

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTING FOR FOREIGN CHILDREN AS A TOOL OF RUSSIAN REPRESSIVE MIGRATION POLICY



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Introduction

Foreign citizens¹ in Russia have long faced numerous systemic violations of their rights. Migrant workers from Central Asia and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable, often becoming victims of xenophobia, exploitation, discrimination, and police brutality—issues that have intensified since the launch of the anti-migrant campaign in March 2024.² One of the most significant violations of migrants' rights in the Russian Federation and in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russian authorities³ is the denial of access to school education for foreign children.⁴ Although foreign children represent only about 1–1.5% of the total student population in Russian schools, authorities in some regions—and more recently at the federal level—have been fixated on limiting their presence in classrooms. Rather than organizing adaptation courses and implementing effective methods for teaching Russian as a foreign language, authorities have introduced a mandatory and very challenging entrance exam. Failure to pass this exam results in children with foreign citizenship being excluded from school.

Free and accessible primary education for children is a fundamental right enshrined in numerous international declarations, conventions, charters, and agreements. It is one of the most frequently cited rights, as it concerns a particularly vulnerable group: children.⁵ Among other provisions, the right to primary education is guaranteed in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁶; Articles 3 and 4 of the UN Convention against Discrimination in Education⁷; Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁸; and Articles 2 and 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁹ all of which have been ratified by the Russian

¹ From this point forward, the terms “foreign citizens” and “migrants” are used interchangeably.

² See, e.g., HRW, *Living in Fear and Humiliation: Rising Xenophobic Harassment and Violence towards Central Asian Migrants in Russia*, Human Rights Watch, March 2025, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/04/russia0325web.pdf [accessed October 28, 2025].

³ Since 2014, Russian authorities have considered Crimea—and, since the fourth quarter of 2022, the Zaporizhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions of Ukraine—to be parts of the Russian Federation. The UN General Assembly has repeatedly condemned the Russian state's aggressive actions against Ukraine by an overwhelming majority and does not recognize these territories as part of the Russian Federation. However, Russian authorities have cynically ignored these resolutions.

⁴ The fact that foreign children constitute approximately 1–1.5% of students in Russian schools is based on data from the Ministry of Education regarding the total number of schoolchildren and the number of foreign children, cited by the head of the so-called “HRC” (“СИЧ”). According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, approximately 18 million children were enrolled in Russian schools during the 2024/2025 academic year. At the end of June 2025, the head of the so-called “HRC” reported that 192,254 foreign-citizen children were enrolled in Russian educational institutions, presumably schools. (Anton Orlov, “Из РФ хотят выслать мигрантов, чьи дети не ходят в школу” (Russian Authorities Aims to Expel Migrants Whose Children Do Not Attend School), *Deutsche Welle*, July 26, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/ru/glava-spc-predlozil-vysylat-iz-rossii-semi-migrantov-ci-deti-ne-hodat-v-skolu/a-73043216> [accessed December 12, 2025]. In 2022, the Ministry of Education estimated the number of foreign children at 249,850, which constituted about 1.5% of the total number of children in schools (17,762,326) (Anastasiya Shirokova, “‘Даже дети из России вряд ли смогут сдать’: как проходит тестирование детей мигрантов для поступления в школу” (“Even Children Born in Russia Are Unlikely to Pass”: An Overview of How School Admissions Testing procedure for Migrant Children Is Conducted), *Mel*, December 9, 2025).

⁵ See, e.g., Tristan McCowan, *Education as a Human Right: Principles for a Universal Entitlement to Learning* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Joel Spring, *The Universal Right to Education: Justification, Definition, and Guidelines* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

⁶ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 10, 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> [accessed December 29, 2025].

⁷ UNESCO, *Convention against Discrimination in Education*, December 14, 1960, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-discrimination-education> [accessed January 5, 2026].

⁸ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, December 16, 1966, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights> [accessed January 5, 2026].

⁹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, November 20, 1989, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child> [accessed January 5, 2026].

Federation. In the context of this report, it is important to highlight that the right to education is also affirmed in the Commonwealth of Independent States Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (hereinafter referred to as the CIS Convention), which was not only ratified but also largely proposed by the Russian Federation. Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 27 of the Convention explicitly state that “no one may be denied the right to education,” and that “primary and basic general education shall be compulsory and free.”¹⁰

However, Russian authorities are not only violating their international obligations regarding the right to education but are also deliberately expanding the scope of these violations.

The right to free and accessible primary and basic general education is declared in Russian legislation, primarily in Article 43 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation¹¹ and Article 5 of the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation.”¹² Furthermore, the Constitution designates those directly responsible for ensuring a child's realization of this right: parents, who must either enroll their child in an educational institution or, if they choose, provide quality home education; and state education authorities, who are obligated to enroll every child in school or assist with home education.

At the end of 2024, Russian authorities adopted Federal Law No. 544-FZ (hereinafter, Federal Law 544), amending the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation,” taking the violation of the right of foreign national children to school education to a new level. The law introduced a mandatory requirement for foreign national children to successfully pass a Russian language test (hereinafter, the Testing procedure) as a condition for school admission.¹³ The Testing procedure consists not only of the exam itself (hereinafter, the Testing exam), but also of the procedures required for admission to it. To be admitted to the Testing exam, parents of foreign-national children must prove the legality of their and their child's stay in Russia, confirm residence at the place of migration registration, provide medical certificates, fingerprint registration data, and, in some cases, even proof of income.¹⁴

The new requirements have already resulted in thousands of children—predominantly from CIS countries—being denied access even to primary education, despite Russian authorities having assured under the CIS Convention that “no one can be denied the right to education.” According to official statistics from Rosobrnadzor, between April and August 2025, only 2,964 foreign children out of 23,616, for whom schools initially accepted applications, passed the Testing exam. Most children were not admitted to the Testing exam due to failure to submit a “complete set of

Mieke Verheyde, *A Commentary on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 28: The Right to Education* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006).

¹⁰ Commonwealth of Independent States. “Convention of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”. May 26, 1995, https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_6966/ [accessed October 29, 2025].

¹¹ Constitution of the Russian Federation (Конституция Российской Федерации) adopted December 12, 1993, https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_28399/ [accessed November 3, 2025].

¹² Federal Law No. 273-FZ dated December 29, 2012, “Об образовании в Российской Федерации” (On Education in the Russian Federation), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_140174/ [accessed October 25, 2025].

¹³ Federal Law No. 544-FZ dated December 28, 2024, “О внесении изменений в статьи 67 и 78 Федерального закона ‘Об образовании в Российской Федерации’” (On Amendments to Articles 67 and 78 of the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_494829/3d0cac60971a511280cbb229d9b6329c07731f7/ [accessed October 24, 2025].

¹⁴ Document requirements for admission to the Testing exam appear to vary by region. For example, there is no formal requirement to provide fingerprint registration data; however, according to other regulations, this data is required for obtaining a long-term residence permit in Russia. In some regions, submitting this data is mandatory for Testing exam admission. For instance, in the Yaroslavl and Voronezh regions, the absence of fingerprint data has become one of the primary reasons for deeming the document set “incomplete.” (Emilia Gabdullina, “Со школой не нашли общего языка” (They Could Not Find Common Ground with the School), *Kommersant*, September 11, 2025).

documents.” Of the 8,223 children admitted, 5,940 were brought to the exam by their parents, but only 2,964—representing 12.5% of those for whom schools initially accepted applications—passed.¹⁵

Many critics of the Testing procedure, citing Rosobrnadzor statistics, have focused on the children who failed the difficult exam questions. However, only 25% of the children whose schools accepted their documents actually took the Testing exam. This means that the vast majority of children whose parents were able to submit documents were ultimately not admitted. But that is not all. According to statistics from some regions, most parents of foreign national children were either unwilling or unable to submit documents to schools, and thus these children were not included in Rosobrnadzor's statistics. This is evident from the discrepancy between the number of foreign national children enrolled in schools in 2024 and those for whom documents were submitted in 2025. For example, in St. Petersburg, 1,740 foreign national children were enrolled in schools in 2024. For admission to the 2025/26 school year, documents were initially accepted for 1,124 children; 944 of these were admitted to the Testing exam, but only 257 passed.¹⁶ In the Kaluga Region, 250 foreign national children were enrolled in schools in 2024, while in 2025, schools admitted 91 children to the Testing exam, and only 36 passed. In the Nizhny Novgorod Region, 150 children applied for the Testing exam in 2025, and 69 passed successfully, although in 2024, the number of those admitted was ten times higher.¹⁷ Thus, even the number of documents accepted by schools is significantly lower than the number of foreign national children admitted to Russian schools the previous year. This substantial difference cannot be explained by a significantly lower number of foreign national children in the Russian Federation; rather, it indicates that many parents either decided not to apply or that schools often did not initially accept their applications. Most likely, both factors were at play.

Families who decide to apply for the Testing exam face the following multi-step procedure:

1. Compile a set of documents, including identity papers, a completed application, documents confirming the legality of the child's and parents' stay, a certificate of migration registration at the place of residence, a medical report, and often additional documents depending on the region and specific case—for example, fingerprint registration data and a certificate of the parents' income;
2. Submit the documents in person to the school or via the “Gosuslugi” portal;
3. Within five working days, the school reviews the documents and either indicates that the submission is “incomplete” or accepts them and forwards them to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. If the set of documents is “incomplete” (for example, there is no certificate of fingerprint registration), the child will be left without access to school;
4. The Ministry of Internal Affairs verifies the legality of the foreign citizen children's and their parents' stay in Russia, as well as the authenticity of the documents, the consistency between migration registration and the actual place of residence, and whether these foreign citizens appear in the register of controlled persons. The Ministry then either informs the school that the child cannot be accepted or notifies that it has no objections;
5. If the Ministry has no objections, the parents have seven days to enroll the child for the Testing exam through the “Gosuslugi” portal;
6. The child attends school on the appointed day to take the Testing exam. If the child passes, they are enrolled in the school; if not, enrollment is denied, and the child is advised to take Russian

¹⁵ See, e.g., Radio Liberty, “Рособрнадзор: 87 % детей мигрантов не могут быть зачислены в школы” (Rosobrnadzor: 87% of Migrant Children Cannot Be Enrolled in Schools), *Radio Liberty*, September 11, 2025, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/rosobrnadzor-87-detey-migrantov-ne-mogut-bytj-zachisleny-v-shkoly/33527550.html> [accessed October 17, 2025].

¹⁶ Fontanka, “В школы Петербурга поступили почти на 1,5 тысячи детей мигрантов меньше, чем годом ранее” (Almost 1,500 Fewer Migrant children Were Enrolled in St. Petersburg Schools Compared to the Previous Year), *Fontanka*, August 29, 2025.

¹⁷ Emilia Gabdullina, “Со школой не нашли общего языка” (They Could Not Find Common Ground with the School), *Kommersant*, September 11, 2025.

language courses. It is important to note that Russian authorities do not provide free Russian language courses for children who fail the exam.

So, it is necessary to distinguish the multi-stage *Testing procedure* from the *Testing exam* itself, which serves only as the final stage of the procedure. Throughout the first five steps of the *Testing procedure*, Russian authorities have denied the vast majority of foreign children access to the *Testing exam*.

