Tajik Labour Migration to Russia:
Tajik Responses to Migrant Vulnerability and Russian State Policies

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses Tajik labour migration to Russia during the period from 2000 to 2010, focusing on each states’ actions in resolving their own interests regarding the large number of labour migrants that leave Tajikistan to seek work in Russia. The article begins by outlining the history of and reasons for the high rate of Tajik labour migration to Russian, using social and economic migration theories to support these ideas. The article goes on to document many of the difficulties faced by Tajik labour migrants in Russia, and examines Russian policies that both exacerbate and ameliorate these problems. The article also examines Tajik state policies concerning the difficulties faced by labour migrants in Russia, concluding that as Tajikistan has little recourse to improve the conditions of migrants once they are within Russian, it has focused rather on domestic policies to maximize the benefits of financial remittances, to prepare migrants for their time abroad, and to make travel to Russia more accessible. Finally, the article concludes by considering some of the future scenarios that might take place concerning the large number of Tajik labour migrants in Russia and Tajikistan’s financial dependence on their remittances.

Keywords: labour migration, Tajikistan, Russia, human rights, migration law, transnationalism, post-Soviet space.
All Central Asian republics faced economic difficulties, social problems and in some cases, political instability during the transition from Soviet rule to independence. The combination of these factors led many households to seek ways to maximize their financial capacity and cope with the many challenges of a new era. In many cases the poverty faced by these households was such that combined with the lack of a social safety net, previously supplied by the Soviet Union, it became a matter of survival to find new financial resources. As a result, labour migration became a major, if not the main, coping mechanism employed by Central Asians, particularly from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, in order to gain more diverse income sources and have a better chance at ensuring financial well-being. Until now, most of these labour migrants traveled to Russia because of a shared Soviet history and connections that continue to this day. However, labour migrants from Central Asia encounter countless difficulties in Russia, despite this shared past. These difficulties range from complicated registration laws to mistreatment or abuse at the hands of employers, authorities and others, and they often stem from a growing feeling of xenophobia and nationalism in Russia.

Arguably, of the Central Asian states, Tajikistan has faced the greatest challenges since independence. Tajikistan was nearly ripped apart by a civil war, and with extremely limited natural resources and little industry, there are few options for this state that formerly relied heavily on subsidies from the Soviet centre. Now, as a result, Tajikistan depends on remittances from labour migration more than any other Central Asian country. The amount of remittances sent to Tajikistan is staggering when one takes into account their percentage of the GDP. As many as one million Tajik labour migrants work in Russia, and for the year 2007 US $1.8 billion was channeled through official banks, comprising thirty percent of the countries GDP. Moreover, other sources project that the actual number is closer to forty-six percent of the GDP (Marat 2009). Actual remittance values are hard to come by, especially as a traditional distrust of banks as well as the potential for high interest rates on transfers means that many Tajiks rely on informal channels such as acquaintances or the hawala system. The amounts of remittances are hence most likely underreported. However, even taking this into account one can see the vital role remittances have come to play in Tajikistan, and the severe negative effect that a sudden drop in remittances would incur. The Tajik state has, indeed, begun to search for ways to maximize the economic power of these remittances to help rebuild the state.

However, Tajikistan’s government is not the only actor affecting labour migration. The Russian government has been trying to establish its own post-Soviet policies regarding migration. It has considered several different approaches, trying to balance its demographic crisis and demand for labour on the one hand with an increasingly nationalistic and xenophobic population on the other. Starting with the Putin era three trends emerge, as before this time migration flows were driven more by ethnic motivations to return to titular states, as well as refugee/IDP movements, rather than by economic-influenced labour migration. First, from 2000-2005, an effort was made, by way of creating laws focusing on the law enforcement aspects of migration, to create the institutions needed for a migration policy (Korobkov 2007). In 2005, a second period started, which tried to increase permanent migration and increase the numbers of legal
labour migrants (Korobkov 2007). However, in 2007 more laws were passed that made it easier to register legally for employment, while also introducing a quota system (Human Rights Watch 2009). Other laws passed in 2009 seem to be even more directly a response to xenophobic ways of thinking, such as one which limits the numbers of foreigners allowed to work in bazaars and retail (Laurelle 2008). Unfortunately, the more nationalistic way of thinking has continued to grow, to the detriment of the migrants. The financial crisis exacerbated this problem to an even greater extent.

