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Russian Ex-Policeman Arrested on Suspicion of Unlawfully Granting 100K Migrants Legal Status

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Migrant workers in St. Petersburg. **Ruslan Shamukov / TASS**

A former senior police officer in St. Petersburg has been arrested on suspicion of unlawfully granting more than 100,000 labor migrants legal status, state media reported Wednesday, citing anonymous law enforcement officials.

Authorities uncovered the large-scale legalization scheme in October 2022 and detained St. Petersburg municipal deputy and regional MMA chief Viktor Danishevsky, as well as six of his alleged accomplices, according to the TASS news agency.

Interior Ministry officers and Federal Security Service (FSB) agents detained the former senior police officer near Moscow and are said to have sent him to St. Petersburg, TASS reported without providing his name.

The news website Fontanka identified the former police officer as 43-year-old Andrei

Kolesnikov, who had reportedly moved to the Russian capital after abruptly quitting his job in November.

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Kolesnikov had served as the chief of migration at the St. Petersburg and Leningrad region's Interior Ministry office, according to Fontanka.

He could face up to seven years in prison on abuse of power charges, according to TASS.

The news agency reported that investigators accused the ex-police officer of unlawfully granting legal status to at least 16,250 labor migrants between January 2020 and January 2023.

More than 3,100 of the legalized migrants had been convicted of misdemeanor charges, and 76 others were convicted of felonies, TASS said.

Migrant workers in Russia come predominantly from the Central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as from Armenia.

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