Moving Toward the Brink? Migration in the Kyrgyz Republic

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Abstract

While labor migration from Central Asia to the Russian Federation has been well documented and researched internationally, the equally important issue of internal migration has been largely ignored. Localized migratory processes should be recognized as vital factors in the region's long-term social, economic, and security development. This article looks at migration from a domestic Kyrgyz perspective. It discusses the general effects of rural out-migration, the remittance "myth," the effects on broken migrant families, hyper-urbanization in so-called *novostroikas*, and the less-discussed issue of creeping migration.

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Kyrgyzstan – Central Asia – labor migration – internal migration – *novostroika*

Migration is one of the most discussed aspects of the post-Soviet transition in the Central Asian states, and it is closely connected to economic dislocation, poor governance, and corruption. It is also a consequence of the Russian Federation's emergence as an economic miracle with an insatiable appetite for labor. Each state in the region has its own migration peculiarities – Kazakhstan has gone from being a source of migrant labor to attracting migrant workers in its own right. Turkmenistan largely has prevented its population from leaving the country; Uzbekistan's regime closely monitors the movements of its citizens by requiring them to procure exit visas before travelling abroad; while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the region's two poorest countries, appear to be encouraging their populations to migrate in order to benefit from monetary remittances and to relieve social pressures and instability in the face of political and economic uncertainty.

Though most migration is voluntary, the conditions for migrants are often difficult, if not outright inhumane. Central Asians have found themselves tricked and trafficked into conditions of near-slavery, abused and deceived by employers, robbed, and victimized by a Russian public that has been increasingly xenophobic and violent against migrants from the former Soviet "South." The international community, especially the International Organization for Migration (iom) and the International Labor Organization (ilo), have worked diligently to try and make the migration experience less dangerous. Other international actors, including the European Union, have also worked with the Central Asian governments to try and ensure the safety of their citizens. Much progress has been made, and migration has become a more regularized process for the majority of those who undertake it, but problems remain. Every year, hundreds of Central Asians working abroad fall victim to unscrupulous practices and persons. Scores die while abroad, victims of poor workplace safety or anti-migrant violence. And yet, despite these risks, hundreds of thou- sands continue the pilgrimage to Russia.

While the vast majority of Central Asian labor migrants travel to other countries, large numbers also follow more traditional migration routes from the countryside to the region's fast-growing cities. While the distances may be less, the risks are not necessarily reduced. A major danger that internal migrants face almost daily is the ever-present problem of corruption, forcing them to bribe their way into a system not yet mature enough to integrate new arrivals

fairly. Like foreign labor migrants, internal migrants face cheating by unscrupulous employers at their workplace poor working conditions, and discrimination by their urban compatriots, and the financial rewards are normally less than those for urban dwellers within the region's malfunctioning economies.

This article addresses some of the major issues emerging from rural out-migration and internal migration in Kyrgyzstan. How seriously does the Kyrgyz government address internal migration? How does internal migration contribute to social instability? What can be done to lessen the risk to internal migrants and to help them contribute to the development of the country as a whole? Pursuant to these questions, attention is paid to two connected aspects of this migration flow. First, we examine hyper-urbanization and the growth of new migrant settlements around Bishkek, an issue that is deeply contested among policymakers and the public at large as a result of the presumed threats to urban norms and domestic stability. Second, we address the destruction of rural communities and the security issues raised by the exodus from the borderlands in the country's southern Batken province.

Internal Migration in Kyrgyzstan

Researchers and policymakers have paid more attention to foreign labor migration than to internal migration within Kyrgyzstan. However, recent studies and reports on migration state that the rate of internal to external migration consistently has been 60% and 40%, respectively, throughout the last 20 years. During this period the number of internal migrants reached 1.9 million,[1] meaning that one of every three citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic has changed his or her domestic residence at least once.[2] Internal migration is dominated by the inter-regional (about 60%) over intra-regional (40%) movement of people.[3] Inter-regional migration is more prominent in the Naryn and Batken provinces (76% and 72%, respectively), but much slower in the southern Osh and Jalalabad provinces (39% each). The latter regions are more conservative and centers of growth attracting migrants from their own hinterlands. Most inter- regional migration originates from the various regions of Kyrgyzstan and

1 B. Sarygulov, *Sovremennaia demograficheskaia situatsiia i formirovanie novykh temdentsii v razvitii narodonaseleniia Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki* (Bishkek: Kirland, 2000).

2 iom, *Internal Migration in Kyrgyzstan* (Bishkek: International Organization for Migration, 2011).

3 U. Ergeshbaev, *Migratsionnye protsessy v Kyrgyzstane i ikh sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie posledstviia* (Osh, 2009).

moves into the northern Chui Valley and the city of Bishkek, a phenomenon called "Northern Drift" by the iom.4

The migration rates in all regions of Kyrgyzstan are negative except for the Chui Valley and the capital, Bishkek. In the early 2000s migration accounted for half of the population growth in the Chui Valley and one-third of the growth in Bishkek.5 A study conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (unfpa) shows that the majority of migrants in Bishkek are from Naryn and Issyk-Kul provinces (19.5% each), followed by Osh and Jalalabad (18.2% and 14.9%, respectively), Chui (11.7%) and Talas (2.6%).6 Bekturganova's study suggests that the difference was even higher in the early years of independence: in 1994 the number of migrants from Naryn to Bishkek was twice as high as from Osh to the capital, while the same figure for the Chui Valley was three times higher.7

During the last few years, more women have migrated, and, as several studies suggest, women now are just as mobile as men.8 Many women are engaged in small-scale trading activities, various low-paid jobs in the service sector, and the flourishing semi-legal garment factories in the capital.9 Ethnically, the majority of internal migrants are Kyrgyz (82%), followed by Uzbeks (11%) and others (7%).10 Uzbek migrants concentrate in the southern cities, but over recent years they also have been migrating to Bishkek. Russians and other European groups are among the least mobile residents, as most members of these communities already emigrated to Russia in the 1990s. This has led to a process of mono-ethnicization in the country, with predominantly Kyrgyz, but also Uzbeks and Tajiks, slowly replacing all other ethnic groups. This process, in turn, has been a factor in the rise of ethnic tensions nationally, with a clear link between internal migrants and the 2010 ethnic violence that rocked Osh.11

4 iom, *Internal Migration in Kyrgyzstan*.

5 Paragraph Information System, *Kontseptsiia gosudartsvennoi demograficheskoi i migratsionnoi politiki Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki, ot 28 aprelia 2000 g.*, Bishkek, http://online.adviser.kg/Document/?link_id=1000822395.

6 unfpa, *Natsional'nyi otchet po chelovecheskomy razvitiiu* (Bishkek: United Nations Population Fund, 2001).

7 B. Bekturganova, "Istoriko-sotsial'nye faktory vnutrennei migratsii kyrgyzov v napravlenii 'selo-gorod'," in A. Asankanov (ed.), *Etnosotsiologicheskii ocherk* (Bishkek: Muras, 1999), 47–57.

8 Sarygulov, *Sovremennaia demograficheskaia situatsiia*.

9 iom, *Internal Migration in Kyrgyzstan*.

10 Ergeshbaev, *Migratsionnye protsessy v Kyrgyzstane*.

11 See J. Smith and E. Satybaldieva, "Lessons from Osh: International Responses to the June 2010 Events, *eucam Working Paper* (forthcoming 2014).

Almost all studies agree that the main factor spurring internal migration is unemployment, followed by insufficient income levels.12 For example, incomes in Bishkek are four times higher than in Naryn, 2.8 times higher than in Jalalabad, and double the rates in Issyk-Kul and Osh provinces.13 Many young people move to Bishkek and Osh to study and then remain after graduation. There are also social, ecological, and political reasons for migration. Families often put pressure on younger members to go out and find work to support immediate relatives. Moreover, in many southern regions water deficits are forcing people off the land and Kyrgyzstan's turbulent post-independence years of popular revolts all have sent people into migration. The iom also high- lights poor social security, the deteriorating economy, prolonged economic depression, and lack of opportunities for youth in the regions.14 Behind this regional economic difference, there have been structural changes in post- Soviet society due to the collapse of state industries, the development of competitive market relations, and the growth of small businesses and entrepreneurial activities, most of which are informal.

