

Concept Note
MOST School
“Youth Return Migration: Problems and Research-Informed Solutions”
Dushanbe, Tajikistan
2019

This Concept Note presents an overview of the envisioned MOST School ‘Youth Return Migration: Problems and Research-Informed Solutions’ to be organized in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 28-29 March 2019. This is an initiative of UNESCO’s intergovernmental programme for the Management of Social Transformations (MOST), in coordination with Tajikistan National Commission for UNESCO and Russian – Tajik Slavonic University.

1. Background

MOST is UNESCO’s intergovernmental science programme on social transformations. MOST works with governments, academic communities in the social and human sciences, and organizations of civil society to improve connections between knowledge and action.

Within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the new 2030 international development agenda, MOST contributes to development, to the eradication of poverty, to inclusive and sustainable responses to environmental change and to the promotion of inclusive, effective and accountable governance. MOST supports Member States in improving policymaking processes through a strengthened research-policy interface, which uses knowledge focused on human needs from the social and human sciences to promote a culture of evidence-informed decision-making.

The ‘Comprehensive Strategy for the MOST Programme (2016-2021)’ includes a set of guidelines for organizing MOST schools. Those guidelines provide flexible principles that may assist in expanding MOST Schools in different regions and countries. These guidelines has been developed building on good practices in developing capacity of young social scientists in policy research and dialogue.

UNESCO explores innovative ways to engage youth in their societies, in particular, in policy development with the participation of youth in line with its strategy on youth (2014-2023). The key aim of the MOST School is to enlarge the pool of qualified young professionals from different backgrounds (academia, government and civil society) that may assist to strengthen the research-policy interface in the context of the challenges of implementation of the 2030 international development agenda.

In 2016-2017, UNESCO is an active member of UN country team, which advocates and facilitates the adoption and incorporation of the SDG agenda as a national framework for development

policy, planning, implementation and monitoring in Central Asia, among government and non-government counterparts and partners.

2. The MOST School Initiative

MOST Schools are events, not institutions. They enhance knowledge brokering, which constitutes the third operational pillar of the MOST Strategy. The Schools are not envisioned from a narrow 'technical' perspective because establishing science brokerage within policymaking systems is essentially a public policy governance problem that involves different actors across multiple research and policy networks. The policy uptake of evidence generated by research is heavily influenced by the culture and behaviour of context-specific policymaking systems.

Thus, to a large extent, successful knowledge brokering depends not just on acquiring thematic knowledge about given topics but are contingent on a set of skills related to the nature of scientific consensus, the understanding of complex science, the critical appraisal of scientific findings, and the comprehension of horizontal decision making processes which are unique in each context.

The MOST School approach is an innovative capacity-building initiative under UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme, designed to strengthen the competences for evidence-informed decision making in Member States.

Based on bottom-up demands arising from specific needs in concrete contexts, MOST Schools prioritize interventions aimed at developing the capacity of researchers and decision-makers to transfer knowledge into action. Their primary goal is to support long-term sustainable development in contexts where capacity gaps may be a major constraint to transforming research into action.

MOST Schools are based on four principles:

- a) *Flexibility*: MOST Schools need to be responsive to specific contexts;
- b) *High quality*: capacity development through the schools must comply with scholarly standards of excellence and with advanced training practices;
- c) *Accelerating dissemination*: Schools must adopt an escalating strategy for spreading knowledge;
- d) *National ownership*: MOST Schools need to be driven by the incentives of communities of practice operating in Member States.

3. The MOST School in Dushanbe

The MOST School in Dushanbe will be the first national MOST school carried out in Central Asia.

MOST School will take place between 28 and 29 of March 2019, at the premises of the UN Information Resource Centre at the Russian – Tajik Slavonic University, Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

The theme of the MOST School is ***“Youth Return Migration: Problems and Research-Informed Solutions”***

Migration can be depicted as a complex social, economic and political phenomenon, in which the expected income differences and the expected probability of finding employment abroad play a significant role. The issues of migration is high on the Tajik international rights agenda. According to Human Rights Centre, young migrants of Tajikistan (aged 15-24 years) constitute an increasing of share of labor migrants. Meanwhile, it is necessary to mention that more than half of the population of Tajikistan is young people under the age of 30.

In times of crisis, the economic sanctions levied against Russia by the United States and European Union, the national currency of major destination countries depreciated, and the return of young labor migrants has reached a critical mass. Moreover, changes in Russian immigration legislation have significantly led to a dramatic increase in the number of ‘blacklisted’ migrants. Most of them were surprised to find their re-entry ban at the airport, which caused a shock effect that undoubtedly affected their family and socio-economic conditions. In the beginning of 2014, there were 71 000 Tajik labor migrants blacklisted by the Russian Federal Migration Services due to violations of Russian law. By 2015, this number grew to 202 000, and by 2016 this number has reached 329 000. In addition, the large proportion of these people were youth representatives¹.

