

# Government Proposes New Migration Rules for Foreign Laborers

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New proposals regarding work permits and border control will make it harder for foreigners to enter and to remain in the country without work **Tim Misir**

The government is drafting legislation that would limit the stay of foreign laborers in Russia and oblige them to take out medical insurance to get a job, but critics say corruption may render the measures useless.

A bill that would require Russian employers to include information about work permits and medical insurance in job contracts with foreign employees was scheduled for review at a Cabinet meeting on Thursday, according to the government's website.

While the bill doesn't specifically mention citizens of former Soviet republics, it appears aimed primarily against the massive flow of migrants from there. They can enter and stay in Russia for up to 90 days without a visa and are blamed by many Russians for high crime rates.

The bill would require employers to dismiss workers whose work permits have expired, and would require foreign workers to provide proof of health insurance before they can be hired, unless the employer is willing to provide insurance for its employees.

The State Border Commission has also instructed the Federal Migration Service to draft a bill that would limit the time that foreigners entering Russia without a visa may stay in the country to no more than 90 days within a six-month period, Kommersant reported Thursday.

United Russia lawmaker Alexei Zhuravlyov said the measure is aimed at preventing immigrant workers from indefinitely "renewing" their legal 90-day stay in the country, by simply crossing the border and coming back.

The border commission has also asked the Health Ministry to draft a bill that would require foreigners to provide proof of medical insurance at border checkpoints before they can enter the country.

Zhuravlyov said that official statistics place the number of migrants in Russia at 3.5 million people, but the actual number may be up to 10 million. He accused undocumented workers of taking advantage of Russia's social services, such as its medical system, "at our expense."

St. Petersburg's city legislature has sent a letter to Federal Security Service chief Alexander Bortnikov earlier this week, asking his agency to block "the mass entry of foreign citizens without means to support themselves and without medical insurance."

In Moscow, more than 1.5 million migrants seek medical help each year, costing the city 5 billion rubles (\$152.7 million) in annual health care bills.

But head of the Migration XXI Century foundation Vyacheslav Postavnin argued that attempts to require foreigners to carry health insurance and keep them from staying in the country indefinitely would be impeded by "corruption."

"If a person needs to feed his family, he will simply cross the border illegally, and this service will be provided," Postavnin said.

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