PRAGUE PROCESS
ПРАЖСКИЙ ПРОЦЕСС

POLICY BRIEF

Russian Migration Policy at the Crossroads: Trends and Regional Repercussions

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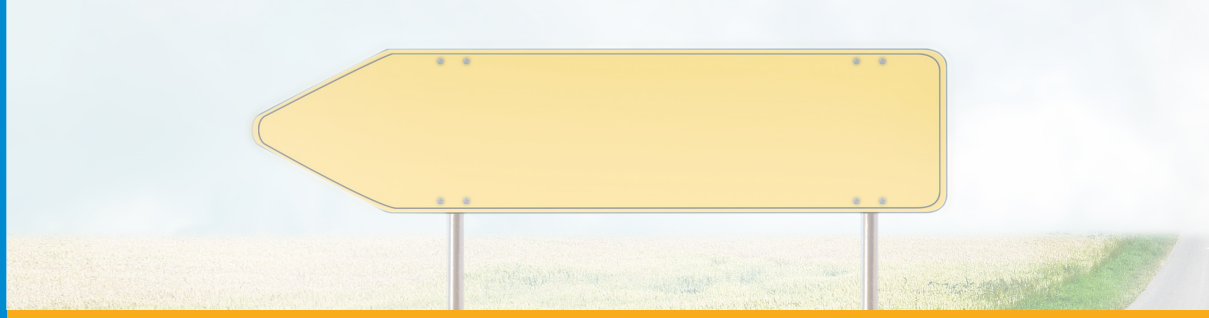
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has strained its migration policies, amplifying longstanding demographic decline and labour shortages. The country faces acute needs for human capital, short- and long-term, with birth rates at historic lows and emigration compounding the crisis. Efforts to mitigate these challenges – such as the Compatriots Program, aimed at attracting newcomers through fast-tracked citizenship offers, as well as seeking to settle over one million Ukrainians who have found themselves in Russia after the 2014 and 2022 invasions – have failed to deliver the numbers required to sustain the economy or meet military recruitment needs. Labour migrants, primarily from Central Asia but increasingly from elsewhere in the Global South, remain essential to the Russian workforce but face growing systemic discrimination, exploitation, and forced conscription into the Russian Armed Forces. The Crocus City Hall attack in early 2024 fuelled xenophobia, deterring migrants from the ex-Soviet south, depressing numbers of newcomers and destabilizing migration flows. Russia has used migration as a tool of geopolitical influence to expose ambiguities in Western policies but has no solutions for its own problems.

This policy brief highlights main directions in Russia's migration policy since the 2022 invasion and underscores the implications of these developments for the Prague Process region. It calls for strategic action to strengthen cooperation with Central Asian states to create alternative labour migration pathways and reduce reliance on Russia, counter the use of migrants as a hybrid tool to challenge European members and work to return displaced Ukrainians, particularly children, home from Russia.

POLICY BRIEF



INTRODUCTION

Russia's migration policies are at a critical juncture. The country has historically been a major destination for migrants within the post-Soviet space, who have been admitted, if not always welcomed, to offset demographic decline and maintain its economic stability. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has disrupted these dynamics. A sharpened demographic decline has collided with wartime demands for human capital. As battlefield losses mount and Russia's economy continues on a wartime footing, the country needs new bodies. Vladimir Putin and government leaders remain aware, however, of the suspicion and xenophobia towards outsiders in Russian society, which they themselves have stoked and which intensified since the Crocus City Hall attack in March 2024, blamed on Tajik labour migrants to Russia.

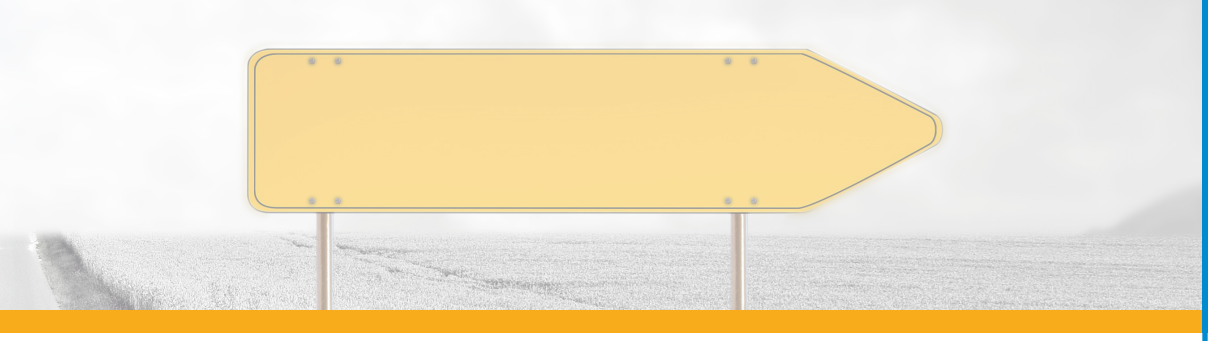
The Russian government has tried largely in vain to adapt existing migration policies and actions to its wartime environment. The country remains an important destination for migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia, and, perhaps counterintuitively after the 2022 invasion, Ukraine. But the war has brought new actors and trends to Russia's migration picture. Wealthier European and Asian countries now compete more actively for Central Asian migrants as Russia looks increasingly to Global South countries outside Eurasia for labour. Even as Russia's demographic picture darkens, its ability – and willingness – to attract newcomers shrinks.

THE BACKDROP: AN INTENSIFIED DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE

Rosstat predicts, under its most likely scenario released in October 2023, the country's population will decline from 146.1 million to 138.1 million by 2046; its worst case envisions a population of 130 million.

