

# NEW RUSSIAN MIGRANTS AGAINST THE WAR: POLITICAL ACTION IN RUSSIA AND ABROAD

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Post-February 2022 emigration flux from Russia is professional, young, and in opposition to the Putin regime. They are translocal and stay interconnected as well as connected to their sending societies having much influence on them. Many of them are eager to engage with the receiving societies culturally, academically, economically, and politically.



The Russian exodus is not over. A tangible threat of the new wave of mobilization is expected to push out several hundred thousand people in 2023. Another flux will consist of the families that seek to reunite with those who left earlier, get settled and have a new start abroad.



The absolute majority of them were into politics back in Russia, using multiple independent sources of information. Most emigrants also engage in donations to both Ukrainian refugees and Russian emigrants, Russian independent NGOs, including Feminist Anti-war Resistance (FAR), and other grassroot initiatives.

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# NEW RUSSIAN MIGRANTS AGAINST THE WAR: POLITICAL ACTION IN RUSSIA AND ABROAD

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## INTRODUCTION

The war against Ukraine came as a shock for most Russians, even the most engaged in politics did not think it would go that far. The first few days after February, 24 many people could not believe what was going on, and many described their feelings as “being frozen”, “not being able to breath”, “terrified”, “horrorified” etc.

The first idea of many was to come out onto the streets to protest. The last grand protests happened in Russia in January and February 2021 when Navalny came back to Russia, and those were severely oppressed. However, thousands of people appeared on the central streets of St. Petersburg and Moscow. After a couple of days of protests in the cities, it became evident that this strategy is fruitless due to very high risks to the participants. Then, at the end of February, several hundred thousand Russians decided that they wouldn't stay in Russia any longer. For many of them, it was a political and moral decision rather than economic: feelings of sympathy and support for Ukraine (many Russians have relatives and friends there) along with shame, anger, and hopelessness drove them. Did these people leave for good and seek to cut all their ties with Russia or do they stay politically active in receiving societies? What drives political engagement when an individual has already escaped an oppressive regime? What we have learnt from previous studies is that under a repressive regime, a political protest may take the form of emigration. Before the war in Ukraine, people who decided to emigrate were actively involved in fighting corruption, advocating for fair elections, human rights, environmental protection, fighting propaganda and anti-war activities.

In our analysis, we draw on an original survey of people who left Russia after February 24, 2022. Since the characteristics of the population data of migrants are unknown, we rely on a convenience sample of 2,300

respondents in 60+ countries recruited via online relocation groups and Telegram channels<sup>1</sup>. To date, we managed to complete two survey waves, in March and September 2022. To the best of our knowledge, our survey currently is the only Russian migrants' panel survey with more than a one-panel wave. Survey data are complemented by a series of in-depth face-to-face interviews with recent migrants conducted in Tbilisi, Georgia during the summer, of 2022.

Tracking emigrants for several months, we note some differences between two groups of emigrants: post-war (in Russian they are often called “Februarists”) and post-mobilisation (“Septembrists”) in terms of political awareness and political engagement, as well as in professional heterogeneity. We argue that the first of those waves can be characterized as a political emigration, and the second resembles evacuation, and the people in it have certain characteristics of refugees. However, both groups are more privileged, educated, urbanized, younger, and better off than the average Russian. The latter means that migrants possess sufficient resources to stay politically active and keep track of the political landscape of the receiving societies and, indirectly, of the domestic affairs in Russia.

**MIGRANTS POSSESS SUFFICIENT RESOURCES TO STAY POLITICALLY ACTIVE AND KEEP TRACK OF THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE RECEIVING SOCIETIES AND, INDIRECTLY, OF THE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS IN RUSSIA.**

<sup>1</sup> We cannot claim that our sample is representative of the general population of all Russian migrants who left Russia after February 24, 2022. Due to the lack of information about the general population it is impossible to create a probability sample, thus, a convenience sample is the only option. Our sample is likely biased towards younger and internet active population. Nevertheless, we undertake a number of strategies to ensure quality and diversity of the sample. We distribute the survey in dozens of political and non-political channels; we remove suspicious responses that are duplicated or filled out too quickly.

## EXODUS OF THE MOST RESOURCEFUL AND POLITICALLY AWARE

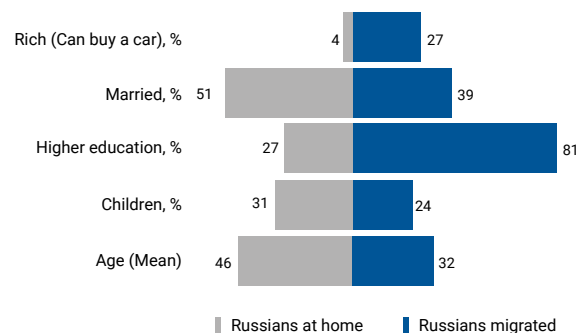
Recent migrants differ dramatically from the rest of the population. They have sufficient means to stay afloat: 27 % of migrants can afford a car while only 4 % of the general population in Russia can; more than 80 % have higher education compared to 27 % of the general population. Vis-à-vis the rest of the population, new Russian emigrants are well informed about the political situation and express their interest in politics.

**RECENT MIGRANTS DIFFER DRAMATICALLY FROM THE REST OF THE POPULATION. THEY HAVE SUFFICIENT MEANS TO STAY AFLOAT: 27 % OF MIGRANTS CAN AFFORD A CAR WHILE ONLY 4 % OF THE GENERAL POPULATION IN RUSSIA CAN; MORE THAN 80 % HAVE HIGHER EDUCATION COMPARED TO 27 % OF THE GENERAL POPULATION.**

Figure 1.

