

Chapter 15

Diaspora Policies, Consular Services and Social Protection for Russian Citizens Abroad



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15.1 Diaspora Policy Infrastructure and Key Policies

15.1.1 *The Russian Diaspora and its Relations with the Homeland*

Russian diaspora is an arguable concept, and the very existence of the Russian diaspora is challenged; it is neither Russian because it includes not only ethnic Russians, nor diaspora since the home country – the Soviet Union (USSR) – no longer exists (Suslov 2017). However, it is this Soviet diaspora which remains in the focus of the authorities of the Russian Federation since collapse of the USSR. When in 1999, the long-awaited law On Support of the Compatriots Abroad was adopted, the political agenda was focused on Russian-speaking population and ethnic Russians who were still living in former Soviet republics, so-called ‘near abroad’.

Russian nationals residing abroad is just a sub-category of a broader category of ‘compatriots abroad’ introduced in the Russian legislation in 1999.¹ The ‘compatriots’ definition came to cover also those who had citizenship of the USSR and their descendants, irrespective of current citizenship. As a result, the Russian nationals residing abroad are not covered by special Government program, but are included into a broad array of measures targeting ‘compatriots abroad’ in general. For

¹ According to the Federal Law “On the State Policy of the Russian Federation in Respect of the Compatriots Abroad” of May 24, 1999, the category of “compatriots abroad” also covers people who had USSR citizenship, descendants of those who have been historically living in the territory of the Russian Federation, and persons whose relatives on the direct ascending line lived in the territory of the Russian Federation earlier, including foreign citizens and stateless persons.

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example, the state program of the work with compatriots abroad makes no distinction between Russian nationals abroad and other categories of compatriots.²

One should bear in mind that by late 1990s when the law on compatriots was adopted, the stock of Russian nationals abroad was made of not only emigrants who voluntarily left the home country in the 1990s, but also of the residents of the former Soviet republics who had used the opportunity to obtain a Russian national passport while remaining abroad. In absolute terms, during the post-Soviet period 1992–2013, Russian citizenship was acquired by 8 million people: 5.8 million were naturalized through the Federal Migration Service of Russia upon arrival to Russia, while 2.2 million people obtained Russian citizenship while living abroad, through representative offices of the Russian Federation (Prokhorova 2017). Unfortunately, there is no data on how many of those who acquired Russian citizenship in the 1990s without coming to Russia, were still living outside Russia.

Currently, Russian nationals abroad constitute about 1/5 of all compatriots residing abroad, or around five million people. These are concentrated in ‘far abroad’ destinations, primarily in Israel, the United States of America (USA) and Germany. According to the 2010–2011 census data in OECD countries, the number of people of Russian origin there was about 660,000 people or 0.46% of Russia’s population (146.7 million people as of January 1, 2019). It is less than in case of Germany (1.5%) and Great Britain (2.19%), but a little bit more than in case of Turkey (0.34%). Russian researchers estimate that, in the period 2011–2017, roughly 2.7 million people left the country to live somewhere beyond former Soviet republics, and around half of these emigrants keep Russian citizenship (Mkrtychyan and Florinskaya 2018).

Up to 2005, compatriots abroad have been regarded by Russian authorities as a rather static category of Russian-speaking population in the near abroad, in need of cultural and language support. However, the situation changed in 2006 with the introduction of the State Program for Assisting Compatriots Residing Abroad in Their Voluntary Resettlement in the Russian Federation (further – the compatriots resettlement program). This program aimed to attract Russian-speaking population from the post-Soviet space in order to compensate for the natural population decrease in Russia. The compatriots continue coming mainly from Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Armenia, i.e. from near abroad, while the share of participants coming from beyond the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – Lithuania, Germany – is quite insignificant. Upon resettlement in Russia, compatriots without Russian citizenship could acquire the Russian passport through a simplified procedure and claim all relevant social protection benefits including pension, maternity capital, unemployment benefits, etc. These benefits can be attractive for compatriots from comparatively economically worse host countries. While for those returning from European destinations, the refugee crisis would serve the key driver of resettlement – as the case of the Russian Germans. In 2012, the compatriots resettlement program was prolonged for an indefinite period. In the new Migration Policy

²The State Program on the Work with Compatriots Abroad for the period of 2015–2017.

