*GUMILYOV JOURNAL OF HISTORY*
*ISSN: 3080-129X. eISSN: 3080-6860*
*WORLD HISTORY – ДУНИЕЖҮЗІ ТАРИХЫ –*
*ВСЕМИРНАЯ ИСТОРИЯ –*

Research Article
/ IRSTI 03.20.00

МРНТИ

*https://doi.org/10.32523/3080-129X-2025-151-2-64-80*

# Soviet migration in the context of passportization in the early 1930s.

**N. Potapova**
*Novosibirsk State University of Economics and Management (NSUEM), Novosibirsk, Russia*
✉*skna17talya@mail.ru*

**Abstract.** The purpose of the article is to study the traditional phenomenon of seasonal migration from the Russian villages, namely the temporary departure of rural residents from their permanent homes for work. In the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, it underwent transformation aimed at establishing state control over labor migration, particularly from the village, and organizing the supply of workers to industry. The study shows that throughout the 1920s, the Soviet government attempted to limit the spontaneous movement of the rural population, seeing it as a reason for rising unemployment and worsening socio-economic conditions in cities. To combat unregulated movements within the country and to evenly provide the industry with labor, the state implemented a system of economic recruitment. However, by the late 1920s to 1930s, unemployment was replaced by a "staff shortage", and the demand for labor first exceeded supply. This shift required the authorities to introduce new measures to ensure the growing industry had enough workforce. Therefore, before the beginning of the passportization campaign, two channels for hiring workforce from the village remained economic recruitment and seasonal migration, but for peasants who signed contracts with economic authorities, agricultural benefits were introduced to attract them to participate in the seasonal migration. Concurrently, due to the policy pursued by the Bolsheviks in the villages and the onset of famine, the problem of mass outflow of population from the villages worsened. This led to disruptions in commodity supply, intensifying the housing crisis, and leading to an increase in criminal activity in cities. Administrative documentation often classified such migrants were also referred to as seasonal migrants, although they were not related to labor migration. In the context of the flight of peasants, the government took measures aimed at keeping village residents in the villages and socially cleansing cities by introducing passports - a kind of filter whose possession granted the right to reside in cities, especially in restricted areas. New documents were not issued to rural residents, which limited their mobility across the country. Now, to leave the village, a peasant was required to provide documents confirming their intention to engage in "socially useful labor" in production, institutions, schools; documents of this kind included a job invitation, a recruitment contract, a certificate from the collective farm's administration about

© Potapova N., 2025

the departure, etc. The introduction of the passport system effectively transformed seasonal migration from a spontaneous labor migration into a system of organized supply for the industrial sector, while mass movement from the village was prohibited under the threat of administrative and repressive measures against violators of the new regime. from a spontaneous labor migration into a system of organized supply for the industrial sector, while mass movement from the village was prohibited under the threat of administrative and repressive measures against violators of the new regime.
**Keywords:** seasonal migrant labor; migrants; economic labor drafts; passportization; passport; restricted-access areas; non-restricted areas; industrialization; urbanization

**For citation:**
Potapova N. Soviet migration in the context of passportization in the early 1930s. *Gumilyov Journal of History.* 2025. Vol.151, no.2, pp.64-80. https://doi.org/10.32523/3080-129X-2025-151-2-64-80

**Funding.** This article was prepared within the framework of the implementation of the scientific project AP23485356 funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the topic "Passportization in Kazakhstan, 1932–1940."

# Советское отходничество в условиях паспортизации в первой половине 1930-х гг.

**Н. Потапова**
*Новосибирский государственный университет экономики и управления (НГУЭУ), Новосибирск, Россия*

**Аннотация.** Целью статьи является исследование традиционного для российской деревни явления – отходничества – временного ухода сельских жителей из мест постоянного проживания для заработка в первой половине 1930-х гг., в период введения в СССР паспортного режима. Задача научной работы - показать трансформацию отходничества в первой половине 1930-х гг., а также проанализировать введение паспортной системы и ее роль в паспортизации отходников, желающих трудиться в советской промышленности. Актуальность и новизна исследования отражены в глубоком критическом анализе источников, некоторые из которых впервые вводятся в научный оборот, а также в попытке восстановить механизм регулирования отходничества в период паспортизации, в том числе через выдачу паспортов сельским жителям. Результаты исследования продемонстрировали, что советское правительство на протяжении 1920-х гг. предпринимало попытки по ограничению стихийного перемещения сельского населения, видя в этом причины роста безработицы и ухудшения социально-экономической ситуации в городах. Для борьбы с нерегулируемыми перемещениями внутри страны и равномерного обеспечения промышленности трудовыми кадрами государство прибегло к внедрению системы хозяйственных наборов. Однако на рубеже 1920–1930-х гг. безработица сменилась «дефицитом кадров», а спрос на труд впервые превысил его предложение, что потребовало от власти новых мер для обеспечения растущей промышленности кадрами. Поэтому до начала кампании

по паспортизации продолжало сохраняться два канала найма рабочей силы из деревни – хознаборы и отходничество, однако для крестьян, заключивших договоры с хозяйственными органами, были введены сельскохозяйственные льготы с целью их привлечения к участию в отходе. Параллельно с этим из-за проводимой большевиками политики в деревне и начавшимся голодом усугубилась проблема массового оттока населения из деревень, что вызвало перебои с товарным снабжением, усилило жилищно-бытовой кризис, привело к росту уголовной преступности в городах. В делопроизводственной документации таких переселенцев также называли отходниками, хотя они не имели отношения к трудовой миграции. В обстановке бегства крестьян государство приняло меры, направленные на сдерживание жителей села в деревне и социальную чистку городов через введение паспорта – своеобразного фильтра, наличие которого давало право проживания в городах, особенно режимных. Сельским жителям новые документы не выдавались, что ограничило возможности их передвижения по стране. Теперь для выезда из деревни крестьянин обязывался предоставить документы, подтверждающие его намерение заниматься «общественно-полезным трудом» на производстве, в учреждениях, в школе, к такого рода официальным бумагам относились приглашение на работу, договор о вербовке, справка правления колхоза об отходе и т.д. Введение паспортной системы фактически привело к трансформации отходничества из стихийной трудовой миграции в систему организованного снабжения  индустриальной сферы, а массовые переселения из деревни запрещались под угрозой применения административных и репрессивных мер к нарушителям нового режима.
**Ключевые слова:** отходничество; переселенцы; хозяйственные наборы; паспортизация; паспорт; режимные местности; нережимные местности; индустриализация; урбанизация

