Self-Legitimation through Knowledge Production and Partnerships: International Organizations as Migration Governors in Central Asia¹

Oleg Korneev²

Paper presented at the ECPR joint workshop sessions, Warsaw, 30 March – 2 April, 2015

Work in progress. Please do not cite, quote or disseminate without the author’s permission.

Introduction

The absence of an overarching global normative structure of migration governance (Aleinikoff 2007; Newland 2005) provides international organisations (IOs) with a favourable context to introduce and even impose varying international standards in different countries (Kunz et al. 2011). Research relying on substantial ethnographic evidence has shown that IOs involved in migration management provide ostensibly technocratic, neutral, apolitical and expertise-based inputs that are actually highly political and sensitive (Geiger and Pécoud 2010). This, inevitably, creates conditions for competition between such IOs and, thus, brings the issue of their legitimacy to the fore. This, for example, is the case for IOM that can be seen as an increasingly challenged institution in migration field. Initially created as a service-providing agency supporting national governments, IOM has taken important steps in order to reposition itself in the field. It now appeals to a broad base for legitimacy through its “migration management for the benefit of all” slogan. But its legitimacy is increasingly challenged by several types of actors: other IOs that enter migration governance terrain, governments of countries-beneficiaries, human rights NGOs and, finally, experts that form transnational epistemic communities in the field of migration.

Drawing on insights from international relations and sociology of translation (Callon 1986) as well as fieldwork in three Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), this paper argues that in order to secure legitimacy in the field of migration governance, both

¹ This paper is based on my Marie Curie project MIGGOV that explores the role of international organizations as global governors of migration and, more specifically, looks at their impact on migration governance in Central Asia. I gratefully acknowledge funding from the European Commission.

² Marie Curie Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, Department of Politics, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, S10 2TU, Sheffield, United Kingdom, O.Korneev@sheffield.ac.uk
challenged and challenging IOs rely on knowledge and partnerships. Global migration governors (Avant et al. 2010; Korneev 2016) act in conditions of uncertainty about international migration arising from the absence of solid scientific foundations for migration policies at national and global levels (Boswell 2009) and the lack of a single coherent framework in the shape of a global migration regime (Betts 2011). This is particularly complicated by migration “crisis” scenarios in politically volatile contexts such as existing in the post-Soviet Central Asian countries. Borrowing from ideas about the emergence and impact of international institutions under conditions of uncertainty and on the role of knowledge therein (Haas 1992), this paper links the study of global migration governors with existing theoretical and empirical research on production and political use of expert knowledge (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Boswell 2009; Boswell, Geddes and Scholten 2011; Nay 2014).

This paper aims to advance discussions of knowledge production and use for legitimating purposes by global migration governors and, thus, contributes to discussions on the following interrelated questions: What kind of knowledge on migration is seen by IOs as authoritative, and why? Which experts/stakeholders influence the ways IOs approach particular policy issues, and why? How do IOs approach knowledge production and policy formulation in the field of migration? How do other stakeholders perceive knowledge produced by IOs? What is the relationship between legitimacy, power and knowledge production in this context? The paper proceeds the following way. In the first section, I introduce the notions of challenged and challenging institutions in patchy global migration governance, identify sources of related challenges and, more specifically, the audiences that are important for self-legitimation efforts of IOs. The second section discusses the relevance of knowledge as a source for self-legitimation of IOs and introduces the key ideas from the “sociology of translation” relevant for this study. The third section provides the context of these interventions sketching the migration governance picture in Central Asia. This region is a peculiar case that allows tracing IOM’s involvement and reactions to it by other IOs from “no man’s land” state of affairs when five Central Asia republics gained their independence in 1991 to the present time when multiple migration governors have become prominent in the region. The fourth section analyses self-legitimating practices of IOs in Central Asia.
Challenged and Challenging Institutions in Global Migration Governance

In the absence of a global migration regime, IOs whose action covers migration issues, find themselves in rather different situations as regards their ability to influence migration governance in various countries and regions of the world. There exist two “global” organisations that can be described as exclusively migration-focused international bodies – referent IOs for global migration governance: the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with its narrowly defined refugee protection mandate and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) with, formally, a very narrow service-providing mandate to its participating states.

UNHCR, tasked with supervision of the Geneva Convention (1951), “derives its mandate from international law and agreements” (Morris 2005: 43). It serves, at least in principle, a humanitarian goal of refugee protection from the first days of its existence and, despite all its turbulences (Loescher 2001), has always been regarded as one of the most important elements of the UN system. IOM is an intergovernmental organisation outside of the UN system. It is “not accountable to any democratically-elected body. Although international organisations such as UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO have observer status, as do international trade union, religious and welfare organisations, they have no voting power” (Morris 2005: 43). It was created after the Second World War and tasked with a very precise mission: to help states resettle forced migrants produced by the war. Even though the IOM’s mandate has been gradually broadened, it basically defines IOM as a service provider for its Member States aiming to regulate migrations to and from their territories; the original mandate does not include the goal of migrants’ protection (IOM 1991). Unlike specialised UN agencies (International Labour Organisation, United Nations Development Programme, UNHCR, etc.) that base their legitimacy on the UN’s all-inclusive membership and global role, IOM – as a product of much more tailored intergovernmental cooperation – constructs its legitimacy using the discourse on the growing need for migration management around the world and claiming that its actions benefit all – countries of origin, countries of destination and migrants themselves (Georgi 2010).