The iom report mentioned above suggests that the central government's weak attempt to revive Kyrgyz regional economies through the creation of free economic zones failed in its early stages due to counterproductive laws on foreign investment; investors lost their trust in the Kyrgyz government and declined to invest further. There is also a strong link between the mobility of people and their education. For example, Rysbakova and Ergeshbaev found that people with higher education are the most mobile (26%). They are followed by people with specialized secondary education (19%), secondary education (10%), and primary or incomplete secondary education (8%). Mendibaev explains that people with less education see fewer prospects for themselves in the cities, while people with higher qualifications cannot find suitable employment in the regions.15 If we consider that the majority of

12 A. Rysbakova and U. Ergeshbaev, "Migratsionnaia aktivnost' sel'skoi molodezhi – vazhneishii factor sostoianiia rynka truda iuga Kyrgyzstana," in A. Satybaldiev, E. Jorobekova, A. Kunin, and M. Erkebaev (eds), *Molodezh' v usloviiakh rynka: Probelma adaptatsii i tsennostnoi orientatsii* (Osh: Osh Technological University, 2000), 150–56.

13 K. Isakov and E. Churakeeva, "Formirovanie prioritetov ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki s uchetom protsessov vnutrennei migratsii," *Vestnik krsu*, 8, no. 12 (2008): pp. 11–15.

14 iom, *Internal Migration in Kyrgyzstan*.

15 N. Mendibaev, "Migratsiia: Novye poseleniia i molodezh'," in Satybaldiev, et al. *Molodezh' v usloviiakh rynka*, pp. 145–49. However, the iom reports that not many are successful and that there is a waste of human capital when people with qualifications come to the city and are forced to work in the informal sector.

migrants are of working age – only 16% are younger than 15 and 5% are older than 65 – it is clear that migration leaves regions without the young and educated human resources necessary for their development.16 The major negative impact of migration relates to the demographic situation in Kyrgyzstan. Migration has created imbalances in the age and gender structures, reproductive behavior, and the composition of the general population. By the early 2000s, the absolute volume of natural population growth fell by 36.6%, the birth-rate coefficient fell by 28%, and life expectancy fell by 1.4 years.17 These are characteristic of a population with a falling reproduction rate.18 Contemporary reproduction is characterized by the transition from an expanding to a stationary type, while the family structure transitions from large- to middle- sized families.19 Currently, half of the country's natural population growth compensates for the losses caused by migration.20

As a result of migration, the Chui Valley and Bishkek have become very densely populated (76 people per sq. km.), while large territories in the south and mountainous regions of the country are being deserted; e.g., the population density in Talas province is now only 14 people per sq. km.21 Besides the emptying villages, small former industrial towns have been experiencing significant population loss, with some settlements now one-tenth their former size. As a result, most regions of Kyrgyzstan are experiencing de-urbanization, while Bishkek and the Chui Valley face hyper-urbanization. Bishkek is turning into a large agglomeration, stretching 60 km along an east-west axis. The urbanization rate in the Chui Valley is 58.4%, while in Naryn province it is only 19.2%.22 An iom study shows that population growth due to migration is 89% in Bishkek and 56% in the Chui Valley. This report warns that such dramatic changes lead to significant demographic risks for the losing regions: "The mountainous areas lose not only demographic and labor potential, but also genetic potential, e.g., the population adapted to extreme living conditions, the recovery of which will require not one but several generations."23

The unfpa report cited above identifies a number of problems caused by internal migration. These include high rates of unemployment in Bishkek, the

16 iom, *Internal Migration in Kyrgyzstan*.
17 Sarygulov, *Sovremennaia demograficheskaia situatsiia*.
18 *Kontseptsiia gosudartsvennoi demograficheskoi*.
19 Sarygulov, *Sovremennaia demograficheskaia situatsiia*.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Bekturganova, "Istoriko-sotsial'nye faktory."
23 iom, *Internal Migration in Kyrgyzstan*, p. 19.

marginalization of internal migrants, and potential national security threats in the deserted borderlands.24 The report notes that the urban population in the capital city increased by 35–45%, reaching 1.1 million, increasing the pressure on the city's resources and infrastructure, which were designed for a maximum of 800,000 people. New informal settlements around Bishkek spring up with- out proper infrastructure and a majority of the migrants living here do not have formal registration in the capital, which limits their access to basic services. Other problems include spiraling crime rates, unsanitary living conditions, and capacity shortages in schools and hospitals. At the same time, the regions are deteriorating; there is a constant loss of active and qualified workers, and the out-migration of women has led to dropping birth rates. The same report suggests that a majority of experts think that migrants will not return, while a survey of migrants' opinions shows that only one-third of migrants have made a definite decision to leave their homes permanently, while others are ready to return if work, micro-credits for business start-ups, and proper housing become available.

The following discussion looks at the specific problems experienced by rural communities due to out-migration and two of the follow-on negative effects of such migration: the hyper-urbanization of Kyrgyzstani cities through rural migrants, reflected in poorly constructed and illegal housing areas known as *novostroikas* (new settlements) on the outskirts of cities, especially Bishkek; and the rapidly emptying rural borderlands in southern regions that are today experiencing creeping migration, as Tajik citizens illegally settle on abandoned Kyrgyzstani-owned lands, particularly in Batken province.

Migration and Its Consequences in Rural Kyrgyzstan

While many studies have stressed the value of remittances for overcoming economic depression in rural areas, the social and political effects of migration on rural communities tend to be neglected. This section attempts to re-examine this favorable attitude toward remittances by digging deeper into the effects of rural out-migration. Specifically, it shows how monies from abroad can reproduce social stratification and divisions in rural societies and urban-rural inequalities. It also focuses on how migration can disrupt family relationships by separating children from their birth parents, resulting in distress, anxiety, and anger and leading to an overall rise in social problems in rural Kyrgyzstan.

24 unfpa, *Natsional'nyi otchet po chelovecheskomy razvitiiu*.

Remittances and economic development in rural villages

There is a steady stream of people migrating away from rural Kyrgyzstan, and young individuals regard migration as an important strategy to survive and access economic opportunities. One positive feature of migration is that a high remittance flow can lead to economic development and poverty reduction in the migrant's region of origin. For instance, Ambassador Andrew Tesoriere, the head of the osce Center in Bishkek, notes that "migration is a positive force which can help the Kyrgyzstani government to overcome economic down- turns."25 According to a migration expert from the French non-governmental organization acted, in 2010 Kyrgyzstani migrants sent $1.2 billion in remittances in 2010, constituting 27% of gdp.26 But it is important to examine how and to what extent remittances improve socioeconomic environment in rural communities. Although national and international actors predominantly view migration as a positive phenomenon, in rural communities migration can have contradictory and ambivalent effects, so that it is simultaneously "celebrated and criticized."27

The World Bank suggests that about 70–80% of remittances to Kyrgyzstan flow to rural areas, but Rueegg disputes this.28 The Economic Policy Institute in Bishkek, after examining yearly remittances of Kyrgyzstani migrants by geographic origin, argues that urban migrants are more likely to send back money than rural migrants because they have better education and employment opportunities.29 For a better understanding of the impact of remittances, greater analysis is required based on regional and household socioeconomic disparities.

There is no comprehensive evidence to suggest that remittances pro- vide secure income and economic opportunities to families left behind in

25 "Kyrgyz Migrants Sending Less Money Home, Finds Study Supported by osce Centre in Bishkek," November 26, 2009, http://www.osce.org/bishkek/51667.

26 Interview, Bishkek, November 2011.

27 E. Isabaeva, "Leaving to Enable Others to Remain: Remittances and New Moral Economiesof Migration in Southern Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey*, 30, no. 3–4 (2011): 541–54.

