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Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research. 2026. 18(2):160–192
DOI: 10.66184/2078-1938-2026-18-2-160-192

NOT QUITE "RUSSIAN DIASPORA": PLURAL SOLIDARITIES AND STRATIFIED ECONOMIES OF NEW RUSSIAN MIGRANTS

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The authors of this article are grateful to Alexei Voronkov for his significant contribution to the desk research on the case of Israel, as well as for his work on data collection and analysis. We also acknowledge Oleg Greshnev's contribution to co-organizing the quantitative part of the study, which is not covered in the current article but was still essential for verifying the results presented here and deepening their interpretation. Additionally, we appreciate Elena Nikiforova's engagement in the collection of interviews in Armenia. Finally, we thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors of Laboratorium*, whose valuable comments helped improve our manuscript.*

This article examines the post–February 2022 wave of Russian migration to Armenia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Turkey—countries that became primary destinations due to their visa-free regimes, geographic proximity, and relatively low institutional barriers to entry. Drawing on 74 semistructured interviews conducted in 2023 with Russian migrants and using the framework of transnational mixed embeddedness, authors analyze how fragmented forms of solidarity—based on professional identity, ethnic belonging, and political orientation—shape migrants' economic strategies and the formation of new migrant communities.

The analysis demonstrates that access to migrant communities' networks and their economic resources is structured by these solidarities and collective identities. Communities organized around shared professional backgrounds, ethnic affiliations, or experiences of politically induced displacement tend to develop distinct social and economic infrastructures, which provide privileged access to employment opportunities,

business initiatives, and mutual support systems. At the same time, they establish boundaries that limit participation for others. While these fragmented solidarities enable adaptive economic strategies and transnational networks, they also reproduce internal differentiation, shaping who is included—and who is excluded—from new economic opportunities.

Keywords: Post–February 2022 Russian Migration; Economic Strategies of Migrants; Mixed Embeddedness; Fragmented Solidarities; Transnational Networks; Eurasia

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Russia experienced an unprecedented wave of emigration. Within months, hundreds of thousands of Russians left, driven by political repression, fear of mobilization, economic uncertainty, and moral opposition to the war. Although Russia has been a brain drain subject for years (see Borusyak 2019; Herbst and Erofeev 2019; Demintseva 2021), the post–February 2022 wave is characterized by a large number of people leaving relatively quickly. Like their predecessors in the 2010s, many of those who left after the start of the invasion were highly educated professionals equipped with financial resources and transnational networks (After24 2022; OutRush 2022; Kostenko et al. 2023) that allowed them to relocate quickly and decisively. Still, the post–February 2022 migrants are a diverse group across numerous sociodemographic characteristics and even political views (see Krawatzek and Sasse 2024; Barsukova and Denisova-Schmidt 2026), which is worth keeping in mind, especially given that most research on the issue has so far been based on nonrandom samples or employed qualitative methodology. Previous estimations (Kasianchuk 2022; "Escape from War" 2023; Mironenko 2024; Florinskaya and Mkrtchyan 2025) found that primary destinations for these migrants were Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Israel, and Serbia—countries offering a combination of geographic proximity, legal accessibility, and conditions for continuing professional life.

The case of post–February 2022 Russian migration presents a compelling opportunity to revise key debates in migration studies concerning diasporas, solidarity, and inequality. Classical theories have long described diasporas as cohesive national or ethnic communities bound together by a shared homeland myth and collective memory (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997). Yet, as scholars like Rogers Brubaker (2005) and Steven Vertovec (2004) argue, contemporary migrant communities are rarely unified and may be shaped by overlapping identities and competing political allegiances; similar dynamics have been observed in other politically motivated emigrations, such as the Cuban postrevolution exodus (Cooper et al. 2009). The case of post–February 2022 Russian migrants also exemplifies this shift. Rather than forming a singular, cohesive diaspora, they have established multiple, parallel communities divided by professional affiliations, political orientation, ethnicity, and religion.

This article explores how these fragmented solidarities among Russian migrants are organized and, crucially, how they shape migrants' economic strategies. We argue that professional identity, more than national belonging, may function as dominant axis of solidarity within these new communities, particularly in high-demand sectors such as IT, design, and media, while professional networks may serve as a primary

infrastructure for accessing employment opportunities, building transnational businesses, and maintaining economic stability in exile. In many cases, we suggest, this dynamic is reinforced by shared experiences of political displacement and collective narratives of belonging to a "community of fate" (Baehr 2001, 2005; Vakhshtayn 2019), thereby interplaying national, professional, and political identities.

Furthermore, we argue that while professional, ethnic, and religious solidarities enable Russian migrants to construct adaptive economic strategies and maintain transnational ties, they also generate new forms of inequality. Fragmented and segmented communities lead to differentiated access to resources, economic opportunities, and social capital. As a result, the emerging Russian migrant communities are increasingly stratified along lines of profession, ethnicity, and political alignment. Rather than offering a unified front, the post-2022 Russian migration illustrates how fragmented identities (Vertovec 2004) and competing solidarities can reproduce, and even deepen, differentiation within migrant populations.

RETHINKING DIASPORA AND SOLIDARITY: IDENTITY, SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

The study of migrant economic strategies has long been grounded in the idea that these strategies are deeply interconnected with social networks. Researchers in migration studies and economic sociology have extensively demonstrated that migrants' access to employment, financial resources, and social mobility is shaped by their relationships within and beyond their ethnic and professional communities. Social ties function as crucial facilitators of economic adaptation, helping migrants navigate the challenges of resettlement, labor market integration, and financial security. Migrants rely on these networks not only for immediate survival but also for long-term economic and social mobility (Light and Gold 2000; Ryan et al. 2008).

The concept of social embeddedness, introduced by Mark Granovetter (1985), serves as a key theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between migrants' social ties and economic behavior. Granovetter argued that economic action is not purely dictated by market forces but is instead embedded in social relations and networks. This idea has been widely applied in migration studies, highlighting the ways in which migrants rely on social capital to secure employment, obtain financial support, and access housing and other resources (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Levitt 2001). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that migrant communities function as informal support networks, enabling individuals to leverage personal connections for economic opportunities (Waldinger 1996; Nee and Sanders 2001; Munshi 2003; Patel and Vella 2013; Martén et al. 2019; Park et al. 2022). Migrants frequently turn to their ethnic networks for job opportunities, business partnerships, and crucial information about institutional barriers in host societies. Thus, social embeddedness is one of the key factors influencing economic adaptation in a new country.

