



The Dynamics of ‘Geopolitical
Migration’ by Russians to the United
Arab Emirates

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Introduction

When the Russia-Ukraine war erupted in 2022, the surge in the number of Russians leaving their homeland captured global attention. While many media outlets highlighted the Russian exodus to former Soviet territories, such as Kazakhstan, Serbia and Georgia, or to Turkey and Finland,¹ less was said about Russian flight to countries in the Arabian Gulf, specifically the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE and other Gulf countries became attractive options for Russians dealing with the effects of the war, including the subsequent [imposition of western financial sanctions on Russian citizens](#). Dubai became a wartime harbour for wealthy elite Russians seeking political refuge and economic opportunities.² This article examines Russian migration to the UAE amid the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war and western sanctions. It explores the economic, political and social dynamics that underpin this migration trend. The UAE emerges as a particularly compelling case in the study of Russian migration patterns to the Gulf region, underscored by its strategic neutrality and the unique socio-economic opportunities it presents. Unlike its geopolitical counterparts, the UAE has not imposed sanctions on Russia, thereby positioning itself as a geopolitical outlier and a sanctuary for Russian capital and migrants.

¹ PONARS Eurasia, "Russia's 2022 Anti-War Exodus: The Attitudes and Expectations of Russian Migrants," Emil Kamalov, Veronika Kostenko, Ivetta Sergeeva and Margarita Zavadskaya, September 6, 2022.

² The Guardian, "Dubai throws open the doors for the rich Russians escaping sanctions,"

A middle class exodus: The appeal of Central Asia for Russian migrants

The weakening business landscape in Russia, exacerbated by the Russian war with Ukraine and the subsequent comprehensive western sanctions, is a major influence on Russian migration. Companies facing sanctions or poor operating environments have sought sanctuary in the former republics of the Soviet Union and the UAE. The Russian middle class, notably business owners and their families, as well as educated workers, make up a sizable proportion of this migrant exodus.³ The partial mobilization draft for young Russian males has also sparked a mass flight of Russians to other countries.

The escalating impact on Russia of sanctions by the United States and other western countries has resulted in a "brain drain" for Russia and, to some extent, a "brain gain" for the countries that have taken in Russian migrants. Olga Chudinovskikh, from the Department of Economics at Lomonosov Moscow State University, asserts that lower-middle and middle class Russians are increasingly choosing Central Asian states as their preferred destination.⁴

Notably, countries such as Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which are Eurasian Economic Union member states,⁵

Martin Chulov and Joanna Partridge, 26 March, 2022.

³ BBC News, "Wealthy Russians flee to Dubai to avoid sanctions," Sameer Hashmi, May 5, 2022.

⁴ Interview with Olga Chudinovskikh on June 16, 2023.

⁵ Established by the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, the EAEU aims to ensure the



are free-mobility zones for the Russian labour force. This facilitates the movement of Russian expatriates, providing them with unrestricted access to the labour markets of these destination countries. Use of the Russian language throughout the former Soviet republics further eases the transition for these people.

The affordable cost of living in Central Asia makes these states attractive options, although the influx of Russian residents has led to a notable increase in rents. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, have seen significant numbers of Russian arrivals. Kazakhstan's interior minister has stated that around 200,000 Russian citizens have entered Kazakhstan since the mobilization was announced. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan has reported over 7,000 Russians applying for citizenship, and at least 192,000 Russian citizens arriving in the country since the beginning of the conflict. This mass migration has put stress on the local infrastructure and economy, leading to rapid increases in the cost of living, including rents. Hotels and hostels across Central Asia have struggled to accommodate the new arrivals and many locals fear eviction as property owners capitalize on the demand by increasing rents.

free movement of goods, services, capital and labour, and to provide for the comprehensive modernization, cooperation and the competitiveness of the national economies within a global market. The EAEU came into existence on 1 January 2015, building on the foundations of the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. The member states of the EAEU are Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. The EAEU also aims to coordinate its members' economic policies, harmonize their legal systems in certain regulatory areas, and establish a single market for goods, services and labour, in a similar way to the European Union, see

In Tajikistan, rents have increased by between 13% and 20%, while in Uzbekistan apartments that previously rented for \$150 are now going for \$400 per month, exacerbating tensions between locals and new arrivals.⁶ In the UAE, however, the fact that Russians face fierce competition from migrants from nations with established networks in the foreign labour force makes the prospects for employment more challenging in the long term.⁷

A safe haven: The UAE and Russia's geopolitical partnership

Whereas most western countries chose to denounce President Vladimir Putin over his decision to invade Ukraine, and to make it more difficult for Russian citizens and businesses to operate freely, the UAE took a more neutral stance and opted not to impose sanctions. This approach gave the Gulf country a reputation as a safe haven for Russian citizens seeking security and an affluent, cosmopolitan lifestyle,⁸ and as a desirable alternative for Russian businesses, which can continue to function in a more politically stable environment.

