

# ***Migration Patterns of the Population in Kyrgyzstan***

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## **1. Migration – a Complex Social and Individual Phenomenon**

To analyse the sphere of migration in Kyrgyzstan means to threat the development of this country. Kyrgyzstan throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century has been an important destination for immigrants not only from different parts of the Soviet Union, but also from other countries of the world. The majority of the population that not are Kyrgyz natives are immigrants or children and grandchildren of those who came to Kyrgyzstan from other countries. In fact this is the case to such a point that the identity of the inhabitants of the Republic is marked by the contentiousness of personal experience of family or group of history of geographic movements. This is still the case, even if in the 70s and 980s and to some extent even the 90s have been periods of decreasing mobility as will be shown later in this article.

The majority of the population is geographically mobile during their lifetime. Migration is linked to people's personal goals of social and economic integration and professional ambitions. However, migration can also be seen as a strategy of economic progress or for the survival of a family or a group. Thus, migration is a result of individual and collective decisions to find better living conditions in a broad sense: housing, economic opportunities, social integration or safety. Migration mostly occur a result of a long decision-making process and migration is often one of several solutions: different forms of spatial mobility (daily commuting, short-term work or studies, seasonal migration) or of social mobility (professional activity) can substitute or reinforce definitive migration. If geographical migration is – at a given moment – one option among a set of different alternatives, it can be assumed that the intention to be mobile is much more frequent than mobility itself. Migration is quite often linked to major biographical events: marriage, widowhood, the start or completion of studies or professional mobility.

Migration touches the personal life of a migrant, but it can also affect the original social and economic context of the migrant or of group of migrants (family, social groups, village, urban quarter, professional insertion) as well as the context of destination. Very often, migrants remain implanted in both contexts, and their geographical movement permits an enlargement of the economic and social interests of the group to whom they belong.

Migration nowadays is not comparable to migration in former days: the transport system has changed and information technology has been fundamentally developed. Today, potential migrants theoretically have better information about their living conditions in their destinations and movement can be realised in a much shorter time. Thus, migration may for lot of migrants have a less final character, since it can be prepared in advance and since return is more easily possible.

On the other hand, a lot of people in Kyrgyzstan are living in a precarious economic situation, which makes it difficult to migrate: travelling is expensive, modern communication systems are not accessible to everyone and access to information is not available to all inhabitants.

Migration has become a big importance for the young Kyrgyz Republic – both in the representations of the population as in its demographic and economic consequences. But migration is by far not a new phenomenon in Kyrgyzstan, but it has always been an important factor of development of the country. Since independence, migration patterns of the country have changed, but the total sum of migrants has rather decreased than increased. The Population Census of 1999 is a rich source of information, which permits to understand better the phenomena that have undergone during the last decade in comparison with former periods.

Migration is defined as geographical mobility of persons changing their domicile. On the individual level, migration touches the personal life of a migrant, but it can also affect the original social and economic context of the migrant as well as the context of destination. For the society, migration processes can be seen as an adaptation of the population to changing economic, social and cultural conditions: migration flows are affecting the different parts of a country in an unequal way and migration is selective by social, demographic or ethnic groups. Finally, the character of a migration and the reasons conducting to this decision are not the same for an emigration abroad, an internal migration between two oblasts or a short distance change of the domicile to another address in the same town.

The analysis of migration processes in Kyrgyzstan shows fundamental changes, which have occurred during the last ten years. The new political and economic conditions of the country can be characterised by the following findings:

- The transition of the former Soviet Union Republics to the new independent CIS countries has reinforced the barrier function of the borders between them. New state legislation (taxes and tolls, national money, patents, social insurance system) and informal changes have modified the economy and access to the education system as well as, to a certain extent, to the labour market; borders to neighbouring countries have become a limiting factor for migration.
- At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet Union opened borders on an international scale; migration with outside countries has become possible. Emigration abroad has been partially initiated, but is quite often hindered by administrative measures of potential destination countries, both in other CIS states and beyond them.
- The first years following independence have been characterised by a strong economic recession. Many sectors of the economy have undergone deep restructuring processes and numerous enterprises have closed or lost many employees. The mining, metal and machinery industries, textile industry, as well as tourism and transport have seen their activities reduced by the loss of their integration in the Union-wide system of co-operation. The economy of Kyrgyzstan is still suffering from the effects of international competition and from its geographical situation of extreme remoteness. But new economic activities are gradually replacing former sectors, especially in trade, tourism, financial services and international organisations. Some traditional economic branches, first and foremost agriculture, have also undergone very deep changes through privatisation; this sector has shown a certain capacity and flexibility to occupy people in critical economic situations.
- The geographical allocations of the different activities are not identical: internal migration between urban and rural areas and between the different regions of the country has occurred as a result of the economic changes. In addition, it is to be

expected that many probably desired migration movements could not be realised due to lack of opportunity and means.

We have attempted to summarize the main findings of the reorientation of migration in Kyrgyzstan since independence:

- 1) Migration has undergone a process of “opening” from a Union-wide horizon to a worldwide scale.
- 2) At the same time, a reduction has occurred from this Union-wide horizon to a national orientation.
- 3) Within the national context, the economic situation has led to a growth of share of the rural population of the country and as well as to the strong expansion of the capital and its surrounding areas.

This very general pattern has been modified by differences in migration behaviour by different groups of the population. Not all demographic groups show the same tendency to migrate, not all professional or socio-economic groups are mobile in the same way. Some of these statements are obvious: young people have always been more mobile; other data are not so general, for instance, mobility is higher among women than men or workers than civil servants.

