

Relocation of Russians in 2022–2023 as a Phenomenon in International Relations: Overview of Migration Trends¹

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Abstract

A distinctive feature of modern international relations is the constant movement not only of capital, goods, and services but also of human resources, highlighting the new transnational nature of global politics. This article analyses the processes of relocation of a significant number of Russians to other countries following the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The study aims to comprehend the phenomenon of Russian relocation, the reasons and dynamics of this “new wave” of migration, the challenges of integration and adaptation in host countries, and to clarify the statistical data. The methodological framework is based on Everett Lee’s “push/pull” theory, which helps identify the factors, causes, and conditions determining migration. The research relies on open statistical data, survey results, analytical reports, and media sources. The article examines the spatial patterns of relocation, which are largely shaped by the financial resources of migrants, value-driven and emotional motivations, and the receptiveness of host countries. A comparative analysis of data from various sources reveals discrepancies between actual quantitative indicators, intermediate and final relocation destinations, and prevailing perceptions about them. Particular attention goes to the sociological profile of Russian migrants. The study concludes that the relocation of Russians in 2022–2023 has become a significant phenomenon in the socio-economic and public life both within Russia and abroad. Although each decision to leave was made individually, the 2022 wave was largely influenced by a “push/pull” dynamic, where “push” and “pull” factors were so strong that relocation costs were often disregarded. In 2023–2024, some migrants continued their movement, changing their trajectory and primary destination, while many returned to Russia. Over time, the likelihood of those remaining abroad reintegrating into the Russian economic and political-legal framework decreases. However, their successful integration into recipient countries may provide new momentum for developing political and socio-economic relations between nations and states.

Keywords: relocation, migrants, human capital, international relations, global politics, mobilization, demography

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Introduction

The international agenda, global trends in world politics and economics, and regional political and economic reverberations have always played a significant role in the mass movement of people. The relocation of large populations is often a direct consequence of these processes. Tensions between countries, military conflicts, economic crises, political uncertainty, and dozens of other similar factors—this cascade of alarming events that alters life trajectories—give rise to the desire to move or relocate.

The current turbulence in global politics largely determines the directions of migration flows, both for individuals and organizations. Businesses have long been able to relocate relatively easily in response to changes in international alliances and trade agreements, seeking to operate in stable systems with consistent diplomatic and sociocultural relations, and favorable conditions for production and trade. For example, a large-scale study of international migration among unicorn¹ company founders showed that out of 3,190 founders examined, 979 (30.7%) had migrated and launched their startups in another country. This fact “testifies to the high mobility of such entrepreneurs, which is nearly nine times higher than the general population migration rate, three times higher than the rate among inventors, and comparable to the mobility of one of the most mobile talent groups—Nobel Prize winners” [Kutsenko, Tyurchev, Ostashchenko, 2022, p.12].

Similar ideas—searching for a place comfortable and promising for realizing one’s ideas and aspirations—often underlie individual decisions to change countries of residence. These motives become especially pronounced when “an established everyday life, once seen as understandable and comfortable, is suddenly replaced by a turbulent social reality prone to delivering surprises each day” [Rudenkin, 2023, p.16]. Realizing that continuing life as before (in Russia or elsewhere) is no longer possible becomes a powerful motivator for seeking a new home.

This trend is well illustrated in the proceedings of the XIII International Grushin Sociological Conference. Researchers highlighted individualization and rationalization trends in decision-making, such as “mobile identity, including as a response to geopolitical and cultural changes” and “variability in life scenarios, strategies, and career trajectories.” In 2023, the gap between the priorities of youth and those of the general population reached a record level: 70% of young people prioritized personal interests above all else [Sedova, Yakimova, 2023, pp.62-63]. These figures largely explain the relocation activity of young Russians as a response to deepening sociocultural and geopolitical contradictions.

Back in 1966, Everett Lee, the author of the comprehensive “push/pull” migration theory, identified four main factors whose combination leads to spatial mobility: (1) push factors associated with the place of origin/residence; (2) pull factors defined by the destination; (3) intervening obstacles between origin and destination; and (4) personal factors. Migration in any domain is the result of interaction among these elements [Lee, 1966]. In turn, the ratio between push and pull factors, the complexity of the obstacles between origin and destination, and one’s capabilities and ambitions determine the scale of migration [Singh, 2023].

“Pushing” large populations is primarily driven by serious political and social upheavals (ethno-religious conflicts, dictatorships, and wars), economic crises, and natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, etc.). In more peaceful times, individual migration may be driven by the desire for better living and career conditions, family changes, and so on. “Pull” refers to the set of attractive (real or perceived, expected) living conditions elsewhere. “Intervening obstacles” refer not to the direction of migration, but to the means and ease of reaching another country, the availability of reliable information about the destination, and financial and language capabilities.

Personal factors include religion, level of education and income, health status, age, value orientations, and one’s perception of a foreign country. Everett Lee believed that personal factors primarily determine a person’s ability to migrate. As the saying goes, “Fortune favors the bold,” and often, the young. Migration is largely a youth phenomenon: the relocation wave of 2022 confirmed this. Income level also determines the distance and direction of migration.

Variability in opportunities, value systems, and life strategies becomes especially visible in comparative international analyses of relocation preferences. The next stage is the adaptation and integration of migrant groups, their formalization (or lacks thereof) into various communities in host countries, and their reverse influence on local—and sometimes global—political and economic processes.