**Comparison of the Russian population and the new Russian migrants. Source: March 2022 survey combined with Levada Center survey data.**

### Comparison of soc-dem characteristics



Before immigrants started any political action abroad, they had to secure their escape. At the beginning of the war, it was hard to predict the future and make decisions at that period, which is why many Russians who opposed the war for various reasons left as quickly as they could, sometimes within a day. Others started to get ready for emigration but had to wait for some documents (many had their visas or foreign passports expired due to limited travel during the COVID-19 pandemic).

The countries that Russians chose as their destination was defined by the least transaction costs. In the first days of the war most flights to Europe were canceled, and the prices to the destinations like Turkey, Dubai, or Israel skyrocketed which led to choosing land boundaries. Another huge issue for many was the termination of Russian-issued credit and debit card services

in Europe, which had left many people without any resources, and they had to move to those countries where they had access to their accounts.

The February wave was also characterized by the organized relocation of numerous companies, both foreign and Russian. IT companies were the most visible in this sense, as some booked the planes and moved their stuff to the countries where no visa or even international passport was needed for Russian citizens like Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, and in March dozens of such charter flights from Russia landed there. Georgia, Turkey, Serbia, Cyprus, Dubai, and Israel were also among the popular destinations due to visa-free entrance and easier legalization of the newcomers. In Russia, people also believed that the local population in those countries is more friendly toward Russians, as many were scared to face hostility abroad. We found that Russian migrants feared discrimination in the receiving countries, but only one-fifth reported that they experience it. Interestingly, the situation has hardly changed over time: the September survey showed that Russians still fear discrimination but rarely encounter it.

**GEORGIA, TURKEY, SERBIA, CYPRUS, DUBAI, AND ISRAEL WERE ALSO AMONG THE POPULAR DESTINATIONS DUE TO VISA-FREE ENTRANCE AND EASIER LEGALIZATION OF THE NEWCOMERS.**

Figure 2.

**Experience and fear of discrimination during the first month of migration. Source: September 2022 survey**

### Discrimination



Countries of the European Union were not the first choice for many due to visa issues in the first place, but some people quickly moved out of Russia and ordered passports and EU visas from abroad as the EU was their final destination. Even compared to the rest of the February stream those who moved to the EU were more resourceful.

**MOST RUSSIANS WHO LEFT FOR EUROPE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO STAY THROUGH BUSINESS (WORKING), EDUCATIONAL OR HUMANITARIAN VISAS, OTHERS CLAIMED FAMILY REUNION.**

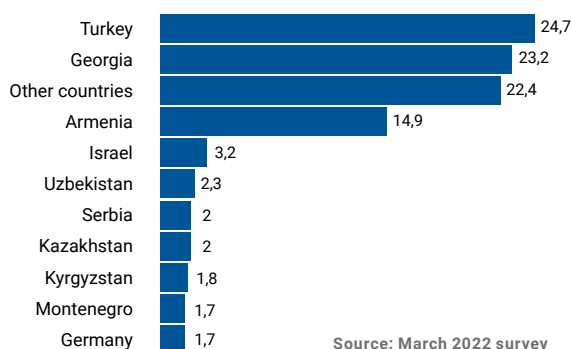
Refugee status was given in very rare, almost non-existent cases.

**GERMANY WAS THE MOST POPULAR DESTINATION OUT OF THE EU COUNTRIES, BUT IT STILL RECEIVED ABOUT 2% OF THE AFTER-WAR IMMIGRATION WAVE.**

Figure 3.

**The popularity of countries among those who left Russia in the first months after February 24.**

**What countries are you in now?**



The September flow that happened after mobilization was even more urgent. People who decided to leave after mobilization was announced are more often male, and more professional rather than politically active. They are still more resourceful than an average Russian, but the way they had to escape from Russia left many without money and jobs. Those people are still quite politically engaged, but to a lesser extent than the previous (February) wave. Some believed all those political issues would not interfere with their everyday lives and claimed they were “not into politics”. They were quite shocked when mobilization emerged, and many want (or at least claim) to come back to Russia “when everything ends up”. Some even did so when Putin announced (but never signed a document) that mobilization had ended.

**REASONS FOR EMIGRATION VARY, BUT ALL ARE UNITED BY STRONG OPPOSITION TO THE WAR. IN SEPTEMBER 2022 SURVEY RESPONDENTS NAME RISKS OF PROSECUTION FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM, EVEN FOR POSTS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS (47%), CLOSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (30%), EXPECTATIONS OF ECONOMIC TURMOIL (57%) OR POLITICAL INSTABILITY, AS WELL AS PERCEIVED EXISTENTIAL THREATS INCLUDING EXPECTED MASS MOBILIZATION (20%) OR THE POSSIBILITY OF NUCLEAR WAR.**

Russians with transferable skills, the most mobile and globalized are more likely to leave. Some professions have lost up to 30% of the workforce, this is especially evident in the IT sector which used to be among the most developed. For innovative areas of the Russian economy, the departure of highly qualified specialists means the loss of years of accumulated experience and connections. Despite the fact that the Russian economy shows a high degree of adaptability to sanctions and the outflow of human capital, experts predict that almost all key areas of the economy will experience strong technological degradation and a transition to “archaic” modes of production and services<sup>2</sup>. As professionals who moved to Tbilisi explain it:

- *“There is simply no prospect in the development of electric cars in Russia. We had a very strong business for the future, with a payback period of 10 years, because the market was growing exponentially. With the start of the war, I no longer see how and where electric cars can come from in Russia if even producing gasoline-engine cars is now problematic.” (male, 25, engineer)*
- *“My field is fintech. It is significantly disrupted in terms of technology and openness to the world. I am no longer interested in working in Russian fintech.” (September survey anonymous feedback)*

**SOCIAL NETWORKS BETWEEN NEW IMMIGRANTS ARE ENHANCED BY THEIR SIMILAR ATTITUDES TO WHAT IS GOING ON IN THEIR SENDING SOCIETY, THEIR RESOURCEFULNESS, AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO BE PRODUCTIVE AND SOLICITED IN THE RECEIVING SOCIETIES.**

As many new migrants are IT developers, academics, journalists, NGO activists, political activists, doctors, and cultural professionals, they often find the majority of their colleagues abroad as well. As some of those areas were just developing in Russia, sometimes the professionals could have been counted on one hand. So, when many members of the professional community leave, others tend to leave as well not to get deprofessionalized. After leaving, former colleagues or even like-minded people tend to reconnect.

