

# Migration policy towards skilled labor in the Russian Federation<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The article analyzes the policy of the Russian Federation towards skilled foreign labor in retrospect — from the moment of the collapse of the USSR to the present day. It is shown that throughout the recent history of law-making and in practice, labor migrants have been considered mainly as a temporary phenomenon despite the country's need for qualified personnel who could become a part of its resident population. The article attempts to systematize existing channels of skilled migration and provides main principles of their operation. It is shown that, with the exception of a program aimed at the so-called highly skilled specialists (HSS), other forms of attracting foreign workers do not offer a package of conditions that can interest potential migrants in moving to Russia. The system of attracting HSS has not yet shown its effectiveness and is mainly used for simplified temporary access to the Russian labor market. The State Program of assistance to the resettlement of compatriots, formally intended for migrants with ethnic and cultural affinity to the population of Russia, actually uses the principles of selection of skilled labor migrants. Only at the end of 2019, steps were taken that made it easier for graduates of Russian universities and technical schools, as well as specialists with professions in demand, to obtain a residence permit. However, these steps look half-hearted. Comparing the Russian experience with the practice of some foreign countries gives grounds for thinking about what tools and approaches can improve the effectiveness of the Russian policy towards qualified migrants and arouse their interest in moving to our country for permanent residence.

**Keywords:** foreign workers, labor migration, skilled specialists, highly skilled specialists, migration policy.

**JEL:** E24, J08, J15, J61.

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## Introduction

In contrast to migration through family reunification and even migration of asylum-seekers, which is difficult to regulate since it depends not only on national but also on international law, labor migration policy is the prerogative of the state and, in theory, should best reflect its interests. Migrant receiving countries regulate this process taking into account the current situation in the national labor market and its long-term needs. A special place in the flows of international labor migration is occupied by those who are allowed to legally stay in the country of destination for a long period of time or move there for permanent residence. As a rule, this applies to people with necessary competencies and professions which are in demand in the country. Such migrants are considered by the host countries as potential citizens, their rights are much wider than those of unskilled workers or people who come to work on a short-term basis (which often coincides). The exact number of skilled migrants in the world is unknown, and most likely they are a minority, but “in terms of development, however, these migrants have an importance far greater than their numbers might imply” (Skeldon, 2004, p. 7). The contribution of skilled migrants is not limited to the performance of their work responsibilities. The most talented and motivated of them contribute to the creation of the new enterprises and jobs and to the technology’s development (Moore, 2006, pp. 330–331).

Experience of the foreign countries shows that the main approaches of migration policy regarding long-term labor migration have stood the test of time. Sponsorship of migrants by employers or, on the contrary, admission of foreigners with necessary human capital on a competitive basis made it possible to establish relatively stable immigration regimes. They ensure selectivity of migration policy and allow to achieve a balance between the capacity of the labor market and the supply of foreign workers.

Countries regulate the influx of skilled labor force taking into account the situation in the labor market, narrowing or, vice versa, expanding this channel. In times of economic downturn, migrants’ eligibility criteria become more stringent (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010, pp. 1–2). When the situation changes, the selection criteria are reviewed in the direction of simplification (OECD, 2019, p. 47). Migration policy adjustments in the field of labor migration can be either radical or, to a greater extent, “cosmetic”. It is about creating new forms of admission of foreigners to the labor market, launching new immigration programs, or about some modifications of the rules that regulate existing migration flows. A country’s migration attractiveness for skilled workers depends on a set of rules that make up the “immigration package”: availability of quotas that control the flows of skilled immigrants, ease of employment, restrictions on admission to permanent residence, citizenship and employment opportunities for adult family members (primarily spouses) (De Smet, 2013, pp. 6–7).

For almost three decades after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Russia has been a destination country for hundreds of thousands of labor migrants not only from the countries of the former USSR but also from other parts of the world. Demographic trends indicate an increasing need for migratory influx. According to the medium variant of demographic prospect, by 2035, the working-age population of Russia will decrease

by 4.4 million people, and without migration – by 5.6 million<sup>2</sup>. Despite the continuing demand for unskilled labor, the goals of the country's long-term economic development require attraction of migrants with certain skills and occupations which are in demand in Russia. According to the Federal State Statistics Service, in 2018, the number of employees needed to fill vacancies reached almost a million people, including almost 94 thousand in manufacturing, more than 150 thousand in healthcare, almost 100 thousand in transportation and storage, and about 40 thousand in the energy sector<sup>3</sup>. The main documents that define the vector of migration policy in Russia traditionally emphasize the need to attract migrants with necessary competencies. However, domestic policy in this direction can hardly be called consistent, and its effectiveness is low. This needs to be understood, and the approaches used need to be reviewed and developed.

It is difficult to give an exact definition of “long-term” or “skilled” labor migration in the Russian context. Most migrant-receiving states establish differentiated mechanisms for different skills and professional groups. A peculiarity of the Russian approach is an attitude to labor migration as to a temporary phenomenon and the absence of direct link between the level of qualification and the duration of a foreigner's stay in Russia. In 2019, some steps were made towards expanding the rights of skilled migrants, but they also look half-hearted and timid.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the Russian policy in the field of long-term labor migration after the breakdown of the USSR and determine the directions of its modernization taking into account foreign experience. It is important to understand which of the most common models – employer sponsored migration, or admission of migrants to free competition for jobs – is most appropriate in the Russian context. The article is based on the analysis of legal acts of Russia and foreign countries, analytical publications on our topic of interest, as well as data from national statistical and migration services. In this article, we do not consider the methods of assessing the needs of the Russian economy in foreign workers but focus on the analysis of conceptual approaches to regulating skilled labor migration.

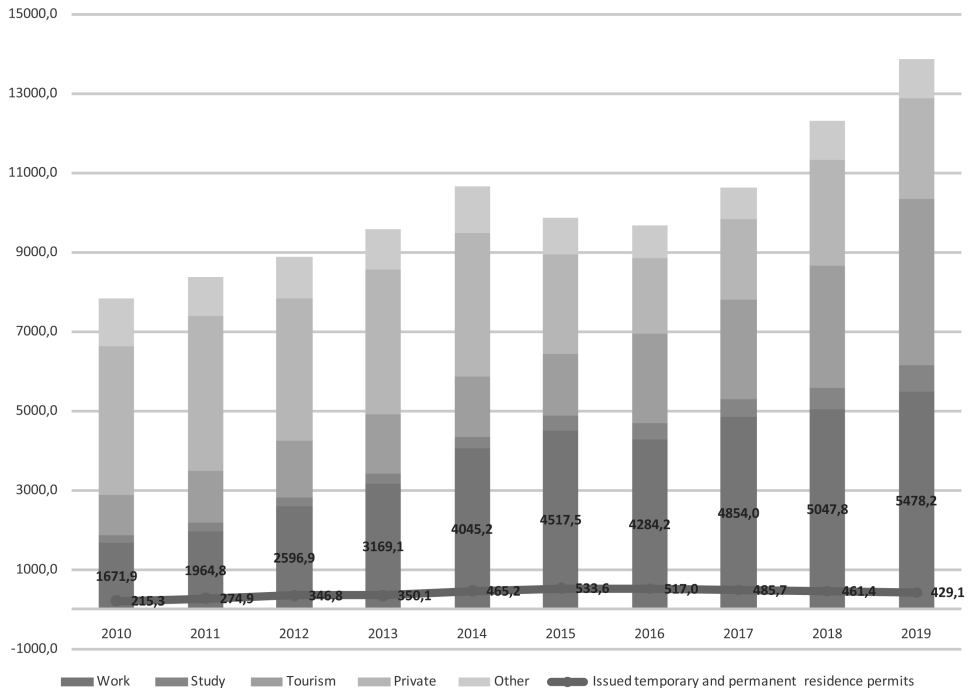
## **1. The first steps in regulating labor migration in Russia after the breakdown of the USSR**