This article analyzes the two states’ reactions to labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia. To begin with, the article will provide a background of Tajik labour migration. Then, the financial effect of remittances on Tajikistan will be discussed, including whether the state has been able to effectively promote developmental uses for the funds rather than simple consumption. Russia’s reaction to the migrants will be analyzed, both among the population and by the government. Finally, the Tajik state’s inability to exert any real influence on Russia regarding treatment of migrants will be discussed. In the end, it will be found that Tajikistan would like to benefit to the maximum extent from migration, and that it also has an interest in protecting its citizens abroad. However, like most migrant producing countries, it has very little leverage regarding its relations with Russia, and as a result migrants suffer. Tajikistan did begin to find ways to focus on policies at home that can help migrants and maximize the impact of their remittances. This is one area over which the Tajik state does have more control, although again, difficulties are encountered in encouraging people to spend personal finances in a certain way. The ways in which this situation for migrants could grow even worse should Russia suffer increased economic difficulties will also be examined, as Russia might deal with problems at home by way of anti-immigrant rhetoric.

REASONS FOR LABOUR MIGRATION FROM TAJIKISTAN

Of the various migration theories that scholars of the subject put forth, the ‘new economic theory’ stresses that individual and household decisions lead to migration. This theory states that migrants decide to leave their countries not only for financial gain, but to create a social safety net that may be missing from the state in which they live. The decision is generally not an individual one as family members together decide to send a labour migrant who will enhance chances for a better way of life, or even survival, for the entire family (Massey et al. 1993). This theory applies to Tajikistan not only because of Tajik culture, which stresses the importance of the family and the community over individual choice (Harris 2004), but also because of the turbulent Tajik history since independence. The civil war in the early 1990s resulted in the deaths of at least 50,000, and caused 600,000 to be internally displaced and 80,000 made refugees, significant numbers for a country with a population of about seven million (Taylor 2002). As a result, the government was initially unable to provide basic state services, especially outside of the capital and in regions which had sided with the opposition during the civil war, and it certainly was not providing any sort of social safety net to a population that was very much in need of one. The end of the war saw refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as former combatants, returning home only to find that there was
little chance for employment and little assistance from the government. The severity of the damage caused by the war varied regionally, as the south, especially the Garm area, suffered most from the fighting. Gorno-Badakhshan suffered not only from geographic isolation but also was allotted an unequal share of resources in response to support of opposition during the war (Gomart 2003). All of the country has experienced similar difficulties to varying extent, however, so out-migration takes place in all regions. Between 17 and 30 per cent of the male working-age population of any one region is engaged in labour migration (Erlich 2006). Subsistence farming is made difficult by Tajikistan’s particularly mountainous terrain, so people were forced to seek other ways to survive. As most (although not all) labour migrants are men between the ages of twenty and forty years old, and sixty per cent are married, it can be inferred that migration was, at least initially, a decision that was reached for the sake of family survival (Mughal 2007).

To reiterate, there are several ‘push’ factors responsible for Tajik labour migration. Economic difficulties challenged Tajikistan after independence, and the civil war exacerbated this. The sudden end of support from Moscow after the fall of the Soviet Union caused economic crisis, while the civil war resulted in even more devastation and unemployment. With a crumbling infrastructure, little industrial development, and lack of arable land, many families had little choice but to send at least one member out as a migrant laborer.

WHY RUSSIA?

