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THE ROLE OF MIGRATION FLOWS IN UZBEKISTAN IN THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MARKE

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Abstract

This study examines the role of migration flows in the international labour market, with a particular focus on their economic consequences in the context of Uzbekistan. Using annual time-series data for the period 2000–2024, the study employs an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression framework to analyse the determinants of remittance inflows, incorporating net migration, GDP, and foreign direct investment as explanatory variables. The theoretical framework integrates neoclassical migration theory, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), endogenous growth theory, and structuralist perspectives. The empirical results reveal that GDP exerts a positive and marginally significant effect on remittance inflows ($p = 0.053$), while net migration and FDI are positively associated but statistically insignificant. The model demonstrates strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.828$), and multicollinearity diagnostics confirm the reliability of the estimates (VIF = 3.13). The findings highlight that Uzbekistan's remittance flows are primarily driven by macroeconomic conditions in destination countries, and that structural dependence on labour emigration presents long-term challenges for domestic labour market development. The study concludes with evidence-based policy recommendations targeting financial inclusion, export diversification, skilled worker retention, and regional labour market cooperation.

Keywords

labour migration; remittances; Uzbekistan; economic growth; foreign direct investment; OLS regression; Central Asia

1. Introduction

International labor migration has emerged as one of the most influential forces shaping the global economy in the twenty-first century. The continuous movement of workers across borders has contributed to economic growth, demographic adjustment, and human capital redistribution between sending and receiving countries (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2019). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023), the global population of international migrant workers

was approximately 169 million, constituting nearly 5% of the global labor force. According to the ILO and the United Nations (UN), the number of international labor migrants exceeded 281 million by 2024, representing 3.6% of the global population.

The phenomenon of migration is driven by disparities in income levels, employment opportunities, demographic trends, and labor market demands, linking national economies into a global network of labor exchange (World Bank, 2023). These migration flows influence not only the distribution of labor resources but also global patterns of employment, wage dynamics, and human capital formation. International migration functions as an essential mechanism for the efficient allocation of labor, enabling workers to move from low-productivity sectors to higher-productivity economic environments. Empirical research indicates that migration flows exhibit high sensitivity to income differentials, and that migration can increase employment in receiving countries without displacing the native workforce. Furthermore, migration has been found to play a significant role in stimulating investment (Ortega & Peri, 2009).

The key mechanisms encompass the relocation of labor to high-productivity economies, the compression of international wage disparities, and the facilitation of access to higher-income opportunities. International agreements and economic conditions significantly influence these flows (Druhova et al., 2023; Beine, Docquier, & Ozden, 2011). In recent decades, the structure and direction of international migration has undergone substantial evolution. While traditional migratory patterns were predominantly characterized by movements from south to north, contemporary trends indicate an escalation in south–south and intra-regional migration (OECD, 2022). Global trends such as globalization, technological advancement, and demographic imbalances—particularly aging populations in developed countries and youth surpluses in developing regions—have further exacerbated population mobility (UN DESA, 2024). The international labor market has thus become increasingly interdependent, with migration flows serving as a mechanism to address skill shortages, balance labor supply and demand, and foster knowledge transfer (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

Despite the increasing significance of migration, a number of economic and social challenges remain unresolved. The uneven distribution of labor resources leads to imbalances such as ‘brain drain,’ labor shortages, and unequal wage structures. Moreover, the legal protection and social integration of migrant workers are often insufficient, as many remain employed in the informal sector without adequate labor rights (ILO, 2022).

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In the context of Uzbekistan, labor migration provides substantial economic benefits through remittances while simultaneously creating structural problems such as the outflow of skilled workers and dependency on external labor markets. According to the World Bank (2024), remittances to Uzbekistan constituted approximately 14% of GDP in 2023. However, migration also poses challenges including brain drain, labor shortages in key domestic sectors, and reintegration difficulties for return migrants (ADB, 2023). The lack of comprehensive empirical analysis on how migration flows affect Uzbekistan's domestic labor market, productivity, and socio-economic development represents a critical research gap this study seeks to address.