**Для цитирования:** Потапова Н. Советское отходничество в условиях паспортизации в первой половине 1930-х гг. *Gumilyov Journal of History.* 2025. Т.151, no.2, с.64-80. https://doi.org/10.32523/3080-129X-2025-151-2-64-80

**Финансирование.** Статья подготовлена в рамках реализации научного проекта AP23485356 по гранту Комитета науки Министерства образования и науки Республики Казахстан на тему «Паспортизация в Казахстане 1932–1940 гг.».

## 1930 жылдардың бірінші жартысындағы паспорттау жағдайындағы кеңестік қалдықтар

**Н. Потапова**

*Новосибирск мемлекеттік экономика және басқару университеті (НГУЭУ), Новосибирск, Ресей*

**Аңдатпа.** Мақаланың мақсаты – 1930 жылдардың бірінші жартысында, КСРО-ға төлқұжат режимін енгізу кезеңінде ресейлік ауыл үшін дәстүрлі құбылыс-қалдықтарды, ауыл тұрғындарының тұрақты тұратын жерлерінен уақытша ақша табу үшін кетуін зерттеу. Ғылыми жұмыстың міндеті 1930 жылдардың бірінші жартысындағы қалдықтардың өзгеруін көрсету, сондай-ақ паспорттық жүйенің енгізілуін және оның кеңестік өнеркәсіпте жұмыс істегісі келетін қалдықтарды паспорттаудағы рөлін талдау. Зерттеудің өзектілігі мен жаңалығы дереккөздерді терең сыни талдауда көрінеді, олардың кейбіреулері алғаш рет ғылыми айналымға енгізіледі, сондай-ақ паспорттау кезеңінде, соның ішінде ауыл тұрғындарына төлқұжат беру арқылы

қалдықтарды реттеу механизмін қалпына келтіру мақсатын да көзделді. Зерттеу нәтижелері Кеңес үкіметі 1920 жылдар бойы жұмыссыздықтың өсу себептерін және қалалардағы әлеуметтік-экономикалық жағдайдың нашарлауын көре отырып, ауыл тұрғындарының стихиялық қозғалысын шектеуге тырысқанын көрсетті. Ел ішіндегі реттелмейтін қозғалыстармен күресу және өнеркәсіпті еңбек кадрларымен біркелкі қамтамасыз ету үшін мемлекет экономикалық жиынтықтар жүйесін енгізуге жүгінді. Алайда, 1920-1930 жылдардың басында жұмыссыздық "кадр тапшылығымен" алмастырылды және еңбекке деген сұраныс алғаш рет оның ұсынысынан асып түсті, бұл өсіп келе жатқан өнеркәсіпті кадрлармен қамтамасыз ету үшін биліктен жаңа шараларды талап етті. Сондықтан, паспорттау науқаны басталғанға дейін ауылдан жұмыс күшін жалдаудың екі арнасы – шаруа қожалықтары мен қалдықтар сақталды, бірақ шаруа қожалықтарымен келісімшарт жасасқан шаруалар үшін оларды қалдықтарға тарту мақсатында ауылшаруашылық жеңілдіктері енгізілді. Сонымен қатар, большевиктердің ауылда жүргізіп жатқан саясаты мен ашаршылықтың басталуына байланысты ауылдардан халықтың жаппай кетуі проблемасы күшейе түсті, бұл тауарлармен қамтамасыз етудің үзілуіне әкеліп соқтырды, тұрғын үй-тұрмыстық дағдарысты күшейтті, қалаларда қылмыстық қылмыстың өсуіне әкелді. Іс қағаздарында мұндай қоныс аударушылар еңбек көші-қонына қатысы болмаса да, қалдықтар деп аталды. Шаруалардың қашып кетуі жағдайында мемлекет ауыл тұрғындарын ауылдарда ұстауға және паспортты енгізу арқылы қалаларды әлеуметтік тазартуға бағытталған шаралар қабылдады – бұл қалаларда, әсіресе режимдерде тұру құқығын беретін сүзгі түрі. Ауыл тұрғындарына жаңа құжаттар берілмеді, бұл олардың бүкіл ел бойынша қозғалу мүмкіндігін шектеді. Енді ауылдан кету үшін шаруа өндірісте, мекемелерде, мектепте "қоғамдық пайдалы еңбекпен" айналысуға ниетін растайтын құжаттарды ұсынуға міндеттенді, мұндай ресми қағаздарға жұмысқа шақыру, жалдау туралы шарт, колхоз басқармасының қалдықтар туралы анықтамасы және т. б. кірді. Паспорт жүйесін енгізу іс жүзінде қалдықтардың стихиялық еңбек көші-қонынан индустриялық саланы ұйымдасқан жабдықтау жүйесіне ауысуына әкелді, ал ауылдан жаппай қоныс аударуға жаңа режимді бұзушыларға әкімшілік және репрессиялық шаралар қолдану қаупі төніп тұрды.

**Түйінді сөздер:** жұмысқа шығу; қоныс аударушылар; еңбек жұмылдыру; паспорттандыру; паспорт; арнайы рұқсатты аймақтар; ашық аумақтар; индустриализация; урбанизация

## *Introduction*

In the USSR during 1932–1933, a series of decrees were issued to regulate the national passportization campaign. According to governmental documents, the population was divided into those who were entitled to receive a Soviet identity document and those for whom passport issuance was not intended; the latter category included rural residents. Passportization began during the period of industrialization and collectivization, which generated several problems that the state needed to address. On the one hand, amid the rapidly growing industrial sector, the Bolshevik government was interested in attracting additional labor from the countryside. Therefore, throughout the first half of the 1930s, it used incentive-based methods to bring peasants into industrial work. For this group, the introduction of the passport system did not serve as a major restrictive measure, since employment at an enterprise provided grounds for obtaining a passport.

