

Foreign Migrants in the Russian Labor Market: the Estimate of Their Overall Number and Their Contribution to Russia's GDP*



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Abstract. Nowadays Russian Federation is one of the world leaders according to the number of international labor migrants it receives. Russia is among the top ten countries according to the volume of remittances from foreign workers to their countries of origin. However, it is impossible to provide an exact statistical estimate for the total number of foreign citizens working in the Russian labor market since there continue to exist certain legal regimes within the post-Soviet area concerning entry into Russia and staying there. The present research analyzes a methodology for an indirect estimate of the overall number of foreign workers in the Russian labor market. The methodology is based on the data on money transfers to migrants' countries of origin, on the estimate of their income in Russia and on the structure of their usage. The research reveals that according to the "medium scenario" in 2017 there were about 7.2 million foreigners working in Russia, and only 2.9 million of them worked legally. The following conclusion can be made: about 60% of foreign workers in Russia are not included in the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of Russia and the General Administration for Migration Issues under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. The estimate of the foreign workers' contribution to Russian GDP is based on the overall number of foreign labor migrants in Russia. According to our estimate, their contribution was around 6.4% in 2017.

Key words: international migration, labor migration, irregular migration, labor migrants, remittances.

Introduction

From the second half of the 20th century, processes of globalization, together with growing cross-country socio-economic differentiation, contributed to sharp intensification of population's migration flows and led to the formation of a new migration situation in the world. Currently, there are more than 258 million migrants [1, p.4]. Moreover, hundreds of millions of people get involved in different forms of interstate movements (permanent and temporary) annually [2]. Foreign migrant workers have become an objective phenomenon in the labor market of developed countries, and emigration has become one of the main ways of improving the level of well-being in developing countries. International Labor Organization estimates that the number of migrant workers is about 164 million [3, p. 6]. According to World Bank data, in 2017, migrants transferred more than 466 billion US dollars to developing countries, which is three times more than receipts through official channels. At the same time, the total amount of migrant remittances exceeded 613 billion US dollars [4, p. 4].

Russia is a classic example of a country that is a major recipient of international labor migrants, and one of the centers of attraction for the labor force within the Eurasian migration system. It is extremely difficult to quantify the total number of foreign citizens engaged in (legal and illegal) employment system of our country. Thus, General Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russian Federation assessed that 1 million 682.6 thousand patents and 148.3 thousand work permits were issued to foreign citizens in 2018¹.

The main labor donors for the Russian labor market are the CIS republics (Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan), from which Russia receives mainly labor resources with a low level of human capital development. Only 27 thousand qualified specialists, who had a valid work permit, were

¹ Official webpage of General Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russian Federation. Available at: <https://xn--b1aew.xn--p1ai/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/item/15850787/>. Accessed: 20.04.2019.

among more than seven million people, who came to the country for work: it is less than 0.4% of the total migration flow².

Labor migration flows form a number of “counter-flows” into countries – donors of labor force. In addition to return labor migration and the flow of information, which is an important factor in the formation of migration processes, financial flow has a great significance. Thus, according to The Central Bank of the Russian Federation, the volume of money transfers to the CIS countries in 2017–2018 was more than 13 billion US dollars³.

Methodology of the research

Currently, there are no “direct” statistical instruments for assessing the total number of foreign employees (legal and illegal) in the Russian labor market. Available numbers are of estimated nature due to the significant illegal component of international labor migration.

Methods of estimating the number of illegal labor migrants are similar to methods of evaluating other “informal” socio-economic processes and have the same methodological problems. The main issue is that it is, by definition, impossible to account all “undocumented” migrants [5; 6; 7].

In general, all methods of estimating the number of illegal migrants are ultimately based on the use of available statistical data and the analysis of registered cases of illegal migration. On the basis of observed and recorded indicators, in turn, it is possible to draw a

conclusion on the scale of “unobservable” phenomena (total number of illegal migrants, number of illegal migrant workers, etc.) [6; 7; 8; 9].

This study proposes a methodology for estimating the total number of foreign migrant workers in the Russian labor market based on the analysis of remittances sent by migrants to their home countries and evaluation of the contribution of labor migrants to the gross domestic product of Russia.

Sources of statistical data were data of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation on remittances of labor migrants to their home countries, data from the Russian Federal State Statistics Service on average wages in the labor market and national GDP, and data from sociological studies on wages and productivity of labor migrants.