Russia's Statistical Agency, ***Rosstat***, has laid bare the demographic picture facing the state after prolonged war. Russia's birth rate is at its lowest since 1999, while its death rate continues to rise. In July 2023, the 110,500 recorded births were the lowest registered since 1945.[1] The relative population decline of 18% led Nina Ostanina, the head of the State Duma Committee for Family Protection, to call for a "special demographic operation."[2] Rosstat predicts, under its most likely scenario released in October 2023, the country's population will decline from 146.1 million to 138.1 million by 2046; its worst case envisions a population of 130 million.[3] Even this latter scenario appears optimistic. Its baseline immigration figure of 154,000 is far higher than the number of migrants – at least officially – who have entered Russia since February 2022. It does not account for hundreds of thousands of Russian "relokanty" who left in opposition to the war or for fear of conscription. Small numbers have returned since 2022 but the significant majority, mainly younger Russians, remain abroad.[4] Even before the war, Russia was bleeding crucial sectors of its population. Nikolai Dolgushkin, Chief Scientific Secretary of the Academy of Sciences, reported that emigration by scientists rose from 14,000 in 2012 to 70,000 in 2021.[5] In the first half of 2023, a record high number of Russians applied for passports. Vladimir Postavnin, a Russian migration expert, noted that: "Previously, foreign passports were issued for almost one reason – for travel on vacation or for work. I think that today, to a greater extent, Russians get it "just in case."[6]

Falling birth and rising death rates undermine President Putin's 2020 claim that "Russia's destiny and its historical prospects depend on one thing: how many of us there are and how many of us there will be."[7] The invasion of Ukraine may have been partly viewed by the Kremlin as a means to increase the population by integrating those considered co-ethnics. The Russian government has sought to raise the birthrate with carrots – payments to young families, increased child-care spaces – and sticks, including outlawing advocacy of a "child-free lifestyle."[8] The results, however, have been underwhelming. Russia is not just fighting challenges of wartime but also broader trends across Europe, where the birth rate is insufficient to maintain a stable population.[9] Migration is a critical tool for the development – and maybe even the survival – of the Russian state in the next years and decades, especially if Putin holds to his plan to expand the armed forces from 150,000 to 1.8 million and keep the economy on a war footing.[10]

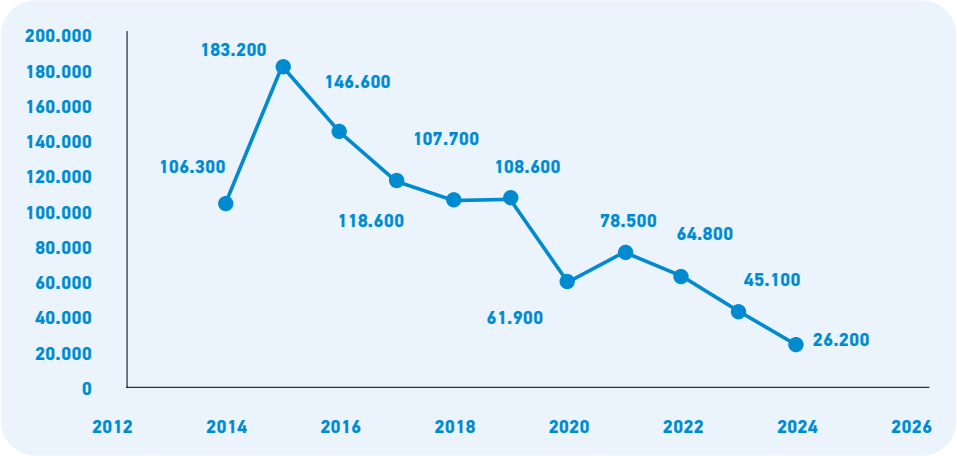


THE STATE PROGRAM FOR RESETTLEMENT OF COMPATRIOTS

Russia has utilised its Compatriots Policy as an important pathway for migrants to gain citizenship since the war in Ukraine. The "State Policy of the Russian Federation Concerning Compatriots (*sootechestveniki*) Abroad," adopted by the Russian Duma in 1999, sought to attract the twenty to forty million Russians who live outside of the Russian Federation. Immigrants from the former Soviet space, where most of these Russians live, account for 95% of total Compatriot arrivals, though many are not ethnic Russians.[11]

Participants in the Compatriots Program are initially offered a temporary residence permit, with pathways to permanent residence and citizenship.[12] Ekaterina Donets and Olga S. Chudinovskikh note that "it is assumed that a compatriot must meet at least one of three criteria: citizenship ([former] USSR, Russian Federation); ethnicity (indigenous peoples of Russia); territory (descendants of inhabitants of the territory of the Russian Federation)."[13] Russian language proficiency is a key requirement for gaining citizenship through the Compatriots Program, which remains deliberately vague on the question of ethnic belonging. The Compatriots Program has fallen far short of President Putin's 2012 goal of attracting 300,000 migrants annually, the number needed to stem Russia's demographic decline.[14] Over 2012-2023, arrivals have averaged less than 100,000 per year. Despite government campaigns, a vibrant online presence promising a "Russian Passport in 3 Months" and policy adjustments like waiving requirements that Compatriots can only apply from abroad or need a pre-arranged place of employment, the program has failed to spark sufficient interest.[15] War against Ukraine further reduced application numbers. Data from Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs shows only 45,100 people registered for the program in 2023, a steep decline from 153,200 in 2019. Citizens of Tajikistan – overwhelmingly ethnic Tajiks – provided the largest contingent registered under the Compatriots Program in 2023 at 14,100, or more than 30%.[16]

Chart 1. The number of participants in the Compatriots program registered with the Ministry of Internal Affairs



Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia; incomplete data for 2024 (January-September)

A major drawback of the Compatriots Program is its regional character. Seventy-six of 83 constituent units (Russia's regions) accept Compatriot applications but not those that would be most desirable: Moscow, Moscow Region, and St. Petersburg.[17] Each region determines which admission criteria to apply as well as what kind of social supports to offer. The program has effectively become a labour recruitment and regional development strategy.[18] Compatriots and other in-migrants, even in Russia's north, come predominantly from the ex-Soviet south. Arkhangelsk contains large Armenian and Azerbaijani populations, Krasnoyarsk has mainly Tajik migrants, while the Komi Republic hosts many Kyrgyz.[19]

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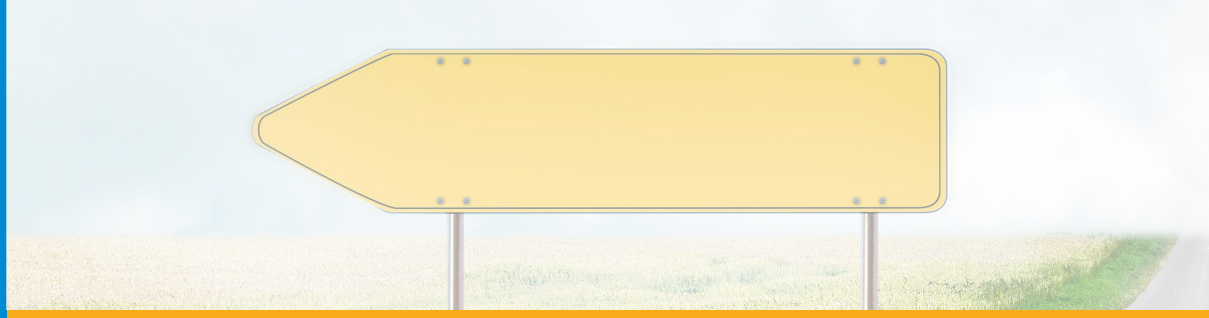