The introduction of the Testing procedure continues a trend observed in several Russian regions. Even before the enactment of the new law, authorities in Moscow and St. Petersburg had, for many years, barred children without local registration from attending school. These two cities have been the primary centers of labor migration in Russia for decades. Moscow and St. Petersburg authorities were among the first to implement particularly stringent migration control measures, aiming to limit the number of unemployed migrants and deport those deemed to have violated migration regulations. As part of these measures, authorities began denying school access to children lacking local registration. The situation with children's right to education gradually deteriorated in several other Russian regions. These violations were semi-official, as no regulatory document authorized denial of school entry on the grounds of lacking migration registration or insufficient knowledge of Russian. Nevertheless, officials and school principals continued these practices, and courts, with rare exceptions, failed to recognize violations of the right to education in cases of non-enrollment, issuing casuistic and vague rulings.¹⁸

The adoption of Federal Law 544 has escalated violations of children's rights to school education to a qualitatively new level. The system of violations has shifted from being semi-hidden, semi-official, and regional to becoming overt, institutionalized, and applied to all territories under Russian authorities' control. Furthermore, Russian authorities have incorporated the denial of educational rights for foreign children into their migration policy.

Numerous human rights organizations¹⁹ and independent media outlets²⁰ have reported on the new law's blatant violation of children's right to education. The novelty and significance of this report lie in its systematic approach, exploration of recent trends, identification of the multifaceted nature of

¹⁸ See Civic Assistance Committee, “‘Такой порядок’: как суды отказывают детям в школьном образовании” (“Such an Order”: How Courts Deny Children School Education), *Civic Assistance Committee*, August 26, 2021, <https://refugee.ru/dokladyi/takoj-poryadok-kak-sudy-otkazvayut-detyam-v-shkolnom-obrazovanii/> [accessed December 19, 2025].

¹⁹ See, e.g., Memorial, “Не сдал – не учишься: детей мигрантов хотят лишит образования” (Failure to Pass Means No Learning: Migrant Children Are Being Deprived of Education), *Memorial. Human Rights Defence Center*, November 27, 2024, <https://memorialcenter.org/ru/news/detej-migrantov-hotyat-lishit-obrazovaniya> [accessed October 27, 2025]; Syinat Sultanalieva, “Дискриминационное тестирование блокирует право детей мигрантов в России на образование” (Discriminatory Testing Denies Migrant Children in Russia Their Right to Education), *Human Rights Watch*, May 19, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/ru/news/2025/05/19/discriminatory-testing-blocks-migrant-childrens-right-education-russia> [accessed October 27, 2025].

²⁰ Verstka, “Российские власти запретили принимать в школы детей мигрантов без знания русского языка. К чему это приведет?” (Russian Authorities Have Prohibited the Enrollment of Migrant Children in Schools if They Do Not Have Knowledge of the Russian Language. What Will This Lead to?), *Verstka*, April 5, 2025, <https://verstka.media/rossiiskie-vlasti-zapretili-prinimat-v-shkoly-detei-migrantov-bez-znaniya-russkogo-yazyka> [accessed October 27, 2025]; Alexander Leonidovich, “Сегрегация для самых маленьких” (Segregation for Young Children), *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, August 19, 2025, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2025/08/19/segregatsiia-dlia-samykh-malenkikh> [accessed October 28, 2025]; Radio Liberty, “Рособрнадзор: 87 % детей мигрантов не могут быть зачислены в школы” (Rosobrnadzor: 87% of Migrant Children Cannot Be Enrolled in Schools), *Radio Liberty*, September 11, 2025, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/rosobrnadzor-87-detej-migrantov-ne-mogut-bytj-zachisleny-v-shkoly/33527550.html> [accessed October 17, 2025].

the Testing procedure, and analysis of the new school enrollment procedure within the broader context of Russia's migration policy.

The results of this report demonstrate the following:

- The Testing procedure legally and officially codifies, at the Russian federal level, the practice of violating the right to education, which has long been unofficially implemented in some Russian regions;
- Federal Law 544 not only infringes upon the right to education but also officially establishes discrimination against children of foreign nationals;
- The new regulations have institutionalized the Testing procedure as a tool for increasing surveillance and control over foreign citizens;
- The form and content of the Testing exam are susceptible to abuse, unfriendly to children, very difficult to pass, ideologically driven, discriminatory, and capable of causing serious mental trauma;
- The Testing procedure is an element of Russia's repressive migration policy, which is characterized by widespread surveillance and strict control, labor exploitation, the removal of a significant portion of social responsibility from the state, the exclusion of certain migrant groups on cultural and/or ethnic grounds, and the indoctrination and assimilation of others.

It should be noted that our report addresses the violation of foreign children's right to *access* to school education, although this right to access is only one component of the broader right to education.²¹ The history of authoritarian and totalitarian states, as well as the practices of the current Russian regime, demonstrate that severe violations of the right to education occur even when access is not denied. Beyond access, the right to education encompasses other elements, including the right to quality education. For instance, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights addresses access in its first paragraph, the right of parents to choose the education of their “minor children” in its third paragraph, and the quality of education in its second paragraph, which states: “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”²²

In light of the above and Article 26, can Russian education be considered high-quality? Clearly, it cannot. Since the mid-2010s, Russian authorities have actively and openly introduced political propaganda, militarization, and indoctrination practices into educational institutions.²³ This process accelerated with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops in February 2022. Since then, Russian authorities have implemented numerous measures to transform the Russian education system into an instrument of indoctrination and militarization.²⁴ In the occupied Ukrainian

²¹ Mieke Verheyde, *A Commentary on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 28: The Right to Education* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006): 17–19.

²² UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 10, 1948. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> [accessed December 29, 2025].

²³ Iuliia Iashchenko, “Nationalistic Propaganda as a Strategy for Patriotic Upbringing in Russian Education”, *Nuovi Autoritarismi E Democrazie: Diritto, Istituzioni, Società* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1109–117; Valentina Feklyunina, Samuel Robertshaw, and James Bilsland, “Militarization of History and Mnemonic Habits in Putin’s Russia: Pedagogy of War”, *Post-Soviet Affairs* 41 no. 3 (2025): 181–98.

²⁴ Agents.Media, “Российские школы смогут потратить на пропаганду рекордные 1300 часов” (Russian Schools Will Be Able to Dedicate a Record 1,300 Hours to Propaganda), *Agents.Media*, September 3, 2024, <https://www.agents.media/rossijskie-shkoly-smogut-potratit-na-propagandu-rekordnye-1300-chasov/> [accessed November 5, 2025]; Meduza, “‘Мы просто физически не успеваем вести свои обычные уроки’. Как изменилось школьное образование в России за годы войны?” (“We Simply Do Not Have Enough Time to Teach Our Regular Lessons. How Has School Education in Russia Changed During the War?”), *Meduza*, September 8, 2025, <https://meduza.io/feature/2025/09/08/my-prosto-fizicheski-ne-uspevaem-vesti-svoi-obychnye-uroki> [accessed November

territories, Russian authorities have supplemented their aggressive propaganda with efforts to russify Ukrainian children.²⁵ All these changes are clearly not aimed at “the full development of the human personality” or “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” They do not promote “understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations,” nor do they contribute to the “United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” On the contrary, they blatantly violate fundamental human rights and run counter to the values of peace, freedom, and justice. In other words, **the right to education in the Russian Federation is violated for foreign children through the Testing procedure, and for Russian children, as well as foreign children enrolled in schools, through a system of indoctrination, propaganda, and militarization within Russian schools.**

This policy report is focused on violations related to access to school education; the issue of gross violations of education quality by Russian authorities warrants a separate study.

5, 2025]; Jonna Alava, “From Patriotic Education to Militarist Indoctrination—Disciplinary Power and Silent Resistance in Russia after the Onset of the War against Ukraine”, *Problems of Post-Communism* 72, no. 5 (2025): 429–40.

²⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Impact of the Armed Conflict and Occupation on Children’s Rights in Ukraine (24 February 2022 – 31 December 2024)*, March 21, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/form/2025-03-21-ohchr-report-children-s-rights-in-ukraine.pdf> [accessed December 29, 2025]; Yale School of Public Health, *Forced Passportization on Russia-Occupied Areas of Ukraine*, New Haven, Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health, August 2, 2023, <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/891469c2-690f-4229-8ffc-35b1c3743744> [accessed December 18, 2025]; HRW, *Education under Occupation. Forced Russification of the School System in Occupied Ukrainian Territories*, Human Rights Watch, June 2024, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/06/ukraine_crd0624%20web_0.pdf [accessed December 18, 2025].

1. A Brief History of Violations of the Right to Access to School Education in the Russian Federation

The history of violations of the right of foreign citizens' children to access school education in the Russian Federation can be divided into five stages: (1) formally unimpeded access (1991–1998); (2) attempts by authorities in Moscow and the Moscow region to introduce a statutory denial of access if a child lacks local registration (1999–2003); (3) isolated violations (2004–2011); (4) the semi-official implementation of systematic denial of admission to children in several regions (2012–2024); and (5) the introduction of a federal statutory denial of the right to access to education (from 2025 onward).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, during the early years of the Russian Federation, access to school education was formally open to all categories of Russian and foreign citizens. Although individual violations occasionally occurred at the level of school principals, such infractions could typically be appealed successfully to higher education authorities, supervisory agencies, or the courts. However, by the late 1990s, Moscow authorities began systematically attempting to restrict access to schools for children without local registration, which officials commonly referred to as “propiska.” These efforts culminated in the issuance of joint Resolution No. 241-28 by the Moscow and Moscow Region (Московская область) governments on March 30, 1999. Clause 5 of the resolution mandated that only children registered in Moscow (for Moscow-based educational institutions) or in the Moscow Region (for regional educational institutions) could be enrolled in kindergartens and schools.²⁶ The Civic Assistance Committee challenged this clause in the Moscow City Court, which at the time maintained a degree of independence from the executive branch. The judges ruled the registration requirement unlawful, and Moscow officials’ attempt to appeal the decision to a higher court failed. In February 2002, the Moscow and Moscow Region governments removed the registration requirement as a condition for enrollment in kindergartens and schools. In 2004, the Moscow Government issued Resolution No. 189-PP, stipulating that registration status could not be used as grounds to restrict citizens’ rights and freedoms.²⁷ This effectively ended the systematic restriction of access to education for several years.

The situation changed in the early 2010s when Sergei Sobyanin became mayor of Moscow. Shortly thereafter, it became nearly impossible for children without Moscow registration to enroll in Moscow schools. Educational violations began to spread to other Russian regions, prompted by the publication of Order No. 107²⁸ by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science in 2012. Certain provisions of this order were interpreted as requiring local registration for school enrollment. This order was replaced in 2014 by Order No. 32,²⁹ issued by the same agency. An analysis of this

²⁶ Resolution of the Government of Moscow and the Government of the Moscow Region No. 241-28 dated March 30, 1999, “Об утверждении Правил регистрации и снятия граждан Российской Федерации с регистрационного учета по месту пребывания и по месту жительства в Москве и Московской области” (On Approval of the Rules for Registration and Deregistration of Citizens of the Russian Federation at the Place of Stay and Place of Residence in Moscow and the Moscow Region), <https://base.garant.ru/12115267/> [accessed: October 29, 2025].

²⁷ Resolution of the Government of Moscow No. 189-PP dated April 6, 2004, “Об утверждении Правил регистрации и снятия граждан Российской Федерации с регистрационного учета по месту пребывания и по месту жительства в городе Москве” (On Approval of the Rules for Registration and Deregistration of Citizens of the Russian Federation at the Place of Stay and Place of Residence in the City of Moscow), <https://www.garant.ru/hotlaw/moscow/102472/> [accessed: October 29, 2025].

