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**OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES**

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**DOES RUSSIA  
NEED AN INTERNAL  
MIGRATION  
POLICY?**

## Does Russia need an internal migration policy?

Attempts to design conceptual foundations of a migration policy have been undertaken in Russia before. Such a document is probably needed, first of all, to put an end to the dashing back and forth in the sphere of migration management. But it is international migration that such a document is required for in the first place, the part of it that governmental and public institutions may manage using the means that are characteristic of *migration* policy. Everything is more or less clear when it comes to external migration policy, especially considering the fact that the world has accumulated a lot of successful and unsuccessful experiences in that area. The situation with internal migration is different. It is believed that in the country traditionally closed for migration, with powerful administrative levers capable (to a certain extent) of managing the distribution of population throughout the country, with a rigid planned economy in which the movement of capital and fixed assets was determined by Gosplan, the government can continue managing migration in the new, fundamentally different conditions. But the management limits today are completely different.

Just like in most developed countries internal population migration in Russia cannot be an adequate object of migration policy because it is practically impossible to restrict it using administrative measures. Our citizens' freedom to move is guaranteed by the Constitution and the basic law "On the right of the citizens of the Russian Federation to move freely and to choose a place to stay and reside within the boundaries of the Russian Federation" adopted in 1993. The same rights apply to foreigners that remain legally in the country. The migration limitation mechanism – propiska – that was in effect in the USSR was formally abrogated by mid-1990s. Pursuant to the letter of the law, the institute of registration (at the place of temporary or permanent residence) introduced instead of propiska has the nature of notification. Despite the fact that some rudiments of the registration's authorization nature still remain in the form of all kinds of limitations it is unable to seriously affect the mobility of citizens. Therefore the hopes to use this instrument to restrict or, by abolishing it, to stimulate internal migration of citizens are not seriously grounded.

This area of migration policy is a derivative of regional economic policy. Spatial mobility can be managed indirectly within the country only by measures of regional economic policy and economic policy of regional bodies of power, as well as by providing targeted support to certain categories of migrants, regions, and municipalities implementing measures designed to admit and adapt migrants. This is a theory. But in practice the economic management levers of spatial mobility are very limited.

First of all, the country's economic policy and associated programs, including long-term programs, have a weak regional component. One can identify certain industry-specific priorities but it is impossible to identify regional priorities. Thus, even if the government had the political will and economic mechanisms capable of stimulating internal migration in a certain direction, there are no points of reference and the entire "policy" in this area boils down to ritual incantations, such as, for example, the following: "*to stimulate migration of the population of the Russian Federation, as well as the citizens of the CIS member-states and the Baltic countries to the northern and eastern regions of the country and to encourage migration to the border regions of the Russian Federation*"<sup>1</sup>. The creation of growth points in the eastern regions of the country in the foreseeable future is associated almost exclusively with large-scale mining projects. But they do not require a lot of specialists and can be implemented using the shift method which is why one may hardly expect to see a great deal of interest from private businesses.

There are other documents demonstrating the concern of authorities with internal migration problems. For example, the Demographic development concept of the city of Moscow states, among other things: "*Central Russia is becoming deserted: the population of the Central*

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<sup>1</sup> Migration management concept of the Russian Federation. Approved by Resolution of the RF Government No.256-r of March 1, 2003.

*Federal District, except Moscow and Moscow region, has lost 1.5 million people. "...” ...if these demographic trends persist, the growth of the Moscow population accounted for by migration will cause further decline of the population of Central Russia, including geopolitically important territories”<sup>2</sup>. In these conditions it is only natural to want to, on the one hand, “limit” migration to certain most attractive regions of the country and, on the other hand, to redirect migration flows to more “desirable” areas.*

Turning migration flows in the opposite direction is not so much a question of complexity of spatial mobility management and the lack of growth points in the parts of the country believed to require an influx of population. The most serious problem is accounted for by the short supply of demographic resources required to implement large-scale migration projects<sup>3</sup>. In the conditions of ubiquitous shortage of population it is not clear where migration flows must be directed and, most importantly, where to get people: it is not only eastern regions that are underpopulated in Russia, but also the center of its European part. It is estimated that the European part of Russia is short of about 5 million people of rural population<sup>4</sup>. Successful agricultural development of the primary agricultural zone of European Russia (exclusive of the North) is short of 64 large cities with 6-7 million people worth of population<sup>5</sup>.