Migrating to Russia through the Compatriots Program provides no assurances of social or cultural integration, especially as it places successful applicants outside the more cosmopolitan St. Petersburg and Moscow. Program beneficiaries who are not of "Slavic appearance" face particular challenges. Lauren Woodard notes that "[a]lthough nearly any immigrant from a former Soviet country can claim Russian compatriotism..., passing as a Russian citizen requires a particular performance that remains tied to phenotypical and linguistic features associated with ethnic Russians."[20]

Since the war, the Russian government has intensified efforts to boost migrant and Compatriots Program numbers beyond Eurasia. One involves the issue of a new, electronic "Rodina [homeland] card" to ethnic Russians (and others who might fall under the auspices of Compatriots) abroad.[21] The card allows access to a "work in Russia" database listing job opportunities.[22] Another initiative involves "value migration," targeted at "Christian families with many children from the USA, Canada, Europe, Australia."[23] The Russian government claims, without evidence, that they are "flocking to the expanses of Russia...to flee the new liberal normality for an oasis of traditional spiritual and moral values."[24] Such initiatives are unlikely to significantly increase participation in the Compatriots Program or address Russia's demographic problem. Nikolai Zatulin, the First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots, stated frankly: "Not everyone is ready to go to a country at war. People are also waiting to see how this [the conflict between Russia and Ukraine] might end."[25]

UKRAINIAN MOVEMENT TO RUSSIA

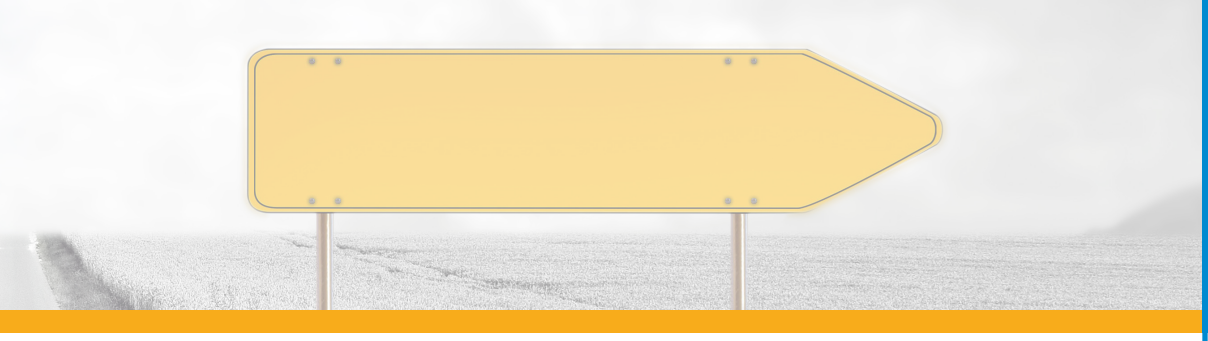
Ukrainians have occupied a specific place in the Compatriots Program, with over one million likely fleeing the war in Donbass for Russia since 2014. The Russian government granted Ukrainians a form of temporary protection, with a simplified process towards a temporary resident permit.[26] The latter allowed them immediate eligibility to seek citizenship through regional migration offices.

Russia's 2022 invasion precipitated another Ukrainian migratory wave to Russia. UNHCR placed the figure at over 1.23 million at the end of 2023, higher than numbers in Germany and Poland.[27] At present, Ukrainian citizens can stay and work in Russia indefinitely subject to fingerprinting and medical examination.[28] Ukrainian arrivals provide a potential counterweight to the falling numbers in the Compatriots Program. Even before the February 2022 invasion, Putin promised 10,000-rouble (€ 95) payments to "refugees from Donbass and Ukraine," though how many have received this stipend is unclear.[29] In August 2022, Putin signed a decree offering one-off and monthly payments through the year to certain categories of citizens of Donetsk, Luhansk, other parts of Ukraine and stateless persons who left these territories after 18 February 2022. This included a 10,000-rouble payment for pregnant mothers and a 20,000-rouble payment for a mother giving birth in Russia.[30]

Authorities pressure Ukrainians to become Russian citizens, but many fear that acquiring citizenship may increase the likelihood of military conscription, and therefore prefer a status of temporary displaced.

Authorities pressure Ukrainians to become Russian citizens; as of July 2023, this can be accomplished by an application and simple "swap" of passports at government offices.[31] Many Ukrainians, however, fear that acquiring citizenship may increase the likelihood of military conscription, and therefore prefer a status of temporary displaced.[32] Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs proposed in November 2024 to limit the period of temporary stay of Ukrainian citizens in Russia and their right to work without a special permit that would create a "stable legal connection" to the country.[33]

Ukrainians' motives for entering or remaining in Russia range from fear of dying in a war-torn state to joining relatives or comfort in a Russian-speaking environment. Russian propaganda



portrays the country as a haven with a prosperous economy and strong labour market, especially in remote regions where compatriots can settle.[34] The war has left Russians suspicious of Ukrainians. Where Ukrainians settle is unclear, but they have been recruited by authorities as far east as Sakhalin.[35] Some seek to "pass" by changing their accent – for example, emphasizing a "g" instead of a "kh" sound in many common words.[36]

Abductions of Ukrainian children is another element of Russia's efforts to boost population. Ukraine has identified about 20,000 children forcibly taken to Russia, but experts believe the number is significantly higher.[37] The Russian government boasts that 744,000 Ukrainian children have, in their words, been evacuated from conflict zones. The Yale School of Public Health has located over 40 camps hosting these children – some are orphans, but many were forcibly separated from their parents.[38] In March 2023 the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants to President Putin and Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova and "for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation."[39]

Ukrainian children deported to Russia undergo an intense Russification program. [40] They are forbidden to speak Ukrainian and required to sing the Russian national anthem in camps and schools. Lessons focus on Russian history and culture.[41] An International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, co-chaired by the Ukrainian and Canadian governments, involves the participation of 40 states as well as NGOs and human rights organizations. As of the end of 2024, only a few hundred have left Russia for Ukraine.

INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF MIGRATION

Russia's wartime efforts to instrumentalise migration have both drawn people from Ukraine and sent people to states it sees as adversaries in Europe. In 2022, President Putin focused not only on Ukraine's Slavic population but also the 75,000-plus foreign students from India, Central Asia, Africa and China.[42] Offers of visa-free status to them had two main purposes: to expose the racialized treatment of students who were fleeing westwards; and to portray Putin as a protector of citizens from states of the Global South, whose support he sought in various UN resolutions.[43]

In 2023, Putin continued to expose perceived double standards in Western migration policies to foster discord. Russian embassies in the Horn of Africa and select Middle Eastern states reportedly eased entry requirements to Russia. The Federal Security Services (FSB) met newcomers in Moscow and facilitated their path to the Finnish border.[44] In November-December 2023, over 1,000 migrants claimed asylum at land border crossings with Russia.[45] The Finns closed several checkpoints, requested the assistance of the EU border agency Frontex and erected wire and concrete barriers.[46] Poland, Estonia and Latvia also noted rising numbers of asylum-seekers from Russia and Belarus. These tactics echoed Belarusian President Lukashenko's sending of hundreds of Afghans to Western borders at the same time as pro-democracy demonstrations in Minsk in 2020.[47]

Finland's Minister of European Affairs Anders Adlercreutz labelled this migration as one of Russia's "deliberate, cynical, hybrid actions" to destabilize western solidarity and migration policies.[48] In July 2024, the Finnish parliament approved a law, valid for one year, to permit border guards to reject asylum applications on the Russian border unless migrants are children, disabled or deemed especially vulnerable.[49] Amnesty International joined academics and human rights groups in criticising the legislation. Its deputy director stated: "This law gravely undermines access to asylum and the protection from refoulement in Finland. It not only endangers the rights of people seeking safety, but it will also lead to arbitrariness and violence at the border (...). It calls into question Finland's commitment to the rule of law."[50]

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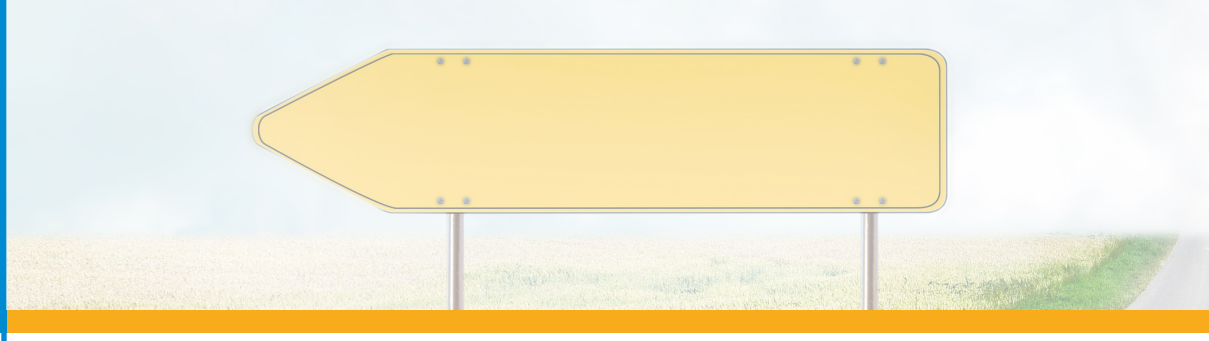
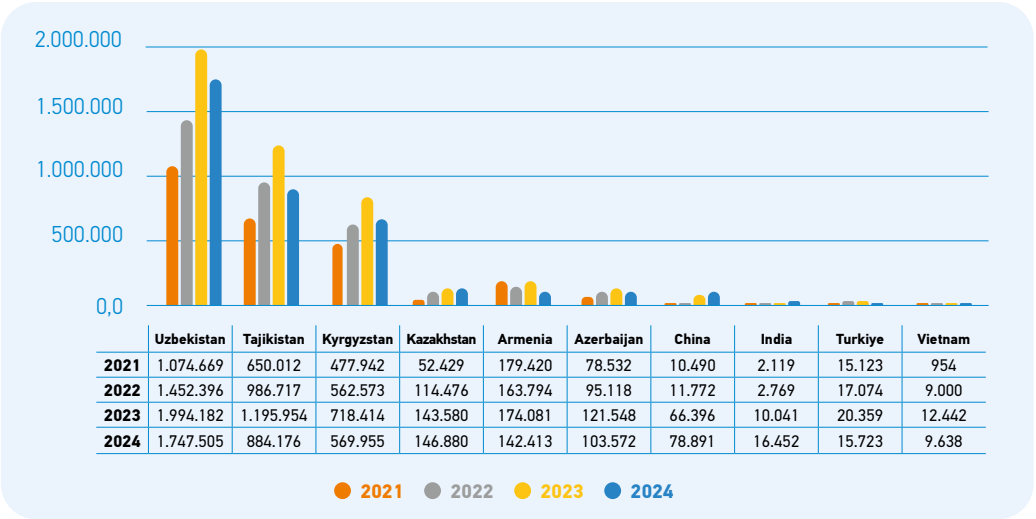


WARTIME LABOUR MIGRATION

While Russia exploits divisions in Western migration policy, it faces even greater wartime challenges. The Compatriots program's relative failure has forced the country to remain reliant on substantial labour migration, primarily from Central Asia. Migrants form the backbone of Russia's low-income labour sector and have become increasingly important in other economic sectors and military roles since the war's start. The country's partial mobilization in September 2022 left job positions in IT, medical and manual labour sectors vacant as Russian citizens fled the country or were recruited into the Russian Armed Forces. By mid-2023, job vacancies in Russia rose to 6.8 percent.[51]

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan provide the bulk of labour migrants to Russia, driven by the shortage of available work in their home states and the importance of remittances to support their families. In March 2024, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated migrant numbers from these three countries at 10.5 million.[52] Irregular migrants from neighbouring countries add millions more.[53] Their path to Russia is full of complexities and informalities. To legally work and reside in the country, migrants from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan must obtain a labour license (*trudovoi patent).* Although officially priced at 4,000 roubles, licenses generally cost migrants 20,000-25,000 roubles due to informal payments to Russian officials.[54] After acquiring a license, Tajik and Uzbek migrants must make monthly payments to migration authorities. Moscow's rate is set at about 6,000 roubles.[55] As do Compatriots from the former Soviet south, they face racism and harassment from law enforcement officers, employers and the general public.[56] Many reside in cramped, communal flats to save their earnings.[57]

