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War Policies and Migration Aspirations in Russia

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Mikael Elinder, Oscar Erixson & Olle Hammar

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Preface

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, European policymakers faced several migration-related challenges, including the influx of Ukrainian refugees into the EU and the potential for widespread Russian migration after the invasion. While the issue of Ukrainian refugees was met with the enactment of the Temporary Protection Directive, potential Russian emigration remained more of a black box.

The fact that war is a driver for migration is nothing new. However, the impact on migration from the aggressor state has received less attention. What are the aspirations to migrate when the subjects are residing in the invading state? What is the impact in this context of an authoritarian government with a declining economy?

While these individual factors are known drivers for migration aspiration, this report demonstrates that in this case, this was not the outcome. Rather, we can observe that the number of Russians that aspire to migrate is declining rather than rising. This pattern is consistent over time. Furthermore, this trajectory is similar to what happened when Russia annexed Crimea. In both cases, Russians expressed a general increase in support of the nation's leadership, living satisfaction, and expectations of a good life within five years.

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External reviewers of the report have been Dr. Matthew Blackburn, Researcher at the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University, and Dr. Timothy Heleniak, Senior Research Fellow at Nordregio. The work on this report has been followed by Göran Holmqvist, former member of Delmi. At the secretariat of Delmi, Daniel Silberstein and Maria Cheung have contributed to the review and the preparation of the publication of the report.

As usual with Delmi-publications, the authors are fully responsible for the report's contents, including its conclusions and policy recommendations.

Stockholm, September 2024

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Summary

This report investigates how migration aspirations within the Russian population have evolved following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022. It primarily focuses on the impact of the war and how changes in political conditions, including support for the Russian government, have affected people's willingness to leave the country. For this purpose, it draws on data from the Gallup World Poll (GWP), which surveyed over 30,000 individuals in Russia between 2008 and 2023 about their migration aspirations as well as their political sentiments and socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

Key findings:

1. **Changes in migration aspirations:** The invasion of Ukraine caused a significant decrease in the desire of Russians to emigrate. In 2021, 20 percent of Russians expressed a desire to leave the country, but by late 2022, this number had dropped to 12 percent. While conflict and economic sanctions usually spur emigration, Russia appears to have become more attractive to many citizens.
2. **Preferred destinations:** Historically, Western countries like Germany and the United States were top destinations for Russians. However, after the invasion, preferences shifted towards non-Western countries like China and Turkey.
3. **Political and social context:** Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the 2022 invasion, a surge of patriotism occurred in Russia. Support for President Vladimir Putin increased, and many citizens began viewing Russia as a better place to live compared to prior years. These sentiments may have led to the reduced migration aspirations, with citizens rallying around the leadership.
4. **Demographics of potential migrants:** The Russians who are more likely to consider emigration are typically young, male, highly educated, and employed. There was a noted change after the invasion, with those willing to leave being more likely to reside in major cities like Moscow and Saint Petersburg and less likely to have children.
5. **Military mobilization effects:** The September 2022 military mobilization in Russia, targeting young men for conscription, caused a temporary spike in migration aspirations among the targeted age group, although this effect was limited compared to overall trends.

In summary, the report shows how migration aspiration have shifted in Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. While many expected an increase in emigration, the data show that nationalist sentiments, restrictions on movement, and a rally effect around the Russian leadership have likely reduced the overall desire to leave the country.

Sammanfattning

Denna rapport undersöker hur migrationsaspirationer inom den ryska befolkningen har utvecklats efter Rysslands fullskaliga invasion av Ukraina 2022. Rapporten fokuserar främst på krigets påverkan och hur förändringar i politiska förhållanden, inklusive stöd för den ryska regeringen, har påverkat människors vilja att lämna landet. För detta ändamål används data från Gallup World Poll (GWP), som har undersökt över 30 000 individer i Ryssland mellan 2008 och 2023 om deras migrationsaspirationer samt deras politiska åsikter och socioekonomiska och demografiska egenskaper. Här är de viktigaste resultaten:

1. **Förändringar i migrationsaspirationer:** Invasionen av Ukraina ledde till en betydande minskning av önskan hos ryssar att emigrera. År 2021 uttryckte 20 procent av ryssarna en önskan att lämna landet, men i slutet av 2022 hade detta antal minskat till 12 procent. Även om konflikter och ekonomiska sanktioner vanligtvis driver emigration, verkar Ryssland ha blivit mer attraktivt för många medborgare.
2. **Föredragna destinationer:** Historiskt sett var västländer som Tyskland och USA toppdestinationer för ryssar. Efter invasionen har preferenserna dock skiftat mot icke-västländer som Kina och Turkiet.
3. **Politiskt och socialt sammanhang:** Efter annekteringen av Krim 2014 och invasionen 2022 uppstod en våg av patriotism i Ryssland. Stödet för president Vladimir Putin ökade, och många medborgare började se Ryssland som en bättre plats att leva på jämfört med tidigare år. Dessa känslor kan ha lett till minskade migrationsaspirationer, där medborgare samlades kring ledarskapet.
4. **Demografi för potentiella migranter:** De ryssar som är mer benägna att överväga emigration är vanligtvis unga, manliga, högutbildade och sysselsatta. Efter invasionen noterades en förändring, där de som var villiga att lämna landet oftare bodde i stora städer som Moskva och Sankt Petersburg och hade färre barn.
5. **Effekter av militär mobilisering:** Den militära mobilisering i september 2022 i Ryssland, som riktade sig mot unga män för värnplikt, ledde till en tillfällig ökning av migrationsaspirationer bland den åldersgruppen. Effekten var dock begränsad jämfört med övergripande trender.

Sammanfattningsvis visar rapporten hur migrationsaspirationerna har förskjutits i Ryssland efter invasionen av Ukraina. Trots att många förväntade sig en ökning av emigration visar data att nationalistiska känslor, begränsningar i möjligheten att resa till andra länder och ett ökat stöd för den ryska ledningen troligen har minskat den övergripande önskan att lämna landet.

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1. Introduction

In 2014, Russia unexpectedly went into Ukraine and quickly annexed Crimea. This heightened the level of conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and spurred protests from the rest of the world. On February 24, 2022, Russia again surprised the world by launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The invasion immediately met more resistance than expected, and a long war begun. At the time of writing this report, there is no sign of peace agreement or end of the war in sight.

In this report, we investigate migration aspirations in Russia and how these have changed following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The invasion has not only caused a human tragedy of immense proportions but has also set off a cascade of consequential social, economic, and political shifts within Russia, as well as policy responses from many other countries, including economic sanctions against Russia and military support to Ukraine. For many millions of Russians, the daily conditions have changed dramatically, posing the question: How large share of the Russian population carries a desire to leave the country?

The aim of this report is to provide Swedish, as well as other countries' policy makers with an in-depth analysis of migration aspirations in the Russian population, and in particular how the war has affected attitudes regarding migration from Russia to other countries. Migration aspirations, whether measured as intentions or concrete preparations, have proven to be valuable predictors of actual migration flows (Docquier, Ozden and Peri 2014, Tjaden, Auer and Laczko 2019, Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2023a), and can thus serve as an early indicator of future migration flows. It is our hope that this report will be of value to policy makers trying to design effective migration policies, as well as predicting migration flows and preparing for migration in different parts of the world.

To understand how migration aspirations within the Russian population have developed following the invasion, it is crucial to consider the diverse and often contradictory perspectives that have emerged. The invasion, while creating substantial upheaval, appears to also have elicited optimism and patriotism in broad segments of the Russian population, influencing their outlooks on both life within Russia and in other countries (Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2024).

The invasion has led to dramatic changes within Russia. The regime has cracked down on independent media, with several media channels being shut down, the term “war” has become illegal to use in public, and several critics and opponents of the policy changes have been imprisoned. These repressions have fueled fear among journalists, dissidents, and protesters, and some have fled the country in fear of prosecution. Concurrently, professionals with lucrative opportunities abroad, such as IT workers, scientists, and businessmen, might also have seen the invasion and the risk of prosecution as a push to leave Russia (Rapoport 2023).

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all Russians may view the situation through the same lens. Parts of the population may support the war and “rally ‘round the flag” (Mueller 1973). It has, for instance, been shown that the annexation of Crimea in 2014 led to increased support for President Vladimir Putin (Balzer 2014). Similarly, surveys indicate that the annexation spurred pride and nationalism (Theiler 2018). Thus, it is possible that the invasion may result in lowered migration aspirations if people perceive staying in Russia as more attractive after the invasion.

The international responses to the invasion have added another dimension to the emigration outlooks of Russians. Many countries, especially in the European Union (EU), as well as the United States, have imposed restrictions regarding visa applications from Russians. This policy-shift has made it more difficult for Russians to emigrate. Moreover, increased hostility towards Russians in many countries may have made it less attractive to emigrate (Pew Research Center 2023).

While it is evident that some groups have fled Russia, the overall picture of Russian emigration is not uniform. At several instances, for example, there has been media reports about sharp spikes in emigration flows from Russia in the days immediately after the invasion and in connection to the announcement of a partial military mobilization of young men (BBC 2023). Similarly, researchers have reported that prices for flight tickets to leave Russia increased dramatically around these events, suggesting that many Russians suddenly wished to leave the country (Avila-Uribe and Nigmatulina 2023). It is, however, not clear if this sudden increase in the willingness to flee from Russia was driven by a relatively small share of the population or whether it reflected a general increase in the willingness to leave Russia.

According to statistics from Eurostat, asylum applications from Russian citizens to the EU tripled in 2022 compared to 2021 (Eurostat 2023a). However, the total number of EU asylum applications filed by Russian citizens is rather modest, reaching a mere 13,350 in 2022. In 2020 and 2021, there were unusually few

asylum applications from Russia, while in the years 2014 to 2019, the average was about 15,000 applications per year. As a comparison, EU countries issued 83,000 and 112,000 new residence permits to Russian citizens in 2021 and 2022 (Eurostat 2023b). Overall, despite some increases in the migration flows from Russia to the EU in 2022, total emigration from Russia to the EU appears to have been rather small compared to both the size of the Russian population (144 million) and EU immigration from other countries.¹

However, comprehensive data on total emigration flows from Russia over time is not readily available.² For instance, we do not know how many have left for non-EU countries, and we do not know much about the demographic composition of those who have left Russia. Fortunately, the Gallup World Poll contains information on migration aspirations and a rich set of demographic characteristics, which we use to shed light on how migration aspirations in Russia have evolved in response to the war and across various population groups.

This report aims to investigate how migration aspirations have changed in the Russian population following the invasion of Ukraine.³ In particular, we try to answer the following questions:

1. How large share of the Russian population carry a desire to move permanently to another country, and how has this changed over time, especially following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022?
2. To which countries do the potential Russian emigrants wish to move, and has this changed following the invasion?
3. Can changes in support for the political leadership, life satisfaction, and/or optimism about the future explain changes in migration aspirations?
4. Has the composition of aspiring migrants changed following the invasion?
5. Did the announcement of the partial military mobilization in September 2022 spur an increase in emigration sentiments, and if so, in which parts of the population?

¹ The Russian share of non-EU citizens' first-time asylum applicants in the EU was only 1.5 percent in 2022 and 1.8 percent in 2023 (Eurostat 2024).

² In general, data on migration flows between countries are not reported to international databases. Additionally, there is another difficulty particularly concerning migration from Russia. Before the early 1990s, migration from Russia was recorded (by destination countries) as immigration from the Soviet Union, which included several contemporary countries such as the Baltic states and Ukraine. This historical context complicates tracking Russian migration flows over time.

³ In a related research project, we study more broadly how Russian sentiments have changed due to the war (Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2024).

To address these questions, we rely on data from Gallup World Poll (GWP), the most comprehensive representative interview survey in the world (Gallup 2022). We focus on GWP data from Russia for the years 2008–2023, during which about 2,000 individuals have been surveyed annually.

