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Forced Migrants from Central Asia in Terms of Archival Documents (1991-2002): A Case Study of the Chelyabinsk Region

Abstract

The article draws on the documents from the United State Archive of Chelyabinsk Region and the State Archive of the Russian Federation to examine forced migration from the former Soviet republics to the South Urals in 1991-2002. The choice of chronological framework is due to the

fact that this period saw the peak of forced migration caused by the outflow from the military conflicts zones and due to the difficulties of post-socialist transit in the states of Central Asia. The 2002 Population Census allows the author to draw the balance of these processes and to identify the number of the region's residents who arrived from the former Soviet Union republics between 1989 and 2002. The Chelyabinsk region is a part of the Russian-Kazakh frontier. After the collapse of the USSR and the reformatting of state borders, this borderland was an extended settlement area of the Russian-speaking population, mostly leaning towards moving from Kazakhstan. Due to a sufficiently high level of development, transport accessibility and low start-up opportunities for migrants, these border regions became one of the main places for receiving forced displacements from the Central Asian states, mostly Kazakhstan. In the current historiographical situation, a holistic reconstruction and detailing of these large-scale migrations requires a reliance on new historical sources. Archival documents of regional migration services contain valuable data on the number of forced migrants, their main areas of origin, socio-demographic characteristics, and other important parameters. The documents revealed in the fonds of the OGACHO and the GARF have showed that, at the initial stage, the backbone of migration flows was the Russian-speaking population from neighboring Kazakhstan, able-bodied, with a sufficiently high level of skills. This compensated for demographic losses due catastrophic growth of mortality and decline in birth rate. Thus, according to the migration service of the region, migration compensated for more than half of the total population loss, without any significant impact on its ethnic composition. At the same time, migrants encountered numerous difficulties in integrating into Russian society, which were rarely reflected in the specific documentation of state institutions. Many of the arrived, for various reasons, were not included in the forced migrants and refugees statistics due to numerous bureaucratic difficulties and an objective lack of resources for helping such a large number of people.

Keywords

Migration, post-Soviet space, social dynamics, Russian-speakers, Russians in Central Asia, forced migrants, refugees, frontier.

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