Chart 2. Top 10 countries by number of entries to Russia for work reasons, 2021-2024



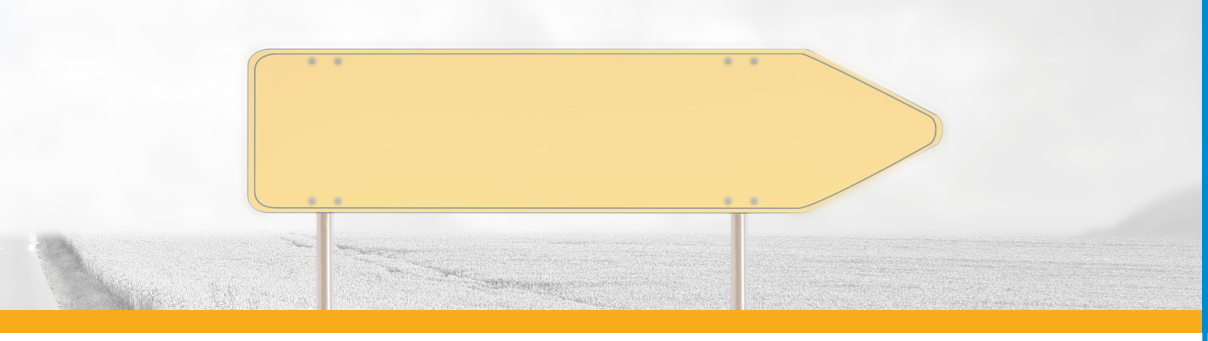
	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan	Armenia	Azerbaijan	China	India	Turkiye	Vietnam
2021	1.074.669	650.012	477.942	52.429	179.420	78.532	10.490	2.119	15.123	954
2022	1.452.396	986.717	562.573	114.476	163.794	95.118	11.772	2.769	17.074	9.000
2023	1.994.182	1.195.954	718.414	143.580	174.081	121.548	66.396	10.041	20.359	12.442
2024	1.747.505	884.176	569.955	146.880	142.413	103.572	78.891	16.452	15.723	9.638

Source: Federal State Statistics Service of Russia

Wartime labour shortages have pushed Russia to seek migrants workers from Southeast Asia and Africa. In addition to filling the gaps on the labour market, migrants from the Global South and Central Asia have increasingly been drawn into Russia's war effort.

Wartime labour shortages have pushed Russia to seek migrant workers from Southeast Asia and Africa. In early 2024, Russian officials began negotiations with the government of Kenya to employ 10,000 Kenyans in a variety of industries, with promises of language training. Mikhail Lyapin, a Russian entrepreneur involved in the negotiations, noted that positions would be temporary and filled on a rotating basis.[58] Russian companies are also advertising job vacancies in countries such as Sierra Leone, Malawi, and Nepal. These postings range from specialist positions in IT companies to manual labour.[59]

Migrants from the Global South and Central Asia have increasingly been drawn into Russia's war effort. Russia continues to face staggering battlefield losses. US officials estimate that Russia



has suffered 115,000 dead and 500,000 wounded as of October 2024.[60] The Putin government is determined to retain a strategy aimed at minimizing the number of citizens recruited from major urban centres and among ethnic Russians overall.[61] Russia's 2022 mobilization targeted regions with high ethnic minority populations, sparking protests in Dagestan and Sakha Oblasts.[62]

The recruitment of migrants into the Russian war effort blends incentivization, subterfuge and force. Recruiters for the Russian Armed Forces advertise military service as a lucrative opportunity. Migrants are promised high salaries, with a sign-up payment of 220,000 roubles (€2,040) on top of a 398,000-rouble salary (€3,691),[63] far exceeding the average migrant worker wage of 20,000-50,000 roubles (€185-463).[64] In January 2024, President Putin decreed that immigrants who sign contracts with the Russian Armed Forces will receive citizenship after one year of service.[65]

Migrants may be coerced into military service through deception and force, even without directly signing contracts. Migrant rights activists in Russia report that customs officers conceal military contracts amongst bundles of documents, up to 40 pages in length, which migrants must sign upon entry to Russia. With long queues at their backs and pressure from customs officers, migrants cannot fully read the material.[66] Misleading job postings also serve as a recruitment method. One Tajik migrant recounted that he and his peers were offered a high-paying contract for construction work in Russian-occupied Ukraine. Indian and Nepalese migrants are lured to Russia with the promise of housekeeping work.[67] Upon arrival, however, migrants are transported to recruitment centres and, in extreme cases, directly to the frontline.[68] Central Asians and other non-Russians who hold Russian citizenship face intense pressure from recruiters and law enforcement.[69] Police raid mosques and workplaces frequented by Central Asian migrants; those with Russian passports are transported directly to enlistment centres.[70]

Recruiters also target female Central Asian migrants to serve as cooks and nurses in the Russian army.[71] Women from African and Southeast Asian countries, attracted to high-salary positions for factory work in Russia on the website "Alabuga Start" find themselves working in factories assembling drones.[72]

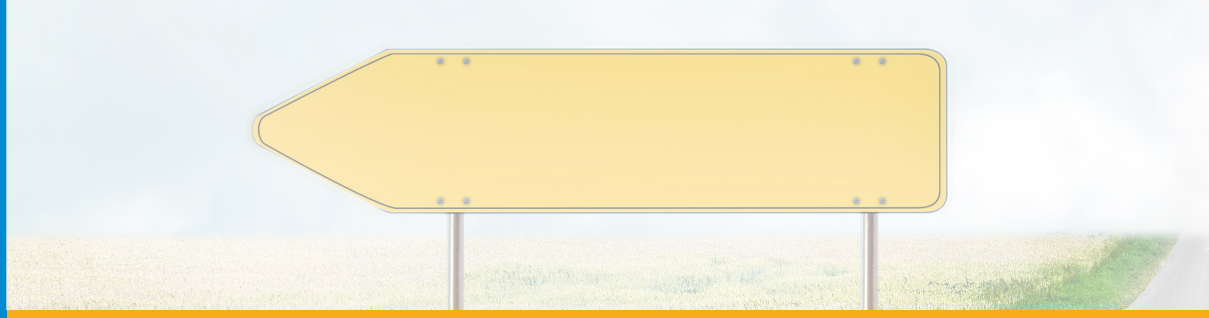
The recruitment of migrants into the Russian war effort remains largely unchecked by home country governments. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan threaten citizens with legal repercussions if they join "foreign militaries."[73] In 2023, Kyrgyz authorities sentenced Askar Kubanychbek-uulu to ten years in prison for his service with the Russian Army in Ukraine, but this remains an isolated case.[74] Southeast Asian governments have yet to protest recruitment of their citizens into the Russian Armed Forces, despite complaints from migrant families.[75]

