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The Role Of Legal Labor Migration In Preventing Crime: A Socio - Legal Analysis

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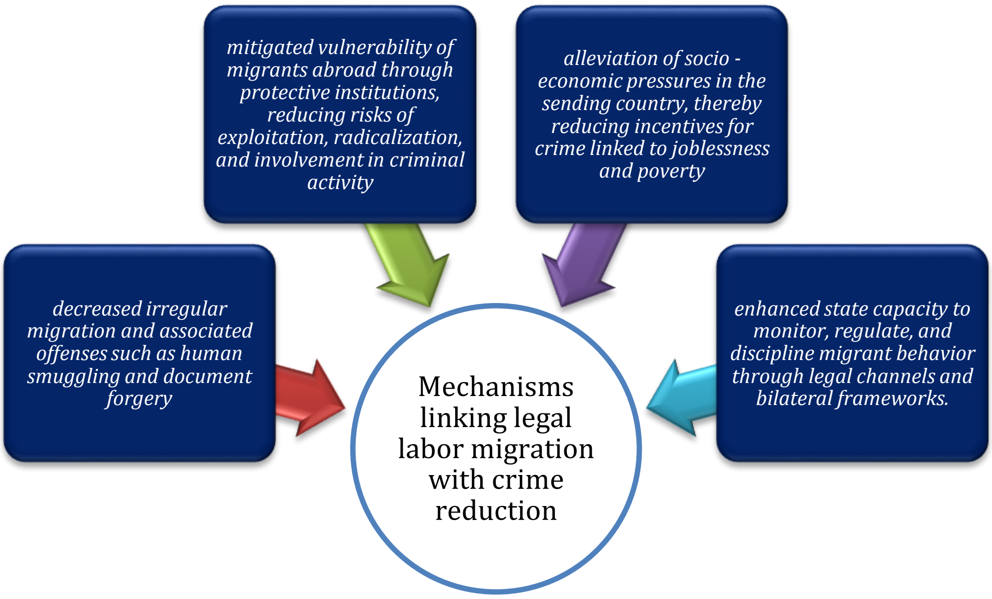
Abstract: This article indicates how legal labor migration mechanisms can influence and contribute to prevention of crimes in both migrant - sending and receiving countries. Using a socio - legal framework, we analyze migration trends, remittance flows, irregular migration statistics, and labor migration policies in Uzbekistan namely and compare them with other post - Soviet states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, Georgia).

According to above - mentioned, our findings indicate that well - regulated labor migration can act as a "reliable tool" for sending countries to reduce unemployment and poverty (thereby mitigating crime drivers), while also decreasing irregular migration and associated criminal activities such as human trafficking, smuggling and etc.

Comparative insights show similar trends across the region: states with more fixed legal frameworks and regional mobility regimes tend to indicate lower levels of irregular migration, reduced tendency to transnational and (national) criminality, and greater stability in migrant - sending communities.

Keywords: Labor law, migration, law, labor.

Introduction: Labor migration has become a defining socio - economic phenomenon across many post - Soviet states. Many workers from Central Asia and the other states seek employment abroad, primarily in Russia, increasingly in other regions, in pursuit of higher incomes. This tendency has significant implications for both sending countries (benefit from external income) and receiving countries (benefit from migrant labor).



This research explores the socio - legal link between migration and crime - including how the availability (or absence) of legal migration pathways might influence criminal behavior, whether by migrants themselves or by those who facilitate or exploit migration.

Moreover, this article investigates *the role of legal labor migration in preventing crime*, focusing on Uzbekistan as a central case study while drawing comparisons with its regional peers. Uzbekistan is an illustrative case as one of the largest labor exporters in Eurasia, with an estimated 2 million of its citizens (about 10.4% of the national labor force) working abroad in 2025[1]. Like several neighboring states, Uzbekistan faces the dual challenge of maximizing the benefits of labor migration *(such as remittances and reduced domestic unemployment)* and minimizing its potential downsides *(such as human trafficking, migrant abuse, or criminality)*. [2][1].

We employ a socio - legal analytical framework to examine how formal labor migration mechanisms *(laws, bilateral agreements, organized recruitment programs, social support measures)* can reduce incentives for crime and enhance public safety. We consider crime prevention broadly, encompassing: (1) reduction of *irregular migration* and related crimes (smuggling of migrants, document forgery, human trafficking), (2) prevention of crimes *against* migrants (exploitation, abuse) through legal protection, (3) mitigation of socio - economic conditions (poverty, joblessness) that may contribute to crime in origin communities, and (4) avoidance of *criminal radicalization* or illicit activities by migrants in host countries.

The analysis draws on a range of data - official migration statistics, remittance figures, policy documents, and prior studies - with a focus on the current (2024-2025) context. By comparing Uzbekistan's experience with those of other post - Soviet states such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, Georgia, and Armenia, we aim to identify common trends and policy lessons on leveraging legal labor migration as a tool for crime prevention.