Concept of November 2018, the resettlement of compatriots is declared as one of the priority areas of work. It is estimated that Russia would need to have around 300,000 compatriots to resettle annually to compensate for the natural population decrease.

Today, Russian diaspora policies have a clear post-Soviet focus, prioritizing compatriots in the near abroad. In the past 25 years, the role of the Soviet diaspora as a specific area of policy has changed due to demographic and geo-political factors.

15.1.2 Diaspora Infrastructure

The main implementing agency in charge of compatriots' policies is the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (called briefly *Rossotrudnichestvo*), established in 2008. Together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Rossotrudnichestvo* is responsible for the implementation of the state program of work in relation to compatriots abroad. The network of Russian consulates and the network of representative offices of *Rossotrudnichestvo* abroad aim to cover the needs of Russian compatriots and nationals in host countries.

Nowadays, *Rossotrudnichestvo* is represented in 80 states of the world by 95 representative offices: 72 Russian centers of science and culture in 62 countries, and 23 representatives of the Agency serving in the Russian embassies in 21 countries. This vast network of representative offices was inherited by *Rossotrudnichestvo* from its predecessors – the Soviet Union Society for Cultural Cooperation Abroad (established in 1925), the Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Cooperation Abroad (acting since 1958), and the Russian International Centre of Science and Culture (operating in 1994–2008). The key mission of the mentioned agencies was humanitarian cooperation, including organization of exchange visits of academia, exhibitions, Russian language training, etc. Today, the overseas offices of *Rossotrudnichestvo* continue functioning as Russian cultural centers. However, unlike its predecessors, *Rossotrudnichestvo* is included into the Government system and is responsible for the implementation of the Government program on the work with compatriots abroad, with a focus on the CIS, i.e. the near abroad. On top of that, *Rossotrudnichestvo* plays the role of a soft power instrument, promoting a positive image of Russia abroad.

The law on compatriots of 1999 had introduced new elements of the diaspora institutional infrastructure. In particular, the law established the World Congress of Compatriots – the supreme representative body providing interaction of compatriots with home country governmental bodies and authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Each World Congress of Compatriots brings together high-level public officials, including the President of Russia, and the delegates of the coordination councils of the Russian society organisations working abroad in more than 90 host countries. The work of the coordination councils in the host

countries and the participation of the delegates is funded by Russia in the framework of the state program with compatriots.

The distribution of the governmental funds allocated for the work with compatriots abroad is overseen in Russia by the Government Commission on the Compatriots Living Abroad, established in 1994. The Commission is headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. At the legislative level, in the Parliament (State Duma), there currently works the State Duma Committee on CIS, Eurasian Integration and Compatriots Abroad. Finally, within the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, there is the Commission on Development of Public Diplomacy and Support of the Russian Nationals Abroad. The latter is probably the only institution which explicitly indicates the Russian nationals abroad as the target category of population whose interests it aims to represent.

The state program on the work with compatriots abroad does not cover issues related to the compatriots' resettlement. There is a separate federal program implemented by the Ministry of Interior which oversees internal and international migration issues. The Ministry has representative offices dealing with migration issues in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to process the applications from the compatriots who wish to participate in the resettlement program. About 45% of all applications are submitted in Russia.

Within such diaspora infrastructure, Russian consulates stand out since they have been concerned primarily with the needs of the Russian citizens residing abroad. However, as of 2017, about 60 Russian consulates in 40 countries – both in the near abroad and in the far abroad (for example, in Germany and Brazil) – were involved in providing consultations and processing applications for the compatriots resettlement program.³ Thus, consulates came to serve both current and prospective Russian nationals.

15.1.3 Key Engagement Policies

Speaking about key policies in relation to Russian nationals abroad, it becomes evident that it is rather problematic to single out this specific area. As mentioned, there is no normative document addressing directly this category of people, but there are rather several laws concerning specifically Russian nationals abroad. Even in this case, the distinction should be made between 'Russians in the near abroad' (i.e. CIS) and 'Russians in the far abroad'. The first category is covered by legislation related to the CIS and additional bilateral agreements between Russia and former Soviet republics. Examples of laws targeting Russians in the far abroad include bilateral agreements on the avoidance of the double taxation, bilateral agreements in the field of social protection, and the most recent legislative initiative on the

³ Monitoring report on the implementation of the State Program for Assisting Compatriots Residing Abroad in Their Voluntary Resettlement in the Russian Federation for the Q4 of 2017.

