

A Lack of Integration and Negative Perceptions of Labour Migrants in Russia: Fracturing Labour Supply

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Policy Paper



Foreign labour migrants working in construction, a very common trade for many migrants to the Russian Federation. Source: Kupfer & Jardine, 2016.

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Nation-Building in Contemporary Russia: Policy Analysis

Table of Contents:

1. Abstract	3
2. Introduction	3
3. The Policy Problem	4
3a. Background	
3b. Current Policies	
4. Policy Options	6
5. Conclusion & Policy Recommendations	8
6. Bibliography	9

1. Abstract

This policy paper tackles the issue of negative attitudes amongst Russians towards foreign labour migrants. It will begin with an outline of the labour supply issue in the Russian economy which has led to an increased demand for foreign labour. This will be followed by an examination of the current situation of Russian-migrant relations, and the current policies in place. Several policy options will be suggested, notably the establishment of migrant-welfare centres to help resolve issues individual to each migrant. These centres would deal with various issues encountered and promote cooperation between migrants and the domestic population. This is to be implemented alongside a wider range of reforms to level the civil liberties of migrant workers, desegregate their housing, and enhance pathways towards long-term residency. Together, these policies could allow migrants to integrate into the domestic population. It is viewed in this paper that a primary cause of these negative attitudes is a lack of integration of such migrants, which must be facilitated from both the side of the migrant and of domestic Russians. This would grant migrants the potential to engage with Russian nationals, eroding the negative attitudes held against the former.

2. Introduction

Russia has experienced a large labour supply problem over the last decade. The workforce is declining and this trend will continue. This has resulted in millions of foreign migrants coming to Russia in search of jobs, which businesses in the Federation gladly accept. Rights are scarce for foreign labourers and they are paid less for the same work compared to domestic workers. Distaste for these migrants amongst the domestic population is also rife, generating a social problem, largely due to a lack of integration into the domestic populace. First, these negative attitudes Russians hold towards foreign migrants will be outlined, showing how they are developed. Second, the policy problem will be detailed with the labour supply issue. Policy options will then be reviewed, finally concluding that state-backed centres for 'all things migrant' could begin to resolve many of these issues, coupled with smaller individual policies to remove obstacles to their well-being.

3. Policy Problem: High Levels of Xenophobia Towards Foreign Labour Migrants

3a: Background

A demographic deficit since 2007 has caused an increasing need for migrant labour in the Russian economy. Approximately four million labour migrants work in Russia, seasonal, part-time or otherwise (Lipman & Florinskaya, 2019). These numbers come nowhere near to closing the deficit and, by the 2020s, the labour force will have shrunk by over ten million since 2007 (Ibid). 97% of migrants emigrate from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), primarily Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Most congregate in cities and the remaining 3% compose the migrant majorities in Far-Eastern Russian cities.

Increases in foreign labour also increase contact had by Russians with these migrants, creating an image of the ‘other’. The following data from the Levada-Center (2015) outlines Russian views on migration. Table 1 shows a large majority (68%) wishing to ‘limit the influx of migrants’. Whilst ambiguous in detail, the sentiment is not: most Russians oppose the current state of inward migration.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT POLICY SHOULD THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT ADOPT CONCERNING IMMIGRATION: ATTEMPT TO LIMIT THE INFLUX OF IMMIGRANTS; OR REMOVE ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS FOR IMMIGRANTS AND ATTEMPT TO USE THEM FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY?

Table 1	Jul. 02	Oct. 05	Aug. 06	Aug. 07	Oct. 08	Nov. 09	Nov. 11	Aug. 12	Oct. 13	Jul. 14	Aug. 15
Attempt to limit the influx of immigrants	45	59	52	57	52	61	64	70	78	76	68
Remove administrative barriers for immigrants and attempt to use them for the good of the country	44	36	39	32	35	30	28	20	14	16	23

3b: Current Policies

There exist small obstacles aggregating to large impediments for foreign migrants attempting to live/work in Russia. Obligatory language tests, resulting in a “cash for grades” where officials are bribed to award certification (Lipman & Florinskaya, 2019), are one. Access to pension schemes is untenable, they work

longer hours for the same pay, cannot access proper health insurance, and are barred from Russia if they commit two legal infractions (Ibid). These could be jaywalking, or even smoking in a zone where it is prohibited. Such simple errors can result in deportation -- hardly a proportional response.