To gauge the extent of migration aspirations, we rely primarily on the following survey question:

"Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?"

Moreover, to assess preferences regarding the desired destination country, we also use a subsequent question directed at those who answered that they would like to move to another country on the previous question:

"To which country would you like to move?"

These two questions have been employed previously in the migration literature to predict migration flows and characterize potential migrants (for example, Burrone, D'Costa and Holmqvist 2018, Tjaden, Auer and Laczko 2019, Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2023a, 2023b, 2024). Moreover, to study the likelihood of movement, we also analyze an additional question about how likely the respondent thinks it is that he or she will move, either domestically or internationally, within the next 12 months. We also make use of other questions regarding demographic characteristics as well as political opinions to better understand how migration preferences are distributed in the population.

Our main findings indicate that Russians have become much less willing to leave the country after the invasion of Ukraine. In 2021, about 20 percent stated that they would like to move to another country. In the fall of 2022, the share had fallen to 12 percent. This result starkly contrasts with the notion that a large share of the Russian population would like to leave the country as a consequence of the war.

Moreover, we see a similar drop in the willingness to emigrate following the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This suggests that, for a large share of the Russian population, Russia became more attractive as a residence country, relative to other countries, after both the annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While several studies have documented "rally 'round the flag effects" in response to military interventions, including the Crimea annexation (for example, Balzer 2014), a main contribution of our study is to relate military interventions to migration aspirations in the invading country.

We also find that the invasion has resulted in some changes in the preferred destination countries among those, in the Russian population, who express a desire to move abroad. In particular, China and Turkey, have become more popular destination countries. Regarding EU countries, their overall popularity among those who would like to leave Russia has dropped from 42 percent stating an EU country as their preferred destination during the years 2019–2021 to 35 percent during 2022–2023, and the absolute number of individuals who would like to move from Russia to the EU has halved, from 13 to 6 million people, driven mostly by the fall in overall migration aspirations. Comparing the numbers before and after the invasion, Sweden has become more popular in relative terms (11th to 9th place), but less popular in absolute terms with an estimated 600,000 Russians carrying a desire to move to Sweden during 2022–2023. During 2019–2021, the corresponding number was 900,000.

Furthermore, we document that political support for Putin has surged following the invasion.⁴ Similarly, more Russians state that they are satisfied with the place where they live after the invasion compared to before, and they have become more optimistic about the future. These trends correlate strongly with migration aspirations, further strengthening the picture that the invasion has made Russia a more attractive country from the perspective of most Russians. These results clearly contrast with the outside world's perspective of Russia. Surveys from the Pew Research Center show that the great majority of respondents in 18 countries had an unfavorable view of Russia already before the invasion and that the share has increased substantially following the invasion (Pew Research Center 2023). Furthermore, Elinder, Erixson and Hammar (2024) find that, following the invasion, political support for Putin has decreased in the great majority of countries in the world, as well as among Russians living in other countries than Russia.

Our analyses also show that aspiring migrants in Russia, before the invasion, are more likely to be well-educated and have a higher income, tend to be younger, are more often male, less likely to be married, and more often living in larger cities, compared with those who would like to stay. These differences are in line with the previous literature on migration aspirations (Aslany et al. 2021),

⁴ Putin was appointed acting president of Russia in 1999 by his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin. The following year, Putin won the presidential election with 53 percent of the vote. Four years later, in 2004, he was re-elected for a second term, this time with 72 percent of the vote. In 2008, because the Russian constitution did not allow for a third term, Putin's chief of staff, Dmitry Medvedev, was elected President, and appointed Putin as Prime Minister. In the 2012 elections, however, Putin was again elected President and has remained so until today, which was made possible by a constitutional amendment to remove the limit on the length of the presidential term. In terms of Russian opinion polls and election results, he is seemingly among the most popular leaders in the world (Hale 2022).

suggesting that the characteristics of people who would like to emigrate from Russia are similar to those who would like to emigrate in other countries. However, we find that the invasion has altered the composition of movers to include more highly educated individuals from larger cities who are less likely to have children.

Finally, in contrast to the overall war effects on migration aspirations in Russia, we find some evidence that the announcement of the partial mobilization of military reservists in September 2022 caused a surge in migration willingness among the affected group: men aged 18–27. Somewhat surprisingly, however, we see no similar change in migration aspirations in other segments of the population.

Taken together, we see a broad and dramatic fall in Russians' willingness to move to another country after the invasion of Ukraine. This pattern is similar, also for young men, until the announcement of the mobilization. At that time, when the war became a more immediate concern in this group, however, we observe a sudden increase in their willingness to leave Russia.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. In the next section (section 2), we describe how emigration from Russia has developed following the collapse of the Soviet Union and during the Putin era. In section 3, we present the theoretical framework regarding migration aspirations. We also discuss how changes in life conditions in Russia, as well as the outlooks for Russian emigrants in potential destination countries, may have changed migration aspirations following the Russo-Ukrainian war. Thereafter, in section 4, we present and discuss the Gallup World Poll data, which forms the basis for our analyses. In section 5, we present the empirical results. In the final section, we summarize our findings and discuss some implications as well as some caveats to keep in mind.

2. Russian emigration

In this section, we try to give an overview of emigration from Russia during the period since the collapse of the Soviet Union until the invasion of Ukraine. The text is mainly based on the excellent review by Alexhovski et al. (2023).

After the Second World War and until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia was a closed country and emigration was, with exceptions for short periods of time, virtually non-existent, except for those who fled illegally.⁵

The first years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were characterized by instability on several fronts: the economy was in shambles, unemployment was rampant, the political landscape was uncertain, and armed conflicts broke out in the country, including in Chechnya.

These factors are believed to have contributed to the substantial emigration from Russia during the early 1990s. Official statistics from the Russian government indicate that 3 million people left the country, but estimates from researchers who have analyzed data on Russian immigrants in various destination countries suggest that this figure is severely underestimated, and that it is rather closer to 5 million (Aleshkovski et al. 2018).⁶

Those who initially left the country were highly educated people from major cities like Moscow and Saint Petersburg, who had good opportunities for employment outside of Russia, primarily scientists and specialists in the pharmaceutical industry. Many from the country's several ethnic minorities, such as Germans and Jews, also took the opportunity to seek refuge abroad when the borders opened. The destination countries in the first wave were thus almost exclusively Germany, the United States, and Israel, which together received more than 90 percent of Russian migrants (Alexhovski et al. 2023, p. 46).

⁵ During the 1970s and the more liberal years of 1987–1991, emigration legislation was relaxed and estimates suggest that 1.5 million people left Russia, in particular Jews to Israel and the United States and people of German descent to Germany. This is commonly referred to as the "The Third Soviet Emigration" (Heitman 1993).

⁶ Note that parts of this migration also involve the fact that the Soviet Union broke up into several countries, and there were significant population movements with minorities leaving Russia for their countries of origin and Russians who have lived in other Soviet states moving back to Russia.

In the latter half of the 1990s, emigration became more diverse, encompassing both labor and educational migration, as well as marriage migration (primarily women who left the country to get married abroad).⁷ International adoption of Russian children also played a significant role in emigration. During this period, the number of destination countries also increased, to include various European countries, as well as countries in Asia and Oceania.

Sociologists have shown that push factors, such as the perception of the uncertain political and economic situation, strongly contributed to emigration in the 1990s, but also that factors such as language limitations, lack of financial resources, and fear of alienation abroad, prevented many Russians from leaving the country.

In the early 2000s, the political situation had stabilized and the economic situation improved significantly, with higher incomes, reduced poverty, and improved welfare. At the same time, many destination countries that were popular among Russians began tightening their immigration policies (Council of Europe 2006). Overall, these factors led to a decrease in Russian emigration. However, migration became more diversified in terms of destination countries: in 2000, 85 percent emigrated to Germany, the USA, and Israel, but by 2010, that figure had dropped to 50 percent (Rosstat 2001, 2010), likely because many of the ethnic minorities had already migrated, with Russians now scattered in around 100 countries (Alexhovski et al. 2023, p. 48, UN 2019). The composition of migrants also shifted towards younger, more educated individuals with knowledge of English. Much of the migration was now temporary rather than permanent, with Russians leaving the country for a few years for studies or work (Iontsev et al. 2016).

From 2010 until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, emigration continued to be dominated by the younger population. The continuous weakening of the Russian ruble from 2014 onwards made it even more lucrative to seek work abroad (Alexhovski et al. 2023, p. 55). There was also a shift in the types of push factors mentioned in sociological surveys towards risk of economic instability, shortcomings in healthcare systems, mistrust of authorities, diminishing respect for democratic and legal rights and political oppression, including new laws that made it easier to punish dissent (Levada 2015, Herbst and Erofeev 2019). This may explain the rise of new groups of people leaving the country, covering people from the economic and political elite leaving the country to protect their assets and well-being, as

⁷ A striking thing about Russian labor migration in relation to other former Eastern countries is that few Russians come as labor immigrants in construction, civil engineering, craftsmanship, and other similar professions.

well as political dissidents and those who opposed the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The loss in human capital due to emigration is estimated to be substantial (Slepenkova 2022). While there still existed goodwill towards Russians in many countries around the world, the great majority left for other neighboring countries, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, as well as China and Ukraine (Slepenkova 2022).

As for most other countries worldwide, emigration from Russia plummeted during the COVID-19 pandemic, because of strict travel restrictions, border closures, and the closing of workplaces and educational institutions to curb the spread of the coronavirus (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021).

There are no reliable estimates of how many people have left Russia since the invasion of Ukraine. However, estimates based on various sources, including immigration statistics from destination countries, reports from anonymous sources in Russia, passport statistics, and Western intelligence services, vary from hundreds of thousands to several millions (BBC 2023).

Russia has not closed its borders making emigration a viable option for those who have the resources. Yet, Russians face practical issues limiting the possibility to leave. With most European countries shutting down their airspace to Russian flights in the wake of the invasion, Russians attempting to depart the country frequently had to opt for circuitous routes through the Caucasus or locate overland paths (Rapoport 2023). Also, the Finnish state railway operator suspended the high-speed railway between Saint Petersburg and Helsinki following the invasion, effectively ceasing the last direct train connection between Russia and the European Union.

It has also become more difficult for Russians to find destinations that accept them. The United States and numerous EU countries have become stricter in issuing visas and refugee offers for Russians. For instance, Finland, Poland, and the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have declared that they will not provide refuge to Russians seeking to avoid participating in the conflict with Ukraine.

Similarly, in other countries such as Kazakhstan, changes to immigration laws have been implemented, seemingly aimed at curbing the influx of Russian immigrants by limiting their tourist stays. In contrast, in countries like Georgia and Armenia, Russians face no such restrictions and could freely come and go and Turkey has allowed Russian citizens to stay for up to two months without a visa.

Avila-Urbe and Nigmatulina (2023) report how flight prices responded to the outbreak of the Russian war in Ukraine and the military mobilization of young men, in an attempt to estimate Russians willingness to leave the country. The data show that there are large spikes in flight prices around the time of invasion as well as around the mobilization, and particularly so for flights leaving within a short time. It can be seen that flight prices stabilize at a level that is about three times higher than the pre-war period, but that the price surge at the time of the events is about eight times higher. While a price surge may be due to either changes in supply or demand, or both, their analysis suggests that it is primarily driven by increased demand, since ticket prices for flights departing in the future increased much less. This analysis suggests that many Russians tried to leave during a short time span. However, it does not say much about the aggregate flows, for example, how many individuals that left Russia after the onset of the war. Residence permit statistics from Eurostat can, however, give a broad picture of the number of Russian migrants going to any of the EU countries.