According to this scheme, the relocation of Russian citizens to various countries after the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis in early 2022 has unfolded. Without exaggeration, the relocation processes have had significant—and in some cases, pivotal—impacts on several affected countries. For instance, within just nine months of 2022 (from March to November), the Armenian dram strengthened against the U.S. dollar by more

¹ Unicorns are privately held startup companies that have reached a valuation of at least one billion USD. In some analyses, additional criteria are applied, such as being founded within the past ten years, remaining at least 75% founder-owned, and not having undergone an IPO.

than 22%, making it the top-performing global currency. The Georgian lari and Tajik somoni strengthened by over 16% and 10%, respectively [Bloomberg, 2022]. These national currencies entered the global top three in growth precisely due to the inflow of Russians.

According to the National Bank of Georgia, money transfers from Russia to Georgia increased fivefold in 2022, accounting for over 60% of all transfers and exceeding \$1.75 billion. In Armenia, remittances over the first ten months of 2022 reached \$2.8 billion, nearly four times more than during the same period in 2021. In Tajikistan, the volume of bank transfers increased by at least 50% in the first half of 2022 [Chernyshova, 2022].

At the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting on May 25, 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin cited a “very impressive figure”—12.1% GDP growth in Armenia [Putin, 2023]. He did not name specific reasons for this “Armenian miracle,” but Armenian Minister of Economy Vahan Kerobyan had previously explained that more than three percentage points of the 12.6% growth resulted from relocation, possibly more: by the end of 2022, 2,500 legal entities with Russian participation and 4,000 sole proprietors had been registered in Armenia [Pashkova, 2023].

In Georgia, from February 2022 onward, Russians registered 1,550 companies, and 25,689 compatriots opened sole proprietorships [Dvali, 2023]. Kazakhstan showed similar dynamics: between 2022 and 2023, the number of companies with Russian capital increased by 70%, reaching 18,000, with 23,670 legal entities registered [Zhandos, 2024]. And these are only some examples.

Of course, an equally—if not more—significant driver of economic growth in several post-Soviet republics following the start of the special military operation has been the sanctions against Russia. These were met with responses such as parallel imports and other circumvention mechanisms. Not surprisingly, in November 2022, the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security included Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan among the countries at high risk of re-exporting goods to Russia [Panova, 2023, p.272].

Although the initial panic among Russian relocants has subsided and migration patterns have shifted, financial flows have tapered off. Nonetheless, the fact that the economies of these countries grew significantly—due in part to being chosen as transit, long-term residence, or business-intermediary destinations by Russian citizens—remains undisputed [Business Media, 2024].

Information and Statistical Battles Around “How Many and Where To”

The quantitative indicators of Russians who left the country in 2022–2023 remain one of the most hotly debated topics—one that government agencies directly involved in data collection have largely withdrawn from. There are, indeed, objective difficulties: not all Russian citizens disclose the true purpose of their trip, often citing generic reasons such as “tourism” or “business”; not all report obtaining residency permits or citizenship abroad, which is permitted under Russian law as long as notification is made upon return; not all officially deregister their place of residence. As a result, this incomplete information is passed from one agency to another, forming an overall picture that does not reflect reality. As S.G. Kordonsky aptly remarked (albeit in a different context): “In reality, everything is not as it actually is” [Kordonskiy, 2021, p.49]. Yet even while acknowledging that Rosstat’s figures are likely underreported, demographers confidently identify this as a new wave of migratory outflow—a trend not seen since the collapse of the Soviet Union [Saitova, 2023].

Naturally, the movement of large population groups has drawn the attention of researchers and institutions in Russia and abroad. However, the lack of effective information exchange complicates objective analysis. It has led to alternative methods of estimating the number of relocates—not by tracking those who leave Russia, but those who arrive in destination countries. These efforts encounter many of the same difficulties: not all arrivals remain in their first host country, with some continuing their journey through several nations before reaching their final destination; not all succeed in settling, and some return to a transit country or even back to Russia; not all register in their new country of residence; and not all status changes are chronologically aligned with relocation, making it difficult to track movements based on administrative data.

Nevertheless, researchers currently have only the combined datasets from both sides—departure and arrival. We will rely on these while attempting to avoid the extremes characteristic of each perspective: understatement on the Russian side and exaggeration on the opposite.

According to estimates, between 0.5 and 1 million people left Russia during the first year of large-scale military activity. Rosstat reported 668,430 departures from Russia in 2022, of which 583,607 were to CIS countries and 84,823 to other foreign states [Rosstat, 2022]. For comparison, the corresponding numbers for 2021 were 210,345 and 27,675, and for 2020 — 417,059 and 70,613 [Rosstat, 2022].

These figures contrast sharply with alternative data sources: border control statistics from transit or receiving countries, publicly available consular and immigration records, and information from airlines and telecom providers in various nations—much of which has been reported by the media. Demographers have characterized Rosstat’s numbers as underestimates [Saitova, 2023].

More importantly, subjective perceptions and emotional reactions to the situation often carry great weight in shaping the public climate—whether it’s panic over ticket shortages in spring and fall 2022 or summer 2023, or sensational media images of border chaos.

