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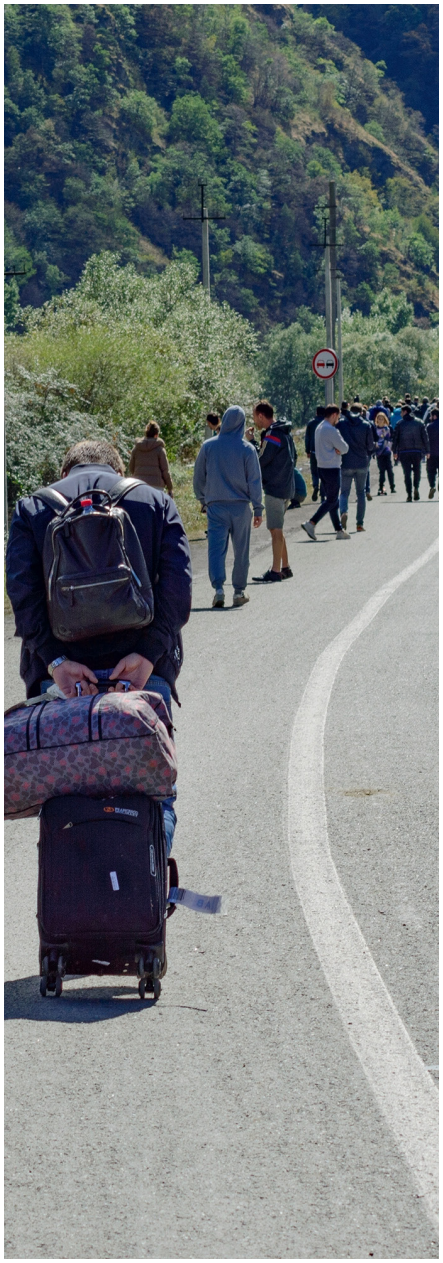

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IDEAS LEADERSHIP HOPE

Democratic Russian Civil Society Outside Russia?

A Window of Opportunity for Support

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Summary

Russia has large sources of wealth and military power and is controlled by an autocratic, kleptocratic regime willing to devote these to aggression toward its neighbors, most violently in Ukraine. It is in the interest of Europe and the United States to support Russians who can help the country become more peaceful and democratic, alongside anti-regime measures. Repression has made supporting democratic actors in Russia extremely difficult but not impossible. That goal must now be complemented. Around 1 million people have left Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and a large majority did not return. This opens a window of opportunity for unimpeded access to a large number of Russians to aid the spread of democratic ideas, raising the prospect of a democratic civil society developing outside the country. Europe and the United States need a strategy to support the democratic potential of the recent emigrants.

Their largest concentrations are in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, the Western Balkans as well as Israel, Türkiye, the EU and the United States. The bulk of the emigrants are young adults who are richer, more educated, and more politically interested or active than the average citizen in Russia. For most, the motivations for leaving mixed political, economic, and lifestyle factors, and for many also unwillingness to be drafted into the military. The majority have democratic, anti-regime, and antiwar views. The emigrants include long-standing and newly civically and politically active individuals. A large share continue engagement abroad in diverse organizations and initiatives.

Their activities focus on rebuilding civil society organizations (CSOs) and media abroad, supporting democratic actors and spreading independent information in Russia, and antiwar initiatives. They provide help to new emigrants and aim to build up their communities. These activities are carried out from one or more host countries, building transnational networks. There are new grassroots actions and initiatives by emigrants who had less or no direct experience of activism in Russia. Emigrant groups mostly operate through horizontal, fluid networks. Many of these are small and informal, but there are larger, more structured ones. Emigrant communities also offer a space for critical debate about the need for democratic change and the link between this and Russia's colonial/imperial heritage and aggression.

The recent emigrants' activities face many challenges, including those in operating networks reliant on online resources; in connecting digital and non-digital activism; and in planning beyond the short term without sufficient resources. They are hampered by reliance on small (often part-time) core teams and volunteers. Many activists experience financial precarity, employment insecurity, and burnout. Security is a major concern due to the risk of infiltration, destabilization, and cyber and physical attacks by Russia's security apparatus. The situation for emigrants has become more restrictive or less safe in some host countries. Individuals and organizations that oppose the Russian regime are also affected by restrictive international measures against it, such as ones against money laundering and the monetization of online content, or the denial of access to financial, professional, and commercial services.

As Russians have realized that emigration will be for a longer term, the phase of settling in a host country became more prominent than the earlier exit phase. For many, this includes the need to move from the first host country, with those more politically active more likely to look for one with a safer, more enabling environment. This will largely mean seeking to move to an EU or other Western country. The non-EU countries easiest for Russians to

access are also the ones where their prospects are more uncertain, whereas the EU countries are harder to access but offer more certain prospects.

Russia in the 1990s showed how an unpredicted democratic opening can fail to lead to lasting or deep change. Today, alongside aiding political and nongovernmental actors, democracy-support providers should also try to help Russian society evolve in a democratic direction. The new emigrant activities are seeds for a democratic civil society abroad that is closely connected to, and supportive of, the one in Russia.

A Democracy Support Strategy for Russian Emigrants

Three principles should underpin a strategy to support the democratic potential of the recent Russian emigration: shifting emphasis to the settling phase of emigration, prioritizing connectivity within the emigration, and helping weave a civil society abroad. To foster the development of a democratic civil society among Russian emigrants, assistance must target the building of a wider community that can be more effective and serve as a model in Russia. For this, the landscape of Russians outside Russia can be seen as four concentric circles, based on their degree of direct political activity: the political opposition in exile; the civil society sector of democracy, human rights, and media organizations; the community of emigrants since 2022, and in particular the new grassroots actors and initiatives emerging within it; and the older, multigeneration Russian diaspora.

A democracy support strategy for Russian emigrants should not be open-ended but time-bound, with a pragmatic approach in an uncertain environment. It can be assessed in 2030, when President Vladimir Putin's term as president is due to end, which could be a time of political turbulence. The strategy can be initially implemented within the next 12–24 months, with annual review of support offered to civil society, especially at the grassroots, with the potential to grow and to reach out to the apolitical emigrants. Support should consist of mostly small, short-term assistance to actors and initiatives that would have until 2030 to show that they have impact and longer-term potential.

It is crucial to support the widest range of diverse, dispersed actors of different sizes so that they can keep operating. The focus should not be only on formal organizations but also on more bounded initiatives and projects. Part of the assistance should focus on enabling politically and civically active emigrants to connect physically and virtually across locations, and to focus on flexible networking suited to their mobility challenges. Funders need to think widely in terms of locations and formats for delivering support. Using different, sometimes unconventional, ways of engaging emigrant actors is a necessity. Support should not rely only on usual formats, not least since new ones for activities are emerging from within the emigrant landscape. Such support is also key for encouraging and amplifying the critical thinking in the emigrant landscape as well as connections to new antiwar and anti-imperialist initiatives—a prerequisite for any democratic progress in Russia.

Connections are what make a society more than a collection of groups. For the development of a democratic civil society outside Russia, support should be directed not only within the individual circles of the emigration but also at connections between them. The primary focus should be on relations between the second (established CSOs) and third (new grassroots actors) circles to prevent the diverse civically and politically active emigrants and groups being in silos. Contacts with recent emigrants could also eventually encourage changes in attitudes within the older diaspora toward the Russian regime or democratic civic engagement in general.

Introduction

Since the start of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in February 2022, a huge number of Russians have left their country and remain abroad to this day. Some analysts argue the West should encourage this emigration because it weakens the Russian state and benefits security in Europe.[1] The future of most of these recent emigrants[2] is uncertain but the substantial share among them of pro-democracy individuals raises the question of whether they can be actors of political change in Russia from the outside.