On the other hand, the passport was intended to restrict the mass migration of peasants

to the cities, which was driven by the repressive policies implemented in rural areas. Thus, it served to tie part of the rural population to a fixed place of residence. From 1932 onward, the passport effectively became a means of controlling population movement. In addition, the passport system allowed the state to address issues such as crime control, public security, and, under certain conditions, economic and fiscal interests.

## *Materials and Methods*

The research is based on both published and unpublished sources. Among the published materials are legislative acts and documents found in The National Economy of the USSR over 70 Years, The Famine in the USSR, The History of Industrialization of the USSR 1926–1941, and The Soviet Village through the Eyes of the Cheka-OGPU-NKVD. 1918–1939, The Siberian Region. Statistical Handbook, and The Collection of Laws and Decrees of the Workers' and Peasants' Government of the USSR. The study also utilizes archival materials held in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and the State Archive of the Novosibirsk Region (GANO), some of which are introduced into scholarly circulation for the first time.

The methodological foundation of the study is the dialectical-materialist approach to understanding socio-legal phenomena. The research is guided by the principle of historicism, which involves presenting events in their chronological sequence and interconnection, in strict accordance with the actual historical context. Within this methodological framework, specific scientific methods were also employed.

## *Literature Review*

In contemporary historiography, there are works by both domestic (Popov 1996, 1997; Chernolutskaya 2011; Baiburin 2017) and foreign researchers (Fitzpatrick 2003; Kessler 2003; Shearer 2014) that focus on the passportization process in the USSR during the 1930s, primarily concerning the urban population. These studies cover various aspects of the passportization campaign, such as the conditions of different social groups restricted by passport regulations, the issue of stigmatization and labeling of the population, the repressive aspects, and pay special attention to the categories of people who were denied passports, the reasons for such denials, and other related issues. Some researchers, such as Russian scholar Moiseenko M.V. (Moiseenko 2017), have focused specifically on the problem of otkhodnichestvo (seasonal labor migration).

Scholars studying passportization cannot ignore the aspects related to the issuance of identity documents and the regulation of otkhod (seasonal migration), which was traditional for the Russian countryside, under the newly introduced passport regime. However, to date, there is no comprehensive study specifically dedicated to the regulation of otkhodnichestvo under the conditions of passportization during the 1930s.

## *Results*

### *State Regulation of Otkhodnichestvo in the 1920s*

In pre-revolutionary Russia, peasants who practiced temporary seasonal migration from rural areas to industrial centers for additional income were called otkhodniki, and the

phenomenon itself was referred to as otkhodnichestvo. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, one-third of the rural population, and in some regions up to half of the peasants, were engaged in seasonal work (Potapova 2023: 180). The military and revolutionary events, as well as the first government initiatives of the Bolsheviks in the early 20th century, led to a temporary decline in rural migration. However, by the second half of 1921, the Bolsheviks faced a growing number of otkhodniki, largely due to the harsh postwar conditions, rising taxes, and the overall rural policy of the Bolshevik regime.

The increasing migration worsened the already difficult employment situation in the cities, where the number of unemployed continued to rise. Cities were unable to absorb the mass influx of labor due to the underdevelopment of the industrial sector. Between 1921 and 1929, the number of unemployed increased 17-fold—from 100,000 people in 1921 to 1.7 million in 1929 (Narodnoe 1987).

The existence of unregulated otkhod was seen by the Party leadership as one of the main sources of growing and persistent unemployment in the country. Indeed, rural migrants swelled the ranks of the largely unskilled urban labor force, which reduced their chances of finding employment[1]. Over six years, the number of otkhodniki increased from 1.7 million in 1923 to 4.3 million in 1929, peaking at 5.5 million in 1928 (Vdovin, Drobizhev 1976: 120). These migrants worked in agriculture, construction, factories and plants, logging and rafting, and peat extraction—that is, in seasonal sectors of the economy. The peak of the peasant movement occurred during the spring months from March to May, while a decline in rural migration was observed from July to December (Moiseenko 2017: 53–54). The concentration of population in cities, especially large ones, often consisted of people who had no means of subsistence and were unable to find employment, which led to extremely negative social consequences such as rising crime rates, worsening housing and food crises, and so on.

To address this situation, even before the onset of industrialization, the country's leadership undertook a number of measures aimed at overcoming unemployment, creating a regulated labor market for migrant workers, restricting entry into certain industrial centers, ensuring the organized supply of labor to Soviet industry, and redistributing the workforce to regions experiencing a shortage of both skilled and unskilled workers.

In the mid-1920s, the leadership intensified efforts to develop the so-called recruitment system to supply labor for the main seasonal sectors of the economy. To this end, a network of correspondent and information centers was also established. At the same time, labor exchanges were tasked with conducting campaigns for the organized recruitment of migrant workers.

With the transition to industrialization, the launch of the first Five-Year Plan, and the shift to a strict command-administrative system of managing the national economy, subsequent government measures aimed at further reducing unorganized labor migration. In addition to the existing methods used by the People's Commissariat of Labor of the USSR, new practices were introduced, such as assigning specific groups of rural workers to particular enterprises and regions.

The practice of imposing entry bans on certain cities and industrial centers—such as Moscow, Leningrad, Baku, Kharkiv, Minsk, Kyiv, Kzyl-Orda, and others—was introduced to ease congestion and improve the unemployment situation in these areas, where the problem was especially acute[2].

By the end of the decade, the state had achieved some success in regulating labor. In 1927, about

1.7 million people secured jobs through formal contract agreements. However, approximately half of all migrant workers were still not covered by the organized labor recruitment system (History of Industrialization, 1969).

By the turn of the 1920s–1930s, the government's socio-economic tasks—related to ensuring planned regulation of the labor market, organized supply of labor reserves to the industrial sector, redistribution of the workforce, removal of those already employed from labor exchanges, urban population relief, and so on-had not been fully resolved. The onset of industrialization, collectivization, and dekulakization once again changed the socio-economic situation in the USSR and created new realities that required government measures to address them.

