

THE POLITICS OF IMMIGRATION CONTROL IN RUSSIA

C. Schenk*

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan; *cschenk@nu.edu.kz

Introduction. Despite a visa-free regime among all CIS countries, Russia has become increasingly restrictive in its policies regulating migrants' access to the labor market. In particular, Russia instituted a quota in 2007 that regulates how many work permits will be issued in each year. This quota has decreased dramatically since its institution and since 2008 has stood well below the actual labor needs of the Russian economy. The quota mechanism has been criticized by numerous experts in Russia for not being in line with labor market need, for being based on political factors more than economic prerequisites, and for having complicated feedback mechanisms between employers and government ministries. According to migration experts in Russia, quotas are "determined through a complicated and multi-layered mechanism not backed by any serious methodology" (Ioffe & Zayonchkovskaya, 2010). The goal of this poster presentation is to assess the rationale and methodology for quota formulation set out in government documents. By assessing whether the methodology prescribed by the government is used consistently across regions and identifying potential gaps in the methodology, we can begin to assert whether the criticisms of the quota mechanism have merit and start to identify additional factors that need to be considered.

Materials and methods. This analysis tests the government methodology for quota formulation through a statistical analysis of yearly quotas alongside macroeconomic, labor market and socio-economic indicators. The data is constructed as a panel dataset that includes quotas for all of Russia's 83 regions from 2007-2014, as issued by government decree. Macroeconomic and labor market data is taken from the Russian Federal State Statistical Service. Additional variables measuring crime, regional corruption, and biographical data about regional governors are constructed from secondary sources.

Results and discussion. The results show that on the whole, indicators such as migrant contribution to regional income, migrants as a percentage of the labor force, and unemployment predict quota levels to some degree. While this shows that the government methodology is working on some level, what is particularly interesting is the identification of significant outliers. While many regions can be reliably explained through the indicators included in the government methodology, regions like Moscow, St. Petersburg and others with large migrant receiving cities not only do not act predictably from year to year, but also cannot reliably be predicted by the government methodology.

Conclusions. In order to explain regional variation, especially in the larger migrant receiving areas, political variables must be taken into consideration. The regions relationship with the federal center (Moscow), as well as the business-government and patronage relationships within the region should be taken into consideration when explaining efforts of immigration control through the quota.

References.

1. Ioffe, G., & Zayonchkovskaya, Z. (2010). *Immigration to Russia: Why It Is inevitable, and How Large It May Have to Be to Provide the Workforce Russia Needs*. Seattle: The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research.