Given the many problems that Tajiks face upon migrating to Russia, which include difficulties with language, xenophobia, difficulties obtaining documents and vulnerability at the hands of their employers, one might wonder why such large numbers continue to migrate to this country in particular. However, the network theory for the perpetuation of labour migration explains that migrants often rely on previously established ties to countries, employers, and other migrants when migrating (Massey et al. 1993). This explains why such large numbers of labour migrants are found in a particular receiving country and often predominately within certain regions, cities or even communities. Financial costs of migration, which are usually very high, are cut down when one is able to move with the help of a community member already established in the receiving country. Furthermore, social costs are also reduced as the difficulties and stresses of trying to live and work in a foreign place are assuaged by the presence one’s fellow nationals. Most Tajiks tend to settle in Moscow as well as the fairly large towns of Yekaterinburg, Tiumen, Surgut, Novokuznetz and Krasnoyarsk, while Uzbeks are more common in Barnaul, and Kyrgyz in Yekaterinburg. The division of migrant groups by nationality in these cities further supports the network theory (Laurelle 2007). More than 80 per cent of Tajik labour migrants travel to Russia, with smaller numbers to the other former Soviet states of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Erlich 2006). Tajikistan has a relatively long history of connections with Russia, dating to the inclusion of its territory in Russia’s sphere of influence in the 1880s. Tajikistan was part of the Soviet Union as an autonomous region of Uzbekistan and after 1929 as a union republic. As a result, there
occurred some migration of Russians to Tajikistan. The low numbers of Tajiks with industrial labour skills led to the Soviet policy of encouraging Russians to settle in Tajikistan, and during the Second World War the relocation of industries to Central Asia caused an even larger number of Russians to move to Tajikistan. As a result, between 1926 and 1959 the percentage of Russians in Tajikistan grew from 1 per cent to 13 per cent. At the same time, some ethnic Tajiks migrated to Russia. Furthermore, as the centre of the Soviet Union, Moscow became very influential. Russian became an essential language. The infrastructure which was created was similar to that in other parts of the Soviet Union, and government institutions are nearly identical. Connections were further strengthened by a number of refugees who fled to Russia during the civil war (although significant numbers sought refuge in nearby Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan as well). As a result, large enough migrant communities existed in Russia to cut down on social and financial costs and ease the transition for migrants. Furthermore, Tajik migrants were initially able to travel visa-free to Russia, although subsequent acquisition of the proper permits to live and work is difficult. The initial entry is, therefore, relatively easy — especially when compared with the difficulties faced by other irregular or undocumented migrants — for example those who cross the desert to enter the Southwestern United States from Mexico.

So far, several push and pull factors relating to the high number of Tajik labour migrants have been discussed. However, other potential pull factors relating to Russia’s demographics should be acknowledged, as the dual labour market theory of migration regards pull factors from the receiving country to be much more important in the initial stages of migration than push factors from the sending country. In this theory, migration is considered a natural result of the inherent labour needs of all industrialized countries. In other words, a country that has a more developed economy and more chances for earning income, and which has a demand for labour, such as Russia, will attract migrants from nearby less-developed countries. This becomes the main reason for the decision to migrate, rather than the conditions within the source country (Massey et al. 1993). So, in addition to the many push factors in Tajikistan which help explain why this country experiences such enormously high rates of labour out-migration, there are also pull factors emanating from Russia which also explain labour migration from the whole region to Russia in particular. Russia is an industrialized country, especially when compared to Tajikistan, and the theory’s assertion that as such it will inherently require an outside source of labour is magnified by its demographics. The population of Russia is currently rapidly aging and declining by 700,000 a year, and is estimated to fall by as much as 146 million by 2050 (Eke 2006). Russia is facing a labour shortage that is expected to increase in coming years. At the same time, the populations of the nearby Central Asian and Caucasus regions are expected to grow. This holds true even for Tajikistan, which despite the effects of the civil war and the current high rates of out-migration has, over the past ten years, maintained a growth rate of about 1.9% (CIA World Factbook 2007). Wages are on an average anywhere from five to twenty times greater in Russia than in Tajikistan (Laurelle 2007). This, at least, was the situation until the financial crisis of 2008 began to directly effect migrant labour in Russia.
Generally, Tajik migrants work in Russian construction, mining, manufacturing, oil and gas, agriculture, and retail sectors (Mughal 2007). There are several reasons Tajiks dominate in these sectors. They are considered low-skill workers, most of them lacking higher education (Mughal 2007). These jobs are often considered less desirable for Russians. Furthermore, to expand upon the network theory of labour migration, many migrants rely upon acquaintances or family members in their search for employment, meaning that they might not only be clustered in one geographical region, but also in a specific type of employment. If the first migrants who traveled to Russia were able to find employment in these spheres, then in all likelihood they would assist subsequent migrants in also finding work in these fields.