Remittances of migrant workers from Russia

One of the main goals of international labor migrants is the sending of money (transfers) to their home countries. According to the Central Bank, more than 17 billion US dollars were transferred by foreign labor migrants from Russia in 2017–2018. This statistical data clearly show that the decline of cash flows, observed in 2015–2016, was replaced by an increase in 2017. Moreover, in the ruble equivalent, the volume of transfers in 2017 exceeded the 2014 indicator (*Tab. 1*). We can say that certain sectors of the Russian economy, which use migrants’ labor, begin to overcome the crisis phenomena of the Russian economy.

In 2018, about 14 billion US dollars were transferred to the CIS countries. In the post-Soviet space, the largest financial flows from Russia were directed to Uzbekistan (3.69 billion US dollars), Tajikistan (2.62 billion dollars), and Kyrgyzstan (2.23 billion dollars). About 4.7 billion US dollars were transferred to distant foreign countries.

² Official webpage of General Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russian Federation. Available at: <https://xn--b1aew.xn--plai/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/item/12162186/> accessed: 20.04.2019. Population size and migration in the Russian Federation in 2017. Moscow: Rosstat, 2018. Available at: http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b18_107/Main.htm. Accessed: 20.04.2019.

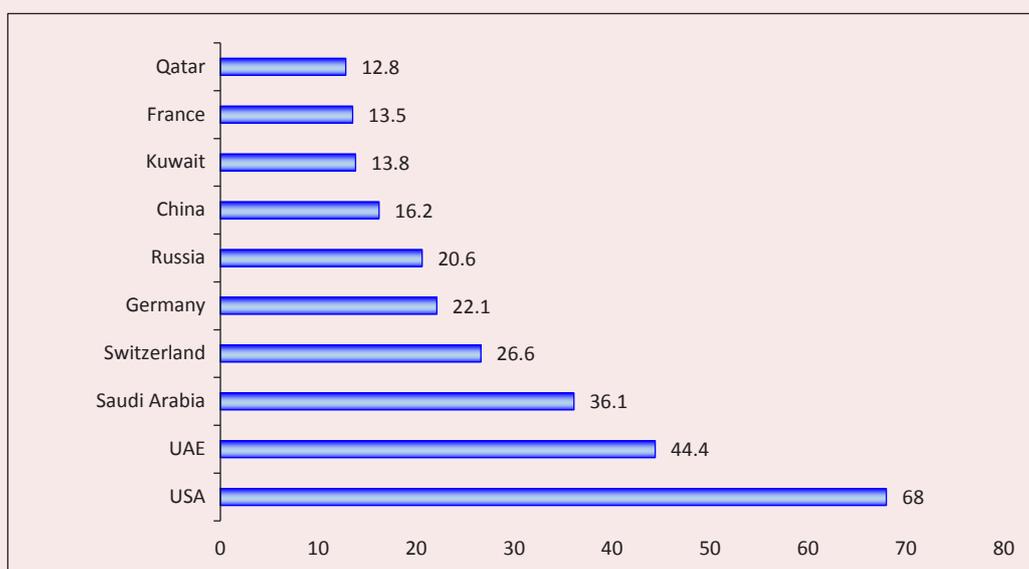
³ Official webpage of The Central Bank of the Russian Federation. Available at: http://www.cbr.ru/vfs/statistics/CrossBorder/Personal_Remittances_CIS.xlsx. Accessed: 20.04.2019.

Table 1. Remittances of foreign employees to their home countries

Indicator	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Remittances of migrants to their home countries, bil. US dollars	30.4	27.0	16.3	14.2	17.9	18.8
In % to the previous year	120%	89%	60%	87%	126%	105%
Remittances of migrants to their home countries, bil. rub.	968.4	1038.0	994.5	948.6	1043.1	1178.6
In % to the previous year	123%	107%	96%	95%	110%	113%

According to: data of The Central Bank of the Russian Federation.

Figure 1. Countries-leaders in migrants' remittances to home countries, billion US dollars, 2017



Source: data of The Central Bank of the Russian Federation [10].

According to the World Bank, Russia holds the leading position in the world in terms of the total volume of transfers sent, being the 6th in late 2017 (*Fig. 1*).

At the same time, if the exchange rate of the Russian ruble to the US dollar remained at the level of 2013 (the weighted average rate from 01.01.2013 to 31.12.2013 was 31.8 rubles per US dollar), Russia would occupy the 3rd position in the list with 40.5 billion dollar indicator. At the same time, the highest value of money transfers from Russia happened in 2013, when the total volume of money transfers exceeded 37.2 billion US dollars.

