

# From migrants to minorities

Are Russian 'relocants' a new minority?

Ilya Lomakin

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## Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, triggered a substantial wave of emigration from Russia, driven by safety concerns, political dissent, and economic instability. While some host countries have adopted welcoming policies for the new Russian emigrés, others have imposed stricter regulations citing security concerns and shared difficult pasts. Despite these measures, many Russians abroad remain in a legal gray area, frequently resorting to visa runs to maintain their stay, and facing discrimination in some contexts; hereby, there is a pressing need for nuanced legal and social responses from the host countries. To approach this task, the paper applies the concept 'new minorities' to Russian nationals who left their homeland after the start of invasion of Ukraine.

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## Keywords

Migrants from Russia, New Minorities, Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Post-Soviet Space, European Union.

# From migrants to minorities

## Are Russian 'relocants' a new minority?

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Even though the flow of Ukrainians fleeing Russian bombs into Europe emerged as the main migration crisis of 2022, Russia itself has also become a subject of population outflow. Estimates of the number of Russians who left vary – on average experts claim at least half a million people, while the upper limit is still a highly controversial issue (see e. g., Novaya Gazeta Evropa 2022; Shirmanova 2023; The Bell 2024b). According to the Vishnevsky Institute of Demography, in 2022, the number of emigrés surpassed that of immigrants for the first time since 1975, resulting in a negative migration balance of around 100 000 people in the first half of the year. Moreover, the population decrease due to migration and natural causes was projected to exceed 1 million by the year's end (Shcherbakova 2022). Since 2022, many Russians have been massively relocating to ex-Soviet member states, namely Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, etc. Moreover, Serbia and Türkiye have also emerged among the most favored regions (Kozioł and Kolarz 2023). However, there is evidence that new Russian emigrés – who sometimes self-identify and are referred to as 'relocants'<sup>2</sup> – have also opted for the European Union (EU), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Thailand, etc.), as well as South (Argentina, Brazil, etc.) and North Americas (US, Canada).

Considering continuous academic discussion regarding the potential expansion of minority protection measures from traditional ('old') minority groups to migrant populations ('new minorities'),<sup>3</sup> this essay will focus on the post-February 24, 2022, exodus from Russia trying to understand whether new Russian emigrés – those whom experts refer to as "a heterogeneous group that has left the country for a variety of reasons" (Petersen 2022, p. 112) – form minority groups in their new countries of residence or not. Moreover, this paper attempts to answer the question whether communities created by these emigrés are converting (or could convert) into *new* minorities. This essay will provide various examples from countries that accepted Russian emigrés around the world using them for illustrative purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Francisco Javier Romero Caro for his brilliant course, 'Minorities and Indigenous Rights,' at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, which inspired me to start working on this text. I also would like to thank Lucia Leontiev and Vincent Della Sala for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper, and the DiGoP team for their help in finalizing it for publication.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I predominantly address Russian nationals who left their homeland after the start of Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, as 'new Russian emigrés.' For the sake of synonymy, the term 'relocants' is also utilized, notwithstanding the existing semantic nuances associated with it, particularly its emergence as a self-identification label during the 2020–2021 Belarusian protests (see Pramen', 2020; Perttu 2024). I also discuss the use of this term in the section 'Migration Motives.' Finally, both to avoid emotionally loaded lexis and cover wider populations of post-February 24, 2022, exodus, I do not use such adjectives as 'anti-war,' 'anti-Putin,' etc.

<sup>3</sup> Within these discussions, researchers are reflecting on various aspects, for instance, including the existing obstacles to fruitful scholarly collaboration between migration and minority studies, aiming to bridge the gap between the two disciplines. The latter emerged because both fields have historically evolved separately from each other (Boulter, Medda-Windischer and Malloy 2020). In Europe, discussions on whether and how migrants' rights should be protected have even more intensified along with 2015 European migrant crisis and the rise of right-wing populist parties during 2010s.