At present, no part of Russia is overpopulated or disposes of “excessive” labour resources, except for a number of North-Caucasian republics and Southern Siberia where the excess is rather conditional. Only Chechnya and Dagestan have a high migration potential of about several hundred thousand people of working age who are most likely to gradually disperse across the territory of Russia.

Over the past 20 years the population has been gravitating towards the Central Federal District, first of all Moscow and Moscow region. The 70%-80% migration growth is accounted for by the influx of population from other regions of the country, the Central district, first and foremost. The pull of the capital region is strongly felt throughout the entire European part of the country and it may become even stronger in the future because the able-bodied population of this region will decline drastically over the next two decades. According to our estimates, unless offset by migration (both international and internal), the decline of the able-bodied population in the Central Federal District and the capital region will be more dramatic than elsewhere in the country on average (Table 1). To compensate for the loss of the able-bodied population alone the Central Federal District will require an influx of 6.4 million workers, including 3.2 million required by the capital region only. Taking into account the fact that able-bodied individuals constitute about 75% of internal migration flows, the migration growth sufficient to compensate for the losses must be 8.5 and 4.3 million people, respectively. A growth in the birth rate and a decline in the mortality rate could adjust these figures but not by much and not within this decade. Such a migration growth can only be ensured by migration, either internal, or international, or both.

**Table 1: Estimate of the able-bodied population in 2005-2025 if not affected by migration**

	Population, million people		Change in 2005-2025	
	2005	2026	Million people	%
Russian Federation	90.2	71.3	-18.9	-21.0
Central Federal District	23.3	16.9	-6.4	-27.5
including Moscow and Moscow region	10.9	7.7	-3.2	-29.3

<sup>2</sup> Demographic development concept of the city of Moscow. Approved by Resolution of the Moscow Government No.482-PP on June 28, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> See for details: A. Vishnevsky, M. Denisenko, N. Mkrtchian, E. Tyuryukanova, Demographic changes and economy / Demoskop Weekly No.431-432, August 23 – September 5, 2010, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0431/tema01.php>

<sup>4</sup> A. G. Vishnevsky, E. M. Andreyev, A. I. Treivish. Russia’s development prospects: the role of the demographic factor. M.: IEPP, research papers No.53R, 2003, p. 33-36

<sup>5</sup> T. G. Nefyodova, Rural Russia at the crossroads: geographic essays. M.: Novoye Izdatelstvo, 2003, p. 299-301

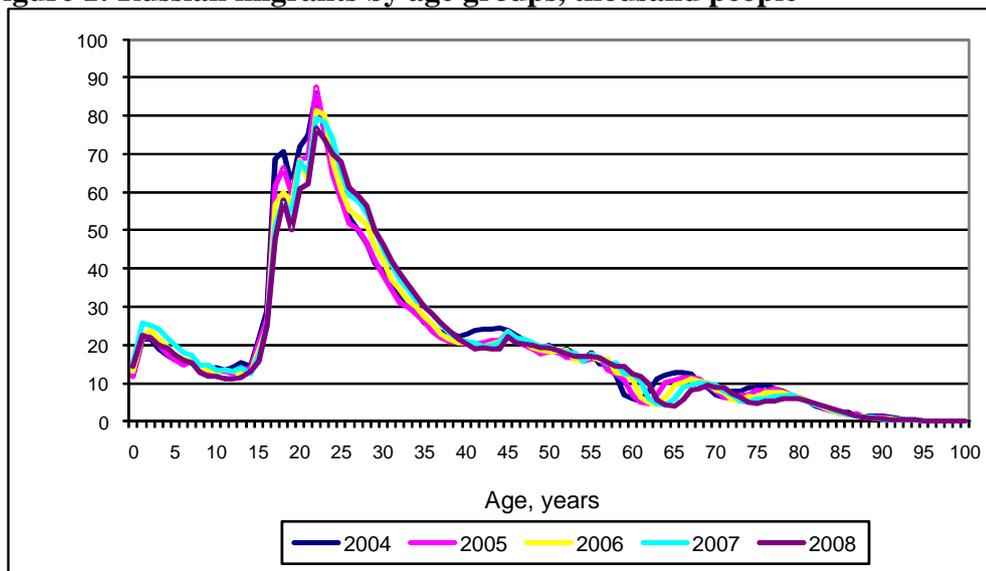
North-Western Federal District	8.8	6.5	-2.3	-26.2
Southern Federal District	13.9	12.5	-1.4	-10.4
Privolzhye Federal District	19.2	15.2	-4.0	-21.0
Ural Federal District	7.9	6.4	-1.6	-19.9
Siberian Federal District	12.7	10.4	-2.3	-18.2
Far-Eastern Federal District	4.4	3.5	-0.8	-19.1