Migrants' social ties do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are actively formed, sustained, and reinforced through shared values and a sense of collective identity

(Mahler 1995; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Putnam 2007). The cohesion of migrant communities is often strengthened by intragroup solidarity, which provides crucial support networks. Traditionally, migration scholars have viewed solidarity primarily through the lens of ethnic and national belonging, assuming that migrants from the same country naturally form cohesive diaspora groups. Foundational contributions by scholars like William Safran (1991) and Robin Cohen (1997) have highlighted the role of a shared sense of belonging, homeland attachment, and transnational ties in sustaining diasporic communities.

However, later debates challenged this assumption, particularly in the context of contemporary migrant communities, which display increasingly complex and fragmented identities (Basch et al. 1994; Faist 2000; Vertovec 2004; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Marta Bivand Erdal and Ceri Oeppen (2013) reject the idea that more transnationalism implies less integration into the host society, showing the two interact in three ways—additive, synergistic, antagonistic—depending on life course and context. Echoing Roger Waldinger's (2015) insistence on specifying mechanisms, Jørgen Carling and coauthors (2021) refer to "transnational living," that is, situations of people who lead multisited lives without fitting migrant/nonmigrant categories. Cindy Horst (2018) shows how remittances and civic/political engagements are uneven, often subnational, and shaped by fragmentation—consistent with Waldinger's "connectivity ≠ collectivity" caution (2015:32). This supports the need to avoid reifying "diaspora" as a coherent group: There is internal fragmentation, whereas belonging is negotiated and multisited rather than assumed. This article contributes to these discussions by examining how different forms of identity and solidarization among Russians who left after February 24, 2022, shape their adaptation and economic strategies.

To further explore this argument, we turn to Rogers Brubaker's (2005) definition of diaspora and his critique of the concept. He proposes that a group can be considered a diaspora if it possesses three constitutive features: dispersion across different locations, mechanisms for maintaining boundaries (criteria for distinguishing insiders from outsiders), and members' enduring orientation toward the homeland. When we attempt to apply this framework to post–February 2022 Russian migrant communities, several challenges arise. The first criterion—dispersion—is unproblematic, given the transnational networks connecting these migrants. However, the remaining two criteria present significant complications. Russian migrant communities do establish boundaries and maintain a form of the "homeland myth"; however, they construct these elements in ways that diverge sharply from those found in classical, established and well-studied, diasporas, such as Armenian and Jewish diasporas (Safran 1991:84). Boundaries here are drawn less against the host society's cultural or linguistic differences than within the Russian migrant population itself—between those who left before 2022, those who remain in Russia, and those holding differing political values (e.g., Kamalov et al. 2023; Krawatzek and Sasse 2024; Kamalov and Sergeeva 2026; Zavadskaya et al. 2026)—and the homeland myth itself is frequently framed in negative terms, emphasizing rejection rather than attachment (e.g., Kozhevnikova and Lejman 2025; Mikhina et al. 2026).

Similar conceptual challenges, as Brubaker (2005) highlights, arise in the study of other diasporas as well. Researchers are ultimately faced with a dilemma: They can either apply the concept of diaspora in a narrow sense, in which case very few migrant communities would qualify, or adopt a broader definition, which risks diluting the analytical clarity of the term. Brubaker's solution is to shift the focus from studying migrant communities as static entities to analyzing their practices—the ways in which different migrant communities engage with, adopt, or reject diasporic modes of belonging to varying degrees. Building on this shift, subsequent scholarship examined what diasporic actors do rather than what they statically are, reframing belonging as relational, intersectional, and multisited rather than territorial or zero-sum (Basch et al. 1994; Brah 1996; Anthias 2008). This raises questions about when "diaspora" remains the right lens versus "transnational migration" or "translocal networks" (Dufoix 2016), as the label itself can obscure internal heterogeneity and power inequalities within migrant populations (Kleist 2008). We use the term "migrant community" rather than "diaspora" throughout this article, considering the former a more neutral descriptor that allows us to register solidarity, boundary-making, and fragmentation without presupposing the coherence the classical term implies. We reserve "diaspora" only for instances when we engage with the theoretical debate itself or cite our interviewees.

Our article follows the logic of multifocality and intersectional positioning of migrants by demonstrating that Russians who emigrated after February 24, 2022, form solidarities and communities based on diverse forms of solidarization—such as political stance, professional affiliation, and shared migration experiences. Rather than constituting a single cohesive diaspora, these communities engage in different migrant practices to varying degrees. We expect multiple communities to emerge with varying boundaries—some rigid and exclusionary, others more permeable and blurred, reflecting what Richard Alba (2005) describes as processes of boundary-making and boundary-blurring.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

MIXED EMBEDDEDNESS

We adopt the mixed embeddedness framework developed by Robert Kloosterman and Jan Rath (2001). Mixed embeddedness integrates two primary perspectives on migrant economic strategies: *social embeddedness*, which highlights the role of migrants' social ties, and *institutional embeddedness*, which examines the legal, political, and economic contexts that create opportunities or impose barriers to migrants' economic activities (see more on each in the relevant subsection below).

Subsequent scholarship has substantially refined this framework along two lines: Some extend it toward multifocality, treating migrant entrepreneurs as embedded in a single transnational field spanning multiple locales rather than a dual home/host structure (Bagwell 2018; Solano et al. 2022; Yamamura and Lassalle 2022), while others emphasize dynamic/processual embedding—disembedding and re-embedding as migrants recalibrate resources under shifting circumstances, particularly

in refugee entrepreneurship (Harima 2022). These revisions converge on a shared move away from ethno-essentialist or host-country-only framings toward multisited opportunity structures, cautioning against assuming that socio-relational transnationality implies affective homeland orientation (Rath et al. 2020)—a caution that echoes Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald's (2004) earlier critique that transnationalism scholarship often reified the persistence and scope of cross-border ties, which vary considerably in form, intensity, and durability. These revisions also extend the framework to informality, legal status, and capital conversion under regulatory constraints (Bisignano and El-Anis 2019), as well as small-scale "globalization from below" practices (Sandoz 2021; Sandoz et al. 2022).

Despite these refinements, we retain Kloosterman and Rath's original dual framework because it best fits the structural comparison at the core of our study. Multifocal or single-transnational-field models are designed for entrepreneurs operating simultaneously across several locales, whereas our respondents are each embedded primarily within one host country's institutional environment, even as they maintain transnational ties elsewhere. We do, however, incorporate the processual and practice-oriented refinements—particularly disembedding/re-embedding and nonessentialist positioning—since they help us avoid treating our respondents' fragmented solidarities as a static, bounded population.

