and capacity development). IOM will support participation in regional cooperation mechanisms such as the Almaty Process, for better migration management and multilateral mobility agreements. Furthermore, IOM will support governments to mainstream migration into strategies, especially development strategies at local, national and regional levels.
- IOM will strengthen the capacity of government and non-government stakeholders to account for gender and youth in migration governance in Central Asia through ensuring gender is mainstreamed into policy development.
- IOM will support the development of multisectoral networks of expertise at

the country and regional levels to inform migration health policy and governance and promote the protection of the human rights of migrants and their family members, including their access to health services throughout the entire cycle of migration.

- IOM will support governments and partners to understand population mobility trends and reinforce public health mechanisms that minimize social and economic disruption. Efforts will include enhanced capacity of government, civil society, and communities to prepare and respond to crisis and enhanced capacity to recover through improved social cohesion, access to justice and economic recovery.
- IOM will provide technical assistance to the Central Asian governments to increase their capacity to securely manage their borders in accordance with international standards and national legislations, including implementing standards on passenger data exchange. Additionally, IOM will support dialogues on cross-border issues, encouraging governments to adopt a rights-based approach and address migrants' needs in decision-making on border issues.

3.4 PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

IOM is an active member of the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) in all Central Asian countries and contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) at both national and regional levels. As a regional issue, migration will be leveraged to support the sub-regional and transboundary aspects important to the UN Reform. The UNSDCFs are being developed in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have already developed the UNSDCFs and have started their implementation in 2021. IOM partners with other UN Agencies to jointly approach areas of common interest such as migration data, data on health and access to health services for migrants, migrants' rights, violent extremism, counter-trafficking, environmental migration, gender aspects of migration, remittances, and mixed migration flows. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, IOM is collaborating with the UN Resident Coordinators' Office and other participating agencies in the establishment of national UNNM, which has provided an opportunity for IOM to be a convener and coordinator of migration initiatives and take a leadership role in the implementation of the GCM. Additionally, IOM maintains committed to collaborate under the objectives of the various United Nations Issue based Coalitions (IBCs) for Europe and Central Asia as well as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Task Force on Displacement.

Inter-State Consultation Mechanisms on Migration (ISCMs) are active in the region and are important for shaping migration policies. IOM and UNHCR provide the technical secretariat for the Almaty Process³³, a state-led, ongoing, regional information-sharing and policy dialogue or regional consultative process dedicated to discussing migration and refugee protection issues in a cooperative manner among Member States of Central Asia and the wider region.

33. More information on the Almaty Process available here: <https://www.iom.int/almaty-process>.

In addition to an effective field presence, IOM also has long standing cooperative agreements with a large network of more than 100 civil society organizations who act as project partners, service providers or implementing partners. In Central Asia, local NGOs provide a wide coverage for reintegration and counter-trafficking programs as well as community stabilization and diaspora engagement activities.

4.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



4. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 POLICY CAPACITY

IOM in Central Asia has a proven track record of assisting governments in policy analysis and providing them with tools, including policy-relevant research and reports, to create more comprehensive sustainable development strategies. IOM is a regular member of various working groups at the parliament and ministerial levels. IOM has been invited to provide its expertise on developing migration policy concepts, legislation and other regulatory documents in various Central Asian nations. With offices across the world and accumulated institutional knowledge and best practices from different regions and countries, in the next five years IOM will continue working closely with governments to improve policies in Central Asia in line with international standards and human rights.

4.2 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

The development of policy or program interventions start with a clear understanding of the status quo based on evidence and data. In Central Asia, IOM continuously works to further the understanding of migration related issues. Over the past decade, IOM has published 14 flagship reports, conducted dozens of desk and field assessments and developed different capacity building materials such as glossaries, guidelines and training manuals. The range of topics studied by IOM include the effects of migration on youth and women, exploitation and human trafficking, integration and re-integration needs of migrants, access to social systems and vulnerabilities of migrants and their family members, the migration, environment and climate change nexus, socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on migrants and societies, tracking the impact of COVID-19 on mobility, etc. IOM has an extensive network of national and international experts and strong connections with academia. As a leading agency on migration, IOM has established itself as a primary source of migration data and evidence for governments, donors, NGOs, media and other development actors. Collecting evidence, enhancing the understanding of migration-related issues and assistance to the governments of Central Asia report against international frameworks such as the SDGs and GCM continues to be a priority until 2025. IOM will also prioritize the development of long-term programmes based on the evidence when working with the donor community to ensure strategic comprehensive and lasting effect of interventions.

4.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As a key component of both results-based management and knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation helps IOM to understand, learn from and communicate in evidence-based ways about achievements and shortcomings of interventions, thereby promoting continuous improvements, as well as accountability to donors and beneficiaries. IOM Central Asia will emphasize monitoring and evaluation activities through dedicated funding and staff capacitation as an essential part of all interventions to enable more robust assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency,

relevance, coherence, impact and sustainability of its projects, programmes, strategies and policies. Communications & Visibility

Despite the amount of work IOM performs in Central Asia, IOM activities and achievements are not always well-reflected and showcased. This affects not only IOM's ability to present its achievements, but also the opportunity to fundraise and inform the donor community about the needs and areas for potential program interventions. In the future, IOM will establish stronger connections with donors and update them on a regular basis on recent developments in the region, results achieved within projects and expertise accumulated. IOM will also dedicate financial and human resources to establishing a stronger presence on popular social media platforms to directly communicate with a broader public and raise awareness on migration-related issues.

4.4 THE WAY FORWARD

By 2025, IOM will have enhanced its position as a key development, climate action and humanitarian actor in the field of migration in Central Asia. This will be accomplished through building the capacity of the staff to respond to growing challenges and changing environment, increased financial stability, improved visibility and building stronger relationships with governments, the UN System, the donor community, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders. IOM will utilize its resources to focus on achieving strategic priorities and long-term objectives, while diverting from traditional project-based angle. By applying this approach, IOM will ensure that migration indeed benefits all parties involved – countries of origin, transit and destination and above all migrants.

Annex 1.

International conventions relating to migration and their ratification status in individual countries of the region	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan
1949 Convention concerning Migration for Employment					
1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees ("The Refugee Convention")					
1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons					
1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness					
1966 International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)					
1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)					
1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)					
1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees					
1975 Convention concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers					
1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)					
1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ("Convention Against Torture" (CAT))					
1989 Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC)					
1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families					
2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime					
2000 Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air ("Smuggling Protocol")					
2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)					
2007 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED)					
2007 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED)					

 Ratified  Not Ratified