Significance of the study

This research is situated at the intersection of migration studies, criminology, and socio - legal policy analysis. While migration is often examined through economic or human rights lenses, its crime - prevention dimension is less explored. Yet, for countries like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, or Tajikistan - where outbound labor migration is sometimes called a *"safety valve"* for domestic pressures[3] - understanding this dimension is crucial.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative socio - legal methodology combined with analysis of quantitative data from secondary sources. We conducted a comparative case analysis, centered on Uzbekistan but contextualized within the broader post - Soviet migration system. Key methods and data sources include:

- **Literature and policy review:** We reviewed national legislation, government resolutions, and bilateral agreements related to labor migration. For example, Uzbekistan's 2025 government resolution on improving labor migration processes (adopted 13 May 2025) was analyzed to discern legal measures aimed at deterring unlawful behavior by migrants[3].
- **Migration statistics analysis:** We gathered the latest available statistics on international migrant stocks, flows, and demographics from reputable sources such as the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and national statistical agencies. UN DESA's *International Migrant Stock 2024* dataset provided a global and regional backdrop - for instance, showing that Central Asia had about 3.91 million international migrants in 2024 (4.8% of the region's population)[4].
- **Comparative indicators:** To facilitate comparison, we compiled key indicators across the number of countries. For example, World Bank and central bank data were used for remittances, while Eurostat data shed light on Uzbek migrants in the European Union (e.g. nearly 59,500 Uzbek nationals held valid EU/EFTA residence permits in 2024)[3].
- **Socio - legal framework application:** We interpreted the data through a socio - legal lens, considering how law and society interact in the context of migration. This involved assessing the effectiveness of legal frameworks (e.g. bilateral labor agreements, visa regimes, recruitment programs) in shaping migrant behavior and outcomes [4].

During the research, we present factual findings on migration patterns, policies, and their apparent correlations with crime or security issues, first for Uzbekistan and then comparatively across other post - Soviet states. In turn, we synthesize these findings, examining causality and broader implications. By combining statistical evidence with policy analysis, this mixed - methods approach yields a comprehensive view of how legal labor migration interfaces with crime prevention.

1. Uzbekistan: legal migration trends and crime - prevention measures

Uzbekistan's population was approximately 37.8 million as of mid - 2025[3], with a young and growing labor force. Each year, an estimated 650,000-700,000 Uzbek youth enter the labor market, outstripping the

300,000 new jobs created annually in the domestic economy[1]. This employment gap has made labor migration a critical outlet. As noted, about 2 million Uzbek citizens (10.4% of the workforce) were working abroad in early 2025[1]. The main destinations remain **Russia** and **Kazakhstan**, which historically absorbed the bulk of Uzbek labor migrants due to geographic, linguistic, and historical ties[1]. In fact, Uzbekistan is the largest exporter of labor in Central Asia[1]. Remittances from these migrant workers constitute a major economic boon: in 2022, Uzbek migrants sent home roughly **$16.7 billion**, equal to 21% of Uzbekistan's GDP[2]. Although remittance inflows dipped in 2023 amid global uncertainties, they rebounded by 2025; in the first half of 2025 alone, Uzbekistan received $8.2 billion in remittances (12.8% of GDP) - a $1.8 billion increase over the same period of 2024[3]. Notably, about 78% of these funds came from Russia, followed by smaller shares from Kazakhstan, the United States, South Korea, Turkey, the UK, Kyrgyzstan, and others[3]. These figures underscore the scale of Uzbekistan's diaspora and its importance to the domestic economy.

Legal labor migration frameworks and approaches:

Facing a rapidly growing population and limited domestic jobs, the Uzbek government in recent years has adopted an active strategy to promote *organized, safe, and legal* labor migration. A pivotal policy framework was the **Action Strategy 2017 - 2021**, which explicitly designated labor migration as a priority area of socio - economic policy[1]. Under this and subsequent initiatives, numerous legal and institutional reforms were implemented:

- **In facilitating migration process:** In 2018, Uzbekistan passed the Law "On Private Employment Agencies," ending the state monopoly on overseas employment and allowing licensed private agencies to place workers abroad[1]. The previous requirement for migrants to obtain a government work permit before departure was replaced by a simpler voluntary registration system for those with private labor contracts [1]. These steps reduced bureaucratic barriers and encouraged more migrants to use official channels rather than informal brokers.

- **Constituting governmental supportive structures:** An **Agency for external labor migration** (under the Ministry of Employment) was empowered and later elevated into a M**igration agency under the cabinet of ministers**, signaling high - level commitment [1]. Uzbekistan opened labor migration offices in Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, and several Western states [1]. These officials are tasked with protecting migrants' rights, liaising with foreign employers, and resolving problems faced by Uzbeks abroad.

