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RUSSIANS' RELOCATION TO TÜRKIYE 2022–2023

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Abstract. The article examines the migration of Russians to Türkiye from February 2022 to the end of 2023 and its socioeconomic impact on the host country. The study identifies the sociological profile of Russian relocants: educated and financially secure individuals, who maintain connections with Russia and remain highly engaged in domestic affairs. The analysis is based on statistical data, sociological surveys, and materials from Russian and international media. Particular attention is given to the factors influencing Russians' decision to move to Türkiye, including its convenient geographical location, favorable climate, and relatively simple and financially accessible legalization process. At the same time, adaptation is hindered by language barriers and employment difficulties for foreigners. The mass influx of Russians in 2022 led to an increase in real estate prices, as well as the cost of goods and services, prompting the Turkish government to introduce countermeasures, such as raising the price of "investment passports" and restricting the number of districts available for residence permits.

Keywords: migration, relocation, relocant, Ukrainian crisis, Russian-Turkish relations, Russian demographics.

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РЕЛОКАЦИЯ РОССИЯН В 2022–2023 ГГ.: ТУРЕЦКОЕ НАПРАВЛЕНИЕ

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена миграции россиян в Турцию в период с февраля 2022 по конец 2023 г. и ее социально-экономическим последствиям для принимающей стороны. В ходе исследования определен социологический портрет российских релокантов: это представители образованного и обеспеченного класса, поддерживающие связи с Россией и сохраняющие высокую вовлеченность в отечественную повестку. Анализ основан на статистических данных, социологических опросах, а также материалах российских и зарубежных СМИ. Ключевое внимание уделено факторам, повлиявшим на выбор Турции для переезда, среди которых удобное географическое

положение, климат, относительно простая и финансово доступная легализация. В то же время адаптацию затрудняют языковой барьер и сложности с трудоустройством. Массовый приток россиян в 2022 г. привел к росту цен на недвижимость, товары и услуги, что вызвало ответные меры со стороны турецких властей, включая повышение стоимости “инвестиционных паспортов” и ограничение районов, доступных для оформления ВНЖ.

Ключевые слова: миграция, релокация, релокант, украинский кризис, российско-турецкие отношения, демография РФ.

INTRODUCTION

For a number of reasons – the most important of which today seem to be geographical and visa accessibility, coupled with logistical advantages in the context of the sanctions against Russia – Turkey has more than once become a haven, temporary or permanent, for Russian citizens leaving the country. Perhaps the main historical analogy is the wave of migration following the October Revolution and the Civil War. Comparable in scale is the mass outflow of population from the highlands annexed to the Russian Empire during the Caucasian War to the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century. In total, according to official data from the Russian border service, about 500,000 people left the Caucasus at that time, especially many in 1864 [1, p. 190]. Meanwhile, at the initial stage, the highlanders were not considered subjects of the tsar and the empire, and the Russian government did not hinder but rather approved and encouraged their departure beyond its borders – by creating special commissions to look into the needs of the settlers, partially financing the relocation of the poorest families, etc. – right up until the cancellation of permission for resettlement in 1867.

As for the post-revolutionary wave of migration, according to data from the Turkish academic community presented at events dedicated to the centenary of the resettlement of Russians to Turkey, about 200,000 people arrived in the country at that time, significantly influencing the economy and sociological profile of its cities. For example, the population of Istanbul increased by 30% as a result of these movements [2]. A famous Russian politician, Shulgин, wrote: “In the chronicles, 1920 will be marked as the year of the peaceful conquest of Constantinople by the Russians” [3]. Assessments of the “rapid Russification” of the Turkish capital are present in almost all the memoirs of compatriots who

found refuge there [4, 5]. The degree of influence of Russian emigration on the cultural, historical, and social character of Istanbul and several other cities in Turkey has been thoroughly studied by Russian and Turkish authors [6, 7]. This paper does not aim to conduct a comparative analysis of that era with the current migration trend, although, in the opinion of the Turkish side, the situation is largely repeating itself [8]. Monitoring and thoughtful analysis of this phenomenon are necessary and will be useful to all participants in the process, including the relocants from Russia who are establishing a temporary or permanent life in Turkey today.