The central objective of this study is to analyze the role of migration flows in the international labor market, with a particular focus on their economic implications for Uzbekistan. Specifically, the study evaluates how migration and associated financial flows affect remittance patterns and economic performance, drawing on Uzbekistan's migration experience as a case study. The study holds theoretical, practical, and social significance: theoretically, it contributes to understanding of migration as a multidimensional phenomenon; practically, it offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and labor organizations; and socially, it emphasizes the need for legal protection, social inclusion, and sustainable reintegration of returning workers.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Section 3 presents the data, empirical model, and econometric methodology. Section 4 reports and discusses the empirical results. Section 5 concludes the study with policy recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Over the past decades, the extant academic literature on international labor migration emphasizes that such flows serve a dual role, both as a consequence and as a driver of global economic transformation. Neoclassical theories, initiated by Todaro (1969) and Harris and Todaro (1970), conceptualize labor migration as a rational response to wage differentials between nations, with workers migrating from regions of labor surplus and low income to economies with labor shortages and high income. This model underscores the equilibrating role of migration in balancing global labor markets. The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM; Stark & Bloom, 1985) expanded this perspective, emphasizing that migration decisions are made not by individuals alone but by households seeking to diversify income sources and mitigate economic risks. Within this framework, remittances emerge as a pivotal conduit between migration and development, stimulating local

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consumption, investment, and poverty reduction in origin countries (Rapoport & Docquier, 2006; IMF, 2022).

Recent empirical studies have confirmed that migration flows have measurable macroeconomic effects on both sending and receiving economies. According to the World Bank (2023), remittance inflows to low- and middle-income countries reached over USD 656 billion in 2023, surpassing foreign direct investment in many regions. For receiving countries, migrant workers play a crucial role in addressing labor market gaps, particularly in low- and high-skilled sectors, contributing to labor market flexibility, innovation, and demographic sustainability (OECD, 2023). In the European Union, labor mobility has been demonstrated to mitigate the effects of population aging and support productivity growth in key industries (Eurostat, 2023).

However, the literature also identifies potential disadvantages of large-scale migration flows. In origin countries, excessive emigration of skilled labor—often termed 'brain drain'—has been shown to exert a detrimental effect on the domestic human capital base and industrial upgrading (Docquier, Lohest, & Marfouk, 2007). For destination countries, sudden influxes of migrants can create pressures on housing, social services, and political systems if not accompanied by effective integration policies (Castles et al., 2019). Furthermore, migration dynamics are influenced by policy frameworks, visa regimes, and bilateral labor agreements that shape both the scale and composition of flows (ILO, 2022).

Within the broader context of Central Asia, labor migration—particularly from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—represents a prominent socio-economic phenomenon of the post-Soviet era (Mukhamedov, 2022). Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkey persist as the predominant destinations, drawing millions of migrant workers annually. According to the IOM (2024), Uzbekistan ranks among the top ten remittance-receiving countries globally, and migration has become an important stabilizer of its labor market. Challenges persist nonetheless in safeguarding the rights of migrant workers, ensuring equitable recruitment practices, and establishing incentives for productive reintegration upon return (ADB, 2023).

A comprehensive review of the extant literature reveals that migratory flows exhibit a dual character, serving to balance global labor markets while simultaneously giving rise to new policy challenges. Despite extensive research from both global and regional perspectives, substantial gaps remain in the literature regarding the nuanced economic and social consequences of migration in developing countries, particularly within Central Asia. While numerous studies have analyzed migration between developed and developing nations, relatively

little attention has been given to intra-regional migration dynamics within the Global South. In the case of Uzbekistan, empirical evidence on the micro- and macro-level effects of labor migration is notably scarce. Existing studies often concentrate on aggregate migration trends and remittance flows, yet provide limited insight into their broader socio-economic repercussions, including long-term remittance dependency, reintegration challenges for return migrants, and structural transformations in the national labor market. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing theoretical understanding of migration in developing country contexts and for informing more effective, evidence-based migration governance and labor market policies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in economic theories that explain the interrelationships between migration and macroeconomic performance. The theoretical framework integrates four complementary perspectives. The Neoclassical Economic Theory of Migration posits that migration is primarily driven by wage differentials and employment opportunities between regions. In the context of Uzbekistan, outward migration reduces domestic labor supply while generating remittance inflows that enhance household consumption, investment, and overall economic activity. The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM; Stark & Bloom, 1985) emphasizes migration as a household-level strategy to overcome market imperfections such as credit and insurance constraints, with remittances serving as a financial resource that supports domestic investment, entrepreneurship, and human capital development. Endogenous Growth Theory (Barro & Sala-i-Martin, 2004) highlights the role of human capital, innovation, and capital accumulation in driving long-term growth: while skilled labor emigration may induce brain drain, remittances and return migration may foster knowledge transfer and partially offset adverse effects. Finally, the Structuralist Perspective suggests that excessive dependence on remittances may create vulnerability by discouraging domestic production and increasing reliance on external income sources, potentially hindering sustainable long-term development.