²⁸ Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No. 107 dated February 15, 2012, “Об утверждении Порядка приема граждан на обучение по образовательным программам начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования” (On Approval of the Procedure for Admission of Citizens to General Education Institutions), <https://base.garant.ru/70163774/> [accessed November 24, 2025].

²⁹ Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No. 32 dated January 22, 2014, “Об утверждении Порядка приема граждан на обучение по образовательным программам начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования” (On Approval of the Procedure for Admission of Citizens to Educational Programs of Primary, Basic, and Secondary General Education), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/70530558/> [accessed October 29, 2025].

document is beyond the scope of this report. It is sufficient to note that many educational institutions interpreted Section 9 of this order as requiring foreign citizens enrolling their children in schools to have local registration, as well as documentation confirming the legality of the applicant's stay in the Russian Federation.³⁰

The Civic Assistance Committee's attempt to have the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation overturn controversial provisions of the new school admissions procedure was unsuccessful. The judges issued an ambiguous ruling, refusing to uphold the human rights activists' demands while also declaring that the new procedure does not violate children's right to education and does not prohibit the admission of children without registration. This ambiguous ruling led some principals to accept the enrollment of children without registration when presented with the ruling. However, almost all schools in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as some schools in other regions, began refusing to admit foreign national children who lacked local migration registration.³¹

Almost simultaneously, Moscow authorities introduced a new procedure for enrolling children in schools. Beginning with the 2015/2016 school year, if children did not attend a kindergarten affiliated with the school they wished to enter,³² applications were accepted exclusively through the "Moscow City Services Portal" (Портал городских услуг города Москвы). The submission process was designed so that it was impossible to apply without providing a Moscow registration address (адрес постановки на миграционный учет). Moreover, schools typically required migration registration for at least one year as a condition for admission.³³ If parents provided, for example, their actual address (фактический адрес) instead of a migration registration address (адрес постановки на миграционный учет), schools rejected the applications, claiming the information was incorrect or that required documents were missing. In other words, technology was used as a pretext to deny children admission to schools.

In the mid-2010s, access to education in St. Petersburg also became almost impossible for children of foreign citizens who lacked local migration registration. In other Russian regions, the situation varied and often depended on the policies of education authorities—not at the regional level, but at the level of individual municipalities. For example, according to the experience of the Civic Assistance Committee, local education departments in the Moscow region cities of Balashikha, Noginsk, Kotelniki, and several others adopted an intransigent stance, refusing to enroll refugee children without local migration registration in schools. In contrast, education departments in Khimki, Podolsk, Yegoryevsk, and several others were more accommodating and enrolled the children when approached by human rights activists.³⁴

In 2024 and 2025, Russian authorities implemented a series of measures to further tighten migration policies. Feigned concern about the purportedly high number of children with foreign citizenship in schools began to emerge from the highest levels of the Russian power system. This occurred despite

³⁰ See, Konstantin Troitskiy, *A Universal Right – but not for all. Access to School Education for Children of Refugees and Labour Migrants in Russia*, Civic Assistance Committee, 2017, <https://refugee.ru/en/dokladyi/vseobschee-pravo-ne-dla-kazhdogo/> [accessed December 29, 2025].

³¹ Ibid.

³² Registration was also required for enrollment in kindergarten in Moscow. The situation for foreign citizens seeking kindergarten placement was even more challenging than for school enrollment, as, with rare exceptions, only children with permanent registration (постоянная регистрация) were admitted. Those with migration registration (постановка на миграционный учет) were placed on long waiting lists that typically lasted several years until the child reached school age (Konstantin Troitskiy, "Об ограничениях права на общедоступное дошкольное образование в Москве для детей без постоянной регистрации" (On Restrictions on the Right to Public Preschool Education in Moscow for Children without Permanent Registration), *Civic Assistance Committee*, May 28, 2018, <https://refugee.ru/dokladyi/kogo-ne-berut-v-detskie-sady-i-pochemu/> [accessed December 04, 2025]).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ More information about the work of the Civic Assistance Committee can be found on its website <https://refugee.ru> [accessed December 04, 2025].

official statistics showing that the number of foreign children in schools had not even reached 2%, and that long-term migration, including labor migration, had sharply declined in the early 2020s.

In the summer of 2024, the Russian Ministry of Education issued a directive limiting the number of foreign children to three per class.³⁵ This policy effectively made it more difficult for foreign nationals to enroll their children in schools, as many school principals became increasingly reluctant to accept any children without Russian citizenship.³⁶ By 2025, violations of foreign children's right to access to school education had escalated, further exacerbated by Russian authorities using these children to enhance surveillance of their parents and advance the objectives of Russian repressive migration policy.

³⁵ Letter of the Ministry of Education of Russia No. 07-3637, dated July 31, 2024, “О методических рекомендациях” (On Methodological Recommendations), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_487423/ [accessed December 22, 2025].

³⁶ Memorial, “Минпросвещения рекомендует установить лимит на количество детей мигрантов в школах” (The Ministry of Education Recommends Establishing a Limit on the Number of Migrant Children in Schools), *Memorial Human Rights Defence Center*, September 27, 2024, <https://memorialcenter.org/ru/news/minprosveshheniya-rekomenduet-ustanovit-limit-na-kolichestvo-detej-migrantov> [accessed November 25, 2025].

2. Analysis of Regulatory Acts

2.1 Federal Law 544 and Russian Language Proficiency Testing

On December 28, 2024, Russian authorities enacted Federal Law 544, which, effective April 1, 2025, requires all foreign national children entering school to pass a Russian language test or the Testing exam.³⁷ This law amends Part 4 of Article 67 of Federal Law No. 273-FZ, “On Education in the Russian Federation,” dated December 29, 2012, the primary regulatory framework governing education in Russia. Prior to these amendments, the law stipulated that “admission to a state or municipal educational organization may be denied only due to a lack of available places.”³⁸ It further required that, in such cases, parents must contact the “governing body in the field of education” to determine another school where the child could be enrolled.³⁹ Effectively, the law did not permit *any* cases of denying a child access to school. Federal Law 544 radically changed this provision by adding that school admission may be denied “if the conditions established by Part 2.1 of Article 78 of this Federal Law are not met.”⁴⁰ What are these conditions? Successfully passing the Testing exam.

The newly introduced Part 2.1, consisting of three clauses, stipulates that: (1) foreign citizens must take the Testing exam upon admission to schools; (2) the methodology and requirements for the Testing exam are developed by the Russian Ministry of Education; and (3) children who fail the Testing exam “will not be admitted to the educational programs.”⁴¹ Thus, in open and flagrant violation of international law, ratified treaties, and even the Russian Constitution, the authorities have effectively abolished the right of foreign children to universal and free school education, introducing direct discrimination based on nationality and language. Although some regional authorities have long and systematically violated the right to education of foreign children, this new law codifies these violations, institutionalizes them, and elevates them to the federal level. At the same time, there is no hope that the so-called “Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation,” an institution entirely subordinate to those who enacted this discriminatory law, will recognize the new regulations as violating children's rights.

Pursuant to Federal Law 544, Russian authorities issued several additional regulations that supplemented the direct requirement to take the Testing exam with provisions defining the conditions for admission to the exam. These included obligations for parents of foreign children to prove the legality of their and their children's stay in Russia, verify migration registration, and confirm the absence of certain illnesses, among other requirements. These regulations also institutionalized the use of the Testing procedure and schools as tools for surveillance of foreign citizens. As a result of these human rights-violating measures, many foreign children were denied even access to the Testing exam. Furthermore, the document submission process, the content of these documents, the exam itself, and the enrollment (or, more often, non-enrollment) of children in schools came under the direct control of officials from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

³⁷ Federal Law No. 544-FZ dated December 28, 2024, “О внесении изменений в статьи 67 и 78 Федерального закона ‘Об образовании в Российской Федерации’” (On Amendments to Articles 67 and 78 of the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_494829/3d0cac60971a511280cbba229d9b6329c07731f7/ [accessed October 24, 2025].

³⁸ Federal Law No. 273-FZ dated December 29, 2012, “Об образовании в Российской Федерации” (On Education in the Russian Federation), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_140174/ [accessed October 25, 2025].

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Federal Law No. 544-FZ dated December 28, 2024, “О внесении изменений в статьи 67 и 78 Федерального закона ‘Об образовании в Российской Федерации’” (On Amendments to Articles 67 and 78 of the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_494829/3d0cac60971a511280cbba229d9b6329c07731f7/ [accessed October 24, 2025].

⁴¹ Ibid.

2.2 Order No. 171 and Conditions for Admission to the Testing Exam

In accordance with Federal Law No. 544, the Russian Ministry of Education issued several orders. For example, Order No. 170, dated March 4, 2025, established formal and substantive requirements for the Testing exam. The formal requirements address scheduling exam dates, organizing commissions to administer the exam, utilizing technical equipment, and related matters. The order also outlines general criteria for the exam content and stipulates that Rosobrnadzor (the Russian Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science) will determine the specific diagnostic materials and the minimum score required for successful completion.⁴² The substantive portion of the Testing exam will be discussed below.

On March 4, 2025, in connection with Federal Law No. 544, the Russian Ministry of Education issued Order No. 171,⁴³ which amended the procedure for admission to schools.⁴⁴ Through this order, the Ministry not only introduced a provision mandating the Testing procedure into the admission process but also specified the methods for submitting documents and outlined communication protocols between parents and educational institutions. Most importantly, in light of our report, this order established the list of documents required for registration for the Testing exam, which include:

“Copies of documents confirming the legality of the presence of a child who is a foreign citizen or a stateless person, and his/her legal representative(s), or an applicant who is a foreign citizen or a stateless person, on the territory of the Russian Federation (such as a valid residence permit, temporary residence permit, temporary residence permit for the purpose of obtaining education, visa and/or migration card, or other documents stipulated by federal law or an international treaty of the Russian Federation confirming the right of a foreign citizen or stateless person to stay (reside) in the Russian Federation).”⁴⁵

Requiring parents to prove the legality of their own and their children's stay in Russia to schools has long been common practice in certain Russian regions, primarily Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, aside from the controversial and ambiguous wording of Russian Ministry of Education

⁴² Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 170 dated March 4, 2025, “Об утверждении Порядка проведения в государственной или муниципальной общеобразовательной организации тестирования на знание русского языка, достаточное для освоения образовательных программ начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования, иностранных граждан и лиц без гражданства” (On Approval of the Procedure for Conducting Testing of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons' Proficiency in the Russian Language Sufficient for Mastering Primary, Basic, and Secondary General Education Programs in State or Municipal General Education Organizations), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/411563589/> [accessed October 24, 2025].

⁴³ Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 171 dated March 4, 2025, “О внесении изменений в Порядок приема на обучение по образовательным программам начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования, утвержденный приказом Министерства просвещения Российской Федерации от 2 сентября 2020 г. N 458” (On Amending the Procedure for Admission to Educational Programs of Primary, Basic, and Secondary General Education, Approved by Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation dated September 2, 2020 No. 458), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/411563591/> [accessed October 26, 2025].

⁴⁴ Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 458 dated September 2, 2020 “Об утверждении Порядка приема на обучение по образовательным программам начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования” (On Approval of the Procedure for Admission to Educational Programs of Primary, Basic, and Secondary General Education), <https://base.garant.ru/74626876/53f89421bbdaf741eb2d1ecc4ddb4c33/> [accessed October 24, 2025].