28 B. Quillin, C. Segni, S. Sirtaine, and I. Skamnelos, *Remittances in cis Countries: A Study of Selected Corridors* (Washington, dc: World Bank, 2007), http://documents.worldbank .org/curated/en/2007/07/11819500/remittances-cis-countries-study-selected-corridors; M. Rueegg, "The Effects of Labour Migration on Rural Development in Kyrgyzstan," (Bishkek: Helvetas Kyrgyzstan, June/August 2008), http://www.majarueegg.com/ Archivos/Speeches/ImpactsLabourMigration_oct08.pdf.

29 S. Aitymbetov, "Emigrant Remittances: Impact on Economic Development of Kyrgyzstan," iceg European Center Working Paper No. 31, June 2006, http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/ 00003286/01/emigrant_remittances.pdf.

Kyrgyzstan. On the one hand, Lukasheva and Makenbaeva30 find that remittances are a main source of income for 53% of households in the three southern provinces, varying from 60% of households in Jalalabad and Batken provinces to 32% of households in Osh province. On the other hand, however, contrary findings suggest that remittances do not amount to a substantial part of household income. For instance, Ablezova, Nastritdinov, and Rahimov's research on the impact of migration on elderly households reveals that the personal pension is the main source of income for 83% of pensioners. In fact, 92% of elderly couples state that their children's remittances are not an important source of income.31 Remittances are seasonal, with sons (48%) more likely to send money back than daughters (30%). The World Bank's research on remittances also finds that only about 40% of labor migrants actually remit money home. Migrants' average monthly income is $410, from which a majority of migrants (61.4%) send between $50 and $200 every two months.32

Furthermore, it seems that the poorest households do not benefit from migration and remittances. Ibralieva and Mikkonen-Jeanneret reveal that of 90 poor and "ultra-poor" households in five provinces, migration as a coping mechanism has a limited impact on reducing household poverty.33 In some ways, high levels of migration in rural areas can contribute toward the emergence of multi-generational households, which consist of the elderly parents and young children of migrants, two very vulnerable groups facing a high risk of chronic rural poverty. Migration can increase the vulnerability of poor households comprised of those left behind, because migrant workers from very poor families often incur debts to pay to migrate and then only are able to earn low wages, working in low-skilled jobs. In some cases, poor families have been refused access to social assistance, such as the united monthly benefit, because they have a family member working abroad. Ibralieva and Mikkonen- Jeanneret also report that poor households do not receive regular monthly

30 I. Lukasheva and I. Makenbaeva, *Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Labour Migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia* (Bishkek: osce, acted and European Commission, 2009), http://www.osce.org/bishkek/40540.

31 M. Ablezova, E. Nasritdinov, and R. Rahimov, *Impact of Migration on Elderly People: Grandparent-headed Households in Kyrgyzstan* (Bishkek: Help Age International, Social Research Center, 2008), http://src.auca.kg/pdf/The_impact_of_migration_on_elderly_people.pdf.

32 Quillin, Segni, Sirtaine, and Skamnelos, *Remittances in cis Countries*.

33 K. Ibralieva and E. Mikkonen-Jeanneret, *Constant Crisis: Perceptions of Vulnerability and Social Protection in the Kyrgyz Republic* (Bishkek: HelpAge International, 2009), http://www.eldis.org/assets/Docs/44801.html.

remittances and, on average, remittances constitute less than 5% of the total household income.

It seems that the benefits from remittances correlate with socioeconomic status, adversely contributing toward the reproduction of social stratification in rural communities. Aitymbetov shows that 60–70% of remittances are spent to meet basic food and clothing needs.34 Affluent households, usually headed by large farmers, invest money into livestock and agriculture. Field observations show that large-scale farmers use remittances to hire labor from neigh- boring countries, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, to cultivate their fields, sustaining their holdings whereas most farmers struggle to do so. Middle class households also spend remittances on house construction, building renovation, car purchase and life-cycle ceremonies (*tois*), enriching their social and symbolic capital. Isabaeva and Rubinov argue that although such utilization of remittances can be constituted as non-productive, it has to be contextualized in Kyrgyzstan's informal economy.35 Life-cycle ceremonies, for instance, are essential for maintaining important social networks and for generating large amounts of cash through monetarized gift-giving practices. Some purchases, such as a car, serve both as consumption and investment, generating income through informal taxi services.

There are some indirect effects of migration. Thieme notes that migrants' sense of belonging changes as they begin to attach importance to their new place of work and residence, pushing aside their old place of origin.36 Migrants often do not return to their villages, and younger migrants, after being exposed to the urban lifestyle and values, come to imagine their future in the city. They tend to build houses in Bishkek and Osh, contributing to hyper-urbanization, higher concentrations of capital in major cities, and reduced money flows into the wealth-generating capacity of rural areas. In such a way, migration can widen the urban-rural divide in the country. It is also worth noting that many migrants aspire to become citizens of Russia and Kazakhstan, which might one day affect their loyalty and support to communities back home.37

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34 Aitymbetov, "Emigrant Remittances."

35 Isabaeva, "Leaving to Enable Others to Remain"; I. Rubinov, *Migration, Development, and the "Toi Economy": Cultural Integration of Remittances in Northern Kyrgyzstan* (Bishkek: Social Research Center, 2010), http://src.auca.kg/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=767&lang=en.

36 S. Thieme, "Sustaining Livelihoods in Multilocal Settings: Possible Theoretical Linkages between Livelihoods and Transnational Migration," *Research Mobilities* 3, no. 1 (2008): 51–71.

37 V. Ruget and B. Usmanalieva, "Citizenship, Migration, and Loyalty Towards the State: A Case Study of the Kyrgyzstani Migrants Working in Russia and Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey*, 27, no. 2 (2008): 129–41.

Impact of Migration on Household Structure and Children's Well-Being

Research highlights that rural residents assess migration not only by interpreting its economic effects, but also by understanding its impact on familial and social relationships. On several occasions, elderly participants expressed sadness and bitterness at how villages have become de-populated and families have broken up. The situation is likened to war, when "all the men are gone," and children are raised by grandparents. There are indeed some negative effects on household structure and children's well-being. As more mothers join their migrant husbands abroad to provide greater economic security, more households become headed by grandparents, who feel over- whelmed by the family burden imposed upon them. On average, grandparents look after four or five grandchildren, struggling to manage the household in the face of insufficient health care, welfare support, and child care subsidies. Gulnara Derbisheva, the former deputy minister of social protection, noted that in Batken province, grandparents had been abandoning their grandchildren at boarding schools for orphans (*internatnye uchrezhdeniia* or *internats*) in order to cope with the caring responsibilities for several grandchildren:

> Grandparents can't look after so many grandchildren, they are barely surviving themselves. We're losing the institution of the family. Grandparents give away their grandchildren to *internats*. These institutions are not equipped to educate ordinary children. In Batken, 80% of *internats* are full of children who are not orphans. They have biological parents, who are migrants.38

Sanghera, Ablezova, and Botoeva argue that separation from birth parents can cause children to experience distress, disappointment, and anxiety that have adverse effects on family support and care in adolescence and adulthood.39 Child–parent attachment is important for fostering a secure upbringing and disruptions or loss of attachment tend to create insecure and ambivalent family relationships.

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38 Interview, Bishkek, November 2011.

39 B. Sanghera, M. Ablezova, and A. Botoeva, "Attachment, Emotions, and Kinship Care-giving: an Investigation into Separation Distress and Family Relatedness in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstani Households," 2011, http://kent.academia.edu/BaliharSanghera/Papers/658849/Attachment_Emotions_and_Kinship_CareGiving_An_Investigation_into_Family_Relatedness_and_Support_in_Post-Soviet_Kyrgyzstani_Households.

Inevitably, migrants are unable to fulfill everyday household chores and obligations, which have to be borne by other family members, who may have reasons to feel resentful and overwhelmed. Children sometimes miss school to carry out daily domestic tasks. A nationwide household survey revealed that many girls do not enroll at school because of household chores and family care work.40 The pressure to miss school is greater for girls than boys, partly because daughters usually marry and join their husband's household, so that their education is less valued and not treated as an investment.