- **Organized recruitment and bilateral agreements:** Uzbekistan has pursued formal agreements with destination countries to ensure *legal recruitment and employment conditions*. A landmark bilateral accord with Russia (signed in 2017, operationalized in 2021) set up an organized recruitment program for temporary Uzbek workers in Russia[7]. This mechanism aims to **"provide guaranteed employment and protection"** for migrants and to **inform them of working and living conditions** in advance[7]. By late 2021, Uzbek officials noted that such agreements help funnel workers to *official employers* who uphold legal standards, thereby reducing migrants' resort to unscrupulous intermediaries or illegal jobs[7]. Also, an April 2024 presidential decree led to agreements whereby the UK would accept up to 10,000 Uzbek medical workers and Slovakia opened 390 positions for Uzbek workers in automotive factories[2]. While small in scale, these agreements signal efforts to diversify migration destinations and channel workers into legal, skilled roles.

- **Pre - departure training - qualification:** According to statistics, 97% of Uzbek migrant workers have only secondary education and tend to occupy low - paid, low - skill jobs abroad[1]. So the government invested in vocational training (centres) programs, offering free courses to prospective migrants in trades and foreign languages[1]. By improving language proficiency and skills of migrants, the government aims to make its migrants less vulnerable and more competitive, reducing the likelihood they end up in exploitative or illegal work. For instance, an official directive now even **reimburses 50% of language training costs** for migrants who obtain an international language certificate [1], and a new Center for Foreign Language and Skills Training for work abroad has been established[1].

- **Financial and social support:** Uzbekistan has instituted a range of support measures for migrants and their families, such as buying **discounted tickets** for going abroad to work [1] and accessing **microloans** *(around $180)* to cover pre - departure expenses such as passports, visas, or airfare[1]. To mitigate risks, the government subsidizes insurance for migrant workers - covering life and health insurance premiums [1].

- **Reintegration programs:** Beyond the migration cycle abroad, Uzbekistan has linked its labor migration strategy with crime prevention at home by aiding returnees. Migrants who come back can access free **job training and placement services** to reintegrate into the local labor market[2]. The government incentivizes businesses to hire returnees by providing a subsidy of 500,000 soum per month (per returnee hire) for up to one year[1]. In rural districts (e.g. Saykhunabad in Syrdarya region) pilot programs offer financial grants to returning migrants to start small businesses or farming activities[1]. Additionally, social services have been introduced for migrants' families who remain in Uzbekistan: a new system mandates regular check - ins by social workers on children of labor migrants, to ensure their well - being and reduce any negative impacts (e.g. truancy or neglect) while parents are away[2][2].

Impact on Crime and Irregular Migration:

Preliminary evidence suggests that Uzbekistan's emphasis on legal migration is yielding results in terms of reducing irregular migration and possibly crime. One striking trend is the **decline in Uzbek labor migration to Russia through unofficial means**. According to an analysis by an Uzbek government institute, the number of Uzbek citizens working in Russia has dropped significantly over the past decade - from an estimated 4 to 6 million in 2016 down to under 1 million in 2024[1]. Meanwhile, the volume of *organized recruitment* has surged: in 2024, over **113,000 Uzbeks went abroad through organized channels** [1]. These were largely to "developed countries" (beyond the traditional Russia/Kazakhstan circuit), and coincided with a 34% jump in remittances that year to $12.6 billion[1]. In turn, this reduces migrants' exposure to criminal syndicates and lowers the incidence of crimes such as document fraud, human trafficking, or illegal border crossings. Notably, Uzbek authorities reported that *90%* of the country's migrants previously went abroad without formal work authorization[2].

Uzbekistan's domestic policy also reflects a crime - prevention behaviour. In May 2025, the government introduced punitive measures targeting citizens who engage in illegal or disreputable conduct while abroad. Migrants deported back for violating another country's laws will be **denied a new biometric passport for two years** [3][4]. Furthermore, starting September 2025, the Migration Agency will maintain a database of Uzbeks who have been deported or who "committed actions negatively affecting the international reputation and prestige of Uzbekistan"[4]. These could include those caught in criminal activities abroad. Such individuals may face case - by - case restrictions if they seek to migrate again[4]. This policy sends a strong signal: the state seeks to *deter migrants from engaging in crime overseas* by threatening tangible consequences at home (loss of travel privileges). By holding migrants accountable for legal compliance abroad, Uzbekistan aims to protect its image and prevent the export of crime. This is a rather unique approach in migration governance, essentially leveraging domestic law to enforce good behavior internationally.

Finally, there are indications that legal labor migration contributes to social stability within Uzbekistan, which could have indirect crime - prevention effects. **Remittances**, as noted, bolster household incomes - and empirical studies suggest this can reduce incentives for crime. In Uzbekistan's context, remittances (accounting for over 12% of GDP in recent years) have been linked to poverty reduction and improved living standards. Government reports credit labor migration with "improved quality of life" and even *reduction in crime* domestically, as incomes rise and unemployment falls (a claim echoed by earlier analyses in the late 2000s)[8]. While it is hard to isolate migration's impact on crime statistically, Uzbekistan's overall crime rate has remained relatively low during the high - migration period, and some rural communities with heavy out - migration have reported less youth unemployment and idleness - factors associated with lower petty crime.

2. Comparative perspectives: post - soviet states and legal migration frameworks

Post - Soviet countries, such as Central Asian states *(Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan)* as well as Russia and the South Caucasus *(Georgia, Armenia)* have also grappled with the nexus of labor migration and crime, each with their own legal - policy approaches.