## 1 Waves of Russian Emigration after February 24, 2022

When speaking about the latest Russian exodus it is important to elaborate on its “waves.” Thereby, the exodus is usually divided into two – a ‘February wave’ (after the announcement of the start of the ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine on February 24, 2022) and a ‘September wave’ (after the announcement of the start of ‘partial mobilization’ on September 21, 2022). This paper posits that the difference between them that the first wave was more of an *ideological* nature,<sup>4</sup> while the autumnal one was based on mostly *existential* grounds. Certainly, an element of fear for one’s life also took place during the spring wave,<sup>5</sup> though it – as well as the panic itself around the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine – did not cover such wide sections of the population as in autumn. Additionally, the first wave mainly consisted of the wealthy middle and creative classes, often including educated young individuals employed in modern sectors of the economy along with politically active Russians – journalists, activists, etc. (Kamalov et al. 2022; Exodus-22 2023). In turn, the second wave appeared to be more heterogeneous, though “more professional rather than politically active” (Kamalov et al. 2023, p. 5).

It is also worth noting that in the existing literature there is an opinion that there was a third wave of emigration from Russia in 2022. Nikolai Mitrokhin, a researcher at the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen, speaks of a ‘summer wave,’ although recognizing it as a continuation of the spring one. Thus, he notes that summer migrants were those who could not afford to leave the country overnight and/or who decided to prepare for departure more thoroughly. Moreover, the summer months marked the relocation of foreign companies’ offices (Tumakova 2022).

Even now, more than two years after the start of both the military invasion and the exodus, new Russian emigrés are continuing to move from one country to another, and many of them see their final point in one of the developed liberal democracies, e. g. EU member states, the US, Canada, Australia, etc. For instance, the research on Russian migrants in Armenia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Türkiye found respondents “repeatedly mentioning” the EU countries and the US “as places where [they] want or plan to move later,” since they saw moving to these countries as “the most ambitious economic strategy with a high barrier to entry, risky, but potentially opening up many opportunities” (Volkova et al. 2023, p. 16–17).

Therefore, greatly decreased, post-February 24, 2022, exodus from Russia is still taking place in Eurasia and beyond. Additionally, those who left Russia for non-Western countries in previous years also continue to move from one country to another. All the above constructs a contextual framework of my research, that this paper will consider within the analysis below.

## 2 Are New Russian Emigrés a Minority?

To start with, it is important to define what minority is before answering the question of whether new Russian emigrés constitute minorities in their new states of residence. In this regard, this paper addresses the classic and the most generally accepted definition given by Francesco Capotorti, UN

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<sup>4</sup> Researchers of the OK Russians Project addressed it as ‘anti-war’ (see Zavadskaya 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Thereby, many publications in spring 2022 cited fear of possible reprisals from the authorities, closure of borders, and military conscription as key reasons for leaving Russia (e. g., Khudoyan 2022; After24 2022).

Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. According to him, a minority is “a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a [s]tate, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the [s]tate – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity directed towards reserving their culture, traditions, religion or language” (Capotorti 1979, p. 96). How then this definition is applicable to Russian emigrés? To answer this question, this paper will elaborate on its key elements.

**Numerical Inferiority.** Although the influx of Russians was – and in some countries still is – very noticeable, overall, the number of those who left is around 1% of Russia’s population,<sup>6</sup> though often addressed as its most globalized and highly-educated segment (e. g., Borusyak 2022; After24 2022; Tumakova 2022; Kostenko et al. 2023). Anyway, various states experienced to absorb different amounts of Russians. Namely, there is difference between 110 000 of Russians in Armenia or 60 000 in Georgia and 9 000 in Argentina or 3 560 in Canada, especially when considering the populations of these countries (Shirmanova 2023).

**Non-Dominant Position.** Capotorti understands the non-dominant position of minority groups in relation to the rest of the population, stressing that “dominant minority groups do not need to be protected” (Capotorti 1979, p. 96). Russians in their new states of residence are definitely holding non-dominant positions. Moreover, in some ex-Soviet states – Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, etc. – they may face postcolonial criticism, especially from younger generations and public intellectuals (e. g., Amiryan 2023). For instance, in Georgia this derives from shared imperial past,<sup>7</sup> which in the post-Soviet era ended up into several conflicts, namely – the 1992–1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, in which Moscow as a sidelined combatant supported Abkhazian separatists fighting against Tbilisi (Kızıluğa 2006), and the 2008 August War, when Moscow moved military forces into the Georgian break away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Galeotti 2023). All the above end up into various manifestations of the undesirability of Russian citizens in Georgia in general and Tbilisi in particular (see, Kucera 2023; Demytrie 2023). Similar attitudes towards Russian citizens – although more post-occupationist in their discourse than postcolonial ones – can also be found in Baltic states, Poland, and Czechia that have imposed the strongest visa restrictions on Russian nationals leaving them with few opportunities to enter and legally reside (Dumbrava 2022; Koziół and Kolarz 2023).