Further, the *patentys* scheme requires all external migrants to buy licences to work in Russia. Introduced in 2010 for migrants hired by individuals or families to work in their households (Ibid), the idea is that those employed in official businesses pay taxes, whilst those working as nannies, caretakers, etc., do not, so should pay an upfront fee. Levied only on migrants, double-standards are evident. Over two million patenty have been distributed since 2010, and the price continues to rise. This further frustrates the material capabilities of migrants as they are required to spend increasingly high amounts on bureaucratic obstacles.

Some migrants access workers' hostels with communal beds and other shared facilities. In St. Petersburg, whilst accommodation provides the basics, the administrative agreement is with employers and not migrants themselves, institutionalising employer responsibility for workers beyond employment. If breakages occur, workers are liable to employers to pay damages (Tkach & Brednikova, 2016). Accommodation is near to places of work, has CCTV in corridors, prohibits visitors, and implements de-facto curfews as tenants can enter and leave only at specified hours (Ibid). Decoration of personal space in their room of 6-8 people is proscribed. This is to control migrants and segregate them from the domestic population. "The concept of the workers' hostel aims to make the city safe from migrants and migrants safe from the city. It reproduces fears and prejudices" (Ibid, p.210) which create negative attitudes towards migrants in making domestic Russians question the need for such measures.

Finally, there exists no nuanced mechanism for non-highly skilled labour migrants (who are the majority) wishing to transition to long-term residency. Years of legal work, paying taxes and law-abiding do not provide any 'extra credit' to access citizenship, and thus equal rights as apportioned to Russian nationals, or long-term residency. One unbroken year of living in Russia is needed to apply for permanent residency, but with a large proportion of foreign labour migrants being seasonal, this is useless to them. One must live for five years in Russia before applying for Russian citizenship (Expatica, 2019). Despite such importance to the Russian economy, no special incentives to stay are provided to low-skilled migrants. Labour supply is thus also not improved, as migrants are fractured from becoming a permanent component of the economy.

4. Policy Options

There are numerous policy options available to facilitate integration which will, in turn, reduce negative attitudes towards migrants. One is the introduction of state-backed centres to cater for 'all things migrant', acting similarly to NGOs. These could help to solve issues such as poor housing, crime, work problems, discrimination, etc., through state-mandated enforcement of (reviewed) legislation which treats migrants as equal to the domestic population. Second, these centres would promote engagement between migrants and the domestic population by organising, for example, inclusive festivals to rival those of Russia Day.

First, centres would open at varying times so as to provide access for migrants working long hours in the day, e.g. nannies and construction workers. Bilingual staff would speak Russian and one language prominent amongst migrants to remove language barriers. All services would be free of charge. Their administrative function would ensure completion of all legal documents, for example *patenty*. Centres would offer to advise migrants in their rights, and provide safe spaces to report crime, most pertinently hate-related. Free programmes to learn Russian would also be offered, dismantling the language barrier. Direction towards usable health insurance and other social security could also be provided here. These centres would thus be 'activist' citizens' advice bureaus, but for migrants, intervening to equate their rights in practice to those of Russians. Practical recognition of such rights -- for example in the workplace or housing -- would increase migrant leisure time, providing opportunity to engage in the wider community if they so wished. Ideally in city centres, current administrative centres where *patenty* are awarded could be upgraded so as to keep costs low. Logging of all cases would make keeping track of the nature of problems migrants face an easy task, helping the centres adapt to meet the needs of their clients.

Second, centres would work with the migrants whom they encounter to promote inclusivity amongst the domestic community. Unlike the failed Toleration Programme in St. Petersburg (Tkach & Brednikova, 2016), these centres would base their attempts at integration on the culture of the migrants who visit them. Offering paid employment to migrants as event organisers and engagement officers, input from the people they concern and the institutional backing needed to make such ideas a success would be ensured.

