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## **Legal and illegal migration across Russia-Kazakhstan border**

In recent years an opinion that control along all newly emerged borders with the former Soviet republics should be made more rigorous is gaining popularity in the Russian official circles. The authorities intimidate each other and population at large with dangers of illegal migration including high levels of crime amongst migrants, staying of big numbers of people with no official registration, enormous scale of illegal labor activities of foreign citizens in the territory of Russia.

That said, politicians and officials do not pay due attention to problems of the ordinary, quite law-abiding former Soviet citizens. Some of them suddenly found themselves to be dwellers of a new near-border zone while others are forced by various reasons to cross this new border. It should be noted that all over the world the living near borders brings by far more benefits than disadvantages. People living near borders exploit differences of prices for goods, make use of extra chances of employment, health and education services. Do the present-day dwellers of the Russian near-border zone manage to do all of that or do the effective laws and regulations bring to them more troubles than benefits?

We have carried out a research and identified scale, character, routes and causes of illegal migration across the Russian-Kazakh border. The research was done at Omsk and Orenburg sections of the border. Taken together these sections encompass 41% of the total length of the border between Russia and Kazakhstan.

### ***Near-border migrants***

Interviews in Omsk oblast (the city of Isil'kul' and the village of Cherlak) conducted among citizens of Kazakhstan and Russia who cross the border in both directions showed that border

migrants were primarily Russians of age 30–50 with families of 3–4 persons and underage children. Thus, it is primarily employable, educated, and married citizens who enjoy the advantages of life near the border. It is noteworthy that the majority of migrants are Russians by birth, although inhabitants of Kazakhstan clearly dominate in the border migration.

As a rule, the near-border migrants go to the neighboring country several times a year for private purposes— to visit relatives and friends. It is not accidental that this motive dominates, since the two countries are closely connected: only 19% of the respondents have neither relatives nor friends across the border, while those having blood relatives there—brothers, sisters, parents, and children—are twice as many.

One fifth of the migrants—those who earn money through their trips—cross the border several times a week. Their number has even increased compared to the Soviet period. Obviously, the population does enjoy the advantages of near-border life, price differences in particular. Apart from merchants proper, there are people who buy and sell while visiting their relatives. Thus, the group of commercial migrants is nearly 40%.

Nearly 50% of the Kazakhstan citizens regard the closeness of the border as an advantage, while the number of Russians who think so is almost three times lower. This is easy to explain: for Kazakhstan inhabitants, the border is primarily an opportunity to improve their life, which seems to them substantially worse compared to the neighboring Russian oblast. In addition, Kazakhstan inhabitants from the near-border areas often use Russian medical services, which are of superior quality than in Kazakhstan. A similar situation is in education: thanks to a substantially higher standard of education in Russia, Kazakhstan inhabitants (primarily Russians by birth) go to study to the neighboring Russian oblasts. On average, one tenth of students in the Omsk institutions of higher education have finished Russian language secondary schools in Kazakhstan.

Let us stress once more that we mainly refer to Russians by birth residing in Kazakhstan. The general satisfaction with life substantially differs in Kazakhstan depending on nationality:

judging from the responses, Kazakhs are much more satisfied with life in their country than Russians are. As for numerous media statements that Kazakhs who come en masse to live in the near-border areas of Russia, they are a myth: 90% of migrant Kazakhs are not going to migrate to Russia under any circumstances.

Despite many differences in the replies of Russian and Kazakhstan migrants, 78% believe that the Russian– Kazakh border should be absolutely open both ways.

### ***The migration from Kazakhstan to Russia***

The second survey was conducted both directly on the border (in Omsk oblast, in the near-border station of Isil'kul' and on a highway crossing in its vicinity, and in Orenburg oblast, at the railway station of Iletsk-1) and in the centers of the two oblasts—Omsk and Orenburg

The absolute majority of those coming to Russia from Kazakhstan are citizens of Kazakhstan, and there are citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Ukraine, and China, as well as stateless persons.

