

Internal migration in the context of land relations

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Introduction

An indicator of economic crisis and a lack of regional infrastructure, internal migration has a negative impact on geopolitical situation in Kyrgyzstan.

Since internal migrants in Kyrgyzstan survive on land as their major resource, the goal of this research was to look into the process of internal migration from a perspective of land distribution.

The research methodology is based on a qualitative approach. Overall, we conducted thirty interviews with migration and land experts, representatives of the Bishkek Mayor's Office, rayon administration offices, State Committee on Migration, Passport and Visa Department under the District Interior Office, and public foundations, who lobby land issues, as well as a wide range of international organizations.

Furthermore, a social survey among the inhabitants of Ak-Ordo, a subdivision that emerged in 2005, helped draw a regional and ethnic picture of this part of the city.

The main problem of this study was a lack of proper statistical data and full-scale research on internal migration, most of which address the issue of external migration.

In the course of the research, we focused on the two major areas for economic activities in Kyrgyzstan, namely, the outskirts of Bishkek and the city itself, as the hub of small and medium-sized enterprise, and the northern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul (Cholpon-Ata and Bosteri), referred to as a Central Asian Mecca for recreational tourists.

Apart from analyzing social and economic factors of internal migration, depopulation and indiscriminate urbanization in Kyrgyzstan, we also looked into the nature, scale, and ethno-cultural repercussions of internal migration.

Socio-economic factors of internal migration

The political events of 2005 significantly affected the dynamics of internal migration in the country and caused a new wave of population movement from southern regions up north. It happened mostly because the new authorities came from the south, which was somewhat underrepresented in this regard during Akaev's regime. As stated by the expert of the State Committee for Migration and Employment, "we can observe a situation in which those from the south can easily settle down and even invest in small and medium-sized enterprise in Bishkek."

From 2005 till now, there has been a surge of internal migration and land seizure outside Bishkek. Apart from the capital, the influx of internal migrants from the south has also hit such developing towns of the Chui province as Kant, Tokmok, and some villages of the Issyk-Ata and Moskva regions.

Given a poorly developed infrastructure and industrial facilities in the regions, as well as imperfect local self-governance reforms, the trend of migration from rural areas to Bishkek and its suburbs remains stable.

Sociology of subdivisions in Bishkek

From 2005 through 2007, about a dozen tracts of land outside Bishkek have been presumptuously seized. According to the housing department of the Bishkek Mayor's Office, most of them were used for building houses.

Historically, land seizure in Kyrgyzstan and in Bishkek in particular started in the early 1990s, and is usually caused by socio-economic instability and a lack of a clear-cut position by the government.

At the present time, according to the Bishkek Mayor's Office, about eight subdivisions emerged in the outskirts of Bishkek, where recent migrants built adobe houses which are not quite fit for living.

Starting in April 6, 2005, migrants occupied about 2000 hectares of land, including the tracts:

- to the south and west of the US Embassy;
- to the east of the Mir Avenue, in the vicinity of the Pinara Hotel;
- in the south of Bishkek, in micro-district Asanbai and micro-district 12;
- to the east and west of Sovetskaya Street, to the south of Orto-Sai village up to Tokombaev Street;
- to the east of the Kok-Jar District and to the south of micro-district Uchkun;

- in the north of the park Karagachevaya Roscha;
- in the territory of Nursery 1 belonging to the Ornamental Gardening Farm on Vasilyev Street;
- to the east of the Ak-Orgo District (close to Thermal Power Plant 2).

When new people came into power after the tulip revolution, they promised to give land to the needy. Ultimately, the new government failed to stop land seizure and meetings, which are often used by various political forces as a way of manipulation.

As opined by one of the experts of the Bishkek Architecture Office, the subdivisions resemble the “dead loop” around the capital, which make the city look bad. What seems worse is that those who seized land illegally occupied areas which could be used for building a great number of multi-storey houses. For instance, this is true of micro-district Uchkun.

According to Mr. Madimarov, a chide expert of the Individual Housing Department under the Bishkek Mayor’s Office, in April this year there were 4346 people in the Pervomaiskiy District registered for receiving a tract of land.

Public foundations act as intermediaries in this process, trying hard to make local authorities provide land. By estimates, there are about 60 to 70 such public foundations in Bishkek, which are, for the most part, comprised of those building houses.

Oftentimes, not only such organizations provide actual assistance on the land issue, but they resort to overt profiteering acting as mediators.

Those seizing land illegally bypass the official line of people waiting for a tract of land to be allocated. As a result, state inspections that select 60% of all requests are dispatched to verify the following information:

- three-year residence requirement in Bishkek;¹
- no possession of land by other family members;
- availability of all necessary documents.

According to Mr. Sarygulov, head of the Analytical and Statistical Text Compilation Department in the State Migration and Employment Committee, going back to the Soviet system of internal migration registration by law enforcement agencies would make it easier to keep track of the numbers and provide important analytical information to dexterously respond to emerging socio-economic problems.

Migration to Issyk-Kul Province

¹ Government Decree as of 177 as of 2005

Starting in April 2005, there was another wave of migration from the south (Osh, Jalalabad, and Batken provinces) to the northern part of Issyk-Kul province, covering almost all settlements from the village of Sary-Oi to Ananyevo, mostly to tourist places, such as Cholpon-Ata and Bosteri, for example.

The majority of migrants are involved in seasonal work and small and medium-sized enterprise in the area of inbound tourism.

According to Elmira, a businesswoman, of Osh province, it is easier for southerners to settle down around Lake Issyk-Kul because land is cheap in rural areas. On the other hand, she said, they have to face some enmity from the local population.

Demonstrating stronger clan relations, people from the south establish compact communities in the northern part of Lake Issyk-Kul. According to Bakyt, of Bosteri, southerners have a different mentality. "We understand them," he said. "Besides, they come here and compete with us, taking away some of our profits."

The able-bodied population, and particularly young people who don't see any hope living and working in rural areas, are considerably involved in internal migration. They seek to make money in urban areas marked by a variety of employment opportunities.

Conclusion

Thus, there are three vectors of internal migration connected with the issue of land division:

- from southern provinces to Chui and Issyk-Kul provinces,
- from rural areas in the north to Bishkek,
- from rural areas in the south to Osh and Jalalabad.

Apparently, one of the causes of internal migration is ineffective land policy. Land reforms failed to promote the efficiency of land use and land security, as well as the development of regional economy, agriculture in particular.

When carrying out the land policy, the government took no heed of the situation in different regions of the country and economic and production relations. They did not consider possible cooperation in the area of production and processing of agricultural products, with no in-depth legal, economic, and environmental analysis of the reforms on land distribution.

This new trend may entail considerable depopulation of various regions in Kyrgyzstan, which, in turn, will lead to imbalanced development and failure of economic policies and decentralization reforms.

On the other hand, internal migration in Kyrgyzstan which became intense in 2005 and is still going on, promotes regional conflation. This can mean a new step on the way to developing national identity.

This situation stimulates ethnic awareness of each other, and despite the menace of conflicts, it can have a positive impact on public consolidation.

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