These sectors slow during the winter, and as a result during these times demand for labour falls. Hence, many labour migrants engage in circular migration, returning home to Tajikistan during the winter months. In fact, only 1.5 per cent of the Tajik migrants in Russia have permanent resident status (Mughal 2007). In addition to the seasonal nature of their work, several other factors may influence this tendency for circular rather than permanent migration, including xenophobic feelings in Russia, the difficulties in obtaining long-term permits to stay in Russia, and the potential for harassment by the police and vulnerability due to undocumented status. As of 2006, only 160,000 Tajiks were reported by the Russian Ministry of the Interior as long-term migrants (Erlich 2006), although this does not indicate the numbers of short-term or undocumented migrants who intend to stay for a longer period of time. There have been some anecdotal reports of Tajiks remaining in Russia for years without returning, mostly by wives of labour migrants who are abandoned by their husbands, often for a Russian wife (Sharipov 2002). However, due to the seasonal nature of the work, as well many peoples decision to migrate in response to the need for money for a specific event or need, such as a wedding or house repairs, most migrants do not bring their families and as such do not remain in Russia (Laurelle 2007). Not eventually sending for family members is a major difference between Tajiks in Russia and migrants to other countries which seem to experience higher permanent migration.

REMITTANCES IN TAJIKISTAN

There are many potential benefits for a country that experiences an influx of financial remittances. Many migrants who travel to developed countries experience a wage increase of as much as 200 per cent, significant even when one takes into account the cost of living increase often experienced in the receiving country (World Bank 2006). The money sent can be invested, and even money spent on consumption would have a beneficial effect on the community and the economy in general. Remittances can also be used as insurance in the event of economic difficulties, they can be used to invest when credit is not available, they generally relieve unemployment pressure and reduce poverty and they can be spent on education and healthcare. The World Bank reported ‘remittances to Tajikistan have helped reduce household poverty and provide essential foreign exchange’ (World Bank 2007). However, there are some possible negatives of remittances, such as the loss of a labour supply, high exchange rates, and an
unwillingness to develop production for export (Lucas 2008). Therefore, the government of a country such as Tajikistan, that has come to rely so greatly on remittances, needs to be sure to develop policies to both maximize the positives and minimize the negatives. Policies which are known to maximize remittances include accessibility to banks, low transfer rates, and policies and programs that encourage investment and saving of remittances rather than simply spending on consumer goods, which is often what happens.

According to some estimates, as many as 600,000 Tajik migrants are working in Russia during the labour season, although other sources place this number at closer to one million (Marat 2009). Russia’s estimates may be high as some migrants cross into Russia more than once a year. Determining an exact number is difficult due to the undocumented status of many migrants, but when compared to the population of Tajikistan at about seven million even the low estimate is substantial. The Central Bank of Russia reported 198 million U.S. Dollars remitted during 2006 (Mughal 2007). Other sources, however, report remittances as high as 600 million, or even one billion U.S. Dollars (Korobkov 2007). It is likely that nearly every Tajik family relies in some way on a family member for remittances, if one considers even the low estimates of migrants and compares it to the population.

As is the case for most countries that receive high amounts of remittances from labour migration, most of the remittances received in Tajikistan are spent on necessities such as food or other goods, around 86 per cent (Mughal 2007). A large amount is also spent on housing and home repair. Another significant amount also goes to life cycle ceremonies such as funerals, wedding, or tois to mark various rites of passage. According to Tajik traditions, these ceremonies must be marked with celebrations that cost much, often sending families into debt. Lesser amounts go towards health care and education. Little money goes to savings or business investments, which is typical for most countries that receive remittances. This tends to be in line with traditional Tajik spending habits, as saving and investing is not valued over consumption, but these norms are not the most beneficial way for remittances to be spent from the viewpoint of the Tajik government. However, this does not mean that remittances being spent in such a way are completely wasted for the development of the country. For one, by putting this money towards consumption, other funds that a family has access to may go towards investments. Additionally, by dispersing this money into the community, other community members from whom commodities were bought may later invest the money. Hence, while remittances themselves are not generally immediately used to invest in the community, this does not mean that possible benefits can immediately be dismissed or lessened, as any influx of funds into a community could spur further growth and investment at a later time. All the same, countries such as Tajikistan can benefit even more by creating programs to maximize remittance use.
PROBLEMS FACED BY TAJIK LABOUR MIGRANTS IN RUSSIA