“currency resident status” (see details below) of the Russian nationals abroad. However, it makes sense to start with a brief description of the home country policy towards compatriots abroad which covers also Russian nationals in the near and far abroad and makes no distinction between them.

Culture, Religion, Language and Education

The state policy in relation to the compatriots abroad is declared to be an essential part of both internal and external policy of the Russian Federation. The framework of relations between Russia and compatriots abroad is outlined across four pillars of support provided by the home country: 1) support in the field of fundamental human and civil rights and freedoms; 2) support in the economic and social areas; 3) support in the field of culture, religion, language and education; 4) support in the field of information.⁴

The third pillar – culture, religion, language and education - constitutes the major part of home country efforts in relation to compatriots abroad as reflected in the state program on the work with compatriots abroad. In terms of the Russian language promotion and preservation, the law states that home country authorities create conditions for learning the Russian language, getting education in Russian and providing access to information in Russian. Additionally, home country authorities are to support training of the Russian language teachers for work abroad.

For a long time, Russia’s efforts in the area of the Russian language promotion have relied on the facilities of the Russian Centers of Science and Culture, established abroad by the predecessors of *Rossotrudnichestvo*, which are now acting as representative offices of *Rossotrudnichestvo* abroad. Such path dependency approach continued up to 2007, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Science and Education jointly established the Russian World Foundation with a mission to promote the Russian culture and the Russian language learning abroad. The Foundation launched a separate network of Russian Centers implanted in the educational organisations in 48 countries. In 2018, *Rossotrudnichestvo* and the Russian World Foundation signed a cooperation agreement to combine effectively their efforts in the promotion of the Russian language learning in CIS.

In the post-Soviet space, the status of the Russian language is a specific area of concern for the Russian authorities. While most ethnic Russians moved to Russia in the 1990s, those who remained outside turned into ethnic minority, and the Russian language lost its positions. Nowadays, only half of the population in 14 former Soviet republics speak Russian. On the one hand, it is regarded by Russian authorities as a sign of weakening of the Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, low level of the Russian language knowledge appears to constrain the social integration of the labour migrants coming to Russia from Central Asia republics.

One of the reasons of the worsening of the Russian language learning in the post-Soviet space is the limited access to the Russian language education in former

⁴Federal Law #99 “On State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to the Compatriots Abroad” (1999).

Soviet republics. This turns out to be especially challenging in the Baltic states. One of the most recent instruments addressing this problem of access to the Russian language education is the Russian federal program “The Russian Language” for the period 2016–2020. In 2015, the President approved the Concept paper “Russian Schools Abroad”. The concept paper envisages the creation of four types of Russian schools providing access to the Russian language education both to Russian nationals permanently residing abroad and to compatriots in the host countries. The state support is to be provided to the organizations included in the register of Russian schools abroad. Currently, the register includes over 2000 schools and its maintenance is carried out by *Rossotrudnichestvo*.

Additionally, the Russian Federation provides support to compatriots in getting education in Russia, including diploma recognition based on bilateral agreements with selected countries. In the Federal law on Education, it is stated that the Russian Federation provides scholarships for foreigners and compatriots to study in Russian higher education institutions.⁵ In 2018, the quota for the number of foreigners and compatriots was defined at 15,000 students. The scholarship covers education fees, but does not cover living expenses and medical insurance. The room in the dormitory is provided. The selection of candidates is conducted in two stages: first, it is an interview in a representative office of *Rossotrudnichestvo* abroad, and secondly, it is the selection made by the university. Recently, *Rossotrudnichestvo* launched a thematic web portal *Russia.study* to facilitate online applications for enrollment into Russian universities and applications for the scholarship to cover education fees. Additionally, students-compatriots are in some regions eligible for city scholarship, for example, in St. Petersburg.⁶

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is also rather actively involved in the work with compatriots abroad. ROC is a frequent beneficiary of the grant program of the Russian World Foundation: the Department of External Church Affairs organizes cultural festivals, meetings with the Russian diaspora community, workshops and the Russian language courses for diaspora. The head of the ROC regularly participates in the World Congress of Compatriots.

