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ZOIS REPORT

THE POLITICAL DIVERSITY OF THE NEW MIGRATION FROM RUSSIA SINCE FEBRUARY 2022

Félix Krawatzek and Gwendolyn Sasse



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Summary

While estimates vary, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted approximately 800,000 to 900,000 Russian citizens to leave their country. Two distinct waves of migration from Russia have been identified: the first in the spring and summer of 2022, the second after the announcement of a partial mobilisation in September 2022. A significant number of Russian migrants have since returned to Russia, and it is estimated that 650,000 remain abroad.

This report focuses on five of the most important destination countries for new Russian migration: Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. We conducted face-to-face interviews with around 4,300 Russian citizens across the five countries in the summer of 2023. The aim was to get a clearer sense of their political attitudes and determine whether different countries were popular with particular categories of migrants. For each of the five countries, we can demonstrate a correlation between the migrants' socio-demographic profile and their political views, in particular their position on Russia's war against Ukraine. These are our main findings:

- Migrants who left Russia since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 represent a highly heterogeneous group within and across the host countries. They differ strongly in their views on Russian politics and Russia’s war against Ukraine and in their political behaviour and social values. Given this diversity, it seems unlikely that the migrants will unite around a new overarching idea of Russians abroad. A shared sense of identity may, however, emerge linked to specific locations and experiences.
- Different countries seem to attract specific socio-economic segments, with marked differences in the migrants’ age, level of education, employment sector, and previous place of residence in Russia. Our samples in Armenia and Georgia pick up a younger, highly educated, urban segment with a large number of employees from the IT sector. The samples in Kyrgyzstan and Turkey are much more diverse, and the sample in Kazakhstan includes migrants with lower levels of education and a large share of people working in the construction and trade sectors.
- Across the five countries, the new Russian migrants cannot be thought of as an opposition-in-exile in the making. Armenia and Georgia emerge as the countries in our sample where a significant share of Russian migrants reports oppositional views and previous experience of political mobilisation in Russia. However, the societal and political context in Georgia, where Russians are viewed with suspicion, limits their scope for local or transnational political action. For the time being, this atmosphere seems to be having a demobilising effect. By contrast, Armenia currently appears to be a more conducive setting for political actions directed at Russia.
- Sizeable shares of the migrant population in Turkey and Kazakhstan are broadly aligned with the political ideas propagated by the Kremlin, whereas the data from Kyrgyzstan suggest significant diversity and the potential for criticism of Russian politics.
- Russian migrants are a key target of the Kremlin’s propaganda and many are still immersed in the Russian media environment. Under these circumstances it would be wise to invest more in alternative Russian-language media and support efforts to forge connections between migrants in different countries.

Introduction

Wars have been one of the main drivers of mass migration throughout human history.¹ Russia's war against Ukraine has led to millions of people leaving their homes—in Ukraine and Russia. Even though the numbers are hard to pin down, the total number of Russians who left their home country since February 2022 was estimated to be over 800,000 in July 2023.² The number of Russians who remain abroad is probably lower at this point and estimated to be somewhere in the region of 650,000.³ It is a group that remains in motion: some have already moved on from their initial host country, while others have not made up their minds about how long they will stay in the receiving societies, where conditions are sometimes challenging. OutRush data from the summer of 2022 suggested that around 15 per cent of those who fled Russia after February 2022 had already returned before the partial mobilisation was announced in September 2022.⁴

Even for a country the size of Russia, the loss of these citizens leaves a significant dent in the labour market.

Even for a country the size of Russia, with a working population of around 73 million, the loss of these citizens leaves a significant dent in the labour market. All the more so since educated, young urbanites account for a disproportionately high share of the migrants. They further diminish an active population that was already shrinking due to the war mobilisation. The Russian unemployment rate has reached record low levels, falling to below 3 per cent in early 2024.⁵ With men in particular missing from the economy, the professional profiles of men and women have significantly changed over the last two years.⁶

In the first months after the start of the invasion, the share of young, educated, urban and opposition-minded individuals who left the country, among them journalists, academics, and activists, was particularly high.⁷ There is a tendency to see this 'group' as a potential opposition-in-exile.⁸ However, there is also evidence of migrants, including Russian migrants in Western societies, who partially integrate while maintaining close links to the home country or even expressing pro-Kremlin attitudes while abroad.⁹ In many

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- 1 The authors are grateful for the research assistance provided by Varvara Ilyina, Macha Gharbi and Alice Lackner. We would also like to acknowledge the comments provided by Tsypylma Darieva, Emil Kamalov and Dmitry Rudenkin, which helped to improve the report significantly.
 - 2 This number is based on a comparative assessment by RE:RUSSIA in July 2023: 'Escape from War: New Data Puts the Number of Russians Who Have Left at More than 800,000 People', 28 July 2023, <https://re-russia.net/en/review/347/>.
 - 3 'Russia's 650,000 Wartime Emigres', 19 July 2024, <https://en.thebell.io/russias-650-000-wartime-emigres/>.
 - 4 'Six Months in Exile: A New Life of Russian Emigrants', 20 May 2023, <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/ejn2c>. The number is heavily disputed and politicised, including in the Russian state narrative. Dmitry Trenin recently claimed that two thirds of Russians have returned: 'A massive transformation is taking place in Russia, and the West is blind to it', 13 May 2024, <https://www.rt.com/russia/597346-massive-transformation-is-taking-place-in-russia/>.
 - 5 'Russia Unemployment Rate', 2024, <https://tradingeconomics.com/russia/unemployment-rate#:~:text=Unemployment%20Rate%20in%20Russia%20decreased,percent%20in%20March%20of%202024>.
 - 6 'Russia has Too Few Workers', 24 March 2024, <https://en.thebell.io/russia-has-too-few-workers/>.
 - 7 Kamalov et al., 'Russia's 2022 Anti-war Exodus: The Attitudes and Expectations of Russian Migrants', 6 September 2022, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/russias-2022-anti-war-exodus-the-attitudes-and-expectations-of-russian-migrants/>.
 - 8 Kirill Shamiev and Ksenia Luchenko, 'Life in Exile: A New Approach to Russian Democrats in Europe', 14 March 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/life-in-exile-a-new-approach-to-russian-democrats-in-europe/>.
 - 9 Tatiana Golova and Liliia Sablina, 'The Pro-war Mobilisation of Germany's Russian-speaking Communities', ZOIS Spotlight 20/2023, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/the-pro-war-mobilisation-of-germanys-russian-speaking-communities>.