On one hand, the Bolsheviks' rural policies in the late 1920s and early 1930s aggravated the situation with rural migration, leading to a renewed mass exodus of peasants from villages. Under these conditions, the state tried by various means—including repressive methods—to stop unauthorized movements due to the worsening social and economic situation in the cities.

On the other hand, Soviet industry faced an acute shortage of workers, as the previous surplus of labor resources gave way to a "personnel deficit." For example, in the Siberian region, as early as 1927, demand for labor exceeded supply for the first time. In 1927–1928, labor supply amounted to around 118,000 people, while demand reached approximately 150,000, leaving about 30,000 positions unfilled. In 1928–1929, this gap grew to 85,000 people (around 124,000 and 209,000, respectively[3]). In the first half of the 1930s, this discrepancy continued to increase. This trend was observed across the entire Soviet Union. Some regions felt the labor shortage especially acutely, for example, Kazakhstan.

To solve the labor shortage during industrialization, local authorities were highly interested in attracting rural residents to industrial projects. These included the construction of the Turkestan-Siberian Railway, the Ust-Kamenogorsk lead-zinc plant, the Shymkent lead plant, the Balkhash and Zhezkazgan copper smelting plants, as well as work at the Karaganda coal mines and others.

One of the characteristics of the labor market in this region was the recruitment of not only local peasants but also rural residents from other parts of the USSR, including Siberia, for construction projects during the first and second five-year plans. In the context of an acute labor shortage, it was not feasible to exclude peasant migrant workers from industrial labor. However, the system of collective farming being established in the countryside required local authorities to meet production plans, which compelled them to prevent peasants from leaving for temporary jobs and seasonal work. This, in turn, further exacerbated the shortage of unskilled labor in industry, including construction, logging, timber rafting, and other sectors.

### *Transformations of Temporary Labor Migration at the Turn of the 1920s–1930s*

In the context of the 1930s, the very concept of otkhodnichestvo (temporary labor migration) transformed. The Soviet authorities interpreted otkhodnichestvo not only as a traditional phenomenon of the Russian countryside-characteristic since the imperial period-whereby peasants temporarily left for industrial centers to earn money, but also used this term to mask the massive departure of rural populations to cities for permanent residence. This migration was a consequence of the Bolshevik reforms of the late 1920s–early 1930s and the famine of 1932–1933. This trend is evident in the administrative documents of the 1930s: the established phenomenon of otkhodnichestvo was redefined. In fact, during this period, two distinct

categories of peasants were grouped under the same term in official records, although they had different motivations for moving to cities. The first group consisted of temporary migrants—the traditional otkhodniki — who sought employment in cities or industrial centers to improve their material well-being. The second group was peasant resettlers, who fled famine, collectivization, and "dekulakization" in search of a permanent place to live.

This article will discuss both categories, as the Soviet government implemented different policies toward each of them during the passportization campaign aimed at integrating them into Soviet society.

Prioritizing the country's industrial development, the central government adopted a number of laws in the early 1930s regulating peasant migration. The first step in this direction was the decree issued in March 1930 by the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR titled "On the Elimination of Obstacles to the Free Movement of Peasants for Temporary Trades and Seasonal Work." This document not only prohibited any obstruction of such movement but also introduced criminal liability for anyone attempting to violate the directive. Responsibility for its implementation was assigned to the chairpersons of the district and regional executive committees[4].

Effectively, this measure legitimized the escape of peasants from collectivization and dekulakization under the guise of seeking industrial employment. As a result, a year later, a new policy was adopted to amend the spring 1930 decree.

At the beginning of the summer of 1931, at one of the meetings of economic managers, J.V. Stalin emphasized that "... it is no longer possible to rely on the spontaneous flow of labor. Therefore, we must move from the 'policy' of spontaneity to a policy of organized recruitment of workers for industry. And there is only one path for this — the path of agreements between economic organizations and collective farms (kolkhozes) and their members[5]."

A week after this speech, a joint Resolution of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR No. 10/458 "On Seasonal Labor Migration" was issued on June 30, 1931[6]. Once again, the state declared its intention to combat uncontrolled rural migration, both for employment purposes and for relocation. The Party offered an alternative in the form of a controlled and managed system — the system of organized recruitment, participation in which was encouraged by various incentive benefits.

Peasants who did not sign contracts with economic bodies were not eligible for these benefits, and any breach of contractual obligations could serve as grounds for the withdrawal of government subsidies. These subsidies included exemption from monetary contributions and agricultural taxes. The resolution also guaranteed employment in the collective farm after the expiration of the contract with economic organizations, and the right to sell a portion of the harvest at fixed prices.

Moreover, the families of seasonal workers were entitled to certain privileges. For example, the local administration was required to provide them with food in the same quantity as other kolkhoz members, and the children of seasonal workers received preferential treatment when enrolling in schools, courses, etc. Individual farmers also received some benefits, though to a lesser extent — for instance, their agricultural tax on non-farming income was cut in half.

The June 1931 resolution also provided privileges for collective farms that supported labor migration. Enterprises and republican authorities were obligated to create favorable conditions for the cultural and economic development of those areas that honored their recruitment

agreements, promoted labor migration, and sent the largest number of people to work in industry. Incentives for collective farms included the construction of schools, clubs, and kindergartens, preferential supply of agricultural machinery, and the establishment of canteens, among others.

The decision was intended to attract peasants to participate in labor migration in conditions of a "personnel shortage" in the industrial sector, and also to halt the mass exodus of the rural population from villages by redirecting the uncontrolled flow of migrants into an organized labor supply system — essentially transforming traditional seasonal migration into a managed process.

To support and encourage labor migration, economic organizations were made responsible for providing daily maintenance, covering expenses for lodging, food, and transportation. A separate provision required the allocation of housing for migrant workers, which, under the conditions of urban housing shortages, could protect them from becoming homeless.