PLURAL AND FRAGMENTED SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is the second concept central to our framework. Following Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner (1993), we understand solidarity as a sense of shared obligation and belonging that is enacted through practices of mutual support and resource exchange. However, we conceptualize migrant solidarities not as a single cohesive formation but as plural and overlapping senses of commonality and mutual obligation, grounded in different identifications and shared experiences. For some migrants, these solidarities emerge through a shared profession; for others, through a common life trajectory, ethnicity, or religion. What results is not a single cohesive community but a heterogeneous network in which participants feel solidarity with one another on different grounds. This move connects our framework to the discussion above—instead of a single community held together by one identity, we describe overlapping networks, each formed on a different ground, none of them coinciding with the national group as a whole (Rath et al. 2020; Solano et al. 2022; Güell and Parella 2024). These networks are uneven, stratified by legal status, gender, and sector (Güell and Parella 2023), and instrumental collaboration within them does not necessarily imply affective belonging or shared identity (Sandoz 2021; Harima 2022; Fradejas-García et al. 2023). As the following sections show, a migrant's position among these networks shapes what work, partnerships, and support become available to them. Fragmentation, then, does not only bring migrants together on different grounds—it also produces inequality between them: A migrant's position among these networks structures unequal access to work, partnerships, and support within the same migrant population, as the following sections show.

SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS

Social embeddedness in our research is conceptualized as multidimensional, encompassing migrants' ties to local residents, fellow Russian migrants, and transnational links that extend to Russia and third countries. Each type of tie plays a distinct role, with local ties indexing host-society integration, conational ties reflecting diasporic network formation, and transnational ties signaling access to resources and opportunities beyond the immediate host country (see Bagwell 2018). These ties are not static: Migrants' premigration social circles disperse, persist, or weaken over time, and the extent to which new relationships form with locals or compatriots has been shown to depend on employment status, family structure, and gender (Kozlov et al. 2024; Sokolova et al. 2026).

Solidarity and trust operate within this same multidimensional structure, shaping whether migrants extend support to compatriots, participate in collective life, and prefer conational economic partners over local ones—behavior that connects directly to the fragmented solidarity dynamics outlined above, since trust and mutual aid are not evenly distributed but activated along the same professional, political, ethnic, and religious lines. We therefore also attend to how collective identities—political stance, professional affiliation, ethnic identity—shape who is included in these networks and with what intensity, without assuming that Russian national identity itself operates as a single, undifferentiated axis of solidarity.

Institutional embeddedness, introduced above, comprises the specific dimensions we examine in detail below: migration policy, legalization pathways, host governments' responses to the recent influx, migrants' perceptions of local labor markets, and their evaluations of political conditions in Russia and host countries alike.

CONTRIBUTION

As Jock Collins (2013) cautions, migrant networks are not universally inclusive. They frequently reproduce divisions based on class, professional status, legal recognition, and cultural affiliation. Existing scholarship has shown that solidarities among migrants are often multiple, selective, and unstable rather than unified (Guarnizo et al. 1999; Ciabarri and Simonsen 2024; Bonnin and Oubad 2025). We extend this work by arguing that fragmented solidarity is not only a form of belonging or survival under displacement but also stratifies migrant economies from within: Access to jobs, business partnerships, housing, and transnational opportunities depends on migrants' position within overlapping, partially disconnected solidarity networks, and not on human capital or host country's institutions alone. Post–February 2022 Russian migration offers strong empirical grounds for this refinement of mixed embeddedness. Dispersed across institutionally distinct host states without a shared organizing homeland narrative, these migrants show that social embeddedness is not a homogeneous resource but one mediated by fragmented solidarities.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs mixed methods research design. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, we aim to capture both the subjective experiences of migrants and the structural conditions shaping their integration and adaptation.

We focus on five countries: Armenia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Turkey. The selection of these cases was guided by two considerations. First, they represent some of the primary destinations for Russian migrants following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. According to previous estimations (Kasianchuk 2022; "Escape from War" 2023; Mironenko 2024; Florinskaya and Mkrtchyan 2025), these countries accepted substantial numbers of migrants from Russia during 2022–2023. Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Turkey emerged as major destinations due to their geographic proximity, visa-free regimes, and relatively accessible residence permits. Israel attracted migrants eligible under the 1950 Law of Return (those with at least one Jewish grandparent and their spouses), offering expedited pathways to legal status and citizenship. Serbia became a significant destination due to its cultural and linguistic closeness, neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, its avoidance of sanctions against Russia, and simplified residency requirements (see Miličić and Umek 2025).

Second, these countries vary significantly in their political, economic, and institutional contexts, including migration policies, labor market opportunities, and public attitudes toward Russian migrants (Gulina 2023a; Lomakin 2025). This diversity enabled a comparative analysis of how institutional environments shape migrants' economic strategies, social embeddedness, and community formation. To maximize institutional variation, we deliberately prioritized Armenia over Georgia despite the central role of the latter for the post–February 2022 Russian migration. While the inclusion of both would have limited the institutional variation in our dataset, we, instead, prioritized geographic and policy diversity to capture a broader range of migrant experiences.

From March to August 2023, we conducted 74 interviews across 5 countries—13 to 17 per country—with Russians who left after February 24, 2022. Most interviews were collected between March and May, while the remaining ones were gathered in the following months. We talked to people of different ages, diverse professional backgrounds, and various marital and parental statuses (see appendices 1 and 2). In each country's case, we also focused on migrants engaged in entrepreneurship or small businesses (5–6 interviews per country), as these groups provide insight into different economic strategies and forms of self-employment. All interviews were conducted in Russian, recorded with informed consent, transcribed, and coded. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and consented before participating. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the study.

The coding was carried out by three researchers working simultaneously in the MAXQDA TeamCloud project and was supported by regular video calls to discuss intermediate results and challenges faced. To construct theoretical insights from our empirical data, we followed the logic of abductive thematic analysis, informed by both the empirical data and the theoretical framework of the study (see Timmermans and

Tavory 2012, 2022). Rather than strictly testing theory (deduction) or generating it purely from data (induction), we cultivated an iterative dialogue between the two. We began with a theory-driven deductive codebook but remained attuned to anomalous or surprising data. By supplementing the analysis with data-driven inductive codes, we actively leveraged these surprises to challenge our research assumptions and expand the existing theoretical framework.

INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS

Our primary focus in this article is on how solidarities shape migrants' access to networks and how these networks, in turn, contribute to unequal access to economic opportunities. However, these processes unfold within different national institutional contexts. Migration regimes and economic environments condition whether resources accessed through networks can be converted into secure residence, employment, or business activity. We therefore briefly outline the institutional differences among five countries before examining cross-country patterns of solidarity and network formation. This comparison reflects the conditions prevailing during our fieldwork in spring 2023.