These perceptions often drive the rejection of the “statistical profile” of the facts when it conflicts with the impressions already formed by observers—based on personal experience or visual evidence from video platforms, airline websites, local real estate portals, and recruiting agencies. Yet perceptions are inherently subjective. At times, they are influenced by misrepresented or misinterpreted information, or even simple terminological confusion. One must also bear in mind that in the context of the ongoing confrontation between Russia and the “collective West,” information is often weaponized.

For instance, in late 2022, media outlets widely circulated a figure of 2.9 million “immigrants from Russia,” citing Acting Chairman of Kazakhstan’s Migration Service Committee A. Atalykov [Esquire, 2022]. In a video report on the country’s migration situation, the statement was phrased as: “First place—immigrants from the Russian Federation: 2,900,000” [Shulyga, 2022]. However, even a brief examination of the material reveals that this figure refers to the total number of Russian entries to Kazakhstan throughout the year—including a surge in summer months and a sharp rise in daily arrivals (up to 30,000) in September 2022 [Esquire, 2022].

Moreover, while republished media reports included the figure of 5.61 million total foreign entries to Kazakhstan in 2022, they often omitted the nearly 6 million departures in the same year. The data emphasized growth compared to the pandemic years of 2020–2021 (when about 2.5 million foreigners entered annually) but did not mention the decline from the pre-pandemic 2019 figure of 7 million.

Printed articles also excluded answers to specific questions about September border crossings, which were included in the original report. In September 2022 alone, 406,000 Russian citizens entered Kazakhstan—most of them after the 21st. By year’s end, 205,000 of them had left for other countries: 47,000 to Uzbekistan, 46,000 to Kyrgyzstan, 37,000 to Turkey, and 19,000 to the UAE. During that period, Russian arrivals in Kazakhstan submitted 3,578 applications for permanent residence and 965 for citizenship. As of the release of the video report, among the 146,000 Russian nationals who entered Kazakhstan after September 21, 36,000 had received temporary residence permits [Shulyga, 2022].

We present the Kazakhstan case to make two points: first, to illustrate how distortions in migration statistics arise; second, to present Kazakhstan as a case study from the broader group of neighboring countries serving as relocation destinations for Russians. More on that later—here we stay within the framework of statistical estimates and related debates.

When it comes to 2022, experts typically refer to two waves (or more accurately, surges) of emigration: the first in the days and weeks following February 24, and the second in the immediate aftermath of the “partial mobilization” announced on September 21. According to Western media, the first wave consisted of about 300,000 people, and the second was between 500,000 and 1 million [The Economist, 2023].

The Economist’s publication was not the first such estimate, but it became a key reference point for many subsequent media and research publications. In the Russian media landscape, Forbes played a similar role, stating that “approximately 700,000 people left Russia in the two weeks following the announcement of partial mobilization” [Tofanyuk, Sapronova, 2022]. The Kremlin dismissed the report as a “hoax” [Nehoroshkin, Voroshilov, 2022].

The Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) described these as “the highest upper-bound estimates,” suggesting instead a more realistic range of 500,000–800,000 people by July 2023 [Moscow Speaking, 2023]. There is little disagreement regarding the classification of departure waves or groups. The Russian side adds another category: domestic specialists (mainly in IT) employed by foreign companies who relocated abroad along with their employers. Of particular interest is the observation by Russian experts that around 20 million people have entered a state of “internal emigration” [Galimova, Sirotkin, 2023]. This phenomenon may prove critical for understanding the broader impact of recent events on Russian society and could take decades to fully address. According to VCIOM head Valery Fedorov, “Since 2018, the country has been in a complex socio-psychological state. ...Deviant behavior has increased, and birth rates have declined. People are having to exert more effort just to maintain control over their lives” [Ibid., 2023].

Russian society is undergoing a difficult period, and relocation—external or internal—is one of how individuals, families, and socioeconomic or sociopolitical groups are seeking to cope with this crisis. There are also many myths about the intermediate and final destinations of relocants. In the long run, Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Armenia became the top receiving countries in 2022–2023. Countries such as Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and even Mongolia served as transit or situational destinations.

In July 2024, the news outlet *The Bell*² published the results of a study on the most in-demand relocation routes for Russian citizens. The summary table of results is presented below.

Table 1. Major Destinations of Russian Emigration in 2022–2023 [Kasyanchuk, 2024]

	Host Country	Number of Russian Relocants
1.	Armenia	110 000
2.	Kazakhstan	80 000
3.	Israel	80 000
4.	Georgia	73 562
5.	USA	48 033
6.	Germany	36 094
7.	Serbia	30 000
8.	Turkey	28 038
9.	South Korea	19 805
10.	Spain	16 441
11.	UK	15 574
12.	Kyrgyzstan	12 582
13.	Netherlands	12 384
14.	Canada	11 730
15.	Argentina	11 064
	TOTAL	585 307

It is worth noting that despite the wide outreach (the publication’s inquiries were sent to migration and statistical authorities in nearly 70 countries), not all responded to the agency’s requests. For example, the journalists reported receiving no replies from Thailand, Indonesia, Greece, and Azerbaijan. Cyprus, meanwhile, stated that it does not track the number of Russians relocating to the island.

