

Exiled Kremlin Critics Urge EU to Welcome Skilled Russians to 'Bleed' Putin Regime

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Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport. **Sergei Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency**

A group of exiled Kremlin critics on Tuesday urged EU countries to do more to welcome Russians fleeing Vladimir Putin's regime, arguing that a shortage of skilled workers would deal a blow to the country's wartime economy.

According to some estimates, up to one million people have fled Russia since Moscow invaded Ukraine in 2022. But some of them are starting to return home, discouraged by the scarcity of available jobs and difficulties getting visas and long-term residence permits.

"One less engineer is one less missile flying in the direction of Ukraine," Russian opposition activist and former State Duma lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov said in Paris.

Speaking at the French Institute of International Relations, Gudkov unveiled a study of the Russian diaspora in several EU member states including France and Germany.

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Conducted this spring by researchers associated with the University of Nicosia on behalf of a new think tank founded by Gudkov and the economist Vladislav Inozemtsev, the study is based on a survey of more than 3,200 Russian emigres living in France, Germany, Poland and Cyprus.

Nearly 80% of respondents left Russia after 2014, the year Putin annexed Crimea from Ukraine, while another 44% fled after the February 2022 invasion.

As part of policy recommendations, the study calls for a broad program of "economic migration" from Russia, adding that most Russians who fled the country were well-educated "Russian Europeans" supporting Western values.

"The strategy to undermine the Putin regime should include orchestrated 'bleeding': stimulating the outflow of qualified specialists and money from Russia unrelated to the war," the study said.

Inozemtsev said more should be done to help emigres, arguing that welcoming skilled Russians could be a more effective blow against the Kremlin than the multiple rounds of Western sanctions that have so far failed to halt Russia's war machine.

"Even we have been surprised by the qualifications of those who have left," Inozemtsev said.

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Citing figures from 2022, the study said the average monthly salary of Russian immigrants in Cyprus stood at more than 5,480 euros (\$5,880), compared with the average monthly salary of 2,248 euros for native Cypriots.

Mindful of the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments across Europe, the study argued that Russian exiles could integrate into European societies relatively easily and would not be a burden on the social welfare systems.

Several hundred thousand Russians could also provide an "additional boost" to slow-growing European economies, the study claimed.

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