⁴⁵ Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 171 dated March 4, 2025, “О внесении изменений в Порядок приема на обучение по образовательным программам начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования, утвержденный приказом Министерства просвещения Российской Федерации от 2 сентября 2020 г. N 458” (On Amending the Procedure for Admission to Educational Programs of Primary, Basic, and Secondary General Education, Approved by Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation dated September 2, 2020 No. 458), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/411563591/> [accessed October 26, 2025].

Order No. 32, Russian law has not established this requirement at the federal level. Despite this, Russian authorities have now decided to formally codify this regulation.

This is not the place to elaborate on why requiring documentary proof of legal stay as a condition for school enrollment violates the human right to education. In light of the report, it suffices to highlight five key aspects:

1. It contradicts the principles of “general access” and “compulsory” education as enshrined in international law, including conventions and treaties ratified by the Russian Federation, as well as the positions of UNESCO and other UN bodies;
2. It is fundamentally flawed, making children’s access to one of their fundamental rights dependent on bureaucratic and migration procedures, as well as on their parents’ ability and opportunity to regulate and/or prove their migration status;
3. It discriminates against children with foreign citizenship compared to those with Russian citizenship;
4. Verification of the legality of residence is beyond the competence of education authorities, which lack the knowledge, experience, and authority to conduct such checks;
5. It creates opportunities for arbitrariness, corruption, and xenophobia at various levels, including education institutions (such as the Russian Ministry of Education, Rosobrnadzor, regional and district education departments, and schools) and individual education employees, especially principals and teachers.

2.3 Law No. 314-FZ and Surveillance of Foreign Children and Their Parents

In addition to denying access to school education, Russian authorities used the Testing procedure to enhance surveillance of foreign citizens. How did they accomplish this?

As previously mentioned, in Order No. 171 dated March 4, 2025, the Russian Ministry of Education officially introduced verification procedures to confirm the legality of the presence in Russia of both foreign children and their parents applying to schools. However, this was not the end of the matter.

On March 31, 2025, the Russian Ministry of Education issued Letter No. 03-608, providing methodological recommendations to affiliated organizations on how to administer the Testing procedure. Point 21 of the guidelines is particularly noteworthy, stating the following:

“21. Executive bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation exercising state governance in the field of education must provide the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (and/or) its territorial bodies) with access to information on test results, as well as to information on the enrollment of foreign citizens, through the state information systems of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and/or via the interdepartmental electronic interaction system.”⁴⁶

It should be noted that this procedural requirement for education authorities is, on the one hand, included in the guidelines and, on the other, appeared several months before the law explicitly established this requirement. These circumstances once again demonstrate: (1) the profound

⁴⁶ Letter of the Ministry of Education of Russia No. N 03-608 dated March 31, 2025 “О направлении Методических рекомендаций” (On the Direction of Methodological Recommendations), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_503271/ [accessed October 27, 2025].

degradation of the Russian legal system; (2) evidence that increased surveillance and control were originally part of Russian authorities' plan; and (3) the fact that education authorities are directly subordinate to repressive law enforcement agencies.

Federal Law No. 314-FZ of July 31, 2025, amended the foundational law concerning foreign citizens, “On the Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation,” and introduced provisions for information exchange between the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs and educational organizations. The law mandates that, starting January 28, 2026, education authorities must send the following information about children with foreign citizenship to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs:

- The Testing exam’s results;
- Decisions regarding their admission to school;
- Decisions concerning their expulsion from school;
- Information on applications to schools by foreign citizens included in the register of controlled persons;
- Personal and contact information of both parents and children; their residential addresses;
- Individual Insurance Numbers of children and parents;
- “Other identifiers of individual information used in information exchange with federal state information systems.”⁴⁷

In turn, it was established that the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs sends to educational organizations information on migration registration and deregistration, as well as documents confirming identity and legal stay in Russia.⁴⁸ This arrangement does not imply that education authorities act as equal partners in this data exchange. On the contrary, it indicates that **the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, in addition to its own personnel, is utilizing teachers and school administrations as agents to monitor, control, and ultimately infringe upon the rights of foreign children.**

Thus, the introduction of the Testing exam—which itself violates children's right to access education—as part of the multi-stage Testing procedure, was accompanied by the legal codification of other human rights-violating measures by Russian authorities. These measures aim to strengthen surveillance and migration control, effectively making the realization of one of the fundamental rights of children with foreign citizenship contingent upon the migration status of both the children and their parents.

⁴⁷ Federal Law No. 314 dated July 31, 2025, “О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации” (On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_511124/ [accessed October 27, 2025].

⁴⁸ Ibid.

3. Analysis of the Testing Exam

The specifics of the Testing exam are determined by the regulations of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and Rosobrnadzor. The Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements, a subsidiary of Rosobrnadzor—which is itself a subsidiary of the Ministry of Education—is directly responsible for developing the exam materials.¹

An analysis of the form and content of the Testing exam reveals several serious issues, including the following: (1) potential for abuse; (2) unfriendliness; (3) high difficulty; (4) poor methodology; (5) discriminatory and ideological bias; and (6) risks to children's mental health. Let us examine each of these issues in more detail.

3.1 Potential for Abuse

Many Russian officials and politicians have long expressed xenophobic and anti-migrant sentiments.⁴⁹ The Testing procedure was introduced amid calls for even stricter immigration controls and greater restrictions on migrants' access to social services. Regarding the children of foreign citizens, it is significant that in August 2025, a bill was introduced in the State Duma to implement exclusively fee-based school education for these children.⁵⁰ Although the Russian Ministry of Education did not support this bill during the discussion, there is little doubt that if higher authorities decide to proceed, the relevant ministry will promptly change its position. It is worth recalling that in the spring of 2024, the head of the Russian Ministry of Education, Sergei Kravtsov, categorically opposed the Testing exam, because “the introduction of a mandatory entrance exam in Russian would lead to restrictions on the rights of minor foreign citizens and stateless persons to receive general education.”⁵¹ However, by early 2025, the same minister declared that there were no issues with this exam, signed the aforementioned regulations—which, as part of the Testing procedure, introduced other measures that grossly violated children's rights—and the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements (FIPI), subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Education, developed extremely difficult exam tasks that not even every native Russian-speaking student would be able to handle.

For many years, Russian authorities, including the Ministry of Education, have typically framed access to school education for children of foreign nationals as a privilege or service. This perspective has led schools to view these children as bureaucratic and administrative burdens. The pervasive xenophobic atmosphere within society at large—and within schools in particular—may have influenced some teachers, significantly increasing the proportion who harbor hostile attitudes toward migrants. Consequently, such teachers may exhibit bias against foreign children when administering the Testing exam. The problem is further compounded at the institutional level: even if individual examiners do not share xenophobic sentiments, schools, educational districts, or

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Vladimir Mukomel, “Российские дискурсы о миграции: ‘нулевые годы’” (Russian Discourses on Migration: the “Noughties”) in *В Россия реформирующаяся: Ежегодник-2011* (Russia undergoing reform: Yearbook-2011), ed. M. K. Gorshkov, issue 10 (Moscow and St. Petersburg: Institut sotsiologii RAN, Nestor-Istoriya, 2011): 86–108.; Caress Schenk, “Open Borders, Closed Minds: Russia's Changing Migration Policies”, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 18 no. 2 (2010): 101–12; Caress Schenk, *Why Control Immigration? Strategic Uses of Migration Management in Russia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Novaya Gazeta Europe, “В Госдуму внесли законопроект о платном обучении в школах для детей мигрантов” (A Bill on Paid Education in Schools for Children of Migrants Has Been Introduced to the State Duma), *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, August 12, 2025, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2025/08/12/v-gosdumu-vnesli-zakonoproekt-o-platnom-obuchenii-v-shkolakh-dlia-detei-migrantov-news> [accessed November 26, 2025].

⁵¹ Avesta, “В России детей мигрантов не будут тестировать на знание русского языка в школах” (Migrant Children in Russia Will Not Be Tested for Russian Language Proficiency in Schools), *Avesta. Information Agency*, 22 марта 2024 года, <https://avesta.tj/2024/03/22/v-rossii-detej-migrantov-ne-budut-testirovat-na-znanie-russkogo-v-shkolah/> [accessed December 12, 2025].

regions may be subject to top-down guidelines instructing them either not to accept migrants, to accept only a limited percentage, or to admit only certain nationalities. As will be demonstrated below, the structure, content, methodology, and difficulty of the Testing exam serve as highly effective tools for enforcing these discriminatory policies.

Available statistics indicate that Russian regions generally implement policies that either outright reject migrant children or admit only a small percentage of them into school education. According to data from seven Russian regions, the percentage of children who successfully passed the Testing exam—out of those admitted and present—ranges from 27% in St. Petersburg to 90% in Tatarstan.⁵² Notably, St. Petersburg authorities have long maintained a particularly harsh stance against migrants and, along with Moscow authorities, have systematically and extensively violated the rights of foreign national children to access school education since the mid-2010s. In contrast, Tatarstan became the only Russian region where authorities criticized the Testing exam (albeit cautiously, with several caveats and not the Testing procedure as such) and announced their decision to accept “children of migrants” into schools. As a result, this region was the only one, according to available data, where 151 children (90% of foreign national children who took the Testing exam) passed successfully.⁵³ Overall, the percentage of children who successfully completed the Testing exam in Russia is approximately 50%, a figure closer to that of St. Petersburg than Tatarstan. It should be recalled that these figures do not reflect the fact that the right to access to school education for most foreign children was violated during the registration process for the Testing exam. Such violations were observed in all regions for which statistics were published, including Tatarstan.⁵⁴

The Testing exam itself is susceptible to misuse. A child can easily become upset or confused by a simple phrase or even a monosyllabic remark. Furthermore, many of the Testing exam’s tasks do not offer a clear choice between correct and incorrect answers but instead consist of open-ended questions, the accuracy of which largely depends on the assessor’s discretion. For example, even a basic and elementary question such as “Where do you live?” (Где ты живешь?), which appears in sample tests for first-grade admission, can be scored inconsistently.⁵⁵ What if a child answers that they live “in Tajikistan” and provides the name of a village? Is this considered a correct answer, or will the evaluator disregard it because a specific street was not mentioned? What if the child names a house in the city but omits the apartment number? What if the child says “in Uzbekinan” instead of “Uzbekistan”? Is this a mistake or not? What if the child takes a long time to respond? This is just the simplest example; more complex questions offer even greater potential for arbitrariness and subjective evaluation.

⁵² Emilia Gabdullina, “Со школой не нашли общего языка” (They Could Not Find Common Ground with the School), *Kommersant*, September 11, 2025.

⁵³ Idel.Реалии, “В Минобрнауки Татарстана сообщили, что 17 из 173 детей мигрантов не сдали экзамен по русскому языку для поступления в школу” (Tatarstan Ministry of Education Reports 17 out of 173 Migrant Children Failed Russian Language Entrance Exam), *Radio Liberty*, August 19, 2025, <https://www.idelreal.org/a/v-minobrnauki-tatarstana-soobschili-cto-17-iz-173-detey-migrantov-ne-sdali-ekzamen-po-russkomu-yazyku-dlya-postupleniya-v-shkolu/33507146.html> [accessed November 6, 2025].

⁵⁴ In Tatarstan, which has approximately two thousand schools, parents submitted applications for only 219 foreign national children, of whom 173 were admitted to the Testing exam. In other words, 46 children were officially denied admission to the exam. However, this figure does not include parents who, for various reasons, were unable to submit applications, nor does it account for those whose applications may have been rejected by schools without being recorded in the statistics (ibid.).

