

[ADRN Issue Briefing]

Russia's Partial Mobilization: Issues Pertaining Russian Migrants in Mongolia

Ariunbayar Bazarvaani
(Academy of Political Education)

Introduction

On September 21, 2022, Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation signed a decree enacting the announcement of partial mobilization in the country. The Kremlin took into account its citizens' potential evasion from partial mobilization, leading to the State Duma of the Russian Federation amend the Criminal Code the day before the signing of the decree. The amendment added articles outlining severe punishment for voluntary surrender, desertion from the military service and conscription, and criminal liability of up to 15 years in prison for looting during wartime.

However, these amendments to the Criminal Code became the basis for mass exodus of military-aged men fleeing the country. As such, these citizens are forced to seek asylum in the countries they migrate to, as they would potentially face severe criminal charges if they return to their homeland. Currently, an estimated 1,400,000 Russian citizens have fled to neighboring countries.

Situation of Russians in Mongolia

Since the announcement of partial mobilization on September 21, 2022, Russian citizens have been entering Mongolia through the border port of Altanbulag town in Selenge Province and Borshoo in Uvs Province. Russians who crossed the border of Mongolia have two options; either stay in the country until the Russia-Ukrainian crisis subsides or pass through our territory. Russian citizens can transit from Ulaanbaatar to the former Soviet Union countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Serbia, which has friendly relations with Russia; countries like Vietnam, Thailand and South Korea, where free tourist entries have reopened; or Israel, which has a large number of Russian immigrants. However, the Russian citizens who have arrived in Mongolia tend to be mainly Buryat, Kalmyk, Tuvan or Mongolian, with a small number of Yakut and Slavic ethnic groups.

So far, it is known that they have only used the Telegram platform since their arrival in the country. These platforms are primarily used to search for jobs and apartments such as

“Mongolia/Adaptation 03” (7638 members), “Apartments for rent in Mongolia” (1457 members), “Job vacancies in Mongolia for Russians” (1101 members), “Apartments for rent in Mongolia” (207 members), “Buryatia-Mongolia chat” (430 members), “Jobs in Mongolia” (2562 members) and “Housing in Mongolia” (704 members). Most of these group chats show a little sign of them transiting to other countries. Subsequently, Russian citizens who crossed the Mongolia border have interest in applying for a temporary stay of another 30 days in Mongolia or further, working without a visa or permit until the Russia-Ukrainian crisis subsides.

On October 3, 2022, N. Uuganbayar, Chief of the Immigration Agency of Mongolia responded to the question of a www.news.mn agency journalist regarding Russian citizens in Mongolia, “...under the given circumstances, if they apply for a temporary residence in Mongolia, a decision was made to grant them temporary residence permits upon review and verification of applications and until the crisis and conflict in their country subside...Of course, there will be another layer of inspection carried out before granting a residence permit. In case there is a request for temporary residence submitted, a permit will be issued based on an inspection of the citizen's request following a detailed process”¹.

This allows more opportunities for the Russian citizens to bring in their friends and families to Mongolia, increasing the migration flow of Russian citizens fleeing to the country. This process has already begun as the citizens have begun to bring their families and children following their arrival. Furthermore, they are even less interested in returning to their homeland following the Speaker of the State Duma V. Volodin’s speech.²

Pursuant to Article 27.5 of the Law on the "Legal Status of Foreign Nationals", foreign nationals in Mongolia can apply for a residence permit in Mongolia for private purposes at the state administrative agency in charge of foreign citizens within 21 days after the first day of arrival in the country. Moreover, citizens and entities that provide accommodation to foreign citizens must register them with the state administrative agency in charge of foreign citizens within 48 hours, which can be completed online (see Article 24.4 of the Law). However, the implementation of the latter provision is disregarded by many entities.

The Russian migrants have organized voluntary charity campaigns and activities in Ulaanbaatar to adapt to Mongolian society and to make a positive impression on the public. Additionally, many of the local NGOs have been taking initiatives to provide assistance to Russian citizens in Mongolia. For instance, civic movements such as "No Double Standard", "Ethnic Mongolian Central Association", and "Urban Citizens' Forum" joined their forces and launched an initiative to help out ethnic Mongolian clans from Russia submitting their recommendations to the Government of Mongolia.³

¹ ГИХГ.2022. "ОХУ-ын иргэдэд Монгол Улсад түр оршин суух үнэмлэх олгоно(Temporary residence permits will be granted to the Russia citizens in Mongolia)." *News.MN*. 2022.10.03.