Payment to foreign employees in Russia

The specifics of Russian foreign workers accounting and the form of their employment do not allow obtaining data concerning migrants' average salary. The patent system and gray, illegal forms of employment make this task impossible for direct statistical methods. For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to use data from sociological studies: especially surveys of migrant workers.

To calculate the total number of foreign workers employed in the Russian labor market, let us refer to the data on salaries obtained during the study conducted by the Center of

Table 2. Comparison of average salaries of Russian and foreign employees

Indicator	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Average monthly nominal accrued salary of Russian employees*, rub.	26629	29792	32495	34030	36709	39167
Average salary of foreign employees**, rub.	19766	21833	23900	25966	28032	30100
Ratio of average salaries of Russian and foreign employees**, %	74.2	73.3	73.5	76.3	76.4	76.9
* According to Rosstat data.						
** Own calculations according to research data of Center for Ethnopolitical and Regional Studies.						

Ethnopolitical and Regional Studies for HSE University. According to it, an average salary of a migrant worker in Russia was 30.1 thousand rubles in 2017: it is 76.9% of the average salary of a Russian citizen.

As we can see (*Tab. 2*), the gap between wage levels of migrants and Russians was about 25% in 2012–2017. However, since 2015, there has been a tendency toward gradual reduction of this gap.

Using Rosstat data on the number of foreign workers, it is possible to calculate an approxi-mate total annual salary of migrant workers in Russia. As we see in *Table 3*, it has significantly increased over the past 5 years. At the same time, in 2016, this figure was higher than the total amount of money transfers by 4835.9 million rubles. In other words, remittances accounted for 99.5% of the annual salary of foreign workers. At the same time, a certain part of money transfers passes through informal networks and is not taken into account by the Central Bank of Russia. We can conclude that a significant

number of migrant workers are not considered by the Russian State Statistical System.

Even if we take into account the fact that the proposed approach includes temporary labor migrants and foreigners, who have a temporary residence permit or a residence permit, it is possible to conclude that the actual number of foreign citizens, engaged in labor activity of the Russian Federation, is two times higher than the official data say.

Estimation of total number of foreign workers in Russia

The structure of migrant workers' wages spending usually consists of the following components: food expenses, rent, taxes, mandatory payments, and funds sent to families back home (money transfers) [11; 12; 13; 14].

Having information about the share of wages that migrants transfer to their home countries and the total amount of migrant workers' remittances, it is possible to estimate the total number of foreign workers, including the illegal component.

Table 3. Ratio of total salaries of migrant workers to total amount of migrants' money transfers to home countries

Indicator	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total amount of annual salaries of migrants, million rub.	670067.4	780250.3	952835.6	1055517.9	953446.8	938608.2
Volume of migrant workers' remittances to home countries, million rub.	788394.1	968370.3	1038000.6	994467.2	948610.9	1043129.5
Balance, million rub.	-118326.7	-188120.0	-85165.0	61050.7	4835.9	-104521.3
Source: own calculations according to data of The Central Bank of the RF and Rosstat.						

According to several studies, temporarily resident foreigners spend significantly less of their income in the country of destination than local residents and migrants moving to permanent residence. In T. Bauer and M. Sinning's studies, it is said that, in 2000–2003 in Germany, the level of savings was 8.6% among local population, while it reached 11.8% among temporary migrants (including remittances to their home countries) [15, p. 10]. According to another M. Sinning's study, temporary migrants in Germany, on average, saved 24% more funds and transferred 21% more funds to their home countries than permanent migrants [13, p. 14].

According to a survey of temporary Mexican migrants in the United States, in the early 2000s, remittances to home countries of migrant workers were about 40% of their earnings. At the same time, a higher share of income transfers was observed among illegal migrants, people with low education levels and low English language proficiency [12, p. 57].

According to International Organization for Migration (Mission in Ukraine), Ukraine migrants spend abroad about 35% of earnings

on their needs and put aside 35%. Average remittances of Ukrainian migrants to their home countries are about 30% of their monthly income [16, p. 57]. At the same time, according to research of The National Agency for Financial Studies and Western Union, labor migrants from CIS countries send home around 40% of their incomes in the Russian Federation [15].

Let us calculate the estimated number of foreign citizens who work in Russia, based on the share of earnings they transfer to their homeland.

We use three scenarios.