⁵⁵ See Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements (FIPI), <https://fipi.ru/inostr-exam/inostr-exam-deti> [accessed October 31, 2025].

3.2 Unfriendliness

Even if the members of the Testing Exam Committee demonstrate “kindness,” as recommended by the Russian Ministry of Education,⁵⁶ this cannot compensate for the overall unfriendly nature of the established format. Regulatory documents specify that the Testing exam must be conducted in a separate, “isolated” room; parents are not allowed inside, and each child is assigned a “separate workstation.”⁵⁷ Audio and video recordings are made,⁵⁸ which, while potentially reducing abuse, do not guarantee its absence and may also increase tension if recordings are overtly perpetrated. Children receive a “briefing” in which the formal aspects of the exam (duration and rules)⁵⁹ are explained. In a formal and tense environment—especially for very young children—this can be an additional source of significant stress and anxiety. Any assistance from parents or committee members administering the Testing exam is prohibited, and the child is reminded of the remaining time.

3.3 High difficulty

The high difficulty of the Testing exam is demonstrated not only by feedback from children, their parents, and experts⁶⁰ but also by several factors: (a) the exam format, (b) the nature of the tasks, (c) the required passing score, and (d) the high failure rate. Together, these elements indicate that the exam's difficulty was intentionally designed by its developers.

a) The difficulties arise from the aforementioned unfriendly nature of the exam, as well as the fact that, for many foreign children, this is their first serious test. Unfamiliar faces, heightened formality, separation from parents, and time constraints contribute to nervousness and increase the likelihood of panic. Even mild anxiety during the exam can significantly impair performance.

b) The previous point is closely related to the inherent difficulty of the tasks themselves. As noted, the Testing exam primarily consists of open-ended questions and tasks, which distinguishes it from, for example, the Basic State Exam (Основной государственный экзамен)—the final exam taken by Russian schoolchildren after completing nine years of schooling. Open-ended questions not only create opportunities for misuse but also pose a risk that, in an unfamiliar environment, children—especially younger ones—may simply not understand what is required of them. Furthermore, the exam demands broader and deeper knowledge from foreign national children whose native language is not Russian than the school curriculum requires from their Russian citizen peers. For instance, the sample version of the Testing exam for a child entering second grade contains 11 tasks, the third of which involves reading and requires the child to pronounce words correctly, place stress marks accurately, and maintain proper intonation. If a child makes even one intonation error or mispronounces a word more than twice, they will not be admitted to school, even

⁵⁶ See paragraph 9 of the Letter of the Ministry of Education of Russia No. N 03-608 dated March 31, 2025 “О направлении Методических рекомендаций” (On the Direction of Methodological Recommendations), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_503271/ [accessed October 27, 2025].

⁵⁷ See paragraph 7, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ See paragraph 6, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ See paragraph 9, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Bumaga, “‘Нужно быть отличником по русскому в русской школе’. Только 10 из 61 ребенка мигрантов, которым ‘Дети Петербурга’ помогали с изучением русского языка, смогли зачислиться в школы” (“One must excel in Russian at a Russian school.” Only 10 of the 61 Migrant Children Assisted by “Children of St. Petersburg” in Their Language Studies Successfully Gained School Admission), *Bumaga*, September 5, 2025, <https://paperpaper.io/papernews/2025/9/5/nuzhno-byt-otlichnikom-po-russkomu-v-r/> [accessed November 27, 2025] and Anastasiya Shirokova, “‘Даже дети из России вряд ли смогут сдать’: как проходит тестирование детей мигрантов для поступления в школу” (Even Children Born in Russia Are Unlikely to Pass”: An Overview of How School Admissions Testing for Migrant Children Is Conducted), *Mel*, December 9, 2025.

if they have completed the other 10 tasks flawlessly.⁶¹ These are standards that not every Russian-speaking child in the second grade of a regular Russian school would meet.

c) Rosobrnadzor, by Order No. 510 dated March 5, 2025, established a “minimum number of points” required to pass successfully the Testing exam, specifically three points.⁶² However, the rationale behind this threshold and its significance remain unclear, as the exam materials correspond to varying numbers of “primary points” depending on the grade the child seeks to enter. The percentage of correct answers required to pass the exam remains unchanged at 90%. For example, a first-grade student must score 9 points out of a possible 10, while a second-grade student must achieve 18 points out of 20, and so forth. For comparison, the aforementioned Basic State Exam is considered passed if a student earns at least 15 points out of a possible 39 (38% correct answers), which corresponds to a grade of “C.” A “B” requires at least 26 points (67% correct answers), and an “A” requires at least 32 points. This means that even an “A” allows for up to 20% incorrect answers, whereas a foreign child attempting to enter first grade who scores 8 out of 10 (80% correct answers) on the Testing exam, or a foreign child attempting to enter second grade who scores 17 out of 20 (85% correct answers), will be denied admission to school. Moreover, starting from second grade and above, the authors of the Testing exam methodology introduced an additional component to the assessment that makes the exam even more difficult. For example, in addition to requiring a child entering second grade to score at least 18 out of 20 possible points across all assignments, they must also score at least 9 out of 10 points in both the oral and written portions. Therefore, if a child makes two mistakes in the written portion but none in the oral portion, thus scoring 18 points overall, they will still be excluded from school. Similar requirements apply to children entering third, fourth, fifth, and subsequent grades.

d) As noted in the Introduction, according to Rosobrnadzor, of the 8,223 children admitted, 5,940 attempted the Testing exam, but only half (2,964 children) successfully completed it. It is highly likely that the overwhelming majority of those who did attend the exam were Russian-speaking children; however, even some of them were unable to complete it. This outcome highlights both the difficulty of the tasks and the general policy of refusing admission to children of foreign nationals.

3.4 Poor Methodology

The demonstration materials presented on the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements website raise concerns not only about their substantive quality but also about their formal methodological rigor. A detailed analysis of these methodological flaws is beyond the scope of this discussion; however, one illustrative example suffices. In the sample exam for children entering second grade, the oral portion requires the child to answer the question: “What are the names of your parents (grandparents, brother, sister, or relatives)?” (Как зовут твоих родителей (бабушку, дедушку, брата, сестру, близких). The assessment criteria specify that if a “foreign citizen”

⁶¹ See, e.g., Bumaga, “‘Нужно быть отличником по русскому в русской школе’. Только 10 из 61 ребенка мигрантов, которым ‘Дети Петербурга’ помогали с изучением русского языка, смогли зачислиться в школы” (“One must excel in Russian at a Russian school.” Only 10 of the 61 Migrant Children Assisted by “Children of St. Petersburg” in Their Language Studies Successfully Gained School Admission), *Bumaga*, September 5, 2025, <https://paperpaper.io/papernews/2025/9/5/nuzhno-byt-otlichnikom-po-russkomu-v-r/> [accessed November 27, 2025] and Anastasiya Shirokova, “‘Даже дети из России вряд ли смогут сдать’: как проходит тестирование детей мигрантов для поступления в школу” (Even Children Born in Russia Are Unlikely to Pass”: An Overview of How School Admissions Testing for Migrant Children Is Conducted), *Mel*, December 9, 2025.

⁶² Order of Rosobrnadzor No. 510 dated March 5, 2025, “Об определении минимального количества баллов, подтверждающего успешное прохождение иностранными гражданами и лицами без гражданства тестирования на знание русского языка, достаточное для освоения образовательных программ начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования” (On Determining the Minimum Number of Points Confirming the Successful Completion by Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons of the Russian Language Proficiency Test, Sufficient for Mastering the Educational Programs of Primary General, Basic General and Secondary General Education), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_500878/ [accessed October 26, 2025].

(иностранный гражданин)⁶³ cannot provide a “specific answer” (конкретного ответа) and instead responds with “I don't know” (не знаю) or “I don't remember” (не помню), such an answer is not accepted and is assigned zero points.⁶⁴ However, a child may genuinely not know or remember the names of some relatives, especially if they come from a foster family, if their relatives have moved away, or if, for example, their grandparents passed away before the child was born. The absence of any acknowledgment of these potential complexities and the failure to formally consider the diversity of family situations demonstrate the poor methodological quality of this task.

3.5 Discriminatory and Ideological Bias

Another significant issue with the Testing exam's tasks is their lack of adaptation for children from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, an analysis of the content and underlying principles reveals that the tasks are culturally and nationally biased and deeply ideological. For example, materials from the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements explicitly state that the content is selected in accordance with “the norms of behavior accepted in Russian society, including norms of speech etiquette.”⁶⁵ This adds an additional layer of complexity to the Testing exam, as it requires foreign-born children not only to have an excellent command of the Russian language—surpassing that of many native Russian peers—but also to be familiar with specialized behavioral norms. This introduces a clear discriminatory element into the exam content itself, as children raised in other countries, particularly those not exposed to extensive “Russification,” will find it extremely challenging to understand or respond to certain questions. Consequently, Russian authorities demand that children of foreign nationals demonstrate not only knowledge of the Russian language but also a high degree of cultural adaptation to Russian realities. Furthermore, the Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements explicitly states that the texts selected for the exam reflect “traditional Russian values, the value of the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation and the language of interethnic communication, the achievements of Russian science, technology, art, sports, military victories and labor exploits, Russia's landmarks, and the strategic development goals of our country.”⁶⁶ This reveals a pronounced ideological bias in the materials and demonstrates the transformation of Russian educational authorities into instruments of indoctrination and propaganda.

3.6 Risks to Children's Mental Health

Sources of stress for children extend beyond the format of assessments and the difficulty of tasks. An even greater threat to children's mental well-being is the lack of tolerance for errors in assessments, as failure can lead to exclusion from school. Consequently, failing the Testing exam results in immediate, long-term, and adverse consequences, including social, educational, and physical deprivation during enforced confinement at home.⁶⁷

Even without such severe outcomes, formal assessments of children present significant challenges. For decades, educators and psychologists have debated the school assessment system, questioning

⁶³ It catches the eye that a child undergoing the Testing exam is referred to as a “foreign citizen.” This once again demonstrates the profound decline of education authorities in the Russian Federation, which are focused not on protecting children's rights, but on weeding out “foreign citizens.”

⁶⁴ See Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements (FIPI), https://doc.fipi.ru/inostr-exam/test_demo_02.pdf.

⁶⁵ See Federal Institute for Pedagogical Measurements (FIPI), <https://fipi.ru/inostr-exam/inostr-exam-deti> [accessed October 31, 2025].

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ According to the Ministry of Education (see paragraph 23 of the Letter of the Ministry of Education of Russia No. N 03-608 dated March 31, 2025 “О направлении Методических рекомендаций” (On the Direction of Methodological Recommendations), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_503271 [accessed October 27, 2025]), education authorities permit retaking the test after three months. However, firstly, not every parent will want to subject themselves and their child to such stress again; and secondly, with a high probability, the enrollment period—especially for those entering the first grade (before September 5)—will have expired. Therefore, even if the retake is successful, the school year will be missed.

who should be assessed, how, what should be assessed, and when, in order to maximize the positive impact of assessments—rewarding successful students and motivating underperformers to improve. Researchers now recognize that assessments often have a negative impact, posing serious risks to a child's mental health, self-esteem, motivation, emotional well-being, and relationships with peers and friends.⁶⁸ High-stakes exams, which determine a student's future, carry an increased risk of harming children's mental health.⁶⁹ Therefore, although opinions vary on specific assessment issues, all experts agree that assessments should not be traumatic for children, and any potential negative consequences must be avoided.