Source: Demography and Human Ecology Center of the Economic Prognostication Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (DHEC EPI RAS), 2004

For years the authorities of the country regions that are most attractive in terms of migration, Moscow, first and foremost, have been talking about replacing foreign workers with domestic workers “from the province”. But the forecasts show that with the Russian population growing through migration by 200-250 thousand people per annum (the current rate), only to stabilize the able-bodied population of the capital region at the level of mid-2000s the population drift from the regions of the Southern, Povolzhye, Ural, Siberian, and Far-Eastern federal districts must increase within the next fifteen years. The migration losses of Siberia and the Russian Far-East, significant as they are already (estimated at about 1.7-1.8 million people in 1990-2002<sup>6</sup>, the population drift in the subsequent years, according to official statistics, amounted to 50,000 per annum and the total loss exceeded 2 million people), will amount to another 1.2 million people in 2010-2025.

Demographic considerations make it impossible to expect significant changes in territorial mobility of Russian labour resources. As the country’s able-bodied population declines in the next several decades, the youth contingent (17-29 year-olds) that is most mobile and most prone to territorial migration will decline the most (Figure 2). This parameter has passed the test of time; in 2004-2008 up to 41%-42% of all spatial migrations were accounted for by people from within that age group. It is estimated that due to the changes in the structure of the able-bodied population alone (a decreased share of youth) the migration activity of the population will decline by 9% by 2025<sup>7</sup>. The changes in the age structure have already affected the spatial mobility rate but the current level of spatial mobility is by no means the limit.

**Figure 1: Russian migrants by age groups, thousand people**



<sup>6</sup> Statistics adjusted based on the 2002 census data. See N. Mkrтчian, Migration in Russia: drifting west / Demoskop Weekly No.185-186, January 10-23, 2005, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2005/0185/tema01.php>

<sup>7</sup> L. B. Karachurina, N. V. Mkrтчian, Demographic and socio-economic factors affecting the migration activity of the Russian population: current situation and prospects / Research papers: IEP RAS // A. G. Korovkin, chief editor. M.: MAKS Press, 2008, p. 571-604.

**Low territorial mobility.** In addition to the shortage of labour resources there is also another problem accounted for by their territorial mobility which is a type of workforce mobility similar to industry-specific mobility, professional mobility, qualification mobility, etc. Workforce mobility is a very important labour market parameter that is constantly fluctuating and requiring all market participants to act promptly.

According to statistics, the migration activity rate of the unemployed in the USA is currently higher than that of the employed. For example, interregional migration includes 1.5% of the employed and 3.7% of the unemployed, and local migration includes 2.7% of the employed and 4% of the unemployed. Data from Great Britain indicate that an unemployed individual is 1.5 times more likely to relocate to a different region than an employed person. About 12%-13% of all migrants there refer to change of employment as reason for relocation. One percent of those migrants explain their relocation by looking for employment and 6% - by having found new employment. The relatively high mobility rate of the unemployed is explained by the fact that many of them relocate to where new jobs and affordable housing are.

Territorial mobility of the Russian workforce is low and this well-known fact has been once again confirmed by the unemployed mobility rate research during the economic recession<sup>8</sup>. Only 11%-13% of the people looking for employment through governmental employment services were prepared to look for a new job outside their region and 4% of the survey participants were determined to relocate to a different region. Even the share of those willing to relocate for the sake of a well-paid job and free housing did not rise above 24%. To be worth relocating for, the wage should be 3-4 times higher than at the previous job and 5-6 higher in case of relocating to Siberian and Far-Eastern regions. Furthermore, most of the survey participants were willing to relocate provided they were able to retain the same or improve their housing conditions at the new place.