Even more complex are the differences between different ethnic groups. During several decades of the former Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz Republic was a territory of immigration. The 1960s were a period of strong modernisation in the industrial sector as well as in agriculture. During this time, immigration contributed significantly to population growth, but even before this, following the creation of the Republic and during the Great Patriotic War, migration to Kyrgyzstan was promoted and forced in order to develop the country and to resettle representatives of various nationalities from other parts of the Soviet Union. The Kyrgyz Republic thus reinforced its multi-ethnic society – a source of pride for the country – but nevertheless it had relatively clearly defined social, political and economic specialisations by ethnic group as well as certain typical geographic differentiations. The clearest separation has been the urban-rural cleavage, since ethnic Kyrgyz (and also Uzbeks, Germans and Uigurs) lived predominately in rural areas, but Russians, Ukrainians and Koreans inhabited essentially towns or industrial places.

At the end of the communist era and since independence, the relations between the different ethnic groups have changed:

- First, the ethnic Kyrgyz portion of the population became predominant. All countries of the former Soviet Union underwent a period of reinforcement of their national attributes. Probably the strongest element has been the definition of the status of the national language(s); all Republics have chosen to adopt a policy that favours the indigenous ethnic group. Kyrgyzstan has been one of the Republics in which this transition has been conducted with a high degree of understanding of the needs of all groups. Nevertheless, the relationship between the ethnic groups has changed and some groups have lost the real or relative advantages they enjoyed before. Independence and the political changes have touched the social and economic situations of the ethnic groups in different ways. Consequently, immigration and emigration have become one of the principal means of responding to these changes.
- The second point is the fact that the different ethnic groups responded in quite different ways to the newly available opportunity to migrate. These differences must be considered in light of the former social integration and economic status of these

groups. But outside factors have probably been more decisive than inside elements. Some ethnic groups have been encouraged to move to their corresponding countries, as in the case of Jews and Germans; for others, the country of origin promotes a policy that is less clear (or more variable over time), such as Russia and other Slavic countries. For other groups, emigration is still not possible. As a result of these conditions, emigration (and the intensity of return) varies quite strongly from one group to another, ranging from a near 90% loss of the German population to stable migration flows (Uigurs, Koreans).

- Quite a different situation exists in the migration flows with the surrounding Republics of Central Asia. Historically, different ethnic groups have been living together for quite a long time and ethnic differentiation was rather social or professional difference. Migration across the borders was frequent during Soviet times, since these borders had almost no discriminatory effect. Before independence, quite a high percentage of non-indigenous ethnic groups were living in all the Central Asian Republics. This is still the case: a great number of Kyrgyz are living in China (120'000, year 1989), Tajikistan (65'000), Uzbekistan (175'000) and Kazakhstan (figures not specified). On the other hand, Uzbeks make up 14% of the Kyrgyz population, and Tajiks and Kazakhs are also quite numerous in the Republic. Since a long time, cohabitation has a friendly character and based on an intensive economic exchange, but historically, the process of Russian settlement had been accompanied by periods of violence, especially during the events of 1916.
- In a region of high population growth and competition for very limited natural resources and land reserves, migration becomes an important factor. The figures show that migration across the borders has decreased sharply; all ethnic groups present in Kyrgyzstan, besides Tajiks and the ethnic Kyrgyz themselves, have shown a negative migration balance between 1989 and 1999. If the result of the migration flows is a reduction in ethnic minorities, the population remains very mixed.

International emigration had some significant effects on the internal migration flows. Emigrants liberated places, which can be reoccupied by people living within the country: job positions or social positions, housing and land. Effectively, since emigrants had often been active in the tertiary sector (administration, education and other) or living the most fertile regions (Chui Valley), internal migration flows can be seen as a re-occupation of vacant opportunities. Other types of vacant places do not have any longer an economic base, such as mining localities or industrial towns; they have not been re-occupied after emigration and have thus been abandoned.

Migration within Kyrgyzstan is influenced by great regional differences. The country is divided into geographic distinct areas and the internal transport connections are difficult, especially during wintertime. Most regions have better access to centres in neighbouring countries than to their own capital. Talas and the southern oblasts are strongly linked to outside economic centres. In addition, social structure and ethnic composition vary in the different parts of Kyrgyzstan. Although there may be some centrifugal forces, the role of Bishkek as capital and centre of the education system, international communication and information became more important since 1991. Population migration is considered to be an excellent indicator of the attractiveness of the regional and urban areas.

## **2. Migration – a difficult phenomenon to measure by statistics**

Migration processes are a complex phenomenon for administrative recording and statistical treatment.

Administratively, migration is an official act, which implies a change of domicile of a person willing to move to another place. In Soviet times migration was an official act requiring registration. At the present time, the permission is needed for international migration, but besides this, in Kyrgyzstan, like in many countries, internal migration still must be registered. This obligation allows for the creation of interesting statistical sources. Kyrgyz Population Registers have existed for quite a long time and they are important sources for any demographic analysis.

Census questionnaires 1989 and 1999 included two questions dealing with migration: the birthplace and the last previous domicile of a person as well as the year of the move. Census data allow to be combined with all available demographic, social and professional characteristics. Internal migration can be presented for immigration and emigration, but international emigration abroad cannot be accounted for. The available geographical information of the census questionnaires has been coded by oblast (1989) and by rural rayon and town (1999). Infraregional migration within a rayon or within a town a not taken into account in census analysis.

Today, the sources on migration for Kyrgyzstan are richer than ever before, but the different sources do not concord completely, since they do not have the same administrative base or the same methodological approach for statistical registration. In the annexe, we present some methodological explanations as well as some considerations on comparability of Register data and Census data 1989 and 1999. In fact, the population given by the 1999 census indicates a higher total than that provided by the current Population Register for that moment and on the regional level, the Register underestimated the urban growth of Bishkek. But it was quite exact for the seven oblasts.