During 2022, approximately 112,000 Russians were granted residence permits in any of the 27 EU countries (Eurostat 2023b). This should be compared to 83,000 in 2021, and an average of 63,000 between 2013 and 2020. Most EU countries experienced increased immigration from Russia in 2022 compared to 2021. Most notably, Cyprus, Croatia, Ireland, Hungary, Germany, Liechtenstein, Denmark, Portugal, Netherlands, and Bulgaria, more than doubled the number of residence permits issued to Russian citizens. At the same time, several of the Eastern European countries that had received many Ukrainian refugees (e.g., Poland and Czechia), decreased the number of permits to Russians by around half. While the changes appear large in relative terms, the total number of Russians granted residence in EU is very small compared to the very large population of Russia (144 million). To put the number in perspective, between 2013 and 2021 (that is, before the war), on average, EU granted residence permit to more than half a million Ukrainians per year, despite the Ukrainian population being less than a third of the Russian population (44 million). In sum, Russian emigration to EU countries has increased after the onset of the war, but has so far remained at comparably low levels. It should also be noted that, so far, we do not know if or how the composition of Russian migrants might have changed in response to the war.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Research on migration aspirations

This report delves into the burgeoning field of migration research that focuses on the concept of migration aspirations and its role in predicting actual migration patterns (e.g., Tjaden, Auer and Laczko 2019). Migration aspirations encompass a range of psychological factors, including ambitions, desires, attitudes, and intentions, as well as more concrete elements like plans and preparations (Carling and Schewel 2018). Many theories in this field view migration as a multi-stage process, with an individual's willingness to migrate developing in response to their specific "emigration environment" (Carling 2002, Willekens 2017, Carling and Schewel 2018). This environment is shaped by social, political, and economic factors and leads some individuals to desire migration while causing others to prefer staying, in accordance with the push-pull framework (Lee 1966, Passaris 1989).

Within this framework, migration aspirations can also be seen as the result of a cost-benefit analysis (Borjas 1989, Huber et al. 2022). Among those who develop a willingness to migrate, known as potential migrants, some possess the necessary resources required for actual migration (for example, financial means, visa or work permit).⁸

Nonetheless, individuals who do not migrate fall into two categories: involuntary non-migrants, who desire migration but lack the means, and voluntary non-migrants, who opt to stay due to their perception of better alternatives in their home country (Carling 2002). Involuntary non-migrants are particularly interesting because even relatively small changes in conditions may lead to actual migration. For instance, a crisis in their home country or eased immigration policies in a destination country can prompt migration among this group. Our analysis will focus on individuals who would like to emigrate, if they had the opportunity, and thus quite closely resemble the theoretically defined group of involuntary non-migrants.

In the empirical literature, there is often distinctions made between long-term aspirations to migrate, intentions to migrate, and concrete preparations (for example, visa applications, buying plane tickets) for migration (Esipova, Ray and

⁸ Key drivers for this transition include job opportunities in the home country versus potential destination countries (Borjas 1989, Hooijen, Meng and Reinold 2020) and access to ethnic networks in the desired destination country (Migali and Scipioni 2018).

Pugliese 2011, Ruysen and Salomone 2018, Crisan, Crisan-Mitra and Dragos 2019, Huber et al. 2022).⁹

Studying intentions and preparations is valuable as they closely relate to actual migration, considering barriers and incentives (Carling 2014). However, migration aspirations provide insights into the proportion of people willing to migrate if opportunities arise or barriers disappear (Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2023a). All three concepts are useful in predicting actual migration outcomes (see below). In this study, we focus on migration aspirations because that is the only question that has been asked systematically in the Gallup World Poll in Russia for the relevant years.¹⁰

Irrespective of what measure one considers, it is inherently difficult to assess to what extent aspirations translates into actual migration. The main reason is that data sources containing both data on aspirations at one point in time and data on actual migration at a later time are scarce.

Some studies have tackled migration within countries by linking survey data on migration aspirations with data on actual moves (van Dalen and Henkens 2013; Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2023a). However, international migration poses a different challenge, as individuals leaving their country are less likely to be captured in follow-up surveys or in emigration registry data. A few exceptions involve studies that have used panel surveys to track individuals expressing willingness (or unwillingness) to emigrate and then contacted them later to inquire about their migration status (de Jong 2000, Creighton 2013, Chort 2014). These studies have generally found a positive relationship between migration aspirations and actual emigration, particularly for permanent emigration.

Recent studies have explored how aggregated migration aspirations in a population corresponds to actual emigration levels (Dao et al. 2018).¹¹ Others have examined changes in willingness to migrate from a specific origin country to a specific destination country, aggregated across multiple countries, and how this relates to overall migration flows between countries

⁹ Questions probing migration aspirations include, for example, “If given the opportunity, would you want to move to another country permanently?” (Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2022). Other questions assess migration intentions, such as, “Do you plan to migrate abroad?” (van Dalen, Groenewold and Schoorl 2005). Preparations are measured through inquiries like “Have you taken any steps toward your move?”.

¹⁰ We will also analyze an additional question about the likelihood of migration. This question, however, does not separate between domestic and international migration.

¹¹ Additionally, some studies have tried to predict future migration flows based on historical migration data (Disney et al. 2015). However, this approach often yields unsatisfactory predictions due to the complexity of the migration process, the influence of legal and political changes, and the lack of reliable historical migration data for many countries and regions (e.g. Bijak 2016, Tjaden, Auer and Laczko 2019).

(Tjaden, Auer and Laczko 2019). In all cases, migration willingness, whether measured as aspirations, intentions, or concrete preparations, has proven to be a valuable predictor of actual migration flows (Docquier, Ozden and Peri 2014, Tjaden, Auer and Laczko 2019, Elinder, Erixson, and Hammar 2023a).

In conclusion, understanding the relationship between migration aspirations and actual migration is a complex task. While there are challenges in linking the two, studies have shown that measures of migration aspirations are indeed important in predicting migration outcomes. One perspective is to consider aspirations as a first necessary, but not sufficient, condition for migration. It is, however, essential to recognize that migration is influenced by a multitude of factors, and researchers continue to refine their methods for better prediction and understanding of migration patterns.

3.2 Theoretical guidance on Russian emigration following the invasion of Ukraine

There is no clear theory that specifies how Russia's war with Ukraine will affect the willingness of Russians to migrate. The classical theory of migration is based on the so-called push-pull framework (Lee 1966, Passaris 1989), which assumes that migration, on the one hand, is a consequence of negative factors and events in the home country (e.g. unemployment, war, political persecution) and, on the other hand, favorable factors in foreign countries (e.g. job opportunities and security). According to the push-pull framework, the decision to migrate is seen as an investment decision, where potential returns are weighed against costs (Borjas 1989). The individual migrates if the returns are positive, meaning that the benefits, such as increased income in the destination country, outweigh the monetary and psychological costs of leaving one's home. In the case of war, the theory is normally clear. A war that involves the risk of death and suffering is expected to increase migration, all else being equal. It is also a well-known empirical phenomenon that war and direct experience of military conflict lead to increased migration. For instance, the invasion of Ukraine led to massive refugee flows (Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2023a). But, from the perspective of the Russian population, it may be different, as the battles are not taking place in Russia and only a small fraction of the population is likely to be drafted for the war. While there are stories about how young men in United States fled to Canada to avoid being drafted for the Vietnam war, and other similar stories from other wars and countries, we are not aware of any systematic research on migration from an invading country.¹² Below, we

¹² We are here referring to research on emigration in the main ethnic groups, not minority groups, such as Jews from Nazi Germany or the like.

discuss how the situation in Russia has worsened in many dimensions, but also how the war may have spurred nationalism and optimism, that is, rallying effects, which may decrease the willingness to emigrate. We also discuss how other countries, primarily in the EU, have become less welcoming for Russians. The conclusion is that theory does not give us a clear prediction. The willingness to move can increase or decrease, and it may go in opposite directions in different parts of the population.

Sanctions and oppression

From an external perspective, the situation in Russia has clearly deteriorated in many dimensions since the annexation of Crimea, and even more so following the war.

The Russian annexation of Crimea in February–March 2014 led to Western sanctions against the country in the form of, for instance, measures limiting Russia's access to international financial markets and technology, arms embargoes, asset freezes, and travel bans targeting individuals and entities responsible for the annexation (Gold et al. 2024). A concurrent sharp fall in the price of crude oil, undermined foreign investors' confidence in the Russian economy and caused a collapse of the ruble, resulting in stagnant growth for a couple of years.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the economic sanctions against the country were further strengthened to restrict its financial and technological capabilities for warfare.

While the direct effects of sanctions on the Russian population may be limited, as they are primarily aimed at degrading Russia's military capabilities (Simola 2022c), there is suggestive evidence that they have had impacts on the population. For example, Russian exports of wood, iron, and steel have declined in response to the sanctions (Simola 2022c), and may impact employment opportunities in these industries. The Russian oil industry has, however, been less affected because of the increase in world oil prices (despite the fact that Russian oil has been sold at a reduced price) and the shift in the direction of Russian oil toward emerging export markets, particularly India and China (Simola 2022a). It has further been shown that import restrictions have contributed to a shortage of essential input goods (Simola 2022b), possibly influencing both Russian production levels and employment rates. As a result, there has been a reduction in the accessibility of consumer goods for the Russian population, both directly and indirectly. Concurrently, a significant and increasing portion of the Russian state budget is allocated to military expenditures (VOA News 2022), which is likely to diminish the availability of public goods and services. Surveys from Russia regarding the impacts of the

war, indeed, show that the population is affected. For example, almost 40 percent of the respondents state that the war “has reduced their options or ruined their plans”, and within this group 14 percent reported a job loss, 36 percent reported a decrease in income and 56 percent reported spending more savings on food, as a consequence of the war (VOA News 2023). These indirect consequences of Russia’s ill-conceived war, in the form of a deteriorating living standard, are likely to increase further in the coming years (Simola 2022c).

The push-pull framework suggests that the deteriorating economic situation, insofar as it affects the residents of Russia, is expected to lead to increased migration from the country. Likewise, there is a plethora of empirical studies that have provided support for the hypothesis, albeit in different contexts (Borjas 1989). Many studies have also shown that both reductions in personal income, negative perceptions of economic wellbeing and a deteriorating view of the economy in general are associated with an increased willingness to migrate (Aslany et al. 2021). A perceived deterioration in the provision of public goods and services has also been shown to be associated with a higher willingness to migrate (Dustmann and Okatenko 2014).¹³

The opportunity to express criticism and political opinions has consistently diminished during Putin’s tenure, as indicated by the country’s fall in various democracy indices (Kekic 2007, Human Rights Watch 2016, Snegovaya 2023), and even more so following the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent invasion of Ukraine.

Despite the Russian constitution affirming the right to freedom of assembly, peaceful protests have consistently faced police dispersion with alleged excessive force.¹⁴ Various laws targeting “extremism” or “terrorism” have been used to imprison those protesting for freedom of assembly, covering issues from election falsification and corruption to the occupation of Crimea. Consequently, the number of political prisoners, including human rights

¹³ While the impact of governance on migration aspirations may be obvious in extreme cases, such as in dictatorships, it is likely to be confounded by economic motivations in more general cases, since poor political conditions are often linked to poor economic situations (Dustmann and Okatenko 2014, Lovo 2014).

¹⁴ Minority groups have also experienced heightened oppression. While the Russian constitution allows for freedom of religion, a new religion law reportedly favors the Russian Orthodox Church, impeding minority religions. LGBTQ individuals face hardships, with both same-sex marriages and civil unions prohibited. The Russian gay propaganda law restricts the promotion of “nontraditional sexual relationships”, leading to fines and potential detention for violators. Repressions against minorities extend beyond the state, with private initiatives contributing to rising nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments, resulting in violence and mass riots based on intolerance.

defenders, journalists, and scientists, has increased sharply. Notably, unresolved assassinations of opposition figures have raised grave concerns, with examples like Alexander Litvinenko's poisoning, the fatal shootings of Anna Politkovskaya, Stanislav Markelov, and Boris Nemtsov, and the recent, unresolved demise of the imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Since 2012, NGOs receiving foreign funding and involved in political activities must register as "foreign agents" or risk being labeled "undesirable", facing fines and closure. Many NGOs have left voluntarily, while others have been closed, with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights being the most prominent example, further restricting civil liberties.