Economic and Social Areas

Access to economic and social protection schemes is available only to those compatriots who have Russian citizenship and is based on the national legislation, multilateral or bilateral agreements. For example, Russia is a signatory to a Treaty for the Prevention of Double Taxation with over 80 countries all over the world. Additionally, all Russian nationals in retirement age are eligible for Russian pensions. Special

⁵In accordance with the Federal law #273 “On the Education in the Russian Federation”, as of 29 December 2012.

⁶The Law of St Petersburg “About establishment of bonuses, scholarships and awards in St Petersburg”/Government of the city of St Petersburg grants special student scholarship to 15 compatriot students from Baltic states studying in St. Petersburg. The scholarships are granted annually since 2005.

agreements address the payment of pension in the «near abroad»,⁷ and in several countries of the ‘far abroad’, namely Lithuania, Spain and Israel.⁸

Two most recent legislative initiatives targeting Russian nationals abroad are associated with control mechanisms rather than support measures, which is explained by geo-political constraints. In 2014, amendments to the law ‘On Citizenship’ imposed on all Russian nationals an obligation to report about having a second citizenship or long-term residence of another country. Citizens residing permanently abroad are required to do that within 30 days period after their arrival to Russia. The notification cannot be submitted through a consulate.

Under the 2018 amendments introduced into the federal law “On currency regulation and currency control”, all Russian citizens are considered currency residents irrespective of their country of permanent residence. Currency residents are required to present account statements to the tax authorities for accounts/deposits held with banks which operate outside Russia. According to the amendments made, these requirements will not apply to Russian nationals with ‘special resident status’ who spend more than 183 days outside Russia in a calendar year. However, the ‘special resident’ status is established based on the results of the calendar year, rather than when a currency transaction is made, or an account is opened abroad. Therefore, the authorities have the right to request documents confirming the duration of stay outside Russia and the fact of crossing the Russian border.

Political Participation

According to the Russian consulates’ statistics, the number of Russian nationals abroad (registered either as permanent or temporary residents of a foreign country) amounts to about two million voters, i.e. people aged 18 and older. It should be noted, however, that the consulates’ data is inconsistent since the registration with the consulate is voluntary.

Russian nationals abroad constitute about 2% of the Russian voters. They can hardly radically influence the results of the elections, but their participation rate is higher than voters in Russia. In 2016, the greatest number of voting age Russian nationals was found in Germany (512,292 people), Moldova (183,194 people) and Israel (163,543 people). In the State Duma elections of 2016, the leaders by absolute number of Russian nationals who voted abroad were Moldova, Abkhazia⁹ and Latvia. According to the Central Electoral Committee of the Russian Federation, 474,616 Russian nationals abroad voted at the presidential elections of 2018, and 85% of them voted for Vladimir Putin (Mislivskaya 2018).

⁷“Agreement on guarantees of the rights of citizens of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the field of pensions” as of 1992.

⁸For example, “Agreement between the Russian Federation and the State of Israel on cooperation in the field of social security”, as of 2016

⁹The Republic of Abkhazia is a state in northwestern Georgia, recognized by the Russian Federation, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Syria. While Georgia lacks control over Abkhazia, the Georgian Government and most United Nations Member States legally consider Abkhazia a part of Georgia, whose Constitution designates the area as the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

Consulates play the leading role in coordinating participation of Russian nationals abroad in the elections. Traditionally, polling stations are arranged in the consulate buildings. According to the general rule, Russian nationals abroad can vote in presidential elections, legislative elections and referendum. To be eligible to participate, a person should have a Russian national passport and be at least 18 years old. Russian nationals abroad vote in person in a consulate and/or polling station. Russian citizens permanently living outside Russia, having citizenship or long-term residence of another country, do not have passive voting rights.

