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## [Russians searching for a new Motherland](#)



In Russia, the historical era of Peter I was heralded by cutting off the beards of the clergy, shipbuilding and the 'opening of the window to Europe'. Since then, Europe has been Russia's comrade, ally and sometimes its rival, but it has always constituted a coveted 'haven' for Russians. Europe accepted several waves of Russian and Soviet emigration which were always prompted by internal political events in Russia. The onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century did not change much in the trajectory and nature of migration flows between Russia and Europe.

### **Russians in Europe: tourists or emigrants**

The statistics for the first quarter of 2014 and the first quarter of 2015 are relentless: the proportion of Russians drawn to Europe for travel purposes is falling whereas the number of those leaving Russia for permanent residence in other countries is growing. In 2014, [308,475 Russians](#) left for permanent residence abroad compared to the 186,382 who emigrated in 2013 - a smaller number by far. The number of emigrants in 2013-2014 already exceeded the figure for 1999 when Russia 'lost' 214,963 of its people.

The desire of Russians to leave their country is not expected to diminish. According to [the poll by VCIOM](#) (the Russian Public Opinion Research Center) as of September 14, 2015, 45% of Russians out of 13% VCIOM respondents and 59% of Muscovites out of 17% VCIOM respondents are prepared to emigrate and have already made efforts to get on the move. Factors affecting emigration sentiments include the desire to move to a place with a more favorable climate (12%) and higher living standards (11%), political and economic situation in the country (11%), dissatisfaction with the decisions of the authorities (10%), the lack of care on the part of the state (9%), unemployment and the lack of prospects for career advancement (9%).

Emigration should not be confused with tourism. According to [data by Rosstat](#), major destinations of emigration among Russians (as of the first quarter 2015) include Finland (786,158 people), Estonia (336,663), Poland (285,558) and Germany (285,362). Whereas the favorite tourist destinations for Russians have been, and still are, Germany (141,007 people), Italy (101,294), Spain (68,462) and the Czech Republic (60,097).

These are precisely the places of recreation and tourism in Europe which suffered a significant decline in the interest among Russians in 2014. In the first quarter of 2015 the drop in the number of Russian visitors to Germany was 29.6% (284,209 versus 403,973) and to the Czech Republic - 39.1% (113,129 versus 218,550). 34.8% of Russians 'lost' interest in Italy (233,951 versus 358,640) whereas the beaches of Spain suffered the most. The willingness of Russians to visit the UK as tourists fell by 43.1%.

The results of the Russian statistics are one thing, but are they in line with the indicators of the states of the European Union? The answer is univocal: they are. The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) [recorded](#) a decline in interest of Russian tourists in this country (a drop of 29.6% in 2014). However, a new upsurge in interest shown in migration among 'ethnic Germans- Spätaussiedler' was noted. In 2013, 10,963 emigration applications were registered in Germany, 30,009 in 2014 and 6,930 in the first quarter of 2015. To understand the scale of emigration sentiments it is suffice to note that there were as few as 3,908 [applications](#) of this kind in 2010.

It is interesting that the number of citizens of Russia naturalized in EU member states [is growing](#) every year.

In 2013, Russians were ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in terms of the number of naturalized citizens of third countries on the territory of the 28 EU member states. The three leaders among EU member states to grant citizenship to Russians were Germany (21.6%), France (13.5%) and Finland (11.3%). In 2011, the largest number of citizens of Russia living in the 27 EU member states were naturalized in Finland (36.2%), Lithuania (25.25%), Estonia (10.3%), Bulgaria (13.2%), Poland (7.4%) and a very insignificant number in Latvia (2.0%) and Greece (1.6%).

### **From Russia to Europe for asylum**

Yet another interesting trend in migration from Russia to Europe has become the growth in humanitarian migration. European Union statistics in 2012-2013 indicated that Russians were among the top three groups of asylum-seekers. Norway, Sweden and Germany recorded peaks in asylum applications, and Russians were ranked second behind citizens of Syria in terms of this indicator. *Der Spiegel* magazine [conducted its own inquiry](#) and discovered that humanitarian refugees were citizens of Russia of the Chechen nationality promised parcels of land and financial assistance by representatives of the diaspora living abroad. The information did not come from the competent authorities and was, in fact, groundless. However, it was this misleading information which created such an upsurge in humanitarian migration.

Another wave of humanitarian migration from Russia comprised LGBT activists. The law No. 135-FZ '[banning homosexual propaganda](#)' which came into force in 2013 officially endorsed discrimination based on sexual orientation and became the blue touch paper for mass [violations of the rights](#) of these individuals in the cities of Russia.

The homosexual orientation of Russians became the grounds for asylum in EU countries and the USA. For example, the Netherlands simplified its asylum procedure for this category of people in 2015. The Ministry of Security and Justice [decided](#) to consider homosexual citizens of Russia: a special risk group. From now on only 'minimal evidence' of a person's persecution due to sexual orientation is enough to recognize him or her as a candidate for asylum. Also, the competent authorities of the Netherlands do not require official documents from the Russian authorities to prove the facts of persecution of an individual in Russia. It is noteworthy that this category of asylum seeker is not recorded separately in the asylum statistics. However, the number of applicants of this category is not growing. Thus, 810 asylum requests by citizens of Russia [were registered](#) in the Netherlands in 2012, 305 in 2013 and 195 in 2014.

Today, the wave of humanitarian migration from Russia to Europe has declined. According to [Eurostat data](#), in the first quarter of 2015, 3,175 Russians applied for refugee status in the member states of the European Union, which is 15% lower than the figure for the same period in 2014. Theoretically, the reason for the decline in this flow of humanitarian migration from Russia to Europe may be the launch of asylum programs in the USA, which is indirectly evidenced by the increase in the number of applications from citizens of the Russian Federation (969 in 2014 versus 329 in 2012).

In general, Russians cannot be considered the dominant group of migrants on the territory of the 28 states of the European Union today, although they constitute a representative group of citizens of third countries in some states. The number of Russians arriving in the EU for family reunification (22,005 in 2012 versus 23,782 in 2013), labor (12,366 in 2012 versus 13,701 in 2013) or education (14,589 in 2012 versus 15,750 in 2013) [is growing](#) every year. Besides, Russia [ranks](#) fourth among the top five countries whose citizens are holders of highly qualified worker cards (271 citizens of Russia), behind citizens of India (699), China (324) and the USA (313).

Summarizing all the above statistical data which demonstrate increasing emigration flows from Russia to Europe, we will find the answer to the question: what are Russians looking for in Europe? Emigrants 'of the new wave' are leaving Russia for Europe in search of asylum and 'a new Motherland'.

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