

Russia's Federal Migration Service Reform and Its Consequences

The reform of Russia's Federal Migration Service (FMS), initiated by the [Presidential Decree of April 5, 2016](#), transferring the agency from under the auspices of the Government to the Ministry of the Interior is undergoing. The analysis of the reform however gives reasons to doubt its usefulness and its potential to improve migration service in Russia.

From 1992, when the Russia's Migration Service was first formed on the basis of the Committee of Migration of the Population under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, - until 2000, when the Ministry of Federation, National and Migration Policy of the Russian Federation was established in its place - the Service had been under the Ministry of Labour's or directly under the government's supervision. It became part of the Ministry of the Interior in 2002, and was transferred back in 2012. Taking into account lessons learned from migration services of other countries, there are dangers that the reform putting the FMS under the law enforcement mandate of the Russia's Interior Ministry could have at least three negative consequences.

- First, one of the main cited reasons for the reform is duplicating functions of the Ministry of the Interior and the Migration Service, i.e. passport control, issuance of ID documents and labour licenses; visa and other measures of migration control; detention and deportation of irregular migrants; fingerprinting of those who have no IDs, etc.

This is also the main error of the reform - migration service's mandate is regulating movements of people, management of human capital, resettlement and asylum of those who need it, and creation of conditions to attract migrants that the country needs. Countries that realize the economic and social potential of this phenomenon benefit from it by taxing migrants, filling jobs and attracting specialists. Viewing migration only from the law enforcement perspective, presenting all migrants as potential offenders, who need to be controlled and (ideally) deported is a counterproductive and outdated perspective which does not take into account the realities of the modern time and prevents using the full potential of the movement of people.

Undoubtedly, ensuring state security and border control is necessary, and may and need to be under the auspices of the Interior Ministry. However, regular migration should be seen from the point of view of its input in employment, productivity, strengthening and contributing to state budget and the labour market, and does not need to be linked to police work.

- Second the promised 30% staff reduction of the Federal Migration Service after its merger with the Ministry of the Interior, could negatively affect quality and professionalisms of its experts.

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Since 2002, when the FMS was created, there have been a number of important professional developments specific to this institution being part of the labour agencies (i.e. the service introduced programs to attract migrants to the labour market, developed rules and procedures for hiring foreign specialists, etc.) - all of which could be threatened when the Ministry of the interior, imposes its rules and subordination.

- Third, the reform could affect the relative openness and accessibility of migration data that exists today, and reduce agency's cooperation with non-government actors.

The statistical data is necessary for informed decisions about regulating migration, fast reaction to the changing situation, and taking advantage from migration for the budget and economy of the country.

Currently, FMS is the leader in the post-Soviet space on quality, composition and accessibility of the [data related to migration](#) (in Russian language). Besides, statistical data provided by the Interior Ministry of the is frequently [fragmented and incongruous](#).

Summing up, it is difficult to evaluate the full consequences of the reform of the Federal Migration Service. However historical analysis indicates that subordination of the FMS to the Ministry of Interior, could lead to the return of the tougher (than previous) line in migration regulation in Russia.

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