1. Scenario no. 1 (“high”): labor migrants send home 30% of their monthly income.

2. Scenario no. 2 (“medium”): labor migrants send home 40% of their income.

3. Scenario no. 3 (“low”): labor migrants send home 50% of their income

Based on data on volume of migrants' money transfers to homeland, *Table 4* presents assessments of total number of foreign workers in the Russian labor market in accordance with “high”, “medium”, and “low” scenarios.

Table 4. Estimation of total number of foreign employees in the Russian labor market

Indicator	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Volume of remittances of migrant workers to home countries, billion rub.	788.4	968.4	1038.0	994.5	948.6	1043.1
Total annual salaries of migrants in scenario no. 1, billion rub.	2628.0	3228.0	3460.0	3314.9	3162.1	3477.1
Total annual salaries of migrants in scenario no. 2, billion rub.	1971.0	2421.0	2595.1	2486.2	2371.5	2607.8
Total annual salaries of migrants in scenario no. 3, billion rub.	1576.8	1936.7	2076.0	1988.9	1897.2	2086.2
Number of foreign employees in scenario no. 1, million people	11.1	12.3	12.1	10.6	9.4	9.6
Number of foreign employees in scenario no. 2, million people	8.3	9.2	9.0	8.0	7.1	7.2
Number of foreign employees in scenario no 3, million people	6.6	7.4	7.2	6.4	5.6	5.8
Source: own calculations.						

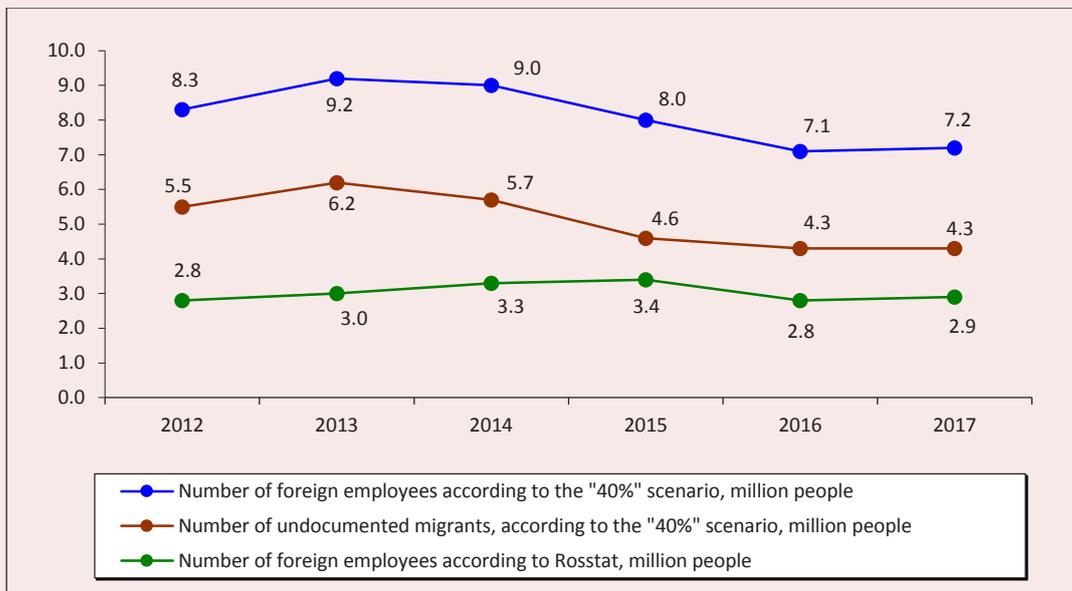
If we use “medium scenario” as the main one (labor migrant sends home 40% of income, earned in the Russian Federation), we learn that, in 2017, estimated number of foreign workers in the Russian labor market was about 7.2 million people. Thus, in this scenario, it might be concluded that about 4.3 million foreign workers in Russia (almost 60%) were not revealed and not included in data of Federal State Statistics Service of Russia and General Administration for Migration Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation (*Fig. 2*). According to a study, conducted by the Center for Economic Strategy in 2018, only 38% of Ukrainian labor migrants work legally abroad. Thus, the share of illegal migrants among Ukrainian migrant workers is about 60% [17].

According to our estimates, the largest number of foreign labor migrants worked in

Russia in 2013 (9.2 million people), while many of them (67%) did it illegally (6.2 million people). The sanctions pressure, which increased the crisis processes in the Russian economy, led to a decrease of the total number of foreign workers in the Russian labor market in 2014–2016. This process is shown in official statistics and our calculations. 2017 indicators showed growth for the first time since 2013, which might be an indirect indicator of improving macroeconomic situation in Russia.