**Distinct Characteristics and Sense of Solidarity.** This criterion derives from the idea that the minority group is “clearly defined and had long existed” (Capotorti 1979, p. 33). Therefore, the special rights accorded to the persons belonging to a minority “should not be interpreted as permitting a group settled in the territory of a [s]tate as a result of immigration to form within that [s]tate separate communities which might impair its national unity or its security” (ibid.). Once it is recognized that a group or specific community possesses a unique identity within the broader population, this identity fosters a sense of unity among its members (ibid., p. 96). Russian emigrés, who left their homeland after February 24, 2022, are part to recently established social groups in their new states of residence, which are often separated from the old diaspora of previous years or even decades (Kostenko et al. 2023). Although sharing some distinct characteristics (e. g., holding Russian national identity and/or speaking Russian language), the latter do not appear to be crucial, especially for ethnic Russians (*‘russkiye’*). However, identities of ethnic and religious groups from Russia that are “not associated with the titular

<sup>6</sup> As of January 1, 2022, Russian Federal State Statistics Service reported the resident population of ~147 million (see EMISS 2022).

<sup>7</sup> I here consider both Imperial Russia and the USSR as empires (see, Lieven 1995).

nation (for example, Bashkirs and Muslims)" more possibly turn out to be points of convergence (ibid., p. 4). Furthermore, Volkova et al. argue that new Russian emigrés share professional identities and the idea of a shared destiny as a bases for solidarity, and "[w]hen the idea of shared destiny is combined with professional identity, solidarity is further strengthened" (Volkova et al. 2023, p. 12).

Overall, under the definition provided I consider new Russian emigrés, who left their home country after February 24, 2022, as minorities in their new states of residence, since they embody the key elements outlined by Capotorti – they are numerically inferior to the host populations, find themselves in non-dominant positions, and possess distinctive characteristics. Although not fully matching classical requirements of "possessing ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population" (Capotorti 1979, p. 96), they still could be united under such characteristics, especially those who were ethnic or religious minorities in Russia (e. g., Bashkirs, Tatars, Chechens, etc.). Moreover, many relocants share other features, such as professional identity or the idea of shared destiny, that may bring them to consideration under the term 'new minority.'

### 3 Approaching Relocants as New Minorities

Academic literature traditionally distinguishes between 'old' and 'new' types of minorities. 'Old minorities' (historical, traditional, autochthonous), or 'sub-state nations,' are no longer the only within contemporary nation-states. Recent decades turned out to be years of permanent increase in the "number of people with distinctive identities in terms of language, culture, or religion" that "have settled, with varying degrees of permanence, in countries other than their countries of origin" (Medda-Windischer 2017, p. 26). They are so-called 'new minorities,' encompassing migrants, refugees, and their offspring residing in countries different from their country of origin for a lesser period than old minorities do (Boulter, Medda-Windischer and Malloy 2020). While economic factors predominantly drive their migration, political motives are progressively becoming significant (Medda-Windischer 2017, p. 27).

In this regard, it is also important to mind both the distinctions between new and old and between national and ethnic minorities. While the former is made based on "length of existence as a group in a particular state," the latter "mainly refers to the existence or lack of existence of a kinstate, as well as other factors" (Dragan 2018, p. 102–103; Kymlicka 1995). However, both concepts may be to some extent referred and used when it comes to 'immigrant communities' or 'immigrant minorities' (Dragan 2018, p. 103). Back in 2002, Sujit Choudhry highlighted that while national minorities were the groups that had been "collectively incorporated" into states, ethnic immigrants lacked the capacity to create comprehensive institutions for social, political, and economic life. They voluntarily immigrate and become citizens of liberal states, as well as stay geographically dispersed (Choudhry 2002, p. 55). While critically engaging with Will Kymlicka's theory of multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka 1995), Choudhry emphasizes on immigrants' consent to integrate into the dominant culture and waive their rights to their own cultural institutions, arguing that the decision to immigrate is often made under conditions of inequality and is not always a free choice (Choudhry 2002, p. 62–65).