### **3. Migration before 1991**

As shown in chapter 3, population growth in Kyrgyzstan was quite high during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century, increasing from 663'000 in 1897 to 4852'000 at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Up to 1959, Kyrgyz statistics do not dispose of figures on migration within the republic and from and to other Republics. The historical overview in this chapter starts at the moment (1960), when annual data on migration to and from the Kyrgyz Republic and among the oblasts have been produced by the National Statistic Committee. This source allows a yearly picture to be drawn of the evolution of the net migration rate – i.e. the difference between immigration and emigration, and also shows the migration intensity rate expressed as the sum of immigrants and emigrants with respect to the population average. The database can differentiate these indicators by external and internal migration. Theoretically, internal net migration should be equivalent to zero, but in fact the register has always counted more immigrants than emigrants due to better registration of the former. The same phenomenon seems to occur on the international level.

The initial year in the observation row, 1960, probably corresponds to one of the peaks of migration intensity, for both external and internal migration, but it also indicates the moment around which external migration had the highest positive effect on population development in Kyrgyzstan. In fact, in 1960 the positive external net migration rate reached 1.07% and three years later it was even 1.26%. From this moment on, the trend reversed and became decreasing (1970: 0.36%), turning negative in 1975 and remaining so for nearly 30 years. During the 1980s, the rate remained quite stable at a slight negative balance, followed after

independence by a strong negative situation (1993: -2.65%). While in 1998 the net rate was again the highest it had been since 1975 (-0.11%), in 2000 it took a more negative turn (-0.46%).

The annual migration intensity rate, which as indicated above is expressed as the relation of the sum of immigrants and emigrants to the population average, has decreased constantly during the last 40 years. This trend is one of the main findings of migration statistics, since it is able to place the actual discussions about migration processes in a historical context. In fact, the total migration rate for the Kyrgyz SSR was very intense during the 1960s and probably before that around 1930 and 1940. Industrialisation, the construction of important infrastructure and development of the mining sector strongly contributed to immigration from the other Republics of the Soviet Union, but the population inflow has been counterbalanced by an important outflow. Workers often have been hired for a relatively short period for a job or training course in the Republic, and have subsequently moved away.

During the sixties, the volume of external immigration and emigration was quite close to the volume of the internal migration flows, i.e. between the oblasts. In fact, migration was encouraged not only at the regional level, but also on the level of the former Union. The sum of external migration diminished constantly from about 70 per thousand in 1960 to 50 (1970), 30 (1980) and 24 in 1991. After the peak of 1993 (37 per thousand), external migration intensity fell to 5 per thousand in 1999. **Today, migration flows over the borders of the Republic are ten times lower than in 1960, but emigration today is higher than immigration – contrary to the situation 40 years ago.**

However, while the volume of external migration has fallen sharply, the volume of internal migration has not followed the same path. Between 1960 and 1980, the fall in the latter was 30% (but 60% for external exchanges). After 1980, internal migration intensity even grew by 12%. During the 1980s, internal migration began to substitute external population exchange; the main migration flows went from rural to urban oblasts within Kyrgyzstan, whereas before urban growth had essentially been fed by trans-Republic migration.

During the last decade, migration intensity decreased considerably, for both external (after 1993) and internal migration. The result is that today the Kyrgyz population is in one of its least mobile phases for several decades; at least since detailed register statistics have been available. While migration is currently still of major importance, this is due to the inequality of the flows: much stronger international emigration than immigration movement, and much stronger internal migration from rural places to urban than the other way around. But migration is also a key problem, since motility (the intention to move) is stronger than the observed mobility (the realized moves).

The historical overview of migration data by register shows the importance of migration flows by origin and destination. Between 1960 and 1980, the different Republics maintained the same proportion of migrants: Russia, 48% of them, Kazakhstan about 25%, Uzbekistan 15%, Ukraine 5% and Tajikistan 2%. If the share of the different republics of the total of migrants has been stable, the effectiveness of migration changed, since immigration and emigration developed differently: Between 1959 and 1970, the difference between 787,000 immigrants and 603,000 emigrants was a positive net migration of 184,000 persons. Immigration was positive with nearly all the other Republics of the Soviet Union, especially Russia (+112,000 people) and Kazakhstan (+57,700 people). During the 1970s, net migration was close to equilibrium (roughly 628,000 immigrants and 660,000 emigrants). The origin and destination

of migrants underwent some changes: during this period, Kyrgyzstan had a gain of 20,000 persons in exchange with Kazakhstan, but a loss of 30,000 persons with Russia, a loss of 10,000 with Ukraine and a loss of 7,500 with Uzbekistan.

The 1980s showed a further decline of general transborder mobility due to a reduction of immigrants but stability of emigrants. Net migration became clearly negative (-96,000 people), but the migration pattern did not change in comparison with the previous period: a gain with Kazakhstan (+14,200) and losses with most of the other Republics (Russia: -61,200). For the first time emigration to other countries in the world became clearly negative (-42,000), since from 1982, other destinations increased their share slightly and from 1988 on, countries outside the CIS comprise the origin or destination of half of the migrants from and to Kyrgyzstan (first to Israel, later on to Germany). Since the natural increase (in absolute figures) was higher than ever before, the negative net migration did not really affect the total population growth. The importance of Russia is still great since 35% of all migrants (or two-thirds of all migrants to and from CIS countries) come from or goes to this country. On the other hand, migration between the neighbouring countries in Central Asia has decreased (although for some oblasts in southern Kyrgyzstan it is still higher than internal migration).

#### **4. International Migration after 1989**

The census decade from 1989 to 1999 covers the first years since independence. This period was marked by a very significant population loss due to international migration. The figures of the Register show that the 250,000 immigrants coming from other countries correspond to only one-third of the number during the period 1979-89, but emigrants (633,600) were nearly as numerous as before. Thus, the total mobility was half as high as before (reduction from 0.33 to 0.17) and net migration fell to -383,600.

