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**THE STATE REPATRIATION  
PROGRAMME:  
FOUR YEARS LATER**



*This article analyses the problems of the state voluntary repatriation programme and describes its key functions and implementation mechanisms. The author identifies the causes of deceleration in the repatriation process as well as the weak points of the Programme and the ways to improve it. The article offers data on the resettlement of compatriots over the three years of the Programme implementation, its demographic structure, and the regions of resettlement.*

**Key words:** Programme of voluntary repatriation, repatriates, migrants, labour potential, migration potential, migration policy, immigration of compatriots, demographic structure, migration attraction.

The steep decline in labour potential related to the demographic crises results in the need for considerable increase in immigration in order to restore it and makes immigration one of the strategic lines of Russian migration policy. And, although, migrations rate has been showing an upwards tendency recently, it does not compensate for natural decline. The State voluntary repatriation programme for the Russians residing abroad was developed and adopted in June 2006 in order to stimulate resettlement from the CIS countries. It became part of the general process of Russian migration policy liberalisation.

The Programme gives an incentive to large contingents of compatriots to return to their historical homeland — Russia. Thus, today it is of utmost importance to ensure the migration attractiveness of the Russian Federation and its constituent entities.

The geographical scope of countries, from which compatriots are ready to return to Russia in the framework of the State programme, is ample. It includes not only the CIS countries, which have a high migration potential and account for 80% of all prospective participants, but also from the prosperous Germany, Belgium, the UK, Israel, the USA, etc.

Most compatriots arrived from Kazakhstan (33.3% of the Programme participants including family members), Uzbekistan (16.3%), Ukraine (12.1%), Kirgizia (10.6%), and Moldova (9.1%) (fig.).

The demographic structure of repatriates is as follows: men account for 52.2%, women for 47.8% of arrivals. There is no significant regional difference in gender structure. Most of repatriates — 25.3% of men and 23.9% of women — are people of the 30—39 years age group; 21% (both men and women) belong to the 20—29 years age group. Thus, the share of working age population among the arriving compatriots is very high — 69.7%.

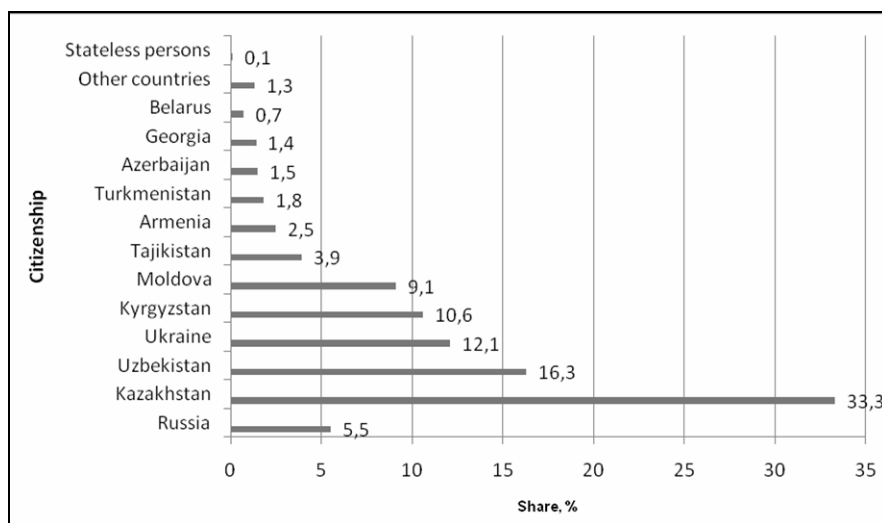


Fig. The arrivals of compatriots by citizenship (2008 — the first half of 2009)

Source: [1].

The most attractive territory is the Kaliningrad region followed after a large gap by the Kaluga and Lipetsk regions. These regions welcomed approximately 80% of the repatriates. At the same time, a very small number of compatriots moved to the regions situated in Siberia and the Far East. Experts believe that the Kaliningrad region has the most favourable conditions for compatriots: it offers temporary residence centres and has agreements with more than 50 enterprises, which are willing to employ repatriates. Moreover, the local authorities conduct an information campaign in the countries of departure. Another important factor was that, according to the region classification presented in the Programme, the Kaliningrad region, being the only Russian enclave, falls into the A category, i.e. is a priority area for repatriation and, thus, enjoys greater financial preferences.