As it is hard to forecast major change in Russia soon, supporting or encouraging the growth of a pro-democracy emigrant community may seem an effort that is hard to justify for outside actors, especially when international donors have large and urgent competing demands on their resources. However, Russia will remain for the foreseeable future a major power with large sources of national wealth and military power that is controlled by an autocratic, kleptocratic regime willing to devote its assets over the long term to an aggressive policy toward its neighbors and further afield, most violently in Ukraine. It is therefore in the interest of, especially, Europe and the United States to support Russians who could contribute to the country evolving in a more peaceful and democratic direction, alongside measures to contain and deter its regime.

The recent emigration has opened a window of opportunity to engage a sizeable part of Russian society that is now outside the jurisdiction of the regime.

Repression in Russia over recent years has made supporting pro-democracy actors in the country extremely difficult, but not impossible. That goal should not be abandoned; rather, it should be complemented. The recent emigration has opened a window of opportunity to engage a sizeable part of Russian society that is now outside the jurisdiction of the regime, and which includes people who will one day go back to Russia and who will remain in contact and collaboration with compatriots there until that time. The ongoing contacts of the recent emigrants, including travel for some, to Russia show they can evade repression to connect with others there, not least at the grassroots and local levels. But this may become more difficult as the regime becomes totalitarian. It is thus important to seize the opportunity that the current situation offers of unimpeded access to a large number of Russians outside the country for helping the spread of democratic ideas. That many emigrants will not return to Russia in the short to medium term does not invalidate this idea—even they can still be active stakeholders in its future from abroad. What is more, as one study notes, unlike those in the past, Russians who have emigrated over the last decade rarely renounce their citizenship and surrender their passports.[3]

What is more, further large-scale emigration is a possibility, whether in another wave, perhaps related to military mobilization, or more gradually due to dissatisfaction with life in Russia. In an April 2024 poll, 9% of respondents said they would like to move abroad, including 15% for those aged 18–39 years, especially to the United States, Europe, and Türkiye—with 36% of them giving the political situation as the reason. While 3% of respondents said

they were thinking of specific possibilities for leaving, this reached 16% for the 18–24 group and 18% for the 25–39 one, and 35% among those who disapproved of President Vladimir Putin.[4]

In March 2023, the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) published a first analysis of the Russians who left their country following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and of their democratic potential.[5] It concluded that:

> Whether the recent Russian emigrants can coalesce into a force for democracy will depend in part on support for their potential. Western governmental and nongovernmental actors should primarily aim at consolidating and strengthening the democratic convictions of a critical mass of emigrants.

Given the pace of the evolution of the Russian emigrant landscape, Europe and the United States urgently need a well-informed common strategy—or at least aligned ones—to support the democratic potential of the recent emigrants, backed with appropriate tools. In doing so, Europe and the United States will have to accept and manage the risks of a fluid situation as well as the uncertainty about the exact nature and role of these diverse emigrants. Waiting for certainty that may take much time to emerge will waste time in the current window of opportunity.

This report is based on GMF research and also draws on a broad range of the latest research into the recent Russian emigration. The focus is on host countries in Europe, from the Baltic Sea to the South Caucasus, given the emigrants' concentrations and for practical reasons of resources. Future research will include other important host countries such as Israel, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, and the United States, but the conclusions drawn so far apply to these countries too. First, the report assesses the emigrant landscape, including in terms of new activism and self-organization and the challenges this encounters. It then investigates the idea of emigration as an ongoing phased process and the concept of a democratic Russian civil society outside Russia. The report concludes by suggesting principles and elements for building a strategy to support elements within these communities as potential actors of democratic change in Russia. The emphasis throughout is more on the emergence of new, small grassroots civic actors and initiatives than on established and institutionalized political and civil society actors that have been operating outside Russia before or since February 2022. The more established actors are undoubtedly important but overall progress will depend on a substantial broadening and inclusion of new actors.

Assessing the Russian Emigrant Landscape

The recent mass Russian emigration happened principally in two waves: one immediately after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and one immediately after the September 2022 partial mobilization in Russia. (At least one expert identifies a less dramatic third wave throughout 2023, driven by dissatisfaction with changing conditions in the country.)[6] In the first year after the invasion, there was much focus on the difficulty to establish exactly the number of emigrants overall and in each host country. This remains just as hard today, especially due to widely differing administrative practices in Russia and host countries. That many Russians move back and forth between host country and Russia or between host countries complicates the issue as they can be counted more than

once in migration statistics on both sides. For example, one 2023 survey in Georgia had 20% of respondents saying they had traveled back to Russia.[7] There are also reports of emigrants shuttling between visa-free countries within one region.

The most reliable estimates put the number of those leaving the country as between 900,000 and 1.1 million by the end of 2023.[8] For context, in the abovementioned April 2024 poll in Russia 16% of respondents—which would translate to about 23 million people in a population estimated at about 144 million—saying they had a relative or friend who had moved abroad for permanent residence since 2022.[9] The latest, most comprehensive survey, in July 2024, estimates that at least 650,000 had not returned to Russia (excluding a few notable host countries for which it was not possible to obtain data).[10]

There is no doubt about which are the main destinations for which Russians have left since 2022, even if precisely how many have remained there is less clear. According to one of the most cited studies, by the end of 2022, the largest numbers of emigrants were in Kazakhstan (146,000), Türkiye (79,000), Georgia (60,000), Armenia (42,000), the EU (36,000), Israel (35,000), Kyrgyzstan (34,000), Serbia (17,000), and Mongolia (13,000), while almost 34,000 tried to obtain political asylum in the United States.[11] The emigration also saw notable increases in the number of Russians in other countries in Central Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and South East Asia. In the abovementioned July 2024 survey, the top host countries are Armenia (110,000), Kazakhstan (80,000), Israel (80,000), Georgia (73,000), the United States (48,000), Germany (36,000), Serbia (30,000), Türkiye (28,000), South Korea (19,000), and Spain (16,000) (see Box 1).[12]

According to official EU data, 17,000 Russians applied for asylum in the EU in 2022, and almost 23,000 in 2023,

Box 1. Main Host Countries for Recent Russian Emigrants

1.	Armenia	110,000
2.	Kazakhstan	80,000
3.	Israel	80,000
4.	Georgia	73,562
5.	United States	48,033
6.	Germany	36,094
7.	Serbia	30,000
8.	Türkiye	28,308
9.	South Korea	19,805
10.	Spain	16,441
11.	United Kingdom	15,574
12.	Kyrgyzstan	12,582
13.	Netherlands	12,384
14.	Canada	11,730
15.	Argentina	11,064
16.	Montenegro	7,412
17.	Finland	5,310
18.	Mexico	5,231
19.	Switzerland	3,968
20.	Moldova	3,601
21.	Austria	3,406
22.	Bulgaria	3,278
23.	Norway	3,146
24.	Slovakia	3,083
25.	Lithuania	2,513
26.	Others	23,431
TOTAL:		**649,956**

Note: Estimates do not include several destinations with sizeable emigrant communities due to unavailability of host-country data.

Source: Denis Kasyanchuk, 'After the start of the war, about 650,000 people left Russia and did not return: The Bell', [in Russian], The Bell, July 16, 2024.

with Germany the most applied-to member state by far, ahead of France, and further behind Poland and Spain. The combined granting of refugee status and subsidiary protection was 30% in 2022 and 33% in 2023.[13] Nonetheless, Russians tend to avoid applying for asylum in the EU.[14] This is attributed to the low success rate,[15] and to restrictions attached to asylum/refugee status regarding employment. In the United States, there were 73,000 nonimmigrant admissions from Russia, alongside only 489 granting of asylum or refugee status.[16] The US border authorities also over encountered over 48,000 "removable' Russian citizens in 2022 and over 44,000 in 2023.[17]

What is certain is that a very large number of Russians left the country and will remain abroad for a considerable time, regardless of where.