Another option concerns the desegregation of housing to prevent 'ghettoization'. In St. Petersburg, foreign migrants were housed in almost-feudalist arrangements with employers responsible for both housing and employment. Migrants' freedom to conduct their lives as they pleased was withdrawn. Integration of housing could begin to alleviate such issues. Adopting a social-housing policy whereby accommodation is distributed across cities rather than concentrated in certain

areas would ease negative attitudes through living side-by-side with migrants. This would make it more difficult to 'ghettoize' areas of the city where migrants are coerced to live separately from the general population. Giving the responsibility for their own homes to migrants equates the freedoms apportioned between them and other Russians, making them comparatively equal in this respect. There would be fewer physical differences with migrants, given that they would live similarly to the domestic population, no longer segregated. At the very least, civil indifference could ensue because domestic Russians would begin to see their migrant neighbours as they would any other neighbour: someone next to whom you can live in peace.

Third, a legislative and bureaucratic review of rights apportioned to foreign migrants must be considered. Unstable access to healthcare, unequal working rights and curtailed civil liberties prevent interaction (and thus cooperation) with the domestic population because they are both prohibited from and have no time to do so due to working hours. Equating access to healthcare, rights (i.e. equal-pay legislation) and increasing civil liberties would place migrants on a similar social standing to Russians, as their freedoms align. Such freedoms would be implemented by the migrant centres outlined above. The status-quo ensures migrants are second-class citizens, necessitating, for example, long working hours because 'normal' hours do not provide a sustaining wage. Such behaviour breeds negative attitudes amongst the domestic population, viewing migrants as concerned only with money. Levelling the social status of migrants via legislative reform would thus ease these perceptions, reducing (for example) the time migrants must work, increasing leisure time and thus the potential for engagement in Russian society. At the very least, migrants would not be viewed in such a self-serving way.

Fourth, tailoring a pathway to long-term residency could incentivise integration, and the easing of attitudes. Currently, anyone in Russia for more than a year can apply for permanent residency (Expatica, 2019). Even with all taxes paid and no incidences with law enforcement, no benefits to the potential to stay long-term are offered (Lipman & Florinskaya, 2019). Crafting pathways towards permanent residency for low-skilled migrants incentivises integration on their part more quickly because there is potential for long-term gain for doing so, e.g. learning Russian or engaging in community activities as this is where their new life will be. On the other side, the knowledge of such desire to live and work in Russia, coupled with a growing number of migrants contributing to the economy, could reduce negative attitudes as the growing economic value of their contribution could not be ignored, not to mention the additional (positive) social aspect permanent residency could engender. In aggregate, the introduction of tailored pathways to long-term residency has the potential to both diminish negative attitudes on the part of Russians and increase the likelihood of migrant integration.

5. Policy Recommendations & Conclusion

Overall, the main policy recommendation is the state-mandated centres for ‘all things migrant’. Being the primary base of support for migrants, they would be able to help them with a wide-range of issues at the grassroots. The administrative issues, such as filling out documents like *patenty* or otherwise could be completed with the support offered here, coupled with more wide-reaching aid to ensure the smoothness of daily life. In doing so, this de-facto status of second-class citizen could be reduced, implementing the same civil liberties as Russians. Migrants could live a life comparable with that of their Russian counterparts, beginning to have a work-life balance. Such balance would allow for more leisure time, integrating migrants into the population via engagement with wider society in such free time. Interactions such as these would diminish the negative perceptions held by many Russians, as the majority of such opinions evolve from ignorance. Integration and the break-down of such attitudes are interlinked, but neither are necessary nor sufficient for the other.

The centres should be opened alongside the legislative review of migrant rights so that their civil liberties equate to Russian citizens’. Outlawing lower pay and worse conditions, obliging usable health insurance, and unambiguously outlining hate-crime legislation to protect migrants would all aid integration into Russian society because they would be equal players in it. Without these impediments, migrants could become active participants in society, freeing up time to form new bonds with other individuals, which could in turn break down the negative attitudes many hold towards them.

The issue of incentivising long-term/permanent residency among migrants would also help in breaking down negative attitudes. Encouraging these vital workers to stay in an economy only set to shrink is in the interests of the Russian state as well as migrants. Relaxing the rules on residency by, for example, cutting down the amount of time a migrant must be in Russia from a year to six months and not making these months consecutive would help numerous individuals, particularly seasonal migrants. More migrants would be inclined to come to Russia long-term, supporting integration (via learning the language, obtaining a home in a local community, etc.) and thus absorbing the migrant population into the domestic population. With more and more migrants integrated and now part of domestic Russia, negative attitudes would lessen because these same migrants would, over time, become part of the domestic community.

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