At the same time, the Kaliningrad region is attractive for repatriates, who settle in a European region with a high economic growth rate and strong labour demand. In particular, the region has a high rate of per capita housing development, which results in a significant deceleration of the growth of housing prices.

By October 1, 2009, according to the data of the Federal Migration Service of Russia, 9789 repatriates acquired Russian citizenship throughout the country, which accounts for 58% of repatriates with foreign citizenship. This indicator differs from region to region: the percentage of repatriates who acquired Russian citizenship is the highest in the Amur and Tyumen regions (95 and 77% respectively) and the Krasnoyarsk Territory (72%) and the lowest in the Kursk (15%) and Tver (48%) regions. Most repatriates are (83.3%) renting accommodation, 8% are staying in temporary residence centres and hotels, 8.7% have permanent accommodation. Most migrants

chose cities to settle in, although, in the Tambov region, 100% of repatriates settled in the rural area. In the Novosibirsk region, on the contrary, all the migrants moved to the city.

The repatriates received travelling cost refunds, one-time payments for the purchase of household goods and equipment, as well as a compensation for luggage transportation expenses.

### The main functions of the State repatriation programme

The main functions of the State voluntary repatriation programme are not only the need to support and strengthen Russian diasporas abroad, but also to offer the willing help in returning to their historical homeland. An intensive but regulated migration stream and high migration attractiveness for people who can substantially contribute to the socioeconomic development are among the most significant attributes of the *positive image* of the country.

The economic functions of the State programme relate to the *solution of human resources problems* in Russian regions. The most apparent economic effect of the Programme pertains to the attraction of highly qualified specialists in almost all spheres to the Russian labour market. In 2008, the best results in engaging migrants with in-demand qualifications were achieved by the pilot regions of the Central federal district, namely, the Kaluga and Lipetsk regions. The Kaliningrad region demonstrated the greatest increase in the number of Programme participants in 2007—2009; there, the result of Programme implementation is the most pronounced. However, the experience of the Kaliningrad region showed that the attraction of compatriots to the region can aggravate certain problems in the field of employment.

A different situation developed in the regions, where the number of repatriates who arrived in 2008 was minimal. In particular, the compatriots moving to the Far East do indeed fill the vacancies that have not been found suitable by the local population; however, the number of repatriates is so small, that one can hardly speak of any economic effect.

### The mechanisms of State programme implementation

The principal mechanism of State programme implementation is the status of Programme participant. A participant has a right to *receive compensations*: the compensation of removal expenses, the payment of fees for the preparation of documents defining the legal status of migrants on the territory of the Russian Federation, the one-time payment for the purchase of household equipment, monthly payment in the absence of income generated in the course of labour, business or other legal activity until the acquisition of Russian citizenship but for not longer than 6 months. They also have a right to the compensation package of a State programme participant, which covers the services of state and municipal pre-school, general, and profes-

sional education institutions, social services, healthcare, and state employment services. All compensations are provided through the federal budget.

A participant of the Programme can also enjoy a simplified procedure of citizenship acquisition, which is considered to be the main advantage of the Programme. If, on regular terms, it requires approximately seven years, the Programme participants were offered an unprecedentedly short citizenship acquisition period — three months.

The status of a Russian citizen grants voluntary repatriates access to public goods, the most important of which for a migrant are as follows:

- taxation in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (income tax at the level of 13 % instead of 30 %);

- an opportunity for free employment (within the region of choice).

A Programme participant is offered a vacancy confirmed with the employer. However, not everybody opts for such vacancies. The reasons can be traced back to both employers and repatriates. One of the predominant reasons to refuse the vacancy is "a poor match of the repatriate's qualifications to the requirements". Such situation can develop due to the "blind" consideration of the repatriate's CV — the employer does not have a direct contact with the potential employee. The deliberate misrepresentation of information in CVs or the obscurity of requirements imposed by the employer can result in the repatriate forced to look for a job independently upon arrival to the place of destination.