It should be noted that the obtained number of illegal (undocumented) migrants is estimated. However, these calculations have instrumental significance, allowing us to estimate the total number of foreign workers in Russia and offer a new methodological approach to calculating the number of illegal migrants.

Figure 2. Dynamics of estimated total number of foreign workers in the Russian labor market



Source: own calculations.

Assessing the contribution of foreign workers to Russia's GDP

Assessment of labor migrants' contribution to Russia's GDP creation is a difficult task [18; 19]. First, there are no precise data on the number of migrant workers in the country. However, there are contradictions even in official statistics. For example, there are discrepancies between the number of migrants who entered Russia for work, according to The Border Service of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, and the number of officially working in Russia labor migrants, according to Rosstat. Second, there is no statistical information on the employment structure of migrant workers in Russia. There are no official data on the number of migrants according to types of economic activity, which makes it impossible to assess the contribution of migrants to the development of certain branches of Russian industry. Third, the scarcity of statistical information does not allow us to accurately determine the level of labor productivity of foreign workers: to calculate the average level for all sectors of the Russian economy or to calculate indicators for certain types of economic activity [20; 21].

One of the most used methods of assessing contribution of foreign migrants into GDP of a host state is the evaluation through employment. However, while assessing the contribution of labor migrants to GDP creation, their share in the total number of employees is rough: it cannot serve as a correct assessment of such contribution. Usually, sectoral structures of foreign citizens and country's residents' employment do not coincide, and labor productivity, in turn, varies according to types of economic activity. Individual productivity of employees also differs within certain economic sectors: an indirect indicator of this is the level of education (duration of training) of the latter

[22, p.110]. On the basis of such approach, ILO experts conducted the following measurements for the U.S. economy in 2010. Given the fact that migrants amounted to 17.5% of U.S. labor force, their contribution to country's GDP creation, including the increased share of foreign workers employed in industries with relatively low productivity (agriculture and household services), was 15.8%, and 14.8% with considering lower level of foreign workers' education [23, p.31]. An indirect indicator of the productivity of foreign workers might also be a relative level of their potential wages (in comparison with the wages of country's citizens), not actually received, which, among other conditions, would correspond to the professional and qualification of foreign workers. According to ILO, in Europe, average monthly gross earnings of foreign workers were 17.5% lower than those of local employees. However, in this difference, only 6.2% could be explained by professional and qualification factors. Another 11.3% practically are not related to productivity and caused by discrimination, worse protection of visiting employees by collective agreements, etc. At the same time, according to the study, the explained (potential) gap in earnings in several countries (including Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and Poland) is even in favor of migrants [22, p. 110].

In Philipp Martin's study, who also uses the method of assessing contribution of migrants in Thailand's GDP through migrants' share in employment, it is pointed out that productivity of migrants might be around 50% from local populations' productivity [10].

As mentioned earlier, migrants' flow to the Russian Federation has the lowest indicators of human capital development. This is caused, on the one hand, by low level of development of the education systems in main labor donor countries, and, on the other hand, by high

Table 5. Estimation of the share of foreign workers in the total number of employees in the Russian Federation

Indicator	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Employed, thousand people	71545	71391	71539	72324	72393	72315.9
Foreign labor migrants, thousand people (research data)	8309.7	9240.3	9048.1	7979	7050.1	7219.8
Share of migrants in total number of employed (research data), %	10.4	11.5	11.2	9.9	8.9	9.1
Foreign labor migrants, thousand people (official data)	2825.0	2978.1	3322.3	3387.5	2834.4	2910.3
Share of migrants in total number of employed (official data), %	3.8	4.0	4.4	4.5	3.7	3.9

Source: own calculations.

