

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

Co-financed by the European Union

### ***Circular Migration in the Russian Federation***

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CARIM-East Explanatory Note 12/97

Socio-Political Module

September 2012

## Abstract

The principal subject of this paper concerns circular migrants entering the Russian Federation. The paper assesses a variety of issues, including appraisals and circular migration scales, socio-demographic profiles of circular migrants, and the presence of such migrants within the Russian labour market (including the types of economic activity concerned and the distribution of the various migrants amongst professional groups). Various ways and modalities of discourses concerning circular migration itself and the prospects of circular migration in Russia are analyzed.

## Foreword

Circular migration represents a specific form of labour migration (it implies a periodic return of a migrant to the country of his/her origin) and is a relatively new phenomenon in Russia. However, in the 2000s, circular migration acquired the proportions of a mass phenomenon in the Russian context. At present, there are no accurate estimates of circular migrant numbers, but it is clearly evident that hundreds of thousands - if not millions - of foreign citizens who work in Russia and Russian citizens who journey abroad for work-related purposes are involved in circular migration.

At the present time, Russia is a host country. The number of circular migrants residing on the Russian territory is many times greater than number of Russian citizens who take part in circular migration. Taking this fact into account, this paper's attention is focused on those migrants who come to Russia.

Approaching the problems evinced by circular migration inevitably raises the issue of definition. The widely accepted definition of circular migration as "the fluid movement of people between countries, including temporary or long-term movement which may be beneficial to all involved, if occurring voluntarily and linked to the labour needs of countries of origin and destination" (IOM 2008: 492; IOM 2011a: 19; IOM 2011b: 192;) is not very useful in operational sense. However, attempts to increase the precision of the notion of circular migration (Fargues 2008) clarify this situation to some extent.

Nonetheless, a set of questions remains open for discussion. For instance, where may the borderline between circular migration and permanent migration be drawn? How can we appraise expediency for all parties involved? How can we estimate labour force requirements of countries of origin and countries of destination? And, do migrations unrelated to labor activities represent patterns of circular migration? Furthermore, "How far a migrant must move to be a circular migrant, how long he or she must remain in each country, how many cycles are necessary and what the development contribution is?" (Newland 2009: 10).

The listing of specific possible situations (EMM 20123: 111) does not bring much clarity to efforts to understand the phenomenon. Kathleen Newland notes that, although different people necessarily encounter different situations, the majority of circular migration definitions include 4 dimensions, namely: spatial, temporal, iterative and human (Newland 2009: 10).

In the absence of generally accepted operational definitions, hereinafter circular migrants are defined as foreign citizens who a) have experience of travels (as a rule, long-term travels), b) perform such travels periodically, c) work in a country of destination or carry out other activities that are considered to constitute investments in the human capital therein.

The methodology of this investigation includes an analysis of the Federal Migration Service (hereinafter referred to as FMS), Database Related to the Registration of Foreign Citizens and Stateless (Apatride) Individuals, hereinafter referred to as the FMS DB on FCR), of the large-scale sociological survey of migrants,<sup>1</sup> as well as the accounts of the FMS<sup>2</sup> officials and of literary sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Sociological surveys for analysis of migration profiles, problems of migrants' adaptation and integration were carried out by the Center of ethno-political and regional studies (CEPRS) for needs of the National research University 'The Higher

## Policy towards the circular migration

There is no policy towards circular migration in Russia. Official documents and normative acts, including the recently-ratified “Concept of the state migration policy in the Russian Federation until 2025”, do not use the term “circular migration.” This is caused, firstly, by an absence of understanding of cardinal transformations that have occurred in the migration processes. Secondly, the authorities cannot decide, whether there is a need for migrants in Russia at all; hence migration policy in Russia is nonlinear, piecemeal and contradictory.

There are no formal obstacles for the organization of circular migration with the CIS or EU countries. Furthermore, the authorities are in fact sympathetic towards the idea of the co-ordination of circular migration policy with the EU countries (without defining it as such), initiating the negotiations about attracting labour migrations from Russia. The situation with the CIS countries is more complicated: spontaneous labour migration from these countries, according to the official position, needs to be regulated. However, the absence of consensus on the prospects of migration policy impedes the development of any instruments concerning migration policy.