Ablezova, Nasritdinov, and Rahimov suggest that children in the care of grandparents are more likely to perform poorly in school than children in the care of their birth parents because grandparents cannot attend school meetings or supervise their grandchildren's homework.41 Children in grandparent- headed households are also more prone to truancy and deviant behavior. Police officers report that children are less likely to listen to their grandparents and are perceived to be "misled by bad elements" in the community. Gulnara Derbisheva also suggests that the level of delinquency and deviance is high in Batken, which lies on a major drug-trafficking route:

> In Batken, don't forget that it's a big narco-transit route that is also very lucrative. In these villages, many young people are unemployed. There is nothing for them to do after completing school. Many kids become recruited into narco-trafficking. There's a trend in criminalization.42

Clearly, rural families as an institution are under huge strain as a result of migration, requiring support to ensure children's well-being. But state institutions and international donors have tended to neglect the impact of migration on families, offering no concrete program of support to mitigate these documented negative effects.

Consequences of Internal Migration: Case Studies from the Field

Though rural out-migration is not a new phenomenon – it was organized systematically under the Soviet planned economy – its pace and unregulated

40 A. Kroeger and A. Anderson, "Remittances and Children's Schooling: New Evidence from Kyrgyzstan, 2005–2008. Paper presented at the 8th iza Annual Migration Meeting, May 12–15, 2011, Washington, dc, http://ftp.iza.org/dp6293.pdf

41 Ablezova, Nastritdinov, and Rahimov, *Impact of Migration on Elderly People*.

42 Interview, Bishkek, November 2011.

consequences have resulted in new challenges for the Kyrgyz state. The causes and effects of migration from the countryside are outlined below, while this section examines two specific domestic case studies that result from these migration flows. Internal migration in the country has brought unregulated population growth to the main cities of Bishkek and Osh, along with various social and economic debates and problems that constitute a threat to domestic security. And in Batken province, which borders Tajikistan, out-migration is resulting in a rather new phenomenon – the illegal settlement of sparsely populated Kyrgyz villages by Tajik citizens, locally known as "creeping migration." This localized cross-border population movement, an in-migration of neigh- boring Tajiks as local Kyrgyz move to the cities of Kyrgyzstan or abroad, is being interpreted as a real risk to state sovereignty and security. It has also increased tensions between the two national groups. Both consequences of internal migration have been largely neglected.

Novostroikas *in Bishkek*

Just like the residents who did not migrate but remain in demographically changing rural areas, migrants moving into cities may feel cheated, angry, and disappointed. Most find themselves living in a *novostroika*, or "new settlement"; that is, the illegal districts and settlements that have built up on the outskirts of Kyrgyzstani cities over recent years to house internal migrants from the countryside. While this phenomenon has implications for the country's two largest cities, Bishkek and Osh, in particular, these differ fundamentally. In Osh, as a representative of the ngo Human Rights Advocacy Center recently described, the legalization of *novostroikas* and extension of rights to their residents have become entangled in the city's post-2010 violence reconstruction efforts. In particular, the city's controversial new master plan has been criticized as discriminating against the ethnic Uzbek population.43 This section focuses on the situation in Bishkek, as policies toward *novostroikas* here have national implications.

Three main inflows of internal migrants into Bishkek have been recognized. Representatives of the ngo Arysh44 describe these as follows: 1) the "social wave" of 1989–1991, when ethnic Kyrgyz – many of them former students – occupied land in Kok-Jar, protesting that most of the land at that time was given to Russians; 2) the "economic wave" of 1992–2005, a longer period when

43 Interview, Osh, May 2013; on the master plan, see, e.g., "Refugee Shelters to Yield to New High-Rise Buildings in Osh," *Crisis Monitor*, January 2011, http://www.crisis-monitor.info/kyrgyzstan/refugee-shelters-to-yield-to-new-high-rise-buildings-in-osh/.

44 Interview, Bishkek, May 2013.

land was taken by migrants coming to the city looking for work; and 3) the "commercial/political wave" after 2005, when then-President Kurmanbeb Bakiev's administration was engaged in the "land business" in partnership with a "land-mafia," which consisted of land-grabbing and selling through middle- men. A popular slogan at the time – "Vote for Bakiev and get a plot of land!"45 – reflected both the political agenda of the new administration, which was attempting to bring in more supporters from the south, and the commercial interests of corrupted agencies.

There have not been many studies of the new settlements in the outskirts of Bishkek. Sanghera and Satybaldieva make a compelling argument that explains the phenomenon of land-grabbing as an outcome of survival and moral struggles. They describe how "socially and politically disfranchised, poor families barely survive, lacking real power to make meaningful changes to their lives" and how "in everyday politics of resistance, the property-less class seeks to get even with the system that oppresses it, grabbing opportunities to either possess or destroy the city's wealth and culture."46 The authors describe the phenomenon of land-grabbing as a fundamental right for humans when the state fails to provide for basic opportunities.

Another report blames the structural inequalities of the post-Soviet transition period for the dire conditions that have emerged in new illegal settlements.47 They portray migrants as a socially excluded class that occupies low-paid jobs, lacks legal status (residential registration), cannot access basic services (education, medical care, social protection), and has the cultural stigma of *myrks* (uneducated villagers) attached to them by city residents. They describe how land issues become politicized when internal migrants resort to protests, violence, and electoral campaigns to obtain land and legalize their status. However, they also propose that the legalization of these communities will not solve their problems unless these structural conditions also are addressed. Similarly, Mitenko underlines the role of internal migrants from

45 In Russian, *Progolosui za Bakieva – poluchi uchastok!* Interview at the Arysh ngo, Bishkek, May 2013.

46 B. Sanghera and E. Satybaldieva, "Ethics of Property, Illegal Settlements and the Right to Subsistence," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32, no. 1-2 (2012): 103, 104.

47 B. Sanghera, E. Satybaldieva, A. Rodionov, S. Serikzhanova, N. Choibekov, and K. Sultan-muratova, "Illegal Settlements and City Registration in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan: Implications for Legal Empowerment, Politics, and Ethnic Tensions," *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, No. 5, 2012, http://www.opensocietyfoundations .org/reports/illegal-settlements-and-city-registration-kyrgyzstan-and-kazakhstan -implications-legal.

new settlements as a major force in both the 2005 and 2010 revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, yet he regards them as mere "meat" shot at by the authorities during the revolts – protesters without a political agenda, driven purely by the economic necessities and the harsh economic conditions in which they live.48 Such images of internal migrants as uneducated, marginalized, and persecuted residents of the city who occupy low-paid jobs dominate public opinion aboutthis issue.

However, other authors focus on different types of settlements. Jeenbaeva suggests that many internal migrants are part of a growing middle class in Bishkek, with statistics showing higher levels of education, qualifications, and skills than previously. Part of this discrepancy relates to the fact that many researchers and media sources tend to focus on the most recently occupied illegal settlements with the worst living conditions.49 These settlements have a whole package of problems that, while a pressing issue that requires immediate attention, only tells one side of the story. A slightly more balanced approach has been taken by Bermet Zhumakadyr kyzy in a study that compared four new settlements located close to each other, but built at different times.50 She regards legal status as one of the key determinants of a *novostroika*'s success; she shows how living conditions can vary greatly in these settlements, but she also mentions the importance of political pressure on and personal connections with government officials for their success. The work of Emil Nasritdinov51 attempts to show a more representative image of *novostroikas* through a comparative study of all the new settlements that appeared around Bishkek over the last two decades. This research employed survey52 and gis (Geographic Information Systems) mapping techniques to compile and analyze Bishkek's

48 P. Mitenko, "Gde nochuet kirgizskaia revoliutsiia?" *Fergana News*, March 2011, http://www.fergananews.com/articles/6917.

49 J. Jeenbaeva, "Intersectoral Policy Making in Creating the New Middle Class: A Case Study of Internal Migrants of Bishkek Engaged in Informal Sector," in *Kyrgyzstan Today: Policy Briefs on Civil Society, Migration, Islam, and Corruption* (Bishkek: auca – Social Research Center, 2008), 38–45.

50 B. Zhumakadyr kyzy, "Development in Urbanized Settings: A Study of Novostroikas in Bishkek," (Bishkek: American University of Central Asia, unpublished Bachelor's thesis, 2012), https://www.auca.kg/uploads/ICP/Development%20in%20Urbanized%20Settings%20-%20A%20Study%20of%20Novostroikas%20in%20Bishkek.doc.