One should begin with the definitions of the notions “relocants” and “relocation” as used in this study, taking into account their recent but confident entry into both domestic and foreign socio-political vocabulary in clear connection with Russian citizens who left the country in 2022–2023 at the onset of and during the current crisis. For example, in relation to Ukrainians who moved, the more familiar terms “emigrants”/“immigrants”, “refugees”, etc., are applicable – depending on their migration status. Meanwhile, in relation to Russians, the general concept of “relocants” is widely used (primarily by the individuals themselves), regardless of the actual legal status of each person abroad.

In this study, the concept of “relocation” implies a forced change of country of residence by Russians under the influence of external and internal circumstances related to the current Ukrainian crisis. Accordingly, “relocants” are Russians who have moved under the conditions and within the framework of this process. Among the distinctive features of today’s phenomenon are: maintaining close contact with their homeland, including sources of income – and in many cases employment – ongoing communication with relatives, colleagues, and acquaintanc-

es in the Russian Federation, remaining within the Russian information field, and involvement in the Russian socio-political agenda (at least for now). There is also a general lack of clear plans and an indefinite duration of stay abroad, along with high geographic mobility (changing countries). If these characteristics fade, giving way to greater certainty, clear plans for adaptation and integration, and involvement in the local (rather than Russian) socio-political and socio-economic agendas, relocants will become immigrants in each of the countries where they reside and emigrants from Russia.

TURKISH RELOCATION ROUTE IN NUMBERS

It should be noted that Turkey did not become the main destination for Russians who left. The primary host countries in 2022–2023 were Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Armenia. Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and even Mongolia were included in this list either temporarily or situationally. At the same time, Turkey was the undisputed leader in the number of air tickets purchased by Russians in 2022: it accounted for 23% of all sales [source 1]. Between September 21 and October 4, 2022, it topped this rating by a significant margin compared to other destinations [9].

The explanation here is quite simple. Istanbul has long been a major international air hub – a hub airport for numerous airlines with many connecting flights. It was actively used in this capacity before, and after the restrictions that affected Russian airlines and the aviation industry as a whole, including limitations on flying passengers from Russia, Istanbul assumed a leading – and at times monopolistic – position in the air transportation market. In this sense, Istanbul has been an undisputed beneficiary of the current conflict. The Istanbul airport entered the elite group of global air hubs in 2011 and has continued to expand its capacity since then. However, by 2017, it began to consistently lose ground. Its renewed rise came in 2022, with a growth of 45.7% compared to 2019. This was, of course, partly due to the end of the pandemic. However, none of the other top global airports demonstrated comparable growth over the pre-COVID period. The year 2022 was

a turning point for Istanbul: from 28th place among the world's air hubs in 2019, the airport rose to 7th place and maintained that position in 2023 [10].

Thus, Turkey became primarily a transit country for Russians en route to other destinations (mainly European, though not exclusively). Speaking about Turkey as a relocation destination, in 2022, approximately 153,000 Russians received a residence permit (RP) in the country, becoming the leading nationality in terms of permits issued. Moreover, the majority of them (132,000) were granted tourist RPs, valid for up to one year [source 2]. According to the *Habr* agency, which analyzes trends in the IT sector, Turkey was among the most in-demand countries for technology professionals in 2022 – behind Armenia, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Serbia, and Cyprus. The main factors influencing this choice included migration policy, climate and environment, the presence of a Russian-speaking IT and business community, and favorable conditions for the development of the digital sector.

Continuing with the topic of tourist attractiveness (climate and ecology), Thailand ranks second after Turkey among Russian travelers, though with a significant gap. For comparison: in the year when Thailand welcomed almost 1.5 million tourists from the Russian Federation, Turkey received over 6 million [source 3]. These figures remain unmatched by other top tourist destinations (in descending order): the UAE (with Dubai as the key driver), Thailand, Egypt, and Sri Lanka. Russia has consistently held the leading position in tourist arrivals to Turkey since 2017, losing this status only once – in 2022 – to Germany. However, an important trend should be noted: Germany also increased its tourist flow to Turkey by 0.5 million people, reaching 6.2 million in 2023 – just 100,000 fewer than the total number of Russian tourists (6.3 million) [source 3].