Although families of migrants can benefit financially from the receipt of remittances, there are also many potential negative situations which can arise, both for the families remaining behind in Tajikistan and by the labour migrants who are working in Russia. For this article, the focus will be on the problems faced by those who are in Russia, as they are the ones vulnerable to policies of the Russian government.

The Russian system of registration was never completely reformed from that of the Soviet Union, despite some changes which have been made in efforts to streamline it, and it remains incredibly complex and controlling. This system requires certain registration procedures for foreigners that not only include work permits, but residency permits as well. As a result, many Tajiks may enter Russia legally, but find that they are not able to get the correct documents to work or even find a place of residency, not only because quotas for laborers may have been reached but also simply because the system to obtain registration is so complex. Someone entering Russia has three days during which they must register, and afterwards they are considered irregular or ‘illegal.’ Migrants often arrive without a place arranged to live, and three days is too little time for them to make these arrangements, especially as many Russians are wary of renting to Central Asians. Some migrants choose to go through intermediaries, but in these cases there is a high likelihood of paying exorbitant fees or even being provided with false registration (Human Rights Watch 2009). In 2007, the procedure was somewhat improved, as a new law was passed that allowed foreigners to register not only through their landlord, but also through employers. Registration was also made free and could be completed by mail (Human Rights Watch 2009).

Migrants can be taken advantage of by their employers. Employers might fail to provide migrants with the necessary written labour contract, as is required by Russian law, even when they do have the proper documents to work and live in Russia. A Human Rights Watch report has determined that as many as 77 per cent of migrants working in Russia may not have contracts (Human Rights Watch 2009). Other statistics regarding Tajiks in particular state that ‘45 percent of Tajik workers are working under an official contract, while 54.4 percent have an oral agreement’ (Milikbekova 2005). The problem with this is that without the contract, the worker is not legally employed, and as such, is not legally allowed to stay in Russia for more than ninety days. This can cause problems should a migrant ever need to take an employer to court. There are also many problems related to the payment of wages. Often wages remain unpaid in an effort to keep migrants at a place of employment in the hope of receiving some sort of compensation in the future. This is despite Russian law, which states wages must be paid twice a month. The result of this is that when migrants do decide to leave a place of employment, they are often not paid their last month, or more, of wages. Sometimes wages are simply completely withheld (Human Rights Watch 2009). Another common practice is to deduct an amount from the wages unexpectedly, giving reasons such as ‘for arranging residency registration or work permits for employees, for housing or food, or as a form of
punishment for alleged mistakes in the work or for taking days off’ (Human Rights Watch 2009).

Other problems migrants complain about include long working hours with no days off, which is against Russian law. Worksite accidents are not uncommon, but without labour contracts workers have little access to medical help when these situations arise. It is documented that some employers use violence and threats of violence to avoid paying wages that they owe workers (Human Rights Watch 2009). Such mistreatment appears to be very common, although of course it is difficult to ascertain percentages of labour migrants who have satisfactory experiences with their employers versus those who find themselves taken advantage of. What is clear is that as a particularly vulnerable group due to their often irregular status, Tajiks are at greater risk of such treatment. While this is the situation faced by many irregular migrants throughout the world, there are certain reasons why the situation in Russia is particularly difficult for migrants. The registration system causes many migrants who may be eligible for legal employment to become irregular. Furthermore, nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric, while a problem in many countries with large numbers of migrants, is arguably more developed in Russia and shared by greater numbers of ‘average Russians’ (Amnesty International 2006).

Living conditions are usually very poor, and are often provided by employers. One reason for poor housing is that labour migrants, in an effort to save money and send the greatest amount of remittances possible home, will often spend as little as they can on housing and try to live with many other migrants. The housing employers provide is often substandard, with migrants living in ‘cellars, container, attics and sheds,’ often with no amenities whatsoever (Milikbekova 2005).