Annual register data shows a very unequal distribution of the migration flows. The number of immigrants diminished continuously from some 45,000 people in 1989 to 10,000 in 1998. Emigration (1989: 60,800) increased and reached a high in 1993 (143,600) before falling to 15,700 in 1998. The years 1990 to 1994 showed high negative net migration, but at the end of the decade, migration became more or less balanced. Thus, emigration problems were acute in the first years of independence and economic transition. Around 1998, transborder migration actually became very weak, if we compare the 10,200 immigrants and 15,700 emigrants with the 60,000 people entering and the 60,000 people leaving the Republic yearly during the 1960s and 1970s (when the total population was half as numerous as today).

As said before, net migration was negative with nearly all other countries besides Tajikistan (+10,400) and – on a very low level of population exchange – with the Caucasian Republics (Azerbaijan +900). On the other hand, important losses occurred with Russia (-252,200), Uzbekistan (-22,200), Ukraine (-8,800), Kazakhstan (-6,100) and Byelorussia (-3,100) and with other countries of the world (-77,300) – primarily to Germany (-71,000). During the 1990s, the Kyrgyz Republic lost a significant number of its former immigrants (of course, their numbers had in the meantime increased by natural growth). In comparison with other countries of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan did not have the highest emigration rate of ethnic groups. The demographic evolution of the 1990s led to a stagnation of the urban part of Kyrgyzstan (+4.6%), but the rural population continued to grow (+18.3%). International migrations as well as internal mobility – exacerbated by the industrial decline – led to this situation, but a difference in the natural increase was also responsible. In addition, since the

definition of urban places is quite restrictive, a part of the suburban growth is attributed to the rural parts of the country.

International migration has affected all parts of the country. Between 1989 and 1998, migration exchange was high in urban regions, border regions and the regions in which non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups were numerous (all three factors are correlated). Bishkek and Chui Oblast each lost 15% of the original population due to migration. In Naryn, the rate was only -0.1%. But Issyk-Kul and Talas in the north and Osh and Jalal-Abad in the south had quite high net emigration rates (between -5% and -8%). All oblasts but Naryn had three times as many emigrants as immigrants.

These results may be somewhat surprising. But detailed analyses provide an explanation for the high emigration rate from rural and southern oblasts: there has been significant emigration abroad from Bishkek and Chui, since the percentage of non-Kyrgyz groups is the highest in this part of the country (78% and 72% in 1989). But in relative figures, Russians, Germans and other national groups did not emigrate as much from Bishkek and Chui Oblast as from those oblasts in which they represented small minorities. Thus, less than the half of the original Russian population in Osh, Jalal-Abad and Naryn remained in these places, as against more than 80% in Bishkek and Chui and two-thirds in Issyk-Kul. International migration depends also on the degree of integration in the local context.

Most observers of recent Kyrgyz history assert that international migration during the 1990s was dramatic. We agree, but we would like to somewhat qualify the picture. First, a long-term evaluation shows that the reorientation of the Kyrgyz transborder migration had already started in the 1970s and that the early 1990s brought a definite intensification of a long-standing trend. This intensification was limited in time and was reduced by policy measures after 1994. Secondly, emigration did not intensify, but immigration broke down. The attraction of the country for immigrants or returnees diminished strongly. Thirdly, the strong reduction of transborder migration shows the effects of the nation-building processes in Kyrgyzstan and other CIS countries. The population exchange with neighbouring countries fell and migration with certain faraway countries intensified. Finally, international migration patterns must also be observed with the internal structure of the country and its geographical orientation. As we will see in the next parts of the chapter, international migration affected internal mobility.

## **5. Internal Migrations in Kyrgyzstan**

One of the most important statistical indicators is the differentiation between urban and rural areas. Historically, this indicator has shown a strong period of urbanisation between 1926 and 1959 that increased from 12% to 34%. In 1970, 37.4% of the Kyrgyz population lived in urban areas; this figure was 38.7% in 1979 and 38.2% in 1989. According to the 1999 census, the percentage fell to 35.4%.

During the 1990s when the urban population percentage diminished, internal migration showed a clear direction of flow from rural parts of the country to urban locations and from mountainous areas to the valleys. This apparent paradox will be the guideline for the analysis of the internal migrations.

In fact, this has a series of explanations:

- The urban decline affects a majority of the urban areas in the country. Industrial towns experience significant emigration and even negative natural increase. Bishkek, however, is a growing city with strong internal immigration.
- Great differences in the birth rate are observed between rural and urban locations (and between the south and the north). Emigration from rural areas partly compensates for the differences in natural growth.
- Immigration from rural to urban areas is replacing the negative balance of international migration, which has been essentially an urban effect. Since 1989, Bishkek lost 89,000 people to international migration (register data), but gained 151,000 through internal migration (1999 census).
- Urban growth is extending beyond the administrative borders of the towns. Bishkek, Kara-Kol, Osh and Jalal-Abad show clearly negative net migration with their surrounding rayons (but gains with more distant rayons). The process of urbanisation is affecting a wider area than officially indicated.

The statistical indicator, which shows an increase of the rural population of the country, highlights two economic phenomena of the 1990s: the de-industrialisation of the country and of the Kyrgyz urban locations, and the importance of agriculture for employment, even if the agricultural employment is often a hidden form of unemployment.

The tendency of internal migration in Kyrgyzstan is the combination of a force of retention of the rural parts of the country in a precarious economic period and emigration to urban places which themselves have been confronted with major economic problems.

During the period 1994-1999, of the 54 towns and rural rayons of the Republic, only twelve had a positive internal migration balance, but 42 registered a loss through migration flows within the country. Six of the 12 rayons with migration gains are located in the Greater Bishkek area, including the capital itself (17.8%) and two neighbouring rayons Alamudun (20.1%) and Sokoluk rayon (10.6%). Three other rayons in the Chui Valley have positive migration rates.