The administrative side of the process was also regulated: upon departure for work, the kolkhoz administration issued a special certificate to the rural resident confirming their membership in the kolkhoz and granting permission to reside in the city for the duration of the employment contract. This certificate legalized entry even into locations where relocation had been restricted by the 1927 decision of the USSR People's Commissariat of Labor.

Nevertheless, the 1931 Resolution had a number of limitations. Its implementation did not cover all sectors of the industrial economy, but only those experiencing labor shortages and in demand during the period of industrialization. These included logging, timber rafting, peat extraction, construction, transportation, and others. In October and December 1931, new decrees from the Council of People's Commissars extended the applicability of the June 30, 1931, Resolution to seasonal workers such as hunters employed by fur raw material procurement agencies[7], as well as to communication enterprises[8]. These areas did not require highly skilled labor and could be staffed with workers from rural areas.

In addition, special conditions were created for workers with skills such as coal mining, peat harvesting, carpentry, woodworking, masonry, and similar trades, as these professions were in high demand by Soviet industry. These workers were essentially exempted from agricultural labor, as collective farm administrations were instructed to leave only the most essential duties in the village to those who possessed in-demand skills.

On the one hand, the resolution achieved some success. In 1931, the number of seasonal workers, including those who signed contracts with economic organizations, reached 5.454 million people. However, the following year, this number decreased by nearly 1.5 times (Vdovin, Drobizhev 1976: 120). Throughout the remainder of the 1930s, the number never reached the 1931 level again, and from the second half of the decade onward, it steadily declined. On the other hand, the resolution failed to halt the mass migration of peasants to cities, as confirmed by the 1926 and 1939 censuses. During this period, the proportion of the urban population rose from 17.9% to 29.2%, respectively (Kessler 2003: 77–79).

Despite the Soviet government's efforts, the peak of rural migration under conditions of repression in the countryside occurred in 1931, reaching around 1.5 million people (Golod 2011). Thus, the forced industrialization and mass repression in the countryside intensified social problems, including the emergence of migration flows to cities, an increase in the urban population due to the influx of peasants, interruptions in goods supply that led to the introduction of the rationing system, a worsening housing crisis, and rising criminal activity.

Overall, in this situation, the state implemented measures aimed at restraining peasants in rural areas and conducting a social purge of urban populations.

### *The Introduction of the Passport System in the USSR and New Regulations for Seasonal Workers*

In 1932, a nationwide campaign for the passportization of the Soviet population was launched. In mid-November 1932, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) issued a resolution "On the Passport System and the Unloading of Cities from Superfluous Elements," which was followed by a joint resolution of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR titled "On the Establishment of a Unified Passport System within the USSR and Mandatory Passport Registration," dated December 27, 1932, accompanied by the "Passport Regulations."

Subsequently, Resolution No. 43 of the USSR Council of People's Commissars from January 14, 1933, titled "On the Approval of the Instruction on the Issuance of Passports," clarified the existing documents. This was followed by Resolution No. 861 of the USSR Council of People's Commissars from April 28, 1933, "On the Issuance of Passports to Citizens of the USSR on the Territory of the USSR," which was approved by a Politburo decision of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on April 23, 1933.

According to these documents, the campaign that had begun divided all citizens of the country into two categories: those who had been issued passports and those who had not (Chernolutskaya 2011: 180–181). The first group had broader rights regarding residence, movement, and employment within the country. It included citizens aged 16 and older who permanently resided in cities, district centers, workers' settlements, rural localities with machine and tractor stations (MTS), in the railway exclusion zone, the 100-kilometer border zone, as well as workers at new construction sites, state farms, industrial enterprises, and in the transportation sector. The second group consisted of rural residents, except in the cases mentioned above. Passports were not intended to be issued to peasants permanently living in villages; as a result, part of the population lost the ability to freely travel to cities and other regions. Their registration was carried out according to "settlement lists" by rural and settlement councils under the supervision of district NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) police departments.

In addition to the introduction of population registration, the new regime also divided passport-controlled territories into ordinary and special-regime zones (Baiburin 2019: 137). The latter included cities such as Kyiv, Odessa, Minsk, Stalingrad, Grozny, Sevastopol, Perm, Dnipropetrovsk, Sverdlovsk, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, Leninsk, and many other Soviet cities, as well as the 100- and 50-kilometer zones around them, border areas, and territories between military installations or fortified objects and major population centers. Residency in these areas was not permitted for individuals whom Soviet authorities categorized as "unreliable" and "socially dangerous elements." These included individuals not engaged in socially useful labor ("parasites"), those who frequently changed jobs ("job-hoppers," seen as disruptors of production), people deprived of voting rights ("lishentsy"), illegal border crossers ("defectors"), kulaks who had fled from villages, former prisoners and exiles, industrial workers engaged in labor without formal contracts, and various other social groups[9].

The passport became the sole document identifying its holder. It was required for residence

registration, employment, and had to be presented upon request by the police and other administrative authorities. A fine of 100 rubles was imposed for violating the passport regime, and repeated violations led to criminal liability. The same penalties applied for document forgery. The resolution "On the Approval of the Passport Regulations" dated December 27, 1932, classified the falsification of passport forms as a state crime[10]. In addition to imposing strict sanctions for violations, the implementation of the new law was supported by a reform of the police, whose duties now included not only issuing passports but also monitoring compliance with the new administrative-police registration and surveillance system. The regulation "On the Establishment of the Main Directorate of the Workers' and Peasants' Militia under the OGPU of the USSR," adopted at the end of December 1932, effectively turned the police into a division of the OGPU. Subsequent departmental orders, including OGPU Order No. 009 of January 5, 1933, "On Chekist Measures for the Introduction of the Passport System in the USSR[11]," and Directive No. 96 of August 13, 1933, regarding the application of extrajudicial repressive measures against citizens violating the passport law, further tightened punishments for violators of the passport regime[12].