A particular feature of the migration situation in Russia is a significant scale of short-term and temporary forms of labor migration. In recent years, the number of foreigners annually registering with authorities and specifying work as the reason for arrival has exceeded five million people. This is the largest group of foreigners registering at the place of temporary stay in our country. Less than half a million people a year are granted the right to reside in Russia with temporary residence permit (TRP) or permanent residence permit (Figure 1). Many of these migrants also become part of the labor force of our country as over 80 percent of them are people of working ages.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates based on the UN data <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>

<sup>3</sup> Rosstat 2019. Trud i zanyatost' v Rossii. Statisticheskij ezhegodnik. 2019, s. 77 (Rosstat 2019. Labor and employment in Russia. Statistical Yearbook. 2019, p. 77).

In the previous years, temporary labor migration determined the whole migration landscape in Russia and throughout the post-Soviet space. It is difficult to compare the number of issued work permits<sup>4</sup> and the number of arrivals for permanent residence<sup>5</sup> in retrospect, because until 2007, the majority of labor migrants worked without documents, the area of free movement of labor was gradually expanding (excluded from the account are citizens of countries that are now members of the EAEU), and the methodology of accounting for both labor migration and migration for permanent residence changed.



Source: Data of the Federal migration service (FMS) and Main directorate for migration issues (MDMI) of the MIA of Russia, Form 2-RD<sup>6</sup>.

**Figure 1.** The number of foreign citizens registered with migration authorities for the purpose of stay, and the number of decisions made on issuing temporary and permanent residence permits in Russia, 2010–2019 (thousand)

In the first years after the breakdown of the USSR, nascent labor migration was regulated by the 1981 law on the legal status of foreign citizens in the USSR. Article 7

<sup>4</sup> Administrative data of migration authorities on the number of issued work permits, patents (from 2010) and notifications of hiring citizens of states with a visa-free entry procedure (from 2007 to 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Rosstat data based on registration of the population at the new place of residence and, since 2011, at the place of stay for a period of 9 months or more.

<sup>6</sup> Data starting from 2016 are available on the MDMI website; for earlier years, it was received at a request of the Faculty of Economics of Lomonosov Moscow State University.

of this law designated the right of foreigners to work in its most general terms, in effect, equating them with the citizens of the country<sup>7</sup>. For several years, the processes of labor migration developed without a regulatory framework relevant to the new geopolitical realities. It was necessary to create regulators capable of streamlining the presence of foreign workers in the Russian labor market. In December 1993, the Decree of the President of Russia “On attracting and using foreign labor in the Russian Federation” was signed<sup>8</sup>. The decree introduced a system of permits to hire foreign workers, both for legal entities and individuals, quotas for the number of foreign workers employed (by groups of professions), and confirmations (documents) of an employee’s right to work. Duration of contract most often did not exceed one year, but could be extended at the request of the employer. The Decree defined the categories of foreigners who had a simplified access to the Russian labor market. These included foreigners permanently residing in Russia, workers in science and culture, university professors, crew members of Russian sea and river vessels, students employed during holidays, and some other categories of foreigners. The decree also mentioned highly skilled specialists. They could be employed without a work permit in enterprises with foreign investment and in the positions of heads (and their deputies) of these enterprises and their divisions. Until the adoption of the Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation in 2002<sup>9</sup>, over a dozen documents on the regulation of labor migration were issued on the federal level. Some regions (like Moscow) introduced their own rules (David, 2000, p. 32). However, same as before, a significant part of migrants from the countries of the former USSR worked in Russia without documents (Chudinovskikh & Denisenko, 2020, p. 59), control mechanisms were weak, and many issues of the legal status of foreigners in Russia remained unresolved.

## **2. Temporary status of foreign workers is the main feature of the Russian labor migration policy**

The law “On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens”, which belatedly replaced the outdated USSR law of 1981, established uniform conditions for the use of foreign labor in the country, defined the terms “foreign employee” and “employment of a foreign citizen”, and also fixed a system of annual quotas for invitations to enter the Russian Federation for employment<sup>10</sup>. In 2003, a decree of the Ministry of Labor determined the procedure of

<sup>7</sup> Law of the USSR dated 06.24.1981 No. 5152-X (as amended on 08.15.1996, as amended on 02.17.1998) “On the legal status of foreign citizens in the USSR”.

<sup>8</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 16, 1993 No. 2146 “On the attraction and use of foreign labor in the Russian Federation”.

<sup>9</sup> Federal Law of July 25, 2002 No. 115-Φ3 “On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation”.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of October 30, 2002 No. 782 on approval of a quota for issuing invitations to foreign citizens to enter the Russian Federation for employment.

forming quotas<sup>11</sup>. The proposed mechanism was cumbersome and inconvenient, and the results of campaigns to collect requests from employers did not reflect the real needs for foreign labor<sup>12</sup>. Over time, the corruption component has developed in the quota system, and this has become one of the main reasons for introducing the patent system in 2010 (Denisenko et al., 2013). Subsequently, the branch of legislation related to labor migration developed. New freedoms or restrictions were introduced for workers and employers, and new forms of admission of foreigners to the Russian labor market appeared. Since 2007, citizens of countries with visa-free entry procedures could apply for a work permit without an invitation from the employer<sup>13</sup>, and employers were exempted from having a permission to hire foreigners. Almost at the same time, at the end of 2006, restrictions were first introduced on recruitment of foreigners in certain sectors and occupations. The practice still exists today<sup>14</sup>. Experts note that binding of this system to sectors of economy and lack of connection with occupations and jobs puts people with completely different skill levels in the same position (Romodanovskij & Mukomel, 2015, p. 14).

The definition of a foreign worker in the law “On the Legal Status...” denotes “a foreign citizen temporarily residing in the Russian Federation and carrying out labor activity in established order”. There are various approaches to the definition of labor migrants<sup>15</sup>, but temporary nature of stay, noted in the 2002 Law and enshrined in all its subsequent versions, demonstrates attitude of the Russian legislator to foreign labor as to an exclusively temporary phenomenon. Such a definition conflicts with practice. Foreigners who work in Russia and have a permanent or temporary residence permit (TRP), in the terminology of the same law “On the Legal Status...”, do not refer to “temporarily staying”. However, they definitely should be treated as foreign workers if they are involved in remunerated labor activities in Russia. The perception of labor migration as a temporary phenomenon, tacit rejection of the prospect of long-term employment and residence of foreigners in Russia led to the fact that until 2010, the issues of creating special conditions for recruitment of such labor migrants were not considered in Russian legislation.

<sup>11</sup> Decree of the Ministry of Labor of the Russian Federation of April 29, 2003 No. 23 “On approval of the Procedure for preparing and considering proposals for determining a quota for issuing invitations to foreign citizens to enter the Russian Federation for labor activity”.

