

Russia and Germany to Face Threats: a comparative analysis of migration policies

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has left an indelible imprint on all spheres of life, including on migration policy. The closure of borders between states has led to a change in the ratio of labor in Europe and in Russia. This article examines the challenges and threats to national stability and security, which developed countries with a high level of migration mobility faced amid the coronavirus pandemic changing traditional traits of migration policy. The article provides an analysis of the migration situation in Russia and Germany that existed before the coronavirus pandemic. The measures taken by Russia and Germany during the pandemic aimed at reducing the risk of the spread of a new coronavirus infection, implemented in the field of migration policy are being compared and analyzed. The purpose of this study is to reveal the effectiveness of new solutions in migration legislation and to consider how the further development of migration policy may affect the labor market. The article analyzes the role of regional authorities in mitigating the consequences of coronavirus infection concerning the migration situation. The urgency of the problem of changing

migration policy is due to the significant role of migrants in the economic and social development of Russia and the European Union. The article analyses expert forecasts of the development of the situation. The conclusions about the effectiveness of the considered measures and decisions are given. |

Key words: labor migrants, migration policy, pandemic, COVID-19, Russia, Germany

Main body

General characteristics of migration in Russia

The main distinguishing feature of migration in Russia is that labor migrants, the majority of whom are immigrants from post-Soviet countries, come to find a job in Russia. However, this process has boom and bust cycles depending on the season. The majority of the labor migrants coming to Russia are less qualified than the locals. [5] Over the past two decades, foreign workers have become an integral part of the Russian labor market. At the same time, work in Russia has become an important source of income for millions of households in the former Soviet republics. Annually the level of migration is the lowest at the beginning of the year. Most labor migrants arrive in the country in the period between March and May, and return to their homeland in late autumn and early winter before the New Year holidays.

Changes occurred due to the coronavirus pandemic and the measures introduced by the Russian authorities

The coronavirus pandemic has worsened the situation of labor migrants in all countries of the world, and Russia is no exception. The lockdown and the suspension of the activities of many enterprises in Russia shocked severely not only those who were in Russia but also those who were going to come in the spring.

The introduction of quarantine measures in March 2020 suspended partially or completely the activities of many enterprises, and especially in those industries where a large number of foreign workers are employed: construction, restaurant and hotel business, wholesale and retail trade. Like Russian citizens, some of

the labor migrants lost their jobs or began to work part-time which led to a complete or partial loss of income. The labor market faced the lowest level of employment in April (Denisenko, Mukomel, 2020).

The worst-paid and most socially vulnerable groups of migrants, such as those with an irregular legal status or without any valid documents for stay, residence or employment in Russia including informally employed people, suffered the most.

Another problem that faced migrants was closing borders and cutting off flights between Russia and other independent states, so that many of them found themselves trapped. Labor migrants, most of whom are citizens of Central Asia countries, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, were stuck in the airports of large Russian cities and were forced to live at railway stations and airports waiting for canceled flights and trains.

All these issues made the Russian authorities conduct emergency measures to escape the crisis, provide safety for migrants and prevent the coronavirus from spreading. The first and foremost measure was the extension of the period of stay. From March 19, 2020 foreign citizens had the opportunity to extend the period of temporary stay in the territory of the Russian Federation. This applied both to citizens who arrived from visa-free and visa required countries. [6]

The regional authorities of Russia introduced emergency measures to combat coronavirus. Thus, in Moscow and the Moscow region, the most stringent self-isolation regime was established, while in other regions “light lockdown” was imposed. As a result, the collapse of the migrant labor market in the megalopolis was more significant than in the regions. Unemployment level in Moscow grew in March, while in the regions the level of working migrants

increased as usual at this time of year. And if the number of workers in April in Moscow decreased compared to March by 40.8%, in the regions the figures are not as oppressing - by 21.2% (Denisenko, Mukomel, 2020)

After the situation began to stabilize the Presidential Decree "On temporary measures to regulate the legal status of foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Russian Federation in connection with the threat of the further spread of the new coronavirus infection (COVID-19)" was issued in order to alleviate the position of migrants. [3]

It is important to highlight the fact that a number of amendments to the Law "On Citizenship of the Russian Federation", simplifying the procedure for obtaining a Russian passport by foreigners, entered into force on July 24, 2020. Russian citizenship can now be obtained without giving up the one that exists. The amendments reducing the period for consideration of an application for acquiring citizenship from 6 to 3 months came into force in June. [4]

Thus, we can conclude that the pandemic has hurt not only the labor market in general but especially labor migration in particular. It exposed the existing problems and holes in the migration legislation. Illegal and officially unemployed migrants found themselves in a vulnerable position, but we can hardly expect them to come out of the "shadow". We assume that the pandemic and innovations in legislation can accelerate the process of institutionalization of the shadow sector, where migrants are involved.