The invasion of Ukraine has escalated restrictions on civil liberties, as seen in the enactment of legislation imposing prison terms for disseminating "knowingly false information" about the Russian armed forces. Media outlets faced closures or ceased reporting on Ukraine, leading to the departure of over 1,000 Russian journalists during 2022 (Moscow Times 2023). In July 2022, a Moscow city council member was sentenced to seven years for using the term "war" instead of "special military operation". Following the outbreak of the war, Roskomnadzor (the federal agency responsible for monitoring, controlling and censoring Russian mass media) blocked access to foreign media outlets as well as Facebook and Twitter. In July 2022, UN human rights experts condemned the heightened crackdown on civil society, human rights defenders, and media outlets, with over 16,000 protesters, including human rights defenders, detained (UN 2022). In September 2022, Putin signed a decree introducing prison terms for wartime acts, including voluntary surrender and desertion during mobilization or war.

Several studies have shown that political performance and governance independently affects migration aspirations. For example, Hiskey et al. (2014) studied Latin America and the Caribbean, combining individual perceptions of crime and corruption with democracy indices. They found that people's experiences and attitudes toward the political system are crucial in considering emigration. Similarly, Etling et al. (2020) find, using survey data from several North African countries, that perceived shortcomings in the political system (such as lack of ability to democratically influence the government, the perception of excessive religious control over political decision-making, and low confidence in the legal system) are positively associated with migration aspirations, conditional on various plausible confounding factors. Moreover, studies have shown that a low sense of belonging, due to, for example, discrimination of ethnic minorities, increases the desire to leave (Aslany et al. 2021). Good governance in democratically sound countries reduces the impact of negative experiences, while in poorly governed countries, these experiences

drive migration aspirations. In essence, people are more likely to consider emigration when dissatisfaction cannot be expressed through democratic means (Hiskey et al. 2014).

Even though Russia has not experienced battles on its own territory, except in areas that have been annexed and in the form of minor drone air strikes, the war has resulted in significant losses of soldiers sent to Ukraine. Although it is reasonable to assume that the reported numbers are kept low by the Russian regime for strategic reasons, it is likely that many Russians are aware of the significant losses. Aslany et al. (2021) report that studies on migration aspirations consistently show that personal experience of violence, as well as fear that relatives may be affected by such, have a positive impact on migration ambitions. The increased likelihood that relatives and acquaintances may die in the war can therefore be expected to lead to an increased willingness to leave Russia. Taken together, this evidence suggests that the willingness to emigrate is expected to increase as a consequence of Russian military aggression.

Patriotism and rally 'round the flag effects

While the situation in Russia appears to have deteriorated in many dimensions during the last decade, there has been an active campaign by the Kremlin to induce patriotism and aversion towards the West, which may have spurred an increased willingness to remain in the country.

Putin's time in power has been characterized by a series of strategic moves to adopt a predominantly nationalistic agenda (Theiler 2018).¹⁵ The nationalist reorientation, reinforced by largely pro-Putin mass media and various Kremlin-supported youth movements and civic organizations, has encompassed a wide range of rhetoric, symbolic gestures, and political actions both domestically and internationally.¹⁶ Many of these measures are based on the claim that the West had betrayed post-Soviet Russia, providing a reason for Russia to take a more confrontational stance. These sentiments are captured by Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 in which he

¹⁵ While these efforts had their roots in the early years of the rule, they gained significant momentum after the anti-Putin protests that took place during 2011–2012 (Volkov 2012) and the government's poor performance in the parliamentary elections in December 2011. Surveys indicated that a significant portion of the opposition to Putin stemmed from a broadly defined nationalist political spectrum, which Putin's post-election measures aimed to pacify (Chaisty and Whitefield 2013).

¹⁶ Putin's government has also emphasized Russia's unique social and cultural identity, drawing closer ties with the conservative Russian Orthodox Church while simultaneously intensifying the persecution of critical artists, NGOs, and sexual minorities, often accusing them of being agents of the West.

expressed Russia's perspective on global security and its concerns about the unipolar world order dominated by the United States as well as the erosion of international law and norms, particularly with regard to the use of military force and intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

Putin has consistently declared that the Russian sphere of interest extends beyond the borders of Russia. This has caused conflict with neighboring countries, and tension with the West, in particular the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO, on the other hand, has also expanded into several of Russia's neighboring countries, which, in Russia, have been perceived as a threat from the West.

The Russian government accused several former Soviet republics of mistreating Russian-speaking minorities and used this as a justification for interventions, such as the South Ossetia conflict and the war in Georgia in 2008. The annexation of Crimea also fit into this pattern of national assertion tailored around Putin. The return of Crimea, which had an overwhelmingly Russian-speaking population, had been a long-standing aspiration for Russian nationalists. It became a central theme in the Kremlin's rhetoric about "compatriots abroad" and an expanded Russian geopolitical sphere of interest (Kragh 2022).

As part of the construction of a post-Soviet Russian national identity, Putin has emphasized his image as a strong and respected leader. Surveys have indicated that an increasing number of Russians are defining their leader based on attributes that Putin's policies were designed to promote, such as being a strong and patriotic defender of the nation against both internal and external threats (Theiler 2018). The annexation of Crimea was depicted as a symbol of national resurgence, and Putin played a central role in these portrayals. It became a powerful narrative of ending Russia's post-Cold War betrayal and rekindling national pride, with Putin personifying these ideals through qualities of strength, pride, and patriotism, which he emphasized for both himself and the entire Russian nation.

Survey evidence suggests that many Russians are positive about the annexation and the war. For example, nearly 90 percent of those who answered a survey by Pew Research Center in the spring of 2014 welcomed Crimea's return to Russia (Pew Research Center 2014). Survey data also show that the annexation led to increased pride and nationalism among Russians and that their view of the West and NATO worsened during the same period (Theiler 2018). The full-scale invasion also appears to have been positively received among the Russian public (Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2024). For example, surveys show that the vast majority of the population supports the war, even up to 16 months following the invasion (VOA News 2023).

Support for Putin has also increased in connection with both the annexation and the invasion. These results are in line with the literature on rally-'round-the-flag effects, which has found that support for leaders tends to increase when they go to war or when they are attacked by enemies, including terrorist attacks (Mueller 1973, Levy 1998). The traditional explanation is that these types of events contribute to patriotism and nationalism and strengthen the tension between the ingroup and the outgroup (Mueller 1973). Since the leader is often seen as a symbol of the nation, such sentiments are reflected in the popularity ratings (Kam and Ramos 2008). Feelings, and thus support, can be further enhanced if the media takes sides with the leader's actions and fails to highlight critical voices (it is also possible that critics refrain from criticizing to contribute to national unity) (Baker and Oneal 2001).

Although research on the phenomenon has primarily focused on democracies, and the United States in particular, studies have shown that rallying effects tend to be even more pronounced in non-democracies, which is likely explained by the fact that authoritarian leaders have greater opportunities to portray themselves in a better light through the media, suppress opposition, and get the public to follow what is portrayed as socially desirable (Newman and Forcehimes 2010, Hale 2022). Moreover, while nationalistic sentiment remains a potent tool for eliciting a rallying effect in authoritarian states, it is not the sole catalyst. Bunce and Wolchik (2011) suggest that another trigger for rallying effects in authoritarian regimes could be pressure from the United States, such as the surge in support for Slobodan Milosevic immediately following NATO's bombings of Serbia in 1999. It has also been suggested that sanctions imposed on authoritarian regimes, especially if they are broad and portrayed as an attack on the country, may inadvertently serve as a potential source of a rallying effect, albeit unintentionally (Grauvogel and von Soerst 2013).

Several studies have shown that the annexation of Crimea led to a clear rallying effect, corresponding to an increase in support for Putin by nearly 20 percentage points (Balzer 2014), which has also been sustained for several years (Hale 2022), in contrast to rallying effects in general, which tend to be short-lived (Hetherington and Nelson 2003). Both the conventional state-controlled media in Russia and social media are considered to have contributed to the strong effect (Yudina 2015). Regarding the invasion of Ukraine, no study has systematically examined rallying effects using microdata, but aggregated statistics suggest a sharp increase in support for Putin of a similar magnitude to that found in relation to the annexation of Crimea (Kizilova and Norris 2023).

Although no study has directly linked rallying effects to migration, research shows that the relationship between a positive view of the political leadership's governance of the country and the willingness to migrate is negative

(Hiskey et al. 2014). Similarly, it has been shown that pride of the country is negatively associated with migration aspirations (Bastianon 2019). Together, this evidence suggests that fewer Russians may be willing to move abroad as a result of the military aggression.

How to leave and where to go?

In addition to the above factors that are expected to affect the willingness to migrate among Russians, there are a number of pull factors that have changed due to the war. Although Russia has continued to have open borders for Russian citizens wishing to leave the country, except for men called up for military service, the practical opportunities to leave have deteriorated dramatically due to the outbreak of the war. The EU has closed its airspace to Russian flights, and train connections to the EU have also been suspended. Moreover, many EU countries have also made it more difficult for Russian citizens to obtain visas, and there have been a number of restrictions on asylum applications.

Even the countries that have remained open to Russians have introduced limitations on tourist visas. Moreover, the prices of flight tickets to these countries have also skyrocketed (Avila-Uribe and Nigmatulina 2023), increasing the monetary costs of leaving the country. Besides the increased monetary costs, there are also surges in the psychological costs associated with migration.

In addition, several surveys show that the view of Russians has deteriorated in many countries as a result of the invasion (Pew Research Center 2023). The literature on willingness to migrate shows that such costs influence the willingness to migrate negatively (Aslany et al. 2021), and especially the risk of discrimination (Becerra 2012), and the risk of not finding work in the receiving country. In summary, these factors are expected to contribute to a reduced willingness to migrate.

Predictions: Net effects are theoretically uncertain

As we have observed, the situation in Russia has deteriorated on multiple fronts, encompassing the economy, political landscape, and civil liberties. Simultaneously, the conflict with Ukraine appears to have instigated heightened patriotism and nationalism among segments of the population. Additionally, numerous countries have turned against Russia, making it more challenging for Russians to travel, obtain residence permits, or integrate into potential destination countries.

Taken together, the effect of the war on migration aspirations in Russia is theoretically ambiguous and can only be determined by empirical investigation. It is also probable that migration preferences may have shifted in different directions among various segments of the population, particularly as push factors affect different groups with varying intensity. For instance, young men who might be involuntarily deployed to Ukraine as soldiers could be more dissatisfied with Russian war policies, thereby making them more inclined to consider leaving for another country.

4. Data

In this section, we describe the main data source for our analysis, the Gallup World Poll (GWP), with focus on the sampling procedure in Russia, as well as some limitations of the data.

4.1 Gallup World Poll

The Gallup World Poll (GWP) is the most comprehensive representative interview survey in the world. It is based on annual surveys and interviews in a large number of countries to measure people's attitudes and behaviors. Since the first survey in 2005, GWP has been conducted in over 160 countries and regions, in more than 140 different languages. In each country, the sample is selected to represent the adult population aged 15 and above. Overall, the GWP is representative for almost 99 percent of the world's adult population (Gallup 2022). The GWP data have been used extensively in research within many different disciplines, including migration research (see Section 3 above).