Kyrgyzstan is a major labor exporter relative to its small population (6.7 million). A 2022 census found **876,000 Kyrgyz citizens abroad**, roughly 15% of the population[9]. Over **99%** of these migrants were in the former Soviet sphere - principally **Russia (870,304)**, with much smaller numbers in Kazakhstan (~2,158), Turkey (~1,828), Germany (~336), and South Korea (240)[9]. What distinguishes Kyrgyzstan is its participation in the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)** since 2015, alongside Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Belarus. EAEU membership grants Kyrgyz citizens the right to enter, reside, and work in Russia (and other EAEU states) without needing work permits or visas. This legal framework has greatly **simplified labor migration** for Kyrgyz migrants: they can be employed in Russia almost as easily as a Russian citizen, provided they register their residence and have valid national passports. The result is a relatively low level of *formal irregularity* - most Kyrgyz in Russia are there legally in terms of immigration status, thanks to freedom of movement.

However, being EAEU membership, Kyrgyz migrant workers still face **exploitation and precarious conditions** in host countries, which can have criminogenic effects. They often work in low - wage sectors (construction, bazaars, services) and may encounter abuse or non - payment of wages, sometimes leading them to retaliate or protest unlawfully. Additionally, some Kyrgyz citizens have been implicated in crimes abroad - notably, isolated instances of radicalization and recruitment into militant groups while in Russia have been reported (paralleling the experiences of Uzbeks and Tajiks). Still, the Kyrgyz government has started to see **return migration** in recent years. In 2023, the number of Kyrgyz returning home rose sharply (85% increase from 2022)[9], attributed in part to **Russia's economic downturn, ruble depreciation, stricter rules and rising xenophobia** in Russia[9]. Kyrgyz officials claim new factories and better pay at home are drawing people back[9]. In summary, Kyrgyzstan's adherence to a *regional legal migration regime* (EAEU) has minimized traditional irregular migration problems and their associated crimes, but broader issues like migrant abuse, ethnic targeting, and post - migration reintegration remain on the agenda.

Tajikistan represents an extreme case of migration dependence. With a population of ~10 million, Tajikistan consistently ranks among the **world's top remittance recipients per GDP**. In 2023, Tajikistan received a record **$5.7 billion** in remittances - nearly **50% of its GDP**[3], the highest proportion globally. This was up from $5.3 billion in 2022 (and just $2.9 billion in 2021), reflecting a surge after the COVID - 19 slump[3]. More than **40% of Tajik households** rely on migrant earnings[3]. The country has been called a "**migration nation**" where labor migration is a *systemic feature* of the economy and a vital **"safety valve"** for releasing domestic social pressures[3]. Each year, between **800,000 and 1.2 million Tajik citizens** (primarily young men from rural areas) travel abroad for work, mostly on a seasonal basis[3]. **Russia** is overwhelmingly the destination of choice: in 2023, about 80% of all remittances to Tajikistan came from Russia[3], and roughly three - quarters of annual labor outflows go to Russian cities[3]. Typically, Tajiks enter Russia visa - free (as CIS citizens) but then must obtain a work patent or permit. Many do so, but a substantial number end up overstaying or working informally, making them **irregular migrants** in Russian law. Indeed, Russia's Interior Ministry indicated in March 2025 that some **685,000 foreign nationals** were illegally residing in Russia (nationalities not specified)[4], and Tajiks likely form a significant portion of this statistic.

However, on 22 March 2024, a terrorist attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall was carried out by operatives linked to the Islamic State Khorasan, and **Tajik nationals were among the perpetrators**[3]. This incident illuminated the "dark side" of Tajik migration: prolonged separation from family and community, coupled with marginalization in Russia, can facilitate radicalization[3]. Tajik migrants often live isolated on the fringes of Russian society, facing discrimination, police corruption, and violence - factors that can push some into extremist circles or criminal gangs[3]. Surveys show significant anti - migrant sentiment in Russia; in 2022, **26% of Russians polled favored banning Central Asian migrants altogether**[3]. After the 2024 attack, there was a noticeable increase in xenophobic incidents and official crackdowns targeting Tajiks - including slower issuance of work permits, elevated deportations, and even regional bans on migrants in certain jobs (e.g. taxi driving)[3]. In response, Tajikistan's government took the unusual step of advising its citizens to *refrain from traveling to Russia* for work in the aftermath[3], and it lodged diplomatic protests over mistreatment of Tajik migrants[3].

Kazakhstan stands apart as Central Asia's largest economy and a net *labor importer* in the region. With about 19.8 million people, it has historically attracted immigrants (including ethnic Kazakh returnees and labor migrants from neighboring countries) more than it has sent its own citizens abroad. As of 2024, Kazakhstan hosted roughly **2.09 million international migrants** (about 10% of its population)[5] - the highest in Central Asia, reflecting the legacy Russian/Eastern European communities and newer arrivals. In contrast, only an estimated 0.2-0.3 million Kazakh citizens live abroad as migrants (many being ethnic Kazakhs in Russia or students in abroad). Remittances are a small share of Kazakhstan's GDP (well under 1%). That said, Kazakhstan does participate in intra - regional migration both as a sender and receiver.