host societies, the new Russian migrants are but the latest of several waves of migration. This can facilitate integration, but it can also lead to segregation or tensions within the growing and increasingly complex migrant communities.

The new Russian migrants find themselves in a highly politicised setting: some of them are engaged in anti-Russian or anti-war activism,¹⁰ others are openly pro-Kremlin, and many are choosing to be silent. The Russian state sees them through the lens of ‘Russkii mir’ as both an ally or channel for propaganda and disinformation campaigns, but also as further brain drain and outright traitors. Any ‘offloading’ of political opposition is, of course, a welcome side effect. Western governments regard them as a source of information on the increasingly closed-off Russian state and society, but also as a conduit for Russian disinformation and hence a domestic security risk. Host governments and societies in Central Asia or the Baltic states tend to view the Russian migrants with suspicion, in particular in connection with their own established Russian or Russian-speaking populations. In the receiving societies examined here, the unexpected inflow of economically powerful newcomers has had a significant impact on the local economy, prompting soaring inflation, particularly in the housing market but also in the price of basic commodities. Coupled with long-held animosity towards Russia, especially in Georgian society, this makes a smooth integration of the new Russian migrants unlikely in their host societies.

Some migrants are engaged in anti-war activism, others are openly pro-Kremlin, and many are choosing to be silent.

In the absence of detailed data on the socio-demographic profile and political attitudes of the new Russian migrants, it is impossible to assess the implications of this migration wave. To our knowledge, our cross-country face-to-face survey of recent Russian migrants in five countries is the only one of its kind to date. Our ZOiS survey was fielded in the summer of 2023 among about 4,300 respondents across the five most important reception countries for new migration from Russia: nearly 1,000 respondents in Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey, respectively, and upwards of 600 respondents each in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. For comparison, the group also includes a share of representatives of the older Russian communities in the host countries.

Methodological considerations

Surveying migrants is always challenging, as they are usually not recorded in one register that can be used as a socio-demographic baseline for sampling. The main recruitment paths for migrants therefore concentrate on particular settings where they gather or try to reach them via social media. Both inevitably introduce biases to be aware of when contextualising the data. Such methodological challenges are amplified in the context of war, repression and very recent migration. It is thus important to be transparent about unavoidable methodological shortcomings, to interpret the data responsibly and to consider and communicate potential distortions in the data.

¹⁰ Tsypylma Darieva, Tatiana Golova and Daria Skibo, ‘Russian Migrants in Georgia and Germany: Activism in the Context of Russia’s War against Ukraine’, ZOiS Report 3/2023, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-report/russian-migrants-in-georgia-and-germany-activism-in-the-context-of-russias-war-against-ukraine>.

Despite the methodological challenges, migrants—and especially large numbers of migrants—are a critical window onto developments in receiving and sending societies. It is with this conviction that we generated our survey data between June and August 2023. In order to use the data where it is strongest, this report puts an emphasis on constellations of factors in order to identify, for instance, the ‘typical’ profile of a respondent who opposed or supported the war¹¹ or who was politically active in the host country. Less emphasis is placed on the total distribution, for instance, of support or opposition to the war in Ukraine. Throughout the text we will refer to broader trends in the data but only rarely to precise percentages so as not to prematurely suggest clear-cut individual results.¹²

Two methodological challenges are particularly virulent in this research:

First, a random and representative recruitment of respondents is impossible in the absence of reliable socio-demographic information about the settlement patterns of this recent group of migrants, both within and across their host countries. All samples therefore have to rely on a combination of non-probability convenience and chain-referral sampling methods. Migrant samples thus include respondents who were convenient to reach, for instance because they were at physical locations typically frequented by Russian migrants or used social media channels aimed at Russian migrants. We also recruited based on recommendations from other respondents (snowballing). This means that not every individual from the overall migrant population had an equal chance of being selected into the sample.

This ZOiS Report relies on face-to-face surveys, which provide a potentially more diverse sample than those exclusively based on online recruitment. The precise sampling method ultimately had to be adapted to the different country settings. This means that, strictly speaking, direct comparisons between the data across the five countries are not possible. Armenia, Georgia and Turkey are, however, more comparable. For example, the street intercept sampling, where potential respondents are approached on the street and interviewed on the spot, worked best in those countries. It proved, however, more difficult in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and in these cases a two-step chain referral sample had to be added to reach a decent sample size. In the two-stage referral, each interviewee was asked to provide contacts for another interviewee (first step) who was then contacted to provide us with a potential interviewee contact (second step).

Our data reflect the migration history between Russia and the countries examined in this report, including varying shares of Russian citizens who settled in those countries before 2022. In our analysis we differentiate between ‘new’ and ‘old’ migrants and report any substantive differences between them.