---

3 It was created as “The Intergovernmental Committee on Migration in Europe”, its rebranding into IOM has happened at a much later stage.
The turbulent context of the international refugee regime complex has created many legitimacy-related problems for UNHCR (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Loescher 2001) that has been recently conceptualized as a “challenged institution” (Betts 2013). On the contrary, IOM is still overwhelmingly regarded as a stable global governor with growing influence. This has clearly been the case for IOM in the post-Soviet space. For example, in projects funded by the European Commission in the framework of the implementation of the EU-Russia readmission agreement IOM, far from being a mere implementing partner, has influenced the outcome of the initial stage of formally bilateral EU-Russia migration cooperation. The context of this bilateral cooperation has allowed IOM to strengthen its position vis-à-vis both Russia and the EU and to be successful in competition with other IOs (Korneev 2014). Similarly, much of EU migration cooperation in its ‘Eastern Neighbourhood’ happened outside of the framework developed by the EU’s acquis communautaire and was influenced by IOM (Hernandez i Sagrera and Korneev 2012).

However, there are clear indications of IOM legitimacy dilemmas in global migration governance that is increasingly characterized by the presence of “challenging” institutions. These are, first of all, various non-referent IOs that interact with each other in the field of migration governance in particular countries or regions, producing impact that is comparable or even exceeding the impact of the two international bodies that are formally related to migration issues. By enlarging discursively as well as practically their involvement in various migration policy sub-fields, these IOs have started challenging the authority, expertise, capacities and overall influence of the above mentioned UNHCR and IOM whose role as referent organizations, albeit with different sources of legitimacy, had long been established in a number of policy fields relevant for migration governance.

IOM – that had less competition in the 1990-s and saw itself as the leading IO in the sphere of migration – is now very much a challenged institution as regards its self-proclaimed exclusive expertise and competence in the field. IOM faces increasing competition from other IOs as well as transnational NGOs in their strive for resources mainly provided by project contracts. In this way, non-referent organisations such as UNDP, UNODC, UN Women, UNICEF, the World Bank, OSCE and others are taking on migration portfolio. Many of them have been continuously manifesting a mission creep (Barnett and Finnemore 2004) and
diversification of their activities over a number of years and, thus, have become “challenging institutions” in global migration governance. For quite a while, IOM has also been an object of strong critique coming from the academia and wider expert community and human rights NGOs (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011; Georgi 2010; HRW 2005, 2010; Schatral 2011) viewing it as a global migration police in the context of “the international government of borders” (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010). This critique is subsequently disseminated not only within the transnational expert community but also to “the end users” of IOM services, mostly states - both funders and beneficiaries of its activities.

Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that IOM is experiencing a legitimacy crisis and an increased need for self-legitimation with subsequent improvement of its position in the “complex webs of varied actors pushing change” (Avant et al. 2010: xiii). This self-legitimation does not necessarily need so-called general public (ordinary citizens) as a whole potential legitimating community. Rather, it targets a certain audience or even several different audiences (Broome 2010). Self-legitimation might be directed towards a very particular group of key stakeholders who, in return, are expected to lend legitimacy to an IO. Such potential key stakeholders can be identified among internal and external audiences in relation to both governance issues at stake and the context in which those issues are tackled by IOs. On the ground, this internal-external distinction is often blurred, but one can nevertheless specify the following ideal-typical groups in the case of migration governance. International audiences include other IOs, states (donors), international NGOs, international media, transnational expert community/transnational knowledge networks. Internal

4 Another important challenger for IOM in a very sensitive field of expertise is the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). Just like IOM it ICMPD has been created with a very specific and limited function but with time has overgrown its initial mission and has become a widely recognized “migration IO”. In this case, competition for resources involves completion in knowledge production and knowledge dissemination as is clear from analysis of major RCPs led by ICMPD (Budapest and Prague Processes) and IOM together with UNHCR (Almaty Process). Originating in the EU, Budapest and Prague Processes have been rather unsuccessfully trying to involve the countries from the region. IOM with its more recent Almaty Process that is being presented as “native” to the region and, even more importantly, region-owned has been hoping to fill this niche, in particular through widening participation in this process on the part of other IGOs, as well as NGOs active in the region. From a closer look, Almaty Process seems to be an overarching and rather hybrid framework that aims at covering both migration and asylum issues in Central Asia and larger region, but paradoxically does not include Russia unlike the longer existing Budapest and even Prague Process. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed analysis of these processes that are also important venues for knowledge production and dissemination. This will be done elsewhere.
audiences are found among the different levels of government (recipient states), other parts of local political elite, local NGOs, local media and local migration experts. Beyond this immediate need to restore challenged legitimacy in the eyes of various key audiences, IOs need legitimacy in order to pursue their long-term goals and impose their agenda in particularly volatile and often hostile political environments. All these dynamics contribute to the growing regime complexity in migration field creating new challenges for old established governors and new opportunities for non-referent IOs.

**Legitimacy through Knowledge**

The authority of many international institutions in global governance is based on their expertise and knowledge. This claim seems to be particularly relevant for patchy global migration governance characterized by the absence of both an overarching legal framework and a single referent IOs with a broad mandate in the field. Research has convincingly shown that IOs play significant role in the fragmentation and regionalisation of migration governance (Betts 2011a; Geddes 2012), whereas “international” norms and standards vary significantly depending on those IOs that introduce them to recipient governments (Badie et al. 2008; Kunz et al. 2011). In this context, expert authority (Avant et al. 2011; Barnett and Finnemore 2004) or authoritativeness – authority based on expertise (Zaum 2006) often becomes a key to success for global migration governors. Knowledge – and knowledge claims – functions an essential resource for both referent and non-referent IOs in the migration field. Paradoxically, knowledge can not only create and sustain authority of IOs, but also eventually undermine their legitimacy in cases when this knowledge is effectively challenged by other stakeholders. In order to avoid this trap and, thus, preserve their legitimacy, IOs rely on various strategies and practices of knowledge production and use.