## The scale of circular migration in Russia

The general situation of poor organization of statistical information gathering and processing in Russia and the incompleteness of such information means that surveys and information systems acquire a particular importance in studies of the present kind. “It would seem that, at present, it is only possible to gather information on the subject of circular migrants with the aid of surveys. The development of mandatory and digital systems of registration for labour migrants in the various destination states will aid us in determining the number of migrants that have come to a given destination state for work on a repeat basis, how many visits these migrants have made previously, and what the period was between these arrivals” (Statistics... 2011: 52).

The FMS DB on FCR, which represents the core of the State information system of migrant registration<sup>3</sup> (hereinafter referred to as the SISMR) provides an idea of possible scale of circular migration, while surveys enable us to draw some conclusions regarding the profiles of circular migrants’.

More than 10 million foreign citizens reside within the territory of the Russian Federation. 42% of these journey for a purpose unrelated to labour activity, 17% are performing lawful labour activities. “21% of foreigners remain in the state beyond the period allowed by their residence permit. It is to be supposed that they continue to perform their working activities, albeit on an illegal basis” (Romodanovski 2012). Therefore, the number of migrants arriving for labour activities does not exceed 3.8 million persons.

Most labour migrants arrive for a rather long term. According to the FMS data, 95.7% of migrants who have received permission for labour activity<sup>4</sup> acquire such permission for a term of more than 6 months. Of these, 91.9% receive permission to stay for a term of more than 9 months. However these data, firstly, only relate to those migrants who work legally. Secondly, it is not clear whether their trips recur and whether these trips are of cyclical nature or not. Thirdly, amongst migrants duly registered at

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School of Economics” (NRU HSE) under the supervision of the author. Results of the survey are still unpublished. 8499 migrants were interviewed in 8 regions of Russia in the end of 2011. Unless otherwise specified results of this survey are adduced.

<sup>2</sup> See the FMS of Russia web-site.

<sup>3</sup> The State information system of migrant registration is an inter-agency automated system and is formed on the basis of the FMS DB on FCR, automated registries of the FMS address and reference units and database on execution of labor activities by foreign citizens.

<sup>4</sup> Data are available for 11 months of 2011. Circular migrants from Byelorussia are not registered because they enjoy all rights of the Russian citizens.

the FMS, there are, in fact, many persons who permanently reside in the territory of Russia. Many of them reside within the Russian Federation with their families. They are fully integrated in the Russian society and do not leave Russia for many years. (Although such individuals are referred to temporary migrants and are recorded as temporary migrants, they are, in fact, immigrants who are unable to acquire Russian citizenship).

According to a large-scale survey of migrants<sup>5</sup>, 40.8% of all migrants are permanent migrants who have not left Russia for more than one year, 38.0% are circular migrants (of these, 11.6% are seasonal migrants<sup>6</sup>) and 21.2% are individuals who have come to Russia for working purposes for the first time (Mukomel 2011)<sup>7</sup>.

Scholars who performed surveys on a smaller scale in 2008-2009 obtained similar results. “A pattern of long-term circular migration is most commonly pursued by those migrants from the CIS who come to the Russian Federation for working purposes. This strategy entails that the migrant in question will spend the majority of any given year in Russia, leaving the country to journey home for vacations up to a maximum period of three months. Circular seasonal (or short-term) migration, by contrast, occurs when migrants return to their country of origin for a longer period (on average, around six months). This accounts for 14% of cases.”<sup>8</sup> (Migration... 2010: 37-38).

Proceeding from the results of the afore mentioned surveys, and taking into account probable errors of samples and different criteria of circularity, it can be said that circular migrants working in Russia comprise between one third and one half of all labour migrants arriving into Russia. If these results are extrapolated throughout the totality of labour migrants, both legal and illegal, then the number of circular migrants in Russia may comprise from 1.3 to 1.9 million persons.

