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Migrant Securities: Community Obligations, Informal Care, and Everyday Security among Uzbek Migrants in Russia

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Executive Summary

This article examines how Uzbek migrant workers in Russia create and sustain forms of protection, care, and support under conditions of legal precarity, labor exploitation, and limited institutional trust. Drawing on longitudinal multisited ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2026 in Moscow and Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley, it introduces the concept of migrant securities to capture the socially embedded forms of protection migrants collectively produce through kinship ties, mahalla networks, reciprocity, emotional support, and informal care infrastructures. The study situates migrant experiences within Russia's migration regime, characterized by strong demand for migrant labor alongside restrictive, unpredictable, and increasingly securitized migration governance. Migrants routinely confront police inspections, deportability, unstable legal status, exploitative labor conditions, overcrowded housing, and racialized discrimination. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, intensified surveillance, migration controls, and anti-migrant sentiment further deepened these vulnerabilities. The findings show that migrants actively organize alternative forms of security that operate alongside—and often compensate for—limited formal protections. Mahalla and community networks function as informal welfare systems that mobilize support during detention, illness, workplace injuries, unemployment, and housing crises. Migrants also seek recognition and legitimacy through everyday interactions with Russian neighbors, employers, and coworkers, using acts of care and assistance to secure trust, social acceptance, and practical protection. Funeral repatriation emerges as a particularly important form of collective action through which migrants ensure dignity, belonging, and social recognition beyond death. Emotional support, reciprocity, and religious belief likewise provide essential resources for coping with fear, loneliness, uncertainty, and exclusion. The article contributes to debates on migration, security, and governance by demonstrating that security is not produced solely by states and formal institutions. Rather, it is often socially generated through relationships of reciprocity, obligation, and care. At the same time, these informal systems are not substitutes for institutional protection; they frequently emerge precisely because migrants lack reliable access to labor rights, legal assistance, healthcare, and social services. The findings suggest that migration policies should complement community-based support systems by strengthening migrants' access to legal protection, labor rights enforcement, healthcare, and emergency assistance.

Keywords

migration, security, Russia, Central Asia, anthropology of security

Introduction

One winter evening in Moscow, news spread rapidly through Uzbek migrant WhatsApp and Telegram groups that a young

worker from Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley had died at a construction site in Moscow oblast. The exact circumstances remained unclear. Some migrants believed he had fallen from an upper floor while working without adequate safety

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equipment, while others suspected that his employer delayed calling an ambulance because the workers lacked proper documents. Yet among migrants, discussion quickly shifted away from the cause of death toward a more urgent question: how to return the body to Uzbekistan. Repatriating a deceased migrant required navigating a costly and complex chain of bureaucratic procedures involving hospitals, police reports, morgues, transportation companies, airports, and consular paperwork. For the deceased worker's family, who lived in a village in the Fergana Valley, the costs were impossible to bear.

By midnight, migrants across Moscow had already begun collecting money. Construction workers transferred funds through mobile banking applications, taxi drivers contributed several thousand rubles each, and market vendors and café employees passed around plastic bags collecting cash after evening shifts. Others mobilized contacts at morgues, airports, and transportation companies, while Telegram groups linking Moscow and village in Uzbekistan became hubs for coordinating logistics and sharing practical information. What was striking was not only the speed of this collective response but also the moral language through which migrants explained their actions. They did not describe helping as charity, generosity, or voluntary kindness. Rather, assistance was understood as an unquestionable obligation toward *o'zimizni odam* ("our own person"). As one migrant put it, "You cannot abandon your own person in the street." Failure to help would not simply reflect individual indifference; it would represent a breach of social responsibility and communal (mahalla) belonging.

This vignette points to a broader puzzle that this article seeks to address: How do migrants create security in contexts where formal institutions often fail to provide protection? How do they cope with illness, workplace injuries, detention, unemployment, death, and other crises in environments characterized by legal uncertainty, precarious labor conditions, and limited access to state support? More broadly, what forms of protection emerge when migrants cannot rely consistently on the state, employers, or formal welfare institutions? While migration scholarship has extensively examined how states regulate, police, and securitize migrants (Aliverti 2012; Bosworth et al. 2018; Coutin 1999; De Genova 2002; Ruhs 2013), considerably less attention has been devoted to the ways migrants themselves actively construct alternative forms of security through everyday social relations.

Much of the literature on migration and security focuses on borders, surveillance, deportation, policing, and migration control (Bigo 2002; Huysmans 2006; Pinyol-Jiménez 2012; Polko 2024; Williams 2016; Zolberg 2006). Within these frameworks, migrants typically appear as objects of governance who are monitored, disciplined, excluded, or rendered insecure by state institutions. Such perspectives are essential, particularly in the Russian context where migrants routinely encounter police extortion, migration raids, racialized discrimination, deportability, and bureaucratic

uncertainty (Reeves 2015; Round and Kuznetsova 2021; Urinboyev 2020). Yet focusing exclusively on the state risks overlooking another equally important dimension of migrant life: the social infrastructures through which migrants collectively manage vulnerability, risk, and uncertainty in their everyday lives.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has become one of the world's largest destinations for labor migrants, particularly from Central Asia (IOM 2026). Yet the Russian migration regime is characterized by a persistent tension between economic dependence on migrant labor and restrictive migration governance (Abashin 2016; Schenk 2018; Urinboyev 2020). Complex legalization procedures, constantly changing regulations, selective enforcement, and widespread informality create a socio-legal environment in which many migrants remain legally precarious even when they possess the required documents (Kubal 2019; Schenk 2018). Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, these dynamics intensified through increased migration securitization, digital surveillance, police monitoring, and anti-migrant sentiment, further deepening migrants' vulnerability (BBC 2023; The Diplomat 2026). Migrants increasingly confronted wartime security measures, debates over military recruitment, and heightened uncertainty regarding their legal status and future in Russia. Under such conditions, migrants frequently cannot rely on formal institutions for predictable protection and instead become increasingly dependent on kinship ties, mahalla networks, informal intermediaries, and digital communication platforms. It is within this broader context of chronic insecurity and limited institutional trust that the migrant insecurities and adaptive strategies emerge and acquire their social significance.

Accordingly, for many Uzbek migrants in Russia, insecurity is not an exceptional event but a routine feature of daily existence (Reeves 2015; Round and Kuznetsova 2021). Migrants face risks associated with police inspections, arbitrary detention, deportation, unpaid wages, workplace accidents, housing precarity, and racialized exclusion (Agadjanian et al. 2017; Kuznetsova 2017). Formal institutions frequently appear inaccessible, unpredictable, corrupt, or openly hostile toward low-wage migrant workers from Central Asia (Kubal 2016a, 2016b). Under such conditions, migrants often cannot depend on the state to provide reliable protection. Instead, they turn to fellow migrants, relatives, co-villagers, and informal networks (Urinboyev 2021). These social ties provide financial assistance during emergencies, help migrants navigate encounters with authorities, circulate information about dangerous employers and migration raids, and mobilize support during moments of crisis (Urinboyev 2017).