In this report, we focus on GWP data from Russia between 2008 and 2023. In each year, at least 2,000 individuals have been surveyed. The interviews are conducted face-to-face or by telephone. In Russia, face-to-face interviews were used in all years, except for 2020–2021 when telephone interviews were used instead due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in 2023. The sample is randomly selected, probability based, and nationally representative of the resident civilian non-institutionalized adult population. The interviews take about 30–60 minutes. The coverage area is the entire country including rural areas. In Russia, urban areas were oversampled until 2015, and in the years when face-to-face interviews were used some very remote or difficult to access areas have been excluded.¹⁷ To account for potential selection, GWP provide sampling weights to ensure that the sample is representative for the population. We use these weights in our analyses, in line with GWP's recommendations (Gallup 2022).

¹⁷ The excluded areas usually include remote small settlements in far-Eastern Siberia, not representing more than 5 percent of the Russian population (Gallup 2022). Other areas that have occasionally been excluded are North Ossetia (2008–2016), Kabardino-Balkariya (2012–2016), Chechenya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Adygeya and Karachaevo-Cherkessie (2013–2016).

4.2 Measuring migration aspirations

To gauge the extent of migration aspirations, we rely primarily on the following question:

“Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?”¹⁸

Note that this question is hypothetical (“Ideally, if you had the opportunity...”), meaning that it should capture migration aspirations, rather than migration intentions or preparations which would also depend on various conditions and circumstances. In an additional analysis, however, we will also analyze a question about the likelihood of migration.¹⁹ It should also be noted that the question above asks only about permanent, not temporary, migration.

Moreover, to assess preferences regarding the desired destination country, we employ a subsequent question directed at those who answered that they would like to move to another country on the previous question:

“To which country would you like to move?”

Notably, respondents are limited to selecting a single preferred destination country.

The proportion of people who would like to leave their country if they had the opportunity varies greatly across the world (Elinder, Erixson and Hammar 2023b), from 2 percent in Indonesia to 64 percent in Sierra Leone. The average share in Russia for this period of 2008–2023 is 15 percent, placing them in the lower half of countries.²⁰

¹⁸ The original wording of the question in Russian reads: “В ИДЕАЛЕ, если бы Вам представилась такая возможность, захотели бы Вы переехать на ПОСТОЯННОЕ место жительства в другую страну, или Вы предпочли бы остаться жить в России?”.

¹⁹ “In the next 12 months, are you likely or unlikely to move away from the city or area where you live?”. This question, however, captures both migration within Russia and to other countries. Other countries with a similar number include, for example, Czechia, Israel, Luxembourg, Nepal, Singapore, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam.

²⁰ The GWP also have data for 2006–2007, but these years lack some central variables such as which country the respondent would like to move to (2006) and survey interview date (2006–2007). By focusing on the 2008–2022 period, our analysis covers the three latest presidential periods in Russia: May 2008–May 2012 Dmitry Medvedev President (Vladimir Putin Prime Minister), May 2012–May 2018 Vladimir Putin President (3rd term), May 2018–Vladimir Putin President (4th term).

We use data for the years 2008–2023, with the exception of 2020 when only a limited part of the survey, not including the migration aspiration questions above, was conducted due to the global coronavirus pandemic (Gallup 2021).²¹ Table 1 summarizes the data and shows the interview period, sample size, the share of individuals who stated a preference to move, and how many million individuals that share translates into in the Russian population. In total, more than 32,000 individuals have been surveyed during the study period. Note that our definition of Russians in this report refers to the Russian population, including minority groups of other ethnicities (such as, Tatars, Ukrainians, Bashkirs, Chuvash, Chechens, or Armenians), while ethnic Russians living in other countries are not included.

²¹ The GWP also have data for 2006–2007, but these years lack some central variables such as which country the respondent would like to move to (2006) and survey interview date (2006–2007). By focusing on the 2008–2022 period, our analysis covers the three latest presidential periods in Russia: May 2008–May 2012 Dmitry Medvedev President (Vladimir Putin Prime Minister), May 2012–May 2018 Vladimir Putin President (3rd term), May 2018– Vladimir Putin President (4th term).

Table 1. Description of the GWP data

| Year | Interview dates | Population in millions | Sample size [non-missing] | Migration aspirations | Potential emigrants in millions |
|------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2008 | May 1–30 | 143 | 2,019 [1,883] | 13% | 18 |
| 2009 | Apr 2–Jun 14 | 143 | 2,042 [1,920] | 12% | 16 |
| 2010 | Apr 29–Nov 8 | 143 | 4,000 [3,752] | 14% | 21 |
| 2011 | May 8–Jun 30 | 143 | 2,000 [1,884] | 15% | 22 |
| 2012 | Feb 9–Oct 8 | 143 | 3,000 [2,782] | 15% | 22 |
| 2013 | Jul 3–Aug 8 | 144 | 2,000 [1,847] | 17% | 25 |
| 2014 | Apr 22–Jun 9 | 144 | 2,000 [1,883] | 8% | 11 |
| 2015 | Jul 2–Sep 17 | 144 | 2,000 [1,904] | 10% | 15 |
| 2016 | Apr 15–Jun 22 | 144 | 2,000 [1,905] | 10% | 14 |
| 2017 | Jun 9–Aug 20 | 144 | 2,000 [1,921] | 18% | 26 |
| 2018 | Jun 24–Oct 4 | 144 | 2,000 [1,906] | 21% | 31 |
| 2019 | Nov 6–Feb 10 | 144 | 3,003 [2,883] | 22% | 32 |
| 2021 | May 14–Jul 14 | 144 | 2,001 [1,997] | 20% | 30 |
| 2022 | Aug 13–Nov 2 | 144 | 2,006 [1,939] | 12% | 17 |
| 2023 | May 23–Jul 29 | 144 | 2,017 [2,005] | 11% | 15 |

Note: No data from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Double lines indicate presidential elections held in March 2008, 2012, and 2018. Single lines indicate Russian annexation of Crimea on February 20, 2014, and Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Interview dates indicate GWP survey dates; Population in millions show Russian total population; Sample size is total GWP sample size in Russia, with sample size for the migration aspirations question (excluding missing, refused and don't know answers) in brackets; Migrations aspirations is the share of the Russian populations who would like to move permanently to another country if they had the opportunity; Potential emigrants in millions are the number of Russians that would like to move permanently to another country if they had the opportunity, calculated as: Population in millions × Migrations aspirations. Calculations include sampling weights provided by GWP.

Sources: GWP (2008–2023). Populations from World Bank (2024).

A key feature of the GWP data is that the collection of the 2022 wave in Russia coincided with the announcement of the partial mobilization of young men on September 21, 2022. The data at hand contain the interview dates at the individual level, which allows us to evaluate how this mobilization announcement influenced migration preferences.

We also make use of other survey questions, including demographic characteristics and political opinions. Importantly, we use a question about whether the respondent supports Vladimir Putin as the leader of the country.²²

This latter question raises a key concern about how reliable survey responses are. Do Russian citizens dare to truthfully state if they do not support Putin, or are they then falsely reporting that they support Putin in fear of repercussions? As has been discussed in the literature, surveys asking about the support for Putin are likely to overestimate the true support (Hale and Colton 2017, Hale 2022), but differences over time can still be very informative about the direction of change in public opinions even if the magnitude may be exaggerated. For a more detailed analysis of the war effect on political support for Putin and other sentiments among the Russian population, including analyses using data from the Russian Levada Center's public opinion polls, see, for example, Kizilova and Norris (2023), and Elinder, Erixson and Hammar (2024).

Another potential concern with the GWP might be that people are afraid of responding to certain questions and/or to the survey at all, and that this risk may have increased with the outbreak of the war. Analyzing the share of people who answer that they don't know or refuse to answer the question about migration aspirations, however, we do not see a large increase in this share following the war.²³ Similarly, we do not observe a large increase in the number of days it took to complete the survey data collection.²⁴

While questions about migration aspirations might be less sensitive than questions about political support, this brings us to a broader discussion of the potential limitations with the migration aspirations data.

²² The survey question is: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of this country?". During 2009–2012 (when Dmitry Medvedev was president), another question was also asked: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the Prime Minister of Russia, V.V. Putin?".

²³ The don't know/refuse share went from 2.0 percent in 2019–2021 to 2.1 percent in 2022–2023.

²⁴ The average number of total survey field days increased from 75 in 2019–2021 to 80 in 2022–2023.

4.3 Limitations

While the survey question above should capture migration aspirations quite well, there are several limitations to using our measure of migration aspirations as a predictor of future migration flows. Firstly, a desire to migrate does not necessarily translate into actual migration. This discrepancy can be attributed to various factors, such as legal restrictions, lack of information, or social and economic barriers (Carling 2017). Consequently, the measurement represents those who have a desire to move, not necessarily those who can or will migrate. Moreover, in certain groups and countries, the migration decisions of women are often highly influenced by their spouse's preferences, making individual willingness to migrate a less reliable predictor of household decisions (Huber et al. 2022). Furthermore, the survey question's binary nature (that is, move or stay) oversimplifies the complex and continuous spectrum of migration desires. As a result, predictive accuracy is compromised, especially for individuals with moderate migration aspirations (Carling 2014).

Additionally, the focus of the study is limited to desires for permanent migration, excluding temporary movements for reasons such as education or work. The main question also lacks consideration of the time frame for migration, making it challenging to predict when these aspirations might materialize. To address this issue, however, we also analyze an additional question about how likely the respondent is to move, either within Russia or to another country, within the next 12 months.

These limitations underscore the challenges in connecting expressed migration aspirations to actual migration decisions. In general, the number of people with migration aspirations are typically higher than the number of people who actually migrate. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in Elinder, Erixson and Hammar (2023a), migration aspirations seem to predict actual migration flows and preferred destination countries relatively well in times of war or other significant push shocks, as observed in Ukraine and Syria.

5. Results

This section contains our main findings. We begin by documenting how migration preferences in Russia have evolved over time. Following that, we provide a description of the countries that are popular as preferred destination choices. We also comment on which destination countries have gained or lost popularity after the outbreak of the war. Next, we evaluate how the trends in migration preferences have co-evolved with key factors of migration, such as political support for the leadership, life satisfaction, and optimism about the future. Subsequently, we examine the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of those who express a desire to move. Finally, we analyze how the mobilization in September 2022 has affected migration preferences among different population groups.

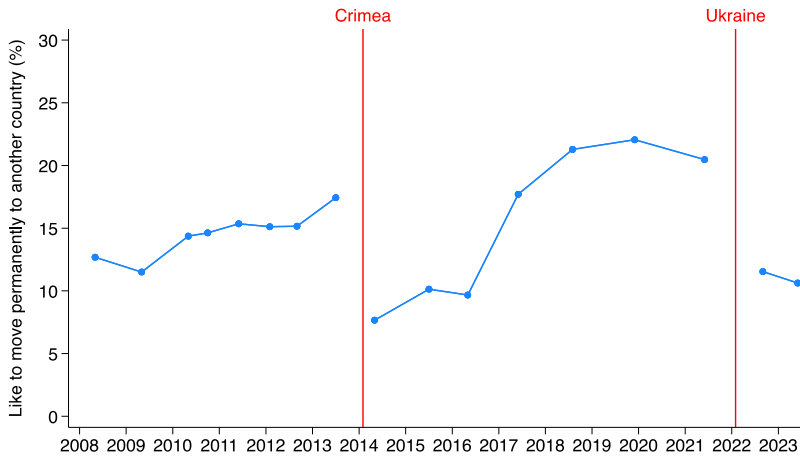
5.1 Migration aspirations in Russia over time

Figure 1 displays the evolution of migration aspirations in Russia from 2008 to 2023 (for exact numbers, see Table 1). Several noteworthy patterns emerge from this analysis. First, in May 2008, 13 percent of Russians expressed a desire to leave. However, the financial crisis that began in 2008 led to deteriorating economic conditions, resulting in a steady increase in migration aspirations in the following years, reaching a peak of 17 percent in July 2013. After the annexation of Crimea in February 2014, there was an abrupt and immediate decrease to 8 percent in May 2014. In section 5.3, we demonstrate that this coincided with a sudden increase in several indicators of optimism. In other words, it seems that a significant portion of the Russian population considered Russia a more attractive country to live in after the annexation of Crimea. This effect remained over the following years (2014–2016). By June 2017, however, the percentage of those expressing a willingness to move abroad had doubled to 18 percent, and continued to rise, reaching its peak at 22 percent in December 2019.