MIGRATION POLICIES

The countries differed significantly in migrants' ability to secure and maintain legal residence. Some of our interviewees held formal statuses, including temporary or permanent residence, digital nomad status, or asylum seeker status; however, many relied on semilegal arrangements to prolong their stay. We focus particularly on the latter because uncertainty of immigration status directly affected migrants' capacity to work, establish businesses, and make longer-term plans.

Armenia and Serbia had comparatively permissive migration regimes. Russian citizens could reside in a tourist status for 180 and 30 days, respectively, and endlessly reset their permitted stay through border runs.[1] For instance, Russians taking advantage of border runs in Serbia sustained demand for taxi round trips to and from the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cvijic and Nikolic 2025:14; Miličić and Umek 2025:413–415). These legal loopholes enabled those working remotely for employers in other countries to remain without immediately applying for residence permits or other forms of regularization. At the same time, it placed some migrants in a gray area of migration legality (see Prashizky 2023; Lomakin 2024) and left them

[1] "A border run" is a term used to describe the process of renewing residence that requires the migrant to leave the jurisdiction for a short period, ranging from a few minutes to a few days. It is often used by migrants residing in visa-free countries as tourists, with no opportunities or desire to apply for residence permits. In contrast, there are "visa runs" that involve migrants traveling to a third country to apply for a new visa at an embassy or consulate. Both border runs and visa runs are typically associated with semiregular status and/or some extent of compulsion (see Green 2014; Sarausad 2019). In the context of our research, the border runs are often mistakenly referred to as visa runs when discussing the practices of post–February 2022 Russian migrants in countries that allow them visa-free entry, for example, Armenia, Kazakhstan (before January 2023), Serbia, and so on.

"stuck . . . in some sort of limbo" (Rapoport 2023:36). "Well, in fact, they say that by law you cannot stay without registration for more than six months. . . . But in my experience, no one cares—live as long as you want. The maximum that you will face is a fine, like 100 dollars, for instance, when you leave the country and they find out that you have lived longer than that. Still, such situations are rare" (ARM1/F/older). Regularization in both countries was relatively accessible, or at least there were intentions to simplify it (After24 2022; Martemyanov 2023). For example, being an EU candidate and one of few European countries that are visa free to Russian citizens, in 2023 Serbia lowered the threshold for acquiring permanent residency by reducing the prerequisite of continuous residency from five to three years ("The Long-Awaited Amendments" 2023).

In turn, Kazakhstan and Turkey moved toward greater restriction over time (for a comprehensive discussion, see Lomakin 2025). Although some Russians had relocated to Kazakhstan earlier,[2] the largest influx followed the announcement of "partial mobilization" on September 21, 2022. Border runs initially enabled migrants to extend their stays, but this option was abolished in January 2023 (Prime Minister of Kazakhstan 2023). State authorities aimed at overcoming the "transit country" status by regularizing newcomers with proven intentions for long-lasting residence and pushing out those who did not have it (Gulina 2023a:5; Delovarova 2024:52). Since January 2023, residence permits—either temporary or permanent—have become key options for those who want to remain in Kazakhstan and are not returning ethnic Kazakhs.[3]

Turkey attracted many Russians in the first months after February 24, 2022, thanks to its mild climate and easily obtainable short-term residence permits that could be renewed annually.[4] Border runs were not available because Russian citizens staying for more than 90 days in any 180-day period were required to obtain a residence permits. However, from early 2023, widespread and often unexplained refusals created considerable uncertainty and contributed to onward migration (Bolshakov 2023; Goulordava and İçduygu 2026; Karaçay 2025). Rising cost of living further reduced the feasibility of long-term settlement, particularly for migrants without substantial financial resources (Krawatzek 2024).

Israel stands apart from other cases in our sample since most interview partners who settled there arrived through the repatriation program on the basis of Jewish

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[2] For example, one source speaks of Russians who moved to the city of Almaty in early 2022 (Brut 2022). Kazakhstan's state statistics indicate a double increase in the number of new permanent residence permits issued to Russian citizens in 2022 (Oshchepkov et al. 2024:5).

[3] The 2011 Migration Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan specified a separate legal status for ethnic Kazakh repatriates and their families—*kandas*. Supporting such repatriation was set as a key goal of the 2022–2026 National Migration Policy Concept (for more information, see Chernyshevskaya 2022).

[4] For instance, by December 2022, there were 110,978 short-term permits, constituting almost 85 percent of the total number of residence permits issued to Russians (131,206) (see "İkamet İzinleri," n.d.).

ancestry.[5] The emergency program introduced by Israeli government after February 2022 initially facilitated rapid arrival. However, after the right-wing coalition came to power in late 2022, stricter procedures and checks were introduced in Israel too. Eventually, in April 2023, the emergency repatriation program for citizens of Russia and Belarus was halted (Sevencan 2023).

ECONOMIC AND INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENTS

Economic environments further shaped the strategies available to migrants. Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Serbia offered relatively straightforward terms for registering businesses, including tax incentives in some sectors. All three received relocated Russian IT companies and Russian offices of international corporations, as well as saw the growth of migrant-owned—and often migrant-customer-oriented—services such as cafés, bars, barbershops, and coworking spaces. Despite being relatively more bureaucratized, Serbia was particularly attractive to entrepreneurs seeking access to European customers because of its, on the one hand, duty-free trade agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union and, on the other, partnerships with the European Union, United States, and several Asian countries (see Miličić and Umek 2025:412, 416–417). Additionally, public authorities in Armenia and Serbia presented relocation of Russian businesses and professionals as beneficial to their national economies ("About 110,000 Russian Nationals" 2023; Thomas and Savic 2023).

Turkey experienced substantial growth in Russian-owned businesses and investment ("Bilgi Erişim Müdürlüğü," n.d.) across—in descending order—agriculture, IT, real estate, hotels and residential properties, restaurants, and entertainment services ("Antalya'daki Rus şirket" 2023). However, this influx-induced growth occurred amid deep economic crisis with severe inflation rate of 96 percent in 2022 alone ("Inflation, GDP Deflator," n.d.) and increasing uncertainty surrounding residence permits issuance. These conditions made Turkey more accessible to short-term migrants and those with greater financial resources than to migrants seeking stable, long-term economic incorporation.

