



A *novostroika* on the outskirts of Bishkek.  
Photo: C. Hatcher

## Simplifying the *propiska*: Realising the benefits of internal migration



Case studies featured here were conducted in: Kyrgyzstan.

### Policy Message

- Internal migration can improve the livelihoods of individuals, strengthen urban economies, and has the potential to promote small-scale rural development through remittances and linkages with cities.
- In Kyrgyzstan, the passport registration system (*propiska* in Russian), which regulates internal migration, is currently ineffective for the government and discriminates against internal migrants by restricting their social, economic, and political rights.
- Simplifying the existing passport registration system, harmonising conflicting legislation, and implementing an electronic system would give the government an effective resource-planning tool that would also ensure access to basic state services for internal migrants.

- Internal migration has the potential not only to improve the livelihoods of individual migrants but is also increasingly gaining recognition for its role in contributing to the wider economic growth of many countries. Despite these positive aspects, restrictive state practices hindering internal migration continue to exist, to the detriment of internal migrants. Kyrgyzstan's population registration system demonstrates this. While the registration system has the potential to fulfil an effective budgetary and planning role for the government, in its current form it fails to do so and simultaneously restricts the rights of internal migrants.

- **Internal migration: a positive role**
- The *Human Development Report 2009* (UNDP 2009) estimated the global number of internal migrants to be close to 740 million, nearly four times the number of international migrants. As with international migrants, internal migrants commonly move in search of better pay, education, and health services. Kyrgyzstan is no exception to this phenomenon. A large number of migrants have moved from rural areas to urban areas, especially Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital city and economic hub.
- Policymakers are increasingly recognising that internal migration has a greater potential to reduce poverty and contribute to economic growth than does international migration (Deshingkar 2006; UNDP 2009).
- Urbanisation – as a result of internal

migration – is perceived not only as inevitable, but also as a powerful force for economic growth as industries cluster and benefit from economies of scale, exchange of knowledge and ideas, and a pool of skilled labour (World Bank 2009). Internal migration also builds linkages between rural and urban areas, particularly through the flow of remittances from internal migrants working in cities to their rural families, although there are few accurate data on this issue.

### Restrictions to internal migration

Registration systems are used by governments throughout the world to count and record details about people and to know their whereabouts. The government needs to know how many people are living in a particular place in order to efficiently allocate state funds and resources. Such registration

## Featured case studies

### Woman renting shop in a *novostroika* in Bishkek

Farida and her husband moved to Bishkek from the southern oblast of Jalal-Abad four years ago in search of work. She originally rented a small house in a *novostroika* with her husband, but the property owner eventually wanted to take back possession. Farida now sleeps on the floor of the shop that she rents and where she works. She is unable to register herself in Bishkek because she has no official address. The local school will not accept her four children because she is not registered in Bishkek. All the children therefore live with relatives in Jalal-Abad. Farida is also unable to obtain child support in Bishkek because she is not registered in the city. The authorities in Jalal-Abad also refuse to grant her child support because she has been living in Bishkek for four years and has no property in Jalal-Abad (Hatcher, in preparation).

### Family living in an illegal *novostroika* in Bishkek

Umut lives in an illegal *novostroika* in Bishkek. She moved there with her husband and two children in 2006 because they could no longer afford to pay rent for an apartment in the city. Umut and her husband are unable to register their address in the *novostroika* because of the settlement's illegal status. Their unregistered status made it difficult to organise schooling for their children but eventually this was organised through personal connections and an informal payment (Hatcher, in preparation).

- systems rely on individuals notifying the state authorities of any changes in their circumstances, while the government must ensure the notification process is straightforward (OSCE 2009).
- Around a third of countries maintain de facto barriers to internal movement; Kyrgyzstan is one of these (UNDP 2009). The current passport registration system (formerly and still commonly known as *propiska*) is ineffective for the government and limits internal migrants' rights. While the ability to move from one place to another in the country is not restricted, problems occur when an internal migrant arrives in their new location; they have to undergo the bureaucratic process of registering their new place of residence or temporary stay with the local authorities. For the migrant, registration is required if they are to access various state services, such as schooling, health care, and social services, in their new place of residence. Migrants are also able to vote only where they are registered.

### Problems and solutions

- **Rented apartments and *novostroikas***
- Internal migrants living in Bishkek commonly rent a property and/or live in one of the city's newly built settlements (*novostroikas*). Some *novostroikas* remain "illegal" and are therefore not officially part of the city. Those migrants who rent a property or live in an illegal

*novostroika* find difficulty in providing proof of an address in order to register with the local authorities in the city. Residents living in Bishkek's illegal *novostroikas* have no recognised legal right to the land where their property is located, and thus cannot register at their property because it is not an officially recognised address.

Internal migrants who rent properties often do so under an informal arrangement with the property owner in order for the owner to avoid any formal agreement that could serve as proof of this taxable source of income. Property owners often also express a fear that an officially registered tenant will be able to claim part ownership of the property. A property owner therefore rarely agrees to a tenant registering at their property, unless they have a close relationship with each other (e.g. a family member).