When discussing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) back in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of representatives opposed the inclusion of provisions recognizing new minorities, since they were supposed to "delay the integration of certain groups which tended to lose their distinct



characteristics and to become assimilated in the population as a whole" (Capotorti 1979, p. 33). As a result, the Article 27 of the ICCPR while addressing the rights of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities to enjoy their culture, religion, and language, still "lacks an exhaustive definition," giving room to the interpretation on whether new minorities can be included (Wolfrum 1993, p. 160). Hereby, by now, "many states have established systems of 'old' minority rights but have not yet developed sound policies for the diversity management of new minority groups originating from migration" (Medda-Windischer 2017, p. 26; see also Dragan 2018). Still on the subject, the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW), under which migrant workers and their families have the right to freedom of religion, while the states parties must respect their cultural identity allowing to maintain ties with their state of origin, was not popular for ratification, with only 58 state parties deciding to bind themselves to such obligations (vs. 173 ratifications for ICCPR).

Finally, it should also be noted here that discussions on putting migrants and individuals with a background of migration under the category of 'new minorities' have no aim to weaken their status but just "to offer additional legal tools with which to respond to their specific needs for protection" (Medda-Windischer 2017, p. 26). Moreover, semantically the term 'new minorities' is broader than the term 'migrants' as the former covers both the first generation of migrants and their descendants, many of whom were born in the country of immigration (ibid.). At the same time, adopting a dichotomous view of 'old' and 'new' minorities may not always be simple or beneficial, taking into account that certain minority groups, such as the Roma, could potentially belong to both groups (Racleş 2020).

Thereby, considering new Russian emigrés a minority, as defined by Capotorti (1979, p. 96), and based on the discussions outlined above, this paper proposes several criteria to follow in this essay when answering whether they are a *new* minority or not. Since this paper has already discussed the factor of 'distinctive identities' in the previous section, this paper elaborates just on *emigrés' motivations for migration*, and *legal and policy frameworks in host societies*. As for the generational factor (offspring of emigrés/refugees), this paper also skips it since too little time has passed from the exodus. Furthermore, this paper mostly skips the issues of the new Russian emigrés' integration into their new societies, since the exodus is still a very recent phenomenon and it is mostly acculturation and adaptation processes that are taking place at the moment.

## 4 Migration Motives

While the major trigger for leaving Russia after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine seems to be obvious, the particular reasons for emigration vary. Some people left the country as they assumed it to not be safe anymore, for some of them the political situation became incompatible with their personal beliefs and values, others could not technically continue working from the country in new conditions. Anyway, within the emigration waves under study the reasons were mostly forcing than motivating to leave. For instance, authors of the Exodus-22 (ex-After24) project, who conducted polls among brand new Russian emigrés, indicated that 80% of their respondents in spring and 59% in autumn 2022 called their leave spontaneous or rather spontaneous (Exodus-22 2023). While the most of emigrés left because of shifts in politics and society – and are often considered as economic migrants, – a vocal minority was politically active prior to departure and interprets their migration as a way of staying active and maintaining their political and social 'voices' for the home country from abroad (Darieva, Golova and Skibo 2023, p. 5; Kamalov et al. 2023).

Such distinction has also provoked various discussions, e. g. about inequalities, naming the exodus, etc. Philosopher Mikhail Nemtsev writes: "New words have spread – '*relokanty*' (relocants), '*uekhavshie*' (those who left). However, while some 'relocants' are greeted at the hotel by a relocation manager sent by their company, others are not greeted by anyone at all, absolutely no one. Probably, the most appropriate word for those who stopped living in Russia in 2022 is yet to appear" (Nemtsev 2023, p. 24). Another paper, that examines the perceptions of Russian citizens who have relocated to Kyrgyzstan after February 24, 2022, addresses the term 'relocant' as implying 'a temporary or semi-permanent relocation rather than a permanent one' (Aitieva, Kim and Kudaibergenov 2024, p. 2). Indeed, the widespread term 'relocants' (*relokanty*) tends to stress the freedom of choice to move from Russia, differing from such terms as 'displaced persons.' Vladislav Inozemtsev matches it with the hope that emigration will not last long, especially during the first year of the invasion (Inozemtsev 2023, p. 9). In this sense, relocants somehow could be related to the abovementioned ethnic immigrants, who voluntarily immigrate to become citizens of liberal states (Choudhry 2002, p. 55), since many of them consider Western liberal democracies as end points of their paths (see e. g., Volkova et al. 2023). However, their experiences of leaving Russia were predominantly forced, directly (e. g., political repressions) or indirectly (e. g., sanctions regime effects on work processes), and in these regards self-identification via 'relocants' could be contemplated more as a psychotherapeutic practice of self-soothing. Moreover, Inozemtsev states (2023, p. 9): "the mood of Russian emigrés has changed; now most of them are prepared to stay abroad for one year or longer, and some realistically note that they will not be able to return 'for as long as Putin is alive'".