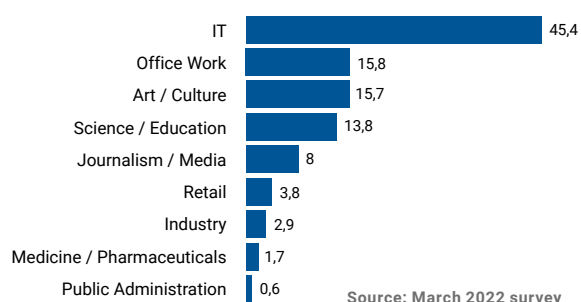
Many celebrities from various spheres have left Russia, and it depresses the public back in Russia. While

<sup>2</sup> Forbes (19 November 2022) The Country We Don't Imagine. Natalia Zubarevich on survival, poverty, and adapting to the worst [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkEMcHJhKY>

the official propaganda tries to show them as “traitors”, people do not believe it as they are opinion leaders of generations (like Alla Pugacheva, a famous singer). Many of the new immigrants are among the best speakers in the country, being popular professors, writers, filmmakers, poets, etc. Many of them did not have a need to speak out internationally, but now they can, and probably will, share some alternative opinions and deeper analysis of the situation in Russia and its potential development. They can also have a serious impact on the older waves of Russian emigration. Anyway, the strongest watershed in attitudes, including attitudes towards the war, is intergenerational.

Figure 4.  
**Professions of people who left Russia in the first months after February 24.**

#### Occupation



**THOUGH MANY EMIGRANTS ARE MORE RESOURCEFUL THAN THE AVERAGE RUSSIANS, THOSE WHO WERE REPRESSED IN RUSSIA OR LIVED UNDER THE MOST RISK HAVE LESS MONEY AND ARE DEEPLY DISTRESSED DUE TO THEIR LONG TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE.**

Their experience is invaluable, but they expected persecution for years, and now need more support than others to return to productivity. As one of the informants puts it:

- *“I realized that they will come to arrest “the enemies of the state” first, will come to those whom they stigmatized in this manner. I didn’t want to get under that flywheel of repressions. But I understood that as an NGO representative, I have to leave as soon as I can, just not to physically face them, not to get into all those problems or those nasty places [prison].” (female, 30, NGO activist)*

We argue that this wave of emigration caused an unprecedented loss of human capital in terms of scientific, educational, business, and cultural potential. New migrants are more politicized, tend to trust each other and trust less those Russians who

stayed and share the experience of the common trauma of departure. Usually, Russians as well as all post-communist migrants share distinctively low levels of mutual trust and trust in political institutions, but the current wave is different. Our surveys indicate that mutual trust among new migrants is extremely high (over 90% reported that they trust other Russian migrants) and remains constant between the waves. These features may be potentially conducive to building horizontal networks and civil society structures abroad.

## POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF EMIGRANTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THOSE WHO STAYED IN RUSSIA

An overall tendency among emigrants is to dissociate themselves from Putin’s regime, in the February wave it is especially pronounced, but in the September wave, these attitudes are also overwhelming. Belonging to political opposition, and especially participating in political action in Russia comes with high risks. The Russian political regime has evolved into a fully blown oppressive dictatorship since the failure of the For Fair Elections movement in 2011-12 with the sheer absence of competitive elections, possibilities to gather as peaceful demonstrations or pickets, and even post and share politically charged information in social media.

**ACCORDING TO INDEPENDENT SOURCES<sup>3</sup>, MORE THAN 19,000 RUSSIANS HAVE BEEN DETAINED ACROSS RUSSIA FOR TAKING PART IN ANTI-WAR PROTESTS.**

The pandemic of COVID-19 speeded up the downward spiral into a consolidated and isolated autocracy. An “all-Russian voting” on constitutional changes in July 2020 extended the presidential term, dismantled the remainders of local autonomy, and proclaimed the protection of ‘traditional values’.

**THE NUMBER AND SCALE OF PROTESTS HAVE GONE DOWN SINCE THE STATE’S CRACKDOWN ON THE ANTI-CORRUPTION FOUNDATION (FBK), THE MAIN COORDINATING INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTING ALEKSEI NAVALNY IN 2021. THE LATTER HAS BEEN BEHIND BARS RIGHT AFTER HIS RETURN FROM GERMANY IN JANUARY 2021.**

<sup>3</sup> OVD-Info. Anti-War Repressions Summary. Nine Months of War, November 2022, viewed 08 November 2022, <<https://english.ovdinfo.org/anti-war-repressions-summary-nine-months-war#1>>

No surprise that many Russian oppositionists were forced into less large-scale and visible forms of political resistance.

- *“In terms of the theory of totalitarian regimes: at the stage, we are at now, it seems to me very difficult to do something from within, something so, I don’t know, global, big, in general. It’s very difficult to do something inside now, when the nuts are screwed in so tightly that they just squeak, and they just get blown out. That’s why, I’ll say it again, I respect people who stay there and do something, but I don’t know what the result will be, what the output of all this will be.” (female, 30, NGO coordinator)*

Recent Russian migrants may still fear reprisals from the Russian state, even while outside the country.