On the *receiving* side, Kazakhstan is a major destination for **Uzbekistani** and **Tajikistani** migrants, particularly for seasonal or shuttle work in agriculture, construction, and services. For example, in Q2 2025 alone, **3,079 Uzbeks obtained permanent residence in Kazakhstan**, making up 48% of all new foreign permanent residents that quarter[4]. Many of these are ethnic Kazakhs (repatriates known as *"Kandas"* or *"Oralmans"* in Kazakh) migrating under a state program to resettle ethnic Kazakhs from Uzbekistan and elsewhere[4]. The *Kandas* program is a legal pathway granting citizenship and support to ethnic returnees, which helps prevent irregular migration by this group. Beyond permanent moves, hundreds of thousands of Uzbeks and others come to Kazakhstan on a temporary basis for work; Kazakhstan has a visa - free regime with its Central Asian neighbors and uses a work permit quota system for foreign workers. There have been incidents of **irregular migrants** being caught - for instance, groups of Uzbeks without proper work papers - but these tend to be handled administratively (fines or deportation) rather than feeding into serious crime statistics.

In terms of **crime prevention**, Kazakhstan has leveraged migration policy mainly by tightening control over entry/exit of potentially dangerous individuals. For example, it cooperates with Uzbekistan and other neighbors on extraditing wanted criminals or suspected extremists - albeit not without controversy (human rights groups have criticized some deportations of asylum seekers to Uzbekistan)[10]. Internally, Kazakhstan has relatively strict registration rules for foreigners (including CIS citizens) staying more than 30 days, and periodic amnesties to legalize undocumented migrants.

In summary, crime related to migration in Kazakhstan tends to revolve around **irregular foreign workers** (e.g. unregistered Uzbeks) and **integration of returnees**, rather than its own citizens abroad. By maintaining legal channels (like bilateral agreements on migration statistics exchange with Uzbekistan[4]), Kazakhstan contributes to regional stability.

Russia *(Receiving Country Perspective)***:** As the primary destination for Central Asian migrants, Russia's policies and conditions heavily influence migration outcomes and their connection to crime. Russia hosts millions of foreign workers (approximately 4-5 million from Central Asia alone in recent years)[10]. These migrants fill crucial labor shortages in construction, agriculture, retail markets, and services - roles that, if left unfilled, could themselves give rise to black - market labor or organized crime filling the void. From a socio - legal viewpoint, Russia has fluctuation between **liberalization** and **securitization** in its migration management:

On one hand, Russia has implemented measures to legalize and integrate migrant labor. The **patent system** (introduced mid - 2010s) allows citizens of countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to obtain a work patent (a monthly - paid permit) relatively easily, encouraging them to register and pay taxes. Russia also periodically announces **legalization windows or amnesties**. Notably, as mentioned in the Uzbek case, Russia extended a migrant legalization deadline to 10 September 2025, giving undocumented foreigners extra time to regularize status instead of facing expulsion[4]. Additionally, Russia has started recruiting migrants for its own needs in organized ways: for instance, agreements with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for **organized recruitment** have been pursued, and there are training centers in those countries (teaching Russian language and skills) for pre - departure orientation[12]. From 2019 to 2023, over 1,200 Uzbek trainees completed such courses preparing for Russian employment[12]. This approach is intended to reduce mismatches and illegal employment by ensuring migrants arrive job - ready for specific employers[7].

On the other hand, Russia's migration discourse is often securitized. Migrants are frequently scapegoated in Russian media and by officials for crime and social ills, despite data often showing migrant crime rates are not higher than those of locals when adjusted for population. Some regions (like Moscow city) mooted bans on migrants in certain sectors (taxi services, food delivery) purportedly for security. Police in Moscow and other cities carried out "preventive" operations in migrant - populated neighborhoods. According to Eurostat data, EU countries (to compare) recorded over **4,000 Uzbek nationals found illegally present in the EU in 2024**[4]. Indeed, corruption in Russia's immigration system is well - documented - some police and bureaucrats extract bribes from migrants for paperwork or to ignore violations, effectively a form of systematic crime that preys on migrants' precarious status.

A major development relevant to crime has been Russia's attempts to **recruit migrants into the military** since 2022. Reports emerged that Central Asian migrants (even those who had acquired Russian passports) were being enticed or coerced into signing military contracts to fight in Ukraine[9]. This blurs the line between legal migration and criminality, as coercing foreigners into conflict potentially violates international norms and can be seen as trafficking in persons for armed combat.

In sum, Russia's handling of labor migration has a direct impact on crime outcomes: effective legalization campaigns and fair treatment can reduce both migrants' inclination toward illegality and their victimization by criminals, whereas crackdowns and hostile climates can push migrants into clandestine existence where crime (either by or against them) festers. For this study, Russia serves as the critical *receiving country case* showing that how a state manages incoming labor flows (strict legality vs. tolerance of a gray zone) can either prevent or inadvertently abet certain criminal phenomena.