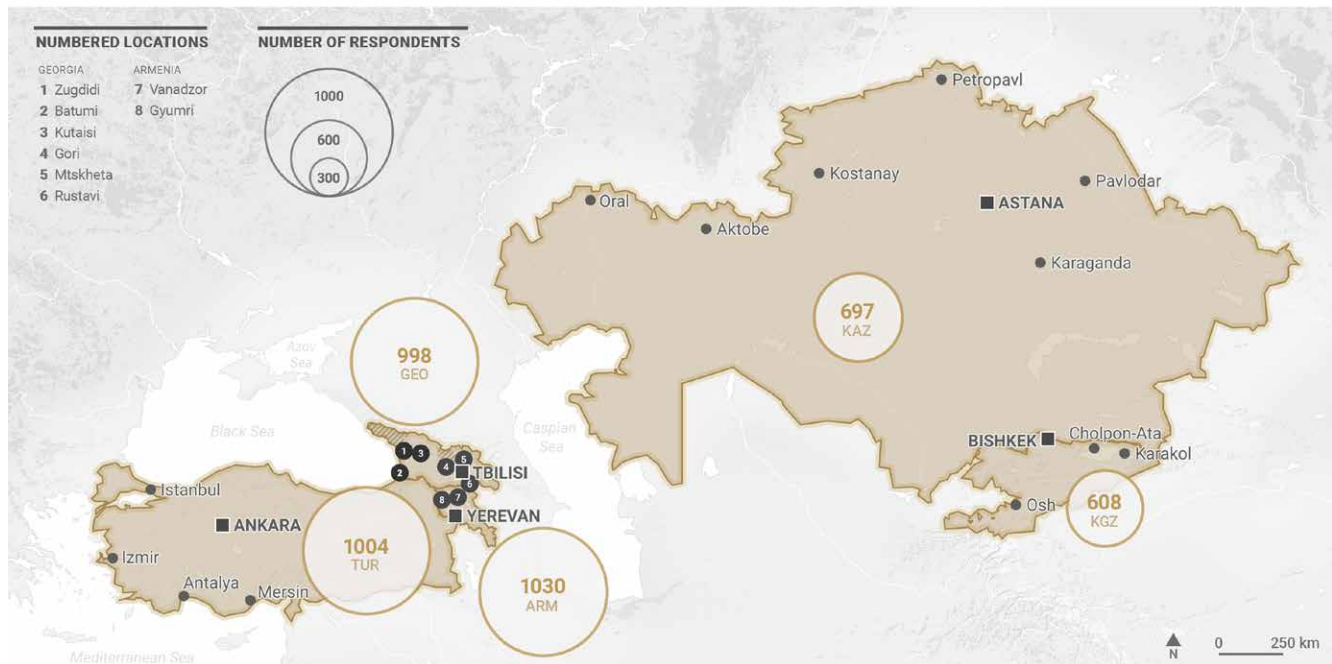
Second, in the uncertain context of war and migration, survey respondents may be more hesitant to take part or answer openly when asked about their

11 The official Russian term ‘special military operation’ was used in the surveys in order to avoid sending political signals to the respondents.

12 See also the discussion on this topic in Félix Krawatzek, George Soroka and Isabelle DeSisto, ‘Russians in the South Caucasus and the War in Ukraine’, ZOiS Report 2/2023, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-report/russians-in-the-south-caucasus-political-attitudes-and-the-war-in-ukraine>.

MAP 1

Numbers of respondents in each of the five surveyed countries



Source: Adapted from OpenStreetMap

intentions, perceptions or social and political attitudes. Survey research always grapples with social desirability biases, i.e. the psychological mechanism that may skew respondents' answers towards what they think the interviewer expects or wants to hear. In repressive or uncertain settings, this type of bias or reluctance to answer may increase. There are further reasons for caution: in a situation where Russian security agents have infiltrated Russian communities abroad and some local authorities are seen to cooperate with Russian authorities, respondents may be afraid of putting themselves or family members or friends in danger.¹³

The surveys were fielded in cities with a high concentration of Russians, including all five capitals as well as provincial hubs. ► MAP 1 In Armenia we expanded the fieldwork to Gyumri and Vanadzor; in Georgia to Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Mtskheta, Zugdidi and Gori; in Turkey to Antalya, Istanbul, Izmir and Mersin; in Kazakhstan to Astana, Aktobe, Karaganda, Pavlodar, Oral, Kostanay and Petropavl; and in Kyrgyzstan to Osh, Karakol and Cholpon-Ata.

Under challenging circumstances for research, we adopted a methodologically sound approach to obtain face-to-face survey data and draw up a baseline for trends in different host countries. We contextualise our data with reference to other available data and country-specific reports. Cross-validation with other existing work is particularly important. We therefore

13 At the end of each interview, the interviewers were asked to judge how comfortable a respondent felt when taking the survey. In both Georgia and Armenia respondents felt mostly or absolutely comfortable, while in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey around one respondent in ten reported feeling a little uncomfortable.

compare some of our findings with other survey projects, in particular the survey projects realised by the OutRush project.¹⁴

Migrant profiles across the sample

The demographic profile of the respondents recruited in each of the five countries shows both similarities and differences. ► **TABLE 1** Across all five countries, the migrants in the sample are much younger than the average Russian, particularly so in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, where the migrants had an average age of 32 compared to the Russian average of 39 years. Male respondents predominate in our samples in Armenia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, whereas women are slightly overrepresented in Kazakhstan and Turkey, also among those who already left before 2022. The gender discrepancy suggests that the military mobilisation in Russia was a stronger

TABLE 1
Socio-demographic characteristics of the samples compared to the overall Russian population

	ARMENIA	GEORGIA	TURKEY	KAZAKHSTAN	KYRGYZSTAN	RUSSIA (2010 census data)	
Number of respondents	1,030	998	1,004	697	608		
Average age	32	36	35	36	32	39	
Share of males	56 %	56 %	37 %	42 %	62 %	46 %	
Settlement size	City with population > 1 million	83 %	88 %	73 %	65 %	73 %	20 %
	City of 500k to 1 million inhabitants	5 %	5 %	15 %	20 %	14 %	11 %
	City of 250k to 500k inhabitants	6 %	4 %	5 %	7 %	6 %	9 %
	City of 100k to 250k inhabitants	3 %	2 %	5 %	4 %	4 %	10 %
	Settlement with a population < 100k	3 %	1 %	2 %	4 %	4 %	51 %
Place of residence	Moscow	46 %	58 %	33 %	23 %	41 %	8 %
	St. Petersburg	21 %	20 %	13 %	18 %	16 %	3 %
Those who self-identify with the titular nationality	19 %	6 %	0 %	11 %	17 %		
Share of pre-2022 Russian migrants in the sample	10 %	8 %	19 %	17 %	7 %		

Source: Data on the 2010 Census of the Russian Federation: <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0491/perep01.php>, https://gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm.