Apart from the well-studied and praised instrumental function of knowledge based on bureaucratic rationality, there are also two symbolic functions of expert knowledge equally important for politics and policy – substantiating and legitimizing (Boswell 2009). The substantiating function is used to give authority to particular policy positions, in particular in cases of political contestation. The legitimizing function is important when an organization needs to rely on expert knowledge to strengthen its claim for jurisdiction over particular
policy areas and to improve its legitimacy as, for example, in the case of IMF (Best 2007). However, Boswell mostly discusses the use of knowledge, and her primary focus is on variations of knowledge use in politics, with the exception of the case study of the European Migration Network that also links to a discussion of policy-making processes. This paper argues that we might get more insights as regards the political use of knowledge if we turn our attention first to the actual processes of knowledge (co)production by those actors that are, in fact, its primary users and disseminators. The spread of knowledge (co)production among such actors – or inspired and sponsored by them – deserves special attention nowadays, when we are witnessing “a creeping McKinseyation of IOs...that need... expertise to do their job properly”5. IOs are, indeed, very active producers or knowledge on migration and migration policies in the current global context, whereas this global migration context is primarily characterized by an enduring uncertainty.

Paradoxically, uncertainty is probably the most stable characteristic of global migration governance and it provides various governors with the freedom to produce and disseminate expert knowledge of two types, particularly valued by stakeholders. I call the first type “predictive knowledge” – knowledge about natural demographic fluctuations, changes in migratory flows, routes, patterns etc. that needs to be produced regularly in order to keep up with changes in the globalized world that increase the perceptions of risk (Beck 1992). Another type of expert knowledge relevant for politics and policy-making at various levels is what I call “normative knowledge” which refers to knowledge claims about the best ways in which particular policies (such as migration control, integration and rights, labour markets, regional cooperation) should be changed and is usually, even though not always, linked to the specific expertise if IOs. Importantly, Boswell also emphasizes the role of risk and uncertainty in defining which knowledge function would be prioritized by an organization in any given context (2009).

In these conditions of risk and uncertainty, IOs compete to be identified as the most suitable providers of “solutions” to various international challenges, they contribute to the construction of reality, often “discovering” problems to be solved – they manage to bring

5 Simon Rushton in an intervention at the Departmental Seminar, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, 12.02.2014.
other actors’ attention to issues that demand intervention and then position themselves as the most suitable problem-solvers (Hulsse 2007; Korneev 2014). Although most recent studies concentrate on the roles of single IOs in migration governance (e.g. Geiger and Pecoud 2010; Potaux 2011; Schatral 2011), the issue of IOs’ competition is also getting attention (Badie et al 2008; Korneev 2013). However, despite being competing bureaucracies (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), IOs often cooperate with each other in the field of knowledge production. Studies that address cases when IOs of different types with overlapping mandates/missions do not only compete, but also cooperate are still rare.6 However, such cases abandon and are provided, for example, by IOM’s cooperation with the World Bank, UN Women, OSCE or ILO; by UNDP’s engagement with IOM and ICMPD or by UNODC cooperation with IOM.

This paper draws upon the “sociology of translation” (Callon 1986) In order to examine how IOs claim exclusive legitimacy in “speaking for others” – for international donors and recipient states, but also for experts and migrants – on the basis of expert knowledge that they produce to sustain a constant need for “translation” between these actors that might at some point become indispensable and thus strengthen the impact of IOs on policy priorities. Ideas from “sociology of translation” or its more reified version generally called Actor-Network Theory (ANT) have already been successfully used in studies focusing, for example, on the concept of failed states (Bueger and Bethke 2013), international fight against piracy (Bueger 2013), international water management projects (Mukhtarov 2012) or EU-Russia cooperation on migration issues (Korneev 2014).

Sociology of translation is an “analytical framework ... particularly well adapted to the study of the role played by science and technology in structuring power relationships” (Callon 1986: 196). The mechanism described by Callon involves four stages or “moments”: problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilization that “constitute the different phases of a general process called translation, during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction and the margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited” (1986: 201). Callon notes that in practice these stages do not necessarily follow this strict chronological pattern, they are closely interrelated and often overlap. In the end, the

6 Notable exceptions are Betts 2013; Elie 2010; Koch 2014.
distinctness of these stages/moments is not important. The core of “translation” is the overarching process of displacement that occurs through these moments, because “to translate is to displace... But to translate is also to express in one’s own language what others say and want, why they act in the way they do and how they associate with each other: it is to establish oneself as a spokesman. At the end of the process, if it is successful, only voices speaking in unison will be heard” (Callon 1986: 216-217). It is this displacement of knowledge-based authority from local actors that underpins knowledge-based self-legitimation strategies of IOs. The nuanced analytical framework produced by Callon helps explaining how local knowledge is being used by IOs.

This analytical framework is well adapted to the study of the role played by both global and local expert knowledge in global governance. When those who attempt to govern have to compete for influence, expert knowledge – both global (external) and local – can play crucial role as a resource and comparative advantage. In many cases, IOs resort to external knowledge produced by experts from “developed countries” (Zaum 2006). Policy norms and standards proposed to local actors are not only being created from scratch, but often selected from a wide range of already existing “success stories” somewhere in the world, thus making “knowledge delivery”? yet another label for (perhaps more subtle) policy transfer and diffusion. Dissemination of transnational knowledge by IOs occurs, according to Nay (2014) through three consecutive normative processes: normalisation, fragmentation and assimilation. These processes involve original producers of “hegemonic knowledge” (in this case – IOs), transnational knowledge networks as well as dissenting experts. This linear model is well suited for analysis of cases where general – not related to any specific local context – normative knowledge produced by global actors is disseminated internationally. But such general – rather abstract – knowledge is not the only type of knowledge used in global governance. Tailor-made knowledge about specific local conditions and complexities is crucial for the authority of IOs (Zaum 2006). This does not necessarily extends to all types of IOs, because some of them might exploit their reputational authority (Sharman 2007) without any particular knowledge of local conditions as it has been convincingly demonstrated by Broome in his study of the IMF (2010). Nevertheless, in the conditions of competition between IOs

---

7 As it is often formulated by the World Bank.
and, in particular, in cases of regime complexity (Betts 2013) there is a certain erosion of reputational authority. Moreover, recent studies in social anthropology of development and in international relations show that when “global” experts unilaterally produce knowledge about local conditions such knowledge often becomes problematic and contested (Mosse and Lewis 2005; Stone 2013).