Outside the Chui Valley, no other rural rayon gained from internal migration, but six towns did: Kara-Kol in Issyl-Kul Oblast (4.9%), Osh (3.5%), Jalal-Abad (5.7%), as well as Kyzyl-Kiya (4.1%), Mailuu-Suu (2.3%) and Kara-Kul (1.4%) in the South. All these towns, besides Kara-Kol, have population decreases (in Mailuu-Suu, it is as much as 30%). While internal migration has been favourable for these urban areas, it has not compensated for the effects of international emigration and the low natural increase of the population: therefore, rayons with positive internal net migration are essentially rayons with population decrease, while rayons with negative internal migration balance show population growth. **From this point of view, internal migration during the period under observation has tended to balance population distribution by offsetting losses through international migration and by somewhat compensating for areas with a high natural increase.**

But some rayons in the country have experienced very strong losses through internal migration processes; this is the case for all the regions in Naryn (Jumgal -21%, Naryn -20%), most regions in Issyk-Kul oblast as well as the upper parts of Talas oblast, and also Alai in Osh oblast and Toktogul in Jalal-Abad oblast. This list shows a geographical pattern with a concentration of the highly affected areas in the northern and mountainous parts of the country. Most of these rayons are relatively close to Bishkek and Chui, and they contributed

most to the migration gain in the capital area, while most of the rural regions in the Ferghana valley are not losing population dramatically through internal migration.

If we break down the five-year internal net migration period by ethnic group, we can see that the ethnic Kyrgyz are not only by far the most numerous group, but they make an essential contribution to the overall picture of migration. In fact, the map nearly completely corresponds to that of the whole population. Osh, Jalal-Abad and Bishkek have somewhat stronger net migration growth for ethnic Kyrgyz than for the whole population. Ethnic Uzbeks have quite a different spatial distribution from the Kyrgyz; nevertheless they are also moving to the Greater Bishkek area and leaving rural areas in which they have a strong presence such as Aravan, Uzgen, Bazar-Korgon, Nooken, Aksy and Ala Buuka. But unlike ethnic Kyrgyz, the migration pattern of the Uzbek population between urban and rural areas in the South shows them leaving towns such as Osh or Jalal-Abad and settling in the neighbouring rural areas (Kara-Suu for Osh, Suzak for Jalal-Abad). Russians are not very mobile within the country; through internal migration, they leave industrial places and move to the Bishkek area, and within the capital region, they show movement from the centre to the surrounding rayon in a (slight) process of suburbanisation. Certain specific patterns can be observed, such as the positive net migration of Naryn, but the absolute figures are low.

## 6. Migration by Altitude

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country. Mountains characterise the Kyrgyz landscape and are essential as the economic base of the population and for settlement – inside the mountains as well as outside – since the mountains house the most important natural resource – water. But although 90% of the surface of the country is situated at an altitude of over 1,000 metres, the remaining section has become the most important part of the country in economic terms. The construction of a large irrigation system since the 1930s has enabled agriculture to develop in the plains, and the foothill regions have also become the sites of the main industries and towns (the Chui and Ferghana Valleys). Bishkek (750 m), Osh (980 m), Jalal-Abad (760 m) and Kyzyl-Kiya (980 m) are located under the 1,000-metre threshold.

In Kyrgyz statistics, altitude has been the main indicator for describing the degree of mountainous characteristics. Other qualities, such as steepness or exposure, are not so important, since most settlements, even at high altitudes, are constructed in more or less flat land. Altitude describes the differences in economic wealth, living conditions and accessibility quite well. As a consequence, we attribute an interpretative value to altitude, by classifying the population of the rayons by the altitude of the centre.

The schema of the net migration rate by different altitude classes (measured by the altitude of the rayon centres) is quite clear: **the higher the altitude, the more negative the migration flows.** Over time, the dependence of altitude has not fundamentally changed, but it has grown. For the internal net migration between 1989 and 1999, only the altitude class of 700-800 meters has a positive value (+10.5%). More than two million of the country's total population live at this altitude. Rayons situated below 700 m and between 800 m and 1,000 m have a slightly negative migration balance. All classes beyond 1,000 m have steadily increasing net migration losses, going from -6.1% (1,000-1,200 m) to -25.7% (2,000-2,400 m).

Only two altitude classes are somewhat different from the general picture. The first is the 1,600-1,800 m class, where we find most of the rayons of the Issyk-Kul oblast, characterised by a very specific climatic and environmental situation, but also a more diverse economic

structure. The rayons situated within this altitude class have a somewhat less negative migration balance, but also here emigration has become quite significant. The second exception is the very highest group (>2,400m). The only rayon belonging to this group is Chon-Alai, where internal migration is very low (-3.9%). At the level of ayil-kineshes, we discover the same picture, since the highest units, Sary-Tash (3,118 m) and Taldy-Suu (3,040 m), have nearly no migration flows. Both ayil-kineshes are situated in the upper Alai Valley, in the extreme south of the Osh Oblast. We do not know whether the positive demographic situation of Alai can be attributed to the quality of its pasture land or its extreme remoteness and to some “protection” by the distance, or if, on the contrary, the region at the Tajik and Chinese border benefits from transborder trade. In any case, Alai and Chon-Alai are the Kyrgyz regions with the highest birth rate, the lowest immigration and the lowest emigration. Between 1959 and 1999, the population of the two rayons increased from 27,500 to 87,600 people, and this without nearly any immigration.