14 Outrush.io is a research initiative based at the European University Institute that has generated over 10,000 responses since February 2022 through online social media recruitment, see <https://outrush.io/eng#results>. For analysis of the early emigration in 2022, see also Exodus 22, a project supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation: <https://exodus22team.wordpress.com/2023/03/07/pressrelease-eng/>. See also Vladimir Inozemtsev, 'The Exodus of the Century: A New Wave of Russian Emigration', July 2023, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_inozemtsev_exodus_july_2023.pdf and Dmitry Gudkov et al., 'The New Russian Diaspora: Europe's Challenge and Opportunity', June 2024, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_gudkov_inozemtsev_nekrasov_new_russian_diaspora_2024.pdf.

motivation to leave for migrants in some of the countries covered. Respondents are also significantly more likely to come from an urban context than the average person in Russia. This trend is particularly pronounced in Armenia and Georgia, where the highest shares of people come from a city with more than one million inhabitants. This is also the most common background of our respondents in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey, although in those countries a large share also comes from cities with a population of between 500,000 and 1 million.

In all of the countries examined, around one third of respondents mentioned that they had children and nearly half were married. A closer examination of the socio-economic profiles of respondents across the five countries reveals that in Armenia and Georgia, there is a particularly high share of younger Russians, many of whom work in the IT sector and come from Moscow and St. Petersburg. The share of those who have completed higher education is high in both countries, particularly when compared to Russian migrants in Kazakhstan. Indeed, the Russian migrants in our sample in Kazakhstan mainly come from larger provincial cities, have lower levels of education on average and tend to work primarily in the construction and trade sectors. In Kyrgyzstan, the socio-economic profile of Russian migrants is diverse, with a very high share working in the IT sector. Respondents in Kyrgyzstan are also among the youngest on average in our sample. In Turkey, we find the most variation not only in terms of the migrants' ages, but also their employment sectors and reported reasons for emigration. The Turkish sample also had the highest share of respondents who were in full-time education at the time of the interview.

Spotlights on hubs of Russian migration

Armenia: A welcoming context

According to official estimates, there are a little over 100,000 Russians in Armenia.¹⁵ On average, the respondents in our sample are highly educated, were in full-time employment before leaving Russia, and in many cases lived in Moscow and St. Petersburg before emigrating. The largest share of respondents work in the IT sector (over 40 per cent), followed by individuals working in the arts and entertainment industry (about 15 per cent). Armenia continues to be a country that is easy to access, since Russians can enter it without an international passport and once registered they can extend their stay beyond the 180 visa-free days in the country.

When asked about their protest experience back in Russia before 2022, respondents in Armenia are highly likely to indicate that they have prior

¹⁵ It should be noted that these numbers are uncertain. The number of more than 100,000 migrants was cited by the Armenian Minister for Economic Affairs Vahan Kerobyan in March 2023: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/characters/2023/03/16/966716-rossiya-i-armeniya-otkazalis-ot-raschetov-v-dollarah-i-evro>. Other sources arrive at markedly lower numbers (upwards of 60,000), see 'Among Citizens of Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus Living in Armenia', July 2023, https://armenia.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/Foreign_ASSESSMENT_25%20August.pdf and 'Statistical Yearbook of Armenia', 2023, <https://armstat.am/file/doc/99541178.pdf>.

A majority of Russians in Armenia believe that Russians abroad should protest against their government.

protest experience: in our sample this is the case for more than one third of respondents.¹⁶ There is a clear correlation between reported past protest experience and age and gender: a typical person reporting protest experience in Russia is likely to be 25 to 49 years old and male. Moreover, those indicating protest experience are likely to have arrived in Armenia with friends, they are well integrated into Russian migrant networks in Armenia, and they do not work in the IT sector. The men in our Armenian sample are also more likely to engage in political discussions. In addition, a majority of the Russians in Armenia believe that Russians abroad should protest against their government, citing a variety of reasons, most frequently the symbolic importance of such protests as an international signal. A general sense of responsibility for Russia's political future is prevalent among the respondents in Armenia (over a third indicates this feeling), more than in the other surveyed countries.

Overall, the social and political context in Armenia is described as welcoming. The overwhelming majority of respondents reports being treated in a friendly and respectful manner by both the Armenian authorities and citizens they interact with, despite the significant repercussions that the arrival of Russians has had for the local housing market in particular.¹⁷ This may explain why many respondents are considering at least a medium-term stay in Armenia, with over a third expecting to stay for one to three years and about a fifth for longer than three years.

The geopolitical context may, however, increasingly interfere with these plans and perceptions. On 6 March 2022, shortly after Armenia suspended its cooperation with the Russia-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Armenian government called on Moscow to pull its border guards from Armenia's international airport. The future of the military base in Gyumri with about 4,000 Russian soldiers is also uncertain.¹⁸ In the past, Armenian governments have been careful not to develop closer relations with the EU at the expense of a security-based relationship with Russia. Yet, since Azerbaijan militarily reclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 in the absence of any Russian support for the Armenian side, Armenia's leadership and society will find it harder to position themselves between Russia and the EU. For the time being, however, scepticism towards Russia has not turned into a hostile attitude towards Russians.