In most countries, the very large number of entries recorded in 2022 was relatively matched by that of exits for another host country or back to Russia. For example, Georgia's authorities recorded the entry of 1.4 million Russians between February and December 2022 with approximately 100,000 staying.[18] There are expert estimates that around 15% of those who left in the February 2022 wave returned to Russia by the time of the September 2022 mobilization.[19] It is possible that many post-mobilization leavers returned in 2023 due to a lower risk of conscription.[20] More recent estimates put the share of returnees since 2022 as 15–25%, or at 40–50% from sources that might be considered more aligned with the Russian authorities.[21] In one major survey, many who returned to Russia in 2022 said they did so for practical, financial, or work reasons, and that they had not initially been psychologically prepared to leave but did not plan to stay in Russia long.[22] This can partly explain the observation that those who left Russia throughout 2023 did so in a more planned way.[23] There is anecdotal evidence that return and in/out travel rates vary across host countries, from maybe up to 50% in South East Asia and many post-Soviet states to 10–15% in the United States and Western Europe.[24] What is certain is that a very large number of Russians left the country and will remain abroad for a considerable time, regardless of where.

* * *

In 2023, GMF conducted initial overviews of the recent Russian emigrant communities in seven key European host countries: three non-EU ones (Armenia, Georgia, Serbia) and four EU members (Czechia, Germany, Lithuania, Poland). These addressed four broad areas regarding the community in each country: number, authorities' attitude, profile, and activities. These overviews were updated in early 2024.

Number of Recent Russian Emigrants

The overviews in the seven countries took into account the fact of Russians also moving on to another host country or back to Russia. They also confirmed the difficulty of obtaining clear and comprehensive official data on the numbers of the emigrants who have so far remained in their initial host country, due to the authorities' secrecy and/or capacity constraints there. On this basis, the estimates from the overviews about the size of the post-February 2022 emigrant communities as of May 2023 were: 50,000–70,000 in Armenia, 50,000–60,000 in Georgia, up to 70,000 in Germany, around 50,000 in Serbia, around 15,000 in Poland, up to 10,000 in Czechia, and 3,000–5,000 in Lithuania. (These estimates for Germany and Serbia are considerably higher than the ones cited above.) An update to the overviews in early 2024 recorded no major changes in these numbers, with a small amount of

onward movement, limited returns to Russia, and in some cases arrivals from other host countries. In the seven host countries, there was reported recognition by the emigrants that their situation is not temporary.

The crucial difference to note is between EU and non-EU host countries. The former were and remain far easier for Russians to enter. Armenia offers visa-free stays to Russians of 180 days, Georgia of 360 days, and Serbia of 30 days, and all three allow emigrants to do "visa-runs"; that is, leaving briefly and returning to reset their visa-free stay period. By contrast the EU has had a policy of stringent restriction of entry for Russians in place since September 2022. Options for entering EU countries have also been curtailed by the ban on flights to and from Russia, as well as by Poland's pushbacks at its border with Belarus since before 2022 and Finland closing its border with Russia in 2023.[25] The situation in the seven surveyed countries (as elsewhere) remains fluid and could be for some time. This fluidity could also be increased rapidly by developments in Russia, in the war in Ukraine, or in the host countries.

Authorities' Attitudes Toward Recent Russian Emigrants

In the three non-EU host countries surveyed, Russian emigrants have generally been seen as economically and socially beneficial in Armenia and Serbia, and more neutrally in Georgia, and they are generally treated in the same way as local citizens by the authorities. The economic impact in Georgia is reported to have faded over 2023, probably due to the fact that the emigrants had mostly finished moving out their money from Russia or faced greater financial restrictions by the Russian authorities. Since 2023, there have also been reports from Georgia and Serbia of some restrictions on entry or cases of expulsions, and concerning Georgia of cases of denying re-entry.

In the four EU host countries, the overwhelming issue relating to the authorities' attitudes is that of the restrictive visa and residency regimes. However, once emigrants have been able to enter and stay in the country, they usually are treated as any other group and do not face discriminatory or preferential treatment. They are also not given particularly targeted official support (with some exceptions). Bureaucratic obstacles have led to some emigrants moving from one EU country to another; for example, from Czechia to Germany or Poland. According to some sources, there have been since 2023 some signs of the Czech authorities taking a less demanding approach.

The neutral-to-positive attitudes of authorities in the seven host countries do not preclude their security and intelligence services paying close attention to Russian emigrants and skepticism or hostility in parts of the political class. This is the case in Czechia, Lithuania, and Poland (which are among the more security-oriented EU members in relation to Russia) as well as in the three non-EU countries, where the presence of Russians (including those critical of Putin's regime) cannot be separated from tensions or complex relations with Moscow. Growing scrutiny of the views of the emigrants about Ukraine and the war was reported in Lithuania. However, the extent to which in some of these countries the security and intelligence services genuinely consider the emigrants as a security risk or whether this is instrumentalized for domestic political reasons is an open question.

A counterpoint to the reported attitudes in the seven host countries surveyed is provided by the OutRush project that produces the most comprehensive multi-wave survey of the post-February 2022 Russian emigrants at the global level. Its most recent survey had some sizeable minorities saying they experienced discrimination by local institutions (Germany 21%, Georgia 18%, Serbia 14%, Armenia 13%) and to a lesser degree by local people (Georgia

24%, Armenia 10%, Germany 9%, Serbia 7%). Fear of discrimination is higher than direct experience of it and has increased, while the initial high rate of emigrants' trust in host societies has declined.[26]

Profile of Recent Russian Emigrants

The March 2023 GMF paper found that, overall,

> These recent Russian emigrants tend to be young, politically active, well-off, and flexible and dynamic. They include large numbers of IT specialists as well as journalists, politicians, and public intellectuals associated with Russian nongovernmental organizations or the liberal media that were closed after the invasion. Other significant categories are academics, teachers, cultural actors, and entrepreneurs.[27]

In the seven host countries surveyed, the recent Russian emigration mostly consists of working-age adults, and skews heavily to the younger segment of this category (18–45-year-olds). There is generally a gender balance within these communities, with in some cases a slight skew in favor of males following the post-mobilization wave. A substantial share of the emigrants is in family or cohabitation units. The post-invasion wave consisted heavily of Russians from Moscow and Saint Petersburg, while the post-mobilization wave included a greater proportion of people from Russia's regions alongside those from the two major metropolitan centers.

The emigrants are predominantly white-collar/upper middle class. Their leading employment sector is IT (including working remotely for Russian companies, at least for some time). The next main sectors of economic activity are: creative industries, media, entrepreneurship, and nongovernmental organizations. In Armenia and Georgia, there is also a sizable minority of blue-collar workers. Most emigrants are in full-time or part-time employment, with a minority self-employed. Unemployment is not reported as a major problem. Over time, there has been a weakening of the economic ties of many emigrants to Russia as they shift from Russian employers to local or international ones, to freelancing, or to starting their own businesses. Efforts by Russia's authorities to cut off emigrants' financial access to the country have also contributed to this.

The findings in the seven host countries reinforce the point made in the March 2023 GMF paper, especially of the post-invasion wave, that

> The majority of the recent emigrants was more politically active in Russia than their predecessors [from earlier emigration waves] and more clearly driven by current political circumstances or even political persecution. They also show a higher level of trust toward each other. For many, the reasons for leaving Russia include opposition to the war and a rejection of the regime.[28]

For most of the recent emigrants in these countries, their motivations for leaving Russia were a mix of political, economic, and lifestyle factors, and for many also unwillingness to be drafted into the military to fight in Ukraine. (By contrast, those who left purely to avoid mobilization are more likely to have gone to Central Asian countries.) The recent emigrants include many people who were politically or civically active in Russia, as well as people with little or no such previous experience but who were sensitized by the full invasion of Ukraine.