In spite of the reasons of their return to Tajikistan, labor migrants, especially young people and their families faced a complex of problems, which required a high attention and prompt solutions from the governmental authorities. Young labour immigrants were not interested in obtaining professional or technical education, and were more willing to work in low-skilled departments abroad since they cannot find jobs at home. Some returned migrants in Tajikistan are struggling to put their new skills into practice because the necessary equipment and technologies are lacking in Tajikistan². Additionally, due to the long-term absence, returning migrants lost their contacts with some relatives, friends or former colleagues, who could potentially help them to find a decent job. Furthermore, young returned migrants also do not have any financial opportunities to obtain formal professional education to improve their skills and knowledge in order to compete in the labor market. Another problem is that any capacity-building trainings can only be recognized through a formal education system, and any skills gained informally remain completely unrecognized. This again limits the opportunities of young returned migrants to enter the labor market and find a job with the decent salaries.

In addition, prohibition of entry into the Russian Federation, administrative penalties, and the lack of working and living conditions faced by young labor immigrants abroad have a negative impact on their mental health. Therefore, their successful reintegration into the family and society is a very important task for their further socio-economic development, which can help to prevent young immigrants from being marginalized, isolated, radicalized and involved in crime.

On the basis of the several facts mentioned in Tajikistan, the MOST School will provide a space for collective learning among key development stakeholders in the country. It will focus in the

¹ Reports from the Tajik Migration Service, 2013 – 2016.

² IOM Report on Tajik Migrants with Re-entry Bans to Russian Federation, 2014.

identification of the capacity gaps that might exist at the national level in relation to the youth return migration problems and challenges, and it will address possible alternatives for the solution of those gaps. The school, conceived as a knowledge brokering exercise, will bring together academics, public officials and representatives from civil society, and it aims to providing a foundation for a steady multi-stakeholder dialogue on the return youth migration in the context of SDGs in Dushanbe.

UNESCO, through its MOST Programme, will coordinate the process of follow-up of the school with other UN entities, national stakeholders, and international donors. One key objective is to stimulate further capacity building activities, which drawing on the results of the school but not necessarily related to MOST, may contribute to strengthening national capabilities in connection with the 2030 development agenda.

Discussions will be structured around two main questions:

- What do policymakers want from researchers?, and;
- What do researchers think they should provide to policymakers?

The format of the MOST School encompasses a mixture of formal presentations and open discussions during 2 days.

The profile of around 40-50 participants includes:

- Government officials (Key Ministries/ Municipalities)
- Universities, Research centers, Students
- NGO, CSO/activists
- UNESCO/ UN agencies

The working language will be Russian. The simultaneous translation for English and Tajik languages will be provided for.

The key expected outputs are:

- (1) A set of research-informed materials that could be utilized in subsequent publication with proposed solutions for the issues related to youth return migration in Tajikistan;
- (2) A draft proposal for organizing at least 2-3 national events (2020-2021) in Tajikistan in deepening the academic debate on the thematic issues to an agreed national development vision.

Preliminary Schedule

Day 1

Time	Session
09.30 – 10.00	Registration of experts and participants
10.00 - 10.30	Opening of the session: An introduction to the First Central Asia MOST School. Introducing/getting to know MOST School participants.
10.30-13.00	<p>Open discussions</p> <p><i>What do policy-makers want from researchers in relation to youth return migration in Tajikistan?</i></p> <p><i>- What current policies and instruments do they have and where they want researchers to intervene?</i></p> <p><u><i>Facilitator: Representative from government authorities, who is directly working with youth migration</i></u></p>
13.00-14.00	Lunch break.
14.00-17.00	<p>Open discussions</p> <p><i>What do researchers think they should provide to policymakers in relation to youth return migration in Tajikistan?</i></p> <p><i>-What research findings and evidences do they have in relation to problems on youth return migration in Tajikistan and where do they expect policy-makers' actions?</i></p> <p><u><i>Facilitator: Representative from academia, scientific associations, who is working in the field of youth migration</i></u></p>
17.00-18.00	<p>Conclusion, Assessment of presentations and Resolution for the Second Day</p> <p><u><i>Facilitator: Representative from UNESCO Almaty Office</i></u></p>

Day 2

Time	Session
10.00-12.00	<p>Brainstorming session: Connecting research and policy-making</p> <p><i>-Ways and methods to improve state policies through research-informed approach;</i> <i>-Alternative solutions for youth return migration problems;</i> <i>-Tools for better partnership and interaction between researchers and policy-makers;</i></p> <p><u><i>Facilitator: Representative from UNESCO HQs in Paris</i></u></p>
12.00- 13.00	<p>Identifying specific recommendations (based on all previous sessions)</p>
13.00-14.00	<p>Lunch break.</p>
14.00-17.00	<p>Collective evaluation, draft proposal on further actions, finalizing discussions</p> <p><u><i>Facilitator: Representative from UN agencies</i></u></p>
17.00-18.00	<p>Closing Ceremony</p>