

Russia Lost 5M Migrants During Pandemic

Russia relies on incoming workers from Central Asia to stem a demographic crisis. Migrant numbers are down by almost 50% this year.

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Almost half of all migrants living in Russia before the coronavirus pandemic have likely left the country this year, the Interior Ministry said Wednesday.

In a statement [cited](#) by the RBC news website, authorities said there are currently 6.3 million foreign citizens in Russia. That number has been steadily declining since the start of the pandemic and the closure of Russia's borders, it explained.

In a normal year, anywhere between 9 and 11 million migrants are based in Russia, the ministry said — meaning up to 5 million could have left the country over the last few months.

Russia sealed its borders in the spring and currently only allows citizens from a handful of countries to enter after a [partial reopening](#).

Related article: [Six Months Into Pandemic, Migrant Workers in Russia Live in Makeshift Camps as They Wait to Go Home](#)

As the country imposed a nationwide lockdown in late March, thousands of labor migrants — many from ex-Soviet countries in Central Asia — dashed to [airports](#), embassies and border crossings in an attempt to get home. Foreign workers in Russia were among those hit hardest by the pandemic. One survey [showed](#) three in four lost their job or wages during the spring lockdown, compared to 48% of Russians. They are also more likely to work in industries unable to switch to remote work and operate in the [grey parts](#) of the economy, lacking formal labor protections.

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants every year has helped Russia stem a demographic crisis since the break-up of the Soviet Union. But Russia's statistics agency said the net inflow of arrivals has fallen by 60% this year — from 167,000 to 69,000 in the first eight months of the year, the latest available data.

Businesses have warned of labor shortages in key industries like construction — which is booming thanks to a government-backed [cheap mortgage scheme](#) that has pushed house prices up around the country — as a result of the fall in migration and groups are [lobbying](#) for Russia to create schemes to facilitate the return of potential workers.

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