

Kazakhstan's Migration Control Regime, Undocumented Labour Migrants and the Informal Migration Industry

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While Russia's migration policy has been liberalizing considerably since 2007 in response to its growing labour need and the looming demographic crisis, Kazakhstan has introduced a tighter migration control regime that makes it ever more difficult for the various "labour migrants" from the neighbouring states (mainly from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) to work legally.

Notwithstanding the adoption of a new Law on Migration in Kazakhstan earlier this year to regulate the different categories of migrants and the prevalence of a stringent migration control regime, migrants from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan continue to devise a variety of informal and not-so legal ways, ranging from the use of kin and ethnic networks to *blat* and bribes to obtain registration, find jobs without a work permits, extend the term of stay and obtain residency. This has led to the emergence of an 'informal migration industry' based on a close and mutually-reinforcing nexus between the official organs that are in charge of combating 'illegal labour migration' and the various intermediaries and networks that offer jobs and protection (*krysha*) to the migrants. Based on interviews with migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in Almaty and Astana, this paper details how migrant are able to utilise connections and networks to attain a stamp of legality while working within the shadow structure. Kazakhstan's migration regime, while appearing stringent and rigid on the surface, is considerably pliable and porous underneath.