A particularly cautious approach to assessment is essential in elementary school, as a child's psyche is especially vulnerable at this stage. An inappropriate approach can lead to demotivation, social withdrawal, and a decline in self-esteem, causing long-term psychological harm and potentially resulting in profound negative consequences throughout life. Even high-ranking officials responsible for education in the Russian Federation acknowledged this, as reflected in a methodological letter issued by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science in 1998, which specifically addressed assessment in schools. The letter emphasized that “a young student should learn from success,”⁷⁰ and that assessment should be based on the principle that children in elementary school “have the right to make mistakes and to engage in trial-and-error analysis of the sequence of learning activities with the teacher.”⁷¹ In 2000, the same ministry banned not only the use of grades in the first grade but also the use of “any symbolic signs that replace a numerical grade.”⁷² Any tests or exams were prohibited during the first semester, and withholding promotion to the second grade was forbidden.⁷³ Furthermore, teachers were advised not to call shy and insecure children to the board during the initial months of school.⁷⁴

As a result, the high risk of negative psychological consequences associated with assessments in elementary school led education authorities to ban the use of grades for first-graders and mandate the promotion of all children to the second grade, regardless of their performance. However, this did not prevent Russian authorities from introducing a highly challenging exam for children of foreign citizens as a requirement for school admission. This exam has become more than just an initial test or diagnostic tool; it is a life-altering trial that directly determines whether a child will be admitted to school. Failure of this exam for children entering elementary school (ages 6–10), as well as for many older children, can be particularly distressing, with potentially dangerous and long-lasting consequences. Several thousand children have already experienced the effects of this exam, and most were not accepted into Russian schools. What impact has this had on their psychological well-being? How much mental trauma have Russian authorities inflicted on these children? It appears that few within the Russian education system are concerned.

⁶⁸ Tamara Gordeeva, Oleg Sychev, and Anastasiya Sidneva, “Оценивание достижений школьников в традиционной и развивающей системах обучения: психолого-педагогический анализ” (Assessing students' Achievements in Traditional and Developmental Education Systems: a Psychological and Pedagogical Analysis), *Voprosy obrazovaniya*, no. 1 (2021): 213–36.

⁶⁹ See, for example, a review of research on the negative impact of failing important exams here: Michaela Minarechová, “Negative Impacts of High-Stakes Testing”, *Journal of Pedagogy* 3, no. 1 (2012): 82–100; Brett D. Jones, “The Unintended Outcomes of High-Stakes Testing”, *Journal of Applied School Psychology* 23, no. 2 (2007): 65–86.

⁷⁰ Methodological letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No. 1561/14-15 dated November 19, “Контроль и оценка результатов обучения в начальной школе” (Monitoring and Evaluation of Learning Outcomes in Primary School), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_255851/ [accessed: November 3, 2025].

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Letter of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 2021/11-13 dated September 25, 2000, “Об организации обучения в первом классе четырехлетней начальной школы” (On the Organization of Instruction in the First Grade of a Four-Year Primary School), <https://base.garant.ru/1584610/> [accessed: November 7, 2025].

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

4. Testing Procedure as Part of Russian Migration Policy

For many years, Russian state migration policy has been marked by ambivalence, oscillating between more liberal and more authoritarian approaches.⁷⁵ Since the mid-2010s, an authoritarian approach has predominated, incorporating many elements of a xenophobic and anti-migrant worldview.⁷⁶ Within this perspective, migrants—especially those from Central Asia—are perceived as detrimental to the economic well-being of “native Russians,” exploiting social programs, prone to conflict and crime, undermining established customs, and failing to conform to the prevailing “values paradigm.”⁷⁷ The situation regarding migrant rights, particularly the rights of labor migrants from Central Asia, has further deteriorated since the onset of the state-led anti-migrant campaign in 2024.⁷⁸

Current Russian migration policy is characterized by: (a) its *ideological* nature, as it is entirely subordinated to the authoritarian political agenda pursued by Russian authorities; (b) *repressiveness*, relying on strict control and egregious violations of the rights and freedoms of foreign citizens; (c) *restrictiveness*, since, with the exception of certain groups, the prevailing approach is to limit and contain migration, which is regarded as a necessary but undesirable measure; (d) *discrimination*, involving systematic violations of migrants’ rights based on nationality, gender, ethnicity, origin, political views, religion, place of residence, and language; and (e) *selectivity*, targeting the exclusion of migrants deemed “alien” by the authorities, while including those considered “their own” on the same basis.

It should be noted that the criteria and intensity of migrant classification into “aliens” and “their own” within Russian migration policy have changed significantly. A recent example illustrates this well. Until 2024, Tajiks were the fastest-growing group of foreign citizens participating in the compatriot resettlement program. This group not only held the top position but also reached a record 31.3% share by the end of 2023. However, following the terrorist attack at Crocus City, Russian authorities radically altered their stance toward Tajik citizens. Consequently, the proportion of participants from this country in the resettlement program declined rapidly, falling to 8.5% by the end of the second quarter of 2025. In absolute terms, the decline is even more dramatic: from 8,000

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Vladimir Malakhov and Mark Simo, “К генеалогии миграционной политики в России: столкновение двух правительственных рациональностей” (Toward a Genealogy of Migration Policy in Russia: The Clash of Two Governmental Rationality), *VTE* 1 (2018): 58–72; Anna-Liisa Heusala, “The Soviet Legacy of ‘National Security’ in Russian Migration Policy”, *Russian Politics* 3, no. 3 (2018): 430–50.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Irina Kuznetsova, “Dangerous and Unwanted: Policy and Everyday Discourses of Migrants in Russia,” in *Migration and the Ukraine Crisis*, ed. Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Greta Uehling (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017): 149–63; Anastasia Gorodzeisky, “Opposition to Immigration in Contemporary Russia,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, no. 3 (2019): 205–22.

⁷⁷ An anti-migrant worldview does not necessarily entail opposition to all forms of migration, as it can be based on different principles. For example, Anastasia Gorodzeisky categorizes anti-migrant positions in Russia into two broad types: “total exclusion”—people who adhere to this position would like to sharply limit or exclude all migration; and “ethnic exclusion”—people who adhere to this position would like to sharply limit or exclude migration of certain ethnic groups (Anastasia Gorodzeisky, “Opposition to Immigration in Contemporary Russia,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, no. 3 (2019): 205–22).

⁷⁸ Alexander Verkhovsky, “What is Driving the Intensifying Anti-Migration Campaign in Russia?,” *Russia.Post*, December 19, 2024, https://russiapost.info/politics/anti_migration_campaign [accessed December 20, 2025]; Alexander Verkhovsky, “What is Behind the Kremlin’s Increasingly Anti-Migration Line?,” *Russia.Post*, August 15, 2024, https://russiapost.info/politics/anti_migration_line [accessed December 20, 2025]; HRW, *Living in Fear and Humiliation: Rising Xenophobic Harassment and Violence towards Central Asian Migrants in Russia*, Human Rights Watch, March 2025. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/04/russia0325web.pdf [accessed December 12, 2025].

participants in the second half of 2023 to 1,000 in the first half of 2025.⁷⁹ It is worth recalling that, at various times, Chechens, Moldavians, Georgians, migrants from Central Asia, Azerbaijanis, and Turks, among others, have been regarded as particularly “alien” by Russian authorities.

In recent years, Russian authorities have implemented a particularly harsh migration policy characterized by both discriminatory exclusion and expansionist inclusion. Migrants subjected to exclusion face systematic violations of their rights, including denial of access to school education. Conversely, those considered “their own” by Russian authorities are targeted for assimilation, often carried out aggressively and in violation of their rights. Notable recent examples of this assimilation include: (a) the mass and essentially forced assignment of Russian citizenship to Ukrainians residing in territories of Ukraine occupied by Russian authorities⁸⁰; (b) the deportation of Ukrainian children from these territories to regions within Russia, where these children are declared Russian citizens⁸¹; and (c) the Russification of Ukrainian citizens living in the occupied territories, a process actively promoted through the Russian school system.⁸²

In summary, in light of this report, four general, interconnected themes can be identified in Russian migration policy: (1) surveillance and control, (2) labor exploitation, (3) reduction of social spending, and (4) ideologization, indoctrination, and assimilation. Furthermore, the introduction of the Testing procedure for foreign children is neither a random nor isolated initiative but an integral component of Russian migration policy. This is confirmed, among other sources, by the “Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2026–2030” (hereinafter, the Concept 2026–2030), which cites the introduction of the Testing procedure as one of its positive outcomes.⁸³

⁷⁹ Konstantin Troitskiy, “Миграционная статистика за 2024 год: число участников программы по переселению в Россию продолжает стремительно снижаться” (Migration Statistics for 2024: the Number of Participants in the Resettlement Program to Russia Continues to Decline Rapidly), Civic Assistance Committee, March 19, 2025, <https://refugee.ru/dokladyi/migratsionnaya-statistika-za-2024-god-chislo-uchastnikov-programmy-po-pereseleniyu-v-rossiyu-prodolzhaet-stremitelno-snizhatsya/> [accessed November 28, 2025] and Konstantin Troitskiy, “Первое полугодие 2025 года: дальнейшее снижение участников программы по переселению в Россию” (First Half of 2025: Further Decline in the Number of Participants in the Resettlement Program to Russia), Civic Assistance Committee, October 30, 2025, <https://refugee.ru/dokladyi/pervoe-polugodie-2025-goda-dalneyshee-snizhenie-uchastnikov-programmy-po-pereseleniyu-v-rossiyu/> [accessed November 28, 2025].

⁸⁰ Yale School of Public Health, *Forced Passportization on Russia-Occupied Areas of Ukraine*, New Haven, Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health, August 2, 2023, <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/891469c2-690f-4229-8ffc-35b1c3743744> [accessed December 18, 2025].

⁸¹ OSCE, *Report on Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, related to the Forcible Transfer and/or Deportation of Ukrainian Children to the Russian Federation*, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, May 4, 2023, https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/7/7/542751_1.pdf [accessed January 3, 2026]; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Impact of the Armed Conflict and Occupation on Children’s Rights in Ukraine* (24 February 2022 – 31 December 2024), March 21, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/form/2025-03-21-ohchr-report-children-s-rights-in-ukraine.pdf> [accessed December 29, 2025]; Yale School of Public Health, *Ukraine’s Stolen Children: Inside Russia’s Network of Re-education and Militarization*, New Haven, Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health, September 16, 2025, <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/e6294def-3f80-4d71-9cc7-91f6af70a523> [accessed December 17, 2025].

⁸² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Impact of the Armed Conflict and Occupation on Children’s Rights in Ukraine* (24 February 2022 – 31 December 2024), March 21, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/form/2025-03-21-ohchr-report-children-s-rights-in-ukraine.pdf> [accessed December 29, 2025]; HRW, *Education under Occupation. Forced Russification of the School System in Occupied Ukrainian Territories*, Human Rights Watch, June 2024, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/06/ukraine_crd0624%20web_0.pdf [accessed: 18 December 2025].

⁸³ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 738 dated October 15, 2025, “О Концепции государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на 2026 - 2030 годы” (On the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2026–2030), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/412750335/> [accessed October 24, 2025].

A detailed analysis of Russian migration policy is beyond the scope of this report. Below, it will briefly outline its main areas and demonstrate how the Testing procedure serves Russian authorities as a tool to advance each of these areas.

