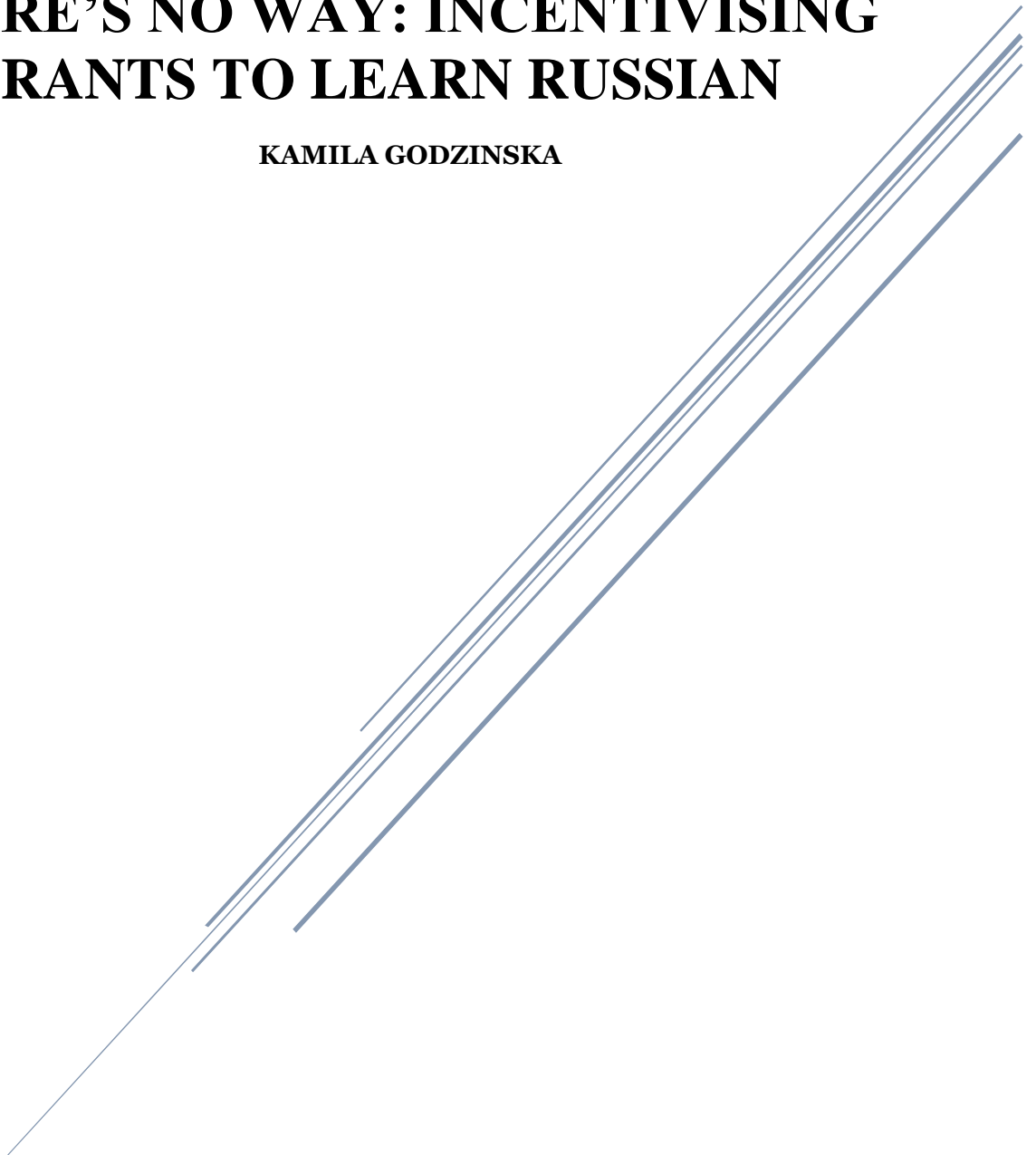


POLICY PAPER

**WHERE THERE'S NO WILL,
THERE'S NO WAY: INCENTIVISING
MIGRANTS TO LEARN RUSSIAN**

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NATION-BUILDING IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA: POLICY ANALYSIS

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1. ABSTRACT

This policy paper addresses the issue of improving the motivation to attain linguistic proficiency among migrants in the Russian Federation. It argues that current policies are not enough for successful linguistic integration. While some resources and strategies have been implemented by local authorities to support migrants in their language acquisition, influencing migrants' motivation to learn has not been seriously attempted in Russia. This policy paper argues that motivation to learn is of paramount importance for improving linguistic proficiency, and consequently for the integration of migrants. The author proposes three policy recommendations to address this issue.

