

## **CARIM EAST – CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

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### ***Russian policy: Emigration and Diaspora***

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## Abstract

Russia is a country attracting migrants, migration policy is focused on the immigration and labour migration, the challenges of emigration are considered minor. In the 1990s emigration was conceptualized as a “brain drain” problem and the main goal of the migration policy was the restraint of the outflow of the high-qualified personnel. In the 2000s, due to the decrease of the emigration, the major aim is seen as return of emigrants, though the mechanisms of its implementation have not been created.

In the USSR emigration was restricted. Restrictions became less tight with the coming of ‘perestroika’ and fall of the ‘iron curtain’, but large-scale emigration started only after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Freedom of exit from and entry into the country is declared by the Russian Constitution: “Everyone may freely leave the Russian Federation. Citizens of the Russian Federation shall have the right to freely return to the Russian Federation” (Constitution of the Russian Federation 1993) and is codified by the federal legislation (Federal law 1996).

Public opinion considers freedom of exit and entry one of the main post-Soviet achievements, and any attempts to justify the need of emigration restrictions are rejected by society and are impossible under the current Russian Constitution.

Russia is a recipient country, and its migration policy is focused on immigration and labor migration, while emigration challenges are regarded as secondary in terms of priority. The first Federal Migration Program (FMP) clearly stated: “Emigration at present is not an acute problem” (FMP 1994). This statement was reproduced verbatim in the subsequent Federal Migration Program (FMP 1997).

In the 1990s emigration was regarded almost exclusively as the problem of ‘brain drain’. Around half of Russians had higher education (Denisenko 2011: 39). According to estimates, by late 1990s permanent core of the Russian research community in the West consisted of 20-30 thousand people, and around 120 thousand people were employed under temporary contracts (Yegerev 2002: 277; Ushkalov 2000: 128-130).

It was then that the objective of emigration policy was formulated: “create conditions for preservation of national highly qualified workforce by minimizing the outflow of Russian citizens departing for permanent residence abroad”. Protection of Russian migrant workers’ rights was also mentioned among the tasks of emigration policy, as well as improvement of the situation in the domestic labor market by means of Russian citizens’ employment overseas (FMP 1994).

In the early 2000s due to the reduced scale of emigration, the task of bringing emigrants back was for the first time formulated (Concept 2003). It was most clearly articulated in the current Concept of Demographic Policy, that talks about the need to stimulate the “coming of emigrants back to the Russian Federation” (Concept 2007).

In the first decade of the XXI century emigration policy pursues the following tasks: curbing the drain of research staff and highly qualified workers, especially young people; stimulating the return of emigrants to Russia, attracting highly qualified professionals from the Russian diaspora; protecting social rights of those who work abroad (Concept 2003). However, mechanisms of implementation of these tasks have not been created. In practice the measures were reduced to introduction of grants for the most gifted students and young researchers.

In the Russian discourse emigration is now mostly regarded in the context of depopulation and domestic political transformations. Those who criticize authorities use emigration estimates as evidence of collapse of the social and economic policy. According to conservative estimates, 1.5 mln.

people emigrated from Russia during the post-Soviet period (Strategy – 2020). In fact, the actual number is likely to exceed 2.5 mln. people (Denisenko 2002; Denisenko 2011: 38). Authorities are to a large extent not very interested in the return of emigrants, many of whom share a critical attitude towards the government's domestic policy<sup>1</sup>.

In the currently discussed draft Concept of State Migration Policy the emphasis is shifted to educational policy: it is suggested to expand the opportunities for emigrants willing to move to Russia, as well as to encourage Russian and foreign applicants to enter the Russian educational institutions regardless of their citizenship and place of residence, and assist compatriots and their children residing abroad in receiving education in the Russian Federation (Draft Concept 2012). It is also proposed to introduce special grants for Russian citizens who have received professional education abroad, in order to encourage them to come back. Around 1 bln. roubles will be required for that in 2012-2014 (Strategy-2020: 240).

It is expected that by 2016 adoption of these measures will allow keeping annual migration surplus at the level of no less than 200 thousand people by attracting former compatriots residing abroad, qualified professionals with families and young people to Russia for permanent residence (Draft Concept 2012).

The Program for the Repatriation of Compatriots is currently the only effective instrument of fulfilling the task of emigrant repatriation. The target audience of the Program includes compatriots residing in the newly independent states, though it also covers re-emigrants (State Program 2006)<sup>2</sup>. However, the program failed: the scale, composition and target areas of this migration are different from what was initially expected (Mukomel 2009: 186-188).

There remains a policy of preserving ties with the Russian diaspora: the latter is regarded as holding re-emigration potential and is seen as an important actor promoting Russian culture, Russian language and Russian interests abroad. At present the functions of communication with emigrants and Russian diaspora organizations are entrusted to the Federal Agency for CIS, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*).

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, at the parliamentary elections of December 2011 the first place among voters in Germany was gained by the opposition party "Yabloko" (Deryabin 2011). At the Russian presidential elections in the United Kingdom and the USA voters gave preference to M. Prokhorov, rather than V. Putin (Voting leaders 2012).

<sup>2</sup> 89% of program participants are from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Armenia (Monitoring 2011)

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