To address politically motivated leaves more, this paper will elaborate on refugees and asylum seekers. While not typically fitting these categories under migration law, new Russian emigrés may under certain conditions align with the 1951 Refugee Convention's definition (Art. 1A(2)) due to fears of persecution following the invasion of Ukraine and domestic crackdowns on dissent. Those opposing the invasion or fearing conscription, for example, could be seen as having "a well-founded fear of being persecuted," qualifying for refugee status, especially if considered part of "a particular social group" like anti-war activists or journalists. However, the interpretation and application of the Convention by various states, such as Germany's cautious approach to granting asylum to Russians fleeing conscription, highlight the complexities and variations in international response (Deutsche Welle 2022; RadioFreeLiberty 2023). Lastly, the principle of non-refoulement under the 1951 Refugee Convention (Art. 33) is getting critical in protecting these migrants with introducing restrictions on travelling for more citizens' categories (Vitkine 2023) and proposing revocation of Russian international passports' validity by the Russian government (The Bell 2024a; TASS 2024). Additionally, there are growing difficulties in obtaining entry visas (see more in section 5) and seeking asylum in Western liberal democracies (European Parliament 2024).

Hereby, the complexity of reasons for leaving, ranging from personal safety to the desire for political freedom, underscores that new Russian emigration is not only a search for better economic opportunities but a forced move driven by significant political and social upheavals. While the number of political refugees and asylum seekers among them is predictably low, the debatable use of the term 'relocants' reflects the tension between choice and compulsion in their migration. All the above provides evidence that fit the migration motives' criteria for recognition Russian emigrés as a new minority.

## 5 Legal and Policy Frameworks in Host Countries

When it comes to international agreements on migration, 'they tend to be non-binding or with few signatories weakening their influence' (Weiss and Wilkinson 2023, p. 768), and Russian exodus after the February 24, 2022, illustrates it well. The influx of 'relocants' has provoked the authorities of receiving countries to add changes into their migration policies depending on their attitudes towards these new immigrants. For example, it happened in Kazakhstan, that got one of the highest numbers of Russian migrants, and Kyrgyzstan – both stopped the visa run opportunities in January and October 2023 respectively. These actions reflect the authorities' aspirations to move away from 'transit countries' and set other, more long-lasting, mainstream migration behavior towards them.

In contrast, Armenia and Serbia showed highly welcoming attitudes towards new Russian emigrés. For instance, Armenia responded to the arrival of Russian IT-professionals by amending its residency rules, reflecting the need for dynamic migration policies in the face of unexpected movements, and providing various opportunities for relocation of Russian companies to Yerevan and Gyumri (Ministry of Economics of Armenia 2022). At the same time, balancing the EU pressures, amendments to the Foreigners Act and the Employment of Foreigners Act were made, which scaled up the duration of the residence permit's validity and lowered the threshold for obtaining permanent residency; these changes have made Serbia even more appealing to Russian citizens (Savic 2023). Furthermore, Serbia's legislative course underwent recalibration, concerning the conditions for granting Serbian citizenship in particular (Khan 2023, p. 5), and ended up into three years of permanent registered residence instead of five (originally proposed a one-year term; see, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia n.d.). Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić stated that Serbia's economy was benefiting from an influx of Russians, "western-oriented, very well educated, against the war" (Thomas and Savic 2023).

At the same time, the current legal status of many Russian emigrés in Armenia, Serbia, and some other countries remains in a gray area. Radoš Đurović, the director of the Center for Protection and Assistance to Asylum Seekers in Belgrade, estimated the number of Russians remaining in the country in March 2023 to be at 50 000 people and noted that only 20% of them have a regular right to stay in the country based on work, ownership of real estate, or marriage with a Serbian citizen. The remaining 80% were forced to resort to visa runs every 30 days<sup>8</sup> – usually, to Bosnia and Herzegovina or Montenegro, which are also visa free for Russians (Beta Briefing 2023). A similar situation is Georgia with its loyal migration policy allowing to the most of residing foreigners there to stay up to 365 days without getting a visa or residence permit (see Lapin 2022, p. 38–45) and granting them the opportunity to reset the period of stay via visa run. Same could be done in neighboring Armenia but every 180 days.

