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Russian Workers at Turkish Nuclear Plant Report Months of Unpaid Wages

July 14, 2025



Akkuyu Nuclear (CC BY 4.0)

Russian workers building Turkey's first nuclear power plant say they have not been paid for two months, the independent news outlet Sota reported, citing workers' relatives.

Since the payment delays began in May, the workforce at the Akkuyu plant, one of Moscow's most high-profile overseas energy projects, has shrunk from 12,000 to just 3,000, Sota reported.

Located in Turkey's southern Mersin province, the Akkuyu plant is a $20 billion project managed by Russia's state nuclear energy corporation Rosatom.

The plant is being built under a "build-own-operate" agreement, which gives Russia long-term control of the facility.

Russian nationals are recruited for the project through agencies at home but sign contracts in Turkey.

In March, Turkish workers staged a strike over stagnant wages that had not kept up with inflation. Russian workers remained silent, reportedly under threat of dismissal and the loss of return flights to Russia that are covered under their employment contracts.

Moscow had earlier asked Ankara to help shoulder some of the construction costs, citing financial difficulties caused by Western sanctions.

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According to Bloomberg, the Russian government proposed that state energy giant Gazprom deduct funds for Akkuyu from Turkey's monthly payments for Russian natural gas imports.

Anton Dedusenko, chairman of Rosatom subsidiary Akkuyu Nuclear, said on July 8 that commissioning work had begun on the plant's first reactor unit.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak previously said that the first unit was scheduled to begin operation by the end of 2025.

The initial launch had been slated for 2024 but was postponed after the German technology company Siemens pulled out of the project in compliance with international sanctions.

Rosatom turned instead to a Chinese supplier, with Dedusenko expressing hope the replacement equipment would arrive next year.

Once completed, Akkuyu will consist of four nuclear reactors, each with a capacity of 1,200 megawatts, enough to meet about 10% of Turkey's electricity demand.

In 2022, The Wall Street Journal reported that Russia intended to use the construction project as a financial lifeline, effectively establishing an "offshore dollar reserve" that would allow it to skirt sanctions and access global markets. The scheme allegedly involved high-level Russian officials, including Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina.

Under the reported plan, roughly $9 billion from Russia's Central Bank was funneled through Gazprombank as a loan to fund construction.

The money was then routed via U.S. banks into Russian corporate accounts held at Ziraat Bank, Turkey's largest state-owned lender.

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