



Russia's Migration Policies after the dissolution of the Federal **Migration Service**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the dissolution of the Federal Migration Service (FMS) of Russia in 2016, the national migration policy has undergone a swift reorientation towards a law-and-order approach to migration management. Given the exacerbation of the demographic challenges and the resulting economic ones for the country, this security-centred approach bares various risks. These range from the sphere of interethnic relations to the attractiveness of Russia for migration, the increased dissociation within the Russian society and reduced efficiency of migration management overall. This policy brief outlines the key effects of the recent institutional reform, identifies the main migration policy challenges and proposes practical steps to modernising Russia's migration management system.



The year 2016 saw the complete dissolution of the FMS.

CONTEXT

Over the past twenty years, the institutional setup of migration management in Russia has changed repeatedly. The institutional restructuring was often associated with either tightening or loosening of control over migration processes and, particularly, over immigration to Russia. The Federal Migration Service, first established in 1992, was shut down in the year 2000 and then re-established under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in 2002. This step already manifested the shift towards a law-enforcement centred approach to migration. By 2009, however, all major migration management functions (e.g. residence permit issuance, registration functions, labour permits and even deportations) gradually returned to the FMS. In 2012, it became an independent civil federal agency again (Volokh V., 2017).

Despite the massive scale of international and internal migration in Russia¹, the year 2016 saw another transfer of the migration management portfolio from the FMS to the General Administration for Migration Issues under the MIA, resulting in the complete dissolution of the FMS². It did not take long to see the impact of this decision. Already in 2017, the Head of the Investigative Committee of Russia, Alexander Bastrykin, called for tightening the control over migration flows into Russia (RIA Novosti, 2017). In 2018, the government amended the Law on Migration Registration of Foreign Citizens³, entrusting property owners who rent their apartments to labour migrants, with the responsibility to register and unregister the migrants' place of residence. In reality, the property owners are usually reluctant to register the migrants, thereby preventing them from registering at all and putting them at risk of

Amid the tighter immigration rules, the number of entry bans increased to 253.600 in 2018 as compared to 210.700 in 2017 and 229.000 in 2016⁴. The price for a work licence ("patent") continued to increase across the country and in Moscow in particular (TASS, 2019), while a considerable number of labour migrants work in the shadow economy. At the same time, the consultations with the expert community and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – already restricted by the FMS - nearly ceased to exist or only allowed for limited participation. These changes alternate with the policies on attracting labour migrants⁵ and compatriots to Russia, but they hardly can be considered comprehensive.

The institutional changes also resulted in the neglecting of several key migration policy aspects such as:

- The development of effective and differentiating mechanisms for attracting and recruiting of the foreign labour force needed by the Russian economy;
- The simplification of registration procedures;
- The humanitarian commitments towards forced migrants and asylum seekers;
- The policy area of integration, including efforts to improve the interaction between migrants and the host community.

In the period 2015-2017, the number of labour migrants in Russia amounted to 4-5 mln people per year. In 2017, Russia recorded 16 mln border crossings by all types of international migrants. In the same year, the volume of internal migration accounted to 1.5-1.7 mln persons. See more Shcherbakova, Ye.M. (2017), Migration in Russia, preliminary results of 2017', Demoscope Weekly No. 763-764. http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2018/0763/barom01.php Accessed on 17.12.2018.

² Official network resource of the President of Russia, 2016

³ Official network resource of the President of Russia, 2018 ⁴ Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, Migration indicators for 2017 and 2018

⁵ For instance, an amnesty was granted to migrants from Moldova, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who had previously been banned from entering Russia. See here: https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4061884; http://kyrgyzembassy xFxrE; https://www.fergananews.com/news/2824



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Another consequence of the institutional reform relates to the national statistics and information exchange with external users. Following the dissolution of the FMS, the Department of Information Technology, Communications and Protection under the MIA inherited the ownership over the well-functioning information systems of the FMS. Meanwhile, the General Administration for Migration Issues under the MIA transformed into a mere user and customer of information (Chudinovskih O., 2018). Two years later, even the sharing of information with the state statistical office remains hampered. Simultaneously, the decline in the amount and quality of the official data published on migration in 2016-2018 complicates the understanding of the actual migration dynamics and allows for differing interpretations. In the absence of regular and comprehensive socio-economic research on migration requested by the state authorities, it is arduous to build a conceptually clear long-term migration policy.