These findings also chime with those of other studies,[29] including by the OutRush project, which finds that, compared to the average for the Russian population, the recent emigrants tend to be younger (average age 34), richer, more educated (47% with a higher education or postgraduate degree), more urban (majority from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and cities over 1 million inhabitants), and more politically interested and active, with the post-mobilization emigrants slightly less affluent and urban.[30] One study divides the initial 2022 leavers in four categories: journalists, activists, and employees of civil society organizations (CSOs); members of the big-city liberal intelligentsia; businesspersons and managers of big corporations; IT specialists and engineers.[31]

OutRush respondents say were strongly motivated to leave by political and moral disagreement with the regime and by repression, and later by fear of conscription. In the latest OutRush survey also unemployment is not reported as a major problem, though this had increased by mid-2023, and that two-thirds of those Russian-employed had shifted to local or international jobs by then—a shift partly caused by the Russian government and companies making it more difficult to work remotely, or by some emigrants being unwilling to support the war effort by working for Russian companies.

Activities of Recent Russian Emigrants

The March 2023 GMF research paper found that:

> The emigrants have created initiatives and carried out activities that can be crucial for developing a broad democratic movement. Groups founded to meet urgent emigration needs are transforming into heterogeneous mutual aid communities of people who meet regularly for a wide range of activities. Organizations have been created and run by people with a high awareness of the need for civic participation. Some are beginning to consolidate the emigrant communities with an agenda aimed at democratic transformation.[32]

The activities of emigrants observed in the seven host countries match those that have been reported by different sources and can be said to exemplify the overall situation. In the larger EU countries surveyed (Germany, Poland, and to an extent Czechia) there is a concentration of activities in the capitals, but they are also spread across major cities where the emigrants are found to varying degrees. In Georgia and Serbia, the main concentrations outside the capitals are in Batumi and Novi Sad respectively.

The activities of those members of the recent emigration with a previous record of political or civic activism have a strong focus on civil society and the population in Russia as well as on the emigrant communities and networks. Inside Russia, they strive to spread independent information and to support or show solidarity with various civic actors. Outside Russia, they provide practical, legal, and psychosocial help to new emigrants, and aim to build up their communities. The more political activists focus especially on rebuilding Russian CSOs and media abroad, on supporting democratic actors in Russia, and on antiwar initiatives. The whole range of these emigrant activities is carried out from one or more host countries, hence the efforts to create networks transnationally. Many activities also involve participants in Russia.

There are grassroots emigrant antiwar initiatives, although in some host countries this faces issues with regard to relations with antiwar efforts by Ukrainians or local nationals. Among them, Czechia has the most active scene. Some emigrant initiatives directly address the connection between the war and the political situation in Russia, or democracy and human rights in Russia generally. There are also emigrant initiatives to offer humanitarian and other help to Ukrainians in and out of the country (some involving Belarusians and Ukrainians too). These tend to be little visible to host-country and international audiences, sometimes intentionally.

Since February 2022, there has been a growth in new grassroots, self-organized actions and initiatives by emigrants who had less or no direct experience of civic or political activism in Russia (though they may have been civically or politically conscious). Many grassroots efforts retain their initial focus on practical and legal support in relocation and mutual help, but the larger ones have widened their activities. Groups have also formed based on occupational categories or for broader social self-help efforts, such as in education. Information, civic education, and social/cultural activities are also important categories of grassroots activities. There are also some initiatives in which emigrants collaborate with host-country civil society on non-Russia-related issues, such as the environment.

Since February 2022, there has been a growth in new grassroots, self-organized actions and initiatives by emigrants who had less or no direct experience of civic or political activism in Russia.

At the levels of experienced activism and new grassroots self-organization alike, the emigrants in the seven host countries surveyed mostly operate through horizontal, fluid networks. Many of these are small and informal, relying on volunteering and small donations, but there are some larger and more structured ones (notably concerning media or relocation support). This aligns with findings of other studies. For example, it has been observed that, before 2022, activists in Russia had operated with declining financial resources (including foreign funding) and in decentralized, less institutional formats due growing repression and a shift away from formal nongovernmental organizations, with a great focus on online activism to build movements and public consciousness of issues.[33] They have carried this experience abroad, enabling continuity in their work during the emigration process.

Similarly, the pre-2022 emergence of hubs for emigrant activities in, for example, Germany (media), Lithuania (political opposition), and Poland (research) provided an environment for the recent emigrants to connect to or to start initiatives very soon after leaving Russia. The existence abroad of different politically active organizations provided some of the new emigrants a place to land in.[34] In the last couple of years, emigrant clusters by profession or activity area have added to these existing environments: notably in Czechia (antiwar); in France, Germany, Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States (academia); in the Netherlands and Spain (media), and in France and Italy (arts). However, the more political and anti-regime activities and groups are often less visible in different host countries.[35]

Challenges for Emigrant Activities

The activities of the recent Russian emigrants in the seven host countries surveyed face many challenges, some typical for all CSOs and civic actors at the national or transnational levels, and some specific to their situation. This is also representative of issues noted by other studies across the wider emigrant landscape. Key challenges include those in operating transnational networks reliant on online resources, especially concerning cybersecurity; in connecting digital and non-digital activism; and in planning beyond the short term without sufficient resources.[36] Emigrants engaged in these activities usually have limited or no experience in and capacity for applying for funding, especially from foreign sources, and low visibility to democracy and civil society state and nonstate funders. Most are unfamiliar with the compliance requirements of large donor projects.[37] Heavy reliance on very small core teams (including part-time and unpaid members) and a wider cadre of volunteers limits emigrant groups to dealing with urgent matters and to short-termism, with little ability to plan even for the medium term for activities or capacity development. Burnout is a widespread reality with the recent emigration now in its third year.

Many activists experience financial precarity or employment insecurity, and they have been affected by the volatility in the ruble exchange rate. For example, in one mid-2022 survey 49% of emigrant respondents reported having savings that would last less than three months.[38] Those without large resources to live on and to keep up their professional activities also face the risk of de-professionalization as they must seek whichever opportunities to earn money.[39] The Russian authorities are pressuring emigrants by cutting financial access to the country or by making renewal of passports and access to official documents only possible there.[40] More financial harm can come from Russia's February 2024 law on seizing property of people criticizing the war. There is a strong prospect that lack of funding for emigrants' groups will drive many to less civic engagement as they seek to ensure their and their family's livelihood. A further challenge comes from the Russian authorities' efforts at getting some categories of emigrants to return; for example, through pressure on employers to restrict remote work or to lure back IT workers.[41]

Over time, the emigrants in Armenia, Georgia, and Serbia—the non-EU countries easy for Russian emigrants to enter and stay in—have reported that their situation has become more restrictive or less safe, in different ways and for country-specific reasons. This comes from a combination of security concerns of the host governments and varying degrees of anti-Russians sentiment, including in some cases fueled by Russian disinformation. There are also reports in Serbia of opposition to emigrant activities by the official Russian representation in the country.

