

Institute on Migration Policy

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Excerpts from the report Trans-Regional Migration: Challenges for Russia (2015) (In Russian).

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1. Russia has not been able to utilize the potential of Ukrainian refugees

Russia is currently experiencing an unusually high inflow of humanitarian migrants. According to the Federal Migration Service (FMS), from April 2014 to October 2015, more than a million people from South-East Ukraine have made it to Russia. Approximately 400,000 people received temporary asylum status, and about 200,000 people received temporary residence permits. Another 18,000 people are waiting in refugee clearing centres.

Since the beginning of 2014, there have been 6,015 refugee applications from Ukrainian citizens. Only 317 people received refugee status, 378,000 people obtained temporary asylum status, and 40,000 people have become participants of the compatriot resettlement program. According to the FMS data, there are 2,6 million Ukrainian citizens currently living in Russia. This number is somewhat inconsistent with the earlier reports, as in 2013, according to FMS there had been 3 million Ukrainians living and working in Russia. It is highly unlikely that this number has decreased with the crises in South-East Ukraine.

2. The difference between refugee status and temporary asylum is essential.

Temporary asylum status gives the right to work, and in order to get it, migrants need to find accommodation and undergo medical examination. Temporary asylum is given for one year, but finding accommodation and obtaining medical certificates requires time, so the real time of temporary asylum becomes 1 to 3 months, after which time it needs to be renewed. Many are forced to work illegally as they jump through bureaucratic hoops.

Those with refugee status, which is notoriously difficult to obtain, have the same rights as Russian citizens. Refugees receive a one-time monetary assistance of 100 rubles (100 rub = 1.5 USD). Participants of the resettlement program have a right to apply for Russian citizenship, but only if they have registration at a place of residence, which is difficult to obtain.

It seems that the numbers above are intentionally opaque.

After reading the statistical reports by the government, and trying to reconcile these numbers with reports by other organizations, one gets an impression that the situation is kept deliberately unclear. Indeed, it is unclear how many people received temporary asylum status, if they usually renew it, how many people participated in the program of voluntary resettlement of compatriots program. These numbers also mean that from 3 million of Ukrainian citizens in need of assistance, maximum 600,000 received any kind of help from the Russian government.

3. Russia has been very poorly prepared to host refugees from Ukraine.

At the beginning of humanitarian migration from Ukraine, FMS does not have the required application forms for new arrivals to fill. Only a limited number of FMS branches accepts refugee and asylum applications, and people have to spend money and time to travel to regional centres to apply.

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Instead of quickly processing applications, officials take their time, creating bureaucratic obstacles, cases are dragged out. It takes a long time to get necessary papers, and formally obtain a legal status of refugee or temporary asylum status holder. It takes even longer to get social support and housing. As a result, tired of waiting for a legal work permit, people start working illegally. Settlement of people in the regions is done without taking into account their professions and vocational training. Consequently, people have to work in a different profession, or work in unskilled labour to feed their families.

At the first conference of Ukrainian Refugee Council, held on October 15, 2014, people reported multiple difficulties in obtaining legal status, enrolling children in daycare and schools, receiving medical care, housing and humanitarian assistance. Employers frequently refuse to employ refugees, afraid of their temporary status in the country.

Since November 1, 2015, Ukrainians who have not applied for refugee status or asylum will lose the preferences they had before, and go back to the status of foreigners. This means that they will be able to legally stay in Russia for 90 out 180 days only, after which time they will have to leave Russia.

Russia has failed to use creative and labour potential of Ukrainian refugees. The government provides very little assistance to Ukrainian refugee claimants and asylum seekers, and the main burden of assisting them, and helping them to find work and accommodation has been on private citizens. One of the main problems is the ineffective work of the FMS, which proved to be not ready for the influx of refugees, and is unable to process asylum applications and provide assistance to refugees from Ukraine.

Source: Vyacheslav Postavnin (2015): Trans-Regional Migration: Challenges for Russia. The full text is [here](#)

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