<sup>12</sup> The quota system has not proved its effectiveness over the entire period of its application. It was and remains characterized by a cumbersome procedure of application campaign, multi-stage passing of instances, and inability to take into account current fluctuations in demand for labor. During the decade under review, a quota for work permits was not selected. The share of permits issued within the quota in relation to its volume averaged 63% in 2010–2014 (i.e. 37% remained unclaimed), and 66% in 2015–2019. In 2019, only 42% of permits were issued within the established quota.

<sup>13</sup> Since 2007, the concept of quotas for this part of labor migrants refers to work permits, not invitations.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of September 30, 2019 No. 1271 “On establishing for 2020 the permissible share of foreign workers used by business entities engaged in certain types of economic activity on the territory of the Russian Federation”.

<sup>15</sup> The definitions used in statistics on labor migration differ from formulations of national legislation. The ILO guide on statistics of labor migration defines long-term and short-term labor migrants, persons who have arrived for work and permanent residence, and temporary labor migrants. The main emphasis is placed on the difference between workers permanently residing in the country or arriving for temporary employment. (ILO, 2018, pp. 11–12).

This is not the only logical contradiction laid down in the law “On the Legal Status...”. The quota for work permits was always formed with indication of specific professions or positions, and the list included such positions that imply long-term employment of a foreign worker. For example, permits for top managers of establishments, organizations and enterprises, as well as their structural divisions (services), specialists in the field of natural and engineering sciences, mid-level specialists in physical and engineering fields, etc. have always been subject to quota limits<sup>16</sup>. We see the problem not in the quotas themselves: this tool is successfully used in foreign practice of skilled workers recruitment. Within the framework of a quota, people get the right to immigrate to a country or obtain a relatively long-term employment. And spouses of migrants get the same rights. In Russia, most specialists have to annually renew their work permit. Many of them have to leave the country after a certain time and then return. Issues of bringing family members along are not considered in the law at all. Lack of stability could have a negative effect on the productivity of such specialists artificially causing turnover and rotation of personnel. Citizens of states with a visa entry procedure, apparently, were in a more convenient position. Multiple extended visas allowed them to stay in Russia for a long time, and extension of the visa was carried out through the FMS/MIA authorities without leaving Russia<sup>17</sup>.

In 2008, the Ministry of Health and Social Development decided to issue work permits without taking into account the quota to the so-called “skilled specialists” — representatives of a number of professions (positions)<sup>18</sup>. Subsequently, the list of professions was repeatedly revised, and their number increased<sup>19</sup>. The latest edition includes already 80 titles<sup>20</sup>. In addition to managers of various levels, it includes engineering professions, technicians and technologists, professions related to theater, circus and other types of

<sup>16</sup> For example: Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 29, 2007 No. 984 “On the determination for 2008 of the need to attract foreign workers to the Russian Federation”; Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 6, 2018 No. 1494 “On determining the need to attract foreign workers arriving in the Russian Federation on the basis of a visa, including for priority vocational qualification groups, and approving quotas for 2019”.

<sup>17</sup> For the period from 2010 to 2019, the bodies of FMS/MDMI MIA issued 1 million 680 thousand work visas. In 2010–2014, more than 200 thousand visas were issued annually, in 2015 their number decreased to 150 thousand, and by 2019 amounted to only 99 thousand.

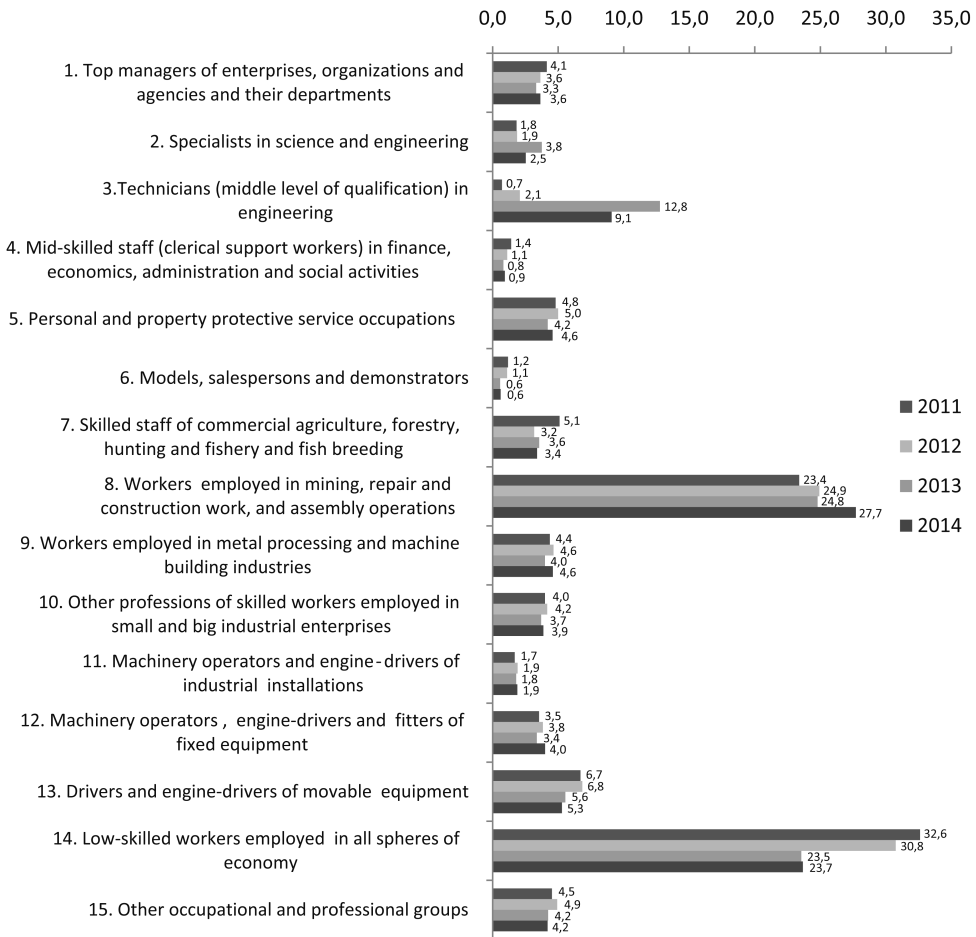
<sup>18</sup> Order of the Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation of July 25, 2008 No. 355H “On approval of the list of professions (specialties, positions) of foreign citizens — qualified specialists who are employed in their existing profession (specialty), to which quotas do not apply, for 2008”. Order of the Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation of December 22, 2009 No. 1010H “On approval of the list of professions (specialties, positions) of foreign citizens — qualified specialists who are employed in their existing profession (specialty), to which quotas do not apply, for 2010”.

<sup>19</sup> Order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation of December 20, 2013 No. 768H Moscow “On approval of the list of professions (specialties, positions) of foreign citizens — qualified specialists who are employed in their profession (specialty), on which quotas for implementation of foreign citizens do not apply, to work in the Russian Federation” — before that — Order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation of December 3, 2012 No. 568H and others.