### **Circular migration from Russia**

It is difficult to estimate the number of Russian citizens participating in circular migration flows. The total number of Russian citizens who are officially employed through licensed firms is known, however. In 2010 their number comprised 70,200 persons. In the first six months of 2011 it comprised 35,200 persons. It is predicted that in 2012-2014 their number will comprise 78-80,000 persons annually, and that approximately 150 firms will be engaged in the employment of these citizens abroad (in 2010, 56 firms were engaged in this activity) (FMS 2011: 129).

The overwhelming majority of Russian sailors receive permission for work abroad through the licensed firms. This constitutes only a part of a flow of Russian labour migrants working abroad.

The principal flows of circular migrations from Russia lead towards the CIS countries, principally, to Ukraine and Kazakhstan as well as to Belarus. Their precise number is unknown, however. Substantial stocks of Russians who work in the Western European countries (where their employment is predominantly illegal), in the USA, China and other countries. If these stocks are taken into account, then the number of circular migrants from Russia probably comprises hundreds of thousands of people.

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<sup>5</sup> NRU HSE CERPS 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Migrants who have come to Russia repeatedly and in their last visit stayed in Russia for less than 6 months.

<sup>7</sup> Conventionality of the typology is obvious. Circular migrants periods of whose travels exceed a year may be included in the “permanent migrants” category. Migrants with a short cycle of travels they started to make in the first year may be referred to “first comers” category. At the same time migrants who reside in Russia permanently but left it for motherland (probably, for the first time in many years) may be included in the “circular migrants” category.

<sup>8</sup> In 2008-2009 1575 respondents were interviewed in 6 regions of Russia (Migration... 2010: 14-15).

## Circular migration of the Russian citizens to the European countries

Relatively few Russian citizens work legally in Western and Eastern Europe. According to the data supplied by the national statistical services, their number is fewer than 12,000, and this also represents the number that can be identified as potential circular migrants (including fewer than 300 seasonal workers) – Table 1, below.

**Table 1. The number of Russian citizens, working legally in the European countries**

Country	Period, date	Evaluation	Type of data	Seasonal workers	
Belgium	2010	97	The first residence permit issued on the basis of having a paid activity for the period between 3 and 11 months, inclusive (flow)		
Czech republic	2011	364			
Denmark	2011	57			
Germany	2011	750			
Ireland	2011	19			
Spain	2011	141			106
France	2011	139			2
Italy	1011	712			
Luxembourg	2011	9			
Hungary	2011	79			3
Netherlands	2011	257			
Austria	2011	97			
Poland	2010	137			
Portugal	2011	2			
Slovenia	2011	77			
Slovakia	2011	95			
Finland	2011	296			
Sweden	2011	162			3
Norway	2011	214			132
Belgium	2010	49		The first residence permit issued on the basis of performing a paid activity for the period from 12 months and longer (flow)	
Czech republic	2011	255			
Denmark	2011	146			
Germany	2011	249			
Ireland	2011	26			
Greece	2011	455			
Spain	2011	1 219			
France	2011	471			
Italy	2011	989			
Luxembourg	2011	16			
Hungary	2011	39			
Austria	2011	160			
Poland	2009	331			
Portugal	2011	56			
Slovenia	2011	53			
Slovakia	2011	36			
Finland	2011	586			
Sweden	2011	260			
United Kingdom	2011	2 125			
Norway	2011	127			

Note: the data of the National Statistical Services and Eurostat were kindly provided by the Deputy Director of the Institute of Demography of the Higher School of Economics, M. Denisenko (Denisenko 2012).

It is most likely that these data represent an underestimation, as the research of the Moldovan and Ukrainian colleagues testify. However, in any case, the number of Russian circular migrants, working in the European countries, will most certainly not exceed some tens of thousands of persons.

### Circular migration from Russia to other states

The proportion of circular migration into the countries of traditional immigration is low. According to the indirect estimates (see Table 2), there are fewer than 15,000 people working legally in the U.S., Canada and Australia, and not all of these can be attributed to the pool of circular migrants.