51 E. Nasritdinov, "Novostroikas," paper presented at the eucam Seminar "Kyrgyzstan and Europe: A Relationship Built on Securing Development?" American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, May 23, 2012.

52 The study includes the opinions of 300 *novostroika* residents, with at least ten respon- dents from each, and will be expanded in future.

new settlements according to population size, infrastructure, and sociocultural characteristics. The city's official roster53 lists 48 new settlements organized around local territorial management units in four urban administrative districts; however, this includes some settlements that are very old, have established infrastructure, and hardly classify as new settlements. Some other settlements are very tiny neighborhoods of some 20 houses built on empty spaces within the city's traditional boundaries. Other listed settlements are comprised of formerly separate settlements that, with the restructuring of the city's administrative boundaries, were merged into larger administrative units. Therefore, the number of remaining *novostroikas* are reduced to some 29 places; a more or less realistic representation of Bishkek's new settlements.

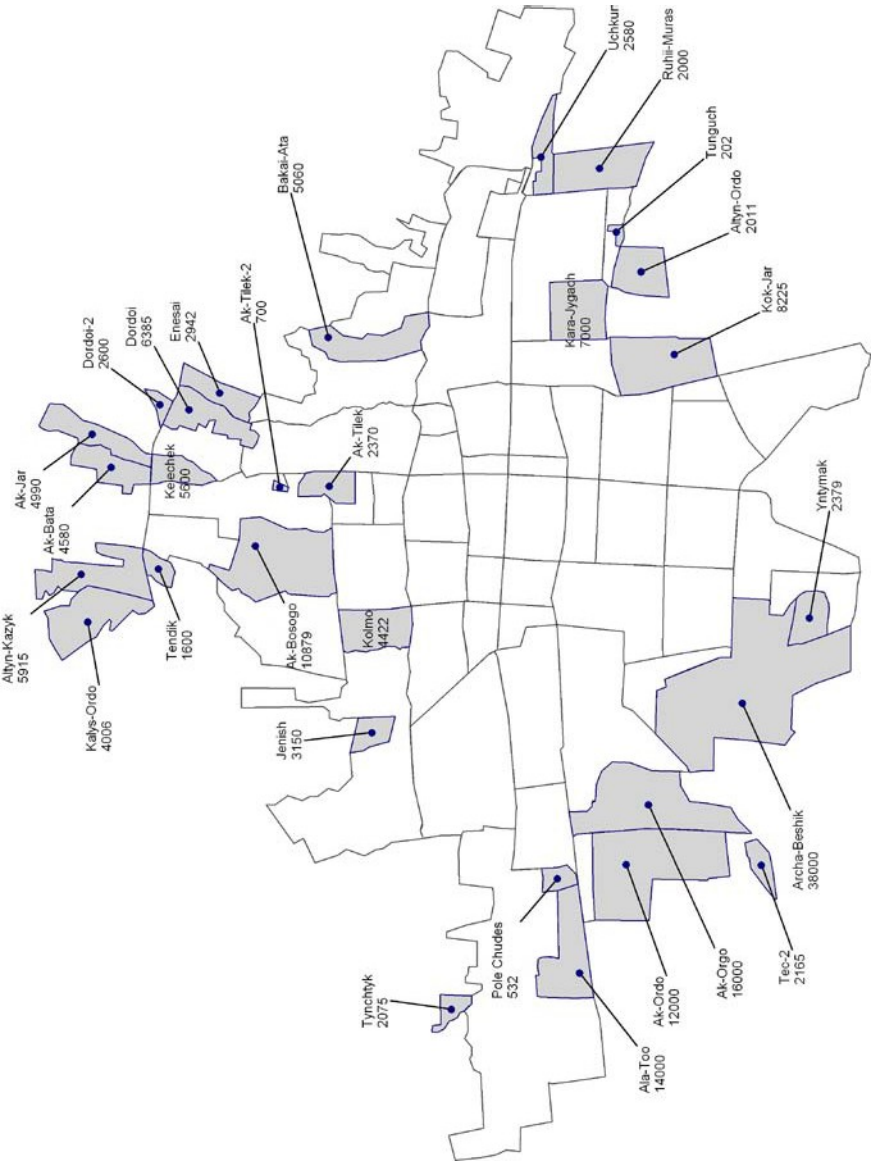
Map 1 shows the variation in the population size in *novostroikas*.54 While the Tunguch settlement has 200 residents, the largest settlement, at Archa-Beshik, explodes to 38,000. The overall, combined population is about 172,000 people occupying some 45,000 land plots. Although, as many migrants are unregistered, both the total city population and *novostroika* population is open to debate. Based on best estimates, about 14–15% of Bishkek's total population lives in these settlements. Out of the 29 *novostroikas*, only two have not acquired legal status: Ak-Jar and Altyn-Kazyk. Ak-Jar is situated on the top of a gas pipeline, while Altyn-Kazyk grew alongside the municipal waste disposal site. Similarly, one part of the Ala-Too settlement remains illegal because it is located near a burial site for anthrax victims. This counters the prevailing dis- course on new settlement illegality, as it suggests that less than 10% of territory in new settlements is illegal, while 90% has some level of proper legal status.

All settlements were compared according to the state of infrastructure, access to basic services, and the activities of various official government agencies. Figure 1 shows the correlation between the date of establishment and the availability of infrastructure, while Table 1 shows when these novostroikas were occupied.

Some 14% of Bishkek's *novostroikas* were established before 1995, 14% between 1996 and 2000, 30% between 2001 and 2005, while 42% of lands were occupied in the last seven years, thus offering some explanation to why many new settlements still face multiple social and economic problems. For example, the overall rate of school attendance among children in *novostroikas* is 92%; these rates drop for children without registration (75%), children whose parents are abroad as labor migrants (88%), and children of the unemployed

53 See the city's agency for development: http://www.cda.kg/index.php/ru/mtu.

54 The figure has been compiled using official statistics when available, supplemented by local experts' estimates when missing.



Map 1 *Population size of Bishkek* novostroikas

(83%).55 While almost all of the older settlements already have schools and medical centers, this is still an issue for the newer settlements. Of interest is the correlation between the date of establishment and the activities of state

55 One surprising finding is that children in younger settlements – those established since2006 – have higher rates of school attendance (97%) despite the poorer infrastructure.

Table 1 *Percentage of respondents by the year of settlement in novostroikas*

Before 1995	**1996–2000**	**2001–2005**	**2006–present**
14%	14%	30%	42%

and civil organizations – police, social services workers, and local administrations are less involved in the older *novostroikas*, suggesting a decrease in the social problems of these areas as time passes and their status becomes normalized.

Though some studies have identified the importance of political pressure and connections with government officials and politicians as factors in the more rapid legalization and infrastructure development in new settlements, the important role of international and local organizations cannot be dis- counted. Local ngos, such as Arysh and Eraiym, have significantly helped *novostroika* residents to organize and lobby for positive changes, while national organizations, such as aris, are now implementing several major infrastructure projects (e.g., water, roads, schools, and medical centers) through the city's development agency.56 However, the main force behind local development is

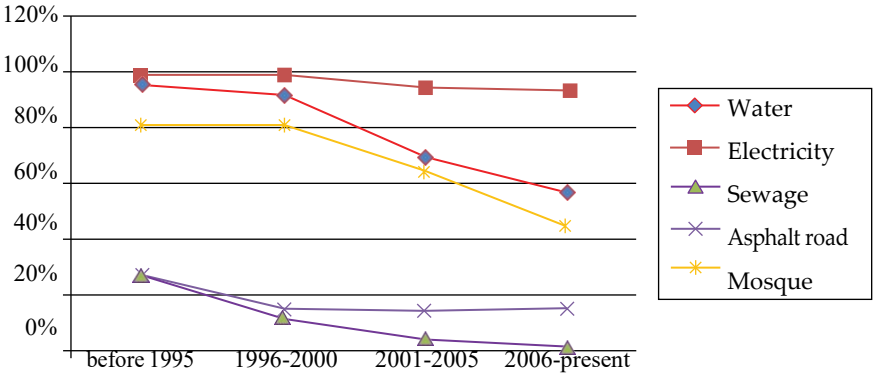


Figure 1 *Correlation between time of establishment and availability of infrastructure*

More research on this is needed, but early hypotheses include the stronger role of ngos today in getting children enrolled in school than in earlier periods, or that children of more established settlements have more opportunities for work.

