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Number of Migrants to Russia Drops 70 Percent in New Year

By The Moscow Times

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The flow of migrants to Russia has fallen 70 percent over the first week of January compared with the same period last year, the head of Russia's Federal Migration Service said last week.

"It's possible this is connected with difficulties in finding low-skilled jobs," Konstantin Romodanovsky was cited as saying by the Regnum news agency.

Many migrant workers from Central Asia come to work in Russia in order to send remittances back home — remittances that have now lost much of their value due to the steep devaluation of the ruble.

Russia's ruble fell about 40 percent against the U.S. dollar in 2014, meaning that migrant workers' wages are worth less than they used to be in their national currencies even as slowing economic growth cuts down on the number of low-skilled jobs on offer.

Just as economic issues have reduced workers' incentives to move to Russia, new rules that

came into effect on Jan. 1 have made it more difficult to do so.

These amendments abolished the former quota system and require all foreign workers hoping to find employment in Russia to obtain work permits — which have more than tripled in price from 1,200 rubles to 4,000 rubles ($65).

Russian law now also requires that migrants pass language tests, prove their knowledge of history and basic laws and cover their own health insurance.

In addition, residents of other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose association of most of the former Soviet republics, must now have a foreign passport in order to enter Russia.

Nonetheless, Romodanovsky noted that there has been an increase in the influx of people from Moldova and Ukraine, with the number of migrants from war-torn Ukraine climbing to "millions of working-age people."

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