**Table 2. The number of Russian citizens, working legally in the USA, Canada and Australia**

Country	Period, date	Evaluation	Type of data	Seasonal workers
U.S.A.	2011 fiscal year	10,500 / 2,900	Flow: temporary workers and family members/ H1B Visa holders/internal flow within the company and individuals with outstanding capabilities without family members	Fewer than 200 (students, agricultural workers)
Canada	2010	486	Flow (number of individuals who arrived with a working permit)	No
Canada	1 Jan. 2010	833	Total number (stock)	No
Australia	30.06.2011	Approximately 400	Total number (stock): number of temporary residents, who were born in Russia (workers and family members)	No

Source: Denisenko 2012.

Distance and the high costs of travel contribute to the high concentration of immigrants rather than transitory/circular migrants in these countries.

### Socio-demographic profile of the circular migrants in Russia

Circular migrants are generally relatively young. The majority of them are younger than 35 years old. However they are considerably older than persons who have appeared at the Russian labour market for the first time.

**Table 3. Age composition of migrants with different periods of trips to Russia, %**

Age of respondents	Frequency of arrivals to Russia		Newcomers
	Permanent	Circular	
Up to 20 years old	3.7	2.5	14.5
20-24	21.1	20.7	36.1
25-29	19.8	19.9	16.4
30-34	16.9	16.6	10.8
35-39	13.4	12.8	7.6
40-44	10.5	12.8	6.9
45-49	7.6	8.8	4.8
50-54	5.0	4.0	2.2
55-59	1.5	1.1	0.5
60 and older	0.5	0.8	0.4
The total	100	100	100

Source: NRU HSE CERPS 2011

This age composition is determined, in many respects, by the fact that many circular migrants – predominantly males – have families. (Circular trips are generally more typical and more attractive for married migrants. Most of them leave their countries of origin for a limited period, do not interrupt ties with their families for long periods, and retain the possibility returning home at any time).<sup>9</sup>

**Table 4. Family status of circular migrants, %**

Never married	29.1
Registered marriage	53.7
Religious marriage	5.0
Civil marriage	5.2
Divorced	4.9
Widow/widower	2.1
The total	100

Source: NRU HSE CERPS 2011

Another peculiar characteristic common to circular migrants is a relatively high level of education.

**Table 5. Educational level of circular migrants, %**

Primary and incomplete secondary	8.9
General secondary	46.2
Secondary professional	26.6
Incomplete higher education, higher education, academic degree	18.4
The total	100

Source: NRU HSE CERPS 2011

Circular migration is traditional for such donor countries as Moldova and the Ukraine. Nowadays it has also become habitual for citizens of Central Asian states, in particular, for Tajikistan.

<sup>9</sup> The overwhelming majority of circular migrants come from countries that have negotiated the non-visa regime with Russia.

**Table 6. Circular migrants by countries of origin, %**

Azerbaijan	32.6
Armenia	36.8
Kazakhstan	45.3
Kyrgyzstan	37.5
Tajikistan	42.0
Uzbekistan	36.9
Ukraine	38.8
Moldova	44.5
China	24.4
Korea (North Korea)	30.1
Vietnam	40.0
Turkey	0.0
Other countries	34.0
The total	38.0

Source: NRU HSE CERPS 2011

### Circular migrants in the Russian labour market

Circular migrants are concentrated in the economic areas of trade and commerce (33.9% of those employed), construction (24.3%), i.e. in forms of activity that allow migrants to undertake regular trips to their countries of their origins and, to their families. Urban utilities are also attractive for migrants (12.0% of migrants employed), as is the transportation sector (10.2%). Many circular migrants also work in processing industries (5.2%).

Circular migrants maintain their own niches within the labour market. Their relatively good education and vocational training allow them to occupy jobs that require a higher level of workmanship. In this respect, circular migrants are no worse off than permanent migrants. At the same time, more than one third of circular migrants are employed at workplaces that do not present any demands to vis-a-vis the level of an employee's workmanship.

