Despite its geographical position and vast territory, historically Russia was not favoured by immigrants, probably due to its rather harsh climatic conditions. Other nations were usually subsumed into Russian society through a process of territorial expansion of the Russian State. However, the assimilation of foreigners was not always complete: hence the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Russia.

A drastic change in migration policy occurred when, in 1917, Tsar Nicholas II relinquished the crown and the Provisional Government decided to grant Russian citizenship to all subjects of the former Russian Empire. This was an unprecedented act of naturalisation in modern times. Subsequently, Soviet Union migration policy was inextricably linked with industrialisation policy, which conditioned the high level of flows of immigrants from all the Soviet Republics to future industrial centres. Nevertheless, starting with the 1960s and to the present day, net migration in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (until 1991) and then the Russian Federation (since 1991) has never dropped below zero.

**EVOLUTION OF MIGRATION POLICY**

The issue of migration policy has become really acute for the Russian Federation since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, when about 25 – 30 million ethnic Russians living in other former Soviet republics suddenly became foreigners. Prior to this, little attention was devoted to the issue of immigrants. However, with the first flows of displaced people into the country as a result of ethnic conflicts erupting on USSR territory at the end of 1980s and early 1990s, Russia faced the need to draw up new migration policy and legislation for immigrants.

The Law on Citizenship of the RSFSR (1991), the paper “Migration” (1992), the Federal Migration Programme (1994) and other migration policy bills, passed in the early 1990s were mostly concerned with the rights of refugees and displaced peoples and the procedures of their settling in the territory of the country. As a result, all other spheres of migration policy, especially irregular immigration, were mainly overlooked.

1994 was the year with the highest rate of immigration, which totalled 1,358,000 people. Previously, since the mid-1980s the migration rate had been quite stable, at around 800,000 people per year. Immigrants from the countries of the newly-formed Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and other former Soviet republics accounted for the vast majority. Between the years of 1991 and 1995, net migration from the CIS and Baltic countries was more than 2.5 million people. However, ethnic Russians accounted for 67% of all the migration gain during the period of 1989 – 2004.

1995 saw a significant decline in the number of immigrants coming to Russia. The Government’s failure to meet most of the obligations declared in the first migration laws exacerbated the situation. However, the main reason for the decline was clearly the increasing instability of the internal political situation and military confrontation in the breakaway republic of Chechnya in particular.

Later, the economic crisis of 1998 in Russia contributed to a further decline in international immigration to the country. It also brought about a slight rise in the rate of emigration. All in all, by the end of the century the immigration rate in Russia was showing a clear downturn. The capacity of neighbouring countries to contribute towards any immigration increase in Russia was increasingly dwindling, and flaws in legislation and an apparent disregard by the Russian government for the importance of a well-elaborated migration policy and other factors were the driving forces of this trend. The situation was aggravated still more by the rise in the numbers of irregular immigrants and pressing demographic problems inside Russia.

Nevertheless, over the period of 1992 – 2000 the total net migration in Russia was almost 3.3 million people. By way of comparison, the figure for the period of 1975 – 1990 was 2.64 million.

The newly elected government was aware of these trends so the year of 2000 represents a turning point in the migration policy of the Russian Federation. The initiatives of the new Administration showed a clear streak of restrictive tendencies in its policy towards immigrants.

As a result of several presidential decrees in 2000-2001, the Federal Migration Service was subjected to reform and its leverage for influencing migration policy was significantly curtailed. The instruction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, approved in August 2000, obliged all immigrants from the CIS states to obtain a residence permit before registration, a requirement that was previously applicable only to residents of non-CIS countries. On 30 August 2000 Russia withdrew from the Bishkek Treaty of 1992, according to which the CIS countries established a visa-free regime for their citizens within the borders of the organisation. This move
was immediately followed by the establishment of a visa regime with Georgia.

The Concept of Migration Processes Regulation in the Russian Federation adopted on 1 March 2003 mainly addressed the problems of registration, control and deportation of illegal immigrants, while also promoting the idea of eradicating irregular migration.

The year of 2003 was also a time when the downwards-tending immigration rate reached its lowest point and the tendency for net migration to rise was revived. However, it is quite probable that the actual situation remained unchanged as the latest improvements in the registration system allowed many irregular labour immigrants to legitimate their presence in the territory of the country through an easier procedure of obtaining temporary registration. Tougher legislation against illegal employment was also conducive to this.

Since then, labour immigration has been given special attention, mostly due to an increasing scarcity of labour resources inside Russia. Accordingly, major changes in labour migration policy were made in 2007, significantly liberalising Russian migration policy.

President Putin’s speech at the meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation on 17 March 2005, in which he called for facilitation of the processes of legal migration, gave impetus to the new migration policy of Russia.