The case of Portugal is particularly interesting. According to a study by real estate brokerage Savills, Lisbon topped the 2022 ranking of the 15 most attractive cities for top managers and remote company employees [Shepherd, 2022]. Many Russian nationals in this category had begun settling in the country well before the outbreak of the full-scale invasion. However, Portugal did not become one of the leading destinations for Russian relocants. The generally favorable migration policy is offset by numerous challenges faced by newcomers—chief among them the complex functioning of government agencies, various departments, and banks [Selizarova, 2022].

In 2022, Portugal admitted a record number of immigrants—almost 121,000 people—four times more than in 2014 [The Portugal News, 2023]. The largest groups among these migrants

² On April 1, 2022, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation included Elizaveta Osetinskaya, publisher of *The Bell*, and the outlet’s editor-in-chief Irina Malkova in the register of foreign mass media agents. Subsequently, on December 9, 2022, *The Bell* itself was entered into the Unified Register of Foreign Agents. Since February 2023, access to the news website has been restricted.

were Brazilians, residents of Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa and Asia, followed by individuals from Afghanistan. According to the 2022 immigration report, there were 6,075 Russian nationals residing in the country [Lopes, Machado, 2023]. Most likely, these figures refer not only to those who arrived after February 2022 but also to Russians who had been living in the country before that. This conclusion is supported by 2023 data from the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum, which reported 10,901 Russians residing in Portugal . [Lopes, Sousa, 2024, p.37], indicating a net increase of 4,826 individuals.

In this case, it is irrelevant whether the newly arrived held Portuguese citizenship or not—an increase of just a few thousand dispels the myth of modern Lusitania as a major hub for the Russian diaspora.

Continuing the discussion of the European vector of relocation, notable statistics (see Table 2) concern land border crossings into Europe by Russian citizens from the beginning of the invasion to October 9, 2022. According to border authority data, most of those entering held EU residence permits or Schengen visas, while some held second citizenship.

Table 2. Number of Russian Citizens Crossing European Land Borders Between February 24 and October 9, 2022 (in thousands) [Kommersant, 2022]

	Departures from Russia (thousands)	Arrivals to Russia (thousands)
Latvia	67,07	67,10
Lithuania	363,85	322,62
Norway	13,64	11,53
Poland	67,68	100,07
Finland	513,36	474,54
Estonia	353,53	366,02
TOTAL	1 379 135	1 341 878

Thus, after the cutoff date of October 9, 2022, a total of 37,257 Russian citizens who had left for the specified countries did not return. This is a significant figure, especially considering that those heading to Europe tend to be relatively affluent and well-educated individuals.

From the cluster of Asian destinations, this study focuses solely on Thailand, which did not respond to the inquiry and was not covered by the research. Alongside Turkey, Thailand ranks among the top five most popular vacation spots for Russian citizens. On the anniversary of the conflict in Ukraine, media reports stated that 233,000 Russians had landed at Phuket Airport between November 1, 2022, and January 21, 2023 [Duangdee, 2023]. They were identified as the largest group of foreign nationals in the country during that period, a phenomenon directly linked to the ongoing military confrontation.

However, the key word here is “tourist”: the discussion concerns tourists, not relocants, even if their stays extend over relatively long periods—ranging from three to six months, or even up to a year. Notably, wintering in Thailand with one’s family has become an established trend among affluent Russians. According to data from MTS Travel and MTS Research, one in ten Russian citizens who travel to warmer destinations during the cold season chooses Thailand. In the winter of 2022–2023, 24% of Russians traveling abroad selected this country as their destination [News Tracker, 2023].

The second point concerns the reported 1,000% increase—or, more precisely, 791,574 Russian visitors during the first half of 2023. In total, Thailand received 1.48 million Russian tourists over the course of the year, which is indeed a sharp increase compared to the previous year's figure of 435,000 [Gorin, 2024]. However, it represents only a marginal growth—by approximately 10,000 people—compared to the pre-COVID year of 2019, when 1.47 million Russians visited the country.

A broader perspective reveals further context. Thailand had projected 25 million international tourist arrivals for 2023 but ultimately welcomed 28 million visitors from around the world. Among them, the top five countries of origin were: Malaysia (4.56 million), China (3.5 million), South Korea (1.65 million), India (1.61 million), and Russia (1.48 million) [Gorin, 2024].

Finally, Thai real estate and its 82% sales growth in 2023 compared to 2021 deserve attention. Notably, Russian citizens accounted for half of these transactions. However, looking at the actual numbers, the total volume was just 338 villas [Mamikonyan, 2023], meaning that Russians purchased around 169 of them—an amount that carries little demographic or relocation significance. In contrast to the Thai case, property sales figures in Turkey appear truly phenomenal. From 2010 to 2024, Turkey's housing index averaged 211.59 points, reaching a record high of 1273.50 points in May 2024 [Trading Economics, 2024]. While Russians were not the sole contributors to this growth, their share was undoubtedly substantial: from 2022 to 2024, Russian nationals purchased more real estate in Turkey than any other foreign group. In 2022 alone, Russians acquired 16,312 properties in Turkey, making them the largest group of foreign buyers. This figure marked a 203% increase from 2021 and accounted for nearly a quarter of all foreign purchases. Iranian (8,223) and Iraqi (6,241) citizens followed in second and third place, respectively [Bilgic, 2023]. The main factor behind this rising demand is the opportunity to obtain Turkish residency or citizenship. The highest annual increase in housing prices was recorded in Antalya, Istanbul, and Mersin [Endeksa, 2022].