**THE SEPTEMBER SURVEY INDICATES THAT 63 % OF RUSSIAN MIGRANTS STILL FEAR REVENGE FROM THE RUSSIAN STATE.**

Fear usually reduces incentives for any political action.

- *“Well, I see rallies here, there are Russians all over the place, But to be honest, I didn’t go, I didn’t take part in them [...] I had a fear that the photos might not be super safe, I mean if they take your picture during the rally, so I had such a cautious attitude towards the rallies so far.” (female, 31, educational designer)*

According to March and September surveys, the Russian current emigration wave is relatively young, 32-33 years old on average. This generation, especially those from larger cities, educated and well-off, were eager to change Russia politically and culturally. Many of them considered themselves patriots and supported Russia’s economic success and are now confused and seeking ways to reconstruct their identities on a new basis and to reapply their skills and resources in their new destinations as they are often professional and eager to develop their projects further. This is how one of the informants explains such confusion:

- *“I was always raised with the attitude that Russia is our home country, no matter what happens here, we will fight it. This attitude is very strong, and now I have a kind of feeling of losing my identity, because ... I tied my activities to “making Russia better”, “doing business to create jobs”, “making design to raise visual culture”, “participating in contests to represent Russia”. Now it’s kind of not quite clear what to do with that. Apparently, I will have to somehow reformat my views for some other country.” (female, 25, graphical designer)*

This generation was the most active during the protests of 2010 - 2011 against election fraud, the largest public protest in contemporary Russia. Many of those people are united by the desire for change.

**ACCORDING TO THE MARCH SURVEY, 80% OF THE FEBRUARISTS SAY THEY HAD EXPERIENCED OF ACTIVE POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE FORM OF OBSERVING THE ELECTIONS, SIGNING PETITIONS, JOINING MANIFESTATIONS, DONATING, OR BEING DETAINED FOR PEACEFUL PROTESTS.**

Many of them have multiple resources and skills for political action along with experience of organizing such actions in a hostile environment. They probably need some support to reintegrate their skills into the contexts of the receiving societies, but openness to their initiatives will help most.

**THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY (90%) OF THEM WERE INTO POLITICS BACK IN RUSSIA USING MULTIPLE INDEPENDENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION.**

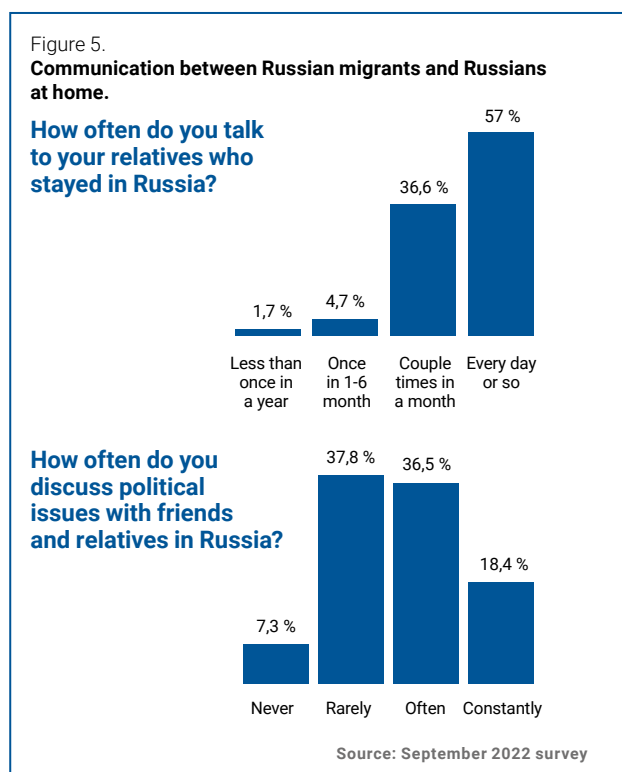
- *“I went to rallies, donated money to Navalny, to OVD-Info, and now I keep making small donations to whom I think it’s necessary... And the most dangerous public protest, where I almost got caught, was when Navalny was in Sokolniki, when they took him to the detention center, and he was marching with the crowd...” (male, 25, project manager)*

This group thus differs from the generation of their parents, and from those Russians who left in 1990-s. Those older compatriots, both inside and outside Russia, tend to be less into contemporary political debate, are more likely to watch TV, and consequently are less supportive to the open-minded attitudes of the younger generation of emigrants. This generation value shift is a result of some modernization processes that happened in Russia in the short period of prosperity of the 2000-s when many younger people traveled and studied abroad, and had wider opportunities than most preceding generations. Evidently, the cultural and political preferences of those groups differ.

Russian migrants continue to be a strong resource for increasing political awareness of Russians back home. This is expressed not only in the numerous media created by Russians in the last few months in the CIS and European countries but also in the almost daily horizontal contact with relatives and friends. Our data show that 57% of Russian migrants talk to those

who stayed home every day or almost every day, and 36% do so at least several times a month. Although such conversations may be stressful for both sides,

**57% OF RUSSIAN MIGRANTS DISCUSS POLITICAL QUESTIONS WITH THEIR RELATIVES AND SEEK TO CHANGE THEIR POINT OF VIEW, AT TIMES SUCCESSFULLY.**



- “I had a real struggle with my mom. I can’t talk to her about flowers and neutral topics because she is supportive, she thinks that everything is normal. Imagine the situation, [...] I came to Russia, I didn’t see my mom for six months. On February 24, we had a dispute, so I tried several times to convince her, and tried to convince my grandmother, and my cousin, but it didn’t work. [...] Practically the first thing she says to me after formal things like “hello, goodbye,” [...] is: Do you know that in Ukraine they do experiments on the sick. I understand that this is not going to end well, so we get up and left. A few days later we visited her again [...]” (male, 35, IT product manager)