[https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/07/what-
eurasian-economic-union](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/07/what-eurasian-economic-union).

⁶ Perri Grace (2022) 'Tracking Russian Migrants in Central Asia', Platform for Peace and Harmony, December 16, 2022,.

⁷ PONARS Eurasia, "Russia's 2022 Anti-War Exodus: The Attitudes and Expectations of Russian Migrants," Emil Kamalov, Veronika Kostenko, Ivetta Sergeeva and Margarita Zavadskaya, September 6, 2022.

⁸ *The New York Times*, "Russia Outside Russia: For Elite, Dubai Becomes a Wartime Harbor," Anton Troianovski, March 13, 2023.



In response to losing its connections with western countries, Russia has turned to other nations for trade, significantly enhancing its bilateral trade with the UAE. This partnership was given a substantial boost in 2022, when a 68% increase in bilateral trade led to a historic peak of \$9 billion. Russian exports contributed \$8.5 billion to this total, a sizable rise of 71%.⁹ It is likely that a significant proportion of this increase in Russian exports was not for domestic consumption but to be re-exported to other countries.

Putin's visit to the UAE on 6 December 2023, during the COP28 climate change conference in Dubai, further symbolized the ties between the two states. Coming on the heels of the UAE's admittance in August that year to the BRICS, an economic and geopolitical alliance founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, Putin's appearance effectively showcased the BRICS' diplomatic counterbalance to US influence. The visit also emphasized the growing military cooperation between Russia and Iran, which was also invited to join the BRICS, adding depth to the geopolitical dynamics in the region.

The economic dimension of the alternative alliance, especially in the light of similar invitations to other OPEC+ members such as Saudi Arabia, could pose a significant threat to the supremacy of the US dollar as the world's reserve currency, and further highlights the collaborative efforts of Russia and the UAE. The UAE's warm reception of

Putin no doubt played a crucial role in attracting Russian migrants and businesses, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship that extends beyond diplomatic gestures to economic and strategic partnerships.¹⁰

While there is no official demographic data on the Russian population in the UAE, estimates range between 100,000 and 500,000 as of February 2022, the majority of whom were from the middle classes. This brain drain and capital flight could result in a gap in Russia's workforce as the best-educated workers and company owners migrate to the UAE and other countries. Russia currently faces a labour shortage in its technology industry, as many of these skilled workers have moved to the UAE, which has also welcomed talented, wealthy individuals and new financial resources into other fields in its economy.¹¹

Mapping Migrant Communities in the UAE

Patterns of migration to the UAE vary significantly among South Asian, Arab and European expatriates, reflecting their diverse economic roles, cultural backgrounds and motives. South Asians from India, Pakistan and Bangladeshis primarily engage in labour-intensive roles and are motivated by economic opportunities and remittances, often on temporary contracts. South Asians from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka make up the largest expatriate ethnic group in the UAE, accounting for 59.4% of the

⁹ Nikita Smagin, 'Is the Blossoming Relationship Between Russia and the UAE Doomed?', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13.04.2023.

¹⁰ The Soufan Center, "IntelBrief: Key Gulf States Help Putin Break out of Isolation," December 11, 2023.

¹¹ TRT World, "Why are wealthy Russian exiles fleeing to Dubai?" Amar Diwakar.



population. Filipinos make up 6.1% of the population.¹²

Iranians rank second numerically among migrant groups in the UAE, following Indians who constitute the largest expatriate community. Arab migrants, both professionals and those fleeing instability, are attracted by the UAE's political stability, professional opportunities and cultural affinity. They are involved in a broad range of sectors. European migrants typically occupy highly skilled and managerial positions, drawn by a tax-free income, a high standard of living and the UAE's strategic global business location. While Europeans and Arabs often have easier access to long-term residency and enjoy a good lifestyle and professional development, South Asians form cohesive communities around nationality and occupation, with a primary focus on economic improvement and temporary employment opportunities.¹³