MIGRATION AFTER THE CROCUS CITY HALL ATTACKS

On 22 March 2024, the Islamist organization ISIS-K claimed responsibility for a mass shooting at Crocus City Hall, a concert venue located just outside of Moscow.[76] The attack killed 145 people and injured hundreds.[77] The next day, Russian authorities arrested four Tajik migrants as the ostensible perpetrators.[78] Subsequently, Russian authorities arrested 11 more Tajiks and one ethnic Kyrgyz for facilitating the attack.[79] In December 2024, four more men were arrested in southern Russian republic of Ingushetia in connection to the attack.[80]

The Crocus City Hall attack changed the migration landscape in Russia. Attacks against Central Asian migrants have mounted. In one instance, a Central Asian man sitting in his car at a stop light was pepper sprayed and beaten.[81] A video posted on Telegram showed two Russians attacking a man they believed to be Tajik, beating him with blunt objects.[82] Arsonists destroyed a migrant-owned business in the Far Eastern city of Blagoveshchensk.[83] The governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan issued warnings advising citizens to avoid travel to Russia in the wake of these attacks.[84] These advisories were reissued in September 2024.[85]

The Crocus City Hall attack changed the migration landscape in Russia and reignited debates about securitizing Russia's migration policies.



The attack reignited debates about securitizing Russia's migration policies. At an April meeting with officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Putin called for the implementation of biometric databases – which remains unrealized after 11 years of discussion.[86] The Russian government has allocated the equivalent of $129.6 million for the development of a biometric surveillance system focused on facial recognition.[87] The State Duma has submitted 28 bills related to the securitization of migrant communities in 2024, a handful of which have been passed. One prevents migrants from taking part in "mass gatherings" while another shortened deportation timelines for detained migrants.[88] These bills still must undergo vetting by the Federation Council, the Russian upper house, and be signed by the President to become law.

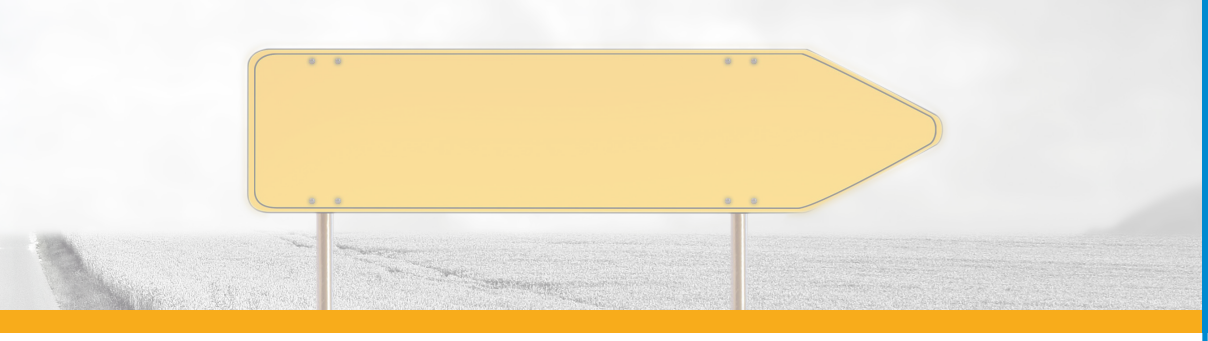
Russia is now testing courses aimed at migrant integration. In September 2023, Russia's Federal Agency of Ethnic Affairs (FADN) announced that it had developed a program to teach migrants about Russian language, culture, norms and values.[89] Aimed at Central Asians, the course instructs participants, among other strictures, not to speak their native language in public. In July 2024, FADN launched the course in several regions across Russia. As of Fall 2024, however, no legislation forces migrants to enrol.[90]

Federal and regional governments have enacted measures to lower Central Asian migrant intakes. On 16 October 2024, the Russian government announced that it was reducing the residence permit quota from 10,600 in 2024 to 5,500 in 2025[91] Regions across Russia have barred foreigners from working jobs commonly staffed by Central Asian migrants. Officials in Samara Oblast have prohibited migrants from renting residences and working in hospitality services.[92] A bill submitted to the State Duma in July 2024 proposes to rewrite the Compatriots Law to exclude most Tajiks and others from the ex-Soviet south.[93]

Central Asian labour migrants now seek alternative destinations for employment. A Kyrgyz worker remarked that "[n]owadays, Asians are leaving to Europe and the US for work, and Russian employees are trying to hire from other countries and continents like Africa, Vietnam and the Philippines."[94] Since Crocus City Hall, the number of job seekers from Tajikistan to Moscow and St. Petersburg has decreased by 60 percent.[95] Similarly, the inflow of Uzbek labourers decreased by 40 percent.[96] South Korea, Türkiye, Eastern Europe and countries in Southeast Asia have emerged as competitors for migrants seeking work.[97] Central Asian governments have also attempted to redirect their workers. In September 2024, Uzbekistan signed a deal to facilitate the movement of its citizens to Germany.[98] Uzbek representatives are also engaged in talks with migration authorities in the Netherlands.[99] German officials met with Kyrgyz representatives to discuss a migrant labour agreement.[100] The United Kingdom has also raised caps on visas for Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz nationals.[101] Opportunities to work in Asian and European countries lessens the popularity of Russia as a destination for Central Asian migrant labourers, especially as anti-migrant legislation and sentiment there has increased over 2024.

CONCLUSION, SCENARIOS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Low intake through the Compatriots Program and declining labour migration flows have worsened an acute worker shortage in Russia.[102] Even so, the Russian government in 2024 has exerted greater effort to instrumentalise and securitise migration rather than attract newcomers. European countries bordering Russia experienced unexpected surges of migrants from the Global South directed by the Kremlin. Some of those coming to Russia for work from the ex-Soviet and Global South have been deceived and coerced into joining the army and face both popular and official antagonism. The danger of dying in a conflict that is not their own is acute. Even as President Putin disregards issues of demographic decline to win what he considers an existential conflict, the immediate consequences of shortcomings in migration policies are clear. Russia's neighbours now must consider their own place in a renewed migratory landscape.