This high level of migration aspirations continued over the period leading up to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and, in the summer of 2021 (May–July), 20 percent of Russians expressed a desire to move. However, following the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the percentage dropped to 12 percent in the fall of 2022 (August–November). This suggests once again that military aggression in Ukraine led a larger portion of the Russian population to perceive Russia as their preferred country to live in. These patterns strongly refute the hypothesis that the Russo-Ukrainian war would result in an increase in the

number of Russians wanting to leave the country. However, it is possible that certain segments of the population increased their desire to emigrate. The averages reported here may, as we will see in Section 5.4, obscure some important heterogeneities within the population.

Figure 1. Migration aspirations 2008–2023



Note: Figure shows the share of the Russian population who would like to move permanently to another country if they had the opportunity, by survey year-month. Data from GWP 2008–2023 (no data from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Red solid lines show the Russian annexation of Crimea in February 2014, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Calculations include GWP sampling weights. Source: Own calculations based on GWP (2008–2023).

This far, we have only looked at migration aspirations, that is, the share of the population who would like to leave Russia, if they had the opportunity. This group of potential migrants will include both people who are likely to emigrate (likely movers) and people who are unlikely to move (involuntary stayers). As such, migration aspirations are more likely to turn into actual migration in the first group. Moreover, it could be the case that there exists a certain threshold, above which migration aspirations become more likely to turn into actual migration. It is therefore possible that actual migration has increased, because in some groups the desire to migrate has become so strong that they act and move, while at the same time, migration desires have decreased from moderate to low in other groups, and in those groups, few would have moved anyway. To get a sense of whether there is any substance to this conjecture, we will also analyze another question from GWP, namely, “In the next 12 months, are you likely or unlikely to move away from the city or area where you live?”. Since

this question does not say anything about whether the move would be within Russia or to another country, we combine it with the question about migration aspiration. That is, we analyze the share of the Russian population who say that they would like to move permanently to another country and that they are likely to move away in the next 12 months.

Figure A1 in the Appendix shows the share of the population who state that they would like to move to another country and are likely to move away in the next 12 months, and how this has changed from 2008 to 2023. The pattern largely mirrors that of Figure 1, with the difference that the numbers are lower. When comparing 2021 to early fall 2022, we see a decline in the share of people who are likely to move away from the country, from 5 to 2 percent. In terms of number of people, this corresponds to a decline from 7 to 3 million Russians who are likely to emigrate.

Next, we will investigate which destination countries are the most popular among Russians.

5.2 Preferred destination countries

To analyze which countries Russians would like to move to, the top-12 most preferred destination countries in different periods are presented in Table 2. We begin by examining the popular destination countries among Russians over the entire period from 2008 to 2023. Wealthy Western countries top the list, with Germany, the United States, and Canada being the top three most preferred destinations. Out of the twelve countries on this list, eight are in Europe, and six of these are EU member states (excluding the United Kingdom). Sweden is ranked ten, with 2 percent of those expressing a desire to move abroad indicating Sweden as their preferred destination. This percentage corresponds to approximately half a million individuals, which can be compared with the total average of around 21 million Russians who expressed a willingness to move during this period. This is also in line with the finding in Elinder, Erixson and Hammar (2023b), that Russia is one of the countries with the largest number of people who would like to move to Sweden, if they had the opportunity. In regard to the EU as a whole, on average 45 percent, or 9 million Russians, had an EU country as their preferred country to live in. Notably, a third of those who wish to move, or 7 million individuals, have mentioned a country that is not on the top-12 list. It should also be noted that, despite a high number of Russians stating a preference for moving abroad, actual emigration has hitherto been relatively low.

Zooming in on the years 2019–2021,²⁵ just before the war, we observe a few significant trends. Most of the countries that were popular destination choices over the entire period from 2008 to 2023 remained favored during these more recent pre-war years. For instance, Germany, the United States, Canada, and Spain are among the most preferred destinations. However, a few noteworthy changes are worth mentioning. The United Kingdom is less popular, falling outside the list at 15th place. Additionally, Japan is more popular, at sixth place, and Norway is on the top-12 list at eighth place. Overall, a larger percentage of people expressed a willingness to emigrate during this period compared to the average between 2008 and 2023, resulting in higher absolute numbers of individuals (the total number of Russians with migration aspirations was on average 31 million between 2019 and 2021). On average, approximately 900,000 Russians have Sweden as their preferred destination during 2019–2021, which is about 400,000 more than the average for the full 2008–2023 period.

To assess the impact of the war, we explicitly compare the period 2019–2021 and the period 2022–2023, which shows some significant changes. In particular, China has entered the list, from 17th place before the war, to now being the most preferred destination country in Russia, with 7 percent of those who would like to move. Turkey has also become much more popular, rising from 3 percent of those would like to move before the war to 5 percent after the war, placing Turkey at the fourth position among the preferred destination countries in 2022–2023. Moreover, Thailand has entered the top-12 list at place eight. It is worth noting that both China and Turkey are countries that have shown more support for Russia following the invasion of Ukraine than most other countries, especially in comparison to the other countries on this list. Additionally, the preferences for destination countries are more diverse in 2022–2023 compared to earlier years. In 2022–2023, 43 percent mention a country not on the top-12 list, compared to 36 percent in 2019–2021. Despite a dramatic decrease in the total number of individuals wishing to leave Russia after the invasion of Ukraine, approximately 600,000 Russians still prefer Sweden as their destination, placing Sweden as the ninth most popular potential destination country. Comparing the numbers before and after the invasion, Sweden has thus become more popular in relative terms, but less popular in absolute terms since fewer Russians now want to leave the country. Comparatively, the number of individuals who prefer Germany and the United States, has dropped significantly from 5.0 and 3.5 million in 2019–2021 to 1.0 and 1.1 million, respectively, in 2022–2023. In relative terms, EU's overall popularity among those who would like to leave Russia has decreased, from

²⁵ No data from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

42 percent in 2019–2021 to 35 percent in 2022–2023, and the absolute number of Russians who would like to move to the EU has more than halved: from 13 to 6 million people.

Table 2. Most preferred destination countries among Russians

| Rank | 2008–2023 | 2019–2021 | 2022–2023 |
|------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Germany, 20% 4.1 million | Germany, 16% 5.0 million | China, 7% 1.2 million |
| 2 | United States, 11% 2.3 million | United States, 12% 3.5 million | United States, 7% 1.1 million |
| 3 | Canada, 5% 0.9 million | Canada, 6% 2.0 million | Germany, 7% 1.0 million |
| 4 | Spain, 4% 0.9 million | Spain, 5% 1.5 million | Turkey, 5% 1.0 million |
| 5 | United Kingdom, 4% 0.9 million | Italy, 4% 1.4 million | Canada, 5% 0.7 million |
| 6 | France, 4% 0.9 million | Japan, 3% 0.9 million | Spain, 5% 0.7 million |
| 7 | Italy, 4% 0.8 million | Finland, 3% 0.9 million | Italy, 4% 0.7 million |
| 8 | Australia, 4% 0.8 million | Norway, 3% 0.9 million | Thailand, 4% 0.6 million |
| 9 | Switzerland, 3% 0.6 million | Switzerland, 3% 0.9 million | Sweden, 4% 0.6 million |
| 10 | Sweden, 2% 0.5 million | Australia, 3% 0.9 million | Norway, 3% 0.5 million |
| 11 | Japan, 2% 0.5 million | Sweden, 3% 0.9 million | Switzerland, 3% 0.5 million |
| 12 | Finland, 2% 0.5 million | Turkey, 3% 0.8 million | Australia, 3% 0.5 million |
| – | Other country, 35% 7.2 million | Other country, 36% 11.1 million | Other country, 43% 6.9 million |

Note: Top-12 most popular destination countries among Russians with migration aspirations. Percentages show the average share of those who would like to move to another country that would like to move to each country. The numbers below show the corresponding number (millions) of individuals who would like to move to that country from Russia. Period averages. No data from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Calculations include GWP sampling weights.

Sources: Own calculations based on GWP (2008–2023). Populations from World Bank (2024).

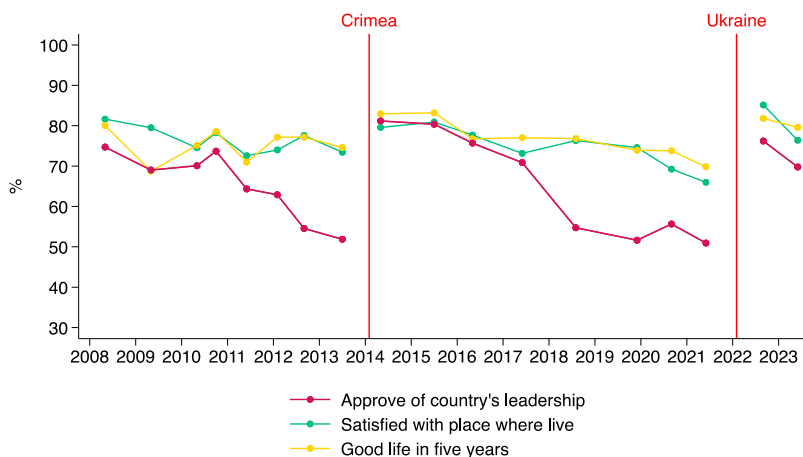
5.3 Political support and life satisfaction in Russia

In Figure 1, we observed that the percentage of Russians expressing a preference to permanently move to another country showed strong trends over time. Specifically, we noticed that in the years leading up to the annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, an increasing number of people expressed a desire to leave Russia. However, just after these events, fewer individuals expressed a preference for moving abroad. A fundamental question arises: How are these migration preferences reflected in indicators of political support and life satisfaction in Russia?²⁶ Were Russians slowly becoming more dissatisfied with their country during the periods of a rising willingness to move abroad? Conversely, did Russians suddenly become more satisfied with their country after the two military interventions in Ukraine? Figure 2 illustrates how three key indicators of political and life satisfaction in Russia have evolved during the period from 2008 to 2023. The first indicator measures the degree of approval of the political leadership (“Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of this country?”), the second assesses satisfaction with the respondent’s place of residence (“Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the place where you live?”), and the third gauges expectations of a good life in five years, as measured by the Cantril scale (Cantril 1965, Gallup 2012).²⁷ We define all indicators such that a value of 1 indicates approval/satisfaction, and a value of 0 indicates disapproval/dissatisfaction.

²⁶ See Elinder, Erixson and Hammar (2024) for a more in-depth analysis of how the war has affected sentiments in Russia.

²⁷ “Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. Just your best guess: on which step do you think you will stand in the future, say about five years from now?”. We define a bad life in five years as values 0–4 and a good life in five years as values 6–10.

Figure 2. Political support and life satisfaction in Russia 2008–2023



Note: Figure shows the share of the Russian populations who approve of the job performance of the country's leadership, are satisfied with the place where they live, and think they will have a good life in five years, by survey year-month. Red solid lines show the Russian annexation of Crimea in February 2014, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Calculations include GWP sampling weights.

Source: Own calculations based on GWP (2008–2023).