Tajik labour migrants are vulnerable to the Russian authorities. Vulnerability caused by the lack of correct documents or work agreements can be further exacerbated by problems in Russia relating to corruption and the lack of rule of law, and can lead to the victimization of those who hold the necessary documentation. Human Rights Watch has documented incidents when migrants are targeted by police, sometimes by random when walking in a public place and sometimes in a targeted fashion, approaching migrants near their workplace or homes, and attempting to extort money from them. Other accounts document beating by the police (Human Rights Watch 2009). Migrants can find themselves forced to pay bribes during travel to and from Russia, to border guards and customs officials as well as police. Taking all of this into account, it becomes clear that migrants are in need of some form of protection, and given the benefits of labour migration to Tajikistan, it is in the interest of this country to attempt to have this instituted. Unfortunately, as is always the case with labour migration, the sending country can exert little influence on the policies and situations in the receiving countries.
RUSSIA’S POLICIES ON MIGRATION

After end of the Soviet Union massive migration flows occurred which were, during the very initial period, generally comprised of titular nationalities returning to their titular state (Korobkov 2007). This included large numbers of Russians migrating to Russia. Over time, migration to Russia continued but the motivations of the migrants changed as temporary migration for labour became more common, especially as initially migrants could travel without restriction as laws that would regulate their movement had yet to be formulated. Russia was faced with the decision regarding how to deal with migration from other CIS states, and initially, much of the focus was on the repatriation of ethnic Russians. However, over time this changed to a need to regulate the labour migrants who were beginning to enter the country in greater and greater numbers. To this end, the years 2001-2004 saw the introduction of several laws designed to control labour migration, including the RF Demographic Development Until 2015, the Concept of Migration Processes of the RF, the Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the RF, and the Law on Entrance and Exit (Korobkov 2007). These laws were intended to restrict labour migration, and during this time period, migration actually lessened to some degree. Russian attitudes due to the second Chechen war and the hostage crisis in 2002 led to the perception of migrants as a security risk, meaning that Russian citizens were generally in favor of such legislation (Eurasianet 2003). However, while migration may have lessened somewhat, significant numbers of migrants still entered the country and then became irregular over time, due to the ease of entry and difficult registration procedures. Therefore, the laws cannot truly be considered successful from a Russian standpoint, as numbers of irregular workers were not significantly reduced, or from the standpoint of one concerned with the rights of the migrants, as they continued to be vulnerable due to their status.

However, the demographic situation in Russia soon demanded attention, and the Putin administration was forced to note the declining and aging population. Therefore, 2005 and 2006 saw the introduction of several laws which were actually intended to increase the number of labour migrants. These laws included the Laws on Migration Registration and the Legal Status of Foreign Residents of 2006. They comprised a simplification of the registration process and an easing of the requirements for gaining a labour permit. These laws were coupled with higher penalties for employing undocumented migrants, in an effort to maintain greater control and to give more migrants the status of legal workers, with less chances of being exploited (Korobkov 2007). So, during this time period the number of permanent migrants increased, and some undocumented migrants were actually legalized. The numbers of temporary migrants allowed into Russia also increased. Furthermore, in 2005 passport requirements changed to require Tajik migrants to obtain an international passport for travel to Russia instead of the domestic passport which had previously been allowed. Tajiks were allowed a grace period in this transfer. Centres were also set up in Russian cities by the Tajik Embassy in Moscow in a bilateral Russian/ Tajik agreement to ease the process of obtaining these passports (Blua 2005). However, once again, the effectiveness of this legislation must also be questioned. No significant decrease of exploitation of workers was reported for
this period, and as was shown earlier the registration process has remained difficult to navigate. One area which was somewhat successful was the work which was done to ease the transition to the international passport, as most Tajiks have, albeit out of necessity, managed to acquire this.