Among the five most popular tourist destinations for Russians, Thailand is the closest to Turkey in terms of numbers, although Turkey remains the clear leader. For comparison, in the same year when Thailand received nearly 1.5 million tourists from Russia, Turkey welcomed over 6 million [Interfax, 2024]. These figures remain far out of reach for other countries in the top five (in descending order): the UAE (primarily Dubai), Egypt, and Sri Lanka [Markelov, 2023].

It is difficult to determine whether tourist popularity contributes to a country's appeal as a relocation destination. In the non-European cluster, it may seem so—Turkey, the clear leader, is the only country from this group that appears consistently among chosen destinations. On the other hand, the leading European country for Russian nationals (specifically holders of Russian passports, not just ethnic Russians) is Germany, which continued to attract relocants in 2022–2023 despite a dramatic decline in Russian tourist arrivals during the pandemic: from over 2 million overnight stays in 2019 to 530,000 in 2020 and fewer than 268,000 in 2021 [Zukov, 2022]. Nevertheless, even with visa requirements, Germany surpassed visa-free Turkey in terms of relocation appeal. A similar pattern is evident in the case of the United States, which outpaces both Turkey and Serbia by more than one-third in the number of Russian relocants.

Thus, for Russian emigrants, some countries designated as "unfriendly" by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs prove more attractive than those officially labeled as "friendly." At the same time, data from Rosstat and, citing it, the German platform Statista, show that in 2023 the main destinations for Russian emigration were: Tajikistan – 89,500, Ukraine – 80,500, Kyrgyzstan – 49,200, and Uzbekistan – 40,900 [Statista, 2024b]. These are followed by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Belarus, Turkmenistan, and only then more distant destinations such as India, China, Vietnam, Georgia, and Germany. This reveals a fundamental discrepancy between the actual directions of Russian relocation in 2022–2023 and their statistical reflection—something that clearly requires explanation. So does the very geography of destinations chosen by Russian emigrants.

Let us begin with the latter. It is reasonable to assume that Dushanbe, Kyiv, Bishkek, and Tashkent received a significant number of dual citizens—individuals holding both Russian and local citizenship. According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such individuals must use their Russian international passports when entering or leaving Russia [The Russian Embassy, 2024]. In theory, this should be reflected in both border crossing records and subsequent migration statistics. However, failure to comply is considered an administrative violation subject to a relatively minor fine (2,000 to 5,000 rubles), so this possibility cannot be ruled out.

Regarding the case of Russian–Tajik dual citizens, in the first quarter of 2023, they constituted the majority of the 106,000 foreign nationals who obtained Russian citizenship [Interfax, 2023]. From January to June 2023, the number was 87,000, with a downward trend [Radio Azzatyk, 2023]. In 2023, 89,550 people left Russia for Tajikistan, of whom 69,620 had not resided at their previous place of residence since birth. Among them, 50,941 had lived in Russia for one year or less, 11,862 for 2–4 years, and only 3,448 for 10 years or more [Rosstat, 2023]. A total of 18,584 individuals who had resided in Russia since birth and relocated to Tajikistan

in 2023 were most likely children born in Russia. Similar patterns can be observed for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The case of Ukraine is more complex and currently difficult to verify.

Now turning to the discrepancy between Russian and non-Russian data and conclusions regarding relocation routes and numbers. The picture presented by Rosstat for 2023 supports a frequently voiced hypothesis among analysts: that those Russian relocants who aspired to move to distant foreign countries—and possessed the necessary resources to do so (not only financial, but also in terms of employability, adaptability, linguistic integration, and other capacities)—had largely already implemented their plans by that time. Consequently, migration flows began shifting toward countries in Russia's near abroad. However, Rosstat showed a similar dynamic in 2022: the total number of people who left for foreign countries that year was 84,823, including only 2,626 who relocated to Turkey [Rosstat, 2022].

At the same time, there is a striking absence of information and analysis on Russia's near abroad as a relocation destination in non-Russian sources—even though data on these directions (potentially more reliable than for other destinations) and a direct link to key drivers of relocation are both available.

In general, we observe a repetition of the issue of numerical inconsistency across directions—though in an even more distorted form. The remarkably low level of awareness on both sides regarding either the "far" or "near" abroad as a vector of Russian relocation appears to stem from a mutual lack of interest in acknowledging and further engaging with the respective cluster.

Sociological Profile of Russian Relocants

Several studies of the migration flow from Russia were conducted during 2023–2024. Strictly speaking, these cannot be considered academic research in the conventional sense—featuring clearly defined parameters, established methodology, flawless sampling, sufficient temporal duration, and appropriate spatial coverage. It is highly likely that some of the conclusions will later be revised or challenged, while others already provoke disagreement. Nevertheless, the contribution of the researchers behind these initiatives is substantial, and the necessity of their efforts—both in data collection and analysis—is indisputable, especially given the rather puzzling inaction on the part of the formal Russian institutions. These institutions, particularly the state and society, should be the most interested parties in conducting a deep and objective examination of this issue, with the aim of applying its results for practical and constructive purposes.