This article argues that Uzbek migrants create what we conceptualize as *migrant securities*: socially embedded forms of protection, care, obligation, and support that emerge through kinship networks, community (mahalla) relations, reciprocity, and informal social infrastructures. Rather than

viewing security as something produced primarily by the state, the article approaches it as a plural, relational, and socially distributed phenomenon. Migrants seek not only protection from deportation or police harassment but also emotional, bodily, reputational, communal, and existential security. These forms of security are often grounded in moral obligations, trust, reciprocity, and shared experiences of vulnerability. Importantly, they are not merely responses to insecurity but constitute alternative systems of social protection that enable migrants to endure and navigate precarious migration environments.

Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork among Uzbek migrants in Moscow and the Fergana Valley between 2014 and 2026, this article examines how migrants collectively produce and sustain forms of protection, care, and solidarity in everyday life. Focusing on crisis support, acts of helping, and the repatriation of deceased migrants, it shifts attention from migrants as passive recipients of insecurity to active producers of security.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The section “Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizing Migrant Securities” develops the conceptual framework by introducing the notion of migrant securities. The section “Methodology: Longitudinal Ethnography of Migrant Security” discusses the methodological approach and longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork. The section “Migration, Insecurity, and Everyday Precarity in Russia” situates Uzbek migrants’ everyday lives within Russia’s migration regime and its forms of insecurity. The “Mahalla Securities: Helping Fellow Migrants in Crisis,” “Securing Recognition: Helping Russians and Social Position,” “Repatriating the Dead: Transnational Moral Economies of Security,” and “Emotional Security and Migrant Moral Worlds” sections present the ethnographic findings, showing how migrants produce security through mahalla obligations, cross-ethnic recognition, funeral repatriation, and emotional support. The final section discusses the broader implications of these findings for debates on migration, human security, informality, and migrant protection.

Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizing Migrant Securities

Migration and security are commonly analyzed through state-centered frameworks that emphasize borders, surveillance, deportation, policing, and the governance of mobile populations (Avdan 2014; Karyotis 2007; Pinyol-Jiménez 2012; Raineri and Rossi 2017; Williams 2016). Within these approaches, security is typically understood as something produced by formal institutions through law, territorial control, and state protection, while migrants appear primarily as objects of regulation and securitization. Although such perspectives remain important for understanding contemporary migration regimes, they often overlook how security is experienced, negotiated, and collectively produced in everyday life, particularly in contexts characterized by

weak rule of law, authoritarian governance, and pervasive informality. For Uzbek migrants in Russia, security rarely appears as a stable condition guaranteed by the state. Instead, state institutions themselves often become sources of insecurity through police inspections, migration raids, arbitrary detention, racial profiling, bureaucratic opacity, employer abuse, and deportability. Yet migrant life does not simply collapse into abandonment. Migrants actively create alternative forms of protection through kinship ties, mahalla relations, reciprocity, emotional loyalty, and informal infrastructures of care. Understanding these practices requires moving beyond state-centric conceptions of security and treating it as a socially distributed and relational phenomenon.

Recent developments in the anthropology of security provide important foundations for such an approach (Borneman and Masco 2015; Burgess 2009; Goldstein 2016; Read and Thelen 2007; Zedner 2003). Scholars such as Goldstein (2016) argue that security should be examined ethnographically as an everyday social practice rather than reduced to military institutions, policing, or national defense. Security is experienced through work, housing, bodily safety, recognition, dignity, and emotional well-being as much as through formal state protection (De Rivera and Pérez 2007; Read and Thelen 2007). This perspective resonates with broader debates on human security, which shift attention from territorial defense to everyday vulnerabilities associated with poverty, exclusion, violence, and uncertainty (Alkire 2003; Hampson 2012; King and Murray 2001). Yet even human security approaches often assume that protection is ultimately provided through state institutions. The experiences of Uzbek migrants in Russia point to a more fragmented reality in which institutional protection remains inconsistent, selective, or at times predatory.

This article draws particularly on Zedner’s (2003) argument that security is plural, unstable, and socially constructed rather than singular and universally defined. Security encompasses both objective conditions and subjective feelings; it includes bodily safety but also trust, predictability, dignity, belonging, and emotional reassurance. Such multidimensional understandings are especially relevant in migration contexts where legal status alone cannot guarantee protection. As De Rivera and Pérez’s (2007) work on emotional climates suggests, security is inseparable from collective emotional environments structured through fear, trust, anxiety, solidarity, and hope. For migrants in Moscow, emotional insecurity is pervasive. Fear of deportation, humiliation during police inspections, uncertainty about wages, loneliness, and concerns for family members all shape everyday life. Yet migrants simultaneously create emotional security through companionship, reciprocity, and mutual support. Security therefore emerges as an emotional and relational condition as much as a legal or material one.

Burgess’s (2009) proposition that “there is no security, only securities” offers a particularly useful starting point. Migrants

pursue multiple and overlapping forms of protection, including legal security from deportation, bodily security from violence, emotional security from loneliness, reputational security within migrant networks, and existential security through proper care for the dead. These securities are interconnected but not reducible to one another, and they are often produced socially rather than institutionally. This perspective aligns with scholarship on vernacular and everyday security (Jarvis 2019; Jarvis and Lister 2013; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016), which emphasizes how ordinary people organize protection under conditions of uncertainty. Uzbek migrants rarely rely exclusively on state institutions during crises. Instead, they mobilize social networks, reciprocity, kinship obligations, and emotional commitments to manage vulnerability collectively. Security, in this sense, is not monopolized by the state but generated through social relationships, moral obligations, and informal infrastructures of care.

Understanding why migrants produce such alternative forms of protection also requires situating migration within Russia's broader system of authoritarian governance. Scholars studying post-Soviet societies have shown that formal institutions frequently operate through informal practices, discretionary enforcement, personal networks, and negotiated arrangements (Gel'man 2004; Ledeneva 2006, 2013; Morris and Polese 2015; Polese et al. 2022). Informality is not simply a deviation from governance but one of its constitutive features (Polese 2015). Migration governance exemplifies this hybridity. Registration systems, work permits, migration databases, and police inspections are highly visible yet often enforced selectively and unpredictably. As studies have shown that law in post-Soviet contexts frequently functions through negotiation and personalized authority rather than abstract rule-bound governance (Gel'man 2004; Humphrey 2002, 2012; Kubal 2019; Markowitz 2008; Solomon 2007). Consequently, legal status alone rarely guarantees protection. Even documented migrants may face extortion, detention, or workplace exploitation, while undocumented migrants sometimes survive through social connections, informal arrangements, and negotiated legality (Dave 2014; Reeves 2013; Turaeva 2025).