In sum, the new Russian migrants based in Armenia have many of the prerequisites for political mobilisation, but the activation of this hub is likely to be shaped by Armenia's geopolitical positioning.

16 For a comparison of protest participation in Russia and place of residence, see also p. 14 in Krawatzek et al., ZOiS Report 2 / 2023, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/publikationen/zois-report/russians-in-the-south-caucasus-political-attitudes-and-the-war-in-ukraine>.

17 'How the Influx of Russian Citizens has Affected the Armenian Real Estate Market', 9 January 2024, <https://jam-news.net/impact-of-russians-moving/>.

18 Paul Goble, 'Moscow Fearful of Losing its Military Bases in Armenia and Tajikistan', 2 May 2024, <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-fearful-of-losing-its-military-bases-in-armenia-and-tajikistan/>.

Georgia: A de-mobilising socio-political context

According to official statistics there are around 74,000 Russians in Georgia.¹⁹ The country maintains a relatively liberal visa regime for Russians, who can enter the country without a visa and stay there for 365 days. If a person leaves Georgia temporarily for another country, they may then immediately re-enter the country for another 365 days. While new Russian migrants in Armenia and Georgia share similarities in terms of their socio-demographic profile and political attitudes, the socio-political context in Georgia is significantly more hostile. A Friedrich Ebert Foundation study on youth in Georgia shows the degree of suspicion Russians encounter in Georgian society—in their surveys, conducted in June 2022 among young people aged 14 to 29, ‘a person from Russia’ is among the categories of people whom young Georgians would most like to deny entry into their country, on a level similar to ‘drug addict’ and ‘homosexual’.²⁰ The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 and the de-facto loss of control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia have left a deep mark on Georgian politics and society. This limits the new migrants’ scope for societal integration or joint protests with like-minded Georgians against the Russian authorities.

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 has left a deep mark on Georgian politics and society.

A high share of respondents reported protest experience before 2022 (over 20 per cent), but few indicated that they had engaged in the manifold forms of social or political activism we listed in the survey since their arrival in Georgia.²¹ There is strong variation in terms of the levels of politicisation we can identify in the sample, even though more than 80 per cent of respondents in Georgia closely follow the news about the war in Ukraine. Female respondents are more likely to have stopped following the news. A clear majority of the respondents have a negative view of the Russian president and the Russian army. There is no doubt in their minds about who is responsible for the war: two thirds blame Russia, irrespective of whether they arrived in Georgia before or after February 2022.

Interestingly, Russians in Georgia, when compared to their counterparts in Armenia, seem to be less frequently in touch with relatives and friends in Russia. Indeed, more than 10 percent said they were no longer in contact with anybody in Russia. Respondents in the 25 to 49 age group are most likely to be in touch with people in Russia, whereas those who left Russia with friends or other members of their family are most likely to have cut ties with their home country. Male respondents and those aged 25 to 34 are more likely to know others who migrated from Russia to Georgia.

In the context of palpable anti-Russian attitudes in Georgia, the most frequent response to the question of how long respondents intend to stay in the country is one to three years (about one third), with about a fifth considering a three- to six-month stay or a stay of over three years. In a deeply polarised

19 See information available in ‘Number of Population’, 1 January 2023, <https://www.geostat.ge/media/53004/Number-of-Population-as-of-January-1%2C-2023.pdf> as well as ‘Number of Population’, 1 January 2024, <https://www.geostat.ge/media/61879/Number-of-Population-as-of-January-1%2C-2024.pdf>.

20 ‘Youth Study Generation of Independent Georgia: In between Hopes and Uncertainties’, 2023, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/20611.pdf>, p. 76.

21 For insights into the network of political activists in Georgia, see Darieva and Golova, ZOIS Report 3/2023, https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/3-Publikationen/ZOIS_Reports/2023/ZOIS_Report_3_2023.pdf.

A significant share of the new Russian migrants are on the same political wavelength as the Georgian protesters, but current Georgian-Russian relations do not allow for joint actions.

society, the current Georgian government has pursued more Russia-friendly policies, including the adoption of a Russia-inspired ‘foreign agent’ law, triggering large-scale protests in Georgia. Despite this politicised setting and the fact that a significant share of the new Russian migrants are on the same political wavelength as the Georgian protesters, the wider context of Georgian-Russian relations does not currently allow for joint actions. It therefore seems more likely that the politicisation of the new Russian migrants in Georgia will decrease as they seek an apolitical niche or consider moving on. It is conceivable that the experience of hostility or discrimination could also mobilise a shared group identity in the host society, but for the time being there is little indication of this type of politicisation.

Turkey: A hub for wealthy and politically diverse migrants

Turkey has attracted a very diverse set of Russian citizens, a group that is not completely unknown in the country due to marriage migration following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 2010s, up to 1,500 Russian women married into Turkish society annually.²² But this figure pales in comparison to the number of recently arrived Russians. According to official statistics, as of early 2024 around 180,000 Russian citizens had a residence permit in Turkey.²³ It is generally believed that Russians regard Turkey as a temporary hub thanks to the existing visa-free regime for onward travel to EU countries or elsewhere.²⁴ Nevertheless, a residence permit is required for stays beyond 60 days, which is a growing concern—a quarter of respondents report problems related to administrative matters or their legal status.

The Turkish sample is striking in that respondents report being well connected not only with other Russian migrants but also with friends and family members in Russia, with no difference in this regard between those who arrived before and after 2022. Typically, those who report that they were politically active in Russia are between 25 and 34 years of age and have strong links with other recent migrants in Turkey. By contrast, the middle-aged segment of the sample (35+) is significantly less connected to other migrants from Russia, even if they say that they generally follow political developments. Female respondents are most likely to stay in contact with friends and family back in Russia. It might be easier for them maintain these contacts given that they are much less likely to have protested before 2022 and also generally less inclined to engage in political activism or discussion.