Internal migrants who rent properties or live in an illegal *novostroika* therefore often fail to register with the authorities. This creates problems for both the internal migrant and the government. The internal migrant is unable to officially access basic state services and cannot vote in Bishkek, whereas the government is unaware of the actual number of people living in particular areas of Kyrgyzstan and therefore cannot budget or direct state resources efficiently.

The government should address the issue of many internal migrants who rent and/or live in one of Bishkek's illegal *novostroikas*. Those internal migrants who rent should be able to register at the address where they live without having to obtain permission from the property owner. Although residents of illegal *novostroikas* have no officially recognised property to register against, article 16(4) of the Kyrgyz Law of Internal Migration 2002 (IM 2002) provides that citizens without a "permanent residence" can register at the address of the local authority where they reside. This provision should be invoked and a mechanism implemented to allow residents living in the city's illegal *novostroikas* to register at the address of the local authority.

### Conflicting laws

Discrepancies between different pieces of legislation relating to the registration system invite corruption and undermine the effectiveness of the law. The IM 2002 clearly sets obligations on behalf of the migrant and the state, but other laws, regulations and decrees conflict with this. For example, whereas the IM 2002 requires an internal migrant to submit three documents in order to register their new address, other pieces of legislation require more. In reality, local administrative offices request up to 12 types of document, making the registration process onerous for internal migrants.



People queuing at a local passport registration centre in Bishkek.

Photo: C. Hatcher

A vast and unsystematic framework of other pieces of legislation undermines the effectiveness and transparency of the IM 2002. Decisions also need to be made by the government in respect of whether registration is required to access certain state services or not. If the registration system were simpler and transparent, there is no reason why the government should not require people to be properly registered to receive state services.

#### Paper-based bureaucracy

The existing registration system is heavily paper-based and uncoordinated nationally as there is no centralised system or database. This can create problems of inaccurate and missing data. Internal migrants are required to attend many different offices to obtain various documents and, when moving permanently to a new location, must deregister in person from their previous place of residence, which can be both time-consuming and expensive. Deregistration by the migrant in person is also contrary to the IM 2002 and should be done by the registering authorities, although this is often ignored in practice.

The State Registration Service (the state organisation responsible for the passport registration system) should pursue existing recommendations to implement an electronic population register (OSCE 2012). A centralised electronic system would make the process of registration easier for internal migrants by, for example, removing the need to deregister from the previous place of residence in person. An electronic system would also ensure data are more accurate and properly maintained, therefore providing a useful data set for the government to use for planning purposes.



A housing area in Bishkek where many residents rent property.  
Photo: C. Hatcher



An entrance to Dordoi Market, Bishkek's largest bazaar and place of employment for many internal migrants.  
Photo: C. Hatcher

#### Definitions

**Internal migration:** Human movement within the borders of a country, usually measured across regional, district, or municipal boundaries (UNDP 2009).

**Registration system:** Referred to as *propiska* in Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet era and still commonly referred to as such today, this system requires citizens to register their place of residence with state authorities. The information is then used in planning and delivery of state services and to contact people. A registered address can "determine a person's eligibility to vote, to access education and health care, and to receive social services or a pension" (OSCE 2009).

**Novostroika:** Meaning "new settlement," these unplanned settlements are located on the periphery of a city. Most of Bishkek's "illegal" *novostroikas* are less than ten years old.



Craig Hatcher, MSc  
 PhD candidate  
 University of Zurich  
 Switzerland  
 Craig.hatcher@geo.uzh.ch



Asylgul Balybaeva, Dip. Law  
 Senior lawyer  
 Adilet Legal Clinic, Bishkek  
 Kyrgyzstan  
 asylbalybaeva@yahoo.com

## Policy implications of NCCR North-South research

### Internal migration is beneficial

While it may be tempting to perceive internal migration as a drain on urban resources (especially in Bishkek), internal migrants contribute to the country's wider economic growth. Internal migrants not only improve their own livelihoods but, by sending remittances to their families in rural areas, they also promote rural development. Internal migration also strengthens urban economies as industries cluster and benefit from economies of scale, exchange of knowledge and ideas, and a pool of skilled labour.

### Passport registration system

A simplified passport registration system would: (1) provide useful statistical data for the government to plan and budget effectively, thereby reducing pressure on services in urban areas such as Bishkek; (2) ensure that internal migrants can easily access state services officially where they are living rather than acquiring access informally through corrupt practices or not being able to access these services at all.

### Intervention

Simplification of the existing passport registration system has three core requirements: (1) allow tenants and residents of *novostroikas* to register at the property where they actually live by eliminating the need to obtain permission from the property owner, and allow residents of illegal *novostroikas* to register at the address of the local authority; (2) ensure that conflicting laws relating to the registration system are harmonised so that the system is simple, open, and transparent; and (3) implement an electronic system to assist in maintaining an accurate and reliable data set for government planning that makes registration easier for internal migrants.

### Further reading

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### Regional Coordination Office

Mira Arynova  
 NCCR North-South  
 #138, Toktogula Str.,  
 Bishkek 720001, Kyrgyzstan  
 mira.arynova@ucentralasia.org  
 www.nccr-central-asia.org

### This issue:

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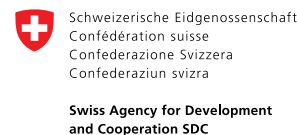
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