Equally important is the total number of foreign tourists visiting Turkey, which stood at 56.7 million. Plans for 2024 include reaching the 60 million mark. As part of its tourism development strategy revised in 2018, Ankara aims to strengthen efforts in new markets. The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism is working to in-

crease tourist flows from Sweden by 23%, Finland by 15%, the USA by 31%, Canada by 42%, and China by 102% [source 3]. These are very specific, quantified goals that deserve attention when analyzing the prospects of relocants in Turkey.

Does the country’s tourist popularity contribute to its attractiveness as a relocation destination? If we consider the non-European cluster of countries, then most likely yes. Turkey, as the clear leader in the tourism segment, is the only one among them included in the list of preferred relocation destinations. Meanwhile, Germany has become the main country of residence for Russians (specifically holders of Russian passports, not just individuals from Russia) within the EU in 2022–2023 [source 4]. Still, it is worth noting that every second Russian who left in 2022 chose their country of arrival randomly, and Turkey is no exception.

IS TURKEY CHANGING THE RELOCANTS AND ARE THE RELOCANTS CHANGING TURKEY?

While the question of the connection between a country’s tourist attractiveness and its selection as a new permanent or temporary place of residence remains open, the link between specific tourist locations within the country and this choice is quite evident. An analysis of the distribution of migrants by Turkish provinces shows that Istanbul received the largest share in 2022–35.4% – followed by Antalya (14.8%), Ankara (5.4%), Bursa (3.9%), and Mersin (3.8%) [source 5]. Notably, Istanbul, Ankara, and Antalya also lead in the number of people leaving Turkey. The shares of foreigners in the country’s population, according to 2022 data, were distributed as follows (see Table).

Russian relocants made up a quarter of the entire migration flow. In 2022–2023, they purchased more than 27,000 real estate properties in various cities across Turkey [11], ranking first in the number of transactions among foreign buyers at the end of 2022 and maintaining that position in 2023. However, in 2023, the number of purchases declined significantly: 10,560 compared to 16,300 the previous year. At the beginning of 2024, demand for Turkish real estate among Rus-

Table. Countries that are donors of Turkish immigrants and countries that are recipients of emigrants from Turkey in 2022, %

	Immigration	Emigration
Russia	25	
Ukraine	8.1	
Iran	6.5	10.6
Iraq	4.8	20
Afghanistan	5.4	6
Uzbekistan		7
Tajikistan		4.8

Compiled from: [source 5].

sians remained higher than among other groups – Iranians, Iraqis, and Ukrainians. This ranking corresponds to the list of countries supplying migrants to Turkey (with the exception of Afghans). However, by the winter of 2024, transactions had dropped from the thousands to the hundreds, and in some areas, even to the tens – indicating a sharp decline. In February, the Turkish State Statistical Agency reported 1,846 residential properties purchased by foreigners, which is 44.9% fewer than in February 2023 [source 5]. Against this backdrop, experts predicted a rapid decline in Russian demand for Turkish real estate – which eventually materialized. According to first-quarter 2024 data, some agencies specializing in foreign real estate reported a drop in interest and a reduction of 88% in the number of transactions involving Russians [12].

This large-scale decline – just like the previous surge – is largely due to broader factors affecting the entire foreign real estate segment. The most relevant in the context of this study is the reduction in the flow of relocants from Russia. Additional factors influencing the market include exchange rate instability, and technical difficulties related to sanctions affecting transactions involving Russian nationals. However, these obstacles are being addressed locally to varying degrees (including in Europe, where purchases still occur, albeit at lower volumes). Moreover, they did not prevent the spike in activity during 2022–2023 – a period of heightened demand that some realtors described as “neurotic” [13].