In order to sustain their legitimacy, IOs, thus, face the need to engage in co-production of knowledge with local partners. This dimension of knowledge production is still very much understudied. However the three-process framework suggested by Nay does not seem to provide enough insights on how IOs manage to successfully produce and disseminate knowledge about specific local conditions. Callon’s framework explaining the phenomenon of translation is better suited to analyse knowledge production in partnerships between global/external and local actors. Since most global governance of international migration takes place under conditions of uncertainty about future migration scenarios, applying the “sociology of translation” to the study of self-legitimation practices used by IOs in migration governance can bring important insights about the role of IOs in problematisation (Hulsse 2007), normalisation (Nay 2014) and specific governance impact in this complex policy field.

Central Asia: a New Migration Governance Terrain

In his study of monetary reforms in Central Asia, Broome rightly points out that “prior to 1992 the Central Asian republics [...] had no previous experience of independent statehood and were tightly integrated during the Soviet era as a single economic unit, which makes them particularly useful cases for studying the impact that the IMF has had in “new” states that lack a track record of previous interactions with external actors, and where new monetary policy frameworks have to be developed from scratch” (2010: 2). A similar description would be valid for migration policies in the region after the break-up of the USSR, which used to sustain probably one of the most restrictive migration regimes in the world. In the conditions of sudden independence and almost immediate migration fluctuations, Central Asian states, just as the other former Soviet republics, faced the challenge of designing and implementing their own migration policies. This task was complicated by a complex character of migrations happening within the Central Asian space, both within and between the five republics,
involving economic and forced migrations (Hisao, Chika and Schoeberlein 2000; Korobkov 2007; Sadovskaya 2007), as well as what has been later labelled as “mixed migration flows”. As a result, just like in case of the Southeast Asia, in Central Asia there is “a lack of coherent national migration policies and institutions [...] immigration and emigration policies are largely short term and reactive” (Kneebone 2010: 384).

Contemporary Central Asia is characterized by relatively high (in comparison to the rest of the post-Soviet region) fertility rates, lower wages, visible decline of agricultural sector (in particular, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), uneven and spontaneous urbanization (in particular, in Kazakhstan), and a volatile socio-political environment (Laruelle 2010; Ryazantsev and Horie 2011). Migration plays an important role in the region’s social and economic development, most notably through remittances. Flows within Central Asia and larger Eurasian Migration System (Ivakhniouk 2003) are highly diverse and include permanent and temporary labour migration flows, asylum seeking, irregular migration, as well as transit and circular migration. Over the last ten to fifteen years, there have been significant shifts in the structure of migration flows in the region. Forced migration and ethnic migration have decreased considerably\(^8\) while economic migration has become more prominent (Ivakhnyuk 2009). Around 80% of international migration flows into and out of CIS countries are within the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region.

This said, migration experiences of the Central Asian countries are very diverse. They share many similar features, but also exhibit some distinct political and socio-economic differences. They have very different economic situations, which suggest that the demand for international involvement might also vary significantly. These variations provide different contexts for the activity of IOs, which also have different expectations. Moreover, these countries receive various degrees of international attention for various ‘supply’ reasons deemed important by international donors that might not necessarily correspond to the perception of needs in the region (Czerniecka and Heathershaw 2011).

---

\(^8\) Probably with the exception of repatriates in cases of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.
Uzbekistan is the most populous (circa 30 mln people) and one of the biggest emigration countries of the region (Thorez 2010), whereas the official discourse has often tended to downplay this dynamic. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are major emigration sources in the region, as well as the countries heavily dependent on migrants’ remittances. According to some estimates, just before the economic crisis approximately one-third of the employable population of Kyrgyzstan was working abroad (Schmidt and Sagynbekova 2008). The World Bank has indicated that Tajikistan is the world’s largest recipient of migrants’ remittances in proportion to GDP, in 2012 remittances as a share of GDP were 52 percent in Tajikistan, 31 percent in Kyrgyzstan (World Bank 2011a, 2014). On the one hand, as estimated in 2010, labour migration from Tajikistan was at 800,000 or 11% of the entire population, although some experts note that due to partial documentation and statistics this figure could be higher⁹. Russia has always been the main destination country for migrants from Tajikistan – 80% in 2013 (World Bank 2014). On the other hand, very specific demands in certain sectors of Tajik economy (construction and electricity generation) attract limited numbers of qualified immigrants to the country. Several thousand Uzbek and Kyrgyz nationals reside and work mainly in the border regions (Tajikistan Migration Profile 2010). Tajikistan and, to a lesser extent Uzbekistan, has land borders with Afghanistan and this creates additional challenges for migration situation in these countries, as well as particular difficulties for their incorporation in regional migration and border management schemes (Lewington 2010).