2. INTRODUCTION

A friction exists in Russia today between the need for migration as a source of workforce, due to a decline in Russia's working-age population and growing anti-migrant sentiments within society. The fact that nearly 50% of recent migrants have little to no knowledge of the Russian language (Mihaylova 2017:181) is hardly conducive to a harmonious coexistence with the local population. A lack of communication with foreign 'others' can only serve to exacerbate xenophobic attitudes. Furthermore, limited linguistic competence can restrict migrants' practical abilities. Improving their linguistic proficiency is therefore imperative for the preservation of social cohesion and for allowing migrants to become self-reliant within the host society.

Language acquisition can be approached with two questions: 'can they?' and 'will they?'. Some measures have been introduced on a regional level to address the former, providing resources and tuition for migrants and their children. The latter, addressing motivation, has been neglected by policy makers. The recommended policies will combine concrete benefits of learning Russian with legal requirements to do so, in order to increase migrants' willingness to learn, and to lower the threat to social cohesion posed by linguistic inability.

This paper is based upon analyses of academic literature, policy reports, public opinion surveys, and publicly-available government documents. The author recognises that the efficiency of the recommendations will be limited by factors such as the high proportion of illegal migrants, who, it is speculated, outnumber those residing in Russia legally (Mihaylova 2017:180); they can bypass official linguistic requirements and would not benefit from incentives. Second, the recommendations do not apply to temporary migrants, who account for approximately 50% of the migrant population (Mihaylova 2017:180). Third, the recommendations target working-age migrants; low linguistic proficiency among children remains to be addressed. Working-age migrants are nonetheless the most important target, as they make up 84.3% of the foreign migrant population (Shcherbakova 2014). Moreover, targeting permanent migrants constitutes a greater investment into their future and the future of Russian society and has the long-term potential of improving the integration of their children.

The first chapter of the policy paper outlines the history and development of the problem, the numerous factors that add to its complexity, and its consequences for Russian society and for migrants themselves. It also evaluates the measures that have already been implemented to address it.

The second chapter considers three policy options that target motivation for learning Russian, namely those of doing nothing and waiting to see the effects of the recently introduced linguistic requirements for obtaining a working visa; increasing the linguistic requirements already in place; introducing a comprehensive integration contract that combines legal compulsion with economic incentives for migrants to learn Russian.

The concluding chapter offers a policy recommendation and explains its benefits for improving the motivation to attain linguistic proficiency among permanent, working-age migrants in Russian.

3. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

3.1. Background of the problem

Limited language mastery among migrants is a relatively new phenomenon in Russia; a marked decline in proficiency occurred between the 1990's and the second decade of the new millennium. This decline corresponds to the second wave of migration in post-Soviet Russia, resulting from increased cooperation and preferential migration conditions between Russia and Central Asian countries (Fedorova & Baranova 2017:224), and from the demand for labour in the former and unemployment in the latter (Nasritdinov 2016:258). While the first wave was dominated by Belarussians and Ukrainians (making up 81.5% of the migrant population (Streltsova 2014:25)) who were often well-educated and studied Russian at school, the second wave is made up predominantly of migrants from the linguistically distant countries of Central Asia (making up 60% of the migrant population as of 2014 (Streltsova 2014:25)), who often have a low level of education and were schooled after the fall of the USSR, with less emphasis on Russian. Limited education is a key factor, as it affects not only the efficiency with which individuals acquire linguistic knowledge (due to having fewer learning strategies), but also the likelihood of the individual having the motivation to learn (Braun 2010:605).

Beyond education, several factors contribute to this lack of motivation. The first is a lack of economic incentives: prospects for career development are low among migrants in low-skilled employment in Russia. This is partly owing to their level of education, and partly due to the demands of the Russian labour market, which requires foreign workers to fill positions in areas like construction. However, without the potential for economic advancement, there is little incentive for migrants to improve their Russian, especially in jobs that do not demand high proficiency. Secondly, many migrants have a limited desire to become a part of the local community: in cities with a large migrant population, migrants often find a circle of acquaintances within their own linguistic and ethnic group, who provide companionship and support. There is less incentive to interact with locals, on whom migrants are not reliant for their social life, and who sometimes display xenophobic attitudes and can be hostile towards newcomers; without participation in the Russian-speaking community, language acquisition becomes more difficult.

Since language is the most important medium of human communication, social cohesion can be disrupted when a substantial proportion of the population is unable to communicate. Studies demonstrate that the public generally holds negative perceptions of migrants (Kosmarskaya & Savin 2016: 137); humans fear difference, they are suspicious of the 'Other'. A lack of communication between migrants and the host society reinforces feelings of

hostility. In a study carried out by the Levada Center, 66% of respondents supported limiting the entrance of immigrants into Russia (Figure 1).