Since 2015, the immigration to Russia has experienced a reduction and a gradual growth (Bobiley, 2019). The emigration of Russians, on the other hand, does not decrease in scale, leastways (Rosstat, 2017). As a result, immigration only partially compensates the natural population decline⁶. The decline in the working-age population may instead accelerate further⁷.

It is worth noting that various experts have persistently pointed out the potential negative consequences of such institutional reorganisation based on the experience of 2002. Against the background of a declining population, the neglect of key components of the migration management system increases the risks of exacerbating the already existing problems, while also creating new challenges. The inconsistency of the current migration policy is its biggest drawback.

MIGRATION POLICY CHALLENGES: ATTRACT AND INTEGRATE

Migration to Russia remains largely uncontrollable (Postavnin, V., Vlasova, N., 2017). Experts agree that at least 30 % of all labour migrants in Russia do not even have an opportunity to formalise their employment (Demintseva, E., Mkrtchan, N., Florinskaya, Yu., 2018). The large scale of undocumented migration and informal employment results not only from Russia's enormous informal economy sector8, but also from the unreasonably complicated administrative and bureaucratic procedures. The migration system itself thus opens a big window of opportunity for abuses and creates the basis for labour exploitation, including cases of human trafficking, forced and slave labour. At the same time, it also harms the Russian economy through the degradation of labour practices, by undermining the competition in the labour market and by hampering the collection of taxes (Poletaev, V., Olimova, E., Nasritdinov, E., 2016).

Whereas Russia has declared its interest in attracting migrants and compatriots to reside in the country, the administrative barriers often hamper the obtaining of a legal status and employment in Russia. The migration policy thus contradicts the strategic goal of enhancing immigration in order to counter the demographic crisis.

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⁶ In 2018, for the first time in 10 years, Russia recorded a demographic decline of nearly 87.000 persons.
7 Without immigrants, the total decline in the working-age population until 2030 is estimated to reach between 11 and 13 million people

¹³ million people.

8 According to Rosstat (March 2017), at the end of 2016, employment in Russia's informal sector economy was at its highest since 2006. In 2016, 15.4 mln people were employed in the informal economy, or 21.2% of the total number of those employed. See 'Informal economy in Russia has grown to a record size' (2017), RBK https://www.rbc.ru/economics/17/04/2017/58f4b8789a7947c1418ff1af Access date: 17.12.2018.



The profile of labour migrants in Russia has also changed significantly over the past decade. There are ever more female migrants and families with children entering the country. The majority of migrants are poorer than those who used to arrive in previous years. Most of today's labour migrants originate from smaller towns and villages with fewer educational institutions. Their lower educational level does not allow compensating the losses suffered from the emigration of highly educated Russians. This trend subsequently has been reducing Russia's economic potential and worsening the quality of its human capital. The cultural differences, including religious and linguistic aspects, aggravate the cultural distance between the newly arriving migrants and Russians. The growing share of Central Asian migrants naturally increases the number of their communities in Russia (Poletaev, D., 2017 and Poletaev, D., 2016). All these changes have an immediate impact on the relations between the migrants and the host society, but yet remain poorly articulated in the migration policy.

The lack of trust between the migrants and Russians is also worth noting. Whereas the distrust rarely develops into open hostility, one can speak of the 'parallel existence' of Russians and migrants. The emergence and growth of 'parallel communities' inside the Russian cities has resulted from the lack of appropriate and effective services for migrants and from their exclusive reliance on their family and kinship networks. Long-term research on migration in Russia (e.g. Zaýonchkovskaya, Zh., et al, 2014, and Mukomel, V., 2012) shows that labour migrants, especially from Central Asia, rely predominantly on their relatives and friends, while the level of communication with the local population remains low (Poletaev, D., 2018). As a result, there are now ethnic cafes primarily serving migrants, sport clubs where coaches with migration background teach migrants, or migrant clinics, where doctors provide medical services to migrant workers in their Central Asian mother tongues. Moreover, the migrants usually tend to mobilise their informal networks in order to address their residence and employment issues (Demintseva, E., Peshkova, B., 2014; and Kashnitsky, D., Demintseva, E., 2018). The existence of such 'parallel communities' represents a serious challenge since it boosts dissociation in Russian society and complicates the oversight over migration and integration.