The status of a Programme participant grants a free medical services package (insurance policy) and gives an opportunity to receive a mortgage loan.

Nevertheless, in the conditions when special attention is paid to registration at the place of temporary and permanent residence, which is quite complicated due to the housing problem, the citizen status does not imply full access to all public goods, in particular, regarding employment.

Today, under the influence of world financial crisis, there is a certain tension as to the employment of repatriates. Most regions limited the initial bank of vacancies for repatriates and are reviewing the regional repatriation programmes and the obligations of regions to immigrants. There has been an increase in employment rejections on the basis of decisions of authorised executive bodies of the RF constituent entities. It redefines the role of opportunity for advanced training or retraining granted to repatriates.

An interesting example is the Irkutsk region, where the Administration of municipal districts, the Labour department of Irkutsk region and employers conclude trilateral agreements. The main feature of such agreements is the employer's liability to reserve jobs for voluntary repatriates and keep such vacancies for a prolonged period of time. Such mechanism "protects" the repatriate from "losing" the vacancy, but does not ensure that the State programme participant meets the employer's requirements and that they will not find a better job.

An important mechanism of the State programme implementation is *the provision of accommodation* for repatriates. In part, this problem is solved through the establishment of the Temporary residence centres.

*The development of information policy* is one of the key components of successful Programme implementation. A Programme participant is offered an official information package and a guideline for State programme participants. However, the information presented in the package cannot fully meet the needs of most voluntary repatriates. The information package includes only the regional programme filled with statistical data and analytical information presented in a specific academic-bureaucratic language.

### The monitoring of compatriot immigration in Russian regions in 2007—2009

The Programme aimed at returning to Russia 40—50 thousand compatriots by 2007, 100,000 by 2008, 150,000 by 2009 and 200,000 by 2010. Alas, it did not come true. The real figures are far from the expected.

To date, more than 16,000 participants of the State programme (including family members) have arrived in the Russian Federation (table).

#### The number of State voluntary repatriation programme, 2007—2009, people\*

Constituent entities	2007	2008	2009	Total for 2007—2009	2009 <i>in comparison to 2008, %</i>
<b>Russian Federation</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>8279</b>	<b>7357</b>	<b>16318</b>	<b>88.9</b>
<b>Central federal district</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>3746</b>	<b>3753</b>	<b>7705</b>	<b>100.2</b>
Kaluga region	33	1747	1816	<b>3596</b>	103.9
Kursk region	—	—	108	<b>108</b>	—
Lipetsk region	64	1466	1335	<b>2865</b>	91.1
Tambov region	109	206	173	<b>488</b>	84.0
Tver region	—	327	321	<b>648</b>	98.2
<b>Northwestern federal district</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>3717</b>	<b>2304</b>	<b>6434</b>	<b>62.0</b>
Kaliningrad region	413	3717	2304	<b>6434</b>	62.0
<b>Volga federal district</b>	—	—	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	—
Penza region	—	—	23	<b>23</b>	—
<b>Urals federal district</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>61.7</b>
Tyumen region	4	253	156	<b>413</b>	61.7
<b>Siberian federal district</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>1018</b>	<b>1452</b>	<b>265.8</b>
Krasnoyarsk Territory	9	293	473	<b>775</b>	161.4
Irkutsk region	42	90	120	<b>252</b>	133.3
Novosibirsk region	—	—	414	<b>414</b>	—
Omsk region	—	—	11	<b>11</b>	—
<b>Far Eastern federal district</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>57.2</b>
Sakha republic (Yakutia)	—	—	—	—	—
Primorye territory	—	63	41	<b>104</b>	65.1
Khabarovsk territory	4	71	43	<b>118</b>	60.6
Amur region	4	46	19	<b>69</b>	41.3

\* Including family members of State programme participants.

Source: [2].