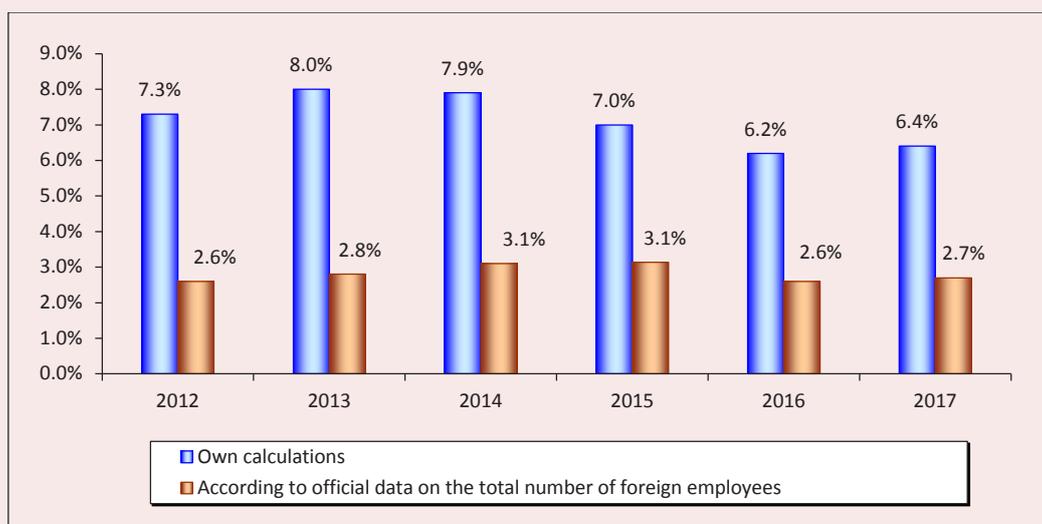
demand for low-skilled labor in the Russian economy. Thus, just like in the United States and the European Union, the productivity of foreign workers in the Russian labor market, on average, will be lower than productivity of Russian citizens [20].

This research contains assessment of foreign workers' contribution in the creation of Russian GDP. It is based on our previously evaluated data on total number of foreign workers in the Russian labor market. Moreover, this study presents comparison of assessments, taken

from own calculations, with official assessments of the number of foreign migrants in Russia (Tab. 5).

According to this data, based on our calculations and given in the table, the share of foreign workers in the Russian labor market was 9% in 2017. The highest share of employed migrants in Russia was in 2013: the number at that period was 11%. In turn, according to official data, in 2017, the share of foreigners in the total number of employed people in Russia was less than 4%.

Figure 3. Assessment of foreign workers' contribution to Russian GDP



Source: own calculations.

Based on our assessment of total number of foreign workers in Russia and official data of Federal State Statistics Service, we conducted an estimation of migrants' contribution into the creation of Russian GDP (*Fig. 3*). Continuing ILO approach, proposed for the U.S. [23], and considering low development indicators of human capital of incoming labor migration flow, let us correct labor productivity of foreign workers on the level of 70% from the average labor productivity level in Russian economy.

The results clearly demonstrate a significant discrepancy between the calculations based on our research data and those based on official information concerning the number of foreign workers in Russia. According to our calculations, the total contribution of foreign labor migrants amounted to 6.4% of GDP in 2017, which is about 5.9 trillion rubles (101 billion US dollars) in absolute terms. At the same time, the maximum contribution of migrants to GDP was fixed in 2013. It was about 8% of GDP, which amounted to 5.9 trillion rubles (184 billion US dollars) in absolute terms.

Conclusions

1. The study showed that official statistics significantly underestimate the total number of foreign citizens who work in Russia. In this regard, the assessment of the contribution of labor migrants to the creation of Russia's GDP, made on the basis of official data does not capture the real situation.

2. The methodological approach, used in this paper, allowed us to estimate the number of illegal labor migrants in Russia and the total number of foreign workers in the Russian

labor market. On the basis of the "medium" scenario (a migrant worker sends home 40% of his earnings), we calculated that, in 2017, the number of foreign workers in the Russian labor market was about 7.2 million. Almost 4.3 million of them were not statistically revealed and were not included in data of the Federal State Statistics Service and General Administration for Migration Issues of the MIA RF.

3. In the course of this study, it was found that the share of foreign workers in the total number of employed people in Russia is about 9%, which is 2.3 times higher than the estimates of the Federal State Statistics Service. At the same time, the maximum value of this indicator was reached in 2013 (11.5%).

4. According to our estimates, the total contribution of foreign workers to Russia's GDP was 6.4% in 2017, which is 5.9 trillion rubles (101 billion US dollars) in absolute terms. It is 2.4 times higher than assessments made on the basis of official data from Rosstat. At the same time, the maximum contribution of migrants to Russia's GDP was also noted in 2013. It amounted to 8% of GDP, which, in absolute terms, was 5.9 trillion rubles (184 billion US dollars).

5. The positive dynamics of indicators, such as remittances of migrants to their home countries (in rubles and dollars), the share of foreign labor migrants in the Russian labor market, and the contribution of labor migrants to Russian GDP, clearly show that the demand for foreign labor in Russia begins to grow. Thus, our research allows us to conclude that there is revitalization in several Russian economy's sectors, which actively use foreign labor.

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