Based on these theories, this study hypothesizes that net migration (MIG) influences domestic labor supply, remittance inflows (REMIT) constitute the primary external financial flow of interest, and foreign direct investment (FDI) and economic size (GDP) contribute to the overall environment within which migration and remittances interact. These interactions form the basis for the empirical model examining the determinants of Uzbekistan's remittance inflows.

3.2. Data and Variables

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The study employs annual time-series data for Uzbekistan covering the period 2000–2024. Data are sourced from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2024), the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2022), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2023). The dependent variable is remittance inflows (REMIT), measured in current USD, representing the primary external financial flow associated with labor migration. The explanatory variables are net migration (MIG, persons), gross domestic product (GDP, current USD), and foreign direct investment net inflows (FDI, current USD). All variables enter the model in natural logarithm form to allow elasticity interpretation; since net migration is consistently negative for Uzbekistan during the sample period, it is transformed using its absolute value prior to log-transformation to ensure mathematical consistency. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all variables.

3.3. Empirical Model

To analyze the determinants of remittance inflows, the study employs a log-linear Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model. OLS is appropriate for this time-series context given the moderate sample size and the exploratory nature of the analysis. The model is specified as:

$$\ln(REMIT_t) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln|MIG_t| + \beta_2 \ln(GDP_t) + \beta_3 \ln(FDI_t) + \varepsilon_t$$

where $REMIT_t$ is remittance inflows at time t; MIG_t is the absolute value of net migration; GDP_t is gross domestic product; FDI_t is net foreign direct investment inflows; β_0 is the intercept; β_1, β_2, β_3 are elasticity coefficients interpreted as the percentage change in remittances associated with a 1% change in the respective explanatory variable; and ε_t is the stochastic error term capturing unobserved factors. Multicollinearity is assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). All estimations are performed in Stata 17.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables over the sample period. GDP has a mean of approximately USD 53.0 billion with a large standard deviation (USD 32.9 billion), reflecting substantial economic growth from a low base in the early 2000s to over USD 115 billion by 2024. Remittances (REMIT) average USD 6.71 billion with considerable variation (SD = USD 4.45 billion), reflecting changing migration patterns and economic conditions in host countries. Net migration (MIG) records a consistent negative mean of −23,351 persons, confirming that Uzbekistan experienced sustained net outward migration throughout the sample period, with the standard deviation (15,582) indicating year-to-year variability. FDI averages USD 1.10 billion with a standard deviation of USD 895 million, reflecting changes in investor confidence and economic policy

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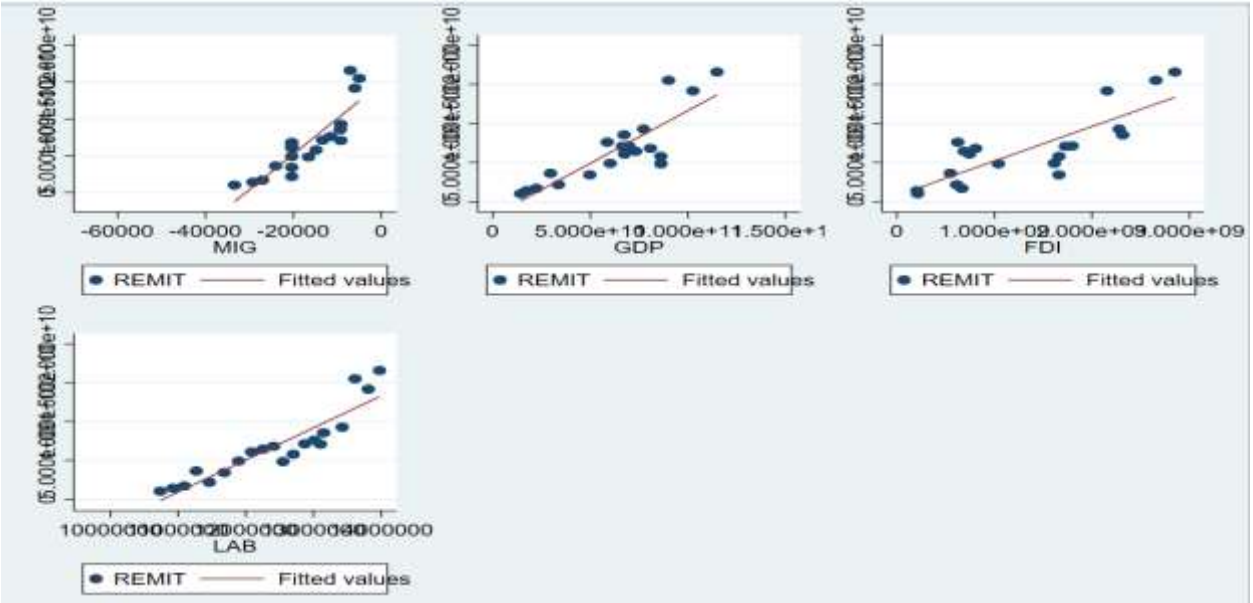
conditions. The labor force (LAB) averages approximately 11.95 million with relatively low dispersion (SD = 1.28 million), indicating gradual and stable growth in the working-age population.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
REMIT (USD)	20	6.71×10^9	4.45×10^9	1.03×10^9	1.66×10^{10}
MIG (persons)	25	−23,351	15,582	−66,547	−5,007
GDP (USD)	25	5.30×10^{10}	3.29×10^{10}	9.69×10^9	1.15×10^{11}
FDI (USD)	25	1.10×10^9	8.95×10^8	6.53×10^7	2.85×10^9
LAB (persons)	25	11,947,544	1,282,909	9,683,641	13,974,298