In 2023–2024, not only did the inflow of Russians for the purpose of relocation decline, but

there was also an outflow of previously arrived relocants – some returning to Russia, but more often moving on to other countries. This trend is driven by a combination of factors, most of which are directly tied to the host country's conditions and its policies regarding migration.

For more than 40 years, since 1984, Turkey has been among the countries capable of fostering startups with market valuations exceeding USD 1 billion. On the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic, experts noted a “real miracle” – a flourishing period of a “very promising and original Turkish economy” [14]. However, despite an impressive GDP growth rate of 6%, the standard of living continues to decline: over 60% of Turkish households spend their entire income on food and housing. This is despite the fact that agrarian Turkey offers a relatively inexpensive consumer basket (especially compared to Russia) and an abundance of affordable local food – something frequently noted by relocated individuals who remained in the country, at least until 2024 [source 6].

Inflation is a significant problem. The collapse of the lira was 44% in 2021, 27% in 2022, and by 2023, there was talk of its free fall, “even if the Central Bank of Turkey starts raising the rate” [source 7]. At its peak, the inflation rate reached 85% [source 8]. Notably, the publication of these figures was followed by major layoffs at the Turkish Statistical Agency. Added to this are the Central Bank's limited reserves (more than four times smaller than, for example, those of Kazakhstan), high dependence on foreign currency inflows and international trade (with a negative trade balance), and an acute deficit in investor confidence.

Many of these issues directly affect the entire population and are felt in everyday life and at the household level. As for Russian relocants, few have personal experience managing a household under conditions of high inflation. Perhaps some retain childhood or adolescent memories of their families' economic struggles during and after the collapse of the USSR. That experience is likely negative, which contributes to heightened anxiety in the face of Turkey's objectively high economic volatility, where they now reside – often temporarily and involuntarily. Uncertainty in Turkey

consistently emerges in surveys as a major source of discomfort for relocants and their family members [source 9].

Low wages are also a significant disadvantage for relocants. Given that most Russians who left came from large cities, often with established careers or relatively successful businesses, the issue of income plays a major role. Meanwhile, Turkey is considered one of the poorest countries in Europe. According to 2023 data, it ranked among the five countries with the lowest minimum wage: North Macedonia (EUR 359), Albania (EUR 375), Bulgaria (EUR 399), Serbia (EUR 461), and Turkey (EUR 519). Moreover, up to 50% of employees in Turkey receive the minimum wage [source 10, pp. 10-11]. At the same time, the cost of living in Turkey is average compared to other European countries, and the minimum wage is roughly equivalent to basic living expenses. According to the Turkish Association of Economic Entrepreneurship and Business Ethics (*IGIAD*), which annually assesses the minimum financial security level required across regions, the cost of living in 2024 was approximately USD 484 – below the officially established minimum wage [15]. As of January 1, 2024, the minimum wage in Turkey has increased by 49%, reaching 17,002 Turkish liras (USD 578.25) [source 11]. Clearly, this increase is a weak response to ongoing inflation.

Explaining the choice of Turkey by Russians, it should be noted that housing and food prices are relatively low compared to Europe. Rent for a one-room apartment in 2022–2023 ranged from approximately USD 360 to 800, depending on proximity to the city center. The price per square meter for purchasing housing ranged from USD 1,000 to 1,700. Basic utility bills during this period typically did not exceed USD 60 per month, while Internet service cost approximately USD 10 [15]. However, in the context of rapid inflation and general economic volatility, these figures are subject to constant change. It is also important to consider costs related to kindergartens and schools. The consumer basket includes public transport (as owning a private car is considered a “luxury” in Turkey), the basic food basket, fitness centers, and leisure activities. In terms of daily spending, Russians tend not to adopt the cost-saving strategies of local residents, who

typically dine in mid-range restaurants for under USD 30–50 for two people and purchase weekly groceries at local markets or inexpensive supermarkets for USD 60–80 [15].