Such conditions produce what may be described as institutionalized insecurity. Russian migration governance does not merely fail to protect migrants; it often generates insecurity through legal ambiguity, deportability, selective policing, and racialized enforcement. Migrants therefore cannot consistently depend on formal institutions for safety, care, or predictability. Instead, they rely on alternative systems of protection that coexist with, rather than replace, formal governance. Their survival depends on practical combinations of legal documentation, social networks, emotional reciprocity, informal mediation, and moral obligation.

One of the most important sources of such protection lies in community/mahalla-based moral worlds and reciprocal obligations. In Uzbekistan, mahalla refers not simply to a

neighborhood community but to broader systems of kinship, reputation, mutual responsibility, and moral accountability that remain influential even after migration (Dadabaev 2012; Sievers 2002; Urinboyev 2017). Shared village origins, family ties, and regional identities create dense networks and socially embedded systems of mutual obligation through which migrants evaluate trustworthiness, generosity, and social responsibility. Migrants contribute money for funerals, assist injured coworkers, intervene during police detentions, and help newcomers find housing and employment not only because they expect repayment but because such actions reproduce moral personhood and communal belonging. At the same time, these systems remain ambivalent. Reciprocity generates solidarity, but it can also create pressure, hierarchy, gossip, and unequal expectations. Security produced through social obligation therefore always involves power relations as well as care.

This more critical perspective also resonates with a growing body of migration scholarship demonstrating that migrant social ties are not uniformly beneficial. Hagan (1998) shows that social networks simultaneously provide resources for immigrant incorporation while also constraining individual opportunities through gendered obligations, dependence, and unequal access to support. Similarly, Del Real (2019) demonstrates how intimate and family relationships within mixed-status communities can reproduce "legal violence," exposing migrants to coercion, surveillance, and exploitation by those closest to them. These studies reinforce the argument advanced here that mahalla-based securities should not be romanticized: while community networks are indispensable sources of care, protection, and reciprocity, they can also generate moral pressure, social control, unequal obligations, and exclusion.

Building on these insights, this article introduces the concept of migrant securities to describe the multiple socially embedded forms of protection, care, obligation, and emotional stability that migrants collectively produce under conditions of authoritarian governance and institutional precarity. Migrant securities are not singular guarantees but plural and relational infrastructures emerging through everyday social life. They encompass legal, emotional, reputational, bodily, communal, and existential forms of protection that are collectively generated rather than individually possessed. Migrants survive not because they achieve full incorporation into Russian institutions but because they participate in social worlds structured by reciprocity, care, and obligation. This perspective challenges approaches that portray migrants solely as victims of exclusion (Coutin 2003; Menjivar and Abrego 2012) or objects of securitization (Pinyol-Jiménez 2012; Polko 2024; Williams 2016). While Uzbek migrants undoubtedly experience profound insecurity within Russia's migration regime, they also actively construct alternative systems of protection that sustain everyday life. Understanding

migration in contemporary Russia therefore requires attention not only to the insecurities produced by the state but also to the socially embedded securities migrants create in response.

Methodology: Longitudinal Ethnography of Migrant Security

This article draws on longitudinal multisited ethnographic fieldwork conducted among Uzbek migrant workers in Russia and Uzbekistan between 2014 and 2026. Although the research initially focused on labor migration, informality, and migrant everyday life in post-Soviet Russia, questions of security, care, obligation, and vulnerability gradually emerged as central themes. Repeated encounters with deportation, police violence, workplace injuries, illness, emotional crises, and death revealed that migration could not be understood solely through labor markets or legal status. Migrants navigated insecurity through dense social infrastructures of reciprocity, support, and collective protection that became particularly visible during moments of crisis.

The fieldwork was multisited both geographically and socially, moving between Moscow and Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley while following migrants across construction sites, dormitories, cafés, markets, hospitals, police stations, airports, train stations, and digital communication spaces. Rather than treating migration as movement between two separate locations, the research approached it as a transnational social field connecting Russian urban life with mahalla communities in Uzbekistan through the circulation of money, obligations, information, emotional support, and social responsibility.

Moscow constituted the primary ethnographic site, particularly migrant-dense districts such as Solnechnogorsk, Krasnogorsk, and Balashikha where many Uzbeks worked in construction, transportation, markets, and services. Daily engagement in migrant apartments, dormitories, construction brigades, and informal gathering places provided opportunities to observe how migrants discussed insecurity, exchanged practical advice, organized mutual support, and collectively interpreted experiences of police harassment, labor exploitation, illness, and deportation. Construction sites were especially important because they concentrated many dimensions of migrant precarity, including dangerous labor conditions, wage theft, police vulnerability, and dependence on co-ethnic support networks. Workplace injuries, wage disputes, and detentions often triggered immediate collective responses involving fundraising, mediation, and emergency assistance.

Additional fieldwork took place in locations such as Moscow's Kazansky railway station, hospitals, police stations, detention facilities, and airports, particularly during moments of crisis. Accompanying migrants during hospital visits, police negotiations, or funeral repatriation procedures provided direct insight into how informal support infrastructures operated through translation assistance, fundraising, emotional labor,

bureaucratic mediation, and collective decision-making. Fieldwork in Uzbekistan focused on the Fergana Valley, where repeated visits to migrants' villages and interview with return migrants and their communities revealed how migration-related insecurity continued to shape family life, community expectations, and moral obligations long after migrants had left for Russia. Mahalla networks proved particularly important for understanding how obligations toward fellow migrants were socially produced, monitored, and enforced.

The longitudinal nature of the research was crucial. Following migrants over more than a decade made it possible to observe changing migration trajectories involving legalization, workplace mobility, deportation, return migration, marriage, illness, economic crises, and death. Long-term relationships enabled observation of how obligations evolved over time and how migrants collectively responded to recurring crises. Many interlocutors first encountered as newly arrived workers later became brigadiers, intermediaries, entrepreneurs, or return migrants, while others disappeared following deportation, accidents, or death.

Methodologically, the study combines participant observation, life-history interviews, informal conversations, migration narratives, emotional ethnography, and digital ethnography. Much of the most valuable material emerged through everyday interactions rather than formal interviews: conversations in migrant apartments, hospital visits, fundraising campaigns, airport waiting rooms, and discussions following police inspections. These interactions revealed security not as an abstract concept but as a lived social practice embedded in everyday relationships.