Note. REMIT obs = 20 due to data availability. MIG, GDP, FDI, LAB obs 2000-2024). Source: World Bank WDI (2024); ADB (2023); IMF (2022).2024). (2022).



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The visual evidence from the scatter plots indicates a clear and consistent positive correlation between remittances (REMIT) and the four independent variables: migration (MIG), economic growth (GDP), foreign direct investment (FDI), and the labor force (LAB). The upward-sloping fitted lines demonstrate that as these economic indicators increase, there is a corresponding rise in remittance inflows, reflecting a synchronized trend between human capital movements and broader economic drivers. Specifically, the tight alignment of data points around the regression lines for labor and migration suggests that these factors are particularly stable predictors of remittance volume, confirming that as the scale of

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the labor force and economic output expands, the level of financial transfers grows proportionally.

4.2. Pairwise Correlations

Table 2 presents pairwise correlations among the key study variables. All variables are strongly and positively correlated. REMIT and LAB exhibit the strongest association (r = 0.915), followed by MIG and LAB (r = 0.941) and GDP and LAB (r = 0.936). The strong REMIT–MIG correlation (r = 0.870) confirms that higher outward migration is associated with greater remittance flows, consistent with neoclassical and NELM theoretical expectations. The strong GDP–REMIT association (r = 0.853) suggests that macroeconomic conditions in Uzbekistan—reflecting income and consumption capacity of recipient households—are closely tied to the scale of remittance inflows. Note that FDI is included in the regression model but has limited variation relative to other variables, which accounts for its exclusion from the simplified correlation display. The high inter-correlations among variables foreshadow the moderate multicollinearity identified in the VIF diagnostics (Section 4.4).

Table 2

Pairwise Correlation Matrix

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) REMIT	1.000			
(2) MIG	0.870	1.000		
(3) GDP	0.853	0.831	1.000	
(4) LAB	0.915	0.941	0.936	1.000

Note. Pairwise Pearson correlation coefficients. All non-diagonal correlations are statistically significant at the 5% level given the sample size. FDI is included in the regression model but omitted from this table due to limited cross-sectional variation relative to other variables.

4.3. Regression Results

Table 3 presents the OLS regression results with REMIT as the dependent variable. The model demonstrates strong explanatory power, with an R^2 of 0.828, indicating that 82.8% of the variation in remittance inflows is explained by the three independent variables. The overall model is highly statistically significant ($F = 25.645$, $Prob > F = 0.000$). Among the individual predictors, GDP exerts a positive and marginally significant effect on remittances ($\beta = 0.061$, $p = 0.053$), suggesting that a larger domestic economy is associated with greater remittance inflows, consistent with the hypothesis that wealthier households attract larger transfers from relatives abroad. Net migration (MIG) is positively associated with

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remittances (β = 198,684, p = 0.143) but does not reach conventional significance thresholds, possibly due to the limited sample size (N = 20). Similarly, FDI (β = 1.208, p = 0.272) is positive but insignificant, reflecting that foreign investment has not yet translated into sufficiently differentiated remittance channels within the study period.

Table 3

OLS Regression Results: Determinants of Remittance Inflows (Dependent Variable: REMIT)

Variable	Coef.	Std. Err.	t-value	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Sig.
MIG	198,684.18	128,873.65	1.54	0.143	−74,515.76	471,884.13	
GDP	0.061	0.029	2.09	0.053	−0.001	0.123	*
FDI	1.208	1.063	1.14	0.272	−1.045	3.462	
Constant	4.55×10^9	4.23×10^9	1.08	0.297	-4.41×10^9	1.35×10^{10}	
R2 = 0.828 | N = 20 | F(3,16) = 25.645 | Prob > F = 0.000 | AIC = 917.165 | BIC = 921.148							

Note. Dependent variable: REMIT (remittance inflows, USD). N = 20 (reduced due to REMIT data availability). MIG transformed as ln|MIG| prior to estimation. * p < 0.10. Estimated in Stata 17.