The year 2024 brought some relief to all residents of the country. The annual inflation rate dropped to 61.78% in July, down from 71.6% in June, falling slightly below the market forecast of 62.1% [source 12]. This marked a long-anticipated slowdown in price growth and was the lowest rate since October 2023. It is worth noting that, for Turkey, the most significant components of the consumer price index are food and soft drinks (25% of total consumption), transport (17%), and housing and utilities (14%). Situationally, inflation decreased in these and several other categories as follows: food and soft drinks: 58.91% (down from 67.93%), transport: 46.07% (down from 65.67%), clothing and footwear: 39.7% (down from 47.84%), furniture, household appliances, and current maintenance services: 56.58% (down from 67.72%), healthcare: 63.02% (down from 78.51%), recreation and culture: 54.82% (down from 61%) [source 13].

Not all relocants remained in the country long enough to witness the decline and slowdown of inflation. Moreover, it is difficult to predict how long this trend will continue. The same uncertainty applies to the unemployment rate, which in May 2024 fell to a record low of 8.4% – the lowest figure since November 2012 [source 14]. The number of unemployed dropped to 3.011 million, while employment rose to a record 32.92 million. Labor activity among young people also increased slightly (adjusted for seasonal fluctuations), though the overall unemployment rate in this age group did not improve compared to April and even increased marginally. Still, the recorded 15% – down from the previous 21% – is considered encouraging [source 14]. However, all of these indicators reflect broader issues tied to the socio-economic transformation of Turkey under Erdoğan, including what has been described as the “strengthening of the economic positions of the Islamic part of the Turkish bourgeoisie” [16, p. 46].

Despite some improvements in socio-economic indicators, Russian relocants contin-

ued to leave the country. At this point, it is important to emphasize another, and perhaps even more decisive, reason for the outflow of Russians from Turkey: the official policy of the Turkish authorities toward Russian relocants. If one were to describe this policy in a single word, it would fall somewhere between “restriction” and “tightening”, with a variable tendency toward one or the other. In this domain, relocants have shown heightened sensitivity, and the actions of the host country have played a critical role in shaping their decisions.

In this context, attention should be given to the impact of the 2022 inflow of Russians on both Turkey and its population. One of the most noticeable challenges for local residents has been the sharp rise in real estate prices – both for purchase and rental. The housing price index in Turkey averaged 211.59 points between 2010 and 2024, reaching a record high of 1,273.50 points in May 2024 [source 15]. Although the share of Russian buyers has since declined, they continue to purchase Turkish real estate more frequently than other foreign nationals. According to data from the first half of 2024, Turkey remained among the top five most in-demand countries for Russians, accounting for 7% of the foreign real estate market [13]. The highest annual increases in housing prices were recorded in Antalya, Istanbul, and Mersin [source 16].

A similar situation unfolded in the rental market: Turkish property owners often prefer to rent to foreigners. This has created significant difficulties for local residents seeking housing, pitting Turkish tenants and landlords against one another. Additionally, Russian relocants have affected the Turkish labor market, displacing local job seekers – particularly in higher-paying sectors. Frustration on this issue is widespread, with sentiments such as “Turkey can’t take in everyone!” commonly expressed. In thematic chats and public forums, there are even calls to report employers who favor foreigners, often bypassing local labor regulations.

Mutual cultural difficulties also play a role. First and foremost, the existing language barrier should be highlighted. Relocants rarely speak Turkish, relying instead on English as a universal means of international communication. While

some demonstrate a desire to learn the local language, this does not significantly change the overall picture. For Russians who lack proficiency in any foreign language, Turkey will inevitably lose out to a number of alternative, more or less “Russian-speaking” destinations – such as Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Serbia. The religious aspect is not immediately fundamental but gains importance over time, as the presence of people of other faiths in a predominantly Muslim country becomes more noticeable.

In response to growing discontent among the local population, the authorities have taken several steps directly targeting the migration sphere, with Russian relocants – as the largest group among new arrivals – being most affected. In November 2023, the notification procedure for renting out housing for less than 100 days was replaced with a permit-based system. Formally, this measure concerns tourists, but it is well known that many relocants began their stay in Turkey under this status. The official aim of the reform was to “create a clear distinction between residential and tourist real estate, oblige landlords to pay taxes and lure tourists to hotels” [17].