What do we observe? Let us start with the approval of the country's political leadership. In the early period, approval steadily decreased, falling from 75 percent in May 2008 to 52 percent in July 2013.²⁸ However, immediately after the annexation of Crimea in February 2014, the percentage of those who approved of the political leadership increased to a record high of 81 percent in May 2014. This sharp increase in support for the political leadership strongly suggests that the annexation of Crimea enjoyed significant backing among the population. This rally effect in response to the annexation of Crimea has been documented by others, such as Balzer (2014), Yudina (2015), and Hale (2022). However, we observe that the percentage expressing approval began to fall again in 2016, reaching a pre-annexation level of 51 percent in June 2021. Remarkably, in September 2022, just after the invasion of Ukraine, support for the political leadership increased significantly, and the percentage of approval rose to 76 percent. This striking trend in the approval of the political leadership suggests that the annexation and invasion had substantial support among the

²⁸ According to data from the Levada Center, Putin experienced a small boost in popularity in the summer of 2008 and the war with Georgia. See also Treisman (2011).

population. In fact, it is consistent with the possibility that Putin's war policies were motivated by a desire to reverse the declining approval ratings (Kizilova and Norris 2023). Regardless of the true motivation for the invasion, the empirical patterns shown in Figure 2 is consistent with Putin adopting a diversionary strategy, in which a political leader initiates a war to divert attention from domestic issues (Theiler 2018). In the most recent poll, collected in June 2023, the approval rate had declined somewhat to 70 percent.

Turning to the other two indicators, we find similar trends, though less pronounced. There was a slight decrease in life satisfaction and optimism in the years leading up to the annexation of Crimea, followed by significant boosts afterward. In 2016, satisfaction began to decline again and reached its lowest point in 2021, just before the invasion of Ukraine. Between 2021 and 2022, the percentage of those satisfied with their place of residence increased from 66 to 85 percent. A similar increase was observed in the percentage of those expecting a good life in five years, increasing from 70 to 82 percent. Overall, the data supports a narrative in which life conditions in Russia deteriorated between 2008 and 2013, after which the annexation of Crimea sparked optimism. However, this optimism was relatively short-lived, and pessimism started to grow again. In 2021, when approval of the political leadership was down at levels close to 50 percent, as in 2013, Putin invaded Ukraine. Once again, military interventions in Ukraine triggered optimism in Russia. In 2022, the number of individuals who reported satisfaction with their place of residence peaked at its highest level over the full period. Moreover, both the approval of the political leadership and the percentage of those expecting a good life in five years were among the highest recorded since 2008.

Taken together, both the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine seem to have injected the Russian population with optimism and, at least temporarily, alleviated growing dissatisfaction with the political leadership and life in Russia.

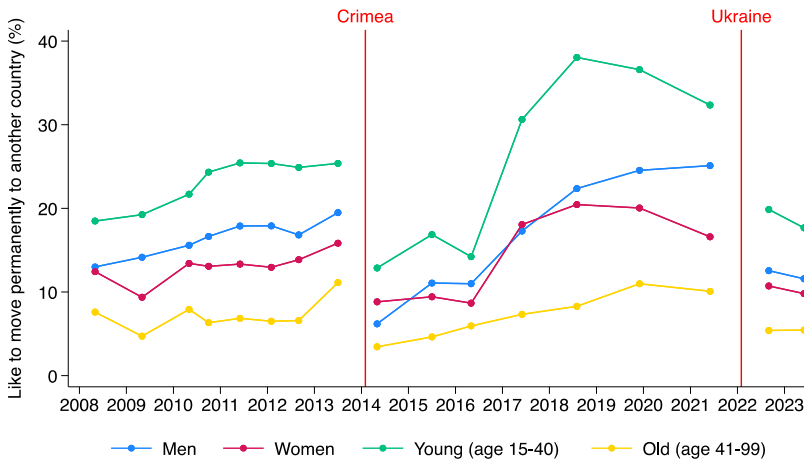
This raises our next questions: Who are the individuals wanting to permanently leave Russia? How do they differ from those who would like to stay in Russia? Are the people who wish to emigrate in 2022 different from those who desired to leave before the invasion?

5.4 Who would like to move?

Up to this point, we have explored the share of individuals wishing to leave Russia since 2008, their most popular destination countries, and aggregate trends in political support and life satisfaction. Let us now shift our focus to those who express a desire to move and investigate whether the characteristics of these individuals differ from those who prefer to stay, and whether this has changed with the war.

Figure 3 shows the trends in migration aspirations, separated between men and women, and young and old individuals. As shown in the figure, men and young people have on average higher migration aspirations than women and old individuals. For all groups, however, we see a similar pattern with large falls in migration aspirations, both with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Figure 3. Migration aspirations 2008–2023 by gender and age



Note: Figure shows the share of the Russian population who would like to move permanently to another country if they had the opportunity, by survey year-month, and separated between gender and age groups. Red solid lines show the Russian annexation of Crimea in February 2014, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Calculations include GWP sampling weights.

Source: Own calculations based on GWP (2008–2023).

Table 3 presents key characteristics of those who have indicated a preference to permanently move to another country (for simplicity, we will refer to them as “movers” in this section) as well as those who would like to stay in Russia (here referred to as “stayers”). Before delving into the details, it is important to note that in 2022–2023, movers made up only 11 percent of the total, as opposed to 21 percent in 2019–2021.

Table 3. Who would like to move? Individual level characteristics

| | 2019–2021 | | 2022–2023 | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------|
| | Stayers | Movers | Stayers | Movers |
| Like to move permanently to another country | 0% | 100% | 0% | 100% |
| Approve of country's leadership | 60% | 21% | 77% | 35% |
| Satisfied with place where live | 76% | 53% | 83% | 64% |
| Good life in five years | 70% | 78% | 81% | 77% |
| Sex (male) | 43% | 52% | 45% | 50% |
| Age (years) | 48 | 33 | 47 | 35 |
| Marital status (married) | 48% | 36% | 49% | 38% |
| Children under 15 | 31% | 37% | 34% | 31% |
| Education level (>15 years of education) | 25% | 31% | 26% | 34% |
| Employment status (employed) | 45% | 54% | 48% | 58% |
| Per capita annual income (international \$) | \$7,871 | \$9,766 | \$9,729 | \$11,849 |
| Region (Moscow or Saint-Petersburg city) | 12% | 11% | 11% | 18% |
| Likely to move away in next 12 months | 7% | 21% | 8% | 21% |
| Number of observations | 3,836 | 1,045 | 3,507 | 437 |

Note: ‘Movers’ are people who would like to move permanently to another country, and ‘Stayers’ are those who would prefer to continue living in Russia. No data from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Calculations include GWP sampling weights.

Source: Own calculations based on GWP (2019–2023).

First, when we compare potential movers with those who prefer to stay, we see that movers are less satisfied with the political leadership and their place of residence. In all of these years, movers are on average about 40 percentage points less satisfied with Russia's leadership and about 20 percentage points less satisfied with the place where they live. Movers are more optimistic about the future than stayers before the war, but less optimistic after. Moreover, we observe a positive selection in terms of labor market characteristics: movers are more likely to be employed, have higher incomes, and education. They also tend to be younger, more often male, and less likely to be married. Before the war, movers were more likely than stayers to have children, while the opposite was true after the invasion. While there are no regional differences before the war, movers are more likely to live in the largest cities, compared with stayers, after the war. These differences are in line with the previous literature on migration aspirations (Aslany et al. 2021), suggesting that the characteristics of people who would like to emigrate from Russia are similar to those who would like to emigrate to other countries. Most of these determinants of migration aspirations are also statistically significant if we include them in a regression analysis (see appendix Table A1).²⁹ A particular feature of migration aspirations in Russia, however, seems to be its strong correlation with disapproval of the country's leadership.

Second, we observe that the majority of Russians approved of the leadership both before and after the war, and this share increased between 2019–2021 and 2022–2023. The war increased the percentage who responded that they approved of the country's leadership, both among movers and stayers, but slightly more so for stayers (17 percentage points) than movers (14 percentage points). Similarly, the share of those reporting satisfaction with their place of residence increased between 2019–2021 and 2022–2023, from 76 to 83 percent for stayers, and from 53 to 64 percent for movers. This means that an increasing majority of Russians expressed satisfaction with their place of residence. These two indicators suggest that, after the war, Russians – both those who wish to move and those who wish to stay – are more content with the political leadership and their place of residence compared to before the war. Additionally, when we examine their views about life in five years, we see that both movers and stayers are generally optimistic about the future, and stayers even more so following the war.³⁰

²⁹ In a regression including all these variables, migration aspirations are significantly associated with disapproval of the country's leadership, dissatisfaction with the place where they live, being male, younger, unmarried, not having children, having a higher education, being unemployed, living in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, and being born in another country. See Table A1 in the Appendix.

³⁰ Note, however, that this question says nothing about whether the respondents expect to live in Russia or in another country in five years. A possible interpretation could thus also be that movers are optimistic about their future because they hope to leave the country.

When we analyze the demographic characteristics of movers, we find that roughly half are male and half are female, the average age is in the early-to-mid thirties, and a minority are married. For these characteristics, we do not observe large changes between the years. Moreover, an increasing majority are employed, the average per capita income increases from approximately \$10,000 to \$12,000 dollars, the level of education is higher among movers in 2022–2023 compared to 2019–2021, and the percentage of movers with children is lower in 2022–2023. Furthermore, in 2022, the share of movers residing in major cities increase from 11 to 18 percent. We can also note that, both before and after the invasion, approximately one in five movers state that they are likely to move away in the next 12 months.

If we consider the changes between 2019–2021 and 2022–2023 as primarily a consequence of the war, we find that the war has altered the composition of movers to include more highly educated individuals from larger cities who are less likely to have children. However, they also express greater support for the political leadership and their place of residence than in 2019–2021, although still less than the stayers. These conclusions are also largely supported by a formal regression analysis (see appendix Table A1).

5.5 How did the military mobilization affect migration aspirations?

We have now observed how the composition of potential emigrants from Russia has changed since the outbreak of the war. Let us now turn our attention to a specific event: the military mobilization of young men in September 2022.

In the initial stage of the war, the soldiers who were sent to Ukraine were either career militaries or conscripts doing their military service. As the intervention grew in scale, recruiting authorities were searching for men to sign up for military service, although the Kremlin assured that no conscripts were to be deployed at the front.³¹

³¹ Reports also say that pressure was put on men to comply with the call (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2023). Beginning already in the spring of 2022, there were media reports suggesting that the private paramilitary Wagner Group, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, was recruiting soldiers among inmates in Russian prisons. Allegedly, inmates were promised a monthly salary of RUB 200,000 (approximately EUR 3,350), early release, and a presidential pardon after six months of combat service. However, instances of alleged pressure, including solitary confinement and threats of sentence prolongation, were reported when inmates declined the offer after expressing initial interest.

However, in response to military setbacks in the war and a shortage of personnel during the late summer, Putin ordered a partial mobilization of the Russian armed forces on September 21, encompassing all men in Russia aged 18–27 (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2023). Despite official claims from Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu of calling up 300,000 military reserve personnel, mainly those with relevant specialization and combat experience, sources suggested the actual target was closer to a million individuals (Novaya Gazeta 2022, Kyiv Independent 2022a). Additionally, the mobilization decree also included reserve members who had not undergone military service and contract soldiers who now became prohibited from terminating their contracts.³²

On October 28, 2022, Shoigu announced the completion of the conscription and stated that no further mobilization was planned and that military recruitment will revert to relying on volunteers. Reportedly, 82,000 of the mobilized reservists had already been deployed to the war zone. However, various independent media sources estimate the actual number of mobilized individuals to be almost 500,000 (Kyiv Independent 2022b) and also, that reservists continued to receive call-up papers after October, and the police conducting checks to identify those who fail to comply with the call-up (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2023).

The announcement of the mobilization can be viewed as a push factor, affecting different segments of the population in various ways. Specifically, men between the ages of 18 and 27 now faced a significant health risk, as they could be injured or killed in the war. Young women, on the other hand, did not face the same risks but might still be negatively affected since people they care about, such as their partners or brothers, were put at risk. The older population was not selected for mobilization but may nevertheless react to this policy change, especially fathers and mothers of young men who may be concerned about their sons being drafted for the war.