The UAE has used a narrative of tolerance strategically as part of its cultural diplomacy and foreign policy, emphasizing a migrant-friendly discourse in official speeches, national events and media campaigns. The discourse of tolerance in the UAE influences migration policies and serves as a strategic tool for promoting inclusivity and multiculturalism, attracting skilled migrants

and positioning the country as a hub for economic growth and cultural exchange.¹⁴ The notion of tolerance is embedded in the concept of civic nationalism and rooted in the country's founding principle as a means of fostering peace and discouraging division and conflict. This approach to nationalism is reflected in the UAE's language-in-education policies, which aim to create a unified national identity while respecting the diversity of its population.¹⁵

In the UAE, there is a hierarchy of nationalities structured on social stratification, with distinct divisions between Emirati nationals and the immigrant population. The UAE's social stratification system reflects a clear division between nationals and immigrants, and nationals enjoy privileges under state laws and business regulations. This hierarchy influences various aspects of society, from economic opportunities to social rewards and access to benefits based on nationality or social class. While the UAE is predominantly made up of foreign workers, the dynamics of how different nationalities are viewed or ranked can vary based on a multitude of factors from historical relationships to economic contribution, cultural similarity and government policy.¹⁶

¹² CIA (World Fact Book), United Arab Emirates.

¹³ Françoise De Bel-Air, 'Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in the UAE', GLMM (Gulf Labor Market and Migration) – Explanatory Note - No. 1/2018.

¹⁴ Hamdullah Baycar (2023) 'Promoting multiculturalism and tolerance: Expanding the meaning of "unity through diversity" in the UAE', *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 32, 40–59.

¹⁵ Fatima Esseili (2020). 'Civic Nationalism and Language-in-Education Policies in the United Arab Emirates.' In: McIntosh, K. (eds) *Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching in the Neo-Nationalist Era*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

¹⁶ Manal A. Jamal (2015) 'The "Tiering" of Citizenship and Residency and the "Hierarchization" of Migrant Communities: The United Arab Emirates in Historical Context', *The International Migration Review*, 49(3), 601–839.



The major nationalities in the UAE are structured in a hierarchy with Emiratis at the top, followed by westerners, other Arab nationalities, South Asians, Filipinos and a diverse range of other smaller expatriate groups.¹⁷ Emiratis, the native citizen population of the UAE, comprise approximately 11.6% of the total population.¹⁸ They hold a significant position within the country. Westerners have jobs that require high levels of qualifications or expertise and benefit from legal privileges, such as short-term visa-free stays. Companies in Dubai often use western nationals in their branding, and executive positions are frequently held by individuals with western passports. This group benefits from the positive stereotypes and structural advantages associated with their nationality, including higher salaries and certain performative expectations related to 'westernness'.¹⁹ Diverse Arab nationalities (non-Emirati) include individuals from countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

The sponsorship (kefala) system in the UAE plays a significant role in the stratification of society, particularly among migrant groups. This system binds the legal residency and employment status of foreign workers to their UAE sponsors, creating a hierarchical structure in the expatriate community. Under the kefala system, worker mobility and legal status are contingent on employers,

which often have significant control over terms of employment, ability to switch jobs and, in some cases, the ability to leave the country. This can lead to a precarious situation for lower-wage workers, who may face harsher working conditions and few protections.

Conversely, highly skilled professionals and those eligible for the UAE's Golden Visa programme experience a different layer of this stratification. These groups typically enjoy more privileges, such as longer-term visas, less restrictive sponsorship conditions and the ability to sponsor family members. This gives them greater job mobility and security, and positions them higher up the social hierarchy, often translating into better living conditions, higher social status and greater economic opportunities.²⁰

While the kefala system has undergone reform aimed at improving the conditions and rights of workers, its foundational impact on social stratification persists. It differentiates the migrant workforce into varying degrees of dependency on employers, shaping the social fabric of the UAE and influencing the experiences and opportunities available to different migrant groups.²¹

Given their skill sets and qualifications, Russian migrants in the UAE would typically fall into the category of senior professionals with international contracts. As such, they

¹⁷ Nora Lori (2019) *Offshore Citizens: Permanent "Temporary" Status in the Gulf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ United Arab Emirates Population Statistics 2024, Global Media Insight.

¹⁹ Amelie Le Renard (2021) *Western Privilege. Work, Intimacy, and Postcolonial Hierarchies in Dubai*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

²⁰ Ibrahim Awad (2023) "The Reform of the Kafala System in the GCC States in the 21st Century."