Introduced in 2007, the new system of registration of labour immigrants contributed to the significant increase in the number of legal immigrants coming to Russia that year. Registration procedure was largely eased by substituting the licensing system of registration with the notification-based one.

Another key constituent of this policy was the quota system, which was first introduced in 2003 and revised in 2006. According to this system, the Ministry of Health and Social Development announces each year the number of labour immigrants allowed to enter from countries with visa-free access. This number was determined on the basis of the capacity of regional governments to provide these immigrants with job opportunities.

It was not long before the fruits of the new migration policy were tangible. In 2007 alone, the migration growth rate was 1.7%. It had previously taken four years (2003-2006) to reach the same level. Moreover, despite the economic recession and subsequent cut in labour immigrant quotas, 2009 was the first year since 1994 when migration gain outweighed the natural decline in population.

ENTRY MECHANISMS

According to the Federal Law on Migration Registration of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation, and the Governmental Regulation of the Russian Federation on Approving the Rules of Exercising the Migration Registration of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation, all foreign citizens and stateless persons are required to go through the process of registration at the place of their sojourn. This means that the relevant territorial office of the Federal Migration Service must be informed of arrival within three working days. Indeed, all registration procedures should be carried out by the Host Party, which can be represented by a citizen of the Russian Federation, a legal person, a foreign citizen or a stateless person having permanent residence in the Russian Federation. The Host Party completes the form of notification of the foreign citizen’s arrival at the place of sojourn and sends it to the nearest territorial office of the Federal Migration Service (FMS). The immigrant subsequently receives the detachable part of the form as proof of registration. If a foreigner is a citizen of any country with a visa-free regime established with Russia, the term of his/her sojourn is limited to 90 days.

In the case of labour migration, a foreigner must first go through the same procedure of registration. Afterwards he/she must apply for a work permit at the nearest FMS office. A work permit is issued within the range of a pre-established quota and entitles its holder to work strictly within the territory of the region where it was issued. Unless a labour immigrant obtains employment during the following 90 days he/she will have to leave the country.

A special migration regime, aimed at the repatriation of ethnic Russians has been in effect since 2007. The programme of facilitating the return of ethnic Russians was worked out at the initiative of Vladimir Putin and mainly targets Russian communities in the former Soviet republics. Participants of this programme are given state assistance with accommodation and employment but strictly on the condition that they choose a place to live out of a state-compiled limited list of regions. Nevertheless, all participants are entitled to a simplified procedure of obtaining Russian citizenship.

NEW CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION POLICY

Despite the positive tendencies in the sphere of migration policy, Russia still faces several inevitable problems.

While the total number of immigrants is on the rise, the main concern of the Russian government is the quality of labour force entering the country. In 2006, only 13% of all the labour immigrants had higher education qualifications. Only half of all the people coming to work in Russia have completed vocational education and training. The majority of immigrants are non-qualified workers.

While these people are employed in spheres that are unpopular among Russian citizens and although in future the country’s dependence on them is expected to be even greater, officials have admitted on several occasions that there is an urgent need to improve the law, which will not only oblige labour immigrants to comply with certain procedures, but will also provide them with certain rights and make their stay in Russia easier.

This should also serve the aim of curbing illegal immigration. According to the head of the FMS, the estimated number of irregular workers in Russia in September 2009 was about four million people. Earlier he had claimed that irregular immigrants accounted for not more than 2% of the total number of immigrants. However, according to some unofficial estimates the figure could be as high as 10 million people.
Such problems are looming still larger owing to the fact that, every year, ethnic Russians constitute a smaller part of all immigration flows into the country. Since the end of the 1980s, their contribution to net migration has been steadily decreasing, the figure for 2007 being only 32%. Neither are the results of the State Programme for Assistance to the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian Federation as encouraging as originally expected. During the period 2007 - 2009 only 14,000 immigrants took part in this programme, while the FMS initially estimated that the number would be between 50 and 100 thousand people a year. These figures raise the problem of assimilation strategy which, in the meantime, is completely lacking.

In sum, contemporary Russian migration policy suffers from the absence of a well-elaborated, long-term strategy, which might have helped to avoid discord in the activities of different governmental and social institutions working in this sphere, and to improve the working and living conditions that usually await labour immigrants in Russia.

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V. The amount of quotas on labor immigration 2007-2010

![Graph showing the amount of immigrants from 2007 to 2010.]

VI. Irregular labor migration in Russia 2000-2007

![Graph showing regular and irregular migration from 2000 to 2007.]

VII. Immigrants from CIS countries according to their country of origin 2008

![Pie chart showing the percentage of immigrants from different CIS countries.]

VIII. Percentage of labor immigrants according to the area of their employment 2006-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The area of employment</th>
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