Digital ethnography became increasingly important as smartphones and social media platforms became central to migrant life. WhatsApp, Telegram, and other platforms were used to circulate police warnings, fundraising appeals, funeral announcements, migration advice, and emotional support. Participation in these digital networks enabled observation of how obligations, solidarities, and support systems were organized transnationally and in real time.

The research also relied heavily on migration narratives. Stories about deportation, workplace exploitation, police extortion, illness, death, and acts of assistance were analytically important not only because of the events they described but because they revealed migrants' moral understandings of obligation, reciprocity, masculinity, solidarity, and security. Such narratives circulated widely and helped define expectations regarding appropriate conduct within migrant communities.

Researching migrant insecurity raised significant ethical challenges. Many participants occupied legally precarious positions involving undocumented status, informal employment, or past deportation. All names used in this article are pseudonyms, and identifying details have been altered where necessary. As Central Asian researchers sharing linguistic, cultural, and regional

backgrounds with many interlocutors, we were often perceived as “*o‘zimizniki*” (“one of our own”), facilitating trust and access to intimate conversations. At the same time, this proximity generated expectations of practical assistance and emotional involvement, particularly during moments of crisis. Rather than viewing positionality as a simple insider–outsider distinction, the research approached it as a continuously negotiated relationship shaped by both shared backgrounds and social differences.

Long-term ethnographic engagement also meant that observation frequently became intertwined with participation. During episodes of illness, detention, workplace accidents, and funeral repatriation, the first author occasionally assisted migrants by translating conversations with Russian officials, helping coordinate logistical arrangements, contributing to collective fundraising efforts, or sharing practical information. Such involvement did not arise from a predefined research strategy but from the relational expectations associated with long-term insider fieldwork and the moral obligations embedded within Uzbek migrant communities. Refusing assistance in these situations would have risked undermining relationships of trust and, in some cases, conflicted with widely shared expectations of reciprocity and communal responsibility.

Rather than treating this participation as a threat to analytical distance, the study approached it as a source of ethnographic insight. Participating in fundraising campaigns, accompanying migrants during hospital visits and funeral repatriation, and observing how responsibilities were negotiated within community networks provided access to forms of decision-making, moral reasoning, and reciprocal obligation that would have remained difficult to capture through interviews alone. At the same time, fieldnotes were written immediately after these events, and subsequent analysis distinguished carefully between descriptive accounts of participation and the analytical interpretation of migrants’ practices. Continuous reflexive discussion among the co-authors further helped interrogate assumptions arising from the first author’s insider position and strengthened analytical distance during the interpretation of the material.

All in all, this methodology sought to capture security not as an institutional abstraction but as a lived social process. Longitudinal ethnography made it possible to observe how migrants collectively organized protection, care, and emotional support within environments marked by chronic insecurity and limited institutional trust, revealing how migrant securities are produced through everyday relationships that extend across borders, crises, and even death.

Although the article is co-authored, the ethnographic material presented here derives primarily from the first author’s long-term fieldwork among Uzbek migrants in Moscow and the Fergana Valley. Accordingly, the empirical sections occasionally shift from “we” to “I” when describing events that the first author personally witnessed or participated in. The use of the

first person in these instances reflects the authorship of specific field encounters rather than a change in analytical perspective.

Migration, Insecurity, and Everyday Precarity in Russia

For Uzbek migrants in Russia, insecurity is not an exceptional circumstance but a defining feature of everyday life. Migrants routinely navigate environments shaped by deportability, racialized policing, unstable employment, legal ambiguity, overcrowded housing, and anti-migrant hostility (Agadjanian et al. 2017; Reeves 2015; Round and Kuznetsova 2016; Kuznetsova 2017). These insecurities are not accidental byproducts of migration but are embedded within Russia’s migration regime, which relies heavily on migrant labor while simultaneously maintaining systems of selective enforcement and legal uncertainty (Schenk 2018; Turaeva 2023; Urinboyev 2020). As a result, migrants often experience the state less as a source of protection than as an unpredictable force of surveillance, extraction, and vulnerability.

One of the most pervasive forms of insecurity is deportability (De Genova 2002)—the constant possibility of detention, deportation, or exclusion from legal residence. Even migrants possessing valid documents rarely experience legal status as secure. Registrations, patents, work permits, and migration cards provide only fragile protection because migration regulations are complex, frequently changing, and unevenly enforced. Many migrants described legality not as a stable condition but as something temporary and reversible, vulnerable to bureaucratic mistakes, police discretion, or sudden policy shifts.

Police document checks and migration raids are routine features of migrant life in Moscow, making encounters with law enforcement a constant source of uncertainty and anxiety. Migrants can rarely predict whether a document inspection will end with a brief check, a demand for an informal payment, detention, or deportation proceedings. As one migrant remarked after avoiding police near a metro station, “Today maybe they just check documents. Tomorrow maybe they take you to the police station. Nobody knows.” Raids on construction sites, markets, dormitories, train stations, and overcrowded apartments further reinforce this uncertainty, while warnings about police operations circulate rapidly through WhatsApp groups and other migrant networks. Detention is widely feared not only because of deportation risks but also because police stations are often experienced as spaces of confusion, extortion, and abuse, where access to legal information, translators, or legal assistance is limited. Consequently, migrants develop various coping strategies—from avoiding particular locations and carrying cash for informal payments to relying on social networks for information and support—yet insecurity persists because migration enforcement remains highly discretionary and unpredictable.

Legal insecurity extended beyond encounters with the police. Workplace precarity constituted another central dimension of migrant vulnerability. Most Uzbek migrants worked in sectors characterized by informal employment, dangerous working conditions, delayed wages, and weak legal protections. Construction work in particular involved constant risks of injury and exploitation. Migrants recounted cases in which employers refused payment, ignored safety standards, or attempted to conceal workplace accidents to avoid legal responsibility. Wage theft was especially common because undocumented or semi-documented workers were often reluctant to seek help from labor authorities. As one migrant remarked, “They know we cannot protect ourselves officially.” Under such conditions, migrants frequently depended on coworkers, brigadiers, intermediaries, and co-villagers rather than formal institutions to resolve disputes or secure compensation.

Housing represented another source of insecurity. Many migrants lived in overcrowded apartments (“rubber apartments”), where fifteen or more people often shared small spaces near construction sites or metro stations. Such arrangements reflected not only economic necessity but also exclusion from formal housing markets, as landlords frequently refused to rent to Central Asian migrants or demanded inflated prices. Yet overcrowded housing generated additional risks, including police raids, theft, poor sanitation, fire hazards, and interpersonal conflict. Neighbors’ complaints often triggered inspections that could lead to detention or deportation.

