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Virus-Driven Migrant Shortage Keeps Russia From 'Ambitious Plans' – Kremlin

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Russia heavily relies on migrant laborers for industries like construction and agriculture. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's acute migrant shortage linked to the coronavirus exodus is keeping the country from achieving its "ambitious" goals, the Kremlin said Thursday.

"We're very, very short of these migrants to implement our ambitious plans," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

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"We have to build more than we're building now, but we need working hands to do it," the state-run TASS news agency quoted Peskov as saying.

Russia's government estimates that the country's population decline hit a 15-year high in 2020, driven by record-setting excess deaths and outmigration linked to Covid-19 border

closures.

Late last year, the Interior Ministry estimated that nearly half of all migrants living in Russia before the pandemic had left the country.

Russia is attempting to implement its ambitious $400-billion National Projects development package — which covers areas including housing, infrastructure, health and culture — by its already pushed-back deadline of 2030.

Peskov's comments came after one of President Vladimir Putin's senior aides decried deteriorating attitudes toward migrants and warned of tensions stemming from failure to integrate migrant children into the Russian school system.

"This situation has a significant impact on the state of interethnic relations," Kremlin deputy chief of staff Magomedsalam Magomedov was quoted as saying at a national policy forum.

Peskov said he was not aware of sociological studies indicating worsening attitudes toward migrants, but stressed that Russia should provide conditions for migrant children to adapt to Russian society.

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