In your opinion, what political course should the government take regarding immigrants?

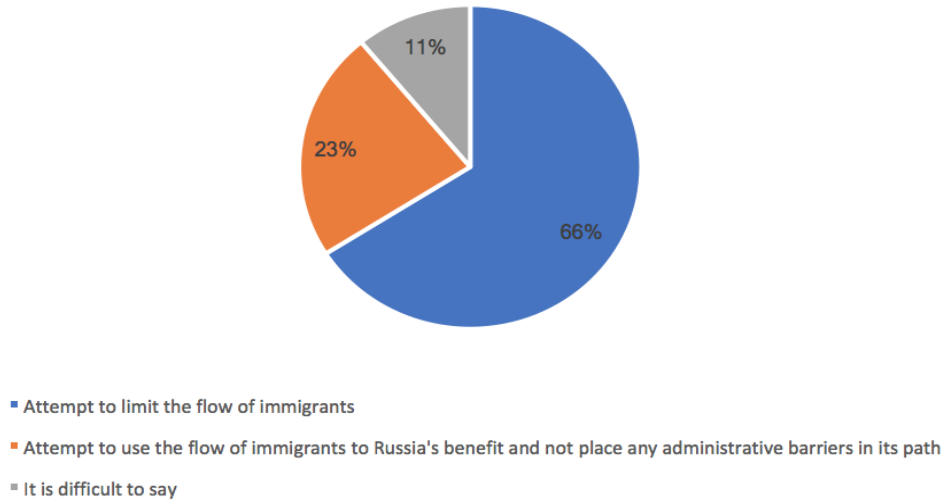
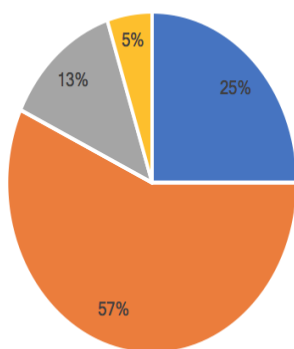


Figure 1: Opinions on migration policy in Russia (Xenophobic Sentiments, 10.11.2016, www.levada.ru/en).

Language can influence attitudes towards migrants: while only 13% of respondents classified their attitude to linguistically similar migrants from Belarus as ‘bad’ (Figure 2), (or 19% for migrants from Ukraine, as shown in Figure 3), the figure rose to 38% for migrants from the linguistically distant countries of Central Asia (Figure 4).

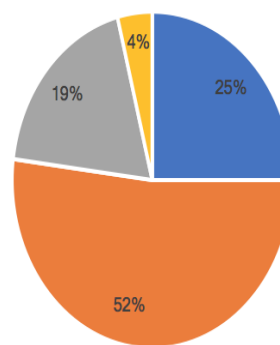
How would you characterise your attitude towards migrant laborers from Belarus?



■ Good, sympathize with them ■ Tolerant, neutral ■ Bad ■ It is difficult to say

Figure 2: Attitudes towards Belarussians (Attitudes Towards Migrants, 29.05.2017, www.levada.ru/en).

How would you characterise your attitude towards migrant laborers from Ukraine?



■ Good, sympathize with them ■ Tolerant, neutral ■ Bad ■ It is difficult to say

Figure 3: Attitudes towards Ukrainians (Attitudes Towards Migrants, 29.05.2017, www.levada.ru/en).

How would you characterise your attitude towards migrant laborers from the Central Asian republics?

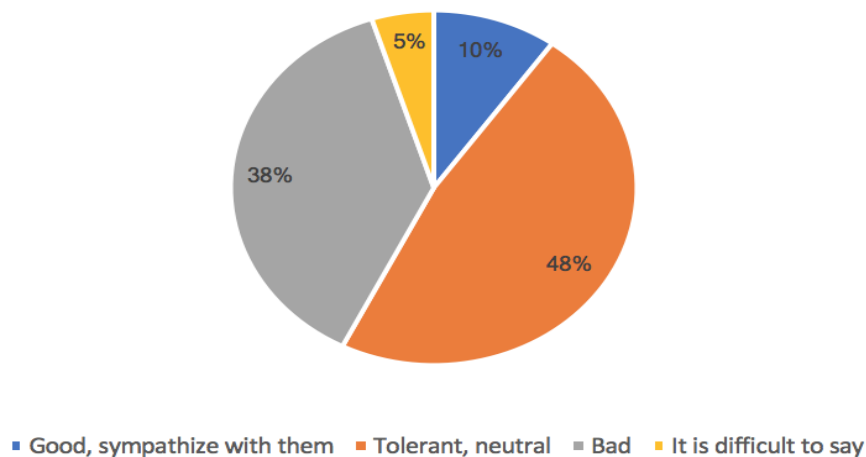


Figure 4: Attitudes towards migrants from Central Asia (Attitudes Towards Migrants, 29.05.2017, www.levada.ru/en).