- “But at that time, it was February 26, he (father) had an opinion that we don’t know the whole truth, it’s not clear what’s going on, who’s to blame, who isn’t...And as a result, a few months later, they recently came to visit me. And in the end, yes, his opinion became more radical: war is awful, Putin is a horrible person, everything became clearer. Well, it became easier, but

we still discuss it more superficially, without details.” (male, 30, marketing specialist)

**WE FIND NO SUPPORT FOR THE CLAIM THAT THERE IS INCREASING POLARIZATION BETWEEN THOSE WHO STAYED IN RUSSIA AND THOSE WHO LEFT. IN FACT, ACCORDING TO OUR PANEL DATA, THE LEVEL OF TRUST TOWARD THOSE RUSSIANS WHO STAYED IN THE COUNTRY HAS INCREASED BY 7 PERCENT POINTS SINCE APRIL 2022: IN SEPTEMBER 2022, 57% OF OUR RESPONDENTS REPORT THAT THEY TRUST RUSSIANS WHO STAYED (COMPARED TO 50% IN MARCH 2022).**

We suggest that many Russian migrants would like to continue supporting Russian independent activists and grassroots initiatives, although it is becoming increasingly challenging due to political threats in Russia (e.g. new legislation on “foreign agents”) and limited access to Russian financial services most of which remain subject to international sanctions.

- [...] I certainly consider them heroes, I mean all those people who stayed in Russia, who are doing something now [in NGOs]. I know them by name, I follow them, I see what they are doing. And it’s probably not hopeless, someone had to stay there and continue at least some kind of civic activity [...] (female, 30, NGO coordinator)

This finding is important as it shows strong ties that can be used for contact with the emigrants with those who stayed. Though we see some conflicts between these two groups in social networks, we argue it to be discursive and not very deep. It leaves plenty of opportunities for supporting and influencing those who stayed from abroad. Any free and benevolent voice from abroad is perceived warmly in Russia, as fewer and fewer people understand the reasons and goals of the war, especially after the mobilization. Those swinging, or opposing people try to build a new picture of the world and imagine some prospects of the future. In the situation of harsh censorship and rampant propaganda, those voices caught against the blockings can be life-giving for Russian society. Any channels: TV, blogs, Youtube, newspapers, talk shows, and especially Telegram channels would work, but they have to be as independent as possible, as mistrust in Russian society is very high and growing.

**NOT ALL POLITICALLY ACTIVE AND CRITICAL PEOPLE HAVE LEFT RUSSIA. POLITICAL ACTION IS STILL POSSIBLE, OFTEN IN THE FORM OF GUERRILLA ACTIONS AND GRASSROOTS SELF-GOVERNING CELLS.**



A good example of such a political movement is the Feminist Anti-War Resistance, whose leaders either remain anonymous (while based in Russia) or coordinate their actions from abroad. Any direct support from abroad to any kind of movement in Russia will soon lead to the criminalization of that movement and serious personal risks to those involved.

Thus, there is little evidence that new migrants seek to cut all ties. It does not necessarily mean they do not plan to integrate into new countries' economies and societies. They maintain close contacts with families and friends who stayed in Russia but try to learn the languages of the receiving societies, search for jobs in local and international markets, and find or organize schools and kindergartens for their kids<sup>4</sup>.

**IN MARCH, 60% OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEY WERE READY TO LEARN THE LOCAL LANGUAGE. IN SEPTEMBER 2022 IT APPEARED THAT MANY HAD REALIZED THEIR ORIGINAL INTENTIONS: 48% REPORTED THAT THEY WERE ALREADY LEARNING THE LOCAL LANGUAGE. AS MANY HAVE BUSINESS EXPERIENCE, SOME ALSO SEEK TO ESTABLISH NEW ENTERPRISES OR RELOCATE THEIR OWN ONES TO THEIR DESTINATIONS. SINCE MARCH, 8% OF RESPONDENTS HAVE FOUND A NEW JOB IN LOCAL COMPANIES.**

At the same time, there are some respondents who try to combine life in several countries and visit Russia sometimes.

- *“I work remotely, so I decided to live sometimes in Russia, sometimes somewhere else.” (September survey anonymous feedback)*
- *“I plan to come to Russia from time to time as long as some of my family is here and it's not dangerous. Plus at work, it is important to see my colleagues in person.” (September survey anonymous feedback)*

Such translocal lives are quite common for resourceful migrants in recent years due to easier communications, cheap flights, and internet, but such semi-involuntary mass escapes of resourceful migrants who seek to continue their transnational lives happens rarely, thus it is hard to predict what will happen with those communities.

<sup>4</sup> According to a telegram channel of one of the largest communities for anti-war Russians abroad, Kovcheg, one of the most popular requests from Russians is the issue of transferring children to foreign schools/ kindergartens

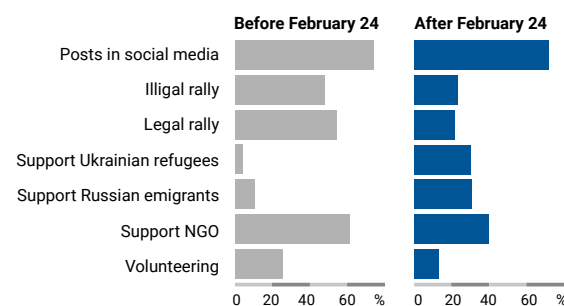
## REMAINING POLITICALLY ACTIVE

Russian migrants stay politically active, although the format of political engagement has changed a lot after emigration. The March survey shows that the share of those who participated in illegal rallies decreased from 49 % to 26 %, this is partially because the government tolerates that in the countries of destination peaceful rallying. The share of those who participated in legal rallies before the war also dropped from 55 % to 21 %. Such a decrease does not necessarily indicate de-politicization, this rather shows a change in activist repertoire, from street politics to volunteering. For instance, providing support for Ukrainian refugees is more challenging in Russia due to the lack of reliable information and its semi-clandestine nature, while in host societies it is often a socially desirable and accessible form of engagement. Protesting actions of the Russian government abroad may not be seen as the most efficient way of conveying the message, but rather as a signal to the host society that they do not support the war. Finally, safety considerations reinforced by earlier exposure to political repression may prevent some migrants from showing their faces in public. At the same time,