The cities where our research was conducted include Istanbul and Antalya. Both cities show the extent to which infrastructure matters for migrants and their choices. In Istanbul, today’s new Russian migrants can build on post-Soviet transnational connections and established Russian communities, which offer them guidance on housing, the labour market and administrative matters. A sizeable share of our respondents in Istanbul (around 15%) work in the trade sector. The city has, moreover, attracted a younger demographic which is still in education and can avail of economic

22 Ayla Deniz and E. Murat Özgür. ‘Mixed Marriage and Transnational Marriage Migration in the Grip of Political Economy: Russian-Turkish Case’, *Turkish Studies* 22.3 (2021): 437–461, p. 438.

23 ‘İkamet izinleri’, 27 June 2024, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/ikamet-izinleri>.

24 Aysem Biriz Karaçay, ‘«New Wave» of Russian Migration to Türkiye’, *International Relations & International Law Journal* 104.4 (2023).

opportunities other locations in Turkey do not offer. Two age groups dominate among recently arrived Russians in Antalya: the very young (18–24) and the older generation (50+). The tourist resort is popular with wealthier migrants, and a very high share of the people we surveyed there work in the IT sector (47 per cent).

The diversity of political opinions found among Russians in Turkey is striking. Respondents in our sample are very divided on the question of which country is responsible for the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Around 40 per cent—mainly the youngest respondents (aged 18–24) and those who arrived after February 2022—put the blame on Russia. Around 60 per cent, mainly respondents aged 35 and older, blame Western institutions (NATO, EU) or countries (USA, Ukraine). Irrespective of what a person thinks about the outbreak of the war, it is remarkable that those who are well connected with other Russians in Turkey are particularly likely to have a clear opinion on the topic either way. Russian migrants in Turkey tend to have a negative view of Western institutions, while a sizeable share expresses positive views about the Russian president and the Russian army.

The diversity of political opinions found among Russians in Turkey is striking.

The repressive political context in Turkey is certainly not conducive to political mobilisation or a sense of political responsibility for developments in Russia and Ukraine. When asked about this, Russian citizens in Turkey are most likely to state that they do not feel responsible for Russia's political future (more than half), and an overwhelming majority of respondents think that Russians abroad should not protest against the war. Nevertheless, the few who do believe Russians abroad should protest are convinced that such political engagement can change Russian politics, a view rarely expressed in other countries. This seemingly contradictory finding points to the existence of a core group of Russian migrants in Turkey with the potential for political activism.

Kazakhstan: A somewhat familiar environment

Kazakhstan was also among the easily accessible destinations for new Russian migrants after February 2022. The visa regime initially in place allowed entry for up to 90 days and the visa 'clock' could be reset by exiting and re-entering the country. In view of the large inflow of Russian migrants, however, Kazakhstan changed this system in January 2023 by cancelling the simple re-entry option and making a temporary registration or more permanent residence permit obligatory after the initial 90-day period.²⁵ By early 2024, there were probably about 100,000 new Russian citizens in the country.²⁶

A legacy of Russian settler colonialism has shaped the reception conditions for the new migrants in Kazakhstan. Despite considerable out-migration to Russia after 1991, Russians still constituted around 15 per cent of the

25 'Kazakhstan Ends Unlimited Stay for Russians', 17 January 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/kazakhstan-ends-unlimited-stay-russians-2023-01-17/>.

26 'V Kazakhstane ostayutsya ne boleye 80 tysyach Rossiyan, v'yekhavshikh v 2022 godu', 12 February 2024, <https://www.lada.kz/kazakhstan-news/119371-v-kazahstane-ostayutsya-ne-bolee-80-tysyach-rossiyan-vehavshih-v-2022-godu.html>.

population in 2021 and are the country's biggest national minority.²⁷ Kazakh is the only state language, but Russian is an official language in communications with state authorities. The transnational networks between both countries are characterised by a high degree of mobility—albeit primarily towards Russia in the past. Around 11 per cent of the respondents in our sample identified as Kazakh.

In terms of socio-economic profile, the sample is dominated by individuals who work in construction or the trade sector. The new Russian migrants in Kazakhstan report having few connections to relatives and friends in Russia and to other newly arrived Russian migrants. Only about a third of respondents confirmed that they know other Russian migrants. While uncertainty or fear about answering questions like this may partially explain the low figure, it still indicates the absence of an active and visible wider network of Russian migrants.

The majority of new Russian migrants in Kazakhstan seem to be politically in line with the mainstream of Russian society. They have been socialised into the Russian state narrative and want to have as little to do with the war as possible. A clear majority does not feel responsible for Russia's political future and about two thirds do not see a need for Russians abroad to protest.²⁸ Respondents' views about the Russian president and the army are fairly positive, while they see the Ukrainian president or Western institutions such as NATO or the EU in a more negative light. Blame for the war is placed more on the US and Ukraine than on Russia.

Interestingly, many of the respondents arrived in Kazakhstan with a more medium- to long-term perspective: close to two thirds state that they plan to stay for more than three years—a higher share than in the other four countries. The dominant trajectory captured by the survey data is one of individuals settling in Kazakhstan with transferable job skills and no experience of or plans for social or political engagement. These plans do not seem to be affected by the fact that a clear majority of respondents reported being treated by locals and officials in an unfriendly manner.²⁹ Here, colonial patterns may reinforce an impression of unfriendliness on both sides—the Russian migrants might be picking up on the resentment of Kazakhs with knowledge or personal experience of discrimination against migrants from Central Asia in Russia. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the locals often perceive the new migrants as arrogant and unfriendly.