4.1 Surveillance and Control

The rise of authoritarian tendencies in Russia in the early 2000s coincided with the emergence of unprecedented surveillance technologies. Utilizing these new tools, Russian authorities began constructing an extensive surveillance system comprising numerous databases, networks of video cameras, internet monitoring, the deployment of surveillance apps on users' mobile devices, financial oversight, research institutes, and an interdepartmental information exchange system.⁸⁴ The development of technological authoritarianism accelerated notably in the 2010s with the advent of artificial intelligence technologies capable of processing vast amounts of data. Russian authorities promptly leveraged these advancements to establish control over the internet and significantly expand their street-level video surveillance network.⁸⁵

The surveillance and monitoring of migrants are of particular interest to Russian authorities. Against this backdrop, 2024 and 2025 saw the adoption of a series of regulations that expanded existing surveillance methods and introduced several new measures specifically aimed at foreign citizens.⁸⁶ In the Concept 2026–2030, Russian authorities set the goal of further strengthening surveillance by planning improvements to the profiling system for foreign citizens, artificial intelligence technologies, biometric data collection, the arrival notification system, and digital location tracking.⁸⁷

The Testing procedure for children of foreign citizens upon admission to schools is an integral part of the Russian surveillance system. As noted above, education authorities verify migration documents upon application, and information about parents and their children is entered into databases. This applies not only to families who successfully pass the Testing exam, but also to those who discontinue the process at earlier stages of the Testing procedure, for example, after unsuccessful attempts to submit documents. It was also noted earlier that the implementation of the Testing procedure was used as a pretext for officially establishing data exchange between education authorities and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As a result, schools that had previously “cooperated” with the migration service became even more instrumental in monitoring foreign citizens. Moreover, the mandated close data exchange extends far beyond the Testing exam itself, as schools are required to notify migration services of the enrollment and expulsion of foreign citizen children, changes in their parents' migration status, their location, and likely other information. For example, in Tatarstan, authorities decided to enroll the overwhelming majority of foreign national

⁸⁴ See, e.g., Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The Red Web. The Struggle Between Russia's Digital Dictators and the New Online Revolutionaries*, (PublicAffairs, 2015); International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and Global Diligence LLP, *Russia's Digital Authoritarianism: the Kremlin's Toolkit*, International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and Global Diligence LLP, September, 2023, <https://iphronline.org/articles/russias-digital-authoritarianism-the-kremlins-toolkit/> [accessed November 12, 2025].

⁸⁵ See, e.g., HRW, *Disrupted, Throttled, and Blocked State Censorship, Control, and Increasing Isolation of Internet Users in Russia*, Human Rights Watch, July, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/07/russia0725%20web.pdf [accessed November 12, 2025]; Anastassiya Mahon and Scott Walker, “Russia’s Digital Repression Landscape: Unraveling the Kremlin’s Digital Repression Tactics”, *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 4, no. 3 (2024): 29–50.

⁸⁶ Konstantin Troitskiy, *On New Methods, Regulations, and Technologies for Surveillance of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation*, Memorial. Human Rights Defence Center, 2025, https://memorialcenter.org/uploads/organized_1_20e8170a3f.pdf [accessed January 3, 2026].

⁸⁷ See subparagraph “a” of paragraph 28, subparagraphs “g” and “d” of paragraph 29 of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 738 dated October 15, 2025, “О Концепции государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на 2026 - 2030 годы” (On the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2026–2030), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/412750335/> [accessed October 24, 2025].

children admitted to the Testing exam. However, as early as 2024, they announced plans to closely monitor these children's academic performance and even their “involvement in socially useful activities.”⁸⁸ Although the exact meaning of the latter is unclear, it evidently refers to enhanced surveillance of foreign national children involving various agencies. Federal authorities also openly acknowledge their use of schools for surveillance and immigration control, as State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin and others have stated.⁸⁹

4.2 Labor Exploitation

Labor exploitation of migrants refers to abuses aimed at extracting economic gain by taking advantage of migrants' vulnerable positions. This exploitation can manifest as direct violence or occur with the formal consent of the exploited individuals.⁹⁰ Labor exploitation encompasses a wide range of situations, from minor but systematic violations of labor rights to outright slavery.⁹¹ In all cases, it involves employer abuse through various tactics and strategies that violate migrants' rights, including unjustified wage reductions, refusal to pay all or part of promised wages, forced overtime, poor working conditions, and, in particularly severe cases, document confiscation, imprisonment, threats, and physical violence.⁹² Many of these abuses have long been common in the Russian labor market and migrant workers are particularly affected by them.⁹³ Recently, labor exploitation of migrants has escalated, as Russian authorities not only continue to do little to combat employer abuses but also participate in exploiting migrants themselves by using some of them in the war against Ukraine.⁹⁴

Overall, Russian migration policy toward the vast majority of migrant workers operates under the slogan, once again voiced by State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin, that migrant workers should “arrive, work, and leave.” This approach treats migrants as temporary resources rather than as persons with rights, social needs, and demands. They are denied rights such as family reunification, integration, and freedom of movement. Migrants are inherently and in nearly every respect considered inferior to the “local population.” This stance is reflected in the Concept 2026–2030 in the following two provisions:

- Paragraph 15 states, “*The efforts of government bodies will be aimed at accelerating the transition to targeted, organized recruitment of foreign workers (primarily those arriving*

⁸⁸ Radio Liberty, “В Татарстане берут под контроль детей мигрантов и студентов из-за рубежа” (In Tatarstan, Children of Migrants and Students from Abroad Are Being Monitored), *Radio Liberty “Ideal.Realities”*, February 9, 2024,

<https://www.idelreal.org/a/v-tatarstane-berut-pod-kontrol-detey-migrantov-i-studentov-iz-za-rubezha/32811967.html> [accessed December 7, 2025].

⁸⁹ The Insider, “Школы будут сообщать в МВД РФ данные детей мигрантов” (Schools Will Report Data on Migrant Children to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs), *The Insider*, July 22, 2025, <https://theins.ru/news/283355> [accessed November 21, 2025].

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Maayan Niezna, “Consent to Labour Exploitation”, *Industrial Law Journal* 53, no. 1 (2024): 3–33.

⁹¹ Toby Shelley, *Exploited Migrant Labour in the New Global Economy* (London: Zed Books, 2007): 6–7.

⁹² FRA, *Protecting Migrant Workers from Exploitation in the EU: Workers’ Perspectives*, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019,

https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-severe-labour-exploitation-workers-perspectives_en.pdf [accessed November 12, 2025]; Anna Boucher, “What Is Exploitation and Workplace Abuse? A Classification Schema to Understand Exploitative Workplace Behaviour towards Migrant Workers”, *New Political Economy*, 27 (4): 629–45.

⁹³ Elena Tyuryukanova, *Forced Labour in the Russian Federation Today: Irregular Migration and Trafficking in Human Beings* (Geneva: International Labour office, 2005); HRW, “Are You Happy to Cheat Us?” *Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in Russia*, Human Rights Watch, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/ru/report/2009/02/10/255854> [accessed January 3, 2026]; Rustamjon Urinboyev, *Migration and Hybrid Political Regimes. Navigating the Legal Landscape in Russia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

⁹⁴ HRW, *Living in Fear and Humiliation. Rising Xenophobic Harassment and Violence towards Central Asian Migrants in Russia*, Human Rights Watch, March 2025, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/04/russia0325web.pdf [accessed October 28, 2025].

visa-free), providing the opportunity to work for a specific employer, at a specific workplace, for a specified period, based on an employment contract and a work permit.”⁹⁵

- Paragraph 21 states, *“Natural reproduction should remain the primary source for replenishing the population of the Russian Federation and providing the national economy with labor resources. Migration policy should be an auxiliary tool for resolving economic problems related to supplying priority sectors of the Russian economy with foreign workers during periods of persistent shortages of national labor resources.”⁹⁶*

The Testing procedure is “organically” integrated into exploitative practices and used as a means to reinforce them, as it compels foreign citizens either not to bring their children or to remove children who have not been admitted to school. This, in turn, often results in one parent remaining in or returning to the country of origin. Consequently, migrant workers with families are forced to live isolated from their children and often their spouses, which inevitably affects the well-being of all parties involved. In cases where migrant workers have brought their children, they are compelled to attempt to pass the Testing procedure, with a predictably high probability of failure. If a child is denied access to school, the parents are either forced to send their children back to their country of origin or coerced by Russian authorities, who openly intend to impose forced expulsion (выдворение) on children excluded from school. It is particularly cynical that the authorities claim to care about the well-being and protection of children's rights.⁹⁷ Notably, one of the first to advocate for this initiative was Valery Fadeyev, head of the so-called “Human Rights Council.”⁹⁸ In other words, Russian authorities first introduce the Testing procedure, making it nearly impossible for the vast majority of foreign children to pass, and then use this as a pretext for the forcible expulsion of these children along with one or both parents.

4.3 Reduction of Social Spending

What was said about labor exploitation is largely related to Russian authorities' desire to reduce social spending, disregarding the fact that this is accomplished through severe violations of migrants' rights. This issue deserves special attention because the withdrawal of social responsibility affects the vast majority of migrants, not only those who come to work. For example, this problem is especially acute for refugees.

Many Russian officials and politicians have long been developing measures to reduce social spending on foreign citizens in Russia. However, the authorities are not stopping there. The Concept 2026–2030 includes a specific clause emphasizing the need to implement measures “to reduce the burden on social, medical, and other sectors associated with the presence in the Russian Federation

⁹⁵ See paragraph 15 of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 738 dated October 15, 2025, “О Концепции государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на 2026 - 2030 годы” (On the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2026–2030), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/412750335/> [accessed October 24, 2025].

⁹⁶ See paragraph 21, *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Radio Liberty, “В Татарстане берут под контроль детей мигрантов и студентов из-за рубежа” (In Tatarstan, Children of Migrants and Students from Abroad Are Being Monitored), *Radio Liberty “Ideal.Realities”*, February 9, 2024,

<https://www.idelreal.org/a/v-tatarstane-berut-pod-kontrol-detey-migrantov-i-studentov-iz-za-rubezha/32811967.html> [accessed December 7, 2025].

⁹⁸ Meduza, “Глава СПЧ призвал высылать из России семьи мигрантов, дети которых не ходят в школу” (The Head of the HRC Called for the Expulsion from Russia of Migrant Families Whose Children Do Not Attend School), *Meduza*, June 25, 2025, <https://meduza.io/news/2025/06/25/glava-spch-prizval-vysylat-iz-rossii-semi-migrantov-deti-kotoryh-ne-hodyat-v-shkol> [accessed November 21, 2025].

of non-working and non-educated family members of foreign citizens who are employed or studying in the Russian Federation.”⁹⁹

From the evidence already presented, it is clear that Russian authorities are using the Testing procedure to block access to schools for the vast majority of children of foreign citizens, thereby attempting to reduce education-related social spending. Paragraph 41 of the Concept 2026–2030 explicitly states that one of the desired outcomes of migration policy is a “reduction in the proportion of children of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation who do not attend education institutions.”¹⁰⁰ Although the document's authors do not elaborate, it is evident from the above that Russian authorities intend to achieve this “reduction” not by facilitating access to school education or through more proactive efforts by educational authorities, but by compelling these children to leave and, likely, directly expulsing those who do not pass the Testing procedure.