In particular, the introduction of punitive measures was prompted by the renewed migration of rural residents from villages - a process that had temporarily declined in the first half of 1933 due to the passportization campaign but returned to 1931 levels by the second half of the 1930s (Kessler 2003: 77–79). This view is confirmed by official documentation from the state security agencies. For example, in an OGPU report prepared in October 1933 for J.V. Stalin, Central Committee Secretary of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) L.M. Kaganovich, and Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR V.M. Molotov, the mass flight of individual farmers and collective farmers across the country was reported. Peasants were heading to cities, other regions, and even abroad. According to incomplete data, 24,000 households left 24 districts of the Middle Volga region in August–September 1933 alone. From the Zaamin and Kzyl-Mazar districts of Central Asia, 1,260 households fled; from the Mumin-Abad district, 1,000; from five village councils in the Shchigrovsky district of the Central Black Earth Region, 240; and so on.

The report also mentioned cases of emigration from the USSR. For instance, in the first ten days of September 1933, 1,500 peasant households were detained in the border zone of Georgia while attempting to cross into Afghanistan. Another 126 households and 35 individuals managed to emigrate successfully. According to OGPU operatives, 1,300 households were preparing to head to Turkey, and 90 people had already left Armenia for Turkey. Moreover, 139 households from the Astrakhan-Bazar district of Azerbaijan resettled in Persia (Soviet Village 2005).

The issue of mass peasant migration was particularly acute in Ukraine and the North Caucasus region, where thousands and tens of thousands of rural residents abandoned their homes to escape famine and the Bolshevik reforms (Kondrashin, Mozokhin 2017).

In this new reality, rural residents were severely restricted in their right to reside in urban areas, especially in special-regime zones where possession of a passport was a mandatory requirement. The passport not only allowed permanent residence in cities but also served as the legal basis for employment, alongside a temporary permit[13]. In these official documents, employers were required to record dates of hiring and dismissal, which functioned as a filter for the police during social cleansing operations. In practice, one of the few remaining legal channels for rural residents to move into passport-controlled territories, including special-

regime zones, was seasonal or temporary labor migration (known as otkhodnichestvo). In the 1930s, Soviet industry still required labor, making a total ban on rural residents entering cities for permanent or temporary work infeasible.

In this context, the decisions adopted in 1932–1933 also regulated, in particular, the procedure for temporary labor migration of rural residents under the passportization regime.

The April 1933 resolution established rules for the stay of rural residents in cities. To leave the village, a peasant was required to provide documents confirming the purpose of their visit. Such documents included a job invitation, a recruitment contract, a certificate from the kolkhoz administration authorizing temporary work away from the village, and so on. In other words, rural residents had to present documentary proof that their departure to the city was justified by the intent to engage in "socially useful labor" in industry, institutions, or education. Based on these official documents, the district or city NKVD police departments at the place of residence issued passports valid for one year. After this period, peasants could apply for a regular identity document on general grounds[14].

Separate regulations governed seasonal labor migration, a significant channel for supplying labor to the industrial sector. The January 1933 instruction issued by the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) required individuals engaged in seasonal work to obtain temporary certificates (passports) at their place of residencet[15]. These could be extended by regional police departments, but only upon the submission of a request from the administration of the relevant economic institution. Based on such a request, the residence registration (propiska) was issued, which was a mandatory registration at the place of residence. In the absence of the required documents from the workplace, registration was denied.

Another measure, which repealed the earlier resolution "On Temporary Labor Migration" of June 30, 1931, and introduced new rules for regulating temporary rural labor migration during the passportization period, was the Resolution of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the Procedure for Labor Migration from Kolkhozes," adopted on March 17, 1933[16]. This document officially established the system of state-organized labor recruitment (khoznabory) as the only permitted method for peasants to obtain employment at industrial sites. It introduced a number of bureaucratic procedures designed to create additional barriers to uncontrolled migration. Violating these regulations could result in expulsion from the kolkhoz.

According to the new instructions, to be hired for seasonal work, it was no longer sufficient to simply sign a contract with an enterprise; the contract also had to be registered with the kolkhoz. Only in such cases could seasonal workers and their families qualify for benefits previously granted by law. The March resolution was accompanied by a clarifying instruction from the People's Commissariat of Labor and the People's Commissariat of Agriculture. It stated that any peasant who had left for temporary work before March 17, 1933, had to send a certificate from their place of employment via registered mail to the kolkhoz administration by mid-June 1933. This certificate had to include personal data, workplace, position, and the duration of the employment contract.

Going forward, the Resolution and its accompanying instructions required rural residents to present both a certificate and a contract from the enterprise to the village administration. The information from these documents was recorded in a special notebook or register, and the documents themselves were marked with the inscription "registered at the administration of

[name] kolkhoz on [date]," verified by the signature of the kolkhoz chairman and the kolkhoz or village soviet seal. At the same time, only a short three-day period was allocated for this procedure. Local authorities still had no right to prevent a kolkhoz (collective farm) worker from leaving or to recall them from their job at an enterprise. There were no limits on the number of contracts with enterprises or their duration. Upon the expiration of a contract, the kolkhoz worker could renew it for a new term, and a certificate confirming this had to be submitted to the kolkhoz administration[17].

***Discussion***

Thus, under the passportization system and the introduced residential restrictions in several areas, otkhodniki (seasonal or temporary rural workers) were allowed to receive temporary identity documents or one-year passports and permits for short-term stays in cities, provided they had documents signed by the kolkhoz administration authorizing their departure from the village. After a year, peasants had the opportunity to exchange their temporary passport for a full three-year one, according to their new place of residence. Otkhodniki passports had to be registered for three months, after which registration needed to be renewed at the police departments, enabling the authorities to monitor this population group. In effect, otkhodnichestvo became a legal and almost the only channel for urbanization during the first half of the 1930s.