The example of Alai and Chon-Alai is not at all significant for Kyrgyz mountain areas. All rayons in Issyk-Kul, Naryn and Talas entered after 1989 in a period of demographic stagnation due to strong emigration, which could only partly be compensated for by natural growth. Three rural rayons in the northern mountains (Ton, Jungal, Bakai-Ata) declined between 1989 and 1999. But compared to the decline of the rural and remote areas, the demographic breakdown has been much more dramatic in industrial and mining towns. Many former mining towns such as Ak-Tiuz or Bordunsky in the Chui Oblast, as well as still-operational mining locations such as Min-Kush in the Naryn Oblast and Engilchek in the Issyk-Kul Oblast are the highest places in their region. The large mining towns in the south, such as Mailuu-Suu, Kok-Jangak, Khaydarkan and Sulukta, are also mountainous. Their economic decline has reinforced mountain depopulation.

The analysis of migration by altitude classes has shown the general pattern of strong population movement from high altitudes to the plains. These migrations flows reflect the difficult economic situation in mountainous areas (limitation of pasture land, breakdown of mining and industry), as well as the potential of economic alternatives in the plains, which obviously have been better in the demographically declining Chui Valley than in the strongly growing South.

A comparison of the two analyses, the “urban-rural dimension” and the approach “by altitude”, shows a clearer result from the second approach. Urban development is not really homogeneous between the different types of urban places. On the other hand, altitude classes – which often combine urban and rural territories in the same class especially in northern Kyrgyzstan (Karakol, Naryn, Talas) – give a clear picture of regional development. This picture is very much in disfavour of all high-altitude locations.

## **7. The Kyrgyz Migration Model**

Graph 1 shows a very schematic migration model of Kyrgyzstan during the period 1989-1999. This model considers four main territorial areas, i.e. the capital Bishkek, the Chui oblast, the northern mountainous areas or Northern Kyrgyzstan (Talas, Issyk-Kul, Naryn oblasts) and southern Kyrgyzstan (Jalal-Abad, Osh, Batken oblasts). The sizes of the rectangles representing the areas proportional to the inhabitants and, in addition, show the evolution over the last ten years: very positive for the South and Bishkek, stable or slightly negative for the two other units. The arrows show the intensity of the international migration to and from

outside countries, the internal net migration between the areas and the net migration between and the surrounding suburban rayons in the Cui oblast.

International migration concerns all Kyrgyz regions, and emigration abroad is two or three times higher than immigration (Bishkek city  $-128'000/+40'000$ , Chui oblast  $-224'000/+94'000$ , Northern Kyrgyzstan  $-67'000/+21'000$  and Southern Kyrgyzstan  $-171'000/+57'000$ ). The intensity of exchange and net migration rate are somewhat different for the four areas; they are by far the highest for Chui oblast where the proportion of non-ethnic Kyrgyz is the highest.

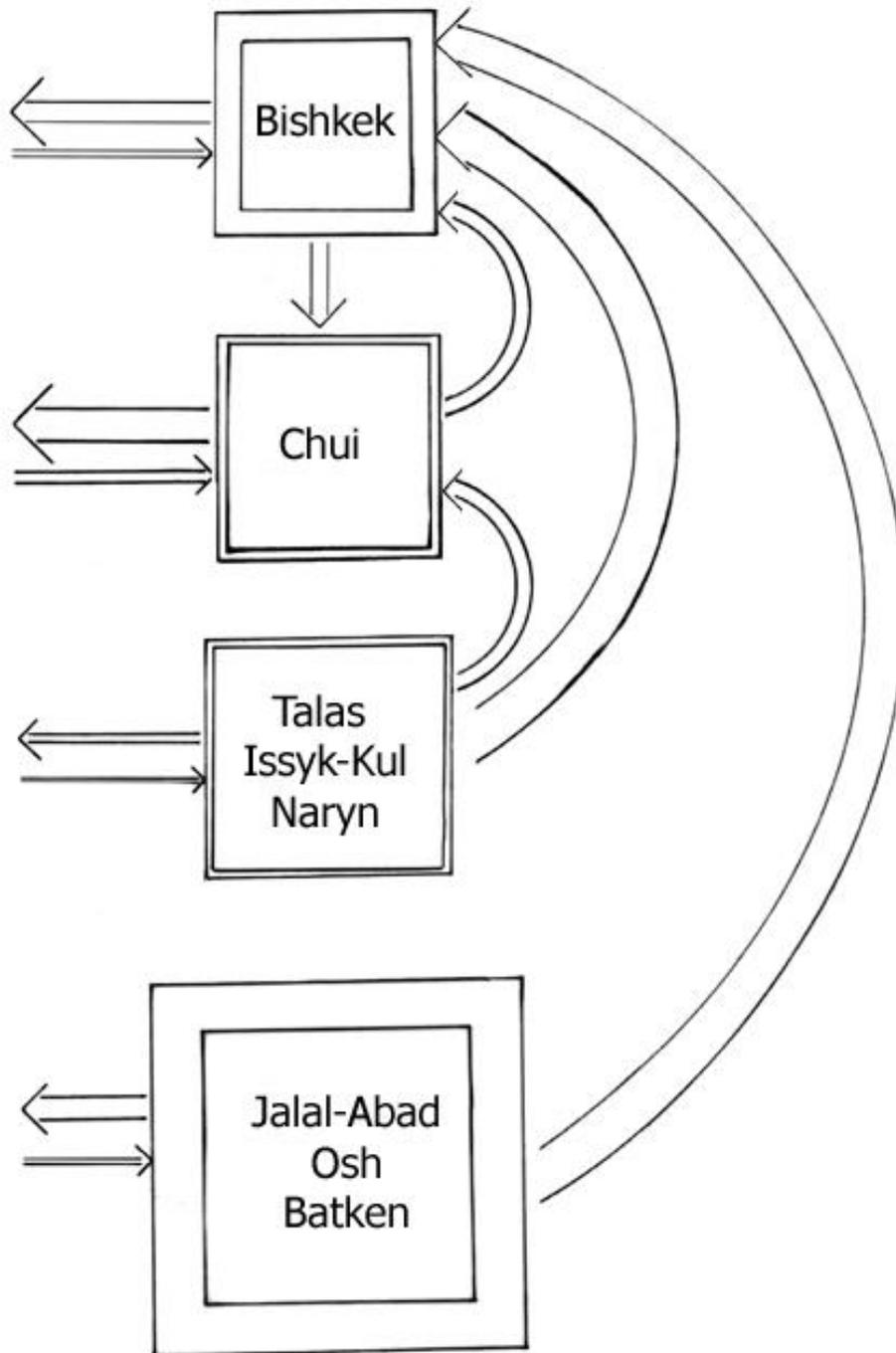
Internal migration is extremely unequal and follows an economic hierarchy:

- Bishkek has very positive net migration with all three other areas: northern and southern Kyrgyzstan and Chui oblast. The only exceptions are the rayons of Chui oblast that surround Bishkek since there is a flow of the population from Bishkek to these rayons.
- Chui is gaining from the two other areas (northern and southern Kyrgyzstan), but essentially from the northern areas.
- Southern Kyrgyzstan is losing through its population exchange with Bishkek, but quite neutral with the two others (hardly any movement).

This model shows four different dynamics:

- High international mobility in all parts of the country and strongly negative net migration (but in the past, exchange rates have been much higher);
- Internal migration flows from poorer to richer regions; Bishkek is the only place having intense exchange with all parts of the country;
- Internal migration has chain effects replacing strong international losses and also the effects of much lower natural population increase: high birth rates in the southern and the northern areas, low birth rates in Bishkek and Chui oblast;
- Finally, center-suburban migration between Bishkek and its surrounding rayons is forming an expanding metropolitan area.

## Kyrgyz Migration Model



This model stresses the effects of ethnic group migration: the percentage of non-ethnic Kyrgyz is high among the total international migrant population and ethnic migration has led

to internal migration. Finally, the model shows that the geographical barriers between the North and the South are limiting migration. The only exception to this rule is the capital Bishkek, which is attracting people from the whole country and playing an integrating effect.

## **8. Migration Prognosis in Kyrgyzstan**

The international migration patterns of the second half of the 1990s have been quite different from those of the first half, since emigration abroad diminished considerably. On the other hand, internal migration is still quite high and is directed from rural to urban places, from mountain regions to the plains, especially to the Chui Valley and Bishkek. These migrations have been seen as expression of chain migration processes, of people re-occupying vacant positions. Currently, emigration from rural places is not only quite negative, but even higher than the natural increase: many rayons in Talas, Naryn and Issyk-Kul Oblasts are stagnating or even losing their populations. In southern Kyrgyzstan, where natural increase is much higher, rural-urban migration is doing little to absorb the surplus population, and international emigration is not very significant.

Northern Kyrgyzstan seems to have entered in a process of rural decrease, a process, which affected a great many industrial countries during the 1950s and 1960s, and other countries during the subsequent decades. At the same time, Kyrgyz towns do not offer sufficient jobs for the immigrants, but the informal sector and urban living conditions are attracting them. In southern Kyrgyzstan, density of rural population is still increasing and affects the economic base of the households. Population in industrial and mining towns is suffering from lack of employment.

During the coming years, international emigration may continue, since the pull factors in the destination countries, especially in Russia, seem to be positive. But these population losses will mostly have a negative effect on the quality of manpower; quantitatively, migration will not be as significant as in the past. On the other hand, there is a real risk that internal migration will increase and lead to rural depopulation, especially in the north and in the mountain areas, where the natural increase will also fall. Without effective regional policy measures, urbanisation will rapidly continue and fundamentally disturb the equilibrium between rural and urban growth. It is evident that the agricultural sector will have to be reformed and that the current labour force in this branch will diminish. Rural policy should be oriented to create jobs in other fields such as local industry and tourism, construction and transport, but also to decentralise state activities such as public administration and education.

The gap between the demographic evolution between the north and the south of the country has several aspects. First, the absolute difference between a stagnating north and a fast-growing South will reinforce the economic and political importance of the south. Secondly, north and south differ not only in demographic and economic structure, but also in their orientation to neighbours. Transborder migration will remain important. The role of Bishkek as national capital and centre for modern economic and cultural life has had an integrating effect. Better road connections within the country and the promotion of Osh as a second national pole could lead to stronger north-south movements.

## Methodical explanations

**Migration:** Movement of people (migrants) across territorial borders (national, oblast, rayon, etc.) in connection with a change in permanent residence. Migration does not cover the movement of people changing their place of residence within a given urban settlement or between rural settlements within an administrative rayon.

**Immigration:** People coming to a given territory, during a given period, from an outside territory.

**Emigration** (or outmigration): People leaving a territory, during a given period, for an outside territory.

**Net migration:** Difference for a territory between the number of people who arrive over a specific period and the number of people who leave permanently by crossing the borders. Net migration can be a positive figure if the number of incoming people is higher than the number of people who are leaving, or negative if the number of incoming people is lower than the number of people who leave.

**Immigration rate** (emigration rate, net migration rate): Total number of immigrants as against the total of the reference population at the beginning (or in the middle) of the period.

**Mobility rate:** immigration and emigration of a given territory by the total population at the beginning (or in the middle) of the period.

**Migration exchange rate:** number of people migrating from A to B in a given period, plus those migrating from B to A referred to the sum of the people living in both regions.

### Annex I: The question on migration in the Kyrgyz Census 1999

#### a) The migration question in the Kyrgyz Census

The Kyrgyz Census questionnaire contains a two-part question on migration: the year of the last migration as well as the year in which the last migration movement took place. This form of question follows the Soviet tradition, but is somewhat different from the question asked in various other countries, where it is the residence at a precise moment that must be indicated (usually 1 or 5 years prior to the date of the census).