4.4 Ideologization, Indoctrination, and Assimilation

In this report, ideologization refers to viewing something exclusively through a narrow ideological lens. Indoctrination denotes the imposition of a particular ideology on a person while avoiding critical evaluation. Assimilation refers to the process of absorbing migrants into a group that upholds the dominant ideology, forcing the assimilated to renounce their cultural, religious, linguistic, and national identities. Ideologization plays an important role in current Russian migration policy. On one hand, authorities aim to attract migrants from developed countries who are either imbued with or receptive to Russian propaganda; on the other hand, they seek to exploit or exclude migrants who are critical of this propaganda or originate from less economically developed countries. Ideologization is already prominently evident in the “Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2019–2025” (hereafter, the Concept 2019–2025), and in the Concept 2026–2030, it ultimately subordinates all other dimensions.

Thus, the Concept 2019–2025 explicitly identifies one of the goals of migration policy as the “protection and preservation of Russian culture, the Russian language, and the historical and cultural heritage of the peoples of Russia, which form the foundation of its cultural (civilizational) code.”¹⁰¹ It also states that the adaptation of “foreign citizens and their minor children” requires, among other measures, the creation of conditions that facilitate their “introduction to traditional Russian spiritual and moral values.”¹⁰²

The Concept 2026–2030 reiterates these goals almost verbatim; however, the authors extend them further by invoking so-called “spiritual and moral values” in four additional contexts: (1) within the framework of the resettlement program for foreign citizens from countries that, according to Russian authorities, “impose destructive neoliberal ideological attitudes”¹⁰³; (2) emphasizing that residence and admission to Russian citizenship should be granted to foreign citizens who “share traditional Russian spiritual and moral values”¹⁰⁴; (3) highlighting the need to assist “foreign

⁹⁹ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 738 dated October 15, 2025, “О Концепции государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на 2026 - 2030 годы” (On the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2026–2030), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/412750335/> [accessed October 24, 2025].

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ See Paragraph 14 of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 622 dated October 31, 2018, “О Концепции государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на 2019 - 2025 годы” (On the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2019–2025), <https://base.garant.ru/72092260/> [accessed November 14, 2025].

¹⁰² See Paragraph 23, *ibid.*

¹⁰³ See Paragraph 8 of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 738 dated October 15, 2025, “О Концепции государственной миграционной политики Российской Федерации на 2026 - 2030 годы” (On the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2026–2030), <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/412750335/> [accessed October 24, 2025].

¹⁰⁴ See Paragraph 27, *ibid.*

citizens who share traditional Russian spiritual and moral values” in relocating to the Russian Federation¹⁰⁵; and (4) stating that the outcome of migration policy should be “an increase in the number of foreign citizens who share traditional Russian spiritual and moral values and who have moved to the Russian Federation for permanent residence.”¹⁰⁶ By “traditional Russian spiritual and moral values,” Russian authorities actually mean a fluid, vague, and changeable set of diverse and contradictory ideological elements and clichés drawn from the assortment of top figures within the Russian authoritarian regime.

The ideological component in Russian schools has increased sharply since the mid-2010s. Authorities have begun to view schools not as institutions for providing quality education and fostering independent, critical thinking in students, but as effective tools for indoctrinating children. Since Russian authorities launched an open war against Ukraine in February 2022, the indoctrination of children in schools has intensified, reaching colossal proportions.¹⁰⁷ Particular attention is being paid by the Russian government to the indoctrination of deported Ukrainian children and to schools in the occupied territories.¹⁰⁸

In this context, the Testing procedure appears to serve primarily as a tool for Russian authorities to “weed out” children who are more difficult to indoctrinate due to their identities differing from that of Russia—those whom the authorities do not consider bearers of “traditional Russian spiritual and moral values,” meaning children who are harder to assimilate. It is important to note that Russian authorities view the Russian language through a narrow ideological lens, assigning it a significant role in the indoctrination and assimilation of migrants. For example, in July 2025, the authorities published the Decree “On Approval of the Fundamentals of the State Language Policy of the Russian Federation,” which states, among other things: “The Russian language is one of the foundations of Russian statehood and is inextricably linked with traditional Russian spiritual and moral values.” It further adds: “The Russian language is a national treasure of Russia, an important element of Russian and world culture, uniting the multinational peoples of the Russian Federation and other peoples of the world into a single cultural and civilizational community of the Russian World.”¹⁰⁹ So, it seems that Russian authorities prefer to admit native Russian speakers into schools and exclude non-native.

How does this align with the fact that even some native Russian speakers fail the Testing exam? It appears that Russian authorities also intend to use the Testing procedure as an additional mechanism to compel native speakers to accept Russian citizenship as an important step toward assimilation. Several years ago, Russian legislation introduced a simplified procedure for those recognized as native Russian speakers to obtain Russian citizenship. Until 2022, many people from CIS countries were willing to take advantage of this procedure. However, since Russian authorities launched an open war against Ukraine, even many native Russian speakers from CIS countries living in Russia

¹⁰⁵ See Paragraph 28, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ See Paragraph 41, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Alexander Colin, “Mr. Nobody Against Putin Gives an Insight into the Propaganda in Russian Schools”, *The Conversation*, July 3, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/mr-nobody-against-putin-gives-an-insight-into-the-propaganda-in-russian-schools-260162> [accessed November 26, 2025].

¹⁰⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Impact of the Armed Conflict and Occupation on Children's Rights in Ukraine (24 February 2022 – 31 December 2024)*, March 21, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/form/2025-03-21-ohchr-report-children-s-rights-in-ukraine.pdf> [accessed December 29, 2025]; Pavel Lysiansky, Liza Denisova and Vira Yastrebova, “From Deportation to Indoctrination: Destroying the Ukrainian Identity Through Children”, *UN Agora*, 2025 <https://www.kas.de/en/web/newyork/un-agora-blog/detail/-/content/from-deportation-to-indoctrination-destroying-the-ukrainian-identity-through-children-1> [accessed November 26, 2025].

¹⁰⁹ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 474 dated July 11, 2025, “Об утверждении Основ государственной языковой политики Российской Федерации” [On Approval of the Fundamentals of the State Language Policy of the Russian Federation], <https://base.garant.ru/412319970/> [accessed December 7, 2025].

have come to view Russian citizenship as a “toxic asset,” associated with significant risks, including the threat of reprisals for any criticism, sanctions, and, for men of conscription age, the risk of being sent to the slaughterhouse in Ukraine. Given this devaluation and even danger associated with Russian citizenship, it cannot be ruled out that Russian authorities, by introducing the Testing procedure, have decided to use children and their need for school education as a means of pressuring those native Russian speakers living in Russia and in the occupied Ukrainian territories who refrain from accepting Russian citizenship.

In the context of the discussion about the exclusion/inclusion mechanism, it is also important to recall that in the fall of 2025, Russian authorities decided to “adjust” the Testing procedure to make it more flexible in line with their selective migration policy. This policy excludes “alien” citizens—economically, socially, culturally, politically, and sometimes even physically through deportation or expulsion—while compelling “their own” to assimilate. Accordingly, in early October 2025, the Russian Ministry of Education issued an order exempting several categories of children of foreign citizens from taking the written portion of the Testing exam. These categories include: (1) participants in the compatriots' resettlement program; (2) children from families granted temporary residence permits for “sharing traditional Russian spiritual and moral values”; (3) children of embassy and consular staff; and (4) children of employees of international organizations whose activities are approved by Russian authorities.¹¹⁰ What is striking is not only the cynically discriminatory nature of this order but also the specific exclusion of the written portion of the Testing exam for these groups. Why exclude the written portion? Does it not provide better protection against abuse during the Testing exam? Perhaps those who introduced these changes, besides valuing oral communication skills over written ones, were also motivated by a desire to grant education authorities greater discretion in deciding whom to admit. Moreover, alongside this order—and possibly in coordination with it—initiatives have emerged to abolish the entire Testing procedure for certain foreign citizens. For example, also in October 2025, a bill was introduced in the State Duma proposing to exempt from the Testing procedure all children from the same categories of foreign citizens for whom the Russian Ministry of Education had already excluded the written portion of the Testing exam. The exception is that those “who share traditional Russian spiritual and moral values” would be replaced by children of foreign citizens from countries where Russian is recognized as an official language.¹¹¹ It is evident that Russian authorities are attempting to configure the Testing procedure to best serve the objectives of their migration policy. The fact that this experiment is being conducted on children apparently does not concern them.

¹¹⁰ See Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 727 dated October 8, 2025, https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_516221/2ff7a8c72de3994f30496a0ccbb1ddafdaddd518/ [accessed December 10, 2025].

¹¹¹ Ekaterina Nekrasova, “Детей переселенцев предлагают освободить от экзамена на знание русского языка” (Children of Resettlers Are Proposed to Be Exempt from the Russian Language Exam), *Information and legal portal Garant*, October 7, 2025, <https://www.garant.ru/news/1883705/> [accessed October 28, 2025].

Conclusion

The introduction of a mandatory testing procedure by Russian authorities as a prerequisite for enrolling foreign children in schools has escalated violations of the right to access to education to a new level. This infringement has become institutionalized, extending across all territories under Russian authorities' control and affecting all foreign children seeking school admission. It has been accompanied by the formal codification of additional requirements. To successfully pass the Testing procedure—and thereby gain access to school—children must demonstrate not only excellent proficiency in the Russian language and adherence to “speech etiquette norms,” but also to have official registration, reside at the registered address, prove the legality of their and their parents' stay, show the absence of certain illnesses, have their fingerprints recorded, and sometimes even provide proof of parental income. These documents and requirements clearly and flagrantly violate children's right to education.

The issues with the Russian language exam extend beyond its requirement for advanced proficiency. The Testing exam can be misused, has an unfriendly format, and employs a methodology with significant flaws. Furthermore, the tasks are ideologically biased and discriminatory. Given its critical nature and application to young children, this exam has the potential to cause serious mental harm.

The Testing procedure is neither an isolated violation nor limited to the Russian language exam itself. It constitutes one element of a repressive and discriminatory migration policy with multiple objectives. Russian authorities have used the introduction of the exam as a pretext to further involve schools in the migration control system and to monitor foreign children and their parents. In this process, documents and other information concerning foreign children undergoing the exam, as well as their parents, are sent to schools and the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, which then decides whether to grant or deny access to a particular child. By discouraging migrant workers from bringing their children with them and forcing those who have done so to send them back, Russian authorities are using the Testing procedure to exacerbate labor exploitation. By restricting access to schools for the vast majority of foreign children, the Testing procedure serves as a tool to reduce social costs. Furthermore, by limiting school access almost exclusively to Russian-speaking foreign citizens, compelling native Russian-speaking parents to accept Russian citizenship along with their children, and assigning ideologically oriented tasks, Russian authorities are using the Testing procedure as a tool for indoctrination and selective migration policy. Within this framework, migrants whom Russian authorities view as “aliens” are excluded, while “their own” are subjected to increased indoctrination and assimilation.

Unless the Russian authoritarian regime is replaced, it would be naive to expect any significant improvements in the overall rights of migrants, particularly the right to education. Regarding the specifics of the Testing procedure, much depends on what Russian authorities consider most effective in achieving their migration policy objectives. At the time of its introduction, Russian authorities apparently believed that subjecting all foreign citizens' children to this procedure would be effective. However, it has become evident that even some Russian-speaking children are left without access to education and not only those whom the authorities do not consider “bearers of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values.” Consequently, after conducting a reckless experiment on foreign children entering schools, Russian authorities have apparently decided to make some unessential adjustments. All of this demonstrates once again that the Testing procedure is nothing more than a regulation that effectively abolishes the right of foreign children to education and uses them as a tool to achieve the goals of Russian repressive, restrictive, discriminatory, and selective migration policy.

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