Not incidental, therefore, was the failure of the RF Federal Employment and Labour Service initiative to facilitate the relocation of workforce as part of the regional programs designed to reduce tension on the labour market: only 13,400 people instead of the originally planned 100,000 received targeted assistance in 2009, including compensation of their relocation costs.

The situation is further complicated by the weakness and poor development of the network of personnel and recruitment agencies looking for and selecting workers in other population centers. The handful of nongovernmental structures operating in this field focus on looking for extremely coveted specialists with rare professions. The governmental employment services are not active either and their services are not popular either among the population or employers. This is why most of the job opportunities in their databases are not attractive. In fact, despite a semblance of governmental regulation, the labour market lives a life of its own. There is no reliable and efficient mediator between employers and workers yet.

The ability of internal migration to help reduce the tension on the labour market is limited. Although this market is able to generate some steady internal migration flows it also exposes the scarcity of available demographic resources helping depopulate already underpopulated spaces.

Efforts to restrain the drift of the population, first and foremost, of youth from the rural areas and small towns with a limited number of employment opportunities (not only company towns!), will be ineffective. This process, aiming to realize human capital by moving it to large cities and multifunctional centers, leads to polarization of the internal regional space, accelerates the depopulation of the periphery, yet at the same time facilitates the growth and development of large metropolitan agglomerations. For the country's eastern regions that over the past two decades have been losing their population due to the so-called "western drift" the development

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<sup>8</sup> Assisted by the territorial bodies of the RF Federal Employment and Labour Service, 2525 unemployed individuals and job seekers from among the clients of governmental employment services were surveyed in October 2008 and 2747 – in December 2009. The survey encompassed all RF regions. The sample was organized so that in each RF subject one half of the respondents were surveyed in the regional (republican) center, 25% - in a city of regional subordination, and 25% - in one of the rural districts.

of agglomerations is perhaps the only sure means of restraining the population outflow to the European part of Russia.

The internal regional periphery of the zone inappropriate or poorly suited for agriculture – due to natural and climactic peculiarities or due to being too far away from sales markets or a shortage of labour resources – could benefit from the development of the following functional types of settlements:

1. Towns and villages serving as bases for shift and seasonal work (in economically poorly developed areas);
2. Cultural and recreation centers;
3. Single-industry villages most of whose inhabitants are shift and seasonal workers.

Municipal and regional authorities may be upset by the efflux of youth to the largest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, first and foremost, but it should be understood that for many young people relocating to the Russian capitals is an alternative to relocating abroad and such opportunities will multiply overtime, considering the growing export of education services from the developed countries and the emerging education centers in some of the Asian countries attracting a lot of foreign students. Almost nine (8.9) thousand Russian students attended Chinese universities in 2008 and their number keeps growing each year<sup>9</sup>. Upon graduating from foreign universities, as we well know, not everyone returns to Russia.

**Developing temporary spatial mobility forms.** Within the past two decades the traditional form of spatial mobility associated with relocation and the temporary migration forms that have existed since the time of the Soviet Union (shift work, seasonal work, etc.) have been supplemented with new temporary mobility forms that, although not accounted for by statistics, are very important for the livelihood of many a Russian household. About 20% of the households in small towns, on average, have one labour migrant. In company towns where the city-forming enterprises are not operating the share of such households exceeds 30%. This is commercial migration (including shuttle commerce that was especially popular in the 1990s), shift work of different kinds, often without days off, “one day out of every four” type of work in a different region, etc. In large cities entire industry sectors operate thanks to temporary migrants but this kind of migration has no infrastructural and institutional support.

Working outside one’s home area is a popular and, most importantly, affordable method of adaptation of households to the new living conditions. Some households truly benefit from such an organization of living when a family member works in a large city and receives a relatively high income but spends most of it in his small home town where its buying capacity is greater. Such people are more often willing to work overtime to earn more money. Moving the entire family to the large city for permanent residence deprives it of the aforementioned advantages.

On the other hand, such work creates a lot of difficulties for the migrants and their families. Labour migrants are often employed in the semi-shadow economy segment and have limited access to health care services and bank loans. Sometimes there are problems with ensuring equal pay for equal labour. Such a peculiar lifestyle often negatively affects the relationships within migrants’ families.

