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Abstract

The overarching goal of this working paper is to reveal how post-communist transformations affected population distribution in the Moscow Region. The article is integral to a project focusing on the evolving geography of Russia's shrinking population. This is the second of three working papers envisioned by this project. Our first paper contained our version of Russia's 2026 population projection disaggregated into federal districts. [Among other things, we showed that Russia is unable to sustain itself demographically and depends on immigration to an ever-increasing extent.]

There is, however, one federal district that can prevent population decline and even ensure growth through domestic migration alone, although that would boost demand for immigrants elsewhere, that is, in all other districts. The district in question is the Central Federal District (CFD), containing Moscow and 17 other regions.

Given the existing polarization of Russia's settlement system and even of that of the CFD itself, whereby a disproportionately high share of migrants both domestic and international head to Moscow, we set out to focus our further research on Moscow and its environs and subsequently on regions whose population is declining (Novosibirsk) or is relatively stable (Stavropol).

We first outline the exceptional role of the Moscow Region in Russia in terms of population dynamics and migration and as the niche for Russia's largest urban agglomeration. We then characterize the migration-induced population growth of Moscow and the Moscow Oblast, including upward adjustments of their population estimates in the wake of the 2002 census. The following three sections of the article reflect our attempt at disaggregation of previously uncovered trends. We then look into recorded and unrecorded migration streams and into origins of labor migrants to Moscow and to the Moscow Oblast. Finally, we switch to a larger-scale analysis, focusing on population growth poles within the most ecologically clean and "prestigious" western sector of the Moscow Oblast.