Migrants of the most capable ages (25–45 years), primarily married (more than two-thirds) and mainly men, aspire to move to Russia. Thus, Russian territories acquire young, able-bodied, and promising (from the demographical point of view) population and not dependents, as some people claim. The majority of married people come to Russia alone at first. Only one tenth of the respondents said that their family members had come to Russia before them (among them, those whose families were separated by the border).

Among the migrants interviewed at entry to Omsk oblast, the absolute majority did not plan to go outside it. The main contingent consisted of commercial migrants who came to purchase goods and/or bring goods to the markets of Isil'kul', Omsk, and other localities of the oblast. One fourth of the arrivals were people who came to work or on a business trip, to look for a job, to get a foretaste of the opportunities to find domicile, and to purchase goods for selling in Kazakhstan.

Conversely, among those who come to Russia through Orenburg oblast there are fewer people who plan to stay there—one fourth of the total. The end points of their trips are various, but the majority of them are in the west and south of Russia. Accordingly, the purposes of their trips differ too. The majority of the migrants come to work (one third of the total); nearly one third, to stay there; fewer people, to visit their relatives; and still fewer, for business.

### ***Legal and illegal entry to Russia***

**CIS nationals** enjoy entry without visa, although they, as well as people from other countries, have to submit credentials (since November 1, 2002) and to fill in the migration chart at the border crossing points.

Out of 100 respondents in Omsk and Orenburg, 20 people came to Russia by avoiding a crossing point (even on the border—in close vicinity to the points— there were five such people). In other words, in a random sample, ***one fifth of the migrants who could enter Russia legally without visa preferred not to use their right.***

There are several possibilities for border crossing bypassing official crossing points.

First, the border is rather long (more than 1000 km in Omsk oblast and 1870 km in Orenburg oblast), border and customs posts being few. For example, in Omsk oblast, there are only seven border and customs posts for 200 earthen roads and a huge number of byroads. In Orenburg oblast, there are substantially more of them, but the leadership of the newly organized Border Department has pinpointed 600 (!) uncontrollable routes for entering the oblast territory.

Second, in Omsk oblast, for example, posts are located far from the border (from 18 to 40 km and more). Border guards explain that it was customs officers who first developed the border, and they wanted to be closer to district centers.

Third, the railway traffic between Kazakhstan and Russia is a difficult control problem. The Kazakhstan railway branch line repeatedly crosses to the territory of Russia, the railroad bed and many railway stations being under the jurisdiction of Kazakhstan. The administration of the Kazakhstan railroad is not in the least responsible for the entry of foreign citizens with invalid

credentials or with no credentials to Russia. For example, the Iletsk-1 railway station is located in the city of Sol'-Iletsk in Russia, while the railway junction belongs to the communication of the Western Kazakhstan railroad "Kazakhstan Temir-Zholy." More than 50 trains a week (7–8 trains a day) pass through this station: Bishkek–Moscow, Alma-Ata–Moscow, Tashkent–Moscow, Aktyubinsk–Moscow, Tashkent–Ufa, and others. Since stopping time is limited, it is not possible to control them in full. In practice, only people who get off the train are checked. Meanwhile, law-enforcement personnel say that nobody prevents aliens (including those who have freights) from getting off the train between stations.

Obviously, the above factors lead to the violation of border rules. Another problem is why law-abiding citizens choose to become illegal aliens.

Near-border settlements on both sides of the border at a distance of 5–7 km, the inhabitants of which have old relatives and friendly connections, are one example. For instance, to pay a short visit, people are obliged to cross the border, which means covering more than 30 km to the nearest customs and border post and paying for the car; otherwise they break the border rules. It is only natural that the majority prefer to take the shortest route across the border.

Sometimes Russian citizens who even do not leave the territory of Russia have to violate border rules. There have been cases when Russian salesmen refused to deliver purchased furniture to a Russian village situated behind a customs point because it was impossible to convince customs officers that the furniture would not be taken to Kazakhstan. Another situation: if it is necessary to drive from a Russian settlement to another one but the route goes through a checkpoint, you have to wait for hours in the line and then convince customs officers and border guards (sometimes in vain) that you are not obliged to pay for the car because you are not going to cross the border.

