

Migrant Workers Flock to Kazakhstan

Author: [Adil Kojikhov](#)

Unemployed Kazaks are fuming over the influx of illegal foreign workers

Astana has introduced a series of emergency measures to try to curb the influx of economic migrants into the country. The measures include tighter border security, legislation to protect the domestic labour market and a controversial visa-style regime to keep tabs on visitors from other Central Asian states.

Astana has already introduced the "migration card" system - essentially 5-day visas - with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and is currently negotiating one with Kyrgyzstan. It's concerned that its already serious unemployment rate is being driven up by the migrant workers. There are fears that local tensions between Kazaks and the foreigners could lead to violence.

Like many residents of the city of Turkestan in southern Kazakhstan, Nurdaulet, a former farm labourer, believes the Kazak authorities should come down hard on the overseas workers. He and others claim that the migrants' willingness to work for little money drives down wages to levels local people cannot afford to live on.

At present, over 5,000 illegal migrants work in southern Kazakhstan and around 4,500 in the Almaty region. A senior official in the former, Nurlan Seitjapparov, revealed there had been 568 passport violations in a single week. The majority of citizens arriving in Kazakhstan for seasonal work possess no licenses or documents allowing them to work or stay in the republic.

In addition, the state loses considerable revenue due to the non-payment of taxes. According to Seitjapparov, the authorities intend to make employers responsible for hiring illegal foreign workers. But the fact is, migrants to Kazakhstan are attractive to employers as they are willing to take almost any job because, however low, the wages they receive are up to twelve times more than they would earn at home.

The economic migrants are mainly hired by the farming sector - especially skilled construction workers from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan - who are attractive as low-cost, high quality workers

Akmal, a construction worker from the village of Zervar, in the Surkhandaria region of Uzbekistan, and his fellow-villagers are building a house in a suburb of Shymkent. Their employer hired them through a middle-man and registered them with the local administration. Akmal and his friends fear leaving the premises, scared of being arrested and deported. They have to serve their six-month employment on a patch of land measuring 15 square metres.

Nevertheless, Akmal is happy to be employed. There is no work for him back home and this is unlikely to change in the short term. Akmal did not disclose his salary, but said that he would now be able to feed his large family for a year.

Usubali, a resident of Kara-Su, in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, has a large family. He has reared livestock all his life but can no longer find work in his native country. Usubali and his grown-up children went to search for work in the Yenbekshi-Kazak district of Kazakhstan. He's now employed by a tobacco plantation in one of the local farms. Usubali and his two sons hope to be paid around 50,000 tenge, 340 US dollars for the season. This will feed their large family during the autumn, winter, and spring to come, until the next journey to Kazakhstan for work.

Illegal workers are not concerned about the introduction of the registration cards for migrants. They are convinced that there will be other ways of entering the country and there is likely to be little change in this respect. Besides, the authorities of the neighbouring countries show little interest in changing the status quo. By leaving for Kazakhstan, their citizens lower unemployment back home.

Kazakhstan's southern regions are overflowing with cheap labour from neighbouring states. This brings serious problems, which cannot be solved quickly, if at all, and so far the authorities have offered few solutions.

Adil Kojikhov is a regular IWPR contributor

Location: [Uzbekistan](#)
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