Kazakhstan, having experienced the role of a predominantly emigration country after the break-up of the USSR when significant numbers of ethnic Russian, German, Jewish and other ‘Russian-speaking’ populations were leaving the country (Dietz 2000; Peyrouse 2007; Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010), has gradually become the second-largest key destination country in the Eurasian migration system (Sadovskaya 2007; Ryazantsev and Korneev 2014). Kazakhstan is the only country that has borders with Russia, but also with three of the five Central Asian republics and, thus, is the main transit route for migrants from other Central Asian republics as well as for those coming from the bigger Asian region. Kazakhstan also experiences intensive internal migration, which consists of migratory movements of the

---

⁹ Observations at the conference “Role of migration in modernization and innovative development of the origin and destination countries: the migratory bridge between the countries of Central Asia and Russia”, 28-29 November 2011, Khujand, Tajikistan.
population of Kazakhstan from the rural populated areas to regions with more developed infrastructure and higher living standards (Kazakhstan Migration Profile 2010: 12-13). Therefore, Kazakhstan’s migration policy challenges seem to be more similar to those of Russia than to the other Central Asian countries.

Historically, IOs have been playing a leading role in the establishment and further development not only of migration policies, but also of the very institutional structures responsible for these policies and their implementation in Central Asian countries. At the inception phase (after the break-up of the USSR), when Central Asia was still a “virgin land” for external governors\(^\text{10}\), their involvement was mostly linked to designing of migration policies and relevant institutions, as well as fostering governmental capacities, creating and reforming agencies, etc. – very much like in Russia and other post-Soviet countries\(^\text{11}\). These processes started in the region quickly after the independence, with Tajikistan being a latecomer in this process due to the civil war lasting through the 1990-s. Some sort of “re-discovering” of Central Asia has happened after the USA intervention in Afghanistan triggering both new migration processes and growing interest of various international donors (with broader geopolitical agendas) to the region. This has eventually led to multiplication of migration-related projects in Central Asian countries implemented by a variety of IOs (Korneev 2013) which has literary stirred up contentious politics of migration governance in the region.

IOM is often described as an organisation that is easy to work with, it is flexible and efficient, it can deliver whatever the state wants from it quickly and with a high standard of quality, in other words it is a reliable, loyal and, thus, convenient partner.\(^\text{12}\) Seen in action, IOM indeed seems to be a rather loyal and careful governor: “while not a standard setter as such, the IOM does not shy away from critiquing state practices. But this occurs at the level of dialogue rather than action, which is in any event limited by the IOM’s mandate” (Kneebone 2010: 392). One

\(^{10}\) Similar to how much of the Kazakhstan’s territory was targeted by a famous “virgin lands” campaign implemented by the Soviet government in the 1960-s to make those lands suitable for agricultural needs.

\(^{11}\) Informal communication with a former top official in the Russian migration service (during the 1990-s), Moscow, 23.10.2013.

\(^{12}\) Similar descriptions of IOM were given to the author in private conversations by, on the one hand, a member of staff of the EU Delegation in Kazakhstan (January 2014) and, on the other hand, by a member of staff of IOM Central Asia (May 2014). Very similar depictions of IOM were given in Russia (Korneev 2014).
would expect that UN-family IOs should have more room for manoeuvre in such situations, as they can justify their critical stances by their mandate and legitimacy in specific issue-areas. However, this does not seem to be the case for such a relevant body as the International Labour Organisation (Kneebone 2010). This description of Southeast Asian situation is equally relevant for Central Asia where ILO is also described by donors as an inefficient and closed structure (Korneev 2013). ILO is also characterised as slow, overly bureaucratic organisation with incomplete or even zero feedback effects by some of its partners from the civil society; at the same time, civil society actors pay credit to ILO for its role in promoting of formal conventions and pushing for minimum standards important for creating and sustaining opportunity structures in the field of migration regulation\(^\text{13}\).

Some other UN bodies – such as UNDP and UNODC – are viewed rather positively by authorities in the region, as their mandates and portfolio of activities seem to provide for legitimacy in volatile political context. However, this quasi-strong positions of UN agencies in Central Asian countries provide space for more competition on the part of IOM, as well as other actors such as ICMPD\(^\text{14}\), OSCE\(^\text{15}\) or even big international NGOs such as International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCRCS) and ACTED. A crucial difference between IOs from the UN family and such IOs as IOM is in that the former have mandate, mission and ideology that are barely flexible and usually tend to have “one size fits all” approach that might be an obstacle for functioning in a particular local context. On the contrary, IOM is widely known for its flexibility, “tailor-made” approach and ability to listen to the needs of the governments in question. Such difference has important bearing both for donors and for recipient governments and, eventually, for the impact that might be achieved in a competitive environment.

At the same time, these organizations also exhibit viable cooperation dynamics as they engage in various modes of cooperation with each other and with other multiple actors present in the field. For example, UNDP – a UN organisation that has a more general remit in developmental issues – has been cooperating with the EU on border and migration policy

\(^{13}\) Interview with a member of staff of a Tajik pro-migrant NGO, 03.06.2014.

\(^{14}\) International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

\(^{15}\) Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
transfer in Central Asia (Gavrilis 2011). UNDP is, thus, similar to such UN body as UNHCR – specialized in refugee protection issues – but also to other organisations within the UN system such as ILO, UN Women (previously UNIFEM) or UNODC that have also been involved in migration governance in Central Asia and, beyond that region, in the post-Soviet space more generally. ILO has implemented several large projects funded by the European Commission that aimed to facilitate intra-regional cooperation in the field of labour migration (Korneev 2013). UNODC has been playing a leading role in intervening on issues of human-trafficking working with major donors such as the USA and the EU, while UN Women has engaged in cooperation with IOM on issues linking migration with the socio-economic situation of women in the region, mainstreaming gender issues in migration policies of Central Asian states.