<sup>20</sup> Order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of November 25, 2019 No. 734H “On Approving the List of Professions (Specialties, Positions) of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons — Qualified Specialists Eligible for Admission to the Citizenship of the Russian Federation in a Simplified Procedure”.



entertainments. Medical professions are not included in the list, apparently because in most cases they need certification of the right to work in healthcare or pharmaceuticals. Short period of work makes it unreasonable to spend time on this procedure. The legislation does not require a migrant to have a diploma confirming formal professional training, and the names of positions themselves sound not like professions that imply certain competencies, but just like job titles.



*Source:* Calculated according to the materials of FMS of Russia (based on Central Bank of Data on the Registration of Foreign Citizens).

**Figure 2.** Distribution of persons granted work permits in Russia (all categories), by enlarged professional qualification groups. 2011–2014 (%)

According to the data for 2018 on work permits issued to “visa workers” by professions, the largest group (27.3%) were workers engaged in mining, repair and construction work, and assembly operations, 13.5% were specialists in the field of natural and engineering sciences, and 12.3% – managers. About 11 percent were skilled workers in large and



small industrial enterprises. Only 2.5% of the permits were received by unskilled workers. Elimination of quotas will stop unnecessary procedures that have been lobbied and justified for decades only by the Ministry of Labor under the pretext of protecting the interests of Russian workers<sup>21</sup>.

The lack of requirements for certificates of professional training has encouraged employers to hire unskilled workers as technicians and technologists (mid-level specialists in physical and engineering fields). Such a “maneuver” allowed to avoid the difficulties of obtaining quotas. It was the main reason of changes in the share of unskilled workers in 2011–2014. It decreased from 33% in 2011 to 24% in 2014, and the share of middle-level technical specialists (which includes technicians and technologists) increased from 0.7% in 2011 to 9% in 2014 (and in 2013, it reached 12.8%). Such dynamics indirectly testifies to a formal redistribution of unskilled workers to the category of “skilled specialists”. Figure 2 shows the structure of people who received work permits in 2011–2014, by major professional groups. Such information for patent holders has been never collected, therefore, the data reflect only a part of the foreign workforce. The observation period in Figure 2 is limited to 2011–2014 due to the quality and availability of data that we received from the FMS of Russia. Until 2011, statistics were not available, and in 2015, migrants from the CIS countries were fully transferred to the patent system. A system for collecting information on occupations of the largest part of labor migrants was not established yet.

The main problem in attracting “skilled specialists” was that, regardless of their position, all of them remained persons with temporary status, having to re-pass the procedure for obtaining work permits every year, leaving Russia, etc. Due to their temporary status, these people were not allowed to bring their family with them, even for the period of their work.

Many countries issuing non-immigrant work visas allow the “main applicant” to move with family members. The world experience shows that the possibility of moving together with immediate relatives is associated with a high level of qualification of a labor migrant and is an important element of the country’s migration attractiveness (Ruhs, 2013, p. 47). As will be shown below, in Russia, such a right was granted only to the so-called “highly skilled specialists”, and a little later – to citizens of the states that are members of the EAEU<sup>22</sup>. Depriving other skilled workers, whose quantitative potential is more significant compared to HSS, of this opportunity, Russian legislation creates artificial obstacles to the growth of the flow. Skilled specialists who have not yet decided to move to Russia, or in principle do not consider it necessary, should be allowed to renew their contract without leaving Russia and obtaining a new work permit. Some types of visas allow this, but the vast majority of so-called “skilled specialists” remain persons with temporary status and short-term stay in Russia.

<sup>21</sup> The quota system has not proved its effectiveness. It was and remains inherent in the cumbersome procedure of the application campaign, multi-stage passing of instances, inability to quickly adjust to the fluctuations in demand for labor. During the decade under review, the proportion of permits issued within quota to its volume amounted to 63% on average in 2010–2014 (i.e. 37% remained unclaimed), and in 2015–2019 – to 66%. In 2019, only 42% of permits were issued within the established quota.

<sup>22</sup> And EAEU citizens, regardless of qualifications for the duration of the contract for work.

Since 2015, this category has been represented by citizens of foreign countries with entry visa requirement, and the potential for such immigration is not great. The times when there were many CIS citizens in this flow have already passed, and chances in this regard have been missed. However, granting skilled workers from foreign countries the right to reunite with family members over time may encourage them to decide to move to Russia for a long term or permanent residence. A lesser tendency to return migration (and, accordingly, the desire to gain a foothold in the host country) is one of the characteristic features of the migration of skilled workers (Docquier & Rapoport, 2007, pp. 14–15), but this potential is not realized in the Russian context.

Perception of all labor migrants as a temporary phenomenon once again demonstrated the attitude of the Russian leadership towards numerous foreign workers of other ethnic groups who do not fit into the concept of gathering the Russian World (subsequently partially implemented in the State Program for the Promotion of Relocation of Compatriots and enshrined in the new Concept of Migration Policy for 2019–2025). We can agree with Malakhov and Simon that political considerations dominate over economic interests in regulating labor migration in Russia (Malakhov & Simon, 2016, p. 9).

The lack of specialized programs aimed at skilled labor migrants and difficulties in finding jobs matching educational attainment have led to a large-scale underutilization of human capital. As V. Mukomel notes, “The problem is that skilled specialists are also employed in jobs that do not require any qualifications” (Mukomel, 2016, p. 33). A similar problem exists in foreign countries, but most often it is associated with migrants who are already part of the country’s resident population. Discrepancy between work performed and educational attainment is associated with difficulties in recognizing the diploma, knowledge of the language of the host country, etc. (Batalova et al., 2016). In Russia, skilled migrants with temporary residence and employment are not interested in going through a complicated nostrification procedure. A simpler solution for the majority is to search for the most affordable vacancies not requiring high qualifications and live a “circular” lifestyle.

### **3. The Reform of 2010: Patent system and program for attracting highly skilled specialists**

In 2010, amendments were made to the Federal Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens that became a milestone in the development of the legal framework for international labor migration in Russia. On July 1, a system of patents<sup>23</sup> for citizens of the former USSR

<sup>23</sup> Patent – a document confirming the right of a foreign citizen who arrived in the Russian Federation in an order that does not require a visa for temporary employment. Patents are granted without a quota and involve monthly payments to the regional budget, which are considered to be the equivalent of income tax (fixed advance payment). Absence of payment invalidates the patent. At the beginning of the application of the system, the price of a patent was the same for all regions and amounted to 1000 rubles (about 25 euros in 2010). Since 2015, the size of payments is set by the regional government with (or without) a deflator coefficient to the base value. In 2019, the cost of a patent ranged from 2172 rubles in the Chechen Republic and the Magadan Region to 9772 rubles in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Until April 24, 2020, an employee had the right to renew the patent in total for a period of up to two years without leaving Russia. In April 2020, the requirement to leave the Russian Federation was canceled.

countries with visa-free entry procedure<sup>24</sup> was introduced, as well as a system of attracting highly skilled specialists (HSS). The introduction of patents was a revolutionary step that in the following years freed hundreds of thousands of temporary labor migrants from the quota system for work permits. Affordable price and simple procedure soon made patents the most common form of authorization document for labor migrants from the CIS countries (Table 1). Initially, a patent allowed working in private households, and in 2015, the system was extended to legal entities and individual entrepreneurs.