Furthermore, Russians are noticeably migrant-phobic. Whereas the level of migrant-phobia seems to have somewhat decreased in 2017 (Levada Centre, 2018), it remains very high. According to a recent study, only 28% Russians are welcoming to migrants, 72% are wary, 77% believe that migration laws should be tightened, and 53% think that migration affects the economic development of Russia negatively (Anketolog.ru, 2018).

The boundaries between locals and migrants are reinforced by the lack of comprehensive adaptation and integration programs that would stimulate the migrants' involvement in the social and cultural life and assist them overall. At present, the limited support mainly consists in the provision of free education for migrant children in Russian schools9, as well as free medical care in emergency cases, including childbirth. These elements, however, do not represent a cohesive migration policy (Poletaev, D., et al, 2018). The lack in public funds and efforts to integrate migrants have further exacerbated the related problems and challenges. This also applies to the MIA, which has neither developed nor implemented any substantial integration or adaptation programs (MIA, 2016).

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6 Read more about the challenges of migrant children access to schooling system in the Analytical repot "Addressing the Challenges of Labour Migration within the EAEU" https://www.pragueprocess.eu/en/migration-observatory/publications/document?id=175 Accessed on 01.11.2019



The public dialogue and cooperation between the state authorities and formal diaspora associations, which have existed since the time of the FMS, have also provided little benefit. The diaspora associations mainly focus on preserving their national cultures, traditions and languages, rather than on ensuring the integration of their compatriots. Besides, some diaspora associations try to profit from their interaction with local authorities by offering their legal services to migrants against remuneration. The Russian NGOs ensuring direct assistance to migrants meanwhile hardly participate in this dialogue. The existing state of affairs thus preserves the isolation of the migrants and complicates their integration.

All prospects for a modernisation of the Russian migration policy relate to the new State Migration Policy Concept of the Russian Federation for 2019-2025¹⁰, adopted on 31 October 2018, and on the Action Plan for its implementation. 11 The key message of the new Concept is the acknowledgement of the existing demographic and related economic problems and of the need to improve Russia's attractiveness towards (skilled and highly skilled) migrants and compatriots living abroad. The migrants in the new Concept are perceived through the prism of development. Meanwhile, the accompanying Action Plan aims to address the widely criticised policy gaps, including the remaining administrative barriers, the lack of engagement with the diaspora or some missing measures to combat irregular migration¹².

PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of migration policy on behalf of the MIA manifests the alienation from its important socio-economic component and simultaneous focus on a law-and-order approach to migration management. The small number of civil experts from outside the law enforcement agencies, as well as migration research experts within the staff composition of the General Administration for Migration Issues under the MIA hampers both the successful management of the experienced immigration and any substantial progress concerning the integration of migrants. Delegating certain functions in the field of migrant integration and adaptation to NGOs on a competitive basis, while equipping the Federal Agency for Nationalities with the respective control functions over this area, may represent a possible solution in this context.

An efficient implementation of the national migration policy would further require a modernisation of the existing interagency cooperation. Nowadays, the responsible ministries and agencies work together upon direct instruction of the Government. This cooperation, however, remains incomprehensive. In the absence of a single dedicated agency responsible for migration, the Federal Agency for Nationalities yet again could assume a coordinating role, paying due attention to socio-economic and humanitarian issues. The Russian migration policy could further benefit from the establishing of an institute of scientific expertise, which could review the administrative decisions and review migration laws against anti-corruption criteria. Importantly, this institute could envisage a more active role for the expert community, international organisations and NGOs.