²¹ Freddie Neve, 'Economic and social reform in the UAE: a bid to boost growth and investment', Asia House, June 8, 2012.



would be part of a group that earns higher salaries and has access to other benefits. Russian migrants are likely to be positioned above mid-range professionals and low-paid semi-skilled workers in the social hierarchy of nationalities in the UAE.

To live in Dubai: Cosmopolitan lifestyle and free zones are a big draw for migrants

Dubai has a history of attracting foreign direct investment during global crises by leveraging its strategic location, business-friendly environment and open migration system. The UAE's ability to reinvent itself and revive stalled projects, such as the Dubai Pearl and Palm Jebel Ali, showcases its resilience in the face of economic challenges.

Through the recent surge in Russian migration, Dubai has again strategically positioned itself as a sanctuary in turbulent times for Russian elites seeking to move their capital and staff to safer host destinations. International elites from Syria, Afghanistan and Iran, among others, have also sought out

Dubai as a place of refuge in times of crisis in their home countries.²²

The UAE is viewed as a preferred destination for Russian migrants, particularly those from the lower- and upper-middle classes. The favourable business environment, absence of sanctions, location, weather and tax-friendly regime have attracted Russian investors and entrepreneurs. Major Russian enterprises – such as Yandex, the Russian tech giant; VTB Bank, one of Russia's largest banks; and several Russian investment firms and hedge funds – have also set up shop in Dubai, taking advantage of the UAE's financial free zones,²³ as well as its tax benefits.²⁴ The competitive job market in the UAE provides a niche for Russian-speakers in the service sector, catering to tourists and the Russian-speaking diaspora.

The migration of Russians to the UAE requires various strategies to navigate financial restrictions. Establishing a business in the UAE allows Russians to secure short- and long-term visas for themselves and their families, ensuring business continuity and

²² AP News, "Dubai boom sees Russian cash, high rents and reborn projects," Jon Gambrell, February 13, 2023.

²³ The UAE's financial free zones attract foreign investors and entrepreneurs by providing several compelling advantages. These include 100% foreign ownership without local sponsorship, significant tax benefits such as exemptions from corporation and personal income taxes, and strategic geographical positioning for access to global markets. The zones operate under an independent regulatory framework based on English common law, which facilitates a business-friendly environment. They offer streamlined processes for business set-up, industry-specific

facilities and access to a global talent pool, enhancing operational efficiency and growth opportunities. In addition, these zones provide networking opportunities, unrestricted profit repatriation and a tax-efficient regime, positioning the UAE as a dynamic international business hub. See Ayman Alkhanbouli & Christophe Estay & Dimitrios Tsagdis, 2020. "Business Model and Business Model Innovation of the Free Zones in the United Arab Emirates: A Qualitative Approach".

²⁴ Arabian Business Insight, "UAE sees surge in new Russian businesses," Shane McGinley, January 11, 2023.



providing an alternative to increasingly challenging operations in Europe.²⁵

The UAE offers means for securing long-term residence either by buying property in the country or by making large enough investments to warrant a “Golden Visa”. The UAE provides two primary visa options: a 10-year Golden Residency Visa Programme and a five-year Green Residency. These visas permit immigrants to reside, work and pursue education in the UAE autonomously without a local sponsor, and allows them full ownership of their businesses.²⁶ The Golden Visa was initially introduced in Dubai for a duration of 10 years. Its duration was matched in Abu Dhabi in 2023, extending it from five to 10 years. In a bid to draw in international talent, the UAE eased application conditions in 2023 and broadened the eligibility criteria.²⁷ Cryptocurrency transactions and informal money exchanges, such as *hawala*, have emerged as alternative channels for financial transactions that allow Russians to diversify their portfolios.

²⁵ Deutsche Welle, “Why are rich Russians going to the UAE?” March 12, 2022.