56 See the aris website: http://www.aris.kg/en/.

people themselves. Situations differ across the city, but anecdotal evidence makes it is clear that people in *novostroikas* do not wait for help to come from above. Various *novostroika* collectives have taken matters into their own hands and secured electricity, gas, water, and even sewerage services. Residents from the Dordoi *novostroika*, for example, described how locals organized their own resources and collected funds to pave roads and were now trying to organize sewerage.57 Moreover, all new settlements have their own saunas, hair-dress- ing salons, car washes, sewing services, and similar endeavors that meet the needs of locals.

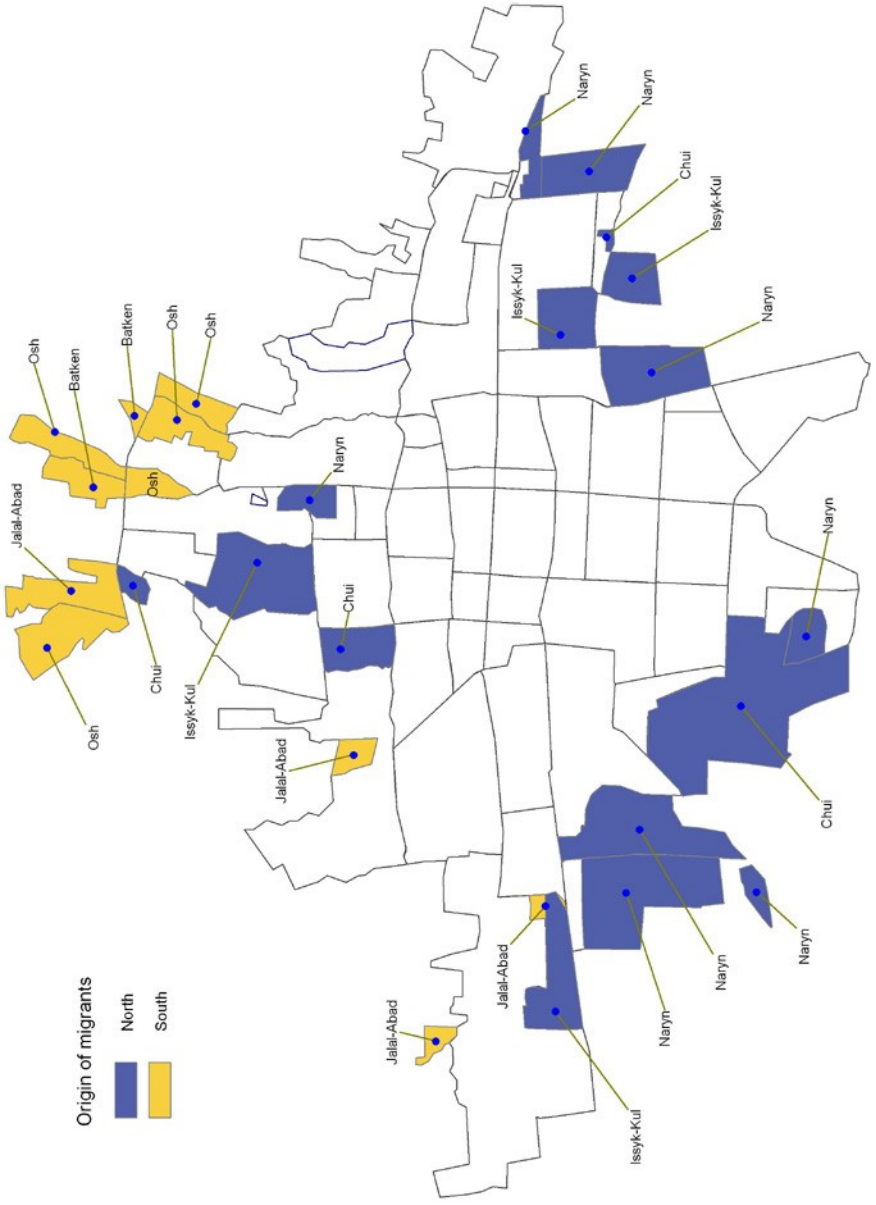
Such joint exercises strengthen the sense of community, something already in existence, as many *novostroikas* are dominated by residents who have migrated from the same regions of the country. Land occupations rarely hap- pen individually, they are group projects. They can be initiated by people from one village or province and led by one political leader or government official with links to his or her relatives, tribesmen, villagers, etc. Map 2 shows how all southern *novostroikas* (which are also amongst the oldest) are occupied mostly by internal migrants from northern regions of Kyrgyzstan, who comprise 63% of all new migrants in Bishkek, while more recent settlements in the north of Bishkek are occupied by southern Kyrgyz (the remaining 37% of migrants). Naryn (23%) and Chui (22%) provinces provide the largest number of internal migrants and residents of *novostroikas*.

Another factor that explains such a spatial distribution is occupation. The numbers of migrants who are engaged in trade from the south of the country are significantly higher than those from the north. Historically, the south is more trade-oriented than the north. Thus, this provides some explanation to why southern migrants concentrate in the northern *novostroikas* of Bishkek – these settlements have grown around Kyrgyzstan's biggest market, the Dordoi bazaar, where nearly 40,000 people work.58 However, evidence from cognitive maps drawn by some respondents in the survey shows that while the large markets are magnets for *novostroika* residents, migrants are not limited to these marginalized settlements, as they use and visit the central parts of the city on a daily basis.

Novostroikas are a fixed feature of the urban landscape, but they are greatly contested by the authorities. Much evidence concludes that the dangers asso- ciated with these settlements are largely exaggerated. There are fewer *novostroi- kas* around Bishkek than appear in official records and the majority of them are legal. The older settlements have developed infrastructure slowly, often at

57 Interview, Bishkek, May 2013.

58 Nasritdinov, "Novostroikas."



Map 2 *Regional origins of* novostroika *residents*

the initiative of the residents themselves, as well as through the help of ngos and local politicians. As a result, living conditions are not uniformly poor, although residents of some of the newer *novostroikas* face difficult conditions and deprivations. Migrants are engaged with the economic, political, social,

and cultural structures of the city, and contribute economically through their activities, especially around the large markets. However, there remain serious challenges for new migrants to the cities, who often remain without official residency, as a result of the uncertain status of several of the *novostroikas*. Migrants often find administrative barriers to receiving residency, very often due to corrupt practices that permeate the lower levels of bureaucracy. Without official registration as resident, these internal migrants remain outside the system and have limited access to formal employment, no access to health and social services, and find it difficult to educate their children. This combination of poor living conditions and marginalization creates a risk group that has often been linked to the political instabilities that have plagued Kyrgyzstan ofrecent years.

Emptying borderlands: Creeping Migration in Batken Province

Batken province always has been seen as a volatile border region because ofthe acute shortage of resources and complex and un-demarcated borders with Tajikistan (in the north, west, and northwest) and Uzbekistan (in the north).In the past decade, migration from many Batken villages has sharpened anxieties over "creeping migration," increasing the potential for "ethnicized" conflictsin the border region. Clashes occurred between Tajikistanis and Kyrgyzstanisin 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011 over land disputes, and, most recently, overthe construction of a road on contested territory.59 The term "creeping migration" describes a process whereby Tajikistani citizens illegally purchase landand houses on Kyrgyzstani territory. The phenomenon can be extended toinclude the illegal use of pastures, water, and "contested" land by Tajikistanisfor cultivation, grazing, and building homes.60 Confusion over the exact position of the border is a Soviet legacy, as the border was not deemed importantenough to be clearly marked. During the Soviet period a number of maps wereproduced by Moscow that showed different borderlines, and today both stateshave been unwilling to agree upon a common border. As one frustrated government official working with the eu's Border Management Programme inCentral Asia (bomca) lamented,

59 Interview with Batken border department, November 2011; also D. Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Another Border Clash, More Conflicting Reports," EurasiaNet, April, 27, 2013, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66897.