At the same time, the conditions for admitting almost all foreign workers to the Russian labor market were changed<sup>25</sup>. The new rules included mandatory testing of knowledge of the Russian language, the basics of Russian history, culture and legislation, requirement for medical insurance of employees, and submission of application only to special regional “migration service centers”. Since 2015, the price of patents, previously the same for all regions, has become subject to free regulation by regional authorities. The legal novelties have fixed the procedure of attracting workers from the CIS countries without taking into account their qualifications. Both unskilled workers and engineers with tertiary education go through the same procedures of obtaining a patent, have the same temporary status, and bear the same material (and moral) costs to legally work in Russia.

As for the system of HSS, the introduced changes can also be called significant. For the first time in its history, Russian legislation defined special conditions for hiring foreign workers with a “high level of qualification” and proposed a package of previously not applied preferences that these workers could count on.

Although since 2009, foreigners with certain professions or invited to work in certain positions were allowed to get work permits without quota, they were still regarded as temporary workers. Such migrants did not receive any other advantages over others.

According to the definition given in the law, a highly skilled specialist is a foreign citizen who has work experience, skills or achievements in a specific field of activity if the conditions for attracting him to work in the Russian Federation imply remuneration in the amount established by law. In the first edition, the lower wage limit was set at a level of two million rubles a year for all HSS. At the end of 2011, new subcategories of HSS were introduced and more flexible criteria for payroll established. Subsequently, Article 13.2 of the Law “On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation” devoted to HSS was repeatedly amended. Currently, there are 6 categories of HSS: teachers and researchers in higher education and research institutions with state accreditation; foreign citizens involved in labor activities by residents of the technology-innovative special economic zone; specialized staff of the international medical cluster; specialists involved in the implementation of the Skolkovo project; employees invited by legal entities operating in the territories of the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol; other foreign citizens. In the current version of the law, the minimum wage for most categories of workers is calculated not for a year, but for a month, and the payment varies from 58,500 to 167,000 rubles (per month). The threshold of one million rubles is set for highly

<sup>24</sup> Visa-free entry and stay is unconditional for citizens of the CIS states except Turkmenistan. Visa is not needed even in case of application for residence permit or employment.

<sup>25</sup> The exception was made for the citizens of the EAEU countries and highly skilled specialists.

skilled specialists who are medical, pedagogical or scientific workers if they are invited to engage in relevant activities in the territory of the International Medical Cluster. Wage requirements do not apply to employees of the Skolkovo Innovation Center.

The main advantage of the HSS system is the absence of quotas, extended validity of work permit – from 1 to 3 years, availability of immediate three-year residence permit, and a right to bring family members. The absence of requirements for confirming professional competencies (the right to assess the sufficiency of knowledge of HSS is granted to the employer) allows people with different levels of education to be hired as highly skilled specialists. Workers are not allowed to be engaged in religious activities; restrictions are also imposed on employment in retail trade, except work related to management and coordination of trade activities<sup>26</sup>.

From 2010 to 2019, 243 thousand work permits were issued for HSS in Russia which amounted to only 1.1 percent of almost 22 million all types permissions issued over the past decade. Patents comprised two-thirds of this amount (Table 1). In the first year, the number of work permits received by highly skilled specialists was small (only 3.1 thousand) and reached a maximum in 2015, exceeding 43 thousand<sup>27</sup>.

**Table 1.** Number of permissions to work issued in Russia in 2010–2019 by major categories (*thousand*)

Type of document	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Regular work permits (quota)</b>	1164,8	1218,7	1403,6	1219,8	1142,0	113,2	93,0	103,8	81,8	74,7
<b>Permits for skilled specialists (quota-free)</b>	n/a	n/a	44,1	129,4	158,6	22,1	14,8	18,0	20,1	17,9
<b>Permits for HSS</b>	3,1	11,3	11,8	26,3	34,2	41,8	25,5	26,5	28,2	34,3
<b>Patents</b>	156,8	862,4	1279,1	1534,1	2379,4	1779,8	1492,2	1682,6	1671,7	1767,3
<b>Total</b>	1324,6	2092,4	2738,6	2909,6	3714,2	1956,9	1625,5	1830,9	1801,8	1894,1
<b>The proportion of HSS (%)</b>	0,2	0,5	0,4	0,9	0,9	2,1	1,6	1,4	1,6	1,8

Source: Data of FMS / MDMI MIA of Russia, Form 1-RD<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> The list of positions is established by order of the Ministry of Labor. See Order of the Ministry of Labor of Russia dated September 23, 2013 No. 475Н “On approval of the list of professions (positions, specialties) of foreign workers who manage and coordinate activities related to conducting trade, and qualification requirements for such employees”.

<sup>27</sup> In the reports of FMS/MDMI MIA of Russia, the data reflect both the documents executed and the number of persons who received them. We are not aware of the reasons for the discrepancies; they are insignificant and most likely are associated with re-issuing forms, or receiving more than one document by an employee within a year.

<sup>28</sup> The main source of data on the flows of foreigners who arrived in Russia as HSS are statistical reports of FMS / MDMI MIA of Russia 1-RD and 2-RD (the last one – from 2017). In the form of 1-RD, the details associated

The vast majority of foreigners who arrived in Russia as HSS are citizens of states with visa entry procedure. Their share in the flow averaged 85% over the decade from 2010 to 2019. The main country of origin of highly skilled specialists throughout the observation period was China, its share ranged from 14 to 33% (Table 2)<sup>29</sup>. The share of citizens of Turkey and Vietnam was noticeable: in 2012–2019, it averaged 11% and 9%, respectively. Citizens of the EU countries together accounted for about 20% of the flow, the United States – about 3%.

**Table 2.** Distribution of HSS by country of citizenship in 2012–2019 (%)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2012–2019
<b>Total</b>	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
<b>China</b>	13,6	17,2	20,4	22,9	23,2	16,2	24,3	32,6	22,3
<b>Turkey</b>	8,8	7,9	9,1	7,2	8,0	12,1	17,3	19,3	11,4
<b>Vietnam</b>	4,4	12,4	12,2	15,8	8,7	4,1	3,7	3,0	8,7
<b>Philippines</b>	1,9	6,2	11,4	6,7	5,7	3,0	2,0	1,5	5,2
<b>Ukraine</b>	5,3	4,1	3,3	5,2	4,9	6,1	4,0	2,8	4,4
<b>Serbia</b>	1,4	2,7	5,1	4,2	3,6	4,2	4,4	2,9	3,8
<b>Germany</b>	7,0	4,4	3,5	2,3	3,8	4,4	3,3	2,8	3,6
<b>France</b>	7,2	3,4	3,0	2,2	3,4	4,6	3,3	2,3	3,3
<b>USA</b>	5,5	3,0	3,2	1,7	2,7	3,3	2,4	2,0	2,7
<b>Italy</b>	3,2	2,0	2,2	1,7	2,7	3,7	3,5	2,5	2,6
<b>United Kingdom</b>	5,8	3,6	2,3	1,7	2,8	2,8	2,2	1,8	2,5
<b>Republic of Korea</b>	2,7	1,3	1,8	1,4	2,3	3,7	2,8	2,3	2,2
<b>India</b>	1,5	1,2	0,9	1,3	2,3	2,7	2,8	3,8	2,1
<b>Japan</b>	2,7	1,4	1,2	1,4	1,8	4,1	1,9	1,4	1,9
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	1,1	4,5	0,8	3,8	1,5	0,5	0,7	0,8	1,8
<b>Other</b>	28,0	24,8	19,7	20,7	22,5	24,4	21,4	18,2	21,7

Source: Based on the materials of FMS/MDMI MIA of Russia.