15.2 Diaspora Policies and Social Protection in the Russian Federation

All Russian nationals residing abroad have a right to two types of benefits: on the one hand, the pension and, on the other hand, a family benefit called ‘maternity capital’ paid by the home country authorities. Both benefits are handled by the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation (PFR). The PFR website provides exhaustive information and regular updates of the rules concerning pension payments to Russian nationals residing abroad.¹⁰ Usually, the websites of the consulates have a special section devoted to pensions and maternity capital. Additionally, consulates inform about relevant bilateral agreements which make Russian nationals residing abroad eligible to some social protection benefits.

Application for both the pension and the maternity capital can be handled through the consulates which accept the documents or/and issue the relevant documents and send them further to the PFR. In the framework of bilateral agreements, as well as in case of regional organisations membership (CIS, Union State, Eurasian Economic Union), home country obligations in relation to pension payments are shared with host country authorities. In such cases, consulates can be also operational providing the service of requisition of documents from the home country.

15.2.1 Unemployment

Russian nationals residing abroad are not eligible for unemployment benefits paid by Russia. However, special rules exist for Russian citizens residing in Belarus. According to the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the State of Belarus on Cooperation in the Field of Social Security, the registered Russian unemployed is entitled to unemployment benefits from Belarus authorities (host country) at a rate not lower than the minimum unemployment benefit set in the host country. The payments stop when a person changes the country of residence.

¹⁰http://www.pfrf.ru/grazdanam/pensionres/pens_zagran/ (last accessed 15 April 2020)

15.2.2 *Health Care*

According to the federal law “On the Basics of Health Protection of the Citizens of the Russian Federation” (as of 2010), Russian nationals residing abroad can receive free medical care in the Russian Federation. To visit a doctor in any Russia-based public hospital, a person needs to present his/her health insurance certificate which is issued for all Russian citizens free of charge. Medical services are also provided free of charge. Additionally, according to the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus “On the Equal Rights of the Citizens” (1998), the citizens of Russia and Belarus are granted equal rights in various spheres of life, including medical services.

Contributory disability pensions can be exported by nationals deciding to move abroad, but non-contributory disability pensions are only available to those residing in Russia. However, special rules apply to Russian nationals residing in Israel. The Agreement between the Russian Federation and the State of Israel on Cooperation in the Field of Social Security indicates that the benefits (including temporary invalidity) being paid to the Russian national by the Russian authorities do not stop in case a person changes his/her country of residence for Israel.

In addition, the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides Russian nationals going abroad with relevant information about the risks for health associated with and emergency situations across the globe. The Ministry also developed a mobile application ‘Assistant abroad’¹¹ as a means of information and communication support for Russian nationals abroad. The application is aimed both for tourists and Russian citizens who reside permanently abroad. In a situation of emergency, the application allows to call or send a text message to the emergency center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia.

In some cases, consulates inform Russian nationals abroad about specific conditions of access to health care services in a host country. As a rule, however, according to the Consular Statute of the Russian Federation, consulates only respond to the needs of nationals associated with sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary security: upon request, a consulate informs Russian nationals about the rules of importing plants and animals to Russia. The consultation is provided free of charge.

15.2.3 *Pensions*

The Pension Fund of the Russian Federation (PFR) assigns and pays pensions to over 305,000 Russian nationals residing in 128 countries.¹² Top five countries by the number of pensioners benefitting from Russian pensions are Germany, Israel, Latvia, USA and Belarus. As of today, Russia’s pension system distinguishes

¹¹ www.sos.mid.ru (last accessed 15 April 2020)

¹² www.pfrf.ru (last accessed 15 April 2020)

between insurance pensions (paid from the PFR budget) and state pensions (paid from the federal budget). These can be referred to as contributory and non-contributory pensions, respectively. Non-contributory (state) old-age pensions are paid only to Russian nationals permanently residing in Russia. Thus, those who live abroad can apply only for the contributory (insurance-based) pension.