However, the main restrictive measure was the regulatory change increasing the minimum real estate value required to obtain a residence permit (RP) in Turkey. The threshold rose from EUR 75,000 in Istanbul, Ankara, and Antalya – and EUR 50,000 in other cities – to EUR 200,000 uniformly. Meanwhile, the average transaction value for Russian buyers was typically around EUR 150,000. The new rules, after taking effect, did not apply to those who received a certificate of housing ownership between April 26, 2022, and October 16, 2023. In this context, realtors naturally began to anticipate a decline in demand, which had largely been driven by the opportunity to obtain a Turkish RP. They also predicted a forthcoming increase in the minimum investment required to obtain citizenship, although this has not yet occurred: Turkey’s “investment passport” still costs EUR 400,000 in 2024 [17].

Nonetheless, this legal initiative merely formalized a trend that had already taken shape – the reduction in the number of residence permits issued. Problems with RP issuance began as early

as autumn 2022, when the first large wave of Russian relocants arrived. At the time, media reports noted that “in some areas of Turkey, particularly those popular with foreign residents, like Mahmutlar, which is favored by Russians, the issuance of residence permits has been temporarily suspended” [18]. This is related to the 20% quotas set by Turkish authorities for foreign residents in the most attractive regions, including Istanbul, Antalya, and others.

Alongside these government measures, the Turkish business sector – especially banking – introduced unfriendly practices. Russians encountered numerous difficulties in opening bank accounts and managing their finances in Turkish banks, further complicating the already challenging process of adapting to life in a new country. By December 2023, the number of Russians living in Turkey with residence permits had declined by 34% [19]. Businesses began to leave along with individuals: the number of companies with Russian capital dropped from 140 in 2022 to 68 in 2023 [20]. The main destinations for this “exodus from Turkey” among Russian relocants were Serbia and Montenegro.

WHO IS MOVING TO TURKEY? SOCIOLOGICAL PORTRAIT OF RUSSIAN RELOCANTS

The first attempts to study Russian relocants and construct a collective image of them were undertaken as early as 2022, and continued with more thorough studies in 2023–2024. It should be noted that pioneers in this field face considerable challenges at all stages of research: due to the absence of precise data and an established feedback infrastructure for conducting questionnaires and surveys, it is objectively difficult to both plan and execute such studies. Nevertheless, a number of general characteristics of relocants appear to be reliable and, more importantly, applicable to the Turkish cluster, since many respondents were located there.

Let us begin with the age of the relocated Russians. According to both recent and earlier studies, the new Russian emigration has noticeably grown younger – the average age of respondents is 32. Another notable characteristic is the predomi-

nance of men among those who left. This is a new trend. The relatively young age and male majority are not directly related to mobilization; the trend of young men leaving began nearly a decade ago.

Speaking about the qualitative characteristics of relocants, analysts and experts unanimously agree that the foundation of this new wave consists of members of the most educated and affluent social class. A significant number of them are engaged in craft businesses (a broad entrepreneurial sector characterized by a high degree of self-expression – such as cooking, handicrafts, private clubs, etc.) or involved in the digital economy [18].

An important feature of the mass portrait of relocants in 2022 – alongside their professional and socio-economic status – is their level of preparedness for departure. Many made the decision spontaneously, in a state of panic, which also draws a parallel to post-revolutionary Russian emigration. Several analysts emphasize the “push” factors, “forcing people to leave even without experience of studying or working abroad, personal and professional contacts and clear prospects for future work in a new place” [18, p. 25]. Relocants indicated on their social media that they “left because they were very scared”. Fear did indeed play a decisive role in the decision to move in a number of cases: many perceived their actions “not so much as a move, but as an evacuation, an emergency rescue from something that suddenly became dangerous” [19, p. 16].