These insecurities were further compounded by racial discrimination and social exclusion. Migrants regularly reported verbal abuse, stigmatization, and discriminatory treatment in public spaces. Anti-migrant rhetoric and nationalist campaigns reinforced feelings of visibility and vulnerability, particularly for Central Asian men who were routinely marked as outsiders within Russian urban life.

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, many interlocutors described a noticeable shift in the everyday experience of migration governance. While police document checks and legal uncertainty had long characterized migrant life, wartime conditions intensified surveillance and expanded the security logic through which migrants were governed. Several migrants reported more frequent identity checks near transport hubs and construction sites, increased scrutiny of mobile phones and digital registrations, and growing fears of being associated with security threats. At the same time, public discussions about migrant recruitment into the Russian military and proposals to link citizenship acquisition with military service generated new anxieties, particularly among younger Uzbek men. Even migrants who were not directly affected described the war as producing an atmosphere of heightened uncertainty in which legal status appeared increasingly contingent upon shifting security priorities rather than predictable administrative procedures.

Importantly, these forms of insecurity intersected and reinforced one another. Legal uncertainty increased vulnerability to labor exploitation, unstable housing heightened deportation risks, and racialized policing intensified emotional insecurity. Although vulnerability varied according to legal status, language skills, social networks, and economic resources, even relatively successful migrants described their lives as fundamentally unstable because security could quickly unravel through a police raid, workplace accident, economic downturn, or legal change.

This chronic precarity reflects broader patterns of post-Soviet governance. Russian migration regulation operates less through consistent rule-bound enforcement than through discretion, informal negotiation, corruption, and bureaucratic ambiguity (Kubal 2016c; Schenk 2021). Laws are extensive and restrictive, but their implementation remains selective and unpredictable. Under such conditions, migrants cannot consistently rely on formal institutions for protection or predictability. Instead, they turn to kinship networks, mahalla ties, reciprocity, and co-ethnic solidarity to navigate crises and manage uncertainty. Russia’s migration regime therefore not only produces insecurity but also compels migrants to develop alternative systems of care and protection beyond the state.

Mahalla Securities: Helping Fellow Migrants in Crisis

One cold evening in Krasnogorsk, an Uzbek construction worker received a phone call informing him that a fellow migrant from the Fergana Valley had been detained during a police document check and taken to a local police station. The detained man had recently arrived in Moscow, spoke little Russian, possessed few resources, and knew almost nobody in the city. Within an hour, several migrants from the same district had gathered outside the station. One brought food, another contacted a Russian-speaking acquaintance, and others began collecting money in case fines or informal payments were required. What was striking was that most barely knew the detainee personally. Yet everyone described helping as self-evident. As one migrant explained, “Still, he is one of our own people.”

Such moments illustrate how security among Uzbek migrants is often organized through mahalla-based moral obligations rather than formal institutions. Under conditions of chronic precarity, helping fellow migrants becomes not simply an act of generosity but a socially expected responsibility rooted in reciprocity, kinship ethics, masculine duty, and emotional obligation. Mahalla functions as an informal welfare system and crisis-response infrastructure through which migrants collectively manage insecurity when formal protections are weak or inaccessible.

Throughout fieldwork, migrants repeatedly emphasized that survival in Moscow depended on having “o’zimizni odamlar” (“our own people”) nearby. Newcomers without relatives, co-villagers, or trusted acquaintances often struggled to find work,

housing, legal assistance, or practical guidance. By contrast, migrants embedded in dense social networks could draw upon temporary accommodation, loans, employment opportunities, translation assistance, police mediation, emotional support, and emergency help. These socially distributed forms of protection can be understood as “mahalla securities,” emerging through obligations among relatives, co-villagers, and migrants sharing common regional origins.

Importantly, such obligations were rarely framed as optional. Migrants described helping others through a moral language of duty, honor, and reciprocity. Refusing assistance during a crisis could damage one’s reputation both in Moscow and back in Uzbekistan. As one migrant observed, “If somebody from your village asks for help and you ignore him, people will talk.” Social respectability was therefore tied not only to economic success but also to visible acts of care and responsibility. Masculinity, in particular, was often measured through a willingness to support injured coworkers, assist detained migrants, contribute to funerals, and help vulnerable newcomers.

These moral obligations became especially visible during illness and workplace accidents. Construction labor frequently exposed migrants to dangerous conditions, while employers often avoided responsibility for injuries, particularly when workers lacked proper documentation. In one case, a migrant named Aziz injured his leg after falling at a construction site. When the employer refused to cover medical expenses and demanded that Aziz leave his accommodation, fellow migrants quickly mobilized. Some negotiated with the employer, others accompanied him to the hospital, collected money for medicine, and later helped him return to Uzbekistan. As one participant explained, “If we don’t help each other here, nobody will help us.” Such responses reflected a widespread perception that employers, police, and other institutions could rarely be relied upon during crises. Mahalla networks therefore operated as alternative infrastructures of care.

Housing insecurity generated similar forms of support. Migrants who lost jobs or accommodation frequently relied on fellow villagers for temporary shelter, even in already overcrowded apartments. Hospitality was understood through long-term reciprocity rather than immediate exchange. As one migrant remarked, “Today he sleeps at my place. Tomorrow maybe my younger brother comes to Moscow and needs help somewhere else.” Such practices reflected a shared awareness that almost anyone might eventually require assistance under conditions of deportability, police harassment, unstable employment, and legal uncertainty.

At the same time, these support systems were neither purely altruistic nor entirely egalitarian. Migrants who achieved relatively stable positions often complained about constant requests for help from distant acquaintances. Obligations generated social pressure, and access to support depended partly on

reputation. Mahalla securities therefore involved not only solidarity but also moral hierarchies and social differentiation.

Their emotional significance was equally important. Migration frequently produced loneliness, anxiety, and isolation, particularly among men separated from their families. Fellow villagers and coworkers often became substitute family structures providing companionship and emotional reassurance. This was especially evident during police detentions or deportation threats. Migrants waiting outside police stations often explained their presence in simple moral terms: “A person should not sit there alone.” Bringing food, tea, or cigarettes to detainees carried symbolic importance because it affirmed social belonging in situations marked by humiliation and uncertainty.

