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KYRGYZSTAN

FIRST PERSON

Helping Migrant Workers

A local group protects migrant workers from exploitation



Photo: Nookat Civil Society Support Center

Mr. Khudayberdiev explains his project to help migrant workers obtain work permits and avoid traps set by traffickers.

“Thanks to the information and contacts gained with the assistance of USAID programs, we can effectively help Kyrgyz labor migrants work legally in Kazakhstan and Russia,” said the director of the Nookat Civil Society Support Center.

Telling Our Story

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Nookat is a town of 14,000 nestled in a valley of southern Kyrgyzstan. The town has no industry to speak of, and insufficient land for all of its population to work in agriculture.

This means there are few opportunities for gainful employment. Many of Nookat’s citizens travel seasonally to Kazakhstan and Russia looking for work as unregistered/illegal migrant workers. While this gives them a source of income, it is a risky endeavor, as migrants are often subject to dubious work arrangements or trafficking rings.

To help solve this problem and combat trafficking in Nookat and other communities, USAID arranged a study tour to Ukraine, which has established systems to address similar problems, for community leaders working to combat trafficking. One of the study tour participants was the director of the Nookat Civil Society Support Center, Mr. Abduvali Khudayberdiev. “Through this program I learned about the Ukrainian methodology of consulting labor migrants and established partnerships with my Kazakhstani and Russian colleagues,” he said. “Now we can effectively help Kyrgyzstani labor migrants work legally in these two countries.”

After returning from the study tour, Mr. Khudayberdiev initiated a six-month project to provide legal assistance to migrant workers from Nookat City. The project was funded jointly by USAID and the Nookat Civil Society Support Center. The center formed four groups that carried out public outreach campaigns to inform communities about the rights of migrant workers. They also offered consultations to community members about official registration in Russia and Kazakhstan. As a result, 82 migrant workers requested consultation on how to officially register as labor migrants. They have all been registered by the internal affairs departments of Russia and Kazakhstan as labor migrants and have received work permits. The next time they travel abroad for work, their families will take comfort in knowing they are safe from the perils of illegal work.