Simultaneously with emergence of various cooperative formats, Central Asia witnesses other cases when legitimacy of IOs active in migration governance is questioned and even undermined. Many IOs do not stay within the limits that are traditionally seen as their “natural” mandates, they cross these boundaries and enter each other’s territories. For instance, IOM has grown into a significant and almost indispensable governor in the field of counter-trafficking which is usually viewed as covered by UNODC with its “organized crime” mandate. Still, many other IOs also aim at stretching their mandate to the issues of human trafficking. While UNODC insists on its mandate as based on the Palermo Protocol (2000), the UNDP has argued that it has the anti-trafficking coordinating role for Eastern Europe and CIS under the broader development agenda (2004), whereas IOM declares its own competence for reasons of both counter-human trafficking measures’ relevance for migration and, importantly, IOM’s extensive expertise and experience in this field. IOM’s indeed has long experience working on human trafficking issues, stemming from its Council’s resolution (1994) and backed by several major international donors. As regards the post-Soviet space, IOM has primarily gained this experience working in Eastern European countries, in particular implementing a large EU-funded project in Russia. Eventually, IOM has also started promoting anti-HT initiatives in Central Asia. Moreover, ILO, UNFPA, OHCHR, UN Women and OSCE also

---

16 The biggest anti-trafficking projects in the region have been implemented by IOM, and currently IOM together with UNDP is conducting assessment of Eastern European and Central Asian NGOs’ capacities to work on counter-trafficking issues for yet another project in the region.
claim their relevance for this policy field. An interesting case is ILO’s involvement with human trafficking issues in 2008-2010 in the framework of its labour migration programme funded by the EU\textsuperscript{17}. On the other hand, UNODC – as if trying to recreate balance in this field and despite the fact that its priority in Central Asia is countering drug-related crime – has become vocal as regards the need to protect the rights of those who have fallen victims of “illicit movement of people” or in other words to focus on “protection of victims of human trafficking and smuggled migrants’ rights” (UNODC 2011). This provides good grounds to doubt the existence of strong institutions in the area of human trafficking and rather think of the proliferation of the phenomena of challenged institutions in this and all other sub-fields of global migration governance.

Beyond these separate cases of recent competition and cooperation, Central Asia presents a very rich picture of IOs’ challenging involvement in migration governance from “no man’s land” state of affairs when former Soviet Central Asia republics gained their independence in 1991 to the present time when multiple migration governors have become prominent in the region. The next section brings in some insights on how various IOs interact with each other and with other stakeholders in the production of knowledge necessary to legitimate their positions in the field.

**Self-Legitimating Practices: Knowledge Co-production in Global-Local Partnerships**

Most of current migration within the post-Soviet Eurasian migration system is considered as labour migration and much of this labour migration is often claimed to be of irregular nature. This labour-irregular migration nexus is both framed and reflected in the discourse and action of multiple external governors involved in Eurasian and, in particular, Central Asian migration governance. Importantly, however, that migration governance priorities in Central Asia are not explicitly framed in terms of irregular migration. IOs emphasize – and keep this story-line for donors – that Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan face the challenges and consequences of significant labour emigration\textsuperscript{18}. Therefore, many IOs’ activities in these countries are

\textsuperscript{17} Interview with a member of staff of Tajik human rights NGO, 03.06.2014.

\textsuperscript{18} See, for example, IOM operational strategy for Tajikistan 2012-2015.
targeting the (potential) labour migrants. Therefore, irregular migration is either regarded as part of this labour migration governance package or excluded from discussions at all. Nevertheless, there are indications that labour migration is strongly linked to irregular migration, as the latter comes on and off the agenda through the projects implemented in the region by various IOs. There are no umbrella projects that would exclusively target irregular migration issues. Instead, in the constant process of translation of the world “best practices” to the local stakeholders, some other migration governance mechanisms are presented as relevant for this purpose and in this way mostly labour migration projects and initiatives are targeting the problem of large-scale irregular migration in the region. IOs are, thus, translating the politically sensitive reality of irregular migration issues into more positively oriented discussions on labour migration. While implementing its regional labour migration project in 2008-2010, ILO was aiming at promoting standards that would create possibilities for a larger scale legal (regular) migration, thus diminishing the need for irregular migration. In a similar setting, within the framework of their Central Asian Regional Migration Programme (CARMP)\textsuperscript{19} since 2010, the World Bank and IOM have been promoting private recruitment agencies as a solution for diminishing the role of irregular migration channels. These links between labour and irregular migration governance – translated by the IOs as “root causes approach” to irregular migration issues – are well established within CARMP as it covers not only several migrant origin countries in the region, but also Kazakhstan and Russia as the major destination countries. The Programme emphasizes that approaches to labour migration governance featuring counter-irregularity components are to be implemented in coordinated efforts by countries of origin and destination. CARMP is a good case-study of how IOs with rather different mandates and profiles – namely IOM, the World Bank and UN Women – come together for knowledge co-production that is performed through the mechanisms of translation identified by Callon (1986). Several sub-fields of CARMP activities can provide good illustrations here.

\textsuperscript{19} The Programme is implemented by three main partners – IOM, the World Bank and UN Women. The point about smooth cooperation thanks to a good division of labour within this programme has been made by both a member of staff from IOM Central Asia in private discussions with the author (29.05.2014, Astana) and a member of staff from UN Women Tajikistan in an interview on 03.06.2013 (Dushanbe).
Having arrived in a new migration governance terrain, IOs first *problematize* migration challenges characterizing individual Central Asian countries locking them into a strictly defined regional framework and developmental agenda. There is some evidence to suggest that despite significant variations in migration dynamics and broader economic and socio-political circumstances described above, most IOs in their activities prefer to approach Central Asia as a region. Facing the challenge of Central Asian countries not ascribing to a homogenous region, IOM and its CARMP partners have been trying to construct this regional reality, its specific features, comparability and similarities between its parts, often referring to common historic past when the present states did not exist and instead the territories they encompass now fitted into some other state-like systems. IOs have also been trying to approach Central Asia as a region comparable and similar to other regions of the world, namely to Eastern Europe – where many innovative regional migration management projects of IOs such as IOM and ICMPD have originated – and in this vein they seem to try to link experiences lived in Central Asia to those in Eastern Europe by the common Soviet past (Korneev 2013). Through this framing, production of migration-related knowledge of both predictive and normative types takes on regional character and involves experts on “Central Asian region” that allows disregarding certain country-specific characteristics.