POLICY BRIEF

- Facing low domestic recruitment numbers, Russia is turning to countries near and far to bolster manpower, even at the risk of alienating allies. The Putin government has already struck a deal to deploy North Korean soldiers in Ukraine, ignoring any potential Chinese discomfort.[103] Thus far, around 11,000 North Korean troops have travelled to Russia, where they have trained and received equipment.[104] On the frontlines, North Korean soldiers wear Russian uniforms and are interspersed in Russian units. In a clumsy attempt to mask their involvement, Moscow has claimed that North Korean soldiers are from the Russian Republics of Buryatia and Tuva.[105] The US Government estimates that around 10,000 North Koreans are deployed in the Kursk Oblast.[106] Western states should identify and address other potential countries that might be incentivised to send soldiers to Ukraine.

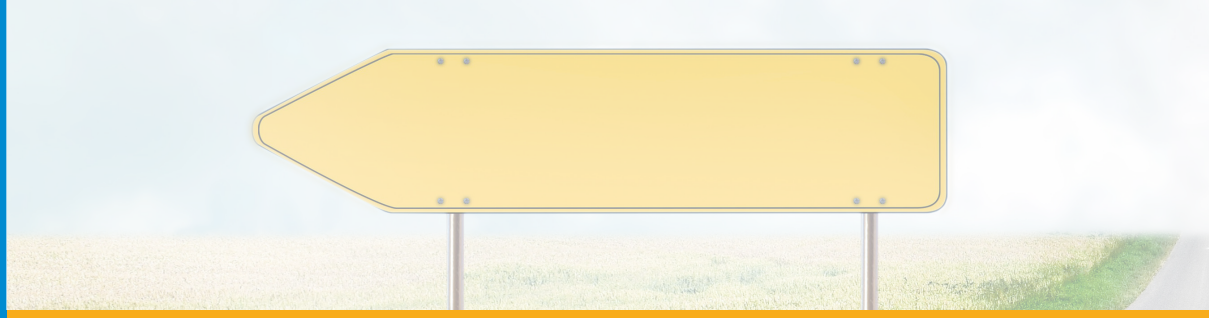
- Governments of European countries bordering Russia and Belarus should work proactively with human rights organisations and academics to design humane, legal and effective policies and practices should Russia attempt to send another wave of migrants to disrupt border areas. An efficient and coordinated response can at once improve humanitarian conditions for migrants whom the Kremlin might try to instrumentalise, display a positive face to Global South countries and exhibit to the Putin government the ineffectiveness of this strategy.

- European governments should continue to work with Central Asian states to direct and regularise migration flows through labour partnerships and agreements. As Russia becomes a less attractive destination, Central Asian migrants look to Europe. Germany has already undertaken investment in Uzbek educational institutions, including advanced training courses and vocational training.[107] Such investment can encourage flows of skilled, talented migrants. Migrant labourers from Central Asia have the potential to counter job shortages in manufacturing and construction sectors in European states.[108] Targeted migration with intergovernmental cooperation can serve to address security concerns and decrease potential backlash from EU member publics. Cooperation and investment will assist regional stability in Eurasia, strengthen ties between Europe and Central Asian states and offer a diverse migrant pool for work across the continent.

- Russia will continue to work to increase its population through forced migration of Ukrainian citizens, especially children. Western governments should consider this scenario in any negotiations to end the war. European states should play prominent roles in the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. This return will, at some point, require discussions with Moscow.

- Western governments and Ukraine should, with NGOs or through online channels, inform citizens from the Middle East, Africa and South/East Asia that offers to work in Russia, however attractive, will likely end up with them in the military sector and quite possibly on the front lines. Central Asian governments should also alert their citizens to practices used by the Russian Armed Forces to recruit migrants.

- In the medium- to long-term, Russia will confront a severe demographic crisis. Its actions in response are impossible to predict as the war continues but this will become the next existential issue for its leadership – both the overall population numbers and their composition, as the percentage of ethnic Russians continues to shrink. Western countries need to start planning for Russia's actions as its population, and most likely its economy, contracts. A weakened Russia will pose important security risks across the continent, regardless of any settlement that might be reached in Ukraine.



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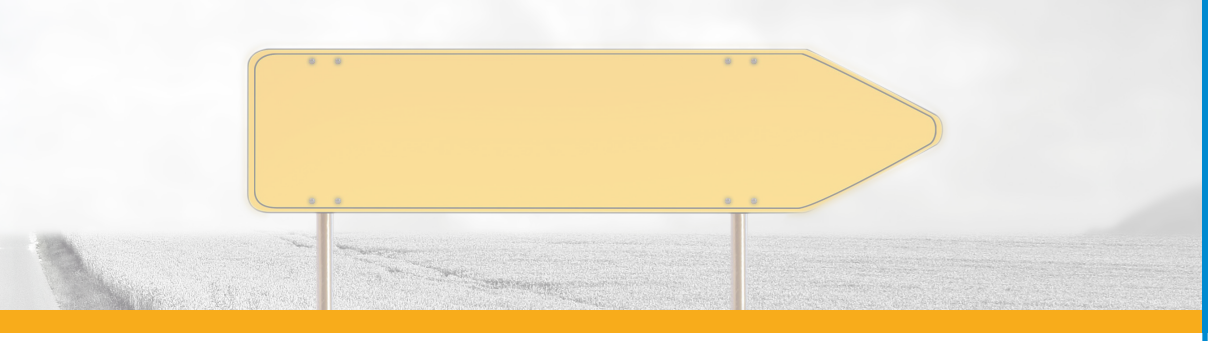