Pension application from abroad can be submitted through the consulates in the host country. According to the decree of the Government of the Russian Federation “On the Procedure for Paying Pensions to Persons Who Leave for Permanent Residence Outside the Territory of the Russian Federation”, consulates issue the following documents for Russian nationals applying for the extension of pension payments: 1) the Act on the personal appearance of a citizen (life certificate); 2) the Certificate confirming permanent residence outside the Russian Federation; 3) the Certificate of performance (non-fulfillment) of paid work outside the Russian Federation. A national residing abroad can apply for these documents via the consular portal.¹³ The documents are further submitted by the consulate to the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation. The extension of pension payment is made annually provided that once a year the Russian national obtains a life certificate which is issued by the consulate upon personal appearance.

Special rules concerning pension payments exist for Russian nationals residing in one of the CIS countries, Belarus and Israel. According to the 1992 Agreement on guarantees of the rights of citizens of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the field of pensions, pensions are paid by the host country considering the employment period in both countries. When a person changes the country of residence within CIS, the pension payments can continue in case the person is not entitled to pension benefits on accordance with the legislation of the new host country. However, for Russian nationals residing in Kazakhstan and Belarus additional rules apply.

In the case of Kazakhstan, all residents of the city of Baikonur, including Russian nationals and Kazakh nationals working at the Russian spaceport Baikonur, are entitled to the Russian pension, paid in rubles and in accordance with the Russian legislation.¹⁴ Also, in accordance with the 2006 Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Cooperation in the Field of Social Security”, the home and host countries share the costs of pension payments: for example, Russian pension covers the years worked in Russia.

Similarly, Russian and Israel authorities share the pension payments, as stated in the 2016 Agreement between the Russian Federation and the State of Israel on cooperation in the field of social security. Requisition of documents confirming the period of employment in Russia is made through the Institute of National Insurance of Israel and the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation. The application form can be downloaded from the PFR website. The agreement with Israel providing for the

¹³ <https://pension.kdmid.ru> (last accessed 15 April 2020)

¹⁴ “Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Pension Rights of the Residents of the City of Baikonur in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, as of 27 April 1996.

Russian pension to Israel-based pensioners was opposed in the State Duma by several parties, especially by the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. The main argument against was that the Russian budget constraints do not allow for the regular increase of payments to the Russia-based pensioners while at the same time the authorities find it possible to allocate funds to pay pensions in Israel. The dispute around the Israel-Russia agreement on social benefits concerned a special provision of the agreement according to which Israeli citizens residing in Israel can apply for Russian insurance pension in case they have worked in the former USSR and left abroad before 1992 (before the break-up of the Soviet Union). In other words, these payments were meant for Russia's non-nationals, i.e. former USSR citizens.

15.2.4 Family-Related Benefits

According to the federal law “On State Benefits to Families with Children” (1997), the birth grant does not cover those who left Russia for permanent residency abroad. However, an exception is made for a specific type of birth grant, the so-called ‘maternity capital’, for which all Russian citizens are eligible irrespective of their country of residence.¹⁵ The maternity capital benefit was introduced in 2006 as the core element of a set of ideological and institutional arrangements aimed at encouraging women to give birth to more children. With the maternity capital family benefit, Russian authorities aimed to increase the birth rate in Russia, not abroad. Therefore, the applications of women to Russian consulates all over the world came as a surprise and it took time to arrange the procedure of application through consulates.

The maternity capital is a benefit provided to the Russian families to which a second or a third child or more was born or adopted provided that these rights are not assigned in the birth (adoption) of a second child (if twins are born, the family is not eligible for the maternity capital). Since January 1, 2015, maternity (family) capital amounts to 453,026 rubles (around 6000 Euro). The benefit is given only once (one-time payment) and exempt from income tax. Although Russian nationals residing abroad do have the right to receive this benefit, they cannot spend it outside the Russian Federation. The benefit is provided in the form of a certificate, and can be only used for special purposes described in the law:

- Improvement of the living conditions (for example, home mortgage)
- Education of the children (since 2018, including kindergarten and services provided by private educational organizations)
- Pension contribution of the mother
- Expenses associated with goods and services for the needs of children with disabilities.

¹⁵ Federal law “On Additional Measures of State Support to Families with Children” as of 2006.