These moves indicate a willingness on the side of the Russian government to work with Tajikistan in the sphere of labour migration. A bilateral treaty was also signed in 2004 for the protection of Tajik migrants (Eurasianet 2006). The treaty was thought to be linked to Russia’s desire to maintain geopolitical influence in the region by remaining in Tajikistan’s good graces. However, while it promised tougher measures on employers who exploited migrants, it does not appear to have translated into any real action.

The year 2007 saw further changes to Russia’s laws relating to migration, with the introduction of amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and a new Law on Recording the Migration of Foreign Nationals and Stateless Persons (Human Rights Watch 2009). These laws further simplified registration and work permits, while at the same time introduced quotas on numbers of migrant workers allowed to enter. These laws have shown to have been at least somewhat effective in increasing the number of legal workers in Russia (Human Rights Watch 2009). Foreigners who enter Russia are given three days to register. However, many migrants continue to say that the registration process is difficult and hard to complete in three days. The 2007 laws did not address the issue of potential amnesty for irregular migrants already present in Russia.

These laws also changed the requirements for receiving a work permit; whereas earlier migrants were required to obtain a permit only through their employer, they now may obtain the permit directly which will permit them to seek work for 90 days. If they do not find work at this time they must leave the country. However, while this does cut down on the potential abuse of migrants by their employers, delays are reported in the issuance of work permits (Human Rights Watch 2009).

These laws also expanded the quota system to include those entering Russia without a visa. As a result many workers, upon being told that the quota was full, simply sought work illegally. The end result appears to be that while these laws have eased some problems for workers, serious difficulties remain that continue to cause vulnerability. The year 2007 also saw the passage of a law which was ostensibly in response to growing public feelings of xenophobia and aggressive nationalism in Russia (United Nations 2007). According to this law, foreigners would be banned from selling alcohol and pharmaceuticals, and by the end of the year, they would be restricted from working in retail or markets of any kind. In addition, continuous stay in Russia would be limited to 90 days in any six month period. This new law will certainly not impact labour migrants positively, and it can be conjectured that it will hurt their situation in several ways. Migrants will find themselves in lower-paid positions as they are excluded from the more lucrative retail sector. It is more likely that greater numbers will find themselves in vulnerable situations as they will be even more likely unable to obtain the correct
documentation to work and live in Russia legally, and they will face increased harassment from the Russian police.

TAJIK GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Russian treatment of Tajik migrants can be particularly harsh. In 2002 several hundred Tajiks were summarily deported on military transport planes. The Tajik government responded with outrage, asserting that the migrants did, in fact have correct temporary registration. President Rahmon publicly responded that this did not fit the friendly relations between the two countries, while other officials actually made statements that Russians had probably destroyed the Tajiks documents (Eurasianet 2003). However, despite criticisms coming from as high up as the president, the reality was that Tajikistan had little weight to throw behind the response. The Tajik government has also demanded that Moscow address such incidents as the 2006 roof collapse of a market in Moscow and beating of Tajik citizens by policemen, sometimes to death (Eurasianet 2006). The Tajik Embassy in Moscow is active in attempting to respond to the violations of migrants’ rights, and sets up centres in various Russian cities to address these needs. Furthermore, the embassy has created a three-person migration policy group that regularly meets with the Federal Migration Service and representatives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. While the embassy tries to intervene when a complaint against an employer is lodged, they find that they generally have no recourse, especially as an employer can simply state that the migrant never worked there (Human Rights Watch 2009). Overall, however, Russia appears to be too important a strategic partner for Tajikistan to risk jeopardizing its relationship, despite the importance of labour migration. For this reason, Rahmon has never really pressed the issue. It appears that outside of efforts within Tajikistan to prepare migrants for migration, there is, in fact, little leverage that Tajikistan has regarding this issue. There is, however, one area where Tajikistan has been more active in promoting policies relating to labour migration.