The Kyrgyz Census allows for a much broader picture of population mobility, since some migratory movements that took place a long time previously may also be indicated (a ninety year-old lady may have noted that she came in the 1920s from Kazakhstan to Bishkek). On the other hand, this way of organizing the question attributed great importance to the last migration movement, which may have been a migration from abroad or a change of residence within the same region. If, in 1994, two brothers came from Tashkent to Osh, and one is still living there but the other later moved to Aravan, only the first is counted as an international migrant. In this way, the calculation of the migration balance between two regions in a given period is influenced by the assumption that the probability of a second move after an inter-regional migration is equal in all cases. This is probably not true: immigrations from abroad to towns are less frequently followed by an interregional movement than immigration from abroad to rural rayons or industrial towns. This method tends to overestimate the negative net migration of rural areas.

A second problem deals with the codification of spatial data. The census migration matrix is based on the indications provided by the population on the questionnaire. Geographical attribution to rayons is not always easy, since in some cases the same geographical name may indicate a town, a rural rayon or an oblast (Naryn, Talas). In case of indication of a last domicile internal to the same rayon, the person is considered as a non-migrant, even if before this person may have effected a long-distance migration.

## Annexe II: Comparison between 1989 and 1999 Census figures and Register data

In annex II, we introduce some methodological considerations concerning the figures resulting from the census and the register data. In fact, the total population counted in the two last censuses and the register figures do not entirely correspond. The *de jure* population had increased from 4,258,000 to 4,823,000, corresponding to an increase of 565,000 people. The population balance given by the State Population Register indicates a change of 457,000 people, resulting from 1,177,000 births, 337,000 deaths, 250,000 immigrations from abroad and 633,000 emigrations. If we take into account about 12,000 people corresponding to the population increase until the date of the 1999 census (March 24<sup>th</sup>, while the 1989 census had been conducted on January 12<sup>th</sup>), we obtain a difference of 96,000 people or 83% of that given by the comparison of the census results.

One hypothesis to explain the difference observed may be inaccuracy of the components of the Kyrgyz Population Register or of the two censuses (or of all three). To make the hypothesis on current statistics coherent, the shortfall should concern the births (*plausible*) and immigration (*not impossible*) or accept over-counting of the deaths (*highly improbable*) and of emigration (*very highly improbable*). Concerning the two censuses, that of 1999 should have over-counted somewhat (*possible*) and/or that of 1989 have a certain shortfall (*not probable*).

In order to test the hypothesis, different approaches have been used. Roughly summarized, they give the following results.

1) A first test, conducted in the manner adopted by Michel Guillot (Chapter 2), compares the numbers of children from 0 to 9 years in order to obtain an estimate of the **accuracy of births**. Adopting the figure of 48,100 deaths for this age range and an estimated loss by net migration of 30,000, we state that the 1999 census has some 50,000 more children up to age 9 than expected (4.6%). We conclude that a slight underestimation of registered births is probable, but this may explain only part of the difference. The 1989 and 1999 censuses may also be responsible for the rest of it.

2) The second test compares **international migration** between the Kyrgyz Population Register and some registers of partner countries. The Council of Europe has information on migration flows to and from the Kyrgyz Republic to European countries (Russian Federation, Belarus and Germany), as do the yearbooks of different countries. The Russian Statistical Yearbook covers the whole period between 1989 and 1998. For the exchanges between Kyrgyzstan and Russia, the Russian source reveals a positive net migration of 278,709 people, while the Kyrgyz Register indicated a net migration loss of 251,432, corresponding to a difference of about 10%. This shortfall is somewhat higher in the second part of the decade than in the first. During these years, comparison with Belarus and Germany confirms a slight shortfall. Since non-integrated registers usually give better accuracy for immigration than for emigration, we consider that this source probably underestimated registered emigration in the Kyrgyz Register (CE, 2002).

3) If we adopt the hypothesis that in the register, births may have been underestimated by 4%, deaths by more than 2%, immigration by 5% to 7% and emigration by 10%, we arrive at a total sum of all four components (101,000 people) that is very close to the observed difference (96,000 people). Underestimations in the components of population development more or less compensate for one another. Thus, the discussion has to focus on the two censuses.

4) **The 1989 census** gives a *de jure* population total of 4,258,000 people. As shown in Chapter 2, this sum was higher than expected by the Register, essentially due to the introduction into the census of some groups of individuals who have no clear territorial attribution (military personnel and others). On the other hand, 1989 may not have been complete due to difficulties in conducting the census. Thus, the number of 4,258,000 people may be relatively close to reality.

5) Could **the 1999 census** therefore have over-counted the population? The population of 4,822,938 corresponds to the *de jure* approach, where the population is counted at their legal residence. The “*de*

*facto*” population counts those physically present at a given place, including those temporarily present. The total *de facto* population is 4,850,734; the difference is 27,996 or 0.58%. While the Kyrgyz census includes people temporarily present in the country, it does not mention the number of people temporarily absent abroad. The census stipulated counting them in the total of the *de jure* population if the duration of their absence does not exceed 12 months (within the country: 6 months). It is probable that the 1999 census included some ten thousand absent population members, who in the Register were counted as emigrants.

The Register also uses an approach corresponding to a *de jure* status. But the Kyrgyz Population Register does not include those with foreign citizenship if they do not have a permit of permanent residence or refugee status. The 1999 census gives a total of 48,000 people with citizenship other than that of Kyrgyzstan. These people are partially excluded from the Register – as are their demographic components.

The gap between the current statistics and the 1999 census may have largely been caused by the separation of the concept of the *de jure* population, which is applied in a more restrictive sense by the Register and openly by the census; in any case, people in the census were free to indicate a status other than the real one.

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