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¹⁰ Official network resource of the President of Russia, 2018

The Concept aims to improve the following: Repatriation and voluntary relocation of migrants capable of integrating into the society; Entry and stay of foreigners contributing to economic, social and cultural development of the state; Creation of conditions for adaptation/integration of foreigners to legal, socio-economic, cultural and other living conditions of the country; Educational migration; Actions tackling the disproportional distribution of population across the country; Actions combating irregular migration and violation of immigration law; Assistance to persons seeking international protections.

protection.

¹² More on comparison of the previous Concept with the new one, please read: http://russiancouncil.ru/ana-to-the-new one, and to-the-new one read: http://russiancouncil.ru/ana-to-the-new one, and to-the-new one read: <a href="http://russiancou -ariu-curriments/analytics/novyy-pos <u>951590 Accessed on march 08, 2</u>019



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The existing administrative barriers prevent the development of a flexible and comprehensive migration policy. The obsolete and inefficient registration system, which resembles the rigid Soviet residence system (propiska), may represent the greatest barrier. Its modernisation is a very important and long overdue step. Changing the registration system to a notification-based one and the issuing of individual tax identification numbers for migrant workers could solve this problem while also strengthening the control over tax payments.

The lack of sustainable and properly funded integration programs at the federal and regional level bares various negative effects on migration management, increases the risks of conflicts between the local population and migrants and hampers the fight against xenophobia. The streamlining of effective but still dispersed integration elements and their upgrade into comprehensive programs could represent a first step to overcome this policy gap. An analysis of existing integration measures, the identification of the most vulnerable groups of migrants and a stronger involvement of the relevant municipal authorities and NGOs would significantly improve the status quo.

More generally, engaging local governments and civil society institutions in the implementation of integration policies, along with the allocation of proper funding, belong to the immediate necessities in this area. A revision of the role of NGOs and the comprehensive use of their potential by the public authorities would be beneficial. There is neither a comprehensive mechanism for their involvement, nor proper funding allocated to support their work. This is why their capacities as service providers, legal experts or monitors of the migration policy implementation remain unused. Instead, their important role in providing direct assistance and information to migrant workers and their family members should be recognised and expanded across all migrant-receiving regions and municipalities. This initiative could be financed by dedicating parts of the income raised by the patent (licence) system to it. Following the example of the Sakharovo Multifunctional Migration Centre (Moscow region)¹³, similar centres could be established elsewhere as well. Supervised by the local authorities, they issue patents, oversee the work of the local NGOs and could possibly contribute to perceiving migrants as an economic asset that can boost economic growth and benefit the country.

The development of a comprehensive labour migration system could address the need of attracting labour force and support its legal employment. The State Program for the Reception of Compatriots - the only comprehensive federal program in the migration sphere - could serve as an example whereby the future system would encompass the assessment of labour market needs, including monitoring and forecasting, and ultimately improve the mechanisms for attracting foreign labour force. The private sector, private employment agencies and NGOs should be involved into developing the formal infrastructure for enhancing labour migration. This infrastructure shall entail information services for migrants concerning employment opportunities, residence rules, accommodation, education, certification, medical care and protection of rights. With the support of the Russian employers' associations, the Russian colleges and universities could facilitate the professional training and retraining of foreign workers. Large business would benefit from organised recruitment schemes, as they would facilitate the recruitment of specialists possessing the required qualifications. Such schemes should inherently ensure pre-departure training in the countries of origin. They should also involve local NGOs to support awareness raising on the risks of migration, such as forced labour and human trafficking in Russia.



Since the right solutions require reliable migration statistics, the state needs to invest into their advancement, including data collection through tailored periodic sample surveys and the accompanying analysis.

Finally, the state shall foster the development of economic and cultural ties with the Russian diaspora abroad, support the learning of the Russian language and stimulate academic migration. The positive experience of the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudichestvo), which leads the work on the diaspora, cultural diplomacy and promotion of the "Russian world", could serve as an inspiration in this regard.

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¹³ The Multifunctional Migration Center in Sakharovo was established by the Economic Department of the Government of Moscow in 2015 to receive foreign citizens in Moscow and is the only organization which officially processes and issues work patents. The migration center in Sakharovo can receive about 5,000 foreign citizens per day. https://mc.mc ru/worker/worker-main



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