At this stage, the visibility of this critical topic in the informational and political discourse across various countries is primarily ensured by Russian relocant researchers and earlier emigrants, alongside traditional and digital media outlets of varying scale—from the Russian service of the BBC to local platforms such as *Bumaga*³ in St. Petersburg. There is hope that a genuine and robust demand for the study and coverage of relocation-related issues will eventually emerge within Russia itself, rather than solely beyond its borders. The first academic publications on this subject authored by Russian scholars have already appeared, offering a reason for cautious optimism [Evstratov, 2024; Puren, Chimiris, 2024; Rakhmonov, 2023].

One of the earliest and most comprehensive efforts was the “Re: Russia” project, initiated by Kirill Rogov⁴ and presented in January 2023. The project is affiliated with the so-called American Coordination Center, which receives funding from the United States [Veterans, 2022]. Based on the processing of a large body of data, the authors concluded that “the core of the new wave consists of representatives of the most modernized, educated, and successful strata of Russian society” [Kostenko et al., 2023], confirming the relevance of the fourth—personal—factor in E. Lee's push/pull migration theory. It is worth noting that this view is shared by many scholars working in the field, at least regarding those relocants who left Russia before the partial mobilization was announced in September 2022.

In the spring of 2022—during the height of relocation movements and well before any formal assessments—demographers and sociologists noted a massive outflow, primarily of urban residents with higher education, including journalists, IT specialists, scientists, and medical professionals. This outflow inevitably impacted several sectors of the Russian economy. Unfortunately, this trend has continued to the present day.

According to the consulting agency *Garant In*, at the beginning of 2024 there was a sharp rise in demand among IT specialists for residency programs in Europe: in the first quarter of 2024, the number of inquiries increased by 233% (absolute figures were not disclosed). Approximately 80% of all inquiries were directed toward France and 10% toward Italy.

³ Based on the decision of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation dated February 24, 2022, Roskomnadzor blocked access to the website of the *BBC Russian Service* on March 4, 2022. On June 30, 2023, the Russian Ministry of Justice added *Bumaga* to the registry of foreign agents.

⁴ On August 25, 2023, he was added to the registry of foreign agents by the Russian Ministry of Justice. Since February 2022, he has been residing in Austria.

As for 2022, data from the *Habr Career* platform indicate that between February and October, around 9% of surveyed IT specialists had already left Russia; by autumn 2022, another 6% were planning to emigrate shortly, while 58% had no intention of leaving. The highest share of those who had left by that time went to Kazakhstan (12% of respondents), followed by Turkey (7%), the United States and Georgia (6% each), and Armenia (5%). Only 15% of those who had left had chosen European countries (down from 45% earlier that spring), while 41% had opted for other destinations [Habr Career, 2022].

In 2023, Russia's Minister of Digital Development, Maksut Shadayev, publicly stated that specialists were actively returning to the country. However, the Ministry provided no data on the number of returnees. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in the first nine months of 2023, at least 68,000 Russians obtained citizenship or residency abroad—twice the number from the previous year [Zhabin, Isakova, 2024]. This educational and social trend arguably represents one of the most damaging aspects of the relocation process for the Russian economy. It is no coincidence that the current wave of emigration is being compared to the revolutionary and civil war period of the early 20th century, when a significant portion of Russia's educated and affluent population left the country—later contributing meaningfully to the socio-humanitarian and economic development of several European nations [Kovalevsky, 2019; Bulgakova, 2024].

Interestingly, in private discussions and academic forums in Belgrade in the fall of 2023, Serbian colleagues expressed hope that the Russian “landing force” could bring revitalization to Serbia's economy and invigorate its intellectual landscape. Indeed, *Yandex* established a large co-working space in the Serbian capital [Minchenko, 2023: 37]. The office, opened in 2022, quickly proved insufficient to accommodate the growing number of arriving specialists, prompting the opening of a second office in 2023. Notably, both offices remain subsidiaries of Russia's *Yandex*, despite the company's decision after the beginning of the “special military operation” to split its business into domestic and international branches, with the latter (*Yandex N.V.*) based in the Netherlands and pursuing maximum separation from Russia [Bykova, 2024].

By the end of 2023, a total of 9,000 companies and 3,200 individual entrepreneurs with Russian participation had been registered in Serbia—figures that closely correlate with those from Armenia (see Table 3). According to Nenad Popović, Serbia's Minister without Portfolio for Innovation and Technological Development, “Russia ranks fourth in terms of investment volume in the republic's economy” [Gein, 2024].

Table 3. Number of Individual Entrepreneurs and Enterprises with Russian Participation Established Between 2022 and 2023 [Gein, 2024; Dvali, 2023; Zhandos, 2024; Pashkova, 2023; Skobtsova, 2024; Tairov, 2024]

	Enterprises with Russian Participation	Individual Entrepreneurs from Russian Federation
Armenia	2 500	4 000
Georgia	1 550	25 689
Kazakhstan	18 000	23 670
Serbia	9 000	3 200

Nevertheless, for Serbia—considered by many economists and policymakers to be already “overheated” by incoming investments [Lastigal, 2024; RuSerbia, 2024]—the primary significance lies not in the inflow of “Russian” capital, but in the presence of Russians in the country's socio-humanitarian space. Serbia serves as an almost ideal example that illustrates the importance of personal factors in migration, as outlined in E. Lee's theory. A visa-free, Orthodox Christian country with deep historical and cultural ties to Russia, Serbia offers a highly comfortable and familiar environment for many relocants.