The majority of Russian migrants in Kazakhstan seem to be politically in line with the mainstream of Russian society.

27 Beate Eschment, 'Kazakh and/or Kazakhstani? The National Identity of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its Citizens', ZOIS Report 4/2020, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/publikationen/kazakh-and-or-kazakhstani-the-national-identity-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-and-its-citizens>.

28 Here one should take account of the impact on response behaviour of the climate of fear that results from cooperation between Kazakh and Russian security agents. See, for instance, 'Kazakh Police Detain Siberian Anti-war Activist at Russia's Request', 10 October 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/siberian-anti-war-activist-kidnapped-kazakhstan/32629834.html>.

29 The OutRush panel data revealed that a clear majority of Russian migrants fear being repressed by the Russian state even while they are abroad. This is another reason why they sometimes feel uncomfortable and avoid networks and engagement. OutRush found that Russian migrants in Kazakhstan were more afraid of repression by local authorities than their counterparts in the other four countries. See Ivetta Sergeeva and Emil Kamalov, 'A Year and a Half in Exile: Progress and Obstacles in the Integration of Russian Migrants', 15 January 2024, pp. 37–40, https://outrush.io/memo_january_2024.

Amidst uncertainty over Russia's influence in the wider region, Central Asian leaders initially took a cautiously neutral stance after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Over time, however, they have returned to pragmatic cooperation with Russia in view of their various economic and security dependencies. Russia is bound to remain a central partner for Kazakhstan in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, with Russia and China both cooperating and competing in the region.³⁰

Kyrgyzstan: A base for transnational Russians

Until the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia was one of the main destinations for labour migration from Kyrgyzstan. Even in 2022, financial remittances from Kyrgyz migrants in Russia accounted for about 30 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP. However, bilateral relations between the two countries are currently strained. The terrorist attack on Crocus City Hall in March 2024 has, for instance, led to an increase of xenophobia in Russia directed against Central Asian migrants, with Kyrgyz citizens being a particular target of a crackdown and increasing controls. Following the attack, the Kyrgyz foreign ministry urged its citizens to avoid unnecessary travel to Russia.³¹

In a dramatic reversal of previous migration trends, more than 170,000 Russian citizens registered in Kyrgyzstan in the first nine months of 2022 alone.³² Kyrgyzstan was open for Russian newcomers, adopting, for instance, special visa and tax regimes such as the 'digital nomad' programme, which was in place until December 2023.³³ Mirroring the empirical evidence from Kazakhstan, over two thirds of the respondents report encountering an unfriendly attitude in their interactions with locals. Yet unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan seems to be seen more as a transit hub, with fewer respondents reporting an intention to stay there in the long term. About a third envisages a stay of one to three years, while about 20 per cent plans to stay for longer than three years.

The socio-economic profile of the respondents is mixed: employees from the IT sector are the most prominent category (about 20 per cent), but a wide range of other sectors are also represented, from manual labour to the services sector. In contrast to their counterparts in Kazakhstan, about three quarters of respondents in Kyrgyzstan report that they know other Russian migrants in the host country and actively stay in touch with relatives and friends in Russia. This suggests either that they are more transnationally connected or more inclined to talk about these ties than Russian migrants in Kazakhstan. In particular older respondents (aged 50+) are likely to be in touch with family and friends in Russia. Reflecting a trend also found in other countries, those respondents who had participated in protests in Russia before 2022 are more likely to know others who left Russia after February 2022.

Kyrgyzstan seems to be seen more as a transit hub, with fewer respondents reporting an intention to stay there in the long term.

30 Kate Mallinson, 'Russia's Influence in Kazakhstan is Increasing Despite the War in Ukraine', 29 February 2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/02/russias-influence-kazakhstan-increasing-despite-war-ukraine>.

31 '«Rezhe vykhodim na ulitsu». Migranty iz Kyrgyzstana o proverkach posle terakta v «krokus», 3 April 2024, <https://www.centralasian.org/a/32889943.html>.

32 'Za vosem' mesyatsev 2022 goda v KP zaregistrovalos' boleye 170 tysyach Rossiyan', 27 September 2022, https://24.kg/obschestvo/246394_zavosem_mesyatsev_2022_goda_vkr_zaregistrovalos_bolee_170_tyisyach_rossiyan/.

33 'Status tsifrovogo kochevnika', <https://mineconom.gov.kg/ru/direct/385/395>.

Based on the survey data, Russians in Kyrgyzstan appear to be a politicised group, with a majority reporting protest experience in Russia and claiming to have followed developments in the war against Ukraine, at least initially. It is, however, unlikely that their political interest will find an outlet in a media landscape where Kyrgyz media are heavily targeted by Russian propaganda and Russian media also enjoy a reputational advantage over Western media.³⁴ When it comes to a sense of responsibility for Russia's political future, respondents are, however, divided: more than one third of them say they have never had such a sense of responsibility, while slightly less than one third claim that they do. One in five indicate that they used to feel responsible, but no longer do so. A similar share of respondents reports waning interest in political developments, especially the war in Ukraine.

Russian migrants in Kyrgyzstan are extremely diverse in terms of their political views. About half of the respondents blame Russia for the war, about 20 per cent the US and about 15 per cent Ukraine, with 15 per cent not responding to the question at all, possibly due to fear or uncertainty. Gender appears to be a factor in the question of who is to blame for the outbreak of the war: twenty per cent more male respondents blame Russia

Blame attribution for the war across all respondents

If we approach the data differently and look at the overall sample of new and old Russian migrants across the five countries, we get a stronger sense of the correlation between certain socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes. We also gain a clearer understanding of the differences between the countries and the extent to which this might be related to the composition of each sample.