Georgia has seen substantial *emigration to the West* and Turkey *(not to Russia from 2018)*. Following the EU - Georgia **visa liberalization in 2017**, Georgian citizens gained visa - free entry to the Schengen area for short stays. While this was intended for tourism and family visits, many Georgians have used it to seek work (often illegally) or even to engage in criminal enterprises abroad. As a result, **Georgian organized crime groups** became notable in parts of the EU, particularly in France, Spain, Greece, and Poland, where they have been involved in burglaries, theft, and smuggling. In Poland, for instance, out of 3,129 crimes committed by foreign nationals in 2024, **532 were attributed to Georgian nationals** - a disproportionately high figure[12]. The issue grew serious enough that in May 2025 a member of the European Parliament formally inquired whether the EU might **suspend Georgia's visa - free travel due to the threat from organized crime**[13]. Georgia has limited legal labor access to the EU (no free movement or work visas aside from small quotas), so many Georgians who struggled economically took advantage of visa - free entry to overstay and work illegally or engage in criminal schemes. Additionally, Georgia has sought to sign bilateral agreements for seasonal work *(with countries like France or Bulgaria)* to create *legal channels*, hoping to dissuade people from illegal paths [14].

On the other side, Georgia has also been a **receiving country** for migrants, notably a transit point for some asylum seekers and an attractive destination for certain expat communities. Post - 2022, a wave of Russians fled to Georgia to escape conscription and sanctions. Georgia's legal framework allows visa - free entry for Russians and many nationals, but long - term work permits are more controlled.

In terms of **crime prevention via legal migration**, Georgia's case shows the importance of balancing *ease of movement* with *enforcement*. Visa liberalization - a legal mobility mechanism - was beneficial for bona fide travelers but was exploited by some criminal elements. Without robust labor integration measures, the risk of citizens turning to illegal activity abroad increased. Thus, Georgia is now working on aligning its laws with EU standards under an Association Agreement, which includes migration management and anti - organized crime efforts.

Summary of comparative findings

- **Legal frameworks block crime pathways:** Countries that are integrated into legal migration regimes see generally fewer of their citizens taking dangerous illegal routes. Legal status abroad means migrants are less likely to be involved in immigration offenses or to be exploited by criminal intermediaries. For instance, Uzbek authorities report thousands of their nationals obtaining **EU residence permits** legitimately (59,452 Uzbeks in EU/EFTA in 2024)[3], indicating many do use legal avenues like work/study visas where available. Similarly, 79% of Kyrgyz abroad live in Russia under legal free - movement, as of 2023[9].

- **Incomes and socio - economic improvement:** High remittance inflows in countries like Tajikistan (50% GDP)[3], Kyrgyzstan (~30% GDP)[16], and Uzbekistan (12-21% GDP)[3] have been associated with poverty reduction and, by extension, potential crime reduction domestically. Households receiving steady remittances are less likely to resort to illicit activities for income. Nationally, there is some evidence that the availability of migration as an option eased social tensions during difficult economic times. However, this benefit can be offset if large income inequalities or family disruptions from migration create new social problems (e.g. unsupervised children, as noted in Uzbekistan's push for social worker monitoring[2]).

- **Policy focuses on migrant welfare and image:** Several countries have taken steps to ensure their migrants behave and are treated well, recognizing that this is key to preventing crimes involving them. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, like Uzbekistan, have worked with host countries to establish *"diaspora focal points"* or officers in embassies to assist citizens legally and intervene if they are in trouble. These efforts can prevent small issues from escalating into crimes - for example, providing legal aid to a migrant worker who wasn't paid might resolve a dispute through court rather than the worker resorting to theft or violence in desperation. Uzbekistan's new decree offers **legal aid to migrants facing harassment or violence abroad**[2], which could help them seek justice rather than retaliating illegally.

- **Irregular migration and crime links:** Where irregular migration persists, it often correlates with higher exposure to crime. In Turkey and the EU, Central Asian migrants (lacking easy work visas) sometimes overstay and work informally, making them susceptible to exploitation. The IOM Uzbekistan report noted **5,865 Uzbek nationals were identified as irregular migrants in Turkey in Jan-June 2025**[4], and **4,065 Uzbeks were found illegally present in the EU in 2024**[4]. These numbers, while a fraction of total Uzbek migrants, point to a pool of people potentially in precarious situations. Irregular status can push migrants into the shadows, where some might become victims of forced labor or trafficking (a crime), or in rarer cases, perpetrators of crime (e.g. working with smuggling networks or engaging in illicit work like drug transport to survive). The data from South Korea illustrates another facet: even in a highly regulated environment, some irregularity exists - **8,103 Uzbeks were detected as irregular in Korea in 2024** (many likely overstayed EPS visas)[4].