**THE SHARE OF MIGRANTS VOLUNTEERING IN FAVOR OF THEIR COMPATRIOTS AND UKRAINIAN REFUGEES INCREASED FROM 10% TO 32 % AND FROM 4 % TO 29 % RESPECTIVELY (see Figure 6).**

Figure 6.  
**Political actions of emigrants before and after February 24, 2022.**

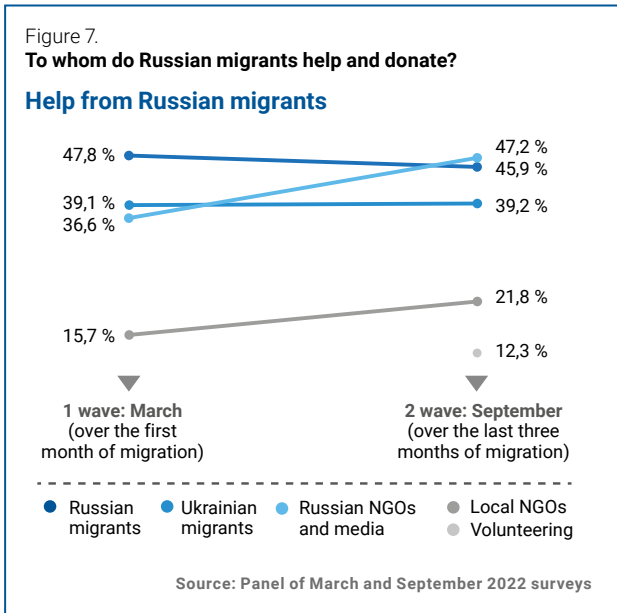
### Political Activities



Source: March 2022 survey

Most emigrants not only post independent information on social networks and participate in protests, but also engage in donations to both Ukrainian refugees and Russian emigrants, Russian independent NGOs, including Feminist Anti-war Resistance (FAR), and other grassroots initiatives. Figure 6 shows an overtime increase in volunteering from Spring to Fall 2022, from

15,6 % to 21,8 %. Donations to Ukrainian refugees have also increased from 36,6 % to 47,2 %. Donations to Russian NGOs and media remain about the same: 48 % - 46 %, as well as helping fellow migrants - 39 %.



Migrants tend to prioritize certain types of activities based on their normative views. One of our informants explains:

- Well, right now I have definitely OVD-Info, a few charity foundations, and something else, I think, Meduza. If I see that some Ukrainian family needs a stroller for a child, I can also give some money. But now my donations to Russian foundations are the same as before, and donations to anti-war foundations are smaller. (female, 25, graphical designer)

Patterns of donations and volunteering vary a lot depending on the political, economic, and cultural landscape of receiving states. In Germany, migrants donate more actively, while in Serbia and Turkey, such activities look less vibrant (see Figure 8). It directly reflects political opportunities for the political empowerment of Russian migrants in various states. Emigrants may also opt for countries with more suitable political and cultural climates. Although the main factor of political regime and overall openness plays a key role. Donating to Russian NGOs and media is the most popular type of donation irrespective of the country while volunteering and support of local NGOs vary dramatically from country to country. Migrants tend to support local NGOs in Germany and Georgia to a greater extent than in Turkey or Israel. Germany offers significantly more opportunities for volunteering as compared to many other destinations.

**SOME MIGRANTS TEND TO BE MORE POLITICALLY ENGAGED THAN OTHERS. OUR SURVEY DATA SUGGEST THAT FEMALES ARE MORE LIKELY TO DONATE, PARTICIPATE IN STREET MARCHES, AND HELP UKRAINIANS AND RUSSIANS. EARLIER EXPERIENCE OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM PREDICTS POLITICAL ACTIVISM AFTER EMIGRATION WELL. EXPOSURE TO REPRESSION MAKES SOME INDIVIDUALS RETHINK THEIR POLITICAL STANCE AND (RE-)SOCIALIZE INTO POLITICS.**

Online activism is the same across all the receiving countries, while participation in rallies tends to vary. Political regimes and landscapes of receiving countries play a decisive role in the emancipation and