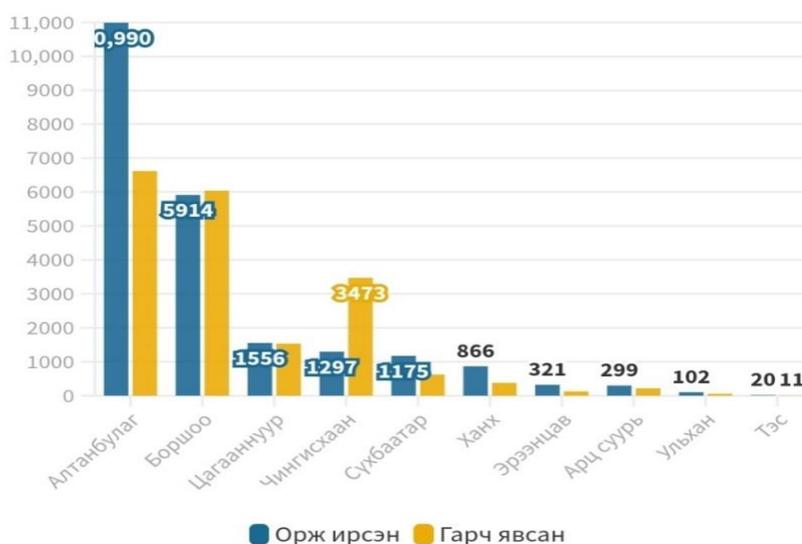
² Sergey Istomin. 2022. “В Госдуме объяснили слова Володина о списках покинувших страну на фоне СВО(The State Duma explained volodin's words about the lists of those who left the country against the background of the SVO).”*Lenta.ru*.2022.09.28.

³ А.САЙХАНБАЯР. 2022." Дайжин ирсэн иргэдэд Монгол Улс хүмүүнлэг хандах хэрэгтэй (Mongolia should treat the migrants humanely)." *News.MN*. 2022.09.29.

Current development and concerns

Media sources report that 22,540 Russian citizens entered Mongolia, of which 85 percent have left the country as of mid-October.⁴ In other words, 3,465 Russian citizens remained in the country. The unofficial reports indicate that most of the Russian citizens traveled to visa-free countries such as Kazakhstan, the Republic of Turkey, Uzbekistan, Georgia, in addition to the European Union countries, Thailand, and South Korea, whereas only a few of them returned to Russia.

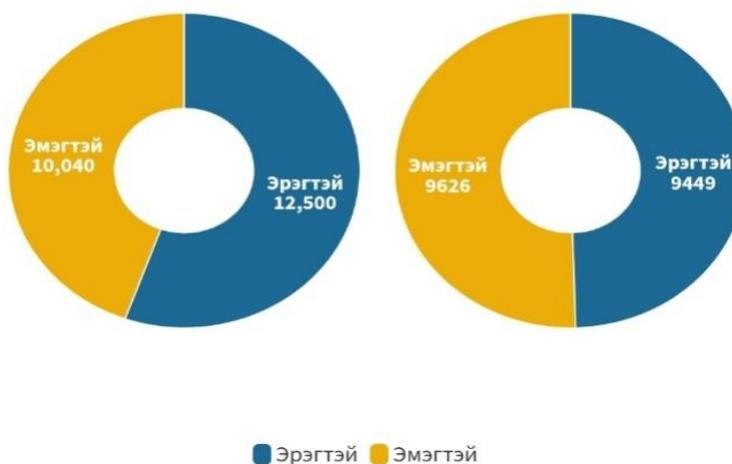
For example, the graph below shows the number of Russian citizens who have entered and exited the border ports of Mongolia from September 21, 2022 to October 19, 2022. (Blue-entered, yellow-exited)



Gender ratio of Russian citizens, who entered and exited the country
Blue-men, yellow-women

Орж ирсэн

Гарч явсан



⁴ Г.ӨЛЗИЙХУТАГ. 2022. “ОХУ цэргийн дайчилгаа зарласнаас хойш сар орчмын хугацаанд 22,540 орос иргэн Монголд орж ирснээс 85% нь гарч явжээ (About a month after Russia announced its military mobilization, 22,540 Russian citizens entered Mongolia, of which 85% have left the country).” *Ikon*. 2022.10.21.

The fact that there is no wide gap in the gender ratio implies that the Russian citizens might have entered, exited, or stayed in the country with their families. The remaining Russian citizens may seek residence (assuming they do not wish to return) in the following ways, such as:

- temporary residence;
- request for political asylum;
- intermarriage (can be fake);
- migrate to rural areas (Darhan, Erdenet, Dornod, Khentii);
- make an investment;
- unauthorized employment;
- apply for immigration;
- commit an offense or a crime.

Although Russian citizens migrating to Mongolia share common features including youth and an avoidance of military conscription, their behaviors are different depending on the economic conscientious, cultural, and educational backgrounds. As a result, offenses and criminal acts of disrupting public order may occur in the capital city of Mongolia, even in rural areas. Up to this point, an incident occurred in late September 2022, where a drunken Russian citizen struck Mongolian citizen with a hammer whom he met at the border point and killed him in his home.⁵ It can be presumed that he might have committed this crime intentionally in order to remain in Mongolia, even if it means a prison for him. The causation for this crime appears convincing, since the perpetrator called the police himself.