60 According to the International Foundation for Tolerance, creeping migration started in 1989 and was prevalent in two districts of Batken province (Batken – Ak-Sai *ayil okmotu*; Leilek – Janyjer and Kulundu *ayil okmotus*). The first period (1990–94) occurred due to the political instability in Tajikistan. The second, intensive wave occurred from 2001 to 2003. Interview, Batken, November 2011.

> No one can say "let's delimitate according to this map," because the decisions of the 1924 and 1955 maps fully contradict each other. Each side chooses the map that is beneficial for itself.61

Both Dushanbe and Bishkek are aware of the volatility of the situation and, for over a decade, they have been engaged in border demarcation talks in an attempt to reach a compromise. However, progress has remained elusive due to the extremely sensitive nature of the issue, as neither side wants to appear to be succumbing to pressure from the other side. Accordingly, the inter-government commission has not publicized any of the results of talks and, according to officials at the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there is an agreement between the two sides to remain silent to avoid rumors and prevent gossip "scaring" locals into unpredictable behavior.62 However, this silence has been perceived as state ineptitude and inaction and has contributed to the growing sense of frustration among local Kyrgyzstanis, often leading individuals to take the law into their own hands.

Batken, Osh, and Jalalabad provinces account for about 88% of Kyrgyzstani migrants, who leave because of poverty, unemployment, deteriorating infrastructure, and the lack of welfare support.63 Batken ranks the lowest in industrial and agricultural output and retail trade, producing about 3% of the national output.64 Agriculture accounts for 27% of employment in the region. During fieldwork in Batken, many rural residents reported that most land plots are mountainous and have no access to water.65 The severe climate and rocky soil only allow for limited forms of agriculture, such as cultivating apricots. In addition, residents in Ak-Sai *ayil okmotu* complain of the lack of pastures for

61 Interview with bomca official, Bishkek, May 2012.

62 Interview with Tajik Foreign Ministry official, Dushanbe, May 2012. For more details on the inter-governmental commission, see also N. Kerim, (ed.) *Kyrgyzstan-Tadzhikistan: Kurs na Ukreplenie Partnerstva v Kontekste Regional'nykh Sviazei* (Bishkek: Obshchestvennyi fond Turdakuna Usubalieva, 85-87, 2010), http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bischkek/ 08172.pdf.

63 Lukasheva and Makenbaeva, *Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Labour Migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia*.

64 undp, "Regional Socioeconomic Disparities in Kyrgyzstan: Are They Shrinking?" United Nations Development Programme, 2011, http://europeandcis.undp.org/senioreconomist/show/C4378032-F203-1EE9-BB353D54710A3B75.

65 Interviews took place in the villages of Ak-Sai, Maksat, Arka-1 and Arka-2, and Batken and Isfana cities in 2011, and the villages of Ak-Sai, Sogment, Gaz, Ak-Tatyr, Samarqandyq, Kulundu, Andarak, and Batken and Isfana cities in 2012.

animal husbandry.66 Ilgiz, a local state official in Ak-Sai village explains how limited opportunities for agro-production led to severe poverty and mass out-migration:

> Ak-Sai is not a good place for agriculture. We can't grow things here. There's also not enough pasture for cattle breeding. After independence, people have become extremely poor. There were days when families had wheat seeds for lunch. Children had no clothes to attend school. […] Starting from 2000, a lot of people began migrating. […] Today amongst able-bodied men, about 70% have gone to work in Russia.67

Out-migration has exacerbated the demographic imbalance in border areas of Batken and has intensified long-standing conflict over land. Tajikistani village administrations (*jaomats*), including the Vorukh enclave, have a population density "on a par with southern China and Bangladesh,"68 whereas Kyrgyzstani villages are progressively de-populating. Ak-Sai village, for instance, now has a population of less than 2,000 people, and the neighboring Tojikon village in Vorukh has a population of 15,000. Many Tajikistani households in Vorukh have seven or eight families living in one house on 4–6 *sotok*69 of land because they cannot buy any land that belongs to state collective farms. The demographic crisis and land pressure have led to rising prices for land in Vorukh, where one *sotok* costs $4,000–4,500, as much as in suburbs of Moscow.70 According to an official in the Batken provincal administration, which oversees border issues, Tajikistanis "need land as air" and young Kyrgyzstani households wish to move north. As a result, both parties engage in illegal property sales. Land pressure also pushes some Tajikistanis to cultivate contested land despite the 2008 Joint Declaration by the presidents of both countries that prohibits this.71

Creeping migration is an outcome of varying population densities, a short- age of resources, pressure for economic survival, and varied laws on property rights in the border region.72 Its nature and extent is unclear because most

66 acted's and osce's 2011 assessment of 100 southern villages also show that lack of pas-ture is an acute problem in Batken. Interview, Osh, July 2011.

67 Names have been changed to protect participants' identity.

68 M. Reeves, "Materialising State Space: 'Creeping Migration' and Territorial Integrity in Southern Kyrgyzstan," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61, no. 7 (2009): 1277–1313.

69 0.1 hectare of land.

70 Interview with border specialist, Batken, November 2011.

71 A copy of the agreement is printed in Kerim, *Kyrgyzstan-Tadzhikistan*.

72 As Reeves notes, in Tajikistan, land remains the property of the state, while in Kyrgyzstan,land is privately owned. But in Kyrgyzstan's remote mountainous areas, high cultivation

purchases are informal, though some suggest that the process has slowed down since 2006. According to Gulnara Derbisheva, who was also a member of the Kyrgyzstani State Committee on Borders, the scale of creeping migration is not negligible, impacting 160 villages, with 42 villages categorized as "high risk."73 The head of the Batken province police department reports that they have identified 300 houses that were sold illegally and that the illegal sales still continue. For instance, in Janyjer village administration (*ayil okmotu*) in Leilek district, a majority of these houses were sold in the late 1990s, but about 15–20 houses were sold as late as in 2007 and 2008.74

During interviews conducted in 2011 and 2012, Ak-Sai village residents expressed anxiety and fear about the demographic imbalance between Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani villages. Ak-Sai residents have become increasingly anxious as more and more Kyrgyzstanis migrate and do not return, increasing feelings of isolation and vulnerability. They also believe that creeping migration is a deliberate strategy by Tajikistani state officials and citizens to remove Kyrgyzstanis from the border region, as Dujshon, a school teacher in Ak-Sai village stated:

> In Vorukh, there are 30,000 people, and in Chorkukh, 35,000 people. Kyrgyz villages are not so populated. There are barely 23,000 people in the three combined *ayil okmotus* in Kyrgyzstan. In just three Tajik villages, there're 100,000 people, more than in the entire Batken district. That's why their demographic situation pushes them to occupy our land. They're slowly moving in. They encroach onto our land. And their government encourages such actions. This is their way of dealing with overpopulation.

Mirbek, a farmer in Ak-Sai expressed a similar concern about land disputes, noting the damage they have caused to Kyrgyz-Tajik relationships:

> We constantly fight over land. I have 15 *sotok* of land, a Tajik family has 4 *sotok*. There are many Tajiks that buy our land. In our village alone, there about 10–12 homes that were bought by Tajiks. Tajiks are also beginning to build houses on our pasture lands. They keep creeping in. They solve their problems in this way. Their state encourages this. Our relations are spoiled – it's not the same as it used to be.

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costs combined with the lack of a local work force often prompts owners to abandon their land.

73 Interview, Bishkek, November 2011.

74 "Gosudarstvo vykypaet doma na granitse," *Azattyk.org*, December 19, 2011, http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_batken_earth_border_tajikistan/24426626.html.