The question of which country or actor is to blame for the outbreak of the war in Ukraine reveals where respondents stand politically. Across all countries, older respondents, particularly those aged 50 and over, are less likely to put the blame on Russia. The same is true of those who left Russia before February 2022. Indeed, these older Russian communities tend to be less critical of Russian politics in general. Across all five samples male respondents are more likely to blame Russia, as are those respondents who are employed in the IT sector.

In particular respondents in Kazakhstan tend to put the blame on Ukraine, with one in four choosing this response option. By contrast, less than 10 per cent of respondents in Turkey and Kyrgyzstan blame Ukraine, while the number of respondents who share this opinion in Armenia and Georgia is negligible. Age does not help when it comes to understanding who blames Ukraine. However, gender is again a significant factor here, with female respondents being more likely to attribute blame to Ukraine. Respondents who left Russia before February 2022 are also more likely to hold Ukraine responsible for the outbreak of the war. IT-sector employees are, however, less likely to put the blame on Ukraine.

Older respondents, particularly those aged 50 and over, are less likely to put the blame on Russia.

³⁴ 'Narratives and Perceptions of Russian Propaganda in Kyrgyzstan', July 2023, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/print-publications/russian-propaganda-kyrgyzstan/english>.

Western institutions and countries are blamed in particular by respondents in Kazakhstan (roughly one third) and Turkey (about half). In Kyrgyzstan, about one in five respondents blame either the USA or NATO, while in Armenia or Georgia only one out of 10 respondents do so. The tendency to hold Western countries (in particular the US) and institutions (NATO or EU) responsible for the war is highest among those aged 35 and older. Interestingly, this is also the age group that is most likely to follow the news about the war, although many who have stopped following those developments are likely to blame the West.

Conclusion

Our original face-to-face survey data from five important destination countries add up to a clearer picture of the predispositions, networks and behaviour of Russian migrants on a country-by-country basis. Overall, our data reveal a significant degree of diversity among the Russian migrants within and across the countries we surveyed.³⁵ Compared to the reference population in Russia, the new Russian migrants stand out in terms of their socio-economic characteristics, most strikingly their predominantly urban background but also higher levels of education. Our research clearly shows that the new Russian migrants are best not thought of as one group, and certainly not as one big liberal exodus. Rather, it is a set of individuals that might become increasingly apolitical—largely depending on conditions in the respective host country—or might already support or come to support the Kremlin's position. If a sense of group belonging develops in the future, it is most likely to be context-specific and possibly in response to perceived hostility in the host country.

The new Russian migrants are best not thought of as one group, and certainly not as one big liberal exodus.

Our data provide timely insights into migration dynamics that are also potentially relevant for future socio-political developments in the receiving societies and to some extent in Russia. The focus in this report lies on the constellations of socio-demographic factors that explain specific attitudes or behaviour with a view to identifying underlying typical profiles. Given the two different sampling techniques employed, we are not directly comparing the data from the five countries. Moreover, we focus on the key trends our data show rather than the actual values in percentages as the most honest way to present and discuss the results. In a politically sensitive context, the extent to which biases (e.g. sampling biases, non-responses, social desirability biases) affect the numbers is harder to judge, and we believe it is important to communicate these issues transparently. Despite these caveats, we remain confident that our data capture trends in each of the surveyed countries.

³⁵ The extent of this diversity diverges from the findings of OutRush, which in the summer 2023 wave of their online survey (wave three) found a high degree of homogeneity in the backgrounds of Russian migrants across countries. Methodological differences are likely to play a role in explaining some of these differences. See 'A Year and a Half in Exile: Progress and Obstacles in the Integration of Russian Migrants', February 2024, https://outrush.io/memo_january_2024.

In each of the countries analysed we tend to find typical profiles of migrants that differ significantly.

- In Kyrgyzstan, those who left Russia report being highly connected to other Russians and they have a sense of political responsibility for Russia's political future. However, Russian citizens are also divided in their degree of politicisation and the Kyrgyz context might not encourage them to find a political voice.
- In Kazakhstan, meanwhile, respondents' levels of political interest and engagement are generally rather low and their views are most closely aligned with the official Russian state narratives. This group seems deeply integrated into the Russian media landscape.
- Turkey has attracted a very diverse set of migrants both in terms of age and employment sector. Russians in Turkey are very divided in their views on the war against Ukraine and continue to maintain a dense transnational network with people back in Russia.
- In Georgia, the political and social context has had a demobilising effect on Russian citizens so far. While many in our sample bring previous experience of political mobilisation, the Georgian context currently makes it difficult to put this into practice. It is too early to tell whether mobilisation on the basis of perceived discrimination by the host society is possible.
- Lastly, the respondents in Armenia remain the most politically active after migration; this is also the youngest group in the sample.

Our data show that the context of this migration does not per se politicise migrants and that those who do arrive with oppositional views find themselves in country-specific settings that can make political mobilisation difficult. Thus, our data guard against simple assumptions about a liberal exodus and map the difficult context conditions for external measures to support political opposition outside of Russia or maintain connections between the migrants and Russia.

The Russian state is actively reaching out to its compatriots, and many of the migrants we surveyed continue to be exposed to a Russian media environment that stifles any impulse they might have to mobilise against the Kremlin. Against this background, Western governments could make more efforts to support alternative Russian-language media and community building among Russian migrants in different countries. Yet, as this report shows, these efforts may only bear fruit in some of the five host countries we examine.

PHOTO 1

Anti-war protest by Russian migrants in Yerevan, April 2022



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Authors

Félix Krawatzek and Gwendolyn Sasse

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Address

**Centre for East European and
International Studies (ZOiS) gGmbH**
Mohrenstraße 60
10117 Berlin
info@zois-berlin.de
www.zois-berlin.de

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The Russian bookshop and cultural venue Poltory
Komnaty (Room and a Half) in Istanbul with a graffito of
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