- **Transnational crime and migration:** A theme across post - Soviet states is the concern that migrants could be drawn into transnational crime - whether **drug trafficking**, **organized theft rings**, or **extremist networks**. Countries are increasingly viewing labor migration through a security lens. Uzbekistan explicitly lists the need to combat "involvement of labor migrants in illegal activities related to human and drug trafficking, arms smuggling and military conflicts" and to prevent their **"falling under the influence of terrorist and extremist organizations"**[1].

- **Role of bilateral and multilateral agreements:** Effective agreements can facilitate legal labor flows and thus reduce illegal ones. Russia's agreements with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on recruitment have had mixed success - initially small scale, but as noted, Uzbekistan's organized recruitment reached 113k in 2024[1]. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have agreements on readmission (for deportations) and are negotiating on organized labor exchange. The Eurasian Economic Union is a multilateral example that largely eliminated intra - bloc work restrictions, thereby nullifying a whole class of immigration offenses among member states. These legal frameworks illustrate how *regional cooperation* can be a powerful tool for crime prevention: when countries align their policies to permit and regulate labor mobility, the space for criminal exploitation shrinks. Conversely, lack of cooperation (as seen between some Central Asian states and EU countries historically) often means migrants face a patchwork of restrictions that smugglers or traffickers' exploit.

To summarize the comparative results: **legal labor migration mechanisms, when well - implemented, correlate with lower rates of irregular migration and certain types of crime.** Post - Soviet examples show that easing legal access (through agreements or unions) reduces immigration violations and can alleviate domestic socio - economic strains that might lead to crime. However, simply having legal channels is not a solution; the quality of conditions in those channels matters. Migrants who are legally present but socially excluded or exploited may still fall prey to crime or contribute to it (e.g. become radicalized or turn to shadow economies). Thus, the next section will discuss these nuances and the need for a holistic socio - legal approach.

DISCUSSION

The findings from Uzbekistan and its regional comparators highlight a complex but discernible relationship between legal labor migration and crime prevention. In this discussion, we interpret the results through our socio - legal framework and explore the mechanisms at play, policy implications, and remaining challenges.

Legal pathways as crime prevention tools: The evidence strongly suggests that providing would - be migrants with *legal, structured avenues* for working abroad can prevent a range of crimes. First and foremost, it reduces the incidence of **migration - related offenses** - such as human smuggling, document fraud, illegal border crossing, and unauthorized work - simply by obviating the need for migrants to resort to clandestine methods [1].

Socio - economic impacts and crime: Legal migration's most profound crime - prevention effects may actually manifest in the *sending countries' social fabric*. As demonstrated, remittance - fueled improvements in income correlate with lower propensity for crime at a community level [1].

Migrant behavior abroad - crime victims or perpetrators? A key question is whether migrants themselves tend to commit more or fewer crimes in receiving countries when they have legal status. Numerous studies in Western contexts have found immigrant communities often have **lower crime rates than natives**, attributed to factors like strong work motivation and community cohesion. Our research indicates that robust legal frameworks can further tilt migrants away from conflict with the law: migrants who have stable jobs, documentation, and rights are far less likely to engage in criminal acts. For one, they have "too much to lose" by risking deportation or jail, and for another, their energies are absorbed in legitimate work. The Eurasianet article on Uzbekistan's strategy quotes experts noting that vulnerability (alienation, lack of support) is what can lead some migrant youth into crime or radicalization[2]. Therefore, Uzbekistan's approach of providing insurance, legal aid, and community outreach (through diaspora attachés and hotlines) is designed to reduce that vulnerability - keeping migrants within the law and away from extremist or criminal influences[2].

Drawing on these findings, several policy recommendations can be emerged:

1. **Expand and diversify legal labor agreements:** Countries of origin and destination should continue to negotiate and scale up bilateral labor migration agreements. Uzbekistan's deals with non -

traditional partners (UK, EU countries) [2] are promising - even if small, they set precedents. For the crime context, having migrants in more countries may reduce over - reliance on one host (e.g. Russia) where xenophobic backlash or economic downturn could abruptly put many in irregular status or jobless (which can lead to crime). Diversification acts as a risk spreader. It also means migrants encounter different legal systems and perhaps bring back positive norms (for instance, Uzbek workers in Korea, who make up nearly 98,000 of the migrant stock[4], often return with high skill and respect for law after living in Korea's orderly society).

2. **Strengthen pre - departure orientation and checking:** Origin countries should thoroughly brief migrants on host - country laws and cultural expectations. Pre - departure programs can also include background checks to ensure individuals with serious criminal records or extremist ties are not sent abroad through official channels, as a preventive measure for host countries.

3. **Improve conditions and rights in host countries:** Legal migration only prevents crime if those legal migrants are treated decently. Host governments must enforce labor laws so that migrant workers are paid and not abused. When migrants are cheated or abused, some may turn to illegal activities to survive or retaliate violently. By ensuring justice for migrants (through labor inspectors, courts, or bilateral dispute resolution mechanisms), host countries can maintain migrants' trust in the system, keeping them away from illicit paths.