Israel combined a highly developed high-tech economy with less favorable conditions in other sectors. The country had the world's highest research and development expenditure, at roughly 5.6 percent of GDP ("Research and Development Expenditure," n.d.), and attracted 25.6 billion US dollars in venture capital in 2021 ("IVC-Meitar Israeli Tech Review" 2021). At the same time, lower-tech sectors received less state support and faced greater regulatory barriers. Israel ranked thirty-fifth in the World Bank's assessment of the business environment, compared with Russia's twenty-eighth position (World Bank 2020). Moreover, relatively small consumer market with high living costs (Wrobel 2023) segmented along religious and cultural lines (e.g., Arab-Muslims, Orthodox Jews; see "Israel's Religiously Divided Society" 2016) created additional barriers for Russian entrepreneurs seeking to enter the service sector.

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[5] The Law of Return offers immediate citizenship to eligible migrants, but full residency rights and access to social services often require additional bureaucratic procedures.

FINDINGS ON INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS

The highlighted institutional differences affected whether migrants could work remotely, enter local employment market, or establish businesses. The permissive regimes in Armenia and Serbia facilitated the formation of relatively stable post–February 2022 migrant communities and supported the growth of migrant businesses. More restrictive or unstable conditions in Kazakhstan and Turkey shortened some migrants' time horizons or encouraged onward migration. In Israel, access through repatriation was accompanied by high cost of living and a both segmented and regulated domestic market that favored high-tech over other entrepreneurial initiatives.

Yet institutional conditions alone cannot explain why migrants living in the same national context had unequal access to employment, finance, information, and practical support. To understand this differentiation, we examine how solidarities based on profession, shared migration trajectories, ethnicity, and religion shaped the formation of networks and the distribution of resources within them. We therefore treat institutional embeddedness as the opportunity structure through which solidarities and networks acquired different economic consequences across national contexts.

BEYOND NATIONAL IDENTITY: NOT QUITE RUSSIAN DIASPORA

Rather than treating migrants from Russia who left after February 24, 2022, as a single, cohesive diaspora, our interviews show that they often draw boundaries in relation to the Russian state and to other migrant groups in ways that are situational, practical, and morally charged. Many respondents described a desire to distance themselves from the current regime and the values they associate with it, presenting their departure not as a continuation of "Russianness" but as a break from it. Migrant communities are often bound together by a myth of return, built on nostalgia and a deep-seated belief in the ancestral homeland as the "true home"—a place where future generations will eventually return when conditions allow (Safran 1991). For many of our interviewees, however, this connection has been somewhat, if not fundamentally, broken. As one interview partner, a speech therapist now living in Armenia, explains,

> But in reality, of course, I am still a Russian citizen, but at this point, I don't have a complete sense of belonging. For psychological reasons, I am trying to distance myself from it as much as possible. Of course, it's impossible to completely separate from it because it is so difficult to disentangle one's legal citizenship from one's feelings about what is happening and those responsible for it. I don't want to be associated with them; I don't want to feel subordinate to them. Power should serve the people, not the other way around. But here [in Russia], everything is turned upside down and in the ugliest way possible. (ARM1/F/older)

At the same time, respondents often distinguished themselves from those who migrated before the war, which suggests that the post-2022 wave is defined not only by exit from Russia but also by internal boundary-making within migration itself. In

these accounts, those who left earlier, those seen as politically disengaged, or those who remained in Russia were sometimes portrayed as shaped by a different experience, political position, or degree of urgency, which made them not quite part of the same moral and social community. A striking example of this distinction can be found in an interview conducted in Turkey, where an interviewee describes the gap between Russians who moved before the war and those who arrived after February 24, 2022, emphasizing differing worldviews:

> **Interviewee:** Here [in Turkey], I think we are actually talking about two completely different social groups. . . : those who moved here long ago and those who arrived recently. . . . The only thing they have in common is that they are from the same country and speak the same language, but beyond that, there is not much that truly unites them.
> **Interviewer:** And what distinguishes them? How would you describe the group that moved here long ago versus those who arrived recently?
> **Interviewee:** Well, those who moved here a long time ago? I would describe them as the Soviet Union. It's as if they still live in a world where the USSR never collapsed. They continue to live that way, clinging to their rosy illusions. (TUR1/M/younger)

We encountered similar accounts in Israel. One interviewee noted that she feels a much stronger connection to her wave of aliyah, that is repatriation, and native-born Israelis than to those who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s:

> It's obvious that the people arriving now are very different from those who came after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These are people with competitive professions and interesting experiences. They are well suited, I'd say, not just for Israeli business but for any business. Many of them work in IT and other highly skilled fields. And they don't want to take on under-the-table jobs or unqualified work. They look for jobs in their profession. But what do they hear? "You need to work as a cleaner for five years, and only then will you become a real Israeli," and so on. Great advice. That's why I feel much more connected to those who arrived recently. We will have minimal contact with those who came long ago and instead integrate into local society. Interestingly, the Israelis born here don't react this way at all. They say, "It's great that you came. You have a different experience, but it's valuable too." They hire us easily. (ISR1/F/younger)

These accounts suggest that the main divisions are not simply between Russians and non-Russians, as proposed by classic research on migrant communities (Armstrong 1976; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) but also within the Russian migrant population itself. This kind of boundary-making is not entirely new; similar patterns have been observed in other politically motivated migrations, including among Iranian migrants who left after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and rejected their civic national identity, instead constructing new transnational affiliations grounded in pre-Islamic or multicultural identities (see Cohen and Yefet 2019). What the Russian case adds is not a fundamentally new model of migrant community but a contempo-

rary example of how diaspora-like belonging can be fragmented, selective, and shaped by political orientation, migration timing, and shared experiences in exile as much as by citizenship.

Thus, Russians who emigrated after February 24, 2022, often feel a stronger affinity with host societies and with others who also recently experienced rupture than with their compatriots who left before the war, which was also found in other studies (e.g., Kamalov et al. 2023; Krawatzek and Sasse 2024). Similar to Iranian political migrants, many Russian migrants are actively seeking new frameworks for collective belonging shaped by their experience of exile (see, e.g., Kozhevnikova and Lejman 2025; Mikhina et al. 2026; Yusupova-Ryder 2026). These emerging identities help sustain community boundaries and provide the basis for new forms of solidarity, adapted to the complex realities of recent emigration from Russia, which we analyze in the next section to show how fragmented belonging shapes migrants' economic strategies.