It is also worth noting that in nearly all relocation destinations, a distinct sociocultural climate tends to emerge around Russian diasporas. These include the establishment of preschools, elementary schools, social clubs, and co-working spaces, which often involve not only local populations but also citizens from other post-Soviet states. One of the most significant relocation trends is the formation of social networks in the new host country. “The crisis has created conditions for the emergence of new social capital, which can be converted into economic growth” [Chimiris, Puren, Grishkyan, 2023, p.68]. This applies not only to the relocants themselves but also to the host countries—and, paradoxically, to Russia as well. Remote work, family ties, property ownership, and ongoing tax payments are dense connective tissues that continue to link relocants with their country of origin.

Well-developed horizontal social ties appear to be a characteristic trait of a specific stratum of relocants—and perhaps even of specific countries. In contrast, in certain countries such as the United States, researchers have observed opposite trends: a tendency among Russians to limit communication with fellow compatriots, a trend that was already present in earlier years [Kalinkin, 2011] and persists today. At the same time, the Russian-

speaking diaspora in the U.S. is now notably polarized along political lines—those “for” and “against” Russia’s actions. This division is not limited to the issue of Ukraine but extends more broadly to Russia’s current stance in global affairs. As a result, communication between compatriots has also become segmented, both online (with separate chats and groups) and offline.

An important characteristic of the 2022 relocants—beyond their professional and socioeconomic profiles—is the degree of preparedness for emigration. Many decided to leave spontaneously, amid waves of panic, which aligns the “new wave” of emigrants with the post-revolutionary Russian emigration of the early 20th century. Some analysts emphasize the push factors that force people to leave even without prior international experience in education or employment, lacking personal or professional contacts abroad or clear career prospects in the host country [Kazantseva, Ostapenko, 2023: 25].

One such push factor was fear. In many of their personal accounts, relocants reported that they “left because they were very afraid.” Anxiety, fear, and panic clearly played a decisive role in many relocation decisions. “Fear is capable of pushing a person to abandon their hometown, home, job, and friends, and move to a foreign country with uncertain prospects” [Rudenko, 2023: 16]. Unsurprisingly, many who made this decision described it “not as emigration, but as evacuation—a desperate escape from something that suddenly became dangerous” [Ibid: 16].

Emotions and subjective perceptions of current events play a significant role not only in the decision to emigrate but also in the ability to adapt and settle in the country of temporary or permanent residence. Two chronologically distinct subgroups within this relocation wave also differ in terms of political and civic engagement, including volunteerism and social activism. However, this may be more typical of a relatively narrow group of relocants who are active on social media and messaging platforms. The authors of various surveys were aware of this sampling bias: their respondents tended to be younger and more outspoken, which is why “the collected data do not represent the full population of Russian emigrants” [Kamalov et al., 2022].

It should be noted that Russian society has been in a complex emotional and psychological state for several years. A joint project by VTsIOM and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* found that 45% of Russians experience melancholy from time to time; 12% feel this way often, and 3% live in this state constantly. In total, 60% of Russians are affected by apathy [Yakunin, 2023], driven by a wide range of causes, including the war in Ukraine. A separate study by the Agency for Social Information (ASI), conducted in September 2023, found that nearly 15 million people—or about 10% of the Russian population—suffer from depression [ASI, 2023], a condition further exacerbated by intergenerational and value-based divides [Sedova, Yakimova, 2023: 39, 42–43]. In this context, today’s relocants can be seen as a clear cross-section of Russia’s adult population. The sense of sadness and loss is especially intense among those with close relatives remaining in Ukraine—a group that represents a significant portion of the relocant population.

Another notable characteristic—perhaps facilitated by the accessibility of all forms of communication—is the continued close contact between relocants and their family and friends in Russia. These individuals maintain a high level of engagement with Russia’s political landscape: they follow the news and regularly discuss current events with relatives and peers. The image of the modern Russian emigrant might best be summarized as: “politicized, active, and sad” [Kiseleva, Safronova, 2024].

The increased political engagement of recent relocants—both compared to the average Russian citizen and to long-established Russian-speaking diasporas in host countries—is confirmed by the authors of one of the most recent and arguably most comprehensive studies to date. Conducted in the summer of 2024 by the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), founded in 1979, the study is titled “*The New Russian Diaspora: A Challenge and an Opportunity for Europe.*” While we lack formal empirical evidence to confirm this finding, based on our own observations, we would suggest that this claim may require further validation over time. Its prevalence might stem less from widespread politicization and more from the visibility and vocal presence of a relatively small number of highly active members within the new Russian communities abroad.

One of the key trends identified by the IFRI authors is the increasing masculinization and “youthfulness” of the relocant community [Gudkov⁵, Inozemtsev⁶, Nekrasov, 2024]. The age-related aspect of this trend is corroborated by other studies: the average age of respondents who had emigrated was 32, compared to 46 in the general Russian population [Kamalov et al., 2022]. The authors do not directly link this shift to the war in Ukraine or fears of mobilization, noting that the change in age structure began as early as 2013, not in 2022. Once again, relocants have demonstrated the broader principle that individuals who have already changed their place of residence—typically moving from one Russian region to another—exhibit greater social and geographic mobility.

