

Brochure Depicts Migrants as Tools

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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This part on HIV prevention depicts a local doctor and migrant workers. **Dmitry Lovetsky**

ST. PETERSBURG — It was intended as a friendly guide to Russia for labor migrants from Central Asia, but instead it turned into an insult. The brochure, with practical advice on how to deal with border guards, police and other authorities, was illustrated with depictions of migrant workers as paintbrushes, brooms and other tools of low-skilled labor.

The anger exploded this week. The government of Tajikistan formally urged Russian authorities to remove the book from circulation, and representatives of Uzbeks voiced their outrage.

Activists see the book, published in Russia's second-largest city, as a reflection of discrimination against the growing number of impoverished, mostly Muslim, migrants in Russia who are working construction, cleaning offices, sweeping the streets and collecting the garbage.

"It's xenophobia, plain and simple," said Lev Ponomaryov, a veteran human rights defender.

“They show residents of St. Petersburg as humans and depict migrants as construction tools.”

Even though “A Labor Migrant’s Handbook” was promoted on a city government website, authorities denied any connection to the publication when outrage erupted after bloggers discovered it and publicized it online last week.

A nongovernmental organization that published 10,000 copies of the book in Russian, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik insisted that it just wanted to provide useful information about everyday life in Russia.

“We didn’t mean to insult anyone with this brochure. On the contrary, we aimed to help labor migrants learn about their rights and avoid getting into trouble in this city,” said Gleb Panfilov, deputy head of Look Into the Future, which published the book.

Panfilov said his group had people from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan look at the proofs prior to publication and received no complaints. He said he couldn’t understand the public outrage now, many months after its release.

But in a nation where dark-complexioned migrants are commonly victims of hate crimes and frequently live in miserable conditions, others are not surprised by the anger.

Alimzhan Khaidarov, a leader among the Uzbeks in St. Petersburg, said he was offended by the brochure.

“They compared us, representatives of the ancient Uzbek culture, to construction tools. And not only us, but also representatives of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan,” Khaidarov said in an interview.

He said rights groups representing migrants from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan would consider filing a lawsuit against the publisher.

On Monday, the Tajik government denounced the brochure as insulting and asked Russian authorities to stop its distribution, Interfax reported.

More than 1 million of the impoverished former Soviet nation’s 7 million people live and work in Russia, and money they sent home totaled about \$3 billion in 2011, equivalent to roughly half the mountainous nation’s gross domestic product. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan also have been major exporters of labor to Russia.

Uzbek activist Suratbek Abdurakhimov called the publication an ethical mistake.

“They should have consulted with representatives of the diasporas before the publication and found a more appropriate way to give the information,” he said. He added that he was against giving the issue too much publicity to avoid fueling xenophobic sentiments among local residents.

“Local people are already to a certain extent irritated with migrants. Why irritate them more?” he said.

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