Security is also a major concern for civically or politically active individuals and groups. As their predecessors from earlier emigration, they risk infiltration, destabilization, and cyber and physical attacks by Russia's security apparatus, which is now operating more aggressively abroad with a wartime mindset.[42] There have been reports of Russia's intelligence agencies approaching some activists and journalists before they left the country to try to recruit them.[43] Audio and video deepfakes and other technologies powered by artificial intelligence can pose of growing risk of digital infiltration of online activities, in addition to traditional physical infiltration. Not only emigrants and their assets but also their relatives in Russia can be targeted. One study argues there is variable awareness across the emigrant communities, or at least the "non-oppositional" emigrants, about the variety of personal safety risks and little sharing of advice among themselves or with host governments.[44]

Some challenges to the emigrant activities stem from policies of host-country governments. Sanctions and other restrictive measures against the Russian regime and its supporters—such as against money-laundering and the monetization of online content, or the denial of access to financial, professional, and commercial services in the West—affect individual emigrants and organizations that oppose the regime or do not support it. This makes it harder for them to operate, to grow, and to keep their connections in Russia. The unintended side effects of these measures—such as over-compliance with restrictive measures—also compound the obstacles many emigrants face as a result of having left Russia at short notice and without planning. With emigration stretching into its third year for many, some report difficulty and slowness in securing longer-term stay rights in the EU host countries as a motivation for individuals and projects to relocate.[45] In these countries, some emigrants also report experiencing suspicion and avoidance of the whole community by employers. Concern (for example, in the IT sector) about emigrants' exposure to regime pressure through threats to family members in Russia is also cited. The case of Russian and Belarusian exiled journalists and activists based in Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland being targeted with the Pegasus spyware has raised the issue of host government potentially targeting emigrant communities.[46]

A Phased Process of Exit and Settling

For many if not most of the recent Russian emigrants, emigration is a phased process rather than a single step of leaving for a host country where they settle for the foreseeable future.

Throughout 2022 and into 2023, the emigration situation was dominated by the exit phase—leaving Russia and making initial arrangements on arrival in a host country, often chosen opportunistically based on available travel options and entry and stay rules. The presence of established Russian migration networks—for example, in Israel—also played a key role in the choice of destination.[47] As far as numbers are available, a diminishing share of the emigrants is now still in this exit phase as the initial impact of the invasion and partial mobilization in 2022 has receded, and with those most likely to leave having left. As noted above, some emigrants have chosen or had to return to Russia, and more will face this choice in the future. And there are indications that some who have returned or are considering it intend to try to leave again later. But, barring a worsening of repression or further mobilization, the exit phase of emigration will be less prominent. Some expected that the November 2023 decision by Russia's Supreme Court to ban the "international LGBT social movement" could prompt another wave but this has not happened.

By late 2022, most emigrants realized that being outside Russia would be more than a short-term situation. For the majority, emigration will be for the medium or longer term, and for some permanent, making the settling phase increasingly prominent. Having relocated hurriedly, many expected this would last a few months but later concluded that they would have to stay abroad, if possible, for more than one or two years at least. In a survey in June 2022 already, 41% said they planned to stay for a long period (and 27% forever).[48] A year later, a survey in Armenia and Georgia had 52% and 49% of respondents respectively saying they had not decided for how long they would stay outside Russia, with those aged 18–24 most uncertain (20% and 12% said they had left forever).[49] In another spring 2023 survey in Georgia, 49% said they intended to stay abroad for at least a year and 93% that

they would not go back in the near future.[50] In a 2023 survey of mostly recent emigrants in Türkiye, a third said they would like to stay more than three years.[51]

The increasing longer-term perspective involves for many the wish or need to move on from the initial host country. There is across the emigrant landscape a growing sense that some host countries will be unsuitable beyond the short term for diverse reasons. In the June 2022 survey, 18% said they were planning to move to another host country in the following three months.[52] A growing feeling of precarity since then has reinforced the calculation for many that they will need to move to a more secure one. In the OutRush survey conducted in mid-2023, only 41% of respondents said their status in their host country was stable or somewhat stable regarding their rights overall.[53] The feeling of stability was highest in Israel (67%), Serbia (55%), Germany, and Armenia (53% each), whereas it was particularly low in Georgia (19%) and Türkiye (16%). Israel may also have become a more uncertain location due the war situation. In this context, the estimates presented at the start of this report show a significant drop in the number of Russian emigrants in Kazakhstan, Türkiye and Kyrgyzstan.

Emigrants less or not interested in political or civic matters are likelier to stay in their initial host country as long as living and economic conditions there are good, while those politically concerned or active are likelier to look for one that offers a safer or more enabling environment. Thus, for many the settling phase of emigration has combined making living arrangements in an initial host country and planning to relocate to one more suitable for the medium-to-long term. For some, this process—which could involve more than one move from host country to host country—has already played out.

The increasing longer-term perspective involves for many the wish or need to move on from the initial host country.

A major factor in calculations about moving to a different host country is emigrants' sense of safety, especially in a general context of growing transnational repression. Russia's transnational repression includes the risk of extradition from major host countries—notably in Central Asia but also in the South Caucasus, Türkiye, Serbia or even EU members—that have ambiguous relations with it.[54] High-profile figures in Russia's regime have made statements threatening emigrants with violence; some projects and their founders have been designated as undesirable or as foreign agents; and individuals have been put on arrest lists or given prison sentences in absentia. There are concerns about the existence of agreements between Russia and Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan that require their compliance with requests from Russian authorities, including on extradition, while in Georgia there have been rumors that denials of entry or re-entry are connected to a list provided by Moscow to the authorities.[55] However, there are conflicting reports about the extent to which these governments act to comply with extradition requests.[56] According to the OutRush project, fear of transnational repression is highest in Kazakhstan, followed by Türkiye, Armenia, Georgia, and Germany.[57] The fact that most emigrant political or civic activities take place through non-hierarchical networks reduces the exposure of individuals but it does not remove all safety risks for those involved, especially for those still in Russia.[58] Emigrants are also exposed at the level of attempted family reunification or of threats to relatives in Russia.

By all indications, the dynamic of recent Russian emigrants relocating from a host country will largely involve ones seeking to move to EU or other Western ones. The non-EU countries easiest for Russians to access to date tend to be also the ones where their prospects are more uncertain, as noted above, whereas the EU countries are harder to access but offer more certain prospects once emigrants have been able to obtain some residency status. Non-EU countries with visa-free access or generous rules (sometimes loosely enforced) for temporary or indefinite stays have provided better options in the short term. However, such conditions can also leave emigrants vulnerable to potential changes in the attitude of governments, many of which are authoritarian or autocratic. For example, in 2023, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan tightened their rules regarding visa-runs and obtaining residency.[59]

EU countries with more stringent entry and stay rules offer more stability and predictability to emigrants as their perspective shifts from the short to the medium or long term.

From early 2023, Russian emigrants in Türkiye started reporting that the authorities had reduced or stopped issuing or renewing residence permits.[60] The number of Russians holding one reportedly fell from 154,000 at the end of 2022 to 96,000 in May 2024, and many relocated to Montenegro and Serbia, also driven by the cost of living and difficult banking access in Türkiye.[61] Georgia, where 6% of Russian emigrants have a residence permit, is another example, with some calls already in 2022 for introducing a visa regime for Russians and the issue entangled in domestic politics.[62] One expert argues that Georgia's visa-free regime also means that some emigrants consider moving on due to the risk of denial of reentry, possibly based on their public political activity, whenever they travel as well as to the difficulty in formalizing their residence.[63] The desire to move on from one host country may also be motivated simply by a desire for more personal or family opportunities, including as reportedly in the case of Israel where many emigrants have left for other countries or Russia once they acquired Israeli citizenship.[64]

By contrast, EU countries with more stringent entry and stay rules offer more stability and predictability to emigrants as their perspective shifts from the short to the medium or long term. However, unless there is a substantial change in approach at the union or member-state level, a more widespread desire of Russian emigrants to move there from other host countries will run up against the same obstacles they have faced since 2022. From the post-invasion wave in particular, the issue was heavily securitized in some EU countries.[65] As well as the issues noted above regarding asylum applications, there would have to be a wider and more flexible use by the member states of humanitarian visas as well as "digital nomad", freelance, and special-skills visas. Not all EU countries offer humanitarian visas, though the major destinations among them—like Czechia, France, Germany, Poland, and the Baltic states—do. But the individual handling of cases is slow and the current criteria would exclude many emigrants who have little or no past documented record of civic or political activity that would expose them to repression in Russia.