PLURAL SOLIDARITIES: PROFESSION, FATE, AND RELIGION

This search for alternative forms of belonging has given rise to what we describe as plural solidarities within post-2022 Russian migrant communities. These communities do not feel unified by a shared civic national identity; instead, they coalesce around diverse forms of collective identification—professional networks, a shared sense of fate, and ethnic or religious affiliations. Each of these solidarities offers a different foundation for trust, cooperation, and mutual support, shaping how migrants organize their social lives and pursue economic opportunities abroad. In the following sections, we explore these plural solidarities in detail, examining how they foster new forms of community and influence migrants' strategies for adaptation and integration.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

For many post–February 2022 Russian migrants, professional identity has become a key source of solidarity. This is hardly surprising. Emigration is more available to those with both financial and intellectual resources—language skills, international experience, and an understanding of global political dynamics. Much like their Iranian[6] and Cuban[7] counterparts, these migrants tend to be highly educated and professionally accomplished compared to the broader population they left behind.

In this context, professional identity offers a powerful alternative to forms of solidarity based on national belonging. What unites these migrants is not their shared citizenship but their shared expertise. Although professional solidarity of

[6] The wave of emigration from Iran that occurred immediately after the 1979 Islamic Revolution included a large number of professionals, entrepreneurs, and scientists (see Hakimzadeh 2006).

[7] Political emigrants from Cuba in 1959–1962, immediately after the overthrow of the Batistianos regime, came from the upper and middle classes and had higher levels of education than the average Cuban population (see Pedraza-Bailey 1985).

migrants often works across national belonging or citizenship (Nowicka 2006; Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt 2018), we found professional solidarity to be more strongly bounded by a shared native language. Our interlocutors identify as *Russian-speaking* actors, designers, restaurateurs, IT professionals, and specialists in many other fields. While their areas of work vary, many are concentrated in the cultural industries and the service sector—fields where creativity, entrepreneurialism, and transnational connections are essential.

Across these professions, there is a palpable sense of pride and confidence. Many believe that Russian-speaking professionals can hold their own—and even thrive—on the global stage. One participant, a jazz musician now living in Yerevan, Armenia, described how this sense of professional community influenced his decision to relocate:

> You know, I've noticed a trend—most of the people who moved to Yerevan are creative professionals. Since I mainly interact with creative people, I see that they are all highly confident in their expertise. There are many real professionals here, masters of their craft, who know they will survive in a new country, start businesses from scratch, and establish private practices. In that sense, Yerevan is the perfect place to develop creative projects. The same is happening in business—Yerevan is growing rapidly. New projects are launching every day. And I am also confident that since I moved to another country, I can support myself and make it here. And that's exactly what happened. . . . I'm a jazz pianist, so for me, this was important. (ARM2/M/younger)

This sense of belonging to a professional elite is further reinforced by the perception that only "the best and the brightest" left Russia. Narratives of brain drain and frequent comparisons to the "philosophers' ships"—the mass expulsion of intellectuals from Soviet Russia in 1922—are common in conversations among migrants (see also Gulina 2023b; Prashizky 2024). These stories fuel the belief that the people around them represent the intellectual and creative vanguard of Russian society. And this belief fosters new forms of solidarity. Migrants are eager to find like-minded professionals, collaborators, and business partners among their peers from Russia.

Throughout the study, we observed countless examples of professional networks evolving into hubs of mutual support and cooperation. These communities are not just social groups but spaces where new businesses are launched, jobs are created, and professional networks expand across borders. One interviewee, a former product analyst at a major Moscow bank, described how she opened a restaurant in Turkey with the backing of her professional network. What started as a solo venture soon attracted a vibrant community of IT specialists who supported her business and collaborated on new initiatives—including her IT startup: "We have everything—designers, marketers, frontend developers, backend developers, analysts—you name it. And most of us come from the IT sector" (TUR2/F/younger).

In the following section, we explore how these professional solidarities are transforming into migrant economies, reshaping both the communities migrants create and the opportunities they pursue.

COMMUNITY OF FATE

Another idea that allows Russian migrants to form solidarity regardless of their national or even professional identity is the perception of a shared fate. The concept of a community of fate is not new to sociology and philosophy. It is used to describe a group that finds itself in similar historical circumstances—facing a common threat that compels its members to overcome it together (Baehr 2001, 2005; Vakhshtayn 2019).

For those who embrace this form of solidarity, what matters most is the sense of unity with others who were also forced to leave Russia after the war began. Many described feeling as though they were "in the same boat," carrying a shared burden and shouldering the emotional weight of exile together. They spoke of collective grief, a common struggle, and a deep awareness that they are part of something larger—an interconnected community scattered across the globe. Addressing all the above, they say about themselves, "There are many of us," "I'm not one," or "We're together," thus emphasizing the multiplicity of their community.

But this feeling of togetherness is not just symbolic or abstract. It often finds expression in concrete, everyday acts of mutual support: "But in terms of mutual support, there is definitely a community. There is support. In Thailand, in Georgia, in Turkey—everywhere, there is a community. We are connected not only by the problems we face together but also by the simple fact that we are living here, supporting one another" (TUR2/F/younger).

A defining feature of the community of fate narrative is that shared suffering is not experienced as passive victimhood but rather as an active and purposeful stance. For many, this collective hardship becomes a source of resilience, a call to mobilize, and a demonstration of determination in the face of adversity. Belonging to this community is seen not as a consequence of loss but as a choice to confront challenges together and to rebuild their lives on their own terms. Some interview partners even spoke of finding a certain romanticism in the sacrifices they have made—an unexpected pride in having traded comfort and security for solidarity and shared purpose. As one migrant described it, these hardships have become part of a larger, meaningful journey toward collective survival:

> Here, I met many people who had businesses in Moscow and so on. And they left everything behind or handed it over to partners, and now they earn significantly less. But I haven't met a single person here who says, "Damn, I used to drive a BMW in Moscow, and now I take the bus." No, not at all. They've all sold their cars. They've all agreed that it's better to take the bus, and they even find some romance in it. I see people really trying to hold themselves together. (SRB1/F/younger)

Another defining element of the community of fate is its exclusivity and the sense of isolation that often accompanies it (Baehr 2005; Vakhshtayn 2019). In our study, many interviewees described a growing distance—not from locals in their host countries but from other Russians who remained behind. These "outsiders" were not perceived as part of the same moral or experiential community. According to our

interview partners, those who stayed in Russia live under entirely different circumstances and inhabit a separate informational world. Without the shared experience of exile, they are seen as unable—or unwilling—to understand the emotional and existential realities faced by those who left. This divide, as many migrants explained, is not just geographical but deeply symbolic:

> Especially with my friends in Russia—it's not that we have conflicts, but we don't understand each other anymore. Most people in Russia have just stopped paying attention to the news. So when I try to discuss something with them, they don't even know what I'm talking about because they're no longer following the news. And it doesn't matter if they're pro-government or anti-government—it's all the same. They just don't care anymore. Meanwhile, abroad, we all share the same informational agenda. (SRB2/M/older)

The shared experience of emigration forced by political factors has forged strong bonds among Russian migrants, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and mutual support. For many, the hardships of relocation have deepened their commitment to helping others navigate the challenges of settling in a new country. Whether through sharing crucial information, offering guidance on adaptation, or helping newcomers find housing and employment, these acts of solidarity are woven into the fabric of everyday life in migrant communities.