Migrant workers are extremely unevenly distributed across the regions of Russia, but to an even greater extent this is characteristic of HSS. According to the MDMI MIA of Russia (Form 2-RD), for three years (from 2017 to 2019), almost half (47%) of highly

with HSS changed throughout the observation period. From 2016, the report no longer includes information on the validity period of issued work permits from 2016 to 2017. Family members of an employee ceased to stand out among persons who received a residence permit under the program of HSS. Since 2018, this type of residence permit is generally not included in Form 1-RD, possibly due to insignificant numbers.

<sup>29</sup> The data on the distribution of HSS by country for previous years were incomplete. Its quality has improved since 2012, when information became available in the FMS's Automated System of Analytical Reporting. Since 2017, a new section – “External labor migration” – has appeared in the statistical report in form 2-RD, which highlights categories of permits, including highly skilled specialists, by country of citizenship and regions of Russia.

skilled specialists worked in Moscow, 9% – in St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast, and 5% – in Moscow Oblast<sup>30</sup>.

From 2010 to 2014, FMS of Russia published information on the validity of work permits for HSS. The share of permits issued for a period of one to three years reached 94%, and only 6% were issued for one year. However, this category of migrants, in fact, still remained temporary. The most important difference between the HSS system and all other channels of labor migration to Russia was the right to receive a three-year residence permit not only by the workers themselves, but also by members of their families. In 2010–2017 (data on residence permits for HSS were available for these years only), about 175 thousand foreigners received work permits as HSS, and only 3.4 thousand, including family members, got residence permits (that amounted to less than two percent of the flow). These migrants still consider Russia as a place of temporary residence and work having no intention to move here for permanent residence. It is quite possible that this system is used to circumvent the procedure of obtaining quotas implemented to regular work permits. One cannot ignore the fact that Russia, as a country of permanent residence, is attractive mainly to residents of the former USSR republics, which until recently did not have convenient and transparent rules for immigration to Russia.

Involvement of HSS in some projects that are most important from the official point of view is uneven. Only the Free Port of Vladivostok (and particularly in 2019) hired more or less noticeable number of foreign specialists, that is, almost a thousand. From 2016 to 2019, not a single foreigner was invited to work in the International Medical Cluster as a HSS<sup>31</sup>. As part of the Skolkovo project, about 130 foreign specialists have received work permits since 2016: 108 of them in 2017, and only 5 and 6 people in 2018 and 2019, respectively. More than 200 people were invited to work in the territories of advanced development in 2016–2019.

**Table 3.** Number of work permits issued to highly skilled specialists for employment in special economic zones of the Russian Federation (*units*)

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Project “Skolkovo”</b>	2	108	5	6
<b>Free Port of Vladivostok</b>	38	89	330	978
<b>Medical Cluster</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Advanced Development Territories</b>	0	81	168	214

Source: Data from FMS/MDMI MIA of Russia, Form 1-RD.

It is likely that foreigners are employed at the enterprises listed in the table, although they are not recruited as “highly skilled specialists”, but on the basis of ordinary work permits (maybe permissions for “skilled” specialists). But data on the number of such workers are not published.

<sup>30</sup> For comparison: the share of Moscow in the number of all issued permits amounted to 26%, and the share of St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast – to 14% and Moscow Oblast – to 12%.

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, due to the fact that workers in the medical and pharmaceutical professions with diplomas obtained in most foreign countries need to receive a certificate for the right to engage in professional activities in Russia, and this procedure is complicated.

Regarding the professional qualifications of HSS, the information is very scarce. For several years, we requested data from FMS and the Ministry of Internal Affairs dealing with professions of labor migrants who received work permits in Russia. For a number of reasons, this information was very incomplete in relation to HSS and reflected only part of the flow (in some years – only half). The data for 2017 were of satisfactory quality in terms of their completeness<sup>32</sup>. The data showed that in 2017, 36.2% of permits were issued to top managers of establishments and organizations, 13.3% were received by specialists in the field of natural and engineering sciences, about 2.5% each were received by mid-level specialists in physical and engineering areas of activity, and medium skills staff in the field of financial and economic activity. More than 40% of HSS were assigned to “other vocational qualification groups”.

#### 4. Graduates and representatives of professions in demand — a potential for long-term migration to Russia

Despite the fact that attracting HSS is framed as a separate program, there are other opportunities for long-term migration of skilled specialists in Russian law and practice. They were not in demand due to difficult conditions, but recently there was hope for a slight improvement in the situation.

First of all, we are talking about graduates of Russian institutions of vocational education (tertiary and high) and people who have a profession in demand in Russia (as well as investors and entrepreneurs). Formally, admission of these migrants was already regulated, but the main regulator was chosen incorrectly. Instead of simplifying the issuance of residence permits, the desired categories of immigrants were offered Russian citizenship. Although it was a facilitated procedure, the conditions established for the graduates by law were still inconvenient and became even more difficult than before. In addition, for many foreigners of above listed categories naturalization was not the main purpose of moving to Russia. The new rules for simplified citizenship acquisition for 2015–2019 were used by 2.7 thousand graduates, 6 entrepreneurs, not a single investor, and 224 skilled specialists with a three-year work experience in Russia (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Number of foreigners of certain categories granted Russian citizenship in a simplified manner, 2014–2019 (*persons*)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Graduates of Russian institutions of vocational education</b>	255	690	292	695	729
<b>Entrepreneurs</b>	0	0	0	1	5
<b>Investors</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Specialists with a 3 year work experience in a profession in demand</b>	0	0	4	84	136
<b>Total received Russian citizenships</b>	209 799	265 319	257 822	269 362	497 817

*Source:* Data from FMS/MDMI MIA of Russia, Form 1 RD.

<sup>32</sup> The issues of information support for migration studies of highly qualified specialists will be addressed in the final part of the article.



Graduates of Russian universities and technical schools could previously obtain Russian citizenship without any additional conditions. An amendment to the Law on Citizenship adopted in 2014 introduced a new requirement for this category of applicants – to work in Russia for three years before applying for citizenship. The possibility of naturalization became more distant for the applicants. The number of graduates who received Russian citizenship after the changes in 2014 decreased significantly. In 2010–2014, 5199 persons who received Russian professional education were accepted into citizenship, and in 2014–2019 – only 2720.

Such an approach confirmed an already observed trend: there is no direct interest in state policy in retaining in Russia and using the potential of foreign students at the end of the learning process (Belova, 2014, p. 78), despite the fact that most of them are people who know the Russian language well, who have received education in Russia and are fully integrated over the years of study.

In addition to graduates, a simplified procedure for obtaining citizenship was introduced in 2015 for people with professions in demand in Russia. In July 2015, the Ministry of Labor published the first list<sup>33</sup>. As with issuing work permits without taking into account the quota, it was about “skilled specialists”. But the lists of professions for simplified citizenship acquisition and for obtaining work permits without a quota were significantly different. The first order of the Ministry of Labor included 74 professions, mainly medical doctors, engineers, and skilled workers. In 2019, the list was revised, and it currently includes 135 points<sup>34</sup>. It has more medical and veterinary specialties (40% of the list), professions of skilled workers (more than 30%), and engineers of various profiles (20%). It also includes positions in agriculture (10%), professions of teachers, and some others. As shown in Table 4, in 2015–2019, only 224 people were able to take this opportunity. The 3-year work experience which was supposed to allow a migrant to change his temporary status step by step to permanent residence and then to acquire citizenship, appeared to be a difficult condition.