⁵ On February 10, 2023, he was added to the list of foreign agents by the Russian Ministry of Justice.

⁶ On May 26, 2023, he was added to the list of foreign agents by the Russian Ministry of Justice.

This recalls a bittersweet joke among Russian authors: Moscow is merely a transit point between the provinces and London. In other words, even before 2022, part of the population had already become the “departed Russia”—only after February 24 did they leave in a physical sense [Minchenko, 2023: 38].

Conclusion

In summary, researchers have generally taken an optimistic view regarding the future of Russian relocants, now two and a half years into the mass migration wave. Survey data indicate that fewer relocants express concerns about their financial security or professional viability in their new countries of residence. On average, it takes about six months for such confidence to take root. Many demonstrate strong adaptability, promptly revising life plans and strategies in response to new realities.

Unsurprisingly, this optimism about relocants contrasts with a more pessimistic outlook regarding Russia—the country that, at least temporarily, has lost them. At this point, the interests of the state and those of its (even temporarily) departed citizens diverge: the former may benefit if relocants face challenges abroad, hoping this would motivate their return [Korolkova, 2023]. This creates an opportunity to recover human capital—especially if legal and fiscal restrictions on returnees are relaxed. A passive or, even more so, hostile stance effectively leaves Russian citizens to the discretion of their host countries. This is particularly significant given the increasing global competition for human capital—a resource in short supply not only in Russia, but also in many recipient countries such as Armenia, Georgia, and Serbia [Podberezkin, Rodionov, 2020].

A shift from prohibitive policies to strategies of attraction could yield both quantitative and qualitative benefits. Whoever first recognizes the potential of such an approach may gain access to a pool of high-caliber human resources. Despite obvious contradictions, Russia still retains a certain advantage: its relocants are not yet full-fledged emigrants. Their eventual legal and psychological status—six months, a year, or two years down the line—will depend largely on the state's recognition of the issue and the effectiveness of its response. The potential for return is already visible: according to the Finion agency (specializing in foreign residency services), by the end of 2023, up to 40% of those who left Russia in 2022 had returned. A more conservative estimate from *The Financial Times*, citing data from the European University Institute, put this figure at approximately 15% [Stroiteleva, 2023].

The future of Russian relocants depends not only on official and public attitudes in Russia but also on the sociopolitical climate of host countries. Those who have found employment—either locally or remotely—feel more comfortable in friendly, safe, if not always economically affluent, environments. However, it should be acknowledged that the relatively tolerant attitude toward Russians in most host societies may not be universal or permanent. A 2023 summer study by the Platform Center for Social Design and the OnIn company in former Soviet states revealed both hospitality and caution toward Russian newcomers.

Sociologists identified Tajikistan as the most welcoming country: 55% of respondents viewed the arrival of skilled professionals positively, citing increased demand for services and new income opportunities for locals. Additionally, 66% expressed readiness to help with language learning, legal employment, and cultural adaptation. In Kazakhstan and Belarus, over 50% of respondents believed that relocants would have little impact on their lives—though some reported social tensions. In Georgia, 21% of respondents believed that incoming Russians posed a threat, linking them to rising living costs and cultural or values-based conflicts. Georgia ranked highest in this regard, yet even there, over 40% believed that Russians could contribute positively. In Armenia, that figure was 73%. In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, 42% and 46% of respondents, respectively, welcomed the new arrivals, though only 23% of Uzbeks believed relocants would enhance the country's technological development [Filipenok, 2023].

Beyond economic and practical considerations, the presence or absence of value-based alignment between locals and newcomers plays a key role in determining whether relocants will settle permanently. A survey of Russian-speaking respondents showed that “the more relocants a country receives, the less its citizens speak of spiritual affinity.” For instance, in Moldova, 48% of respondents mentioned shared values, compared to 37% in Armenia and just 28% in Georgia [Filipenok, 2023].

As for the impact of Russian relocation on interstate relations and broader international dynamics, Russian officials describe it as “rather positive,” viewing it as “an additional link between Russia and those countries with which we already maintain economic and humanitarian relations” [TASS, 2023]. In the long run, the presence of highly qualified Russian professionals may help stimulate renewed contacts even with countries that currently maintain overtly adversarial stances toward Moscow in the public sphere.

The analysis presented here demonstrates that the relocation of Russian citizens affects the socioeconomic fabric of recipient states. Notably, Russians may be the only sizable diaspora that continues to be financed primarily by income generated within their country of origin—rather than sending remittances back home, as is the case with most other migrant populations. Today's relocants are not merely defined by financial flows or

rising rental prices. They represent new business models rooted in alternative logistics chains, advanced technologies, and digital communications.

In parallel, we are witnessing the formation of localized yet potentially transnational social networks in which Russians serve as a central node and Russia itself remains a reference point. Even those who have fully settled abroad remain socially, economically, intellectually, and psychologically connected to their homeland. Thus, the spatial divide does not necessarily equate to alienation—a fact that offers hope for the continued engagement of Russian citizens, wherever they may reside, in fostering horizontal ties and advancing transnational dialogue in an increasingly fragmented world.

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⁹ On March 28, 2022, the Russian Ministry of Justice included the publication in the register of foreign agents.