

Temporary Workers from Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Mongolia

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to report the situation surrounding North Korean temporary workers in Mongolia based on fieldwork, and to consider the significance of sending and receiving North Korean temporary workers.

The employment of North Korean workers is in line with Mongolian policies which aim to resolve the problem of labour power shortage at low cost, and to maintain influence in diplomacy through economic cooperation with North Korea, whose historical experience as a small state between big powers of the former USSR and China is similar to Mongolia's. It is also welcomed by North Korea, because Mongolia displays a friendly attitude toward them and does not intervene in their domestic politics. By sending workers, they can also acquire economic benefits at relatively low political cost. Within this framework of cooperation, there do not seem to be such problems as excessively heavy labour, a severe working environment, ethnic discrimination, or poor conditions of food, shelter, and clothing, which are often pointed out for North Korean temporary workers overseas. However, problems do exist such as extraction of wages by North Korean officials, non-payment by Mongolian employers, and the human rights violation of unpaid labour.