Moreover, language is an instrument of action, and one's practical abilities are limited by a lack thereof. Migrants who do not speak Russian often struggle with registration or enrolling their children in school. They often depend on mediators to address their legal issues, who can be exploitative, seeking to benefit from their linguistic inability. With the help of a mediator, getting a work permit costs approximately 30,000 rubles (450 euros) (Migration Policy Centre 2014:3), which is extortionate for a low-salaried worker. As such, the problem of low linguistic proficiency among migrants requires government action, as it adversely affects not only the host society, but also the migrants themselves.

3.2. Policy Environment

Policy makers have only begun to address the integration of migrants, and its focus on linguistic proficiency has been insubstantial. Local authorities in areas with a large migrant population have implemented measures to provide learning support for migrants and their children, such as preparatory classes in schools (Streltsova 2014:34-35) or research into teaching methods for Russian as a second language (Martynova 2016:549). While such schemes and initiatives should continue to expand, the factor of motivation demands attention, and very little has been done in this direction by central or local authorities.

While low motivation for language acquisition among migrants is common in many host societies, the problem is exacerbated in Russia by the fact that until 2012, integration was not a priority of migration policy, owing to the ease of assimilation among migrants of the first wave (Migration Policy Centre 2014:2); it was not until 2012 that linguistic requirements were implemented. In December 2012, the State Duma passed amendments to the law "On the Legal Position of Foreign Citizens", requiring that migrants demonstrate knowledge of the Russian language to obtain permission to work in Russia. A migrant without a formal language qualification must pass a state exam, proving that he has at least basic mastery of the Russian language.

While this policy may be a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough; in the author's opinion, the level required (A2, according to the Common European Framework for Languages) is insufficiently advanced, and it is proposed that a level of B2 is necessary for active participation in society. Furthermore, there is only one time-point at which migrants are tested- the beginning of their stay in Russia-, which does not demand any improvement over the course of their residency. Finally, beyond jumping through legal hoops, there are no measures to incentivise migrants; there is no tangible, economic benefit of learning Russian. In order to avoid the marginalisation and disempowerment of a substantial part of those residing in Russia, and the development of interethnic and intercultural hostility, urgent measures must be taken to motivate migrants to learn the Russian language and participate in the community. While increased migration remains necessary for addressing Russia's demographic crisis, the problems discussed in this paper, including xenophobia and growing social division, are only likely to get worse.

4. POLICY OPTIONS

In an increasingly globalised world, in which migration plays a significant role, fostering harmonious relations between migrants and the host society through strict language requirements and extensive linguistic support is indispensable for achieving a successful migration policy; tough measures and high expenses are fully justified. Policy must demonstrate that migrants have an obligation to learn Russian, while offering concrete benefits of doing so. Policy makers have three main options when addressing this issue:

- *Continue the current language policy and wait to see the results.*

It is possible to simply wait until newly-arrived migrants, who are required to demonstrate knowledge of Russian at an A2 level, outnumber those who arrived prior to 2012. While it can be argued that the present policy has not yet had time to become effective, the author maintains that it will never have any substantial effect, as the required level is too low. More can and ought to be done to increase the effectiveness of such linguistic measures.

- *Increase the linguistic level required to obtain a work permit or patent.*

On the surface, increasing the linguistic level of the above policy to one which allows for active participation in the host society, such as B2, seems to solve the problem outlined above. However, such a high linguistic requirement to be met upon arrival in Russia, without first being immersed in the language, has the potential of excluding many possible migrants, which would run contrary to Russia's migration targets. While linguistic proficiency in Russian ought to be non-negotiable, a fairer policy that allows time to learn would more effectively reconcile Russia's wider migration policy and labour market demands with linguistic integration.