²⁶ The introduction of the Golden Visa programme marked a pivotal shift in the UAE’s approach to foreign talent and investment. Unlike the traditional *kefala* system, the Golden Visa allows for long-term residency (5 to 10 years) and greater autonomy, without requiring a local sponsor or employer. This programme targets investors, entrepreneurs, scientists, outstanding students and other highly skilled professionals, aiming to attract and retain international talent by offering them more stability and freedom within the country. While the programme targets these specific groups on paper, in practice it is accessible to a wider audience. Any individual earning a salary of over AED 30,000 and possessing a university degree meets the criteria

Short-term gain, long-term pain? The pros and cons of allowing Russian investment

The influx of Russian migrants initially contributed to an economic upturn in the UAE, particularly in the real estate sector. Property purchases by Russians surged by 67% in the first three months of 2022, driving up demand for luxury villas and apartments. Dubai, in particular, witnessed a revival of abandoned real estate projects, driven by Russian investors seeking a safe haven for their wealth.²⁸

Some affluent Russians with construction industry expertise became involved in the development of residential buildings and hotels, raising construction quality standards in Dubai. Russian investors also acquired clusters of homes in Dubai, establishing “Little Moscow” communities in the emirate, in some cases looking to partner with locals.²⁹ Since mid-2023, however, there has been a slowdown in Russian purchases of real estate in Dubai, which can be attributed to multiple

for application, provided they fulfil other basic residency requirements. This makes the Golden Visa an attractive option for a wide range of professionals seeking stability and opportunities in the UAE’s dynamic economic environment. See Magdalena Karolak, ‘Long-Term Residence: GCC Countries Making a Shift Toward Inclusive Social Policies’, GLMM Policy Brief, No.8. September 2024.

²⁷Magdalena Karolak, ‘UAE as a Center of Innovation: Towards Attracting Global Talent’ GLMM Policy Brief, No.5. September 2023.

²⁸ CNBC, “Villas by the sea: Rich Russians fleeing sanctions are pumping up Dubai’s property sector,” Natasha Turak, July 7, 2022.

²⁹ Zawya, “Russians snap up plots of land to build ‘Little Moscow’ in Dubai,” October 2, 2023.



factors from the devaluation of the rouble by one-third to a natural ebb after a surge in buying following the invasion of Ukraine. Some Russians who initially resettled in Dubai have decided to move elsewhere. Russians were avid buyers of UAE property in 2022, flooding the market amid international sanctions on Russia. However, a more recent shift has seen some Russians taking profits or exiting deals they can no longer afford.³⁰

Real estate experts observe a tapering of property prices in Dubai, especially in luxury developments such as Bluewaters. Some Russians are reportedly trying to exit deals due to unexpected increases in final payments, while others are selling holdings at a loss or defaulting. Real estate investors are also facing limitations on money transfer services as Russian banks look to reduce their risk. Overall, the dynamics of Dubai's real estate market are changing as Russians step back and buyers from other parts of the world step in.³¹

The influx of Russian migrants and their investments in the UAE's real estate sector have had various positive spillover effects across economic sectors beyond real estate. Increased investment has stimulated the banking sector, as Russian migrants require local bank accounts, loans and other financial services. Wealth management, investment banking and financial advisory services have seen higher demand from affluent migrants seeking to manage their wealth and investments effectively. The increased

presence of Russian migrants has also led to a boost in the tourism sector, as friends and relatives visit, which in turn benefits hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues.

In addition, entrepreneurs and investors among Russian migrants might also be contributing to the tech ecosystem, either through direct investment in start-ups or by establishing their own ventures. This could stimulate innovation, job creation and the growth of the tech sector. The UAE views the influx of skilled and entrepreneurial individuals from the Commonwealth of Independent States countries as beneficial, and aligned with its goals of fostering innovation, developing the digital economy and nurturing a start-up ecosystem. The UAE has expressed an interest in investing in Russian high-tech firms, and the relocation of Russian tech professionals could bolster the nation's digital sector.³²

The strengthening of trade and business relations between the UAE and Russia in recent years can be illustrated by several key metrics and developments, particularly in increased air connectivity, trade volumes and investment flows. The number of flights between Russia and the UAE has seen a notable increase, particularly around major business hubs such as Dubai. For instance, Emirates and other airlines have increased their flight frequencies to Moscow, St Petersburg and other Russian cities. This enhanced air connectivity facilitates business travel and tourism, which are crucial for

³⁰ Bloomberg, "Russians Lose Taste for Suddenly Pricey Dubai Property," Lisa Fleischer, November 7, 2023.

³¹ *Le Monde*, "Dubai's influx of Russians causes real estate turmoil," Ghazal Golshiri, May 24,

2023, and The Cradle, "Russia-fueled Dubai real estate boom winds down," November 8, 2023.