Ak-Sai residents believe that they are being penalized for the population growth in Tajikistani *jaomats* and therefore feel justified to resist creeping migration. For instance, in 2004 and 2006, Tajikistanis planted trees on six hectares of disputed territory in Ak-Sai *ayil okmotu*, and the Kyrgyzstani residents responded by uprooting them. Such confrontations can lead the two communities to clash, requiring border guards to intervene. The Kyrgyzstanis believe that they are under siege by the more numerous Tajikistanis, causing them to become solidaristic, as Mirbek, the farmer in Ak-Sai noted:

> People have become agitated and angry. There's a real ethnic solidarity now. Now, no one even looks at the nature of the conflicts. It's become "us" versus "them." When conflicts happen, we can gather here about 30 Kyrgyz men. The Tajik side gathers about 500. When conflicts occur, they're never resolved in our favor. […] These days, military men [in border posts] come to separate the fighters. This border post is very important, because it prevents Tajiks from completely moving in here.

Mutual antagonism and frequent clashes create hardened attitudes, disrupting cooperation and collaboration. Joint *marshrutkas* (mini-buses) across the border region are stopped, roads are blocked, border posts impose passport checks, and water canals are diverted. Both Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani residents report that communal interaction and inter-marriages have diminished over the years. In Tojikon village in Vorukh, a village leader noted that joint gatherings and discussions with Kyrgyzstani counterparts about local issues rarely take place. Everyday cross-border interactions have declined, as both residential communities engage in tit-for-tat violence and hostage takings. Many residents regret the loss of dialogue and interaction, but mutual suspicions and mistrust are too great to overcome, as Jalil, the farmer in Ak-Sai, suggested:

> I've lost half of my Tajik friends. We don't communicate. We now don't visit each other. Once I was invited to a wedding and they spoke about us [Kyrgyz] at the table, ignoring me. They kept saying that this is their land and that they can push out the Kyrgyz. After such incidents you don't wish to mingle with them.

Kyrgyzstani officials, international donors, and ngos have done very little to tackle the root causes of the border region problem. In March 2006, the Batken province government issued a law prohibiting the sale of land and property to foreigners. In 2011, the Kyrgyzstani national government approved a law on the special status of border areas, promising to allocate 150 million soms

($3.3 million) for social support in affected villages. International organizations operate for a limited period, usually organizing cultural events and training workshops on tolerance to ease tensions. Given that the real issues are the demographic imbalance and lack of resources, local residents feel that national and international actors are not committed to resolving the local problem.

Despite mutual mistrust and violence, both residential communities wish to prevent an escalation of tensions and to improve cooperation and cross-border trade. But relationships have been held back because Kyrgyzstanis want clarity on the demarcation issue as soon as possible, while Tajikistanis are reluctant to enter talks on this matter. Both residential communities express a desire for a greater law-enforcement presence to ensure order, the rule of law, and protection for citizens, though accusations of corruption have been levied against existing authorities. In Ak-Sai, the only presence of Kyrgyzstani state security is a border post that has 30 soldiers, which is inadequate to deal with regular conflicts and tensions. Local state institutions are too weak to regulate resources and to prevent conflicts. Mirbek, the farmer in Ak-Sai, believes that the Kyrgyzstani government has to intervene before tensions escalate into a major conflict:

> The state has to intervene. If our people beat up Tajiks, the police have to prosecute them, regardless of ethnicity. The law has to work. We have conflicts at least once a month. We have been living with this tension for almost the last 15 years. […] In the long run, if things are left as they are, there will be a bad fight. I've heard some people say, "Let there be a big fight. Let's sort this out once and for all." God forbid this! Our government does not recognize how dangerous the situation has become. Like in Osh, the state will be too late to respond.

In the presidential elections of 2011, the residents in Ak-Sai almost unanimously voted for Kamchibek Tashiev, who was perceived to be a nationalist willing to restore law and order and to "defend his people." Locals perceived Tashiev's third-place finish as another example of the state's corruption and weakness, compounding the border region residents' feelings of abandonment, vulnerability and anger, and such sentiments could easily lead to bitter conflicts, like in Osh in June 2010.

Conclusion

Though recognized as a human right and opportunity with potential benefits, migration cannot be understood as bringing only economic prosperity to

households, as it also has unintended negative social and political consequences. Migration affects family structures, children's well-being, social stratification, regional inequalities, political citizenship, and border security, among other issues. Kyrgyzstani officials and international donors need to address the effects of rural migration and the internal consequences in a thorough manner, rather than leaving individual families, villages, and communities to cope. Local communities simply do not have the capacity or the resources to adequately respond to social, economic, and political problems.

The inflow of these human resources into Bishkek and the Chui Valley creates, on the one hand, competition for jobs and the potential for conflicts with local people. The unplanned and regulated development of new settlements, *novostroikas*, increases competition for land, and further strains already overstretched resources (e.g., water) and infrastructure. Moreover, the often disillusioned and marginalized internal migrants, faced with poor living conditions, scant employment opportunities, and limited access to social services, have become pawns in the political intrigues of the country on more than one occasion, making them a destabilizing factor that cannot be ignored.75 On the other hand, this in-migration has had a very positive effect on the local economy. Migrants make up the majority of people working in the informal sector: they are the major traders in Bishkek's bazaars and the majority of workers in the construction, service, and growing textiles industries.76 The mature, integrated *novostroikas* have shown that they can become close communities that create secure and healthy living environments for their residents. Jeenbaeva argues that internal migrants in Bishkek have the potential to become a fully-fledged middle class contributing to the economic growth and stability of the country.77 She suggests that internal migrants create nearly $200 million annually and that most of this amount remains undeclared. Suitable governmental policies are necessary to support this growing middle class of migrant- entrepreneurs and to legalize the informal sector.

However, economic growth in Bishkek comes at a high price for rural communities in other parts of the country, especially those in the border zone with Tajikistan. Depopulated rural border villages offer houses, jobs, and better opportunities to residents in overpopulated Tajik villages. Local Kyrgyzstani residents have been left with a feeling of marginality and "abandonment" by

75 Interview with ngo workers, Bishkek, November 2011.

76 E. Nasritdinov, R. Rayapova, N. Kholmatova, E. Damirbek kyzy, and N. Igoshina, *Informal Economy and Social Vulnerability in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan* (Bishkek: HelpAge International and Social Research Center, auca, 2010).

77 Jeenbaeva, "Intersectoral Policy Making in Creating the New Middle Class."

the state, and they have few reasons to remain in this impoverished region. Creeping migration is facilitated by the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments' inability to reach agreement on the delimitation and demarcation of the national borders. The resulting uncertainty has left the remaining Kyrgyzstani population feeling vulnerable and threatened, and the past 10 years has seen a rise in violent border incidents that may, if not checked by the government, spiral into something much larger and deadlier. Local migration experts have become concerned about the possibility that local Kyrgyzstanis who have migrated to Russia for work and received Russian citizenship, but have remained registered in their home villages, may act as a pretext for the Russian state to "intervene" locally, with many people comparing the situation to that of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia before the 2008 war and subsequent Russian occupation.78 The danger to the Kyrgyz state is that the presence of hundreds of foreign citizens – both dual-national Kyrgyzstanis and illegally settled Tajikistanis – in this sensitive area constitutes a security risk for Kyrgyz statesovereignty.

For over a decade, researchers and policymakers have been preoccupied by Central Asia's – including Kyrgyzstan's – challenging experience with foreign labor migration to the Russian Federation, both in terms of the supposed benefits that it brings through remittances, to the problems of lost human resources in the country and the dangers and abuses faced by individual migrants abroad. In the aftermath of the 2010 Osh conflict, much attention was directed toward efforts to foster an inter-ethnic dialogue and an understanding of a purported North–South divide, something that many Kyrgyzstanis complained did not address the fundamental issues facing the country. The young state of Kyrgyzstan has many challenges ahead of it, ranging from the potential fall-out from nato forces withdrawing from Afghanistan this year to the Eurasian Customs Union negotiations that are ongoing. However, it is also clear that the government can no longer ignore Kyrgyzstan's complex domestic demographic situation, including the illegal settlements and creeping migration that are byproducts of labor migration.

78 Interviews in Bishkek and Osh, May 2013. Arguably, the current 2014 situation in Crimeaand eastern Ukraine may also fuel locals' fears of intervention.