A more open approach to allowing Russian emigrants entry and stay might be facilitated by the change in tone in the EU debate from the strong focus in 2022 on restrictions and, for several member states, security concerns to one in 2023 that takes the emigrants more as useful for EU interests, weakening Russia, or countering its

propaganda.[66] Some of the more security-conscious EU states have even created tracks for "strategically relevant" Russians to enter and stay.[67] There is also a growing sense that the risk of infiltration by Russian agents through the emigration poses more of a threat to these communities than to host countries, and at the same time that emigrants are best able to identify infiltrators or individuals posing a security risk.

Democratic Russian Civil Society Outside Russia

The existence of a large recent Russian emigrant population including many previously and newly civically and politically active individuals, grouped in diverse organizations, initiatives, and projects—while Russia becomes an ever more hostile environment for their likes—raises the prospect of a democratic Russian civil society developing outside the country. What is more, many recent emigrants not currently active have more opportunities for exposure to and supporting civic initiatives, as well as becoming open to engaging with political debates and activities, than they would have in Russia.

Political engagement against a country's repressive regime and emigration are not mutually exclusive, and they can be mutually reinforcing.[68] And, even if emigration in itself does not politicize people or have a politically liberating effect on them, this does mean that people in emigration are not thinking about politics.[69] For example, in an exit poll—by election-monitoring experts among the emigration—of Russians abroad voting in the 2024 presidential election in 44 countries, those who had left Russia for two years or less made up the largest group of voters (37%) and mostly voted for another candidate than Putin. The exit polling also revealed the extent of the manipulation of the overseas vote by the authorities in favor of Putin, putting it at 15% rather than the official 41%.[70]

Continuation of political engagement is clearly the case for a large share of the recent Russian emigrants as shown by the initiatives that they have engaged in so far as well as the opinions they express. One study identifies over 300 Russian antiwar and resistance grassroots initiatives that have emerged since 2022 wholly or partly outside Russia, mostly formed online.[71] In one 2023 survey, 38% of respondents in Armenia and 37% in Georgia said they felt responsible for Russia's political future, and 50% in Armenia and 40% in Georgia said that they had an obligation to try to influence the political situation there.[72] The OutRush project surveys have repeatedly showed emigrants expressing a strong connection to Russia and interest in politics as well as being a source of information their contacts in the country.[73] A 2024 study of Russians in Cyprus, France, Germany, and Poland showed that more than two-thirds of those who had emigrated since 2022 are interested in politics and that democracy is needed to build country with a high quality of life.[74]

The different activities and collaborations among recent emigrants (and with those from earlier emigration) are seeds for a civil society across host countries that is closely connected to, and supportive of, civil society in Russia. Those who were politically active in Russia have brought their skills in organizing, educating, and connecting to this environment.[75] For example, the humanitarian, self-help, and antiwar activities of diverse

grassroots groups can evolve into or encourage later democracy activities from new sources in Russian society (such as feminist or profession-based groups). Each component of an emerging democratic civil society abroad—not just CSOs, media, or political activists—can be a transmitter of democratic ideas into Russia. They can also be sources of support for actors in the country through their web of connections, not only to Russia's metropolitan centers but also to the regional and local levels.

Younger emigrants are not only seen to have very different views on politics compared to older ones; they are also often the drivers of new grassroots initiatives. This further suggests potential in the recent emigration, given that it skews heavily to the younger demographic groups. The fact that so many of the emigrants are young also can mean that they have a long time ahead of them to be able to return to Russia and play an active civic or political role there. However, it can also mean that some will find it easier to settle permanently in host countries, especially if they have children.

The recent emigrant communities also form a space for the development of bottom-up critical thinking and debate among Russians about the need for democratic political change and about the link between this and the country's colonial/imperial heritage and aggression. This can begin with a more sustained and broad debate among emigrants about the origins of Russia's aggression toward Ukraine (and its other neighbors like Belarus and Georgia), which also would be an entry point into a more general discussion about Russia's past, present, and future.

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There are important challenges in the way of the recent emigration becoming the ground for a democratic Russian civil society abroad. The risk of disillusion is more real the longer emigration lasts. The OutRush project respondents in mid-2023 reported a decline in donations to Russia and in online activities, which may be due to fatigue but also to fear in case they need to return to Russia, as these forms of political engagement are more traceable. Nonetheless, volunteering went on and one-third said they took part in demonstrations.[76] There is anecdotal evidence from several host countries that, after more than two years outside Russia, many active emigrants are experiencing not only burnout but also growing pessimism, in part due to events in 2024 including the death of Alexei Navalny, Putin's heavy-handedly engineered "reelection", and apparent military progress by Russia in Ukraine.

Competition for donor funding for Russian emigrants, which is currently limited, could hurt the collaboration among them necessary to strengthen the wider community. It could also lead to polarization, repeating earlier tensions in Russia over, for example, who received funds.[77] Further emigration waves could worsen this problem, and growing competition for funds could lead to the end of many small and grassroots initiatives. There may also be a risk of tension within organizations and movements that were created in Russia before 2022 between those who stay in the country and those who left; although one study that found some evidence of this displayed on

social networks did not judge it a deep divide.[78] Some emerging groups outside Russia might be wary seeking Western support for practical and image reasons, including in the context of the Kremlin's messaging that democracy is Western or foreign.

There is also a history of politically active Russian emigrants failing to unite or collaborate. A repetition of this would severely undermine not only the political opposition in exile, but also the relations between it and CSOs, or between CSOs and grassroots actors. Observers have noted a tendency for the political opposition to criticize some activists for not directly fighting the regime or for being apolitical or too disorganized. In return, activists, especially at the grassroots, do not see the political opposition as representative of their communities and complain about being neglected or instrumentalized by it.[79] They often see exiled politicians as having lost touch with the reality in Russia in recent years or as grandstanding for Western audiences.[80] Discord is also a risk within the overall emigrant community, with potential gaps between recent and earlier emigrants as well as among recent ones on several issues. These include the war in Ukraine, the conduct of politics and activism, organizing horizontally versus vertically, gender issues, and colonialism/imperialism.[81]

It is not necessarily a problem if there is no single body, coalition, or platform that can claim to speak for the whole of the emigration.

However, a lack of unity or uniformity across the different emigrant actors is not exclusively detrimental. Diversity and pluralism—including contestation among those with competing visions—in the political opposition or the CSO/grassroots sectors or between them, is part of the process of building a democratic civil society. As one analyst noted, "emigration brought together groups that, in more peaceful times, may not have consented or chanced to share a forum."[82] It is not necessarily a problem if there is no single body, coalition, or platform that can claim to speak for the whole of the emigration, or if its components do not employ a single narrative. While such things would have clear benefits, any consolidation of actors in the emigration in this direction should develop naturally rather be engineered prematurely, as artificial consolidation and consonance can also have negative consequences. Consolidation also works better for some goals and situations than others, and therefore can take ongoing or ad hoc forms.

The emigrant civic sector that has emerged since February 2022 is likely to undergo some consolidation driven by circumstances, especially financial factors. Some of its components, such as media actors, could be particularly affected. This would be good in many instances, not least for pooling of resources, but so would be preserving the diversity that brings innovation from new sources. A diverse sector functioning though loose, dispersed networks will also be more difficult for the Russian regime to counter.