These informal systems of care remained limited and could not eliminate the structural causes of insecurity, such as exploitative labor arrangements, racialized policing, or unstable legal status. Nevertheless, for many Uzbek migrants they constituted the most reliable forms of protection available. Mahalla thus functioned simultaneously as an informal welfare system, emotional safety net, moral community, and crisis-response infrastructure. Through these socially embedded relations of reciprocity, obligation, and care, migrants collectively produced forms of security that made everyday life possible under conditions of chronic precarity and institutional uncertainty.

Securing Recognition: Helping Russians and Social Position

One evening in Moscow oblast, several Uzbek construction workers helped an elderly Russian woman carry groceries through the snow and clear ice from the entrance to her apartment building. In the months that followed, she greeted them warmly, accepted packages on their behalf, and once warned them about police document checks near the building. Reflecting on the relationship, one migrant explained: “If Russians see you as a normal person, life becomes easier.”

At first glance, such interactions may seem unrelated to security. Yet for many Uzbek migrants, helping Russians constitutes an important strategy for securing recognition, legitimacy, and social protection within a highly racialized environment where Central Asians are often viewed as suspicious outsiders. Migrants frequently described insecurity not only in legal or economic terms but also through experiences of humiliation, disrespect, invisibility, and moral suspicion. Under such conditions, everyday acts of assistance toward Russian neighbors, employers, coworkers, or strangers became ways of negotiating moral worth and reducing social vulnerability.

Unlike formal integration, which remains limited and unstable for many low-wage migrants in Russia, symbolic incorporation often depends on everyday interactions. Migrants repeatedly emphasized that survival in Moscow required not only documents and employment but also relationships of trust

and respect with Russians. Such relationships could generate practical benefits, including housing opportunities, workplace trust, protection from police attention, and informal support during legal difficulties. Equally important, they provided emotional relief from the stigma and exclusion that many migrants experienced in daily life.

Throughout fieldwork, migrants contrasted experiences of discrimination with moments when Russians treated them “like human beings.” Employers who invited workers to family meals, neighbors who defended migrants during housing disputes, or passengers who showed kindness acquired disproportionate significance because they challenged the suspicion and hostility migrants routinely encountered. As one migrant remarked, “When somebody trusts you here, you remember it for a long time.”

These efforts must be understood within the context of racialized social hierarchies. Central Asian migrants are frequently categorized as *chernye* (“blacks”) and associated with criminality, illegality, or low-status labor (Abashin 2014; Sahadeo 2007; Urinboyev 2020). Many migrants described feeling constantly watched in public spaces and singled out during police inspections. Helping Russians therefore often functioned as an attempt to challenge negative stereotypes and demonstrate qualities such as honesty, hard work, reliability, and generosity. One worker recalled helping a Russian coworker repair a car: “After that he treated me differently. Before, I was just a migrant for him.” Practical assistance thus became a means of asserting moral personhood in environments where migrants often felt reduced to anonymous laborers or security threats.

Recognition could also be converted into tangible forms of protection. Trusted neighbors were less likely to report overcrowded apartments to the police, while sympathetic employers occasionally intervened during document inspections or legal disputes. In one case, an Uzbek migrant named Farrukh regularly helped an elderly Russian neighbor with household repairs and snow removal. Over time, the man offered Farrukh temporary registration at his apartment after learning about his difficulties with migration documents. As Farrukh reflected, “First you show what kind of person you are.” Here, a moral relationship became a source of practical legal security.

At the same time, helping Russians was not solely strategic. Many migrants explained such behavior through Islamic ethics, masculine responsibility, or simple human decency. Yet morality and survival were often intertwined. Demonstrating respectability became a way of navigating a social environment marked by uncertainty and exclusion. Acts of assistance also allowed migrants to reclaim dignity and self-worth. As one migrant noted after helping a Russian woman whose car was stuck in the snow, “She said, ‘You Uzbeks are good people.’ Maybe it sounds small, but such words matter here.” Recognition offered not only practical advantages but also affirmation of migrants’ humanity and social value.

Nevertheless, these efforts remained constrained by broader structures of inequality. Many migrants recognized that no amount of good behavior could fully shield them from racialized policing or anti-migrant hostility. As one construction worker observed, “You can help Russians all your life, but when police stop you, you are still a migrant.” Symbolic recognition could soften social boundaries in particular relationships, but it could not fundamentally transform the structural hierarchies that shaped migrant life.

Moreover, respectability itself became a source of distinction within migrant communities. Some migrants contrasted themselves with those they considered rude, criminal, or irresponsible, reproducing internal hierarchies between “good” and “bad” migrants. Gender also shaped these dynamics. For many men, helping Russians became a performance of masculinity, responsibility, competence, and honor, offering symbolic compensation for the humiliation and powerlessness often experienced in workplaces, police encounters, and everyday urban life.

For Uzbek migrants, security therefore extended beyond protection from deportation or economic hardship. It also involved dignity, visibility, moral recognition, and social acceptance. By cultivating relationships with Russians through acts of care, assistance, and respectability, migrants sought forms of symbolic incorporation that partially compensated for legal and social exclusion. These practices reveal that migrant securities are not confined to co-ethnic solidarity but also emerge through cross-ethnic relationships capable of generating both practical and emotional forms of protection. In this sense, security is not only about avoiding danger but also about being recognized as a trustworthy, respectable, and fully human member of society.

Repatriating the Dead: Transnational Moral Economies of Security

Late one night in Moscow, news spread through Uzbek migrant networks that a young construction worker from the Fergana Valley had died after falling from an unfinished building. Within hours, messages circulated across WhatsApp and Telegram groups: “One of our boys died,” “The family has no money,” “We need to help.” By the following morning, migrants from different construction brigades had already begun collecting donations. Taxi drivers transferred money electronically, café owners organized collections, and fellow migrants mobilized contacts to assist with paperwork and transportation. No formal organization coordinated these efforts, yet among migrants the obligation to help was unquestioned. As one older migrant explained, “He suffered while alive; at least we must return him home.”

Funeral repatriation represents one of the most emotionally powerful and morally significant forms of migrant security. It reveals how obligations of care extend beyond life itself and how migrants collectively respond to vulnerabilities that formal

institutions often fail to address. For many Uzbek migrants, one of the greatest fears is not simply dying abroad but being forgotten, abandoned, or buried far from family and homeland. As one migrant put it, “The worst thing is not dying. The worst thing is if nobody sends you back.” Such statements point to a deeper form of existential insecurity concerning dignity, belonging, and recognition at the boundary between life and death.

Returning the deceased to Uzbekistan is therefore far more than a logistical task. It ensures that migrants remain embedded within family, mahalla, and religious communities even after death. Burial in the homeland symbolizes continued belonging and fulfills moral and religious obligations that connect migration, kinship, and collective responsibility. Yet the process is often costly and bureaucratically complex, requiring hospital documents, police reports, morgue procedures, transportation arrangements, airline approvals, and coordination with relatives in Uzbekistan. Employers frequently avoid responsibility after workplace deaths, while state institutions provide little support beyond administrative requirements. Consequently, repatriation depends heavily on migrant networks.