4. **Focus on irregular migration's downstream effects:** Both origin and destination countries should view irregular migration not just as a migration management issue but as a **law enforcement** and **human security** issue. Origin countries need to raise awareness that going abroad illegally often ends in exploitation or involvement in criminal proceedings (as victims or accused). Simple steps like facilitating easier passport issuance and reducing migration costs can dissuade migrants from choosing smugglers. Destination countries, for their part, should target the organized crime networks behind irregular migration - e.g. prosecute those forging documents, those running safehouses for illegal labor, etc., rather than merely rounding up individual migrants. Breaking the infrastructure of irregular migration (which is essentially organized crime) will prevent future flows.

5. **Monitor and counteract migrant - related organized crime:** Both sets of countries should collaboratively monitor transnational organized crime that intersects with migration. For instance, *Georgian mafia networks in the EU* or *Central Asian extremist recruitments in Russia* - these phenomena can be addressed by joint task forces. Similarly, Central Asian states have security officers in their embassies in Russia now, working with Russian police to track any criminal rings involving their nationals. Sharing intelligence on known criminal elements (while being careful to avoid ethnic profiling of ordinary migrants) is a delicate but necessary balance. Some countries have begun exchanging blacklist data (e.g. Russia shares with Central Asian republics names of their citizens expelled for crimes so they can be prevented from returning to Russia easily or monitored if they do).

Challenges and considerations: Despite the overall positive link between legal labor migration and crime reduction, several challenges persist:

- **Scale and capacity:** Not all who want to migrate legally can do so - supply of legal jobs vs. demand from workers can be mismatched. Uzbekistan, for instance, registered 2 million abroad[1], but that still leaves perhaps another 200-300k per year who might try irregular channels if they can't secure a spot. Expanding legal schemes enough to accommodate most aspirants is a tall order, requiring continuous negotiation of quotas and diversification of destinations.

- **Quality of legal jobs:** If legal migrant jobs are too low - paying or harsh, some migrants might still choose illegal but better - paying options (for example, a construction worker might prefer an illegal gig in Germany earning high wages over a legal job in Kazakhstan earning much less). So making legal migration attractive is crucial - through decent wages (which often means aiming for higher - income destinations) and protections.

- **Domestic crime displacement:** There is a possibility that as migration reduces certain crimes at home (like property crime via remittances), other crimes may rise, such as fraud or cybercrime (if some use remittances to finance illicit businesses). Also, communities flush with remittance money have seen spikes in consumption of alcohol or drugs in some cases, leading to local issues. Policies need to ensure sustainable local development (e.g. channeling remittances into productive use) so that new social ills don't crop up.

- **Human rights vs. crime prevention:** Some measures intended to prevent crime - like Uzbekistan's two - year passport ban for deportees[3] - walk a fine line regarding individual rights. Denying someone the ability to seek work abroad because they were deported (which might have been for overstaying rather than a violent crime) could be seen as collective punishment and may push them into illegal routes out of desperation. Thus, such policies should be applied carefully and with transparency, including an appeals process (the resolution does allow exceptions via the Interior Ministry)[4]. Balancing security and rights is an ongoing challenge.

External shocks: The migration - crime nexus can be suddenly altered by external events - war, pandemic, economic crisis. The COVID - 19 pandemic saw many migrants return abruptly, and interestingly, some countries (like Uzbekistan) reported upticks in local crime like petty theft initially, as returnees were unemployed. Governments had to step in with emergency job programs to absorb them. Russia's war in Ukraine is another shock: it changed attitudes and laws in Russia, creating new risks (conscription of migrants, or migrants being blamed for social problems). Policy frameworks must be resilient and adaptable to such shocks, ensuring migrants are not left in limbo or scapegoated.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the socio-legal assessment demonstrates that structured and lawful labor migration frameworks serve as an important preventive mechanism against crime. By channeling the movement of people through regulated and transparent pathways - where migrants are documented, protected, and provided with lawful employment - such mechanisms effectively diminish both the incentives and opportunities for criminal conduct. The case of Uzbekistan provides a compelling illustration of how an origin state can, through policy reform, render migration more "humane and orderly" (in the terminology of the International Organization for Migration) while integrating it within broader national development strategies [4].

A comparative analysis further underscores the significance of context, indicating that migration policies cannot be universally transplanted but must be adapted to the specific socio-economic and legal environments of each country. Ultimately, cooperative engagement between sending and receiving states yields the most sustainable outcomes. When both parties acknowledge their shared interest in crime prevention - whether addressing transnational theft or countering violent extremism - they can strategically employ migration policy instruments, such as labor visa systems and integration initiatives, to mitigate related risks.

For Uzbekistan and neighboring states, a continued commitment to expanding lawful migration channels and safeguarding migrant rights will not only strengthen economic performance but also advance public security objectives. As migration dynamics evolve - through emerging destinations in the Middle East and European Union or new modalities such as digital and remote employment - legal and institutional frameworks must adapt accordingly. The findings of this study therefore encourage policymakers to reconceptualize labor migration not as a source of insecurity but as a regulatory domain that, when effectively governed, transforms potential vulnerabilities into foundations of socio-economic stability and mutual security for both origin and destination societies.

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