Consolidation should not be confused with coordination either. The recent emigrant initiatives, especially grassroots ones, are protective of their independence and are unlikely to give up on their horizontal structures. But most also recognize the importance of coordinating and sharing information. For example, one goal of the Anti-war Initiatives Congress, in Berlin in December 2022, was to build a horizontal network to do so better.[83] Ultimately, any consolidation of the emigrant civic sector will be really impactful only if it comes from internal demand.

A Democracy Support Strategy for Russian Emigrants

One never knows when an opening for democratic change will happen in entrenched autocratic regimes like the one in Russia, but history shows that it can happen out of the blue. The experience of Russia in the 1990s after such an unpredicted moment also confirms that breakthroughs can easily fail to lead to lasting or deep change. One reason for this is that Russian society at that point was not fertile ground enough for new democratic practices and institutions to take root deeply, and not enough was done by Russian actors to address this at the time. Providers of democracy support to Russia too for a long time underestimated the need to help Russian society evolve in this direction alongside their efforts to aid democratic institutions and actors, and before that they had no opportunity to help prepare the ground in society in the time of the Soviet Union and Cold War. Russian activists today are more prepared than those at the start of the 1990s were to react to a political opening; it is important that work also be done at the level of broader society so that it is more receptive to democracy messages in such an event.

Even with Russia becoming totalitarian and in a confrontation with the West, democracy supporters have a chance to do this in part through the recent emigration. This can draw on the development in recent years of the approach to helping civil society by reaching out to a wider range of actors to include more small, local, and diverse ones. This has been applied not only inside countries but also to civil society actors that have fled to multiple locations to escape particularly repressive regimes, such as in the case of Belarus.

To use the window of opportunity opened by the recent Russian emigration, the analysis in this report suggests three key principles for a strategy to support its democratic potential.

Shift emphasis to the settling phase of emigration. Short-term assistance for those exiting Russia and making a new start in an initial host country will still be needed, especially if there are further waves of emigration. What is more, helping new initiatives that offer such support to become more effective and institutionalized also can enable emigrants to engage sooner and more with civic and political activities in their new location. But it is now more necessary to offer more of them paths to greater stability and predictability in their situation, whether this involves them to moving to another host country (especially in the EU) or remaining in their initial one. This requires a calibrated change away from a broad-brush restrictive policy regarding the issuance of residence permits and travel documents alike, targeting not only those emigrants that are clearly politically active but also those already or trying to be civically engaged in a more general sense. This shift should also help them take a longer perspective on pursuing their goals, something they have begun to do as early optimism about success in the short term fades.

Prioritize connectivity within the emigration. Support should not focus excessively on fixed structures, including location-based ones, which are necessary for some types of actors more than others. It should address equally the connectivity and mobility needs of the diverse actors in the Russian emigration as

they will continue to face a fluid and uncertain environment. The recent emigration has led to a wide dispersion of actors across countries but some clustering has taken place organically and with donor support. Those that want to do so but cannot because of practical obstacles should be supported. But encouraging clustering could also incentivize groups and initiatives to move to higher-cost locations, which can increase their sustainability challenge. Active individuals and groups leaving a host country, even when justified, can also reduce the opportunities for apolitical emigrants who remain there to interact with engaged ones. Crucially, even if the focus here is on helping actors outside Russia with their specific challenges, this dovetails with, rather than undermines, the vital goal of their connectivity with the country as this faces increasing obstacles.

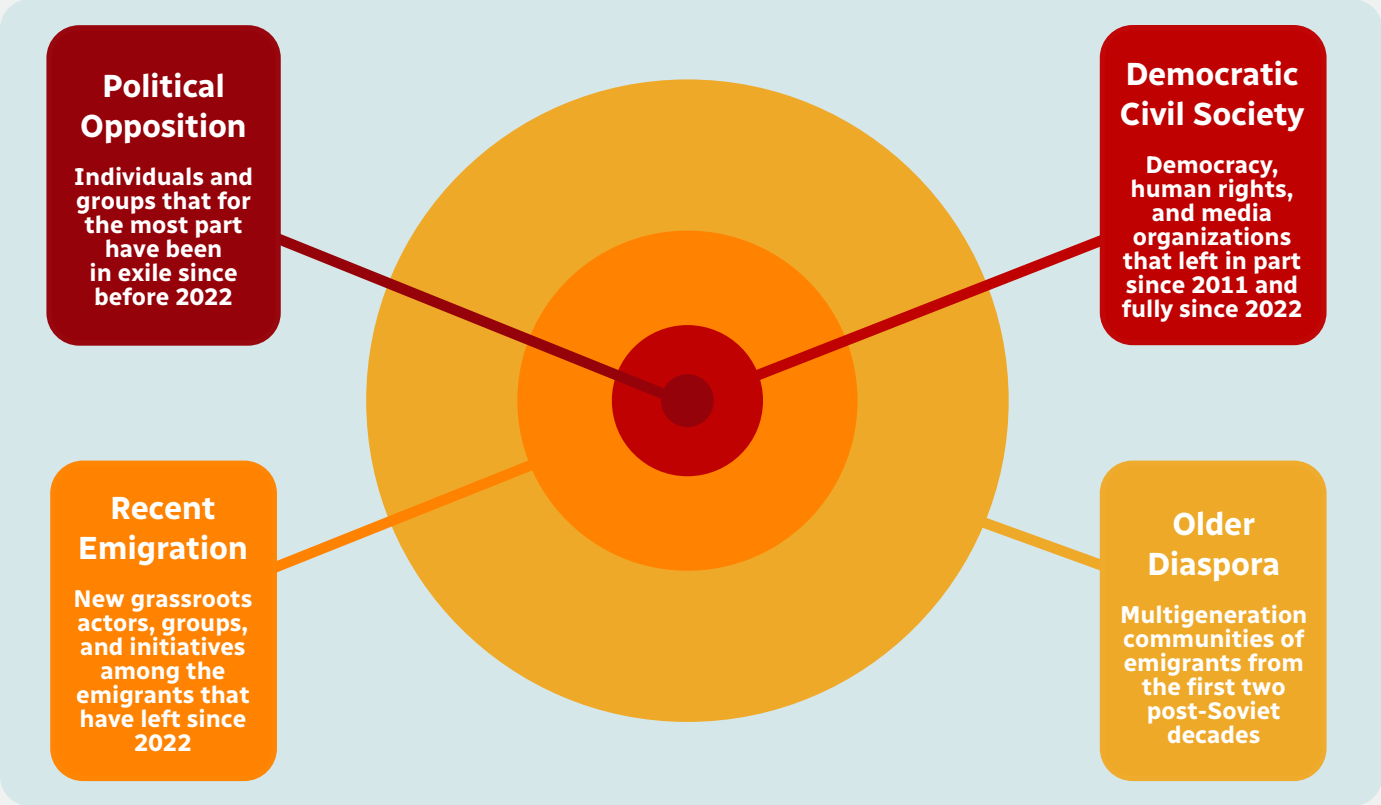
Help weave a democratic civil society abroad. To foster the development of a democratic civil society among those who have left Russia, assistance must combat compartmentalization in the emigrant landscape, and encourage the building of a wider community that can serve as a model in Russia. This will also help the recent emigrants continue seeing themselves as useful stakeholders in the country's future and combat the risk of them distancing themselves over time. For this, the landscape of Russians outside Russia can be seen as four concentric circles, based on their degree of direct political activity, acknowledging that the dividing lines between them are often blurry (see Figure 1). The first, core circle consists of individuals and groups in the political opposition, which for the most part has been in exile since before 2022. The second circle consists of the civil society sector of democracy, human rights, and media organizations that left Russia in stages since 2011. Here, politically or civically active emigrants since February 2022 have joined peers from earlier waves (dating from the 2011–2012 protests, the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea, the 2017–2019 protests, and the 2021 increase in repression). The third circle consists of the emigrants who have left Russia since 2022, and in particular the new grassroots actors, groups, and initiatives emerging among them. This includes those who left out of concern for their safety from repression or out of broad dissatisfaction with the political situation in the country as well as those who did so for a mix reasons, including fear of mobilization or pessimism about their prospects in Russia. The fourth circle consists of the older, multigeneration diaspora from the post-Soviet period, which can be divided into a wave of mostly ethnic repatriation in the 1990s and a wave of economic migration in the 2000s.[84]