We proceed to the labor market for migrants in Germany, which has a different look from the Russian one.

General characteristics of migration in Germany

A characteristic feature of the German labor market is its need for skilled workers. According to the Ministry of Economy and Energy of Germany, 61% of German employers today experience a shortage of skilled labor. The majority of labor migrants heading to Germany have qualifications, education and work skills. Labor migration to Germany is not seasonal, on the contrary migrants stay there on a long-term basis. A report released by the German Ministry of the Interior in January 2020 indicates that humanitarian migration to the country is declining, while migration in search of work and study is growing dynamically.

Changes occurred due to the coronavirus pandemic and the measures introduced by the German authorities

It is noteworthy that the German government copes with the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic much better than other countries do. At the end of April, the unemployment rate in Germany was 5.8%. The main blow fell on the gastronomic, tourist and auto-industries.

The EU plays a major role in stabilizing the situation and fighting against the new coronavirus infection. The Commission of the European Union issued a set of recommendations for all EU member states at the end of March, urging not to punish foreigners from non-EU countries who could not leave the EU territory in time due to the restrictions imposed and renew their permitted stay as soon as possible.

The Federal Labor Agency released a report that in April more than 10 million workers were transferred to work on reduced schedules. [1] The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture made the corresponding decision to allow tens of thousands of labor migrants to enter the country in April and May, despite closed borders. The purpose of the permit is to avoid shortages of certain types of fruits and vegetables, which could lead to higher

prices. Germany lifted the current travel restrictions for seasonal workers from the EU and the Schengen countries on June 16 imposing a quota of 300 thousand people. The measures listed above correspond to the idea of the importance of economy in German policy.

Being a federal state Germany has dispersed power to the regional authorities in order to increase the effectiveness of measures imposed to fight against coronavirus. The awareness of regional authorities of the current situation has contributed to the success in the migration sphere amid pandemic. The measures differ from one federal land to another. For example, a state of emergency was introduced in Bavaria, where the Health Emergency Act giving the regional government unprecedented powers was drafted and adopted quickly. [2]

Based on the foregoing, we can conclude that the German government did not resort to such measures as simplifying the procedure for obtaining citizenship. A decline in the number of labor migrants takes place in Germany, as well as throughout the world, but this trend was set even before the pandemic.

Conclusion

Further forecasts and measures

It is high time for adequate and timely public policy to be imposed in order to help labor migrants. Effective use of technology can also benefit migrant workers and their families. For example, the use of digital technology and mobile payment systems can make it easier and cheaper to send and receive money transfers. Reducing these costs would allow a significant portion of the money to be switched to the public needs.

The worsening healthcare crisis in some largely populated countries will lead to an increase in emigration sentiment, which may motivate skilled workers to

move to countries where the economic and social situation is better (e.x. Germany). As for Russia, in the short term after the end of the restrictive measures associated with the coronavirus epidemic the emigration of Russians, including qualified specialists, from their motherland may increase amid the economic crisis. And educational migration from post-Soviet countries (migration donors of Russia) will increase. Consequently, educational migrants to Russian educational institutions of secondary vocational education, whose graduates have good prospects of employment in Russia, will become more sufficient.

A great part of labor migrants in Russia will be forced to move from the legal Russian labor market to the shadow economy. We should expect an increase in the shadow component of the labor market, where foreign workers compete with Russians. Their competitive advantages are a lower hourly wage rate, to which they will agree, and a willingness to work in difficult conditions, including health risks.

The restrictions on entry and exit from Russia and within Russia introduced during the pandemic even for its own citizens and citizens from the EAEU countries, as well as in Germany, have seriously worsened the living conditions of external migrants. The gradual removal of barriers of movement is unlikely to lead to a quick and complete restoration of migration opportunities that existed before the pandemic. This is also a serious challenge, as restrictions on the free movement of labor force reduce the rate of economic growth, both regionally and internationally.

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