The polling period for GWP in Russia in 2022 extended from August to November, coinciding with the announcement of the mobilization. About half of the respondents (942 individuals) were interviewed before the announcement (August 13–September 20), and the other half (1,064 individuals) after the

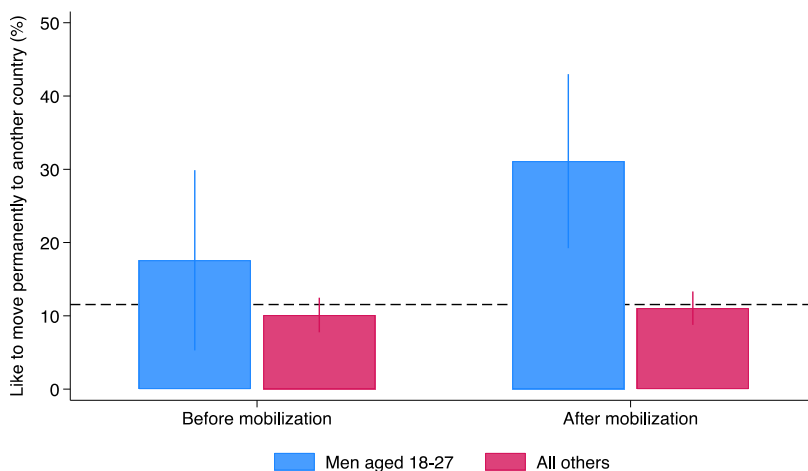
³² Immediately following the declaration of mobilization, protests involving thousands of people erupted in several cities all around Russia. Within a week, approximately 2,250 individuals, including those in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Yekaterinburg, had reportedly been arrested, and in some cases under violent forms (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2023). Also, the prospects of having to serve in the war is reported to have caused widespread panic and prompted hundreds of thousands of Russians to flee abroad, in particular to Kazakhstan and Georgia.

announcement (September 21–November 2).³³ Since the timing of the announcement is random with respect to GWP polling, we can assess the effect of the mobilization on migration preferences by comparing responses to the migration question among those who were interviewed before and after the announcement.

In Figure 4, average migration aspirations during the weeks before and after the announcement of the mobilization are displayed for young men versus the rest of the population. The left blue bar shows that, among men aged 18–27, about 18 percent expressed a desire to permanently move to another country before the mobilization. After the mobilization, this share had increased to 31 percent (right blue bar). This corresponds to an increase of more than 70 percent. While the increase is not statistically significant (p-value 0.121), it stands in stark contrast to the rest of the Russian population, whose migration aspirations were essentially unaffected by the mobilization: 10 percent before (left red bar) and 11 percent after (right red bar). It thus appears that the announcement of the mobilization worked as a push factor only in the segment of the population that was directly targeted by the mobilization.

³³ Very few (60 individuals) were interviewed after 28 October, when the mobilization was announced as complete. On September 30, 2022, nine days after the announcement of the mobilization, Putin also announced the annexation of the four Ukrainian regions: Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia.

Figure 4. Migration aspirations, before and after the mobilization, for young men and others



Note: Mean values with 95% confidence intervals. Before mobilization includes interviews conducted between August 13 and September 20, 2022, and after mobilization includes interviews between September 21 and November 2, 2022. Dashed line shows weighted average of all respondents in 2022 (12 percent). For men aged 18–27, migration aspirations increased from 18 to 31 percent, and for all others from 10 to 11 percent.
Source: Own calculations based on GWP (2022).

In Table 4, we show average migration aspirations in different segments of the population in 2021 (before the war), and in 2022 (after the war) before and after the mobilization. What is striking is that the willingness to move abroad decreased sharply in all groups between 2021 and 2022 (before the mobilization), including among young men. However, immediately after the mobilization we see a large increase in the willingness to migrate among young men. In none of the other groups, not even among young women, we see any substantial changes in migration aspirations following the mobilization. It appears that only young men, who directly faced an increased risk to their own lives, became more eager to leave Russia.

Table 4. Migration aspirations before and after the mobilization for different subgroups

| | Before war 2021 | Before mobilization 2022 | After mobilization 2022 | Mobilization change |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Men aged 18–27 | 46% | 18% | 31% | +13.5 p.p. [0.121] |
| Men aged 28+ | 19% | 9% | 12% | +3.3 p.p. [0.282] |
| Women aged 18–27 | 36% | 28% | 23% | –4.3 p.p. [0.579] |
| Women aged 28+ | 12% | 8% | 8% | +0.5 p.p. [0.760] |
| All individuals | 20% | 11% | 12% | +1.8 p.p. [0.280] |

Note: Mean weighted values for different subgroups. Before war includes interviews conducted between May 14 and July 14, 2021. Before mobilization includes interviews conducted between August 13 and September 20, 2022, and after mobilization interviews between September 21 and November 2, 2022. All individuals refer to the full population aged 15 and above. Mobilization change shows the percentage points difference between before and after the mobilization, with p-values in brackets.

Source: Own calculations based on GWP (2021–2022).

In summary, our results suggest that the mobilization only impacted the willingness to emigrate among young men. Thus, only men who directly faced an increased risk to their lives became more willing to leave Russia. However, it is important to exercise caution when interpreting these estimates. First, the precision of the estimates is not very high. Second, we are measuring preferences in the weeks immediately after the announcement. The situation for Russia and the war’s development can change rapidly, especially for subgroups of the population. Nevertheless, this analysis suggests that young men became more willing to leave Russia, whereas no such response can be observed in the rest of the population.

6. Conclusion

The Russo-Ukrainian war has set off a cascade of life changing events, not only in Ukraine but also in Russia. War-related policy changes in both Russia and the West have influenced the possibilities of living a good life in Russia, as well as the outlooks of living a good life in another country. With a population of about 144 million, emigration by only a small share of the population can cause large immigration flows in other countries. For small countries, like Sweden, it is therefore important to carefully follow what happens in Russia and try to understand how the war influences migration sentiments in Russia. In line with previous research, we argue that analyses of migration aspirations can provide important insights for policy makers trying to make informed forecasts and prepare for future migration.

In this report, we have discussed, how recent changes in the Russian society, as well as in Western countries have influenced migration sentiments in Russia. The basic theoretical framework departs from the push-pull theory and is complemented with the so-called rally 'round the flag theory to acknowledge the political nature of military conflicts. We argue that, taken together, there are arguments both for and against increased willingness to emigrate from Russia. This highlights the importance of empirical investigation.

With the use of data on migration preferences in the Russian population from the Gallup World Poll, we have documented how the war has influenced migration attitudes in different segments of the Russian population. Quite strikingly, we find that fewer, not more, people express a desire to emigrate from Russia following the outbreak of the war. We find that migration aspirations have fallen from 20 to 12 percent. Consistent with this finding, we also find that most Russians appear to perceive Russia as a better place to live after the invasion of Ukraine, and they seem, in general, to be supportive of Putin's policies. These results are consistent with strong rallying effects, and suggest that the likelihood of substantial emigration from Russia in the near future is very low.

Closely after the invasion and especially around the time of the mobilization, there were several reports in media and elsewhere on increased migration from Russia. The evidence, so far, suggests that the number of migrants from Russia has been rather low, at least in comparison to the size of the population of the country. In line with these reports, we find some evidence that the mobilization spurred an increase in willingness to move abroad among young men, that is, those most affected by the mobilization. Additionally, we also find

that migration aspirations are higher among highly educated individuals, those living in the bigger cities, and those who disapprove of Putin. Taken together, migration aspirations appear to have increased only in a small segment of the population, while it has decreased in the main population.

To get a firm understanding of migration aspirations in Russia and how they may evolve in the future, it requires several different kinds of analyses. The aim of this report is to add one important piece to the broader understanding of migration aspirations in Russia.

From a policy perspective, it would be interesting to know more about how attitudes towards Russians and migration policies, such as visa rules, influence the willingness to migrate from Russia and which destination countries that may be preferred. Our analyses suggest that several EU countries have lost in popularity, while some countries with more positive attitudes towards Russia have gained in popularity.

As a final remark, we cannot know how the war will develop and we do not know how Russia, Ukraine, or the rest of the world will alter their policies in response to the war. While the evolution of the war can have dramatic effects on migration decisions, currently, we see no signs of immediate increases in migration from Russia.

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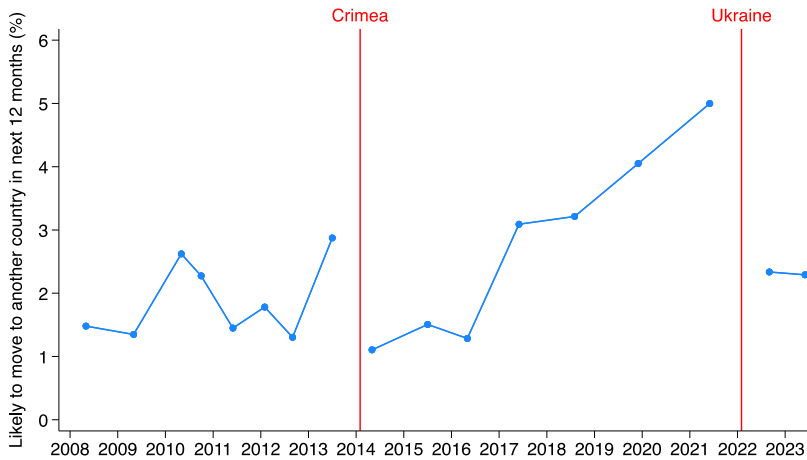
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Appendix 1

Figure A1. Migrations likelihood 2008–2023



Note: Figure shows the share of the Russian population who would like to move permanently to another country and are likely to move away in the next 12 months, by survey year-month. Data from GWP 2008–2023 (no data from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Red solid lines show the Russian annexation of Crimea in February 2014, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Calculations include GWP sampling weights. Source: Own calculations based on GWP (2008–2023).

Table A1. Who would like to move? OLS regression results

| Like to move permanently to another country | 2008-2023 | 2019-2021 | 2022-2023 |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Approve of country's leadership | -0.150*** (0.00682) | -0.206*** (0.0157) | -0.162*** (0.0160) |
| Satisfied with place where live | -0.123*** (0.00790) | -0.121*** (0.0178) | -0.0951*** (0.0176) |
| Good life in five years | 0.000766 (0.0125) | -0.0143 (0.0287) | -0.0911*** (0.0281) |
| Sex (male) | 0.0138** (0.00582) | 0.0315** (0.0151) | -0.00465 (0.0119) |
| Age (years) | -0.00502*** (0.000193) | -0.00627*** (0.000539) | -0.00453*** (0.000465) |
| Marital status (married) | -0.0305*** (0.00552) | -0.0534*** (0.0142) | -0.0156 (0.0116) |
| Children under 15 | -0.0277*** (0.00661) | 0.00524 (0.0178) | -0.0568*** (0.0129) |
| Education level (>15 years of education) | 0.0457*** (0.00606) | 0.0464*** (0.0148) | 0.0546*** (0.0118) |
| Employment status (employed) | -0.0185*** (0.00616) | -0.0154 (0.0157) | -0.0138 (0.0126) |
| Per capita annual income (\$, thousands) | 0.000189 (0.000198) | 0.00210** (0.00104) | 0.0000649 (0.0000506) |
| Region (Moscow or Saint-Petersburg city) | 0.0228*** (0.00860) | 0.0175 (0.0246) | 0.0207 (0.0201) |
| Immigrant (born in another country) | 0.0322*** (0.0119) | 0.00899 (0.0246) | 0.0220 (0.0227) |
| Year FE | Y | N | N |
| Observations | 21,950 | 3,976 | 3,347 |
| R-squared | 0.160 | 0.204 | 0.152 |
| Approve of country's leadership | -0.150*** | -0.206*** | -0.162*** |

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