Temporary migration and working outside one’s home area are the first steps to relocation to a new place of permanent residence. Working outside one’s home area enhances the migration activity of families which is why this form of migration should be viewed in most cases as potential relocation. By creating conditions for temporary migrants regional and local authorities “invest” in the region’s future migration attractiveness. Conversely, for the regions whose residents go away to do temporary and seasonal work it means a prospective departure and population decline.

Ethno-phobia is one of the factors restricting mobility in Russia. It is often much harder to find employment, rent a flat, etc. for a person with a non-Slavic name, let alone appearance,

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<sup>9</sup> A. L. Arefyev, Russian students in Chinese universities / Demoskop Weekly No.441-442, November 1-14, 2010, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0441/analit03.php>

regardless of whether or not he is a Russian citizen. According to sociological surveys<sup>10</sup>, such problems are especially often encountered by Russian citizens from the North-Caucasian republics. On the one hand, Caucasians often cause and participate in domestic conflicts that quickly become interethnic<sup>11</sup>. This is a serious barrier that impedes the efflux of youth from Russia's only labour-excessive region.

Poor internal mobility of the population is a serious socio-economic problem that cannot be ignored by migration policy. This is why it is necessary to administer a migration policy that is closely connected with the national and regional migration policies, as well as the socio-economic development policies of the federal districts, RF subjects, and municipalities. This policy must **facilitate internal mobility of the population and aim to:**

- *Eliminate socio-economic barriers impeding internal migration*

The notification character of registration of citizens at the place of residence entails reorganizing the system of provision of social services to the population – unemployment, retirement, other benefits, free health care, access to kindergartens, schools, etc. De jure, such problems must not exist for the RF citizens regardless of where they live or remain temporarily. De facto, these rights are not always easily exercised<sup>12</sup>.

The high cost of housing in the regional centers is the primary reason that prevents temporary labour migrants from relocating there for permanent residence.

Despite the fact that Russia does not stand out on the backdrop of most western countries in terms of the formal housing affordability indicators<sup>13</sup>, the housing affordability index being approximately 5 years (the number of years required to save average earnings in an average household to buy “average” housing), according to independent assessments housing is considerably much less affordable. Depending on the region, buying a flat or a single-family house may take 12 - 60 years<sup>14</sup>. Migrant households are no different from other households in terms of material wellbeing and considering the fact that migrants often do less prestigious and less-paying jobs any possible differences will not be to their advantage.

The problem of access to affordable housing available to migrants is extremely serious and cannot be resolved without governmental support, even despite the fact that some migrants may expect some or all of their housing costs compensated by their employers. This applies, first of all, to highly skilled workers that constitute not more than 5%-10% of all labour migrants.

The problem may be partially resolved by expanding the construction of hostels, dormitories, inexpensive hotels, and other kinds of cheap housing, i.e. by restoring the spatial mobility infrastructure that existed in the USSR and was lost at the onset of the market reforms (when most of such housing was transferred to municipalities and subsequently privatized).

In some cases the problem may be addressed by creating mobile camps situated in specially designated areas and equipped with all the requisite utilities.

It is necessary to accelerate the development of credit mechanisms in the housing sphere by attracting funds from private businesses, among other things. This measure, however, may only be used very carefully and selectively to prevent this scheme from rigidly binding workers to employers as the latter strive to conserve “bad” jobs (e.g. in rural areas, company towns, etc.). It is necessary to enable borrowers from among workers to repay their loans early without sustaining any penalties.

There is a great potential for public-private partnership in accelerated construction of affordable housing, yet to be realized.

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<sup>10</sup> See: V. I. Mukomel, Russian migration policy: post-soviet contexts / Institute of Sociology of RAS. – M.: Dipole-T, 2005, p. 225-243; Z. A. Zayonchkovskaya, N. V. Mkrtchian, Internal migration in Russia: law-enforcement practices. M., 2007, p. 46-47.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the conflict in Kondopoga in 2006.

<sup>12</sup> For details see: Z. A. Zayonchkovskaya, N. V. Mkrtchian, Internal migration in Russia: law-enforcement practices. M.: CMI, 2007, p. 37-49.