- *Implement a comprehensive integration contract.*

To address the problems raised in the policy alternatives above and earlier in the paper, the author proposes the combined implementation of the following policies:

1) Language tests: when applying for permanent/long-term residency, migrants will sign a contract specifying the spoken language requirements they must reach by two separate time-points within a given timeframe, e.g. B1 after 2 years, B2 after 3 years. Migrants will then arrange two speaking tests within this period (tests can be taken earlier if desired); failure to arrange or pass them will result in a considerable (but reasonable) monetary fine. This will only apply to migrants with no prior linguistic ability; if linguistic ability can be demonstrated in advance, exemption is obtained. This may be regarded as too demanding: language teachers in Europe note that migrants often struggle to attain the B1 or even A2 level required in countries such as the Netherlands or Germany (Bocker & Strik 2011:172). To maximise the effectiveness and fairness of this policy, the central government should offer financial support to regional authorities to help them to expand and improve learning resources for migrants, which are already provided in regions like Moscow.

2) Salary increases: the central government will force employers who hire foreign workers to increase their salary by a fixed percentage after they pass each test, e.g. 5% after the first test, 10% after the second, on top of inflation. For migrants who can demonstrate linguistic proficiency in advance, the higher salary is automatically applied. The competition between colleagues created by this system should further incentivise them to learn. To avoid excessive costs, the salary after the second increase should correspond to the salaries of Russian citizens performing the same job, while the previous salaries should be lower. While the first part of the contract works by compulsion, this part seeks to incentivise. The combined implementation of the two policies will constitute a strong financial incentive to learn the Russian language. They will work negatively and positively: ‘if I do not learn Russian, I will lose money’; ‘if I learn Russian, I will make more money’. The immediate financial returns, broken into two parts, corresponding to two manageable steps of Russian language acquisition, will create a stronger incentive to learn.

3) Compulsory language club attendance: language clubs will be set up with Russian-speaking volunteers, creating a social space for migrants to interact with locals in Russian. As part of the integration contract, migrants with no prior linguistic ability must attend a certain number of meetings, e.g. 60 in the first year of residence, 30 in the second year. In order to organise the meetings and attract volunteers, a paid director will be assigned to each region (organised according to migrant population size). This policy combines opportunities and resources for language acquisition with a requirement to make use of them. It comes with an economic cost, but it is a worthwhile investment. The key problem with this policy would be finding volunteers. However, the existence of grass-root initiatives, such as ‘Children of St. Petersburg’ (Tkach & Brednikova 2016:214), in which local volunteers help migrant children to learn Russian, indicates that there are members of civil society who are prepared to help. Furthermore, being a volunteer could be framed as work experience for young people, and project directors could provide them with references to help them with gaining future employment. The club sessions could also involve a degree of cultural exchange, and volunteers could be given the opportunity to learn about the cultures of the migrants. Many low-skilled migrants work in professions such as construction, which are dominated by migrant employees, making it difficult to make Russian friends. The compulsory nature of this policy would not only make migrants spend time speaking Russian, but also getting to know the local people and the local culture and expanding their social network, aiding their integration from more than a linguistic perspective. At the same time, locals could benefit from this system, and most importantly, get to know the migrants, harmonizing interethnic and intercultural relations in the area, and reducing anti-migrant sentiments.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to support the scale of migration required to ameliorate the declining working-age population in Russia, effective integration of migrants is of utmost importance. Proficiency in the Russian language, which has significantly decreased since the second wave of migration beginning in the mid-2000s, is indispensable for the maintenance of social cohesion. While some resources and strategies have been implemented by local authorities in parts of Russia to support migrants in their language acquisition, influencing migrants' motivation to learn has not been seriously attempted in Russia or on a global scale. Motivation to learn is of paramount importance for improving linguistic proficiency, and consequently for the integration of migrants

The recommended policy, aimed at increasing the motivation among migrants to learn Russian, can be summarised as follows:

Implementing a comprehensive integration contract that combines legal obligations, economic incentives and opportunities to learn Russian. The key components of this contract include:

- 1) A requirement for long-term migrants to pass two language tests (B1 and B2) in the first three years of residence. Non-compliance to result in a monetary fine.
- 2) Two salary increases of 5% and 10% on top of inflation following the successful completion of the above tests. This is a requirement placed upon employers.
- 3) A minimum number of language club sessions to be attended by migrants during the first two years of their stay, where they would socialise with Russian-speaking volunteers.

By increasing migrants' motivation to learn and ameliorating the linguistic problem, these policies would aid integration in general, either directly, through the language clubs, or indirectly, through the migrants' increased ability to communicate with locals and become active members of society. The effects of these policies would be reducing fear and suspicion among the local population, minimising hostility towards migrants, empowering migrants to carry out practical tasks which require language proficiency, improving the migrants' employability, and finally, granting them the ability to become a part of the community. The contract can be used not only by Russia, but also by other countries with an elevated level of migration, making it a valuable tool for addressing problems with migrant integration worldwide.

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