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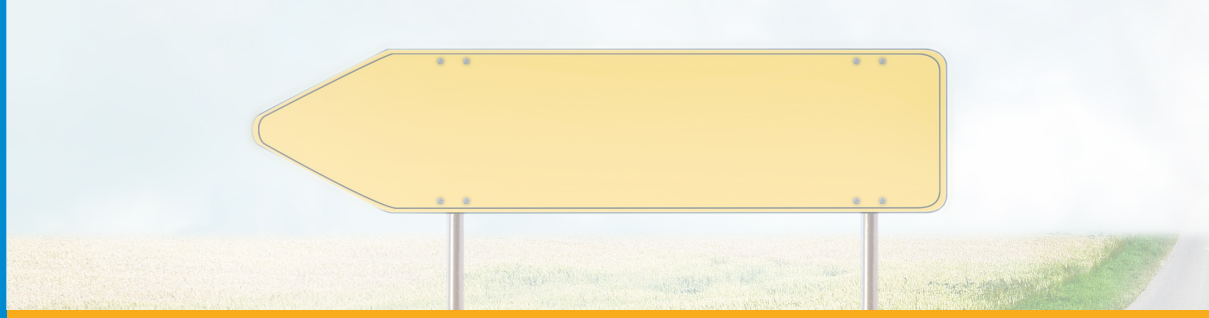

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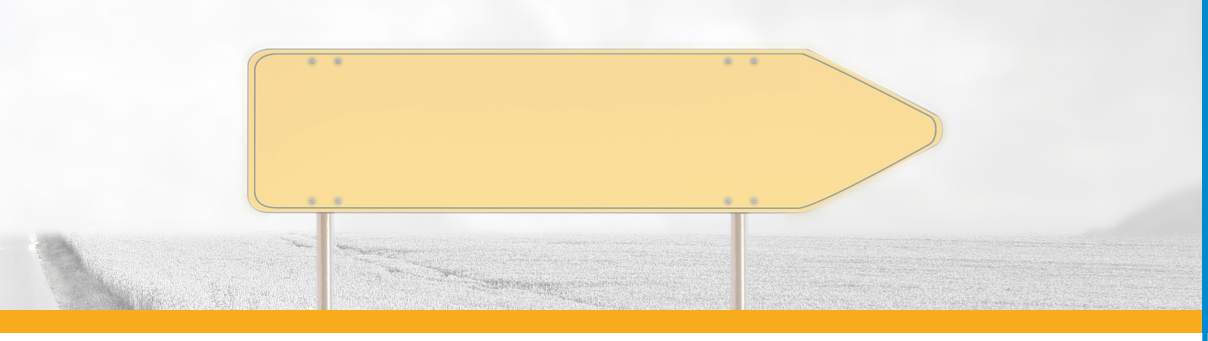

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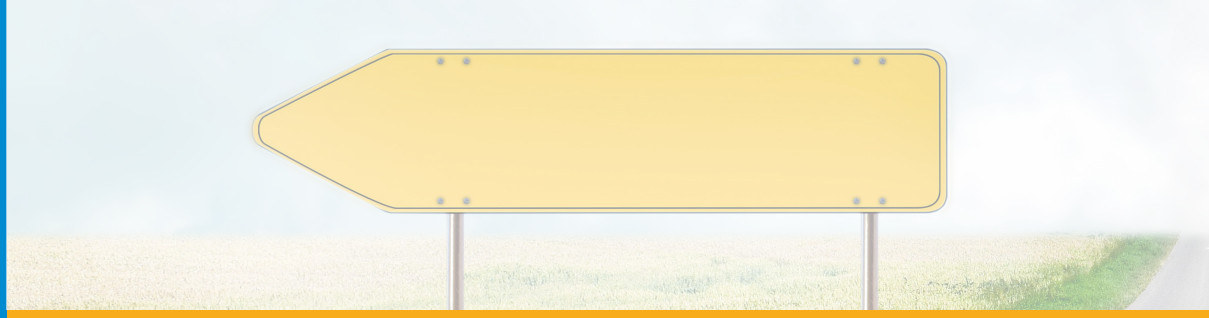

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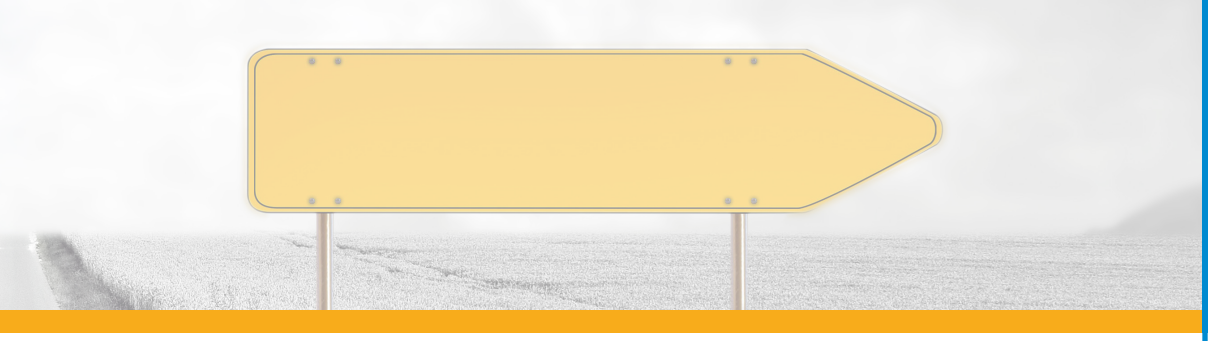

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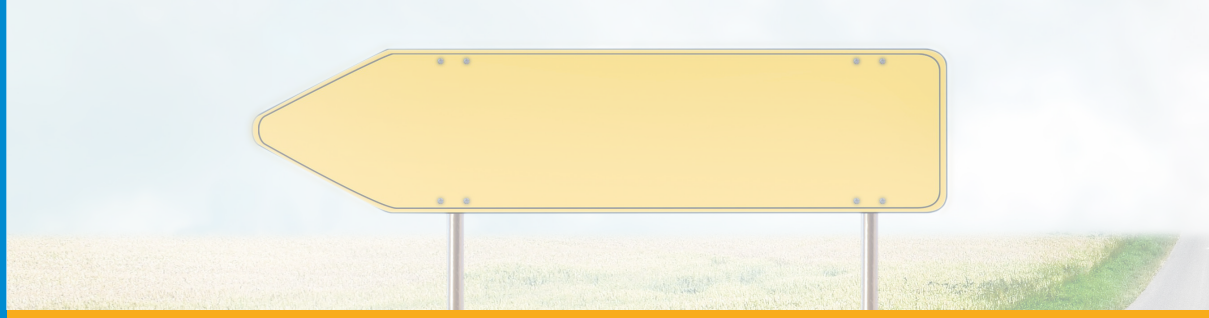

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