Realizing that it is largely dependent upon labour migration for economic survival, and that there is little influence that can be asserted upon the Russian government, Tajikistan has undertaken certain policies to ease the problems faced by migrants. Two such programs include the improvement of the railway system and the removal of a tax on remittances. Most migrants use the rail system to travel to Russia. The borders of the Central Asian states are winding and complex, and previously the route included four entries and exits into Uzbekistan as well as one entry into Turkmenistan. Of course, when these republics were all part of the Soviet Union, this had little impact on travel, but when the new borders were established after independence, it caused travel to become cumbersome and time consuming. The new rail line only enters Uzbekistan once and avoids Turkmenistan (Erlich 2006). Additionally, the government previously collected a tax of 30 percent on remittances sent through formal channels, but in 2001 it abolished this tax (Kireyev 2006). As a result, more migrants became willing to use these formal channels, and not be at risk of exploitation by corrupt officials or other dangers associated with informal channels. Reasons behind abolishing this tax included regaining trust on the part of the people in the banking system, and the desire to increase
remittances brought into the country in a secure way, thus ensuring that they will continue to positively impact Tajikistan.

Additionally, the government of Tajikistan is collaborating on several programs being implemented by the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Development Program which are designed to maximize the benefits that remittances have in the sectors of business and development. Trainings are held for the family members of the migrants in business development, to encourage the successful use of these funds in the small business sector. Migrant resource centres are being created to assist migrants in what is to be faced as workers in Russia or whatever country they migrate to. A program has been implemented whereby the amount of remittances put towards business development is matched equally, and a similar program exists which matches funds put towards small-scale infrastructure programs such as road improvement. Such rewards programs may encourage families who otherwise spend funds on necessities, or who may not receive enough through remittances to start a business, to be more likely to do so. In addition, an exchange has taken place with the government of Tajikistan and the Philippines, which has been one of the more successful countries to take advantage of a large number of overseas foreign workers. It is hoped that Tajikistan will then be able to follow the Philippines example in embracing labour migration as a major export and long-term answer to many of the economic challenges faced (Koceva 2006). If properly implemented, they can further maximize the benefits of remittances on this country, and perhaps eventually be put to use in ways that would allow Tajikistan to diversify economically, by way of creation of business and investment opportunities within the country.

CONCLUSIONS

Labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia should be considered one strategy ensuring the economic survival of many Tajiks until today. The economy of Tajikistan is dependent upon these remittances, and with so much of the population living so close to poverty level, it really does become a survival issue. At the same time, however, anti-immigrant sentiment in Russia, combined with a legal situation that, despite some improvements, makes it very difficult to obtain the correct documents and with a culture of corruption among law enforcement officials, ensures that migrants remain vulnerable. The Tajik government has been proactive and somewhat effective in trying to maximize the economic and development potential of remittances. It has also tried to prepare migrants for their trips to Russia. However, once the migrants enter Russia they find themselves with little protection, as the Tajik government has little influence and is at the mercy of Russian legislation, practices, and feelings towards immigrants.

The theories of migration discussed, however, indicate that labour migration to Tajikistan will most likely continue despite the many difficulties faced by the migrants, the Russian state’s as well as much of the Russian people’s hostility towards the migrants, and the Tajik government’s inability to substantially ameliorate the situation. The New Economic Theory — i.e., migration is a household decision made to increase
and diversify income as well as provide a safety net during times of hardship — indicates that families will likely continue to choose to send a family member abroad, as Tajikistan’s economy does not appear to be showing signs of significant improvement in the near future. The network theory — i.e., migration is perpetuated by networks of migrants helping each other transition into life in the receiving country — indicates that the large numbers of migrants already in Russia will encourage more to make the decision to migrate. And, the dual labour market theory’s emphasis on pull rather than push factors indicates that because of Russia’s substantially more developed economy in relation to Tajikistan’s, more and more migrants will be drawn to Russia.

Of course, a financial downturn in Russia could change the situation to such an extent that these theories will no longer apply. The current global economic situation may not only hurt the amount of remittances that are received by Tajiks as less work is found, as Tajik migrants who do choose to stay in Russia will be increasingly vulnerable as less will have legal status and as anti-immigrant feelings are likely to grow. It remains to be seen whether this will result in most of the migrants returning to Tajikistan, as it is unlikely they will have more options there than in Russia. Recently, however, Tajiks are becoming more frustrated with Russia’s ongoing refusal to face problems relating to anti-migrant sentiment within population (Sodiqov 2009), and this may be what actually brings an end to high numbers of Tajik labour migration to Russia.

REFERENCES


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