The analysis of the table shows that the Programme has come to a standstill and one can hardly expect any impressive results. It was launched with a considerable delay; after 2007, repatriation was almost non-existent. That year was called a preparatory one. In effect, the Programme started to function in 2008. Although, in 2007, the target figures were reduced (down to 85,000 people by 2008, 110,000 by 2009, in view of the programme implementation results, they require further reduction. As the table shows, a considerable increase in the number of participants (including their family members) in the second year after the Programme adoption from 682 people in 2007 to 8,300 people in 2008, dropped by 11 points in 2009 in comparison to the previous year. A faint hope for an increase in the number of repatriates came to the Programme from Siberia, where this number grew more than by 2.5 times. But it is explained by the active settlement in the Novosibirsk region in 2009 (414 arrivals), where none had wanted to move before. The Siberian Federal district just equalled its indicators; its share in the number of repatriates does not exceed the national average (2.5% and 2.6% respectively).

In the other federal districts, except the Central one, where the number of participants remained at the same level thanks to the successful immigrant policy of the Kaluga district, the number of compatriots participating in the Programme decreased dramatically over the last year. And we can hardly count on its significant growth in the future.

### The drawbacks of the Programme

1. One of the drawbacks of the Programme is that it covers a limited number of regions. The initial number — 12 — is obviously insufficient. So, almost 80% of the compatriots who refused to participate in the State programme justified their decision by referring to the lack of opportunity to move to the region they are interested in, since it is not included in the State programme. Thus, the Federal migration service of Russia is working on extending the list of regions of destination within the Programme. To date, the Voronezh, Kursk, Nizhny Novgorod, Penza, Kurgan, Kemerovo, and Omsk regions have joined the Programme. Thus, the State programme is being implemented in 19 constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Almost 40 regions — approximately a half of Russian constituent entities — have applied for participation in the Programme.

2. Repatriates have to stay for two years in the region of destination. They can leave for another region participating in the Programme, but, in this case, they lose monetary compensation. Today, the preparation of a new version of the State programme is underway, which should increase its efficacy and the attractiveness of Russia for repatriates and create more comfortable conditions for them. The issue of free movement of repatriates regardless of the region of destination is being discussed too.

3. The problems of social adaptation of the repatriates, first of all, the housing issues, have not been solved yet. Most repatriates are either renting

accommodation or staying at temporary residence centres, which they can enjoy for not more than two years. It is assumed, that two years are enough to buy accommodation or receive a mortgage loan. But 90% of repatriates arriving from the CIS countries cannot afford this even within a longer period. The mechanism of housing loans, which proved to be successful in 1997—2002, is dysfunctional today.

4. All resettlement problems (housing, registration, and citizenship) rest with the regions of destinations and the role of the federal centre is reduced to covering travelling costs, luggage fees, and removal expenses (even though does not happen everywhere). There have also been cases of fraud and abuse of power. Moreover, migrants often find themselves in a better position than the local population, which is inadmissible and leads to intolerance in society.

5. The existing registration mechanism creates groundless problems for repatriates with acquiring citizenship. On the one hand, according to the new legislation, repatriates can enjoy the simplified citizenship acquisition procedure in the framework of the Programme. At the same time, as before, they enter the vicious circle, when citizenship was not granted without registration, and registration was not granted without citizenship. The law on citizenship stipulates that the simplified citizenship acquisition is available for those who are "registered at the place of residence". In effects, it boils down to the notorious "propiska" system, which is now called 'residence registration', though retaining its servile nature: a person should be firmly bound to a certain place. It means, as L.I. Grafova, a member of the Governmental commission for migration policy, put it, that "a repatriate, who does not have a place of residence, is expected to be registered at the place of residence". There is a need for a new registration mechanism. Repatriation cannot take place only in certain regions. It is the problems of registration at the place of residence, which is the most acute for repatriates and inevitably leads to the discrediting of the Programme.

6. The question of decreasing the tax rate for companies employing the Programme participants and their family members, who do not have Russian citizenship, down to 13% has not been settled yet.

### **The improvement of the State programme implementation mechanism**

The analysis of the State programme implementation conducted by the Federal migration service of Russia in 2009 indicates the insufficiency of the efforts taken by the authorised executive bodies of constituent entities of the Russian Federation in order to achieve necessary results in increasing the efficiency of State programme implementation, which does not contribute to solving the problems set in the document.