**Table 7. Distribution of employed circular migrants among professional groups, % of persons who answered the question**

Chiefs of organizations and structural subunits	1.3
Specialists of the highest grade	1.9
Specialists of medium grade	2.0
Office staff	1.3
Skilled workers of service, housing and utilities and trade and commerce	26.0
Skilled workers of agriculture and crafts	0.7
Skilled workers	21.7
Operators of machines and mechanisms	9.4
Unskilled workers	35.7
The total	100.0

Source: NRU HSE CERPS 2011

A certain gender specialization is noted: males, as a rule, are engaged in construction and transportation, whereas females are employed predominantly in trade and commerce and in the housing and utilities sectors.

This fact creates a certain problem for researches. Males engaged in construction have a greater chance for trips to their motherland during interruptions caused by seasonal factors or the search for jobs projects. Migrants who are engaged in transportation activities undertake rotation trips for a certain term, which allow them to visit their families. Females far more rarely enjoy such possibilities. As a result, surveys carried out in donor countries record predominantly male contingents, and individuals who perform short-term trips predominate among circular migrants.

The above trend has become apparent in the course of simultaneous investigations performed among labour migrants along single methodology lines in Moldova and Russia. According to conventional wisdom, over 40% of Moldovans, predominantly males employed in construction, leave the country for the sake of seasonal employment (Goerlich, Trebresch 2008). Further, as surveys performed in Moldova (migrants and members of their families were interviewed) would seem to confirm these notions<sup>10</sup>. However, when migrants from Moldova were interviewed in Russia, the results obtained were very different: the majority of migrants were females (though males predominated among circular migrants), and the overwhelming majority of migrants had worked in Russia for a long time.

**Table 8. The period of the last staying in the Russian Federation**

<b>Period of staying in the Russian Federation in the past 12 months</b>	<b>Migrants in the Russian Federation (N=394), IOM 2011</b>	<b>Migrants in the Russian Federation (NRU HSE CERPS)</b>	<b>Migrants in Moldova (N=119) IOM 2011</b>	<b>Members of migrants' households in Moldova (N=183) IOM 2011</b>
Up to 3 months	6.6	15.4	34.5	27.4
4-6 months	3.6	11.7	37.2	31.1
More than 6 months	89.8	72.9	28.6	41.5
Including staying for 1 year	62.4	50.0	0.8	5.5

Sources: IOM 2011; NRU HSE CERPS 2011.

Migrants that were interviewed in Moldova were predominantly seasonal circular migrants. (I can say that I live there. I come here to just to visit my wife and children and to bring money to them. I depart 3 or 4 times a year"). They, in the main, are encumbered with families and are forced to coordinate their plans with plans of other family members of their families (55.5% of migrants have children, and virtually all children of migrants live in Moldova. 35.6% of migrants who were interviewed in Russia had children, and 21.2% of children lived with parents in Russia (IOM 2011).

### **Discourses and perspectives of circular migration**

The transformation of migration flows where circular migration has begun to play a significant if not the key role has not been left unnoticed by specialists. However clichés that reflect the situation of the past century prevail in the Russian discourse. Public opinion and politicians are convinced that labour migrants come to Russia for the short term, that all migrants are seasonal workers whom can be easily sent back to their countries of their origin at any time.

<sup>10</sup> Socio-demographic characteristics and profiles of circular migrants' profiles interviewed in Moldova are, in fact, no different from similar parameters obtained in result of previous large-scale investigations carried out in Republic of Moldova (Migratia 2008).

The concept of “organized recruitment” – which implies use of the Soviet experience when the regular labour force was recruited for the purposes of the development of territories in regions of the USSR with an excess of labour – is very popular in Russia. Though organized recruitment is somewhat similar to the concept of circular migration regulation, organized recruitment ignores the interests of the leading actors, i.e. of businesses, employers, local self-government bodies, recipient populations and migrants themselves.

Circular migration enables persons who are involved in it and who have been already adapted to the realities of a recipient society to solve problems within their private life, to build up the human capital. At the same time, the process of circular migration providing help to donors and recipients as a solution to economic and social problems is grossly underestimated.

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