The gradual transition of temporary migrants to permanent ones is a common phenomenon. The concept of “two-step migration” implies retention of temporary workers and former international students who have secured domestic qualifications (Hawthorne, 2014, p. 2). Upon graduation from a national university, a graduate is immediately granted access to the labor market and permanent status if he or she finds a vacancy. The amendments of 2014 backfired: the waiting period for acquisition of citizenship turned out to be tied to three years of work in Russia with a temporary status. First, a migrant had to obtain a temporary residence permit on a quota basis, and then a permanent residence permit to be eligible to apply for citizenship. The same procedure was

<sup>33</sup> Order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Russian Federation of July 13, 2015 No. 446n “On approval of the list of professions (specialties, positions) of foreign citizens and stateless persons — qualified specialists entitled to receive Russian citizenship in a simplified manner”.

<sup>34</sup> Order of the Ministry of labor and social protection of the Russian Federation of 05.07.2019 No. 490n “On approval of the list of professions (specialties, positions) of foreign citizens-qualified specialists who are employed in their existing profession (specialty), in which quotas for issuing work permits to foreign citizens arriving in the Russian Federation on the basis of a visa do not apply”.

assumed for specialists with professions in demand. There was a legal conflict: the listed categories of foreigners were offered a simplified procedure for admission to citizenship, but the complex procedure for obtaining previous statuses remained unchanged. As noted by Russian researchers, there was a paradoxical situation: after graduation, it was almost impossible to immediately obtain a long-term status, and a university graduate had to work on a patent basis (Demintseva et al., 2018, p. 33) under the same conditions as an unskilled worker.

The immigration potential of graduates of Russian institutions of vocational education is significant. In 2019, the stock of foreign students at universities reached almost 300,000, of which 64% were citizens of the former Soviet republics. Around 49 thousand foreign students graduated from Russian universities, of which 32 thousand were citizens of countries that were previously part of the Soviet Union. About 6 thousand people graduated from technical schools and colleges, almost all of them were citizens of the newly independent states and the Baltic states<sup>35</sup>.

The rules for admission of graduates of vocational education institutions, as well as skilled specialists, to TRP and permanent residence permits have changed only since November 2019. The law adopted in the summer of 2019<sup>36</sup> introduced important amendments addressed to these categories of foreigners. Graduates were granted the right to receive TRP without a quota<sup>37</sup>. Persons who graduated with honors were able to apply for a permanent residence permit, bypassing the stage of TRP. Skilled workers could also immediately apply for a permanent residence permit, and the period of professional activity before application was reduced to six months.

Outside the scope of the amendments listed above, the question remains whether graduates and skilled specialists will be allowed to bring their families with them. We have already noted this problem in the context of quota-free work permits for “skilled specialists”. There is possibly a certain logic in such an approach if we are talking about temporary (short-term) work permit holders. A person with a short-term status has less rights than a person who is granted the right to settle. However, the amendments of 2019, along with simplification of obtaining a residence permit for graduates and specialists in demand, were again focused on single people and offered nothing to members of their families. This does not give a sense of stability to potential migrants. The possibility of family reunification becomes a problem that migrants will solve themselves.

<sup>35</sup> Data of the Ministry of higher education and science and Ministry of education of Russia.

<sup>36</sup> Federal Law dated 02.08.2019 No. 257-Φ3 “On Amendments to the Federal Law “On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation” regarding the simplification of the procedure for granting temporary residence permits and residence permits to selected categories of foreign citizens and stateless persons”.

<sup>37</sup> This right is granted to citizens of the former USSR republics which obtained higher or secondary vocational education in state educational or research institutions located in the Russian Federation within state-accredited educational programs.

## **5. The State Program of voluntary resettlement of compatriots as a program of migration of skilled personnel**

The functions of the missing programs of skilled labor migration in our country have been for many years partially performed by the State Programme to Assist Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian Federation. Formally, the goal of this program was to recreate the Russian World, and it was presented to the society as a repatriation program. The normative documents of the federal level emphasize the ethno-cultural closeness of potential migrants to the Russian population. In fact, this program is a hybrid combining repatriation and economic goals. We can cite the Decree of the government of Leningrad Oblast of 2015 that states that an increase in demand for skilled workers and structural changes in the regional labor market cannot be satisfied with existing labor resources and without attracting external labor migration. The next phrase of the Decree emphasizes that resettlement of compatriots with demanded vocational qualifications, educational, economic, demographic, socio-cultural, and other characteristics who can successfully adapt and integrate into Russian society is one of the sources of population growth in the region that is needed for its further socio-economic development<sup>38</sup>. Similar requirements can be found in other regions of Russia.

Due to a combination of dissimilar criteria, the State Program turned out to be ineffective, as evidenced by the relatively small number of its participants. Over the entire period of the program implementation (2006–2019), about a million people moved to Russia along this line. For Russia with a population of 146 million, this is rather a small amount. Kazakhstan, with population of 18 million, also received about 1 million migrants under the program of resettlement of ethnic Kazakhs (oralmans), which does not require professions or skills. This contradiction of the State Program can be eliminated by giving it an exclusively humanitarian, repatriation character, while migration of skilled labor must be regulated by special programs devoid of the requirements of “ethno-cultural closeness”. Significant financial resources allocated to support the participants of the State Program will be saved, since labor migrants are self-sufficient and do not count on assistance. At the same time, true repatriates will not have to prove that they are of pragmatic value to their historical homeland.

## **6. The issues of attracting skilled specialists in the Concepts of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation**

The issues of attracting skilled personnel are reflected in two Concepts of the State Migration Policy of Russia. In the first Concept, adopted in 2012, it was noted that “attraction of foreign workers in priority vocational qualification groups to fit the needs of the Russian economy is a necessity for its further progressive development”. One of

<sup>38</sup> Decree of the Government of the Leningrad Oblast of June 29, 2015 No. 240 “On Amending the Decree of the Government of the Leningrad Oblast of November 14, 2013 No. 394” On the Approval of the State Program of the Leningrad Oblast “Stimulating the Economic Activity of the Leningrad Region”.

the most important strategic tasks was “creating the conditions and mechanisms for attracting highly skilled and skilled specialists of various fields, entrepreneurs and investors, demanded by the economy, primarily on a long-term basis”<sup>39</sup>. Many tasks of the first Concept have not been completed (Denisenko & Chudinovskikh, 2017). Instead of offering diverse immigration channels, the lawmakers went the simplest way. They decided to provide simplified access to citizenship for these categories of migrants. It was supposed to increase the attractiveness of Russia for immigrants. As mentioned above, the measures taken were formal and did not bring the expected result because the preliminary statuses (based on residence permits) remained hard to obtain. The time was wasted.

In October 2018, a new Concept of the State Migration Policy for 2019–2025 was adopted<sup>40</sup>. It generally does not contain provisions dealing with skilled specialists as an independent target group of migrants. The issue is considered exclusively in the context of the State Program of the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots, thereby fixing its economic rather than repatriation character. At the same time, skilled migrants who, for various reasons, do not participate in the state program are left to their own devices. No special conditions are offered to them to facilitate their resettlement to Russia. Hopefully, the novelties of the legislation on residence permits that were put in force at the end of 2019 will find their audience and to some extent compensate for the lack of programs to attract skilled migrants to Russia.