A Time-Bound, Staggered Strategy

These principles should underpin the development of programs to tap the potential of emigrants to form a democratic civil society outside Russia in the current window of opportunity. The goal here is not an open-ended but a time-bound democracy support strategy, with a pragmatic approach in an environment shaped by uncertainty about when there might be an opening in Russia and by the fluidity of emigration. In this context, 2030— when Putin's current term as president is due to end, which could be a time of political turbulence—can be the deadline for assessing the strategy

With that date in mind, a democracy support strategy can be staggered. The elements set out below should be initially be implemented within the next 12–24 months, with in most cases seed support offered for a first year to civil society actors and initiatives, especially at the grassroots, identified as having potential to grow and to reach out widely to the apolitical parts of the emigrant communities. This should be reviewed annually with support renewed for same period where progress is observed, or eventually extended in duration only after two years if this

Figure 1. Four Circles of the Russian Emigrants Landscape



is assessed as warranted. This would build a portfolio of initially mostly small, short-term assistance to actors that would have until 2030 the chance to show that they have impact and more long-term potential.

To implement without delay such a strategy, there is an urgent need to identify which new actors can and should receive support to sustain themselves over the next few years. The focus of much support for Russians outside Russia has been on the second circle of democracy, human rights, and media organizations—which should continue as it is a vital sector that has benefited from this over the long term—but it is increasingly necessary to develop more, better, and new support for grassroots actors and initiatives in the third circle. Most funders have extensive expertise in how to support traditional actors like media and CSOs, and in how to identify and evaluate new entrants in this sector. In the context of the recent Russian emigration, here it is thus mostly a matter of improving and adapting existing practice. By contrast, when it comes to emerging and embryonic actors, there is a lack of detailed knowledge in terms of the diversity of groups, initiatives, and activities; of their needs; and of the key issues and dynamics. Funders still have an incomplete picture of latest sprouts of civic activity and self-organization within emigrant communities. It is also important to have a clear picture of which actors now operate completely or almost outside Russia, and which ones retain substantial connections to partners in the country, as

they will need differentiated support. There will also need to be differentiation in the support offered to those in or moving to the EU and to those remaining in non-EU countries.

Funders need to be able to identify new actors, initiatives, projects, and civic spaces quickly, and to direct seed funding to them so that they can take root, and later to assess if they are able grow. Developing a base of actionable knowledge to inform support measures should be done out as soon as possible to allow the prompt implementation of support, given the fluidity of the situation. This knowledge will enable identifying what kinds of support from existing toolkits or new ones can be deployed quickly to foster democratic ideas and practices among the Russian emigrants, especially at the grassroots.

It will be crucial to support the widest range of diverse and dispersed actors of different sizes so that they can keep operating, without make unrealistic demands of them regarding short-term outcomes. The focus should not be only on formal organizations but also on more bounded initiatives and projects, as much as possible responding to the demand from them. Long-term institutionalization is important for many civic actors but not automatically for all—supported initiatives with a short or medium life span, or that remain informal or semi-formal, can also play an important part in the development of a democratic civil society. What is more, it will be still too early for many new initiatives to be able to absorb organizational support at scale. Rather, there should be strong emphasis on small and micro grants. Such initial, small funding should be accompanied by basic capacity-building for civic initiatives. Training offers should include organizational and financial management; legal requirements regulating CSOs; strategic development and fundraising; volunteer engagement and community outreach; physical, psychological and digital safety; and public communication and advocacy.

It will be crucial to support the widest range of diverse and dispersed actors of different sizes so that they can keep operating, without make unrealistic demands of them.

There are great challenges in communicating and coordinating movements transnationally.[85] One tranche of the assistance portfolio should focus on enabling politically and civically active Russian emigrants to connect physically and virtually across different locations, and to focus on flexible networking suited to their mobility challenges. Mobility is a major factor for the emigrants to be able to continue and expand their activities, not only in terms of resettling but also of travel for their work and to meet in different locations. This applies across host countries and in some cases within them, as well as to and from Russia where possible. Support should include the provision of physical and digital security training and secure hardware. When it comes to new grassroots emigrant actors, it is particularly important to support the most flexible connectivity and networking capacity, primarily among themselves across many locations but also with more established CSOs and political actors as appropriate, while respecting their specificity and the different needs that come with it.

Funders need to think as widely as possible in terms of locations and formats for where and how they deliver support. The Russian emigrant communities in different host countries are very diverse and some local contexts are more difficult than others. Using different and sometimes unconventional ways and channels of engaging

emigrant actors is a necessity. Support should not rely only on usual formats, not least since new ones for activities are emerging from within the emigrant landscape that are not always very visible to outsiders; for example, unconventional ways of spreading information among emigrants and to people in Russia through popular culture and art. Informal spaces and initiatives of mutual assistance foster trust among Russian emigrants, and "soft" discussions on political, social, or cultural topics are fruitful in countering regime propaganda and challenging apolitical attitudes. Offering support across a wide range of locations and formats is also key for encouraging and amplifying the new forms of internal discourse and societal critical thinking emerging in the emigrant landscape as well as connections to new antiwar and anti-imperialist initiatives, all of which is a prerequisite for any democratic progress in Russia.

Support should not rely only on usual formats, not least since new ones for activities are emerging from within the emigrant landscape that are not always very visible to outsiders.

Finally, connections are what make a society more than a collection of groups. Thus, for the development of a democratic civil society outside Russia, support should be directed not only within the individual circles of the emigrant landscape but also at connections between them. This is needed between the political opposition and the CSO sectors, between the CSO sector and the grassroots actors in the recent emigrant communities, and between the recent emigrant grassroots actors and the older diaspora. The focus for a support strategy to 2030 should be on relations between the second and third circles, with the aim of preventing civically and politically active emigrants and groups at different degrees of institutionalization staying in silos. The fact that the third circle contains emigrants whose motivations for leaving Russia were not particularly political is not an obstacle to the development of their democratic potential, as the growth of grassroots initiatives among them indicates, and more exposure to the CSO sector can foster this further. And, while this would be a possible goal for later,

Endnotes

1 See, for example, Vladislav Inozemstev, L'exode du siècle: une nouvelle vague d'émigration russe [Exodus of the Century: A New Wave of Russian Emigration], French Institute for International Relations, July 2023, and Maria Domańska and Stefan Ingvarsson, Russia in Exile: Support for Russian Political Migrants as an Instrument to Increase European Security, Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies, November 2023.

2 The term "emigrant" is used here as a catch-all one for people referred to in different contexts as, for example, exiles, refugees, asylum-seekers, "relocants", and migrants. Space does not allow engaging here with the point made that the debate on this terminology among those who have left Russia is one step in the identity-building process needed to forge a community and to enable collective action. See Emil Kamalov et al, In Their Own Voice: Supporting Russia's Wartime Migrants, PONARS, December 2023.

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