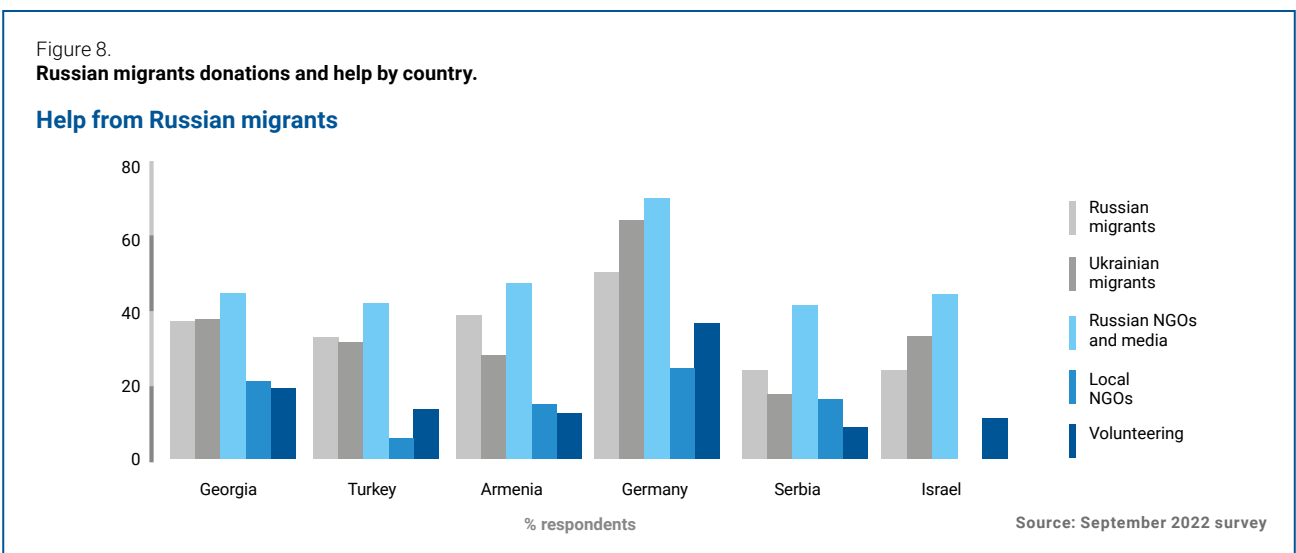
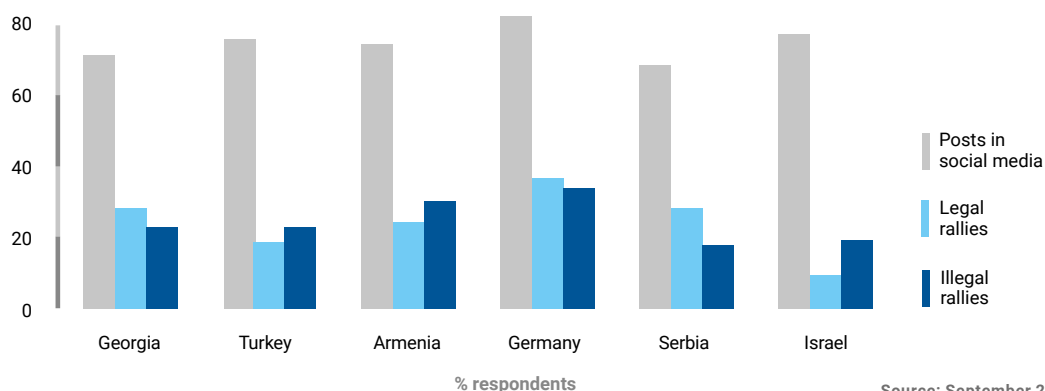


Figure 9.

**Political activities of Russians in some popular destination countries.****Political activity**

empowerment of new migrants. In countries where public street protest is common, like Georgia and Armenia, Russians often participate in street protests. Migrants are more active in Germany. While in less democratic states, like Kazakhstan and Turkey, Russians do not participate in public demonstrations that often. In the context of former USSR states, migrants seek to avoid possible negative labeling of “Russian oppressors” or “fifth column\turncoats” and to face hostility. Israel has the lowest share of demonstrators compared to other countries.

Meanwhile, we would expect stronger tensions between older diasporas in receiving societies as well as older generations of Russian political emigration even though they share the anti-war stance. Inter-generational differences are getting more weight and have the potential for further politicization.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMINISM, TOLERANCE TO LGBT+, OPENNESS TO ETHNIC AND RACIAL DIVERSITY, AND DECOLONIAL OPTICS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MANY IN THE NEW EMIGRATION FLUX, BUT LESS RELEVANT FOR THE OLDER, THIS CAN POTENTIALLY DRIVE DEEPER CLASHES BETWEEN OLDER AND YOUNGER RUSSIAN OPPOSITIONS.**

- “Russia needs decolonization. I don’t care how many borders must be crossed on the way from St. Petersburg to Moscow, if thereby Bologoe, Tver, and Torzhok will have a higher quality of life and developed business, science, and culture open to the world.” (September survey anonymous feedback).

- “You definitely cannot go anywhere [from Russia] now with this imperial consciousness, with such an attitude that you are our younger brothers, you are our former colony, and you have to speak Russian to me.” (female, 34, top manager)

As one can see from the quotes above, decolonial, anti-imperial optics becomes crucially important for many, though not for all, emigrants. Some recognize Russian imperialism which is knitted in Russian cultural narratives as one of the reasons for the war, and strive to get rid of it at least in themselves. The popular pursuit of studying the languages of the receiving societies is a part of this anti-imperial program.

## SUMMARY

**The Russian exodus is not over.** If the Russian borders stay open, even to a limited number of countries, the amount of migrants from Russia is likely to keep growing. A tangible threat of the new wave of mobilization is expected to push out several hundred thousand people in early 2023. Another flux will consist of the families that seek to reunite with those who left earlier, get settled and have a new start abroad.

**This emigration flux is professional, young, and in opposition to the existing regime in Russia.** They are translocal and stay interconnected as well as connected to their sending societies having much influence on them. In many areas, the brightest have left. Some support for their initiatives can give a significant output culturally, academically, economically, and politically.

**Some people do not have enough resources to continue their professional lives which leads to serious risks of de-professionalization.** This is especially true for the most vulnerable groups and those who suffered stronger repressions in Russia, like the LGBT+ communities, feminists, young adults with no finished education, and other people in insecure positions. Those repressed or those who lived under the highest risk of repression are still traumatized and need support.

