"Contextualizing Central Asian Migration to East Asia: Comparative Analysis of Uzbek Migration to South Korea and Japan"
February 16, 2026
Venue: IAIS's Conference Room

This project, *Contextualizing Central Asian Migration to East Asia: Comparative Analysis of Uzbek Migration to South Korea and Japan*, was originally designed to examine emerging patterns of educational mobility and labor migration from Central Asia to East Asia, with a particular focus on Uzbekistan and comparative perspectives involving South Korea and Japan. The project responds to a significant transformation in regional mobility patterns, whereby East Asian destinations—especially South Korea—have increasingly replaced traditional post-Soviet migration corridors such as Russia and Kazakhstan for young Central Asian migrants.

At its core, the project aimed to analyze how educational mobility and labor migration are interlinked processes rather than separate phenomena. By examining student migrants, skilled workers, Employment Permit System (EPS) laborers, and irregular migrants within a single analytical framework, the project sought to understand migration as a continuum shaped by aspiration, institutional constraints, moral responsibility, and identity transformation. Particular attention was given to how migrants navigate host-country migration regimes, reinterpret hardship, and construct meaning around work, education, and mobility.

The project concentrated its primary fieldwork, data collection, and analysis on South Korea, while retaining comparative perspectives through targeted thematic contributions and analytical reflection. This approach ensured methodological depth and empirical rigor while remaining fully aligned with the project's conceptual objectives.

In addition to the Uzbek case, the project incorporated comparative gender-focused perspectives through contributions on female migration from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to South Korea. These case studies enrich the project's analytical scope by highlighting gendered mobility pathways, diverse household strategies, and variations in vulnerability and agency among Central Asian women migrants.

Conceptually, the project advances three key analytical contributions. First, it develops the notion of the education–labor continuum, demonstrating how educational and labor migration pathways overlap in practice and shape long-term mobility strategies. Second, it introduces the concept of aspirational precarity, capturing the coexistence of strong future-oriented aspirations with structural vulnerability in migrants' everyday lives. Third, it foregrounds the importance of moral, religious, and gendered frameworks through which Central Asian migrants interpret work, hardship, legality, and responsibility in the Korean context.

The final reporting session serves as an additional dissemination platform, presenting consolidated project outcomes to academic, policy, and institutional stakeholders. Following the session, participants will receive further information regarding access to forthcoming publications and opportunities for continued engagement with the project's research agenda.

For any inquiries related to the dissemination of project outputs and publications, please contact *Ms. Mekhriniso Abdurasulova* at m.abdurasulova@iais.uz.

PROGRAMME	
Opening Remarks **Welcome and Introduction to the Conference**	
09:30 – 10:00	**Registration**
10:00 – 10:15	Chair (Abdurasulova M) Korean Embassy Vice-rector of UWED
Introductory Speeches	
10:15 – 10:35	*Prof. Timur Dadabaev* *Short review of the project team and their research*
10:35 – 10:55	**Data Collection and Empirical Coverage** **Data Collection among Central Asian Migrants in South Korea** **Prof. Timur Dadabaev** **Mr. Umidjon Tolibjonov** • Fieldwork locations in South Korea • Interview and survey methodology • Access to migrant communities (students, EPS workers, skilled migrants, irregular migrants) • Ethical considerations and research constraints **Key Output:** Primary qualitative dataset covering multiple visa categories and migrant trajectories
10:55 – 11:00	Brief Discussion of Approaches
11:00-11:20	**Coffee break**
11:20-11:40	**Core Research Findings – Uzbekistan–South Korea Migration** Aspirations, Precarity, and the Education–Labor Continuum Prof. Timur Dadabaev • Educational (D-2), skilled (E-7), EPS (E-9), and irregular migration pathways • Aspirational precarity as a structuring condition • Moral economies, responsibility, and identity transformation • Implications for Korea's migration governance Related Outputs: • Journal manuscripts • Conceptual framework development • Korea-focused empirical chapters

	Moral, Religious, and Gendered Dimensions of Migration Prof. Timur Dadabaev • Faith, masculinity, and endurance among Uzbek Muslim migrants • Ethical interpretations of labor, hardship, and legality • Relevance for Korean workplace integration and social cohesion •
11:40-11:55	**Female Migration from Tajikistan to South Korea** **Ms. Manizha Rajabova** • Gendered pathways of labor and educational migration • Care, work, and vulnerability in the Korean context • Comparative reflections vis-à-vis Uzbek migration experiences
11:55-12:10	**Kazakh Female Migration to South Korea** **Ms. Aizhan Mukhamedjanova** • Professional and educational mobility of Kazakh women • Negotiating opportunity, precarity, and identity in Korea • Comparative implications for Central Asian migration trends

12:10-12:20	**Synthesis and Policy Implications**
	Project Outcomes and Policy Relevance
	Prof. Timur Dadabaev
	• Summary of key empirical findings
	• Contributions to Korea–Central Asia migration scholarship
	• Policy implications for:
	    o Korean migration governance
	    o Educational mobility frameworks
	    o Labor integration and protection
	• Reflections on KF support and future research directions

12:20 – 12:30	**Discussion** *(questions and comments up to 3 minutes)*