Throughout fieldwork, the first author observed how coworkers, co-villagers, intermediaries, mosque contacts, and social media groups mobilized to organize fundraising, translation, transportation, and communication with families. In one case, a migrant named Ulug‘bek died suddenly of a heart attack in an overcrowded apartment near Krasnogorsk. Because his family lacked the resources to cover transportation costs, migrants from the same district rapidly organized a fundraising campaign through transnational Telegram groups linking Moscow and villages in the Fergana Valley. Over several days they collected money, negotiated with morgue officials, arranged transportation, and coordinated with relatives in Uzbekistan. As one organizer explained, “This is not about money only. If something happens tomorrow to me, people should also help my family.” Funeral repatriation thus operates through long-term moral economies of reciprocity rooted in shared vulnerability and mutual obligation.

Religious values also play a central role. Many migrants described returning the deceased home as an Islamic duty and viewed burial among family and ancestors as essential for preserving dignity after death. As one migrant remarked, “A Muslim should return to his people.” Such beliefs connect bodily return with broader understandings of community, memory, and moral continuity.

Airports often became emotionally charged spaces where these obligations were enacted. During several repatriation processes, migrants coordinated documents, negotiated with airline staff, transported coffins, and maintained constant communication with relatives waiting in Uzbekistan. Although grief was palpable, participants often emphasized practical responsibility over emotional expression. Masculine ideals of duty and composure shaped these interactions. As one older

migrant supervising the process remarked, “Right now crying is useless. First we must send him home.” Care was expressed less through words than through collective labor and organizational responsibility.

Funeral repatriation also reinforced transnational social ties. News about who contributed money, accompanied the deceased, or helped organize documents quickly circulated back to villages in Uzbekistan. Such actions enhanced social reputation, while failure to contribute could attract criticism and moral condemnation. As one migrant observed, “People remember who helps during death.” These practices therefore strengthened communal accountability and reinforced the moral foundations of migrant solidarity.

At the same time, support was not distributed equally. Migrants with stronger social networks, village connections, or positive reputations generally received more assistance than socially isolated individuals. Moreover, many deaths were linked to broader structural inequalities, including unsafe workplaces, untreated illness, overcrowded housing, and fear of seeking medical care because of legal insecurity. Yet formal accountability for these conditions was rare. Employers often avoided responsibility, while state institutions treated deaths as bureaucratic matters rather than social tragedies. Migrants themselves therefore assumed responsibility for restoring dignity to the dead.

Funeral repatriation demonstrates that security cannot be understood solely in terms of legality, policing, or physical protection. Migrants also seek assurance that, even in death, they will remain socially recognized, morally valued, and connected to communities of care. Through transnational networks of reciprocity, religious obligation, and collective responsibility, Uzbek migrants create forms of posthumous security that extend beyond life itself. In doing so, they become custodians not only of one another’s survival but also of one another’s dignity, memory, and belonging after death.

Emotional Security and Migrant Moral Worlds

Much of the insecurity experienced by Uzbek migrants in Russia is discussed through visible structures such as deportation, policing, labor exploitation, and legal precarity. Yet ethnographic attention to everyday life reveals that insecurity is also deeply emotional. Fear, loneliness, shame, trust, obligation, and hope shape how migrants experience migration and organize relationships with others. Security therefore cannot be understood solely as legal protection or material stability; it is also an emotional condition produced through social relations, collective atmospheres, and moral expectations.

Many migrants described living with a persistent sense of anxiety generated by the possibility of police checks, deportation, unpaid wages, workplace accidents, illness, or

social abandonment. These fears accumulated through ordinary routines. Leaving home early in the morning, entering a metro station, hearing a knock on the apartment door, or receiving a late-night phone call could all trigger concern because such moments were associated with police raids, migration inspections, or emergencies involving relatives and coworkers. As one migrant observed, “Even when everything is normal, your heart is never fully calm here.” This reflects a broader emotional climate in which insecurity is not simply an individual feeling but a collectively shared environment shaped by uncertainty and vulnerability.

Fear was particularly closely linked to deportability. Even migrants with valid documents often perceived their legal status as fragile because migration rules were complex, frequently changing, and unevenly enforced. Rumors of migration raids or new restrictions circulated quickly through migrant networks, generating collective anxiety. Digital communication platforms played an important role in this process. WhatsApp and Telegram groups spread warnings about police operations, deportations, workplace accidents, and legal changes, allowing fear to circulate socially. Yet these same networks also provided reassurance, enabling migrants to check on one another, coordinate support, and respond collectively to crises. Emotional security therefore emerged through relationships as much as through information.

Trust became especially important in a context where formal institutions were often perceived as unreliable or threatening. Police, migration authorities, employers, and bureaucracies were frequently described as unpredictable, corrupt, or hostile. By contrast, fellow villagers, relatives, coworkers, and trusted acquaintances provided emotional stability and practical support. As one migrant put it, “Documents may fail you. Your people should not.” Trust, however, was not automatic. It had to be earned and maintained through reciprocity, loyalty, and visible acts of assistance. Migrants carefully observed who contributed during funerals, helped detained coworkers, shared money during hardship, or disappeared when problems arose. Emotional security depended heavily on maintaining these trustworthy relationships.

The war also reshaped migrants’ emotional landscapes. Before 2022, uncertainty centered primarily on deportation, wage theft, and police harassment. After the invasion, conversations increasingly revolved around military mobilization, recruitment campaigns targeting migrants, and the possibility that migration status could become entangled with wartime security policies. Telegram and WhatsApp groups that had previously circulated information about police raids and employment opportunities began sharing reports on military recruitment, border regulations, and changing migration rules. Digital communication therefore became not only an infrastructure of everyday security but also a mechanism through which migrants collectively interpreted rapidly changing wartime conditions and adapted their strategies accordingly.

Loneliness represented another pervasive aspect of migrant life. Many Uzbek men spent years separated from their families while living in crowded dormitories or construction-site apartments. Despite being surrounded by other migrants, they often described feelings of isolation and emotional exhaustion. One migrant remarked, “In Moscow you are always surrounded by people, but inside you still feel alone.” Such feelings intensified during illness, financial hardship, or legal difficulties, when migrants feared becoming invisible and unsupported. Practices of helping within mahalla networks therefore carried profound emotional significance because they reassured migrants that they would not be abandoned in moments of vulnerability.