**The opinion leaders for this flux of emigrants can significantly differ from the previous ones, as they tend to pay more attention to issues of feminism, LGBTQ+, decolonisation, and ethnic tolerance which used to be of less importance to the leaders of previous generations.** They also prefer grassroots initiatives to vertical structures and are much more likely to self-organize and create horizontal networks. Among other things, it will result in lower interest in quarrels inside the diaspora. These new people tend to care less about the debates on the leadership of the Russian opposition abroad. Another important difference is a higher level of generalized trust among the new wave, including trust in other immigrants and those who stayed in Russia. Those generational value differences can result in stronger tensions between older diasporas and the new stream of migrants. Simultaneously, we do not observe growing polarization between those who left and those who stayed. Connections are very strong, emigrants stay in the same discourse space as those who are in Russia, and the longer the war goes on, the more people share or at least can imagine the translocal experience of the others. However, there are political forces capitalizing

on the polarization between those who left and those who stayed. Polarization decreases efforts to agitate and inform the latter from abroad.

**Many migrants left for good and will seek to engage with receiving societies.** As the war in Ukraine proceeds, Russian migrants are likely to re-orient their political aspirations towards receiving societies. In our September survey, 60% of respondents reported that they were interested in the local politics of the countries they stayed in. In the data, we see that the earlier experience of political activism predicts well political activism after emigration, as well as exposure to repressions. Many of those who left in the February wave were people professionally connected in one way or another with political activism. Among them are coordinators of nonprofit organizations, human rights activists, investigative journalists, artists, and educators. Over the many years of activity in Russia, they had accumulated unique experience: on the one hand, they were quite familiar with the Western grantmaking and management systems, while, on the other, they were able to survive the unfriendly realities of Russia. For active and competent people, leaving Russia can be an excellent chance to develop projects and networks. Support for emigrant activists and NGOs may be strategically efficient, especially now that the Russian regime has stepped up its repressive measures against opposition abroad. They can contribute to the receiving communities as well as to Russian society after the regime changes.

**The new migration wave from Russia can alter the perception of Russia and Russians internationally.** These new migrants differ from the previous generation in their attitudes and values, are fluent in foreign languages, and are driven out of the country by predominantly moral issues along with the pressures of professional development as well as personal risks that stem from their critical position. They represent an alternative image of Russian society to the outside world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening intra-diaspora networks. Due to the preference for horizontal structures and translocality of the new Russian emigrant communities they are likely to have many nodes in their networks, not one leader or one organization that knits the community together. Cross-country networks can support the Russian diaspora transnationally and facilitate the co-creation of alternative cultural and political projects.
2. Paying attention to the most vulnerable and least resourceful. Those who suffered most from repressions in Russia, or belong to the most oppressed groups (like LGBTQ+ activists), have a strong potential for political engagement, and will to participate, but currently need more support than the other groups of migrants.
3. Facilitating emigrants into local communities. Since new migrants have a lot to offer in terms of skill and connections, it would be fruitful to channel these new resources into strengthening domestic civil society. Working with their horizontal, translocal (and at the moment very diffuse) structures requires more effort, but it can pay back well. Grants or projects stimulating mutual engagement of the Russian community with domestic NGOs and organizations would eliminate their current isolation and potential de-professionalization.
4. Engaging the strengths of the new migration wave like competence and professional skills. Easier paths of integration for medical professionals, academics, IT specialists, the artistic community, NGO professionals, and journalists can help fill in the gaps in the local markets. The countries that will offer easier integration for them can receive a pool of well-trained professionals in one or several fields. Supporting them by providing language programs can seriously enhance integration.
5. Removing excessive barriers and avoiding unnecessary securitization discourse of migrants as it is likely to discourage them from any collective action. These migrants are very unlikely to form security threats to the receiving societies.
6. Supporting educational projects (e.g. open lectures, civic education initiatives) for Russian-speaking communities in various countries can enhance the spreading of the voices of the brightest members of the new wave of migration and keep the communities vibrant intellectually and culturally. It will also have a strong effect on the representatives of the earlier waves of Russian emigration. One of the challenges for emigrants is the inability to agree on the political projects of the future. Providing forums and platforms (both online and offline) for interaction and negotiation can help develop political agendas and action plans.
7. The political influence of the emigrants on those who stayed in Russia is likely to depend not only on the format and tone (which is important and has to avoid manipulation) but also on the degree of polarization between the two groups. Thus, supporting opinion leaders who work to reduce the polarization between those who left and those who stayed in Russia, not reinforcing it, is crucial.

## ABOUT THE SERIES

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a turning point in the history of the continent. While the war is undoubtedly the most catastrophic outcome of the fundamental crisis in Russia, it is not the only one. **The Russian Crisis** is a series of papers, which are focused on events and trends affecting society, economy, and politics in the Russian Federation.

Due to Moscow’s growing global isolation, intensified internal repression, mass emigration, severed international ties, disinformation campaigns, and rapid news cycles, it has become increasingly difficult to keep up with long-term developments in Russia. This project is dedicated to deepening the public discourse and aims to bridge the gap between fast-paced political reporting and academic research. By doing so, it strives to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of the crisis and encourage a more nuanced understanding of the complex challenges ahead.

The series editor is **Greg Yudin**. He is a political theorist and sociologist, affiliated with multiple academic institutions in Russia and the United States. He has contributed to the theorization of Russian politics within the current global trends, conducted fieldwork in Russia and beyond, engaged in methodological debates on studying and reading Russian society. He is active as academic researcher, author of commissioned reports and policy papers, and is a contributor to major media in Russia and abroad.

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## SUMMARY



We do not observe growing polarization between those who left and those who stayed. Connections are very strong, emigrants stay in the same discourse space as those who are in Russia, and the longer the war goes on, the more people share or at least can imagine the translocal experience of the others. However, there are political forces capitalizing on the polarization between those who left and those who stayed. Polarization decreases efforts to agitate and inform the latter from abroad.



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