Further, the developmental agenda – prioritized by the World Bank – is used in order to channel local knowledge production in the direction of globally produced knowledge on migration and development. This overarching philosophy of “migration and development” promoted globally by the same World Bank, various UN agencies and major donor states (de Haas 2012) functions as the direct link between global norms and local conditions, targeting migration as resource for development without questioning their interaction in concrete settings. Producing knowledge on migration and development in the local context, thus, serves the need to lock the discussions in this context in order to promote relevant policy instruments, avoid discussions of other more politically sensitive issues and, thus, stabilize the legitimacy of IOs’ involvement in “internal affairs” of the rather authoritarian states in the region.

---

20 These are usually evoked by critically-oriented experts challenging “one size fits all” approach used by IOM and other IOs in the region.
Specific features – uncertainties – of individual Central Asian countries, however, constrain or, vice versa, enlarge the ability of certain IOs to act. To address these uncertainties, IOs proceed with *interessement* of local actors using their particular positions in the field. The general developmental dynamics in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the countries’ strong dependence on remittances and generally poor state of their economies make the position of the World Bank particularly strong. That is why the World Bank – clearly a non-referent IO for migration issues – has been successful in its translation efforts as regards the Philippines’s migration management model. This model – based on organised recruitment of migrant workers – has been a part and parcel of the World Bank’ developmental agenda for a number of years in various regions of the world. It has been presented to the Tajik authorities as the most up-to-date normative knowledge on migration enabling them to organise, control and protect labour migrants from Tajikistan in the best possible way.\(^\text{21}\) The model has been further promoted by IOM and embraced by both Tajik officials and local NGOs\(^\text{22}\), despite significant criticism from the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH 2011) presenting the crucial differences between the Philippines and Tajikistan as reasons for this model “non-fit” with the local realities. To counteract this critique, IOM gains support from well-established experts from Tajikistan and other countries in Central Asia through their involvement in various research and training projects funded by these IOs.\(^\text{23}\) Projects studying organised recruitment and its impact on migration patterns from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are getting continuous support within the relevant national administrations\(^\text{24}\).

The roles of IOs and their respective local counterparts are interrelated and reinforced through the mechanism of *enrolment*. UN Women involved in CARMP by IOM mostly to convey a positive, inclusive and, at the same time, gender-specific image of the Programme activities is playing a major role by alleviating critique from IOM. In particular, various IOM moves to significantly increase its “population of concern” involved launching massive research on so-called “abandoned women” – women staying in the country while their

\(^{21}\) Interview with a free-lance migration expert who has rich cooperation experience with various IOs in Central Asia, Dushanbe, 02.06.2014.

\(^{22}\) Interview with a member of staff of a Tajik human rights NGO, 03.06.2014.

\(^{23}\) Informal communication with a migration expert from a Dushanbe-based think-tank, Dushanbe, 26.11.2014.

\(^{24}\) Interview with a former member of staff of the Kyrgyz Migration Service, Bishkek, 10.10.2014; informal communication with a member of staff of the Tajik Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment, Dushanbe, 28.11.2004.
husbands leave to work abroad and eventually being left with no proper economic means or even eventually forced to divorce. The scale and character of this phenomena in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is far from clear and its significance for migration-related context is disputed by various local experts.25 IOs’ discourses on “abandoned women” are contested by many local experts, pointing to the fact that this knowledge is produced by researchers who lack sufficient knowledge of local conditions and, hence, professional expert legitimacy within local expert communities. This leads to questioning overall expert authority of certain IOs, such as IOM and UN Women in this particular case. Such questioning of expert legitimacy by the expert community renders the task of stabilizing IOs’ expert authority even more important, especially when such dissenting expert voices come from well-established professionals who have good links with governmental bodies in the region. However, IOM is keen to direct resources – namely in the field of research – towards this area. Cooperation with UN Women whose reputation for gender mainstreaming and women-sensitive research is widespread in the region is crucial for this IOM’s strategy.26

Another example of enrolment comes from Kazakhstan. In the framework of IOM’s cooperation with the World Bank and UN Women, when migrants’ rights and, in particular female migrants’ rights, are very much in focus, there are interesting cases of using knowledge produced by other actors for legitimating IOs’ own agenda. In Kazakhstan, this happens in the context of a prominent working group that includes rather unexpected participants. Together with representatives of the government, as well as IOM, the World Bank and UN Women, the working group also involves one of the biggest consumers of specific agricultural production in the region – the Philip Morris company that uses tobacco collected by migrants. This tripartite setting – albeit different from more representative but also vaguer format that underpins the functioning of the ILO – is a very interesting case of partnership with private actors27. There is a number of reasons for such engagement, one of them being the negative visibility of migrants’ exploitation during tobacco collection that has been signalled to the

---

25 Interview with a free-lance migration expert, Dushanbe, 21.11.2014.
26 Interview with a member of staff of UN Women, Dushanbe, 04.06.2014; informal communication with a member of staff of IOM, Dushanbe, 22.11.2014.
27 Interesting details on the involvement of private actors in migration governance were provided by Alexander Betts in his talk “The Private Sector in Global Migration Governance” at the EUI Migration Working Group (EUI, Florence) on 10.10.2012.
public by the Human Rights Watch report having wide resonance (Human Rights Watch 2010). The official rationale of such working groups formally created under the auspices of CARMP is presented as the need to build trust relationships between all those actors involved with the ultimate purpose of increasing companies’ social responsibility and improving migrants’ conditions. However, more importantly, the knowledge about “bad” practices of migrant labour in the country produced by one of the most influential transnational NGOs in the field has allowed IOM – acting as a “reputational intermediary” (Broome 2010) – to play an active role in engaging business in practical exchanges with authorities about migration policy in Kazakhstan, where such an engagement previously existed only on discourse level.