<sup>13</sup> N. Kosareva, A. Tumanov. Is housing affordable for Russians? / Demoskop Weekly No.307-308, October 29 – November 11, 2007, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2007/0307/tema04.php>

<sup>14</sup> Yu. Bocharov. Is comfortable housing affordable for Russians? / “Project Russia”, 2006, No.44, p.173-176.

- ***Promoting and providing institutional and infrastructural support to various forms of spatial mobility***

Taking into account the abundance and diversity of temporary labour migration forms, as well as the problems encountered by migrants and their families, it is necessary to take measures to provide organizational and institutional support to the existing forms of temporary spatial mobility, such as:

- Develop the market of rental housing, its inexpensive segments, primarily, by increasing the offer of housing with various consumer parameters;
- Develop the network of personnel and recruitment agencies that look for and recruit personnel nationwide and improve collaboration between private employment agencies and governmental employment centers;
- Improve the existing forms of shift work;
- Promote the institution of borrowed labour to ensure prompt and inexpensive exchange of workforce between economy subjects;
- Reinstate certain organized recruitment practices to implement large-scale investment projects in the regions experiencing short supply of labour resources, provide support in acquisition of temporary housing, reimburse moving costs, etc. Private businesses may co-finance the reimbursement of moving costs of migrant workers.
- Create and improve a system of information support for internal workforce mobility nationwide, including online databases of job opportunities etc.
- Develop the transportation and motorway infrastructure facilitating interregional and intraregional passenger services.

During the 20 years of market economy Russia has failed to resolve to satisfaction the problem of overpopulation of the North. Overpopulation of the North does not mean it suffers from excessive population, even though nowhere in the world other than in Russia are there such large cities as Norilsk and Murmansk located beyond the Polar Circle. The country used its very own method developing northern territories: it created large and medium-sized cities with permanent population, whereas Canada, for example, created villages on the same latitudes to accommodate contract shift workers, often without families. As a result, people who chose to go and work in the North at the very end of the Soviet Union are now approaching the age of retirement but in the new conditions not many of them can afford relocating to regions with better climate conditions upon retirement. Such people need their moving expenses reimbursed and the government and employers could do that for them.

- ***Facilitating local spatial mobility, first of all within metropolitan agglomerations***

Development of intraregional and local spatial mobility may be an alternative to relocation for permanent residence or temporary migration. This may be implemented in the form of relocation and temporary migration within the confines of a region, as well as in the form of commutation. These, regrettably, are almost ignored by the development programs of economy sectors, regions, and municipalities. And yet, considering the fact that the population, including the unemployed and job seekers, is more willing to engage in intraregional migration than relocate to other parts of the country, such programs could be more successful.

In addition to the already mentioned approaches such programs could also be supported by:

- Developing passenger transportation services within the limits of metropolitan agglomerations and adjacent peripheral parts of the regions;
- Improving the interior organization of metropolitan agglomerations by relocating enterprises outside the urban core to reduce the workload of the urban and public transit system;
- Changing the work organization method and switching, wherever possible, from daily work schedules to shift work schedules (one-day-out-of-every-four), etc.
- Developing the system of motorways between population centers.

It should be emphasized that internal and external (international) migration processes are closely interconnected: both internal migrants and immigrants tend to head towards the regions with a higher standard of living and better and more numerous opportunities for self-realization and employment. They are most attracted by large and very large cities with well established labour niches. As odd as it may sound, the more immigrants come to live in large cities and take traditional niches of migrant labour, the slower will be the depopulation of the country's eastern regions, villages, and small towns outside metropolitan agglomerations. On the scale of the country it will mean that free distribution of immigrants across the cities of European Russia will slow down the population efflux from the country's eastern regions – this is supported by the forecasts of the Demography and Human Ecology Center of the Economic Prognostication Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (DHEC EPI RAS)<sup>15</sup> and the Institute of Demography of Higher School of Economics.

Internal migration policy, having very few management levers, depends on other policies, first of all, regional socio-economic policies. This dependence is indirect which requires fine tuning of all conditions affecting migration-related decisions, as well as relocation and adaptation processes. Many regional socio-economic development programs are designed either to turn around migration flows towards a region or to stop the efflux of “own” population or some of its groups (e.g. youth) to other regions of the country. Experience shows, however, that no one has been successful in doing so.

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<sup>15</sup> Commissioned by Rosstat in 2003 and 2005, never been published.