



A NEW FRONTIER IN SOCIAL REMITTANCE TRANSFERS: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFERS

Migration is one of the ancient phenomena in the history of humanity that has lasted for thousands of years. In the 21st century, with the rapid development in the technological and infrastructural system of the transportation sector, the migration process has become easier and faster. In 2020, there are 272 million people around the world working or residing outside their home country, mainly for economic reasons. In the literature of migration, studies mainly focused on the decision making process of migrants, choice of the destination country and the socio-economic integration process of migrants to their host country. However, migrants' ties to their home country and potential results of these relations are often neglected. Even when the attention is paid to migrants' interaction with their home country, experts in this area often focus on the economic side of the issue, which has become quite famous in the recent decade.

This is due to global remittance transfers having reached an enormous amount of \$716 billion annually in 2019, which is three times larger than whole foreign aid provided by every donor country in the world. The increase in the magnitude of the migration flow in recent decades started to divert the attention of experts to conduct research on the benefits of the economic remittances for the economy of the home countries. Therefore, many analyses have investigated the effects of this additional income to the lives of the migrants' families at the micro level and to the economic growth rate of the country at the macro level. Economists pay attention to the well-being of migrants, whereas anthropologists study how remittance transfers change the social status of the migrants and their family relations. Within the remittance transfer research, few of them touch upon the intangible factors such as transfer of ideas, values and beliefs of migrants to their friends, families and in a general, home society, which is called social remittances, a term coined by Peggy Levitt. Alongside the monetary transfers, migrants remit ideas, values and norms that they are exposed to in their host society. Thus, migrants do

not send money back home with purely economic concerns. They also embed social meanings in them in order to cause a change in the lives of their families and friends towards better living conditions. Considering the remittances as an outcome of the migration, analyzing the social remittances has its own difficulties. This is due to the fact that analysis of social interactions usually requires a complex approach in order to understand the general trend of these social acts. In economic remittances, calculations of transferred earnings allow us to see the practical results of these contributions. However, the same cannot be said for the social remittances. Social remittances are intangible deliveries that need to be framed under a certain scope to define what could be considered a social remittance.

For instance, Karolak (2016) states that if social remittances were not transferred to the home society, it could not be counted as one. Though his opinion has a logical standpoint, it neglects the potential of social remittances. Another more detailed attempt was made by Carling (2014), where he tried to define social remittances as socio-cultural scripts and created 12 different scripts to identify these transfers. In his definition, he explains the social remittances as "structures of expectations for specific types of situations which facilitate social interaction". Levitt (2005) indicates that social remittances are often transferred directly to the recipient, where the receiver trusts the sender due to their social connections and the recipient could point out how they decided to change their way of thinking on a particular situation. Social remittances, in other words "idea investments," follow the same logical path as monetary investments but since they are intangible features that come with no cost, and losing them or not using them does not hurt anybody, they don't receive significant attention.

Idea investments should be considered as an asset that has a potential for institutional change that could develop where it has been largely stocked. Migrants around the world have different priorities

when it comes to what ideas they are remitting. For instance, Ukrainians are more prone to remit political values, while Indians focus on skills that have an economic outcome such as technical and entrepreneurial skills.

In the case of Central Asia, we could say that the migrants are more interested in improving their living standards. The majority of the labor migrants abroad search for jobs that pay salaries higher than the local ones. In other words, one of the main reasons for job hunting abroad is driven by their aim to improve their living standards by earning more income. In order to achieve their goals, many decide to migrate abroad, mainly to Russia due to the visa-free regime, common Russian language and higher salaries. During their time spent abroad, they build financial capital and obtain necessary skills to start a new business at home or find a job with a decent salary, using skills learned abroad. In their pursuit, some achieve their goals, while some fail to do so due to different factors they encounter in their lives. It is important that their gathered knowledge needs to match their expected business plans or occupation. For instance, a farmworker who learns how to use a drip irrigation system can more easily transfer this experience to his hometown than a worker in the automobile industry, because the former requires a less technologically equipped workspace than the latter.