In some cases, this sense of obligation goes even further. Wealthier or more established migrants have taken significant financial risks—sometimes even bending or breaking local labor laws—to offer work to newly arrived Russians who have not yet managed to secure legal employment.

> Yes, we are taking huge risks because, in reality, we are employing undocumented workers. We can't get them work permits because for every foreign worker, we are required to hire five locals. So if we want to get a work permit for a waiter, it's extremely unprofitable and very expensive. And we run a tiny café with only eight tables—it's a tiny family-run coffee shop, not some big operation. (TUR2/F/younger)

When the idea of a shared fate is combined with professional identity, the resulting solidarity becomes even more powerful and enduring. This intersection creates tight-knit communities that are not only emotionally cohesive but also strategically effective. Migrants leverage these overlapping identities to maintain extensive transnational networks—connections that stretch across countries and continents, linking hubs of Russian-speaking professionals, entrepreneurs, and activists. These networks serve as vital channels for exchanging knowledge, resources, and opportunities. Migrants share job leads, collaborate on business ventures, and pool expertise, creating dynamic ecosystems of mutual support. In many cases, these relationships evolve into transnational business partnerships or joint projects, enabling participants to access markets and clients far beyond the borders of their host countries.

RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

In search of alternatives to civic national identity—often rejected or radically redefined in the aftermath of emigration—many Russian migrants have turned to their ethnic and religious backgrounds as new foundations for belonging. For some, these identities offer a sense of pride and continuity, serving as a stabilizing force amid profound upheaval. As one migrant of Tatar origin now living in Armenia explained,

> Ideally, I'd like to renounce my Russian citizenship. Right now, I don't want to be associated with Russia at all—it triggers something inside me. And with the recent [domestic] laws and everything else happening there, I just don't want any connection to it. Honestly, I never really thought about my nationality before. But now, I find myself looking at it differently. I'm Tatar, and I feel proud of that. I think it's great. But being Russian? I don't want that anymore, to be honest. (ARM3/M/younger)

This process of reaffirming ethnic or religious identity is most visible when it aligns with the host country's dominant culture. Israel is one example where Russian Jews can find institutional and cultural recognition. But similar dynamics are evident elsewhere. In Turkey, for instance, one interviewee described how his experience of the war shifted his sense of belonging. Once identifying primarily as Russian, he found himself reconnecting with his Bashkir heritage and embracing a sense of kinship with other Turkic peoples:

> Before, I saw Turkish society as foreign to me. But after the war started, I heard all these conversations about how it's just another Russian imperialist war against Ukrainians, and why should Bashkirs be involved in that? That's when my worldview shifted—I started seeing Kazakhs and Turks differently. Before, I saw them as just other migrants. Even though I'm Bashkir, my identity was more Russian. But now, I've started to separate myself more. It's not that I don't like Russians—I have a lot of Russian friends—but my identity has changed. My perspective on Kazakhs and Central Asians has changed, as well as my perception of Turks. Here in Turkey, they have a special residency program for Uyghurs, Crimean Tatars, and other Turkic peoples who don't have their own independent states. They grant them permanent residency for 99 years. And when I say I'm from Bashkortostan, they see us as a brotherly nation. There is a strong sense of Turkic unity here. (TUR3/M/younger)

Ethnic solidarity has become an important mechanism for practical support as well. In several cases, Bashkir and Tatar networks played a key role in organizing migration, facilitating employment, and helping newcomers adapt to life abroad. One interview partner of Bashkir origin described how, while planning his family's relocation from Russia, he closely monitored the activities of the Bashkir migrant communities abroad and used these connections to search for housing:

> I started actively following Bashkir expatriates, observing how they lived, what they did. I tried to get in touch with them in advance, to establish contact. Not to ask for a place to stay, but maybe they knew someone renting an apartment at

> a lower price. . . . I had to talk to a lot of different people about this. Some of them had something available. They seemed to offer some options. . . . So, basically, I was messaging and communicating about all of this while still in Moscow. (KAZ1/M/younger)

Religious identity has also provided a foundation for connection and mutual assistance. One interviewee recounted how his morning prayers at a local mosque in Turkey led to an unexpected relationship with a local man, which opened new opportunities for his family.

> **Interviewee:** Because I go out to exercise every morning at 6 a.m. . . . , I perform my morning namaz, then go for a run. . . . That's how I met this older man—he's about 62. His name is Mehmet. One day, he invited me over to his house. . . . He helped my cousin get a residence permit. He made calls, used his connections, and even helped him join a football team. He's a professional footballer.
> **Interviewer:** Why do you think this local person reached out to you? What made him want to get to know you?
> **Interviewee:** It's probably because we are not Turks but still want to pray. That surprises them. (TUR4/M/younger)

These examples illustrate that ethnic and religious identities have become crucial sources of belonging and support for post–February 2022 migrants from Russia navigating uncertain futures. They offer not only a renewed sense of who they are but also practical pathways for community building and survival in new contexts. In the next section, we explore how these forms of solidarity and transnational networks contribute to the emergence of migrant economies and reshape the socioeconomic landscapes of receiving countries.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION: THE IMPACT OF FORMS OF SOLIDARITY ON MIGRANTS' ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

The various forms of solidarity described in previous sections—whether based on professional identity, shared fate, ethnicity, or religion—play a decisive role in how post–February 2022 Russian migrants navigate their economic lives in exile. These solidarities do not simply offer emotional comfort or cultural continuity. They actively shape migrants' economic strategies by determining who gains access to resources, opportunities, and support networks. In this section, we examine the dual role of solidarity: how it operates as both a resource and a barrier in shaping migrants' economic strategies. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews, we highlight how inclusion in specific networks can enable economic mobility, while exclusion from these same spaces can lead to isolation, downward mobility, and the reproduction of inequality.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS SOLIDARITIES

For many Russian migrants, ethnic and religious solidarities are not just about shared traditions or a sense of belonging—they often function as informal insti-

tutions upon which entire economic strategies are built in exile. These networks provide the first and most reliable points of access to employment opportunities, housing, and local markets—key factors shaping how migrants construct their livelihoods.