Shame and guilt also shaped migrant moral worlds. Men who failed to send remittances, repay debts, or support family members often experienced a deep sense of moral failure. Deportation, unemployment, or illness threatened not only material survival but also masculine self-worth and social reputation. One deported migrant recalled avoiding phone calls from relatives because he felt ashamed of returning home without success. Similarly, migrants who failed to assist fellow villagers during crises often experienced guilt and anxiety about how others would judge them. Moral expectations surrounding reciprocity were emotionally powerful because migrant communities depended heavily on collective support.

Religious belief provided an important source of emotional resilience. Many migrants described prayer, Islamic rituals, and faith as helping them cope with uncertainty, loss, and hardship. Expressions such as “God sees everything” or “One must endure patiently” offered moral frameworks for interpreting suffering and maintaining hope. While religion did not eliminate insecurity, it provided emotional resources that helped migrants endure precarious conditions.

The emotional climate of migrant life therefore combined fear and solidarity, uncertainty and reassurance. Migrants lived under conditions of chronic vulnerability, yet they also created emotional securities through trust, companionship, reciprocity, faith, and moral obligation. Security emerged not only through documents, money, or legal status but through the assurance that one remained socially recognized, emotionally supported, and morally valued. This emotional dimension is central to understanding migrant securities more broadly, revealing how care, trust, and solidarity function as vital infrastructures of survival in environments where formal institutions often fail to provide reliable protection.

Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout this article, Uzbek migrants appeared in seemingly contradictory roles. Men who feared police raids and deportation gathered outside police stations to assist detained compatriots. Workers struggling with their own legal and economic insecurity contributed money to repatriate deceased migrants

they had never met. Migrants excluded from formal systems of protection nevertheless organized emergency assistance, funeral repatriation, housing support, emotional care, and practical guidance for others facing crisis. At the same time, they sought recognition not only from fellow villagers and relatives but also from Russian neighbors, employers, and coworkers whose trust could provide forms of legitimacy and protection unavailable through formal institutions. These cases point to a broader paradox: those who occupy some of the most insecure positions within Russia's migration regime are simultaneously engaged in the active production of security for others.

This paradox forms the central contribution of the article. Much migration scholarship approaches migrants primarily through the analytical lenses of exclusion, deportability, vulnerability, and precarity. These perspectives have generated important insights into how migration regimes produce insecurity and differential access to rights. Yet they often leave insufficient space for examining the social infrastructures through which migrants themselves respond to insecurity. The ethnographic materials presented here suggest that migrants are not simply governed through insecurity; they also collectively organize protection, care, recognition, and belonging through networks of reciprocity and moral obligation. The concept of migrant securities captures these socially embedded forms of protection that emerge within, rather than despite, conditions of precarity.

The longitudinal character of the research also demonstrates that these securities are not static. Comparing fieldwork conducted before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine shows how community support mechanisms adapted to changing political conditions. Networks that had previously focused primarily on document advice, employment opportunities, and emergency assistance increasingly circulated information about wartime regulations, military recruitment, intensified policing, and cross-border mobility. While the underlying principles of reciprocity and collective care remained remarkably stable, the risks they addressed evolved alongside Russia's increasingly securitized migration regime. This illustrates that migrant securities are dynamic social infrastructures that continually adjust to shifting forms of state governance and political crisis.

The findings contribute to broader debates in the anthropology of security by questioning the assumption that security is primarily a state-generated condition. Rather than treating security as something delivered through institutions, legal status, or bureaucratic inclusion, the article demonstrates how security is often produced relationally through social practices. Mahalla networks, reciprocal obligations, funeral repatriation, emotional support, and everyday acts of care function as forms of security production that coexist with, supplement, and sometimes compensate for formal governance structures. Security therefore appears less as a bounded institutional resource than as a distributed social accomplishment.

At the same time, the article complicates accounts that romanticize informality, resilience, or community solidarity. The social infrastructures that generate protection are also sites of obligation, hierarchy, and moral discipline. Access to support depends on reputation, reciprocity, gendered expectations, and social embeddedness. Informal securities therefore do not stand outside power relations; they constitute alternative forms of governance that both protect and regulate community members. This finding contributes to debates on informality and hybrid governance by showing that care and control frequently operate through the same social networks.

The findings also suggest that migration scholars should broaden their understanding of what migrants seek to secure. The ethnographic material demonstrates that migrants pursue not only legal status, employment, or protection from deportation but also dignity, recognition, emotional reassurance, social belonging, and posthumous return to the homeland. Such concerns challenge narrow distinctions between material and symbolic security and draw attention to the moral and emotional dimensions of protection that remain less explored in migration research.

Seen from this perspective, migrant securities are not merely coping mechanisms for life under precarity. They reveal a broader sociological insight: security is often produced through relationships rather than institutions alone. The experiences of Uzbek migrants make this particularly visible because institutional protections remain fragile and uneven. Yet the dynamics documented here extend beyond migration itself. They point toward a more general condition in which people increasingly rely on networks of reciprocity, moral obligation, and collective care to navigate uncertain futures. Migrant securities therefore illuminate not only how migrants survive precarious worlds but also how security itself is socially constituted in contexts of institutional fragmentation and uneven access to protection.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The article's empirical findings support the following recommendations:

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation should reduce discretionary migration enforcement by strengthening oversight of police document checks, expanding access to interpreters and legal information during detention, and establishing independent complaint mechanisms for reporting extortion and abuse.

Federal and regional labor inspectorates should increase inspections in sectors heavily dependent on migrant labor, particularly construction, and impose meaningful penalties on employers who fail to provide safe working conditions, timely wage payments, or compensation for workplace injuries.

Russian healthcare institutions and regional authorities should ensure that migrants can access emergency medical treatment regardless of migration status and provide multilingual information about healthcare rights and procedures.

The governments of Russia and Uzbekistan should develop bilateral mechanisms to assist families following migrant deaths, including simplified procedures for body repatriation, emergency financial assistance, and coordination between consular and local authorities.

Uzbek consular offices in Russia should expand outreach services, provide legal guidance for detained migrants, maintain emergency hotlines, and support families facing crises related to deportation, injury, or death.

International organizations, including IOM and ILO, should support migrant community organizations by funding legal aid programs, labor rights education, and emergency assistance initiatives that complement existing community-based support networks.

Digital platform providers, migrant associations, and civil society organizations should collaborate to disseminate verified information on migration regulations, labor rights, police procedures, and emergency support services through platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp.

These recommendations build directly on the article's central finding: migrant networks provide vital protection, but community-based support should complement—not substitute for—effective institutional safeguards and rights-based migration governance.

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