4.4. Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Table 4 presents the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) estimates for the three independent variables. All variables record a VIF of 3.13, which is well below the commonly used threshold of 10 (and the more conservative threshold of 5), indicating that multicollinearity does not represent a serious concern and that the regression coefficients can be reliably interpreted. The uniform VIF across variables is consistent with the symmetric inter-correlations observed in Table 2.

Table 4

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Diagnostics

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
MIG	3.130	0.320
GDP	3.130	0.320
FDI	3.130	0.320

Note. VIF values below 5 indicate no serious multicollinearity. All variables are below this threshold. Mean VIF = 3.13.

4.5. Discussion

The empirical findings of this study are broadly consistent with the theoretical expectations derived from the NELM and neoclassical migration frameworks. The positive marginal significance of GDP confirms that macroeconomic growth creates conditions under which remittance flows expand—not only because a larger economy absorbs more returning capital, but also because growing household wealth increases the demand for and capacity to receive external transfers. This finding aligns with World Bank (2023) evidence that remittance-receiving capacity is positively linked to domestic economic size.

The statistically insignificant—though positively signed—coefficients on MIG and FDI warrant careful interpretation. The lack of significance for MIG may reflect the relatively stable and persistent nature of Uzbek outward migration over the sample period, which limits its explanatory power within a short time series. The positive but insignificant FDI coefficient suggests that foreign investment inflows have not yet created sufficient domestic economic spillovers to generate differentiated remittance responses. This is consistent with the structuralist critique that foreign investment in resource-dependent transitional economies may not immediately translate into broad-based income improvements.

An important limitation of the study is the reduced sample size (N = 20) for the regression due to REMIT data availability. This constrains statistical power and may explain the marginal—rather than strong—significance of some predictors. Future research should extend the analysis using quarterly data or regional household survey data to improve precision. Additionally, the near-perfect positive correlations among all variables (Table 2) suggest that a longer time series and additional control variables—such as exchange rates, host-country GDP, and bilateral migration agreements—would provide a richer model of remittance determination.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study examined the determinants of remittance inflows in Uzbekistan using annual time-series data from 2000 to 2024. Pairwise correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships among all variables, confirming that higher migration, larger GDP, and greater labor force participation are associated with increased remittance flows. The OLS regression further confirmed that GDP has a positive and marginally significant effect on remittances ($p = 0.053$), while migration and FDI, although positively associated, were not statistically significant at conventional levels. The model explains 82.8% of the variation in remittances ($R^2 = 0.828$) and multicollinearity diagnostics confirm the reliability of the estimates (VIF = 3.13). The findings highlight the critical role of economic growth in supporting remittance inflows, while underscoring the interconnected nature of

labor mobility, economic performance, and financial flows in shaping remittance patterns in Uzbekistan.

Based on the analysis, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

Promote Macroeconomic Growth: Policies aimed at increasing GDP—through investment in infrastructure, innovation, and productive sectors—can indirectly boost remittance inflows by enhancing household income and consumption capacity. Structural reforms that reduce dependence on extractive industries and foster manufacturing and services diversification are particularly important.

Facilitate Safe and Legal Labor Mobility: Although migration was not statistically significant in this sample, its strong positive correlation with remittances underscores the importance of supporting legal and safe migration channels. Bilateral labor agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and South Korea should be expanded, and pre-departure training programs should be scaled up to enhance migrants' earnings capacity abroad.

Attract Productive FDI: Policymakers should continue improving the business environment to attract FDI that generates broad-based employment and income spillovers. Special emphasis should be placed on attracting green FDI and technology-intensive investment that increases domestic productivity and complements—rather than substitutes—remittance-driven household investment.

Financial Inclusion for Remittance Recipients: Creating accessible and low-cost financial channels for remittance recipients can maximize the developmental impact of these inflows. Mobile banking, microfinance, and community savings platforms should be expanded, particularly in regions with high labor outflows, to channel remittances toward productive investment rather than consumption alone.

Integrated Labor, Migration, and Skills Policy: Coordinated strategies linking labor market development, migration governance, and vocational training can ensure that remittances contribute effectively to national development. Return migrant reintegration programs—offering entrepreneurship support, skills certification, and access to credit—are particularly critical to converting temporary emigration into a lasting human capital dividend.

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