³² Triska Hamid, 'Running in parallel, the Russian startup ecosystem in Dubai', Wamda, 29 May 2023.



economic exchanges and personal mobility between the two states.³³ Companies from both countries have entered into joint ventures and partnerships. For example, Mubadala Investment Company from the UAE has made significant investments in Russian energy projects and technology firms, enhancing collaboration in sectors crucial to both economies.

Concerns have also been raised, however, about the potential reputational risks for the UAE as it becomes a conduit for Russian capital flowing into the global market. The influx of Russian money into Dubai has raised concerns at the international level, particularly regarding money laundering and opaque ownership structures. The US Treasury has expressed apprehension about Russian funds entering the Dubai real estate market, emphasizing the need for vigilance, and its Financial Action Task Force (FATF) placed the UAE on its “grey list” in March 2022.³⁴ Worries about the country’s efforts to counter money laundering and terrorist financing prompted calls from the FATF for increased regulatory measures.³⁵ Despite these initial worries, however, Dubai’s proactive approach and adherence to international standards have helped to prevent major reputational damage. The economic benefits, including contributions to sectors such as real estate, finance and

tourism, underscore the positive outcomes of the migration. By focusing on attracting legitimate businesses and fostering social integration, Dubai has successfully shifted its image from a potential “Russian haven” to a diverse and welcoming financial hub.

The pain of the brain drain: Russia’s reaction to loss of skilled labour

In addition to the economic brain drain, the significant exodus of Russians has raised long-term national security concerns for Moscow. It is estimated that more than 100,000 IT specialists and engineers emigrated from Russia in 2022, many of whom worked either for the military in cybersecurity or for the government’s programme to replace imports sanctioned by the West. The Russian government has been debating various countermeasures, including plans to increase income taxes on Russians working for Russian enterprises overseas. These plans were met with opposition, however, most likely because of fears about their unpopularity, particularly in the run-up to the presidential elections in 2024. More recently, the Russian government has changed tack and is making efforts to lure back IT specialists with incentives such as draft deferment, low mortgages and free air

³³ Peden Doma Bhuta, ‘Russia is now Dubai’s No.2 Source Market’, Skift, March 15, 2023.

³⁴ In February 2024, the FATF, an international body combating money laundering and terrorist financing, removed the UAE from its grey list, recognizing the country’s extensive efforts at reform to align its anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing frameworks with global standards. This development is seen as a boon for the UAE’s business environment,

enhancing its international image and attracting investments by signalling a secure and transparent market. Kim Medina, ‘UAE removed from the FATF grey list: What this means for businesses’, Arabian Business, February 26, 2024.

³⁵ Bloomberg, “UAE Tightens Scrutiny on Russian Firms Amid Pressure From US,” November 23, 2023.



travel. Russian IT companies are now actively recruiting Russians from neighbouring countries through trade shows and events.³⁶

The economic implications of this emigration are of paramount concern to the Russian authorities. The departure of skilled professionals and business owners could result in a temporary or permanent loss of innovation, economic productivity and tax revenues. This challenge is compounded by the fact that efforts to bring back those who left have proved ineffective, as people are reluctant to return amid ongoing geopolitical uncertainties.

Recent Russian migrants exhibit notable demographic differences compared to the wider Russian population. They tend to be younger, from more privileged backgrounds, better educated and more urban. Despite these advantages, they grapple with distinct challenges, particularly apprehension over retaliation by the Russian state, especially among those who actively participated in political protests in their home country. A segment of these Russian migrants continues to engage in grassroots political activities,

despite the obstacles put in their way by the Russian government, such as legislation on “foreign agents” and limited access to financial services. Political activism might also be tempered by the culture of the host country, which could see those participating as potential security threats.³⁷

Conclusion

The migration of the Russian middle class to the UAE reflects the complex interplay between geopolitics and migration in the 21st century. While providing a refuge for businesses and individuals seeking a stable environment, this trend poses challenges for the Russian authorities, which must navigate a delicate balance between retaining skilled professionals and addressing broader economic concerns. It also produces significant economic opportunities for the UAE, like other host states of Russians globally, as capital and human capital flight from Russia offer significant value, diversity and complex scenarios for the UAE economy in the long run.

³⁶ Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, “In From the Cold: The Struggle for Russia’s Exiles,” Center for European Policy Analysis, December 12, 2023.

³⁷ Emil Kamalov, Veronica Kostenko, Ivetta Sergeeva, and Margarita Zavadskaya, “New Russian Migrants Against the War: Political Action in Russia and Abroad,” Paper #5, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn, 2023.



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