According to official statistics, the scale of otkhodnichestvo remained significant throughout the decade, despite the fact that only organized recruitment was recorded starting in 1933:

- 1933 — 1,887,000 people
- 1934 — 3,247,000
- 1935 — 3,124,000
- 1936 — 3,104,000
- 1938 — 2,011,000
- 1939 — 2,315,000 (Vdovin, Drobizhev, 1976: 120)

Nevertheless, Soviet industry continued to suffer from a shortage of labor, especially in seasonal sectors. This was partly due to the newly implemented measures and restrictions, as enterprises could not hire rural residents without official documentation from kolkhozes or village councils granting permission to leave. According to a report by the VTsIK commission on passportization in the Leningrad region, in 1934, there was a high demand for labor that was not even 50% fulfilled due to a shortage of workers. It was reported that the situation was especially dire at Dorvodmost (the Directorate of Water, Road, Bridge, and Gas Utilities), which required 5,000 workers but, at the time of the report, had not recruited a single one. Other sectors also faced labor shortages: the construction sector needed about 200,000 workers but had recruited only 100,000; water transport needed 6,000 workers but had hired only 800; peat extraction required over 27,000 workers but had secured only 15,000[18].

Clearly, under such conditions, fearing failure to meet state plans and targets, enterprise and institution directors resorted to hiring passportless peasants who had fled villages due to famine and mass repressions, despite bans reiterated by both central and regional authorities. For example, at a meeting of the Presidium of the Semipalatinsk City Council in January 1934, it was once again emphasized that all organization and institution leaders must check the passport

records of workers and employees, and in cases of missing passports, either terminate their employment or ensure the proper documents were issued. It was stressed that employment without a passport was prohibited, except for contracted kolkhoz workers who had arrived as part of the organized otkhodniki system.

However, the hiring of passportless individuals continued. Directors knowingly took this risk, fully aware of the administrative and criminal liability associated with employing undocumented persons. An example of this can be seen in an investigation that took place in the workers' settlement of Alga in the Aktobe region of Kazakhstan in May 1934. At the "Aktyubkhimstroy" enterprise, a check was carried out to verify whether workers had passports and were properly registered. Numerous violations were uncovered, including a large number of passportless workers, who were fined up to 100 rubles, which in turn triggered mass flight from the enterprise. Similar cases were recorded throughout the country.

In this context, new restrictive measures were adopted — Resolution No. 193 "On the Registration of Passports of Seasonal Kolkhoz Workers Entering Employment at Enterprises Without Contracts with Economic Agencies", dated September 19, 1934[19], and the subsequent circular from the Main Directorate of the Workers' and Peasants' Militia of the NKVD of the USSR "On the Procedure for Registering Seasonal Kolkhoz Workers in Special-Regime Areas", dated September 27, 1934[20]. These documents applied to peasant migrants seeking to move to cities for permanent residence. According to the 1934 rules, rural residents from non-passportized areas who left their place of residence without authorization could not be employed in special-regime zones. However, if they had passports issued at their place of residence along with a certificate from the local rural administration authorizing the move, they could be officially hired by enterprises and institutions.

Nevertheless, this category was placed under strict police control. Their passport registration was permitted once every three months, and re-registration after this period required a formal request from the enterprise's administration. In the event of job abandonment or dismissal, individuals were prohibited from residing in special-regime areas and were subject to immediate administrative expulsion.

By 1935, the rules for entering and residing in non-regime areas were established (Popov 1996). According to the passport work instructions prepared in the spring of 1935, in addition to three-year and one-year passports, there were temporary permits valid for up to three months. These were issued to rural residents for the duration of their travel to passportized areas for work. This document served as the legal basis for residing in regular (non-regime) regions.

### *Conclusion*

Thus, by 1935, formal rules were developed for the entry of rural residents into both special-regime and non-regime areas. Under the Soviet Union's passport regime, temporary migration of peasants to cities for employment remained one of the few available migration pathways. On the one hand, the state actively encouraged this through agricultural incentives, as the leadership was interested in attracting rural labor to urban industries due to the labor shortages caused by rapid industrialization. On the other hand, to combat the mass exodus of peasants triggered by Bolshevik policies in the countryside during the late 1920s and early 1930s, seasonal migration was severely restricted by the passport system. Migrants were now required to present a set of

authorizing documents, including a contract with an economic agency and a certificate from the kolkhoz administration permitting them to leave.

Based on these documents, the police could issue passports granting the right to reside in both special-regime and non-regime zones. However, enterprises were required to record the dates of hiring and dismissal in the passport. This measure allowed the state to regulate migration flows-particularly from rural areas—and meet the labor needs of the national economy while maintaining strict surveillance of individuals through the police. Job termination and the corresponding entry in the passport served as grounds for administrative penalties.

By the mid-1930s, traditional Russian seasonal labor migration (otkhodnichestvo) had been transformed under state pressure into a system of officially sanctioned labor recruitment. The passport or temporary permit became essential documentation for employment. Whereas spontaneous rural labor migration had been tolerated prior to the passportization campaign, by 1933 it had been entirely prohibited. Nevertheless, the introduction of the passport system did not resolve the problem of mass peasant flight from villages, prompting the state to continue reforming the passport regime established in 1932–1933.

***Acknowledgements***

I would like to express my gratitude to the editorial board and the reviewers for their academic support of our article.

***Notes***

1. Report of the NKT on the state of the labor market. GANO. f. r-532, op. 1, d. 1176, l. 1–10.
2. Report of the NKT on the state of the labor market. GANO. f. r-532, op. 1, d. 796, l. 45.
3. Siberian region. Statistical handbook. Novosibirsk: Statistical Department of the Regional Planning Committee, 1930. 804 p.
4. Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On eliminating obstacles to the free departure of peasants for migrant trades and seasonal work." Collection of laws and regulations of the Workers' and Peasants' Government of the USSR (hereafter – SZ USSR). 1930. No. 18. Art. 206.
5. Stalin I. V. New conditions – new tasks of economic construction (Speech at the meeting of economic managers on June 23, 1931). Pravda. 1931. July 5.
6. Decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of June 30, 1931, No. 10/458 "On migrant labor." SZ USSR. 1931. No. 42. Art. 286.
7. On the extension of the decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of June 30, 1931, on migrant labor to collective farmers and individual peasants recruited for work as hunters. SZ USSR. 1931. no. 63, art. 410.
8. On the extension of the decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of June 30, 1931, on migrant labor to collective farmers and individual peasants recruited for work in communications enterprises. SZ USSR. 1931. no. 72, art. 482.
9. Instruction on the issuance of passports to citizens of the USSR in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kharkov In the 100-kilometer zone around Moscow and Leningrad and in the 50-kilometer zone around Kharkov. State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter – GA RF). f. r-5446, op. 14a, d. 740, l. 109–114.