However, in the majority of cases, involuntary illegal aliens are generated by the organization of checkpoint service. Our interviews showed that among the citizens of the CIS countries who entered Russia officially, one third had problems at the border, the respondents unsatisfied with

Russian services being three times more than with Kazakh ones. It is noteworthy that claims to checking services do not depend on the nationality of the respondents. The claims are as follows: “long and expensive,” “expensive and difficult to import and export goods,” “they seize goods unofficially,” “extortion,” “bribery,” and “boorishness.” There is not even primitive information for beginners at the checkpoints: what and in what order it is necessary to do and how to execute documents.

There are crossing points where it is impossible to execute all the documents on site. For example, to formalize papers, people have to leave their car on the border and go from the crossing point “Sagarchin” situated on the Aktyubinsk–Orenburg highway to Orenburg! However, a uniform mode for all checking services and the provision for the entire information at crossing points could make it possible to formalize all the documents quickly and on the spot, but it is more profitable to bribe desperate people.

One should take into account that the majority of the respondents on the border had crossed it more than once and, consequently, acted with due regard for their experience of communicating with border guards and customs officers. Many people, having experienced all the “joys” of official methods of crossing the border, prefer to take an illegal method next time. Even if they are stopped and fined, it will be cheaper and more convenient than “legal control.”

**The flow of illegal aliens from far-abroad countries.** About 34% of illegal migrants from far-abroad countries coming to Russia are detained at the Russian–Kazakh border. The majority are from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. Border guards say that many aliens coming to Russia have visas to Kyrgyzstan, sometimes to Kazakhstan. Afghanis often have false Tajik passports. In the majority of cases, these people who illegally cross the Russian border are interested in Russia only as a transit country on their way to Europe.

For example: “In Petropavlovsk, a routine group of 30 Sri Lankans was detained. Only 15 of them had passports, which, however, lacked entry visas to Kazakhstan and several pages were

missing which, evidently, bore border-crossing stamps. Detainees' evidence shows that they started by plane from their country to Delhi and then to Kyrgyzstan, from where they went to Alma-Ata and then by bus to Petropavlovsk, where they stayed in a tenement house apartment. The Sri Lankan detainees said that the ultimate purpose of their trip was Moscow and then Europe.”

The criminal business of taking illegal aliens from Southeast Asia to Russia or farther to Europe is very profitable. Manufacturing a false Tajik passport for an Afghan national costs about \$1500; to be smuggled to Europe a group of 20 Sri Lankans paid about \$70000; and members of another group paid from \$5000 to \$8000 each to find themselves in Germany. As long as this business brings such incomes, the toughening of border rules will not shut off this flow.

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The research makes obvious the sheer impossibility to ensure the effective control on the border with traditional means, i.e. with reliance on checkpoints. It is the principal and, alas, disappointing conclusion of the research.

For the purpose of a greater efficiency of measures aimed at prevention of illegal migration under specific circumstances of the Russian-Kazakhstan border the following steps were recommended:

1. To grant the right of the border free crossing to inhabitants of near-border zone and to provide them with special permits. These migrants are illegal only in the technical sense, due to imperfection of laws. By virtue of this measure checkpoints will acquire a chance to focus on migration of persons with invalid documents, overdue visas, smugglers. Besides that a chance will appear to engage local people who will help the border guards.
2. To intensify Russia's negotiations with Central Asian countries on coordination of the state border regime and control procedures.

3. To take measures aimed at improvement of organization and acceleration of checks at checkpoints. That will bring about curtailment of bypasses on the part of law-abiding foreign citizens. Perhaps it is possible to come to an agreement with Kazakhstan and to introduce unilateral checks performed alternatively either by the Russian border-guards or by Kazakh ones. That would speed up movement across the border considerably.