## Concluding remarks

In what direction should the Russian policy of attracting qualified migrants be modernized? The experience of major migrant-receiving countries of the West shows that until recently, they used two fundamentally different approaches to selecting economic migrants. One of them was focused on meeting the demand from employers, the other was aimed at building human capital (Papademetriou & Hooper, 2019, p. 5). The first model, used mainly for temporary but also for permanent migration, has become more widespread. Sponsorship from the employer is considered a guarantee of the demand for certain competencies and qualifications. The second selection model is the points-based assessment of candidates according to characteristics related to their human capital, as well as, in some cases, the demand for a profession, regional nomination. It is a flexible and transparent system that insures an influx of immigrants able to adapt to changing labor market conditions (Papademetriou & Simption, 2011, p. 3). To better use the advantages of both migrant selection systems, the host countries started to implement hybrid models designed to balance the current and long-term interests of the labor market.

Analyzing in retrospect the policy of Russia in the field of skilled labor migration or long-term labor migration, we can see a dilemma: on the one hand, Russia’s interest

<sup>39</sup> The Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation through to 2025 (approved by the President of the Russian Federation on June 13, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 10, 2018 No. 622 “On the Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2019–2025”.

in skilled migrants is recognized, and several categories of skilled foreign workers are distinguished in the law, but on the other hand, effective targeted programs to stimulate their relocation to Russia and long-term employment are not created. The multiplicity of categories of skilled workers shows that different regulators are applied to persons who may have the same characteristics. To a certain extent, the management of labor migration in Russia is characterized by an artificial retention of its participants in a temporary status and restriction of rights, which apply equally to low-skilled workers and specialists with high-demand professions. “Skilled specialists” receiving work permit without quota are essentially temporary labor migrants, their stay in Russia is limited by the duration of the visa. A work permit is issued for a year, the vast majority of the employees, even having the prospect of receiving a new contract, is obliged to leave Russia to receive an invitation and a work permit again. Although such migrants can bring accompanying family members (on a special visa), they rarely use this opportunity.

The program for attracting highly skilled specialists, although it is declared as a special migration channel designed to attract long-term workers and provide the Russian economy with particularly valuable foreign personnel, also does not stimulate these people to move to Russia. The scanty numbers of issued residence permits for both specialists and their families confirm that the system of HSS is used very selectively to overcome the difficulties that an employer and employee encounter when obtaining quotas and work permits. Almost none of the highly skilled specialists use the opportunity to repeatedly extend an ordinary work visa for up to three years<sup>41</sup>.

The systems for receiving skilled and highly skilled specialists from the “visa” countries have much in common, and in terms of effectiveness they do not differ from the rest of the flow of labor migrants who come to Russia by visa.

The State Program of compatriots resettlement, which is formally considered a repatriation program, in reality is a program for selection of labor migrants, and we can say that such a combination does not bring tangible results. It needs to be freed from an unnecessary and even unfair function – the selection of potential participants by profession. If Russia wants to collect the Russian World, the terms of admission should not be connected with professional skills of potential migrants. These issues should be left to special labor migration programs. On the one hand, this will prevent labor migrants from the need to become “compatriots”, and on the other hand, it will make the state program itself consistent and improve its image and attractiveness.

When developing policies in the field of skilled migration, Russia should apply a wider range of tools and create different channels of labor migration with the possibility of status change. Given the experience of foreign countries, it makes sense to reconsider approaches to attracting skilled labor, removing unnecessary restrictions, and, on the contrary, giving migrants more rights. First of all, it concerns the right to a long-term contract and family reunion.

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<sup>41</sup> See Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of 09.06.2003 No. 335 “On approval of the Regulation on the establishment of a visa form, the procedure and conditions for its processing and issuance, extension of its validity, its restoration in case of loss, as well as the procedure for canceling a visa”, paragraph 29 (1).

The possibility of introducing a points based system is a debatable issue in Russian conditions so far. We believe that with a constant demand for skilled workers, it can work, but in a relaxed mode. The set of criteria should not be too large, and the “passing score” – too high. The main requirement should be the availability of a profession needed in Russia, knowledge of the Russian language, education, and professional experience. Vocational education received in Russia may be one of the circumstances giving additional preferences. Regional programs of attracting specialists would be effective with differentiated selection conditions and lists of professions in demand. And of course, foreigners who are of interest to the economy of Russia and its regions should have the right to bring their closest family members with them. Spouses and children of skilled workers should have the same rights to temporary or permanent residence and citizenship as the “main” migrant. Adult family members must have an unconditional right to work. These measures will make it possible to formalize disparate and not always logically connected rules into a relatively ordered package of measures, create a program (or programs) to attract workers with demanded professions and a prospect of gaining a foothold in Russia for a long time or moving here for permanent residence.

Within the framework of this article, we have not considered some important issues directly related to migration of skilled labor. In particular, it is the issue of recognizing the qualifications of migrants, which is considered one of the most significant elements in the development of immigration policy (ILO, 2013, p. 127). We also cannot investigate in detail the motivation and immigration intentions of skilled migrants who come to Russia as part of the so-called “intra-company transfer”, do not compete with local workers for a specific workplace, and may not consider their country of destination as a place of voluntarily chosen residence<sup>42</sup>. Another important problem is the incompleteness and poor quality of data on foreign specialists’ position in the Russian labor market. We know practically nothing about what jobs and in which sectors of the economy are occupied by skilled workers from the CIS countries who work on patents, and to what extent their education matches the performed work. And we also do not have comprehensive assessments of the needs of the Russian economy in skilled migrants<sup>43</sup>.

It is impossible not to think about a possible impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the skilled workers migration to Russia. According to the Pew Research Center, as of April 1, 2020, about 91% of the world’s population live in countries with entry restrictions<sup>44</sup>. Most likely, these measures will be temporary; however, there is a risk that “temporary measures have a nasty habit of outlasting emergencies”<sup>45</sup>. Compared to the first 5 months of 2019,

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<sup>42</sup> Although they have a positive attitude to working abroad during their assignment both from the viewpoint of earnings and career growth (Moodley, 2014, p. 63).

<sup>43</sup> In foreign practice, trade unions are involved in such assessments, advisory councils are created that can link research results with political decisions (Ruhs & Anderson (Eds.), 2010, p. 3).

<sup>44</sup> Connor, P. *More than nine-in ten people worldwide live in countries with travel restrictions amid COVID-19*. 1 April 2020. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/01/more-than-nine-in-ten-people-worldwide-live-in-countries-with-travel-restrictions-amid-covid-19/>

<sup>45</sup> Harari, Yu. N. The world after coronavirus. *Financial Times*. March 20, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>



in 2020, the number of work permits issued for skilled and highly skilled specialists in Russia accounted to 35% and 53%, respectively, and the number of patents — to 70%. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the demand for skilled workers in Russia — with some structural changes — will remain in the future. If Russia needs skilled workers who will become part of our society, it is necessary to simplify the terms of reception conditions for migrants and allow them to bring their families, that is, to enable them to form a new vision of Russia as a country of future residence, and not just a place of short-term employment and earnings.

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