The first state migration policy, which was assigned an individual budget line, was approved in 1994. Unfortunately, one cannot call it successful. Shortly, it turned out that Russia was not ready to fulfil and financially support the assumed obligations, first of all, to refugees and displaced

persons. The Russian migration policy of the 1990s, unfortunately, did not facilitate the adaptation of immigrants from the CIS countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, approximately 11 mln migrants arrived in Russia from the CIS countries and the Baltics. In 1992—2003, around 2 mln people applied for the status of a displaced person (refugee), more than 1.6 mln people were granted it. According to the Federal Migration Service of Russia, actual support was provided to 500,000 people, mostly, through long-term interest-free repayable loans for purchasing or building a home.

Our compatriots were promised accommodation with all necessary documents. But only 10% of the interviews repatriates were provided with it. Almost all respondents, who participated in our surveys<sup>1</sup>, were living either in hostels or derelict properties (barracks, sheds, trailers). Only a few were lucky to be granted flats in the houses built by the Federal migration service for displaced persons; however this accommodation is temporary. The catch is that, even if immigrants were granted accommodation, they did not have an opportunity to formalise their rights to it.

In 1997, a new version of the Law on refugees, within which state guarantees were significantly limited in comparison to the requirements of the UN Convention of 1951, which especially concerned the adaptation of migrants. At the same time, the grounds for granting the refugee status were narrowed down, the procedures complicated, the development of bylaws delayed for up to two years. In effect, Russia decided for granting the refugee status in limited quantities, which can be proven by the following: in 1997, 5751 people were granted the refugee status, in 1998, only 510.

As a result of the implementation of Federal migration programme of 1997, in 1998—2000, in the conditions of economic crisis, 17.2 thousand displaced persons were granted accommodation, 63,300 received long-term loans for purchasing a home, 345,000 were entitled to an allowance, 6,000 received medical and psychological rehabilitation; 92 temporary residence centres were established to house 3,500 people; support was provided for the establishment of 24 areas of compact settlement.

However, the state could only partially keep its promises to repatriates. For example, only 6% were granted accommodation. It seems that Russia was late with the Repatriation programme. Those willing to move to the RF for permanent residence already left, most of those who stayed adapted. And the situation in the CIS countries changed as well. Many of them are developing more rapidly than Russia; qualified specialists are in demand everywhere. Today, Russians from the ex-Soviet space do not aspire to rush from their settled lives into the unknown. First of all, the removal allowance does not cover the substantial resettlement costs; secondly, there are serious housing problems. And those who want to move do not act without thinking — first, they conduct reconnaissance. And that what they see in Russian does not give rise to hopes. Thus, many migrants opt for the temporary labour migration instead of permanent residence.

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<sup>1</sup> The author carried out the surveys in 2002—2003 among repatriates coming from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, and the Baltics in a number of regions of the Central and Volga federal regions.



If the Programme had been adopted 10—15 years ago, in the first years after the collapse of the USSR, it would have alleviated substantially the hasty repatriation to Russia. Then, millions of compatriots returned to Russia — without any programmes and even circumventing the counteraction of Russian — local and sometimes federal — authorities. But now, the period of mass return of compatriots is in the past, and it is hardly reasonable to expect, as it is stipulated in the Concept of demographic policy, that until 2016, they would significantly contribute to the annual net migration rate in Russia at the level of 200,000 people.

The main reasons for slow repatriation is both the imperfection of information and legislative frameworks and the lack of repatriation aspirations among compatriots. The number of Russians, who stayed in the CIS, — the target group of the Programme — is estimated by experts at 4 mln people, which is obviously not sufficient to meet Russia's need for immigrants. But even in order to attract the existing resource, the inconsistency in migration policy, which is characteristic of Russia, should be resolved. Russia should fulfil the assumed obligations to displaced persons. And, under no circumstances, the country should attract new immigrants without taking into account such experience.

The number of compatriots willing to return to Russia is modest and decreasing every year. Most of them live in Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. As one can conclude on the basis of survey results, the aspirations to move to Russia for permanent residence are not wide-spread even among Russians living there: in Ukraine, Belarus, and even Kazakhstan, Russian population does not consider removal.

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