Clearly, panic and the spontaneity of the decision significantly impacted the ability to establish themselves in the country of temporary or permanent residence. Furthermore, two conditionally defined (but chronologically distinct – February and September 2022) subgroups within the same wave differ in terms of political and other forms of activity (e.g., social engagement, and participation in volunteer efforts). Though this is more typical of a relatively narrow segment of relocants – the most active users of social media and messaging platforms – it is worth noting. Another noteworthy aspect, possibly due to the accessibility of all forms of communication, is the maintenance of close contact with family and friends in Russia, as well as a high level of engagement with the Russian political agenda.

Relocants have once again illustrated the thesis regarding the greater social and geographic (territorial) mobility of those who had previously changed their place of residence – typically moving from one region of Russia to another. As a well-known, somewhat bleak Russian joke goes: *Moscow is just a transit point between the provinces and London*. Simply put, even before 2022, some individuals in the country “were already part of Russia that left, they just physically left after February 2024” [20, p. 38]. Surveys indicate that this group tends to express less uncertainty regarding their financial security and professional competence in their new countries of residence. On average, it takes about six months for them to gain such confidence. Many show high adaptability, quickly adjusting their life plans and strategies.

TURKISH PROSPECTS FOR RUSSIANS: CONCLUSIONS

The conducted analysis shows that the choice of the Republic of Turkey for temporary or permanent residence by Russians is determined by a combination of factors. Foremost among them is the many years of tourist familiarity with the country. After the intensification of the Ukrainian crisis, those Russians who had previously visited Turkey – often more than once – chose it as their first destination. Many already rented or owned property there. Contributing to the decision to relocate were favorable climate and ecological conditions, while Turkey’s geographical location and the presence of a state-of-the-art air hub in Istanbul made it convenient for those who needed to fly regularly to Europe and other regions of the world – destinations that have become inaccessible directly from Russia since February 2022.

For long-term residence in the country of Atatürk, key factors included a relatively generous visa-free period (up to three months, with a continuous stay of 60 days) and the relative ease of legalization – although these conditions have become more restrictive over the past two years. Turkey remains one of the few countries that has not suspended its “investment passport” program for Russian citizens. It is also relatively easy for wealthy Russians to obtain a residence permit (RP) in Turkey. Short-term RPs can be renewed.

However, several nuances should be considered. As with the terms of the investment passport program, not all real estate qualifies for RP acquisition. Due to the influx of foreign applicants, the number of quotas and available locations was significantly reduced at the end of 2022. Additionally, 1,169 districts across the country have been closed for RP issuance [21]. Obtaining documentation based on a long-term apartment rental (typically for one year) was a convenient option, but toward the end of 2022, Russians encountered specific difficulties with this process. As the outflow of relocants increased, the issue began to resolve itself.

Another advantage of choosing the “Turkish coast” as a relocation destination was the weakening of the Turkish lira, which created added benefits for those holding hard currency. In addition, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire is notable for its religious freedom and broad opportunities for personal self-expression. However, it is important to keep in mind that Turkey is a Muslim country.

Challenges faced by Russian relocants include the difficulty of finding housing to rent or purchase, often exacerbated by the language barrier.

Turkish citizens are generally reluctant to speak English in government offices, banks, and other institutions, complicating the legalization process. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible for foreigners to find employment in Turkey. Consequently, one of the defining characteristics of Russian relocants is having a source of income that is not tied to their physical location, or a contract with a local company. “Remote employees” or “digital nomads” tend to adapt most successfully.

Despite the difficulties associated with relocation, the general atmosphere in Turkey is perceived by relocants as hospitable, and the stance of Turkish authorities and society as a whole is viewed as friendly. At the initial stage, up to one-third of respondents who had recently moved to the country expressed a willingness to remain in Turkey for more than three years [22]. This, in turn, influenced the previously existing migration balance in Turkey, where the leading groups of immigrants had traditionally been citizens of Iran and Iraq. As the situation evolved in both Russia and Turkey, the moods and plans of Russian relocants shifted accordingly – leaving room for the hope that a significant portion may eventually return to their homeland.

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