To apply for the maternity capital benefit from abroad, Russian nationals should submit the necessary documents to the consulate in their host country, including: 1) the Russian passport; 2) the certificate of the place of residence or actual stay of the Russian citizen who has the right to receive a certificate of maternity capital; 3) the birth or adoption certificate of a second or subsequent child; 4) a document confirming the Russian citizenship of the child with the birth of which the right to obtain a certificate of state emerged. The birth certificate and the child adoption certificate are issued by the Russian consulate in the host country.

Special rules concerning maternity and family-related benefits apply to Russian nationals residing in Belarus and Israel. According to the 2006 social security agreement between Russia and Belarus, child benefits and family-related benefits are assigned and paid by the country where the child resides. The 2016 agreement with Israel also specified that Russian nationals residing abroad have the right to maternity leave benefits which are assigned and paid by the host country where the beneficiary has worked. Family-related benefits are assigned and paid by the country where the child resides. A one-time child benefit (paid upon the birth of a child) can be paid by the home or host country.

Those compatriots who resettled in Russia under the compatriots resettlement program, have a right to apply for the maternity capital after the acquisition of the Russian citizenship, under the condition that a second child was born after 2007 and has Russian citizenship.

15.2.5 Economic Hardship

According to the Federal law “On the Minimum Subsistence Level” (1997), the minimum subsistence level is set on a quarterly basis by the Russian Government, at the federal and at the regional level. In case a family’s income is below the minimum subsistence level, that family is considered “low-income” and entitled to benefits, which could be both monthly cash payments and in-kind benefits. However, the family or individual should be permanent residents of Russia. Thus, nationals residing abroad are not entitled.

When a Russian citizen finds himself/herself abroad without any means for living and further stay puts his/her life under threat, a consulate can assist him/her to return to Russia. This assistance is provided in the form of covering expenses for hotel accommodation, travel expenses and food items or/and other first necessity things. The assistance is provided at no charge. Cash benefits are never offered.¹⁶ In other cases, consulates can be involved by handling the issuance of the temporary identification document in case a person has lost his/her passport or issue a death certificate which is necessary to arrange the repatriation of the body to Russia.

¹⁶According to the Russian Government regulation “On the approval of the Provision of assistance in the return to the Russian Federation of citizens of the Russian Federation who have found themselves on the territory of a foreign state without means of subsistence”. As of 31 May 2010.

15.3 Conclusions

As a home country, Russia has developed a specific framework of policy providing for the support and protection of rights of the compatriots abroad. However, nationals residing abroad represent just one of the categories of compatriots defined in the law on the state support in relation to compatriots abroad (1999). No specific framework for policy in relation to nationals residing abroad exists in Russia. The institutional infrastructure to support compatriots abroad is outdated: it is based on the Soviet legacy of political and cultural propaganda and is meant to serve primarily the interests of compatriots in the near abroad, i.e. CIS.

Being included in the category of ‘compatriots abroad’, Russian nationals abroad are automatically covered by the home country work program with compatriots. However, the program is mostly aimed at providing cultural support to compatriots by means of organising cultural events to consolidate the diaspora. The compatriots resettlement program launched in 2007 is mostly meant for non-nationals with Soviet background. To a certain extent, the inflow of compatriots also compensates for the outflow of Russian nationals abroad in the 2000s. However, new citizens based in Russia are entitled to a wider range of social protection benefits compared to Russian nationals residing abroad.

Social protection schemes developed by the home country to serve Russian nationals abroad are based on multilateral and bilateral agreements between Russia and former Soviet republics. Besides the agreement on pension payments in the CIS, Russia has additional agreements with Kazakhstan and Belarus, and a special agreement with Israel. As a rule, Russian nationals abroad are entitled to two types of social benefits – pension and ‘maternity capital’ family benefit. The application procedure to these benefits is based on the documents exchange between the Russian consulate in the host country and the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation in the home country. Bilateral agreements with Israel and Belarus in the field of social protection provide Russian nationals with additional social benefits paid by the host country or shared with the home country.

Russian nationals permanently residing in the so-called far abroad have been mostly beyond the outreach of the Russian authorities. Legislative initiatives targeting specifically this category of compatriots are rare and often associated with control mechanisms rather than support measures, which is explained by current geopolitical constraints.

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