While performing more strict migration policies in general, the EU regulations mandate that states must treat Schengen Area visitors with dignity and humanity in every circumstance (Kozioł and Kolarz 2023). Moreover, despite the migration crises, migrant integration policies have shown a trend towards liberalization, especially in EU countries (Solano, Schmid and Helbling 2023). However, for years, in speeches, political and legal actions, historical interpretation, and media representations immigrants have been depicted as posing a threat to European cultural identity, political structures, economies, and welfare systems through securitization (Carlà 2020). Margarita Zavadskaya applies it to Russian citizens' war-induced migration to the EU and indicates that, despite the low numbers, Russian migrants have become a politicized issue in some EU states, particularly those bordering Russia, due to perceived potential security risks (Zavadskaya 2023, p. 3–4). As a result, strong visa restrictions were imposed on

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<sup>8</sup> Nowadays, there are even entrepreneurs who organize visa run tours taking entire groups to the border to put entry and exit stamps (Kiseleva and Safronova 2023).

Russian nationals in Baltic states, Poland, and Czechia (Dumbrava 2022; Koziół and Kolarz 2023). In August 2023, Finland, addressing its “disposal to combat instrumentalized migration,” has fully closed its land-border crossing points, making it not possible to enter for any reasons and even to submit application for international protection when entering from Russia (Finnish Government n.d.). In May 2024, Norway was the last Schengen Area country to close its land-border with Russia for ‘leisure and non-essential travel’ (Nilsen 2024).

Furthermore, in violation of non-discrimination principle (ICERD, art. 2 and 5), some air companies reportedly did not allow Russian nationals – even those with the EU residence permits – to board flights in Europe (e. g., RadioFreeEurope 2023), and the process of opening a bank account in an EU member state has turned into a challenging quest. Grounding in a set of opinion polls conducted among Russian relocants by the OutRush project, Zavadskaya states that it is “unlikely to pose any major security threat to receiving states” (Zavadskaya 2023, p. 8) and proposes to handle this exact migration “like any other [...], whether it involves asylum-seekers, economic migrants, or repatriates” (ibid., p. 2).

Therefore, new Russian emigrés are not legally recognized in any of host countries and do not enjoy additional legal protections as ‘new minority.’ On the one hand, since the Russian exodus is a recent event, there are still few changes in the legal field, particularly inclusive ones; on the other, it could appear there is no need in such kind of recognition. Nevertheless, all the facts presented above – supportive actions of countries, such as Armenia and Serbia, restrictions imposed by some Northern and Central European countries on incoming Russians, etc. – (in)directly indicate recognition of such distinct communities’ existence and the host states’ need to react on them.

## Conclusions

The Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered more than a geopolitical crisis; among other things, it led to a substantial migratory movement. Professionals, predominantly young and educated, formed the bulk of this exodus. This demographic shift indicates a significant loss of human capital for Russia, as these individuals were integral to its urban professional landscape (Kamalov et al. 2022). The migration was fueled by political repression, fears surrounding military conscription, and economic instability, leading to the largest brain drain since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Borusyak 2022). Anyway, the patterns observed within three waves of migration highlight predominantly forced and spontaneous nature of their departure (see After24 2022; Exodus-22 2023), often to visa-free countries (Kamalov et al. 2022). This situation complicates their legal recognition and statistical accounting in host countries, leaving many perpetually considered as tourists rather than residents or potential citizens.

Acceptance of new Russian emigrés by various countries and restrictions imposed on Russian nationals by other states indicate the recognition of existence of these distinct communities and their identities. However, even states and societies, that are relatively friendly to new Russian emigrés characterized by proposing and adopting some targeted legal changes or (in)formally providing additional help to them (e. g., Armenia, Serbia, etc.), do not seem to introduce this social group into their national laws; moreover, granting new Russian emigrés special status or any specific preferences may be politically and economically risky for host countries, so they prefer to maintain a distance to avoid being subjected to sanctions. On the contrary, they are more open to integrate Russians into their societies by granting them residence permits and even citizenship. Furthermore, this paper asserts that Russian relocants do not need themselves to be legally recognized as any kind of minority or be distinguished somehow

differently (it, however, may be in the interest of migrants from national republics of Russia). Not pretending to be distinguished as a specific social group, they aim to continue their professional and personal lives in their new countries of residence in conditions of safety and non-discrimination, primarily on the fact that they are Russian nationals. This can be achieved through equal dialogue between host countries and representatives of the new Russian emigrés' communities, supported by Russian influencers and lobbyists' voices in favor of rights and needs of new Russian emigrés (e. g., Dmitry Gudkov, Zhanna Nemtsova, Yulia Navalnaya, etc.). Such a dialogue has already begun and is targeting specific issues (Gudkov, Inozemtsev and Nekrasov 2024), although these topics cannot be considered as substantial within the existing agenda.