To sum up, there is considerable social capital potential waiting to be harnessed and channeled to the home countries. The main sectors like trade and construction could benefit from the experiences of labor migrants. Recently, working abroad in a circular migration system has become difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Central Asian countries could attract the attention of their skilled and highly skilled migrant workers with certain economic incentives. Encouragement of entrepreneurial activity at home and introduction of new support programs could influence the decisions of many migrant workers to set their economic roots in their own countries, which would positively affect these sectors.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev paid a working visit to Turkey and had a meeting with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu. The parties assessed the current level of bilateral relations and discussed perspectives of future political and economic cooperation. The countries agreed to strengthen joint efforts to increase bilateral trade to \$1 billion. Kyrgyzstan guaranteed the legal and physical security of Turkey's investments (Kabar, 11.11.2020)
- Presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Shavkat Mirziyoyev discussed, in a telephone conversation, issues of bilateral and regional cooperation. They commended the promising development of bilateral relations and welcomed the results of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Summit held under the Russian presidency. The presidents outlined new joint projects focusing on ensuring stability and security in the Central Asian region. The countries agreed to provide economic aid to Kyrgyzstan (Kazinform, 12.11.2020).
- The Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov resigned from the powers of the acting president and announced his candidacy for the presidency of the republic. Under the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan, the powers of the acting president of the country were transferred to the president of the Jogorku Kenesh (Upper House of the Parliament), Talant Mamytov. The upcoming presidential elections are scheduled for January 10, 2021 (kabar.kg, 14.11.2020).
- The heads of the states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) took part in the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO held by videoconference under the chairmanship of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. Prospects for the development and interaction within the SCO along with topical issues of international and regional significance were discussed during the meeting. A set of documents were adopted following the meeting, including the Moscow Declaration of the Council of Heads of State (Mamasnews, 11.11.2020).
- The Chairman of the Supreme Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah paid a working visit to Uzbekistan, where he was received by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. During the meeting, the sides discussed topical issues of bilateral cooperation and the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. The parties also expressed satisfaction regarding the dynamics of the recent development of Uzbek-Afghan relations (Uzreport.news, 11.11.2020).
- Thousands of protesters took to the streets of the Georgian capital Tbilisi calling for a re-run of the parliamentary election. According to the final results, the ruling Georgian Dream party won 48.23% of the vote, whereas the largest opposition party, the United National Movement (UNM), took 27.18%. The opposition demands new parliamentary elections and the resignation of the head of the central election commission (Ria.ru, 14.11.2020).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The Deputy Finance Minister of Kazakhstan Kanat Bayedilov visited a meeting of the Senate, where he proposed to eliminate the land tax for apartment owners. According to Bayedilov, the average tax payment, which equals \$0.14, is less than the value of sending notifications amounted to \$1.20. Therefore, this tax is costly for the government. The Senate members, in turn, proposed to provide the same measure for the owners of the private independent houses (Kazakh TV, 12.11.2020).
- According to the head of the Russia-Syrian interdepartmental coordination center for the return of refugees Mikhail Mizintsev, Russia started reconstruction projects in Syria. In particular, it allocated more than \$1 billion for the recovery of power networks, production facilities and for other humanitarian purposes. Moreover, Russian ministries implement different projects in the education and healthcare sectors. Together with the World Food Program, Russia will provide food aid to Syria amounted to \$20 million in 2020 and 2021 (TASS, 11.11.2020).
- During 9 months of 2020, Belarus attracted \$6.4 billion foreign investments in the real sector of its economy. Russia dominates the list of foreign investors and its share in the total volume of investments equaled 43.1%. Corresponding shares of other main investors such as Southern Cyprus and Austria reached 9.1% and 7.4%. For the same period, companies from Belarus excluding banks invested \$3.2 billion abroad, 69.5% of which went to Russia (BelTA, 11.11.2020).
- The foreign trade of Ukraine decreased in 2020. During 10 months of the current year, its trade turnover amounted to \$82.7 billion, which was 9% or \$8 billion less than for the same period of 2019. The country's imports decreased by 12% and equaled \$43.3 billion, while its exports reduced to \$39.6 billion declining by 5%. The European Union remains the major trade partner of Ukraine (Ukrinform, 10.11.2020).
- The Asian Development Bank continues to provide financial support for infrastructural projects in Uzbekistan. Recently, it approved a \$121 million loan for the modernization of the railway network in the eastern part of the country. It is expected that the project will stimulate economic growth, improve trade and regional connectivity. In 2017, the bank allocated \$80 million for the electrification of 145 kilometers of railway track in Ferghana Valley (UzDaily, 11.11.2020).
- The international reserves of Kyrgyzstan decreased by \$127 million during the last two months due to volatility in the foreign exchange market. According to the website of the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan, its October interventions to support the national currency amounted to \$50.4 million. However, the country's reserves, which currently equal almost \$3 billion, are higher than in the corresponding period of 2019. Since the beginning of 2020, they have increased by \$520 million (24.kg, 14.11.2020).

Society and Culture

- The International Organization of Turkic Culture TURKSOY organized a conference dedicated to the 1150th anniversary of Al Farabi at Ankara University. The event was organized in cooperation with Ankara University and the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Ankara, bringing together diplomats and prominent Turkic scholars. The ceremony was followed by a panel discussion titled "The Second Teacher of Humanity: Al Farabi on the 1150th Anniversary of his Birthday" (TURKSOY, 11.11.2020).
- The International Turkic Academy organized an international online conference titled "Hungarian Turkology". The event was dedicated to the 130th anniversary of famous Turkologist Gyula Németh, a prominent Hungarian orientalist and Turkologist. The event was attended by Hungarian government officials, diplomats from different Turkic states, representatives of Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-speaking Countries (TURKPA), the Turkic Council in Hungary and well-known Turkologists (TWESCO, 10.11.2020).
- The State Information Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) signed a Memorandum on the exchange of news content with the largest news agency of India, Asian News International (ANI). According to the Memorandum, the news agencies will exchange operational, informational, analytical materials on the political, economic, socio-cultural life of the two countries regularly. The document is expected to contribute to the development of information ties between India and Turkmenistan (Centralasia.news, 10.11.2020).
- The Cambridge University Press in partnership with the National Bureau Translations of Kazakhstan (NTB) published the first complete collection of works of Abai in English. The event is part of NBT's project to publish Abai's works in ten languages and is organized within the framework of celebrating the 175th anniversary of the great poet, philosopher and enlightener. Around 100 people from all over the world attended the online presentation of the book (Inform.kz, 12.10.2020).
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev met with the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Turkey Mehmet Nuri Ersoy. The meeting was held as part of the working visit of Minister Kazakbaev to Turkey. The Ministers paid special attention to bilateral cultural and humanitarian cooperation as well as the implementation of joint projects of TIKA. Minister Kazakbaev proposed to the Turkish side to consider the possibility of mutual abolition of visas and work permits for citizens of the two states (Mfa.gov.kg, 09.11.2020).
- The Institute of Language, Literature and National Manuscripts named after Makhtumkuli of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan won a \$43,470 grant from the U.S. State Department under the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Heritage Preservation (AFCHP) program. The funds will be used to restore and create a server for storing photocopies of 80 medieval handwritten and early printed Turkmen books. Since 2007, more than 100 dilapidated handwritten books have been restored thanks to this international program (Asiaplustj.info, 09.11.2020).