To implement the fourth work package of the CARMP (“research component”), IOM and DFID via a private consultancy firm hired a research team to analyse the existing research on migration in/from/through Central Asia and to identify further research needs that could possibly be developed into policy-relevant projects. The creation of this research group demonstrates how migration-related knowledge co-production by IOs is taking shape. Without going into detail of the content of the work done by the group, it is important to mention its composition. The group is headed by an established scholar from a reputable European university who possesses “strong knowledge of migration and the Central Asia region, strong knowledge of UK research and publishing environment and standards... and experience producing research that is of the standards required by DFID”. The group includes a well-known Russian expert on migration in the post-Soviet space, as well as several experts from Central Asia. The activities of the group are supervised by DFID and closely linked to the other CARMP work packages implemented by IOM, the World Bank and UN Women. Seen through the prism of Callon’s ideas on translation, this is a perfect composition based on properly implemented mobilization representing “various relevant collectivities” (1986: 196). It enables claims to both global expertise and local knowledge, legitimates both the process

---

28 Private discussions with IOM Central Asia staff, May 2014.
29 It is rather problematic due to the absence of any publicly available information about this activity. All information used here comes from the author’s informal communication with the private consultancy company that organised the research logistics and with some members of the research group in the summer and autumn 2014 and some – unpublished – documents to which the author has gained access during his fieldwork in the region.
30 Author’s correspondence with the private consultancy company, July 2014.
and the outputs of this knowledge co-production and, eventually, lends legitimacy to the actors producing this knowledge, including IOM.

A close look at these knowledge-generating activities of IOs helps revealing several significant shifts in the way knowledge is produced and, more specifically, in those who contributes to its production and local-global dissemination. First, there are fluctuations in terms of “location” of expertise. We certainly observe changes from global to local and back to global (or external) sources of expertise preferred by IOs. Second, IOs seek to move from cooperation with the older – “Soviet” – generation of local experts from academic circles and clearly articulated positions in the field of migration studies to a new generation of more “neo-liberal” free-lancers who move from one project to another with no particular knowledge “backpacks”. Third, there are also certain disciplinary changes reflected in the shift from co-optation of primarily demographers and sociologists to political scientists and public policy experts. Fourth, we also observe changes in experts’ professional profiles: preferences in issue changes: involvement of experts who can equally well deal with migration and at least one other field – development, gender, children, human rights – a reflection of new approaches to migration governance linking it to governance interventions in other fields and by other – non-referent – international organisations. Finally, there are also changes in the way IOs are involved in knowledge production – their current preferences for direct but insulated via intermediaries production of knowledge seem to reflect their strive to derive expert authority from a broader support base within knowledge circles. These changes signal that opposing perceptions of what constitutes important migration-related problems are based on similarly opposing perceptions of what can be defined as important policy-relevant and legitimacy-enhancing knowledge. This knowledge produced by IOs in specific regions relying on local expertise is then gradually incorporated into “international migration narratives” (Pécoud 2015) circulating between local and global governance levels through transnational knowledge networks.

**Conclusion**

IOs are the major players in the game of depoliticizing migration (Pecoud 2015) – by doing this they make migration issues seem requiring merely technocratic solutions – hence their expertise is useful and is often proclaimed to give them legitimacy in the field. IOM that has
been continuously manifesting a mission creep and diversification of its activities over a number of years has become a challenged institution through analysis of its interaction with other global migration governors in Central Asia. Therefore, for IOM knowledge is a resource crucial to sustain its quasi-monopoly in migration governance field. For non-referent IOs knowledge – its specific strands with emphasis on particular linkages between mandates of these IOs and migration – is important in order to establish their legitimacy in this sphere. That is why challenging IOs are also increasingly getting involved in knowledge production.

The self-legitimation through knowledge happens via knowledge-generating activities implying co-optation of both internationally recognized and local experts where IOs come to be seen as the sole sources of reliable knowledge. The self-legitimation through partnerships happens in global-global and global-local formats. The former include partnerships between IOs involved in mutual legitimation, such as in cases of IOM and OSCE, the EU and ICMPD or the World Bank, IOM and UN Women, as well as with “global” experts. The latter implies engagement with “local” experts, governmental and civil society actors via implementing partnerships, multiplication of working groups and various knowledge production activities. Knowledge production in partnerships through stages of translation leads to reshuffling of local expert communities and presents new constellations of experts as “speaking for all the others”. IOM is particularly successful in this endeavour and is often praised for its creativity and innovation.

Practices of self-legitimation through knowledge production and partnerships tend to be mutually reinforcing which emphasizes cumulative nature of legitimacy for many IOs in this field. Knowledge production interventions by global governors in local contexts increase reputational authority (Sharman 2007) of global governors in relations with their domestic and international audiences. Paradoxically, as the need for knowledge-based legitimacy increases, it raises important questions about reliability of knowledge produced by both challenged and challenging institutions.
References


Mukhtarov, F. (2012) Rethinking the Travel of Ideas: Policy Translation in the Water Sector, in Policy and Politics, DOI: 10.1332/030557312X655459


Regulation, CARIM-East RR 2013/44, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (Fi): European University Institute, 2013.


