

**12th Conference of the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI)
Cross-border Cooperation in Central Asia**

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**SESSION 2 - Central Asia and management of mixed migration flows: Protecting
state security and migrants' rights**

SESSION 2: CONCEPT NOTE

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Questions for discussion:

- What mechanisms/ instruments/good practices facilitate legal migration and contribute to fighting cross-border crime related to migration (current situation, objectives and activities, Crime-as-a-Service, cooperation with neighbouring states)?
- How can we effectively and efficiently protect migrants' rights?
- Which measures do you consider necessary and appropriate in Central Asia to counter migrant smuggling activities?

Key Phrases: mixed migration flows, migrants' rights, labour migration, Afghanistan

While migration flows from, to and within Central Asia have undoubtedly been beneficial for states, migrants and families, a number of new developments occurring simultaneously might pose an increased danger for the security of individual (groups of) migrants as well as for national and regional stability.

States understandably perceive large-scale of inadequately managed migration primarily as national security concern. Understanding that security cannot be defined unambiguously and will have different meanings in different societies also implies that the impact of migration flows should be discussed in several different security paradigms. At the same time, any discussion on links between migration and security should refrain from concluding that the migrants themselves constitute a threat and implement measures which would affect legitimate and indeed much needed mobility and migration. On the other hand, awareness of the potential negative effects should lead to better migration management and improve longer term planning.

Migration and security

One of the greatest current problems is the existing security threat faced by migrants who are often confronted with discrimination, exploitation, physical abuse and lack of access to protection.

The causes can be in part attributed to the legal and procedural weaknesses within the countries of origin, transit and destination, the lack of training and instruments for the involved officials as well as widespread crime, corruption and prejudices against certain ethnic groups. Set against this backdrop, poorly managed migration combined with a lack of preparation for possible changes in migration patterns can also pose a challenge for the security of states and societies.

When an issue is considered a security threat, this has significant implications in terms of the laws, norms, policies, and procedures that are applied in response. In the migration context, a security threat may justify greater surveillance, detention, expulsion and more restrictive policies. Such responses in turn can impact the migrants involved, for example, by denying asylum seekers access to safe countries, driving more migrants into the arms of migrant smugglers and human traffickers, and by contributing to growing anti-immigrant sentiment among the general public, in the media, and in the political debate.

This perception can provide fertile ground for misleading arguments as migration causing the spread of infectious diseases and acting as a vehicle for importing terrorists and criminals. Although these perceptions might be deceptive, they are nonetheless. Yet, threats to human security of migrants remain, and most importantly, these are more tangible than any threat to national security these migrants may cause.

Migration and border security

Integrated Border Management, widely known as IBM, can play a crucial role in supporting efforts on better management of mixed migrations flows. With its concept that involves several relevant players, and not only the “traditional” ones, IBM gives an adequate response on providing required and expected level of security to the states, while at the same time ensuring that human rights – including right of migrants - are observed and respected. BOMCA, among other successful border management programmes, is a clear example of how to provide effective border security hand in hand with effective management of mixed migration flows. The 9th phase of BOMCA assists CA states in developing and advancing their migration governance. In particular, one of the programme components aims to further develop procedural instruments, introduce advanced practices to promote cross-border mobility and address multi-faceted challenges caused by mixed migration flows from, through and to Central Asia. This includes ensuring proper identification and protection of vulnerable migrants, notably labour migrants, promoting advanced local border traffic regimes, implementing the use of the EU guidelines and sharing examples from the EU external border.

Challenges to migration in Central Asia

While Central Asian states have remained consolidated and relatively stable since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have always been a number of direct or latent challenges affecting migration. Obviously, these challenges vary from state to state but, as a rule, they include: absence of clearly demarcated borders and the resulting border tensions, emotions stirred up by the increasing tilt towards 'ethnic states', the prevalence of organised crime groups and the impact of drug-related crime, corruption, environmental deterioration and disasters, conflicts in the region, the absence of employment opportunities for large parts of the population and the dependency on the Russian Federation as the major country of destination for Central Asian migrants.

While none of these factors are new, several recent negative developments make it more likely that all of these factors will have a much stronger combined impact on migration, migrants and security in the region. Some of the key changes are highlighted below.

The dependency on Russian Federation for emigration

Migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in particular travel to the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan in search of employment opportunities. A number of factors lead to the decreased attractiveness and/or accessibility of the Russian Federation. These developments might cause labour migrants from Central Asia to reconsider their stay in the Russian Federation, and will have a negative impact on the lives of emigrants and their families. A dramatic drop in remittances will also directly affect the financial stability of some of the more remittances-dependent countries in the region, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The real impact of the formal establishment of the Eurasian Union with its simplified procedures for the free movement of workers, and the impact this might have on the movement of people between its members, as well as on the accession of new Central Asian members, still needs to be further monitored.

Mixed migration flows through and from Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan and its impact on Central Asia remains unpredictable. However, one of the risks concerns the potential arrival of larger numbers of refugees from Afghanistan. Unlike the 1990s, when the migration flows focused on Pakistan and Iran, this time Central Asia is likely to attract more refugees. If the security situation deteriorates in northern Afghanistan, some parts of the population might try to cross the border. Tajiks living in northern Afghanistan regard Tajikistan now as a country that could offer better opportunities, especially since international aid to Afghanistan has slowed down. It is less likely that large numbers of Afghan Uzbeks and Turkmens will flee to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Many Afghans also consider Kazakhstan as a country with a nearly European standard of living. The sudden arrival of larger groups of refugees does not pose a security threat in itself, but may weaken the Central Asian states in several ways. First,

the lack of preparation of state agencies could lead to serious humanitarian crises. Second, local reactions to badly managed refugee flows are likely to be largely negative. The arrival of refugees would most likely be welcomed neither by the Central Asian regimes nor by the general public, and their presence could give rise to local tensions and human rights violations.

Impact of environmental degradation and natural disasters

In Central Asia, the complex interplay of over-exploitation of natural resources, the (ab)use of access to water in regional power games, climate change and disasters such as earthquakes will continue to push people away from their homes, adding to an already tense situation.

Possible radicalisation?

The appearance of IS has a variety of effects on migrants from Central Asia and indeed might have an impact also on the security of Central Asian states. In terms of migration, two trends can be observed. First of all, discrimination against migrants from Central Asia is increasing, strengthened by the unfounded suspicion of connections to Islamic extremism. Secondly, reports are increasing that IS recruits foreign terrorist fighters among marginalized migrants in Moscow. There are indications that a considerable number of citizens of Central Asian states travel to the Middle East to support the Islamic State. Should a significant number of these radicalised migrants return, they could pose a serious challenge to security and stability throughout Central Asia.

At the same time, Islamic radicalisation of Central Asia is widespread by some media. The Islamic revival in Central Asia began much earlier than 1991, and was dominated by the creation of a secularised Islam where religious identity was secondary to national identity; and this remains the dominant form of Islam in Central Asia today. The level of awareness of global Islamism remains extremely low in Central Asia, and those who join IS often do so outside the region, often motivated by financial gain, and many never return. Finally, Central Asia remains populated largely by secularised Muslims and politicians are in favour of the state control of religion.