Apart from the mentioned incidence, there are currently no criminal records or news update involving migrating Russian citizens. Since Russia has been removed from SWIFT international payment network, the migrants in Mongolia are likely to carry cash with them. Most local banks require a temporary residence card when opening an account for a foreign citizen, which presents new challenge for them. The news about rent increases of residential buildings also strains these migrants in need of housing. Migration to rural areas is possible in this situation. In particular, those from Russian city Ulan-Ude could migrate to the eastern provinces in search of their relatives.

Conclusion

Mongolians are concerned about the fact that the country's "natural neighbor", Russia, has irrevocably established its strict authoritarian regime and brutally invaded Ukraine, which strives to become a democratic country like ours. This incident challenges the solidity of democratic values in Mongolia as an upholder of human rights and freedom.

It can be seen that in most of the cases, Mongolia's position regarding the Russian Federation and its pursuit of war on the international stage has been an abstention.⁶ Although local citizens are aware of only the Mongolian two neighbor policy and that it should be taken with utmost care and cautiousness, civil society organizations in particular have been critical of the government's position.

⁵ А.ТЭНГИС. 2022. “ТОЛГОЙГ нь алхаар цохин гэмтээжээ (He was hit on the head with a hammer, severely injured).” *Daily News*. 2022.09.26

⁶ UN News. 2022. “Ukraine: UN General Assembly demands Russia reverse course on ‘attempted illegal annexation.’” 2022.10.12.

Mongolian NGOs have been paying close attention to issues related to the Russian migrants. For instance, the Mongolian National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MNCCI) conducted a survey among the Russian migrants in Mongolia from October 10-25, 2022, and attracted the government's attention on this issue.⁷ The report outlined that 28.8 percent of the Russian migrants were in the country on tourism, 21.2 percent evaded the drafting of the Russia-Ukrainian conflict, 18.3 percent were seeking employment and 12 percent stated that their purpose was to study in the country. About 98 of them are now located in Ulaanbaatar. The survey also showed that 28.3 percent responding that they plan to stay for more than a month, 28.5 percent plan to reside in Mongolia permanently, and 34 percent were uncertain about their plan of stay. In addition, 82.6 percent of the migrants expressed their willingness to extend their visas whereas approximately 90 percent hoped to be employed in Mongolia.

When asked about the most pressing challenges and difficulties they encountered in Mongolia, 30.5 percent of the survey respondents specified that finding employment and earning income have been challenging as companies pay high taxes for employing a foreign citizen, while 16.2 percent mentioned the difficulties of finding affordable accommodation to rent, given high prices of renting an apartment. Subsequently, 13.8 percent pointed out the problems of language barrier and 20.5 percent the difficulties of obtaining a residence permit and extending their visas.

All of these present the necessity for the Mongolian government to direct its attention to the following issues:

- Mongolia's announcement on the issuance of temporary residence permits was a right course of action to increase the flow of Russian migrants. The decision was made to issue them temporary residence permits in Mongolia until the war related crisis and conflict in Russia are resolved.⁸
- Although Russian citizens are passing through our country to transit to other countries, it should make necessary arrangements to show support to the remaining migratory citizens who are inclined to stay in Mongolia for a longer period of time.
- Actively involve Mongolian NGOs, such as MNCCI, and collaborate with the administrative agencies to recruit and provide employment opportunities as well as create a favorable environment for those who want to live and work in Mongolia.
- Be considerate of the language barrier that hinders potential employment opportunities and resolve it by providing financial support to organizations, which expressed their interests in offering accelerated language training.⁹
- Mongolia needs to be recognized internationally as a country that upholds democracy, human rights, and freedom by taking flexible approaches in the cases of Russian migrants' visa violations in Mongolia, issue temporary residence permits in a simplified manner, and not discriminate them in social interactions.
- Since the migrants who entered and stayed in our country are mostly from remote regions of Russia, it is crucial for NGOs and civil movements to provide them with all kinds of

⁷ Mongol Chamber. 2022. "МОНГОЛ Улсад ирсэн ОХУ-ын жуулчдад тулгарч буй бэрхшээл, дэмжлэг судалгааны тайлан(Report on problems and supports of tourists from Russia)."2022.11.11.

⁸ А.САЙХАНБАЯР. 2022."Богино хугацаанд хэлний бэлтгэлд хамрагдах Орос иргэд нэмэгдсэн(Russian citizens added to short-term language preparation.)", *News.MN*. 2022.10.04

⁹ Ibid.

humanitarian assistance to socialize them and offer training to raise awareness on democracy, human rights and freedom. ■

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- **Bazarvaani Ariunbayar** is the CEO of the Academy of Political Education and the project manager of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Mongolia. He holds a Master of Arts in Political Science, Graduate School of Arts and Science, National University of Mongolia.

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For inquiries:
Jinkyung Baek, Senior Researcher

Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 (ext. 209) j.baek@eai.or.kr

The East Asia Institute
1, Sajik-ro 7-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul 03028, Republic of Korea
Phone 82 2 2277 1683 Fax 82 2 2277 1697
Email eai@eai.or.kr Website www.eai.or.kr