Altogether, all of the above is exactly what Medda-Windischer promotes in her article when noting that the concept of legal recognition gets context-dependent, focusing on offering "additional legal tools with which to respond to their specific needs for protection" rather than mandating a uniform legal status for all new minority groups (Medda-Windischer 2017, p. 27). The necessity for legal recognition of new minorities emerges as a nuanced subject rather than an absolute requirement; hereby, acts of hosting or non-welcoming new Russian emigrés serve as indirect recognition them as 'new minority.' However, while 'old' and 'new' minorities share basic common claims, such as the right to existence, equal treatment, identity, diversity, and effective participation in public life, the extent of rights and legitimate claims may differ (ibid., p. 25).

So, do new Russian emigrés constitute a new minority? Following the theoretical framework of this article, such a label is appropriate. In fact, they are *new minorities in the making*, mostly lacking legal recognition, not enjoying consequent protection measures, and experiencing discrimination(s) in some contexts, despite being non-dominant and numerically inferior to the rest of the population, widely recognized in public discourse, and sharing distinct identities. In this sense, it is important to recall the statement by Fernand de Varennes, former UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, that "[t]he objective existence of a minority is factual, not dependent on the 'popularity' of a minority or the whims of a government" (OHCHR 2020). Among other things, Russian emigrés definitely serve as drivers of host countries' migration policies changes – unfortunately, not always inclusive ones. All this results in activities, still isolated and relatively timid (at least publicly), to defend the rights of new Russian emigrés in their new countries. This process is not happening without the assistance of the Russian opposition in exile.

Nowadays, the complexity lies in the fact that Russian migrants are continuing to move between countries. As it is common to characterize new minorities as groups that "consist of migrants, refugees, and their descendants who are living in a country other than that of their origin, on a basis that is more than merely transitional" (Medda-Windischer 2017, p. 27), it is thereby possible to speak of new minorities, although not in all countries that have experienced an influx of Russians. Thus, such groups are emerging (or already emerged) in countries where numerically inferior groups of new Russian emigrés stay for a (relatively) long period. Although this fact does not directly lead to their legal recognition by the host states, the issues of their legal regulation, as well as their adaptation and subsequent integration, are already on the research agenda (e. g., Legut 2023; Aitieva, Kim and Kudaibergenov 2024). Therefore, given existing practices, host societies are expected to shift towards treating them not inherently as security threats but as individuals contributing to and integrating into their host societies (Carlà 2020). Following Medda-Windischer's general thesis, integration and social cohesion can be achieved by recognizing the diverse needs and contributions of all minority groups within a pluralistic society framework (Medda-Windischer 2017; see also Palermo 2020).

This paper has several limitations that must be highlighted. First, not much time has passed since the beginning of the exodus, which means that the situation is still evolving. Additionally, while the volume of materials and research on the topic is growing, many aspects remain unexplored, preventing us from drawing comprehensive conclusions. Second, this work focused on publicly observed communities of new Russian emigrés, omitting the case of wealthy Russian migrants who own luxury real estate abroad and sometimes even hold a second citizenship, since they may merit separate research. Moreover, this paper treated new Russian emigrés mostly as homogeneous social group not paying much attention to inequalities among its members (e. g., remote vs. on-site employees, IT-workers vs. representatives of other spheres, etc.); sure, inequalities take place also between remotely working new Russian emigrés and locals, especially in Central Asia, South Caucasian states, and Latin America. Third, this paper also skipped discussion on generational considerations in this paper. It is too early to begin this discussion, as even if descendants of the first-generation migrants exist, they are still too young, given that too little time has passed since the exodus. It remains a subject for future research to explore the identity, needs, and socio-legal status of the second and subsequent generations, comparing them to those of the initial emigrés. Moreover, future research could apply the general framework proposed in this paper to specific cases of host countries that have managed to retain new Russian emigrés.

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