10. Decree "On the approval of the passport regulations" of December 27, 1932. Izvestia of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, December 28, 1932, no.358.
11. Order of the OGPU no. 009 of January 5, 1933, "On Chekist measures for the introduction of the passport system in the USSR." GA RF. f. r-9401, op. 12, d. 137, l.1 –2.
12. Directive no. 96 of August 13, 1933, on the procedure for applying extrajudicial repressive measures against citizens who violate the law on the passportization of the population. GA RF. f. r-9401, op. 12, d. 137, l.202–204.
13. Instruction on the issuance of passports to citizens of the USSR in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kharkov, in the 100-kilometer zone around Moscow and Leningrad, and in the 50-kilometer zone around Kharkov. GA RF. f. r-5446, op. 14a, d. 740, l. 109–114.
14. Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR no. 861 of April 28, 1933, "On the issuance of passports to citizens of the USSR on the territory of the USSR." SZ USSR. 1932. no. 84, art. 516.
15. Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of January 14, 1933, no. 43, "On the approval of the instruction on the issuance of passports." SZ USSR. 1933. no. 3, art.22.
16. Decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR "On the procedure for migrant labor from collective farms" of March 17, 1933. SZ USSR. 1933. no. 21, art.116.
17. Instruction of the People's Commissariat of Labor and the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the USSR on the implementation of the decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of March 17, 1933, on the procedure for migrant labor from collective farms. Za industrializatsiyu, April 23, 1933.
18. Report of the commission of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on the implementation of the decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of December 27, 1932, and the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of April 28, 1933, on the establishment of a unified passport system and the mandatory registration of passports in Leningrad and the Leningrad region. GA RF. f. r-1325, op. 141, d. 1650, l. 6–26.
19. Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR on the registration of passports of collective farm migrant workers employed at enterprises without contracts with economic organizations, dated September 19, 1934. GA RF. f. r-9415sch, op. 3, d. 8, l.37.
20. Circular of the Main Directorate of Workers' and Peasants' Militia of the NKVD of the USSR "On the procedure for registration of collective farm migrant workers in restricted areas" of September 27, 1934. GA RF. f. r-9415sch, op. 3, d. 8, l. 36.

***References***

Baiburin A. *The Soviet passport: History – structure – practices.* Saint Petersburg: EUSPb. 2017. 488 p.

Vdovin A., Drobizhev V. *The growth of the working class: 1917-1940.* Moscow: Mysl. 1976. 264 p *Famine in the USSR. 1929-1934. In* 3 volumes. Vol. 1. Book 2. Moscow: MFD. 2011. 656 p.

Kessler H. Collectivization and flight from the countryside are socio-economic indicators. 1929-1939. 1n: *Economic History.* The review. Moscow.. 2003. Is. 9. pp. 77-79..

Kondrashin V., Mozokhin O. *MTS political departments in 1933-1934.* Moscow: Russian Book. 2017. 397 p.

Moiseenko V. The departure of the rural population to work in the USSR in the 1920s. *Population.*

2017. No.3(77), pp.53–54. DOI:10.26653/1561-7785-2017-3-4
Popov V. Passport system in the USSR (1932-1976). *Sociological research.* 1995. No.8, pp.3–14.
Popov V. The passport system of Soviet serfdom. *Novy Mir.* 1996. No.6, pp.185–203.
Potapova N. State regulation of otkhodnichestvo in the 1920s. (based on materials from Siberia *Historical Courier.* 2023. No.1(27), pp.178–185. URL: http://istkurier.ru/data/2023/ISTKURIER-2023-1-14.pdf
*The history of industrialization of the USSR 1926-1941.* Documents and materials. In 4 books. Book 1. 1926-1928. Moscow: Nauka Publ. 2005. 838 p.
*The national economy of the USSR for 70 years: Jubilee statistical Yearbook. Goskomstat of the* USSR. Moscow: Finance and Statistics. 1987. 766 p.
The Soviet village through the eyes of the CHEKA–OGPU–NKVD. *1918-1939. Documents and materials.* In 4 volumes. Vol. 3. Book 2. Moscow: ROSSPEN. 2005. 838 p.
Chernolutskaya E. Forced migration in the Soviet Far East in the 1920s and 1950s Vladivostok: Dalnauka. 2011. 511 p.
Fitzpatrick S. " Attribution to class" as a system of social identification. Russia and the Modern World. 2003. No.2, pp.133-151.
Shirer D. *Stalin's Military Socialism: Repression and Public Order in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953.* Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2014. 541 p.

***Information about the authors***
**Natalia A. Potapova –** Candidate of Historical Sciences, Novosibirsk State University of Economics and Management (NSUEM), Novosibirsk, Russia, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8562-0310, skna17talya@mail.ru

***Авторлар туралы мәліметтер***
**Наталья Анатольевна Потапова** – тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, Новосибирск мемлекеттік экономика және басқару университеті (НГУЭУ), Новосибирск, Ресей, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8562-0310, e-mail: skna17talya@mail.ru

***Сведения об авторах***
**Наталья Анатольевна Потапова –** кандидат исторических наук, Новосибирский государственный университет экономики и управления (НГУЭУ), Новосибирск, Россия, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8562-0310, e-mail: skna17talya@mail.ru

***Conflict of Interest Statement:*** the author declares no conflicts of interest. ***Мүдделер қақтығысы туралы мәлімдеме:*** автор мүдделер қақтығысының жоқ екенін мәлімдейді. ***Заявление о конфликте интересов:*** автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

***Мақала туралы ақпарат / Информация о статье / Information about the article.***
Редакцияға түсті / Поступила в редакцию / Entered the editorial office: 24.03.2025.
Рецензенттер мақұлдаған / Одобрено рецензентами / Approved by reviewers: 14.04.2025.
Жариялауға қабылданды / Принята к публикации / Accepted for publication: 16.06.2025.