However, these solidarity-based strategies are not universally available. While they create powerful channels of support for some, they can simultaneously exclude others, reinforcing economic divides within the migrant community. A clear example can be seen in the case of the Bashkir "diaspora," which we encountered in our study. In countries such as Turkey and Kazakhstan, Bashkir migrant communities have developed highly organized transnational networks aimed explicitly at facilitating migration and economic settlement. Such networks serve as informal infrastructures, offering assistance with housing, job placement, and even joint business ventures. As one interviewee explained: "Bashkirs from Russia who have moved here—we periodically go somewhere, travel, meet, work together, do business together" (TUR3/M/younger).

This ethnic network creates clear pathways for economic adaptation. New arrivals can quickly access temporary housing, find employment through word-of-mouth referrals, and participate in community-run enterprises. By reducing uncertainty and transaction costs, these networks enable migrants to stabilize their livelihoods and engage in longer-term economic planning, such as launching small businesses or investing in joint ventures with co-ethnics.

At the same time, these networks can be exclusionary. Their benefits are typically reserved for those with a common ethnic or religious identity. Russian migrants who do not belong to such groups often find themselves outside of these informal support economies. Telegram channels such as *Relocation of Bashkirs* provide critical information and assistance but are not perceived as meant for the wider Russian migrant community. This segmentation limits the scope of solidarity and produces unequal access to resources necessary for economic survival and success.

While the Bashkirs represent the only case of ethnic and religious solidarity we encountered in our research, other Russian ethnic minorities may have similar practices. For instance, in the autumn of 2022, media reported on men from the North Caucasus who fled mobilization to Istanbul, "often gathered for collective prayers and in restaurants serving Vainakh cuisine . . . discussed ways to earn money, helped each other with rent and other issues" (Evloeva 2022).[8] Multiple reports of more massive conscription among representatives of Russia's ethnic minorities—with Dagestan, Buryatia, and Kalmykia exceeding mobilization quotas (Iliyasov and Ratelle 2025) and suffering disproportionately high casualty rates (Bessudnov 2023)—may have contributed to a higher risk assessment and willingness to leave among these communities, even taking into account the threat of being left without a livelihood.

[8] Turkey has historically hosted large numbers of Muslims from the North Caucasus ("Russian-Origin Muslims" 2021).

PROFESSIONAL SOLIDARITIES AND THE RISE OF MIGRANT ECONOMIES

For many Russian migrants, professional identity has become a central axis around which economic strategies are built in exile. Professional networks—particularly in sectors such as IT, design, media, creative industries, and high-skilled services—have emerged as critical infrastructures that offer far more than social belonging. These networks provide access to job opportunities, collaborative ventures, legal advice on entrepreneurship, and even investment capital. For some migrants, they become the primary mechanism for securing stable livelihoods, navigating bureaucratic hurdles, and preserving familiar ways of working and living (e.g., Baranova et al. 2023; Volkova et al. 2023).

As one IT professional in Turkey explained, these networks function as ecosystems of economic cooperation and mutual aid: "We've built an entire ecosystem here—IT professionals, designers, analysts. We're helping each other with job leads, paperwork, even investments in new businesses. Honestly, it feels like we're building our own little Silicon Valley" (TUR2/F/younger). Access to such networks enables migrants to pursue transnational economic strategies that are far less dependent on the host country's labor market. Many maintain remote work arrangements with international companies, participate in global digital platforms, or establish transnational businesses that enable them to remain mobile, flexible, and independent of local economic fluctuations. These strategies are typically higher-paying, more stable, and offer greater autonomy compared to opportunities available within local labor markets.

These transnational professional networks become particularly cohesive and effective when they are reinforced by a shared sense of belonging to a "community of fate." In such cases, professional identity is not just a common field of expertise—it is bound together with a collective experience of displacement and a sense of solidarity forged through shared trauma.[9] This intersection strengthens both trust and cooperation, creating dense and highly functional transnational economic networks. A striking example comes from an IT entrepreneur now living in Israel. He describes how his Russian professional community, once united within the country, fractured after February 24, 2022, into those who left and those who stayed. However, among those who emigrated, transnational ties intensified, enabling them to create businesses that operate across multiple countries.

> The people I communicate with now are this diaspora that left on February 24. These are people who filtered out according to certain criteria—those who had the money, the beliefs, and so on. They left for different countries. And now, within this diaspora, communication is extremely dense. Right now, I'm doing business with people in Vietnam, Singapore, and Cyprus. They are all Russians who left after February 24. . . . There's this hypothesis that this diaspora of those who left Russia is like the new Jews—they have extremely tight connections, excellent skills in international law, international markets, and moving

[9] For further discussion of the shared trauma and its consequences for the subjective well-being of post–February 2022 Russian migrants, see Mukhina (2023); Sergeeva and Kamalov (2026).

> money. . . . It's a large group of people connected by a single language and a shared trauma, highly educated and equipped with all the tools to start businesses anywhere. (ISR2/M/younger)

In addition to facilitating employment and transnational partnerships, these professional networks often give rise to migrant economies—self-sustaining circuits of businesses and services designed for and by Russian-speaking migrants. Across major host cities, Russian cafés, coworking spaces, beauty salons, and IT hubs have emerged. These localized economies not only cater to the specific preferences and needs of Russian migrants but also create employment opportunities within the community itself, further consolidating these networks into economic infrastructures that transcend national borders.

One café owner in Turkey, formerly a product analyst at a major Russian bank, described how her establishment evolved into an informal community hub for Russian migrants working in IT and design fields: "We have a big community here now—27 people who meet regularly, and that's just in my circle. Our customers are mostly our friends, but they also come to us for advice, information, and emotional support. People share their struggles, ask for help with paperwork, or just want someone to listen. Over time, we've developed much closer ties" (TUR2/F/younger).

Professional solidarities also encourage entrepreneurial risk-taking. The same interviewee, who opened a bakery-restaurant after relocating, explained how the support from her professional network gave her the confidence to enter an unfamiliar industry: "It was just a hobby for me, baking and cooking. But after we moved, my husband encouraged me to try. I spent a month working out recipes, researching, and within no time we were running our own place" (TUR2/F/younger). Around her, an informal IT community became both the core clientele and advisors, enabling her and her husband to launch a tech startup simultaneously. Similar dynamics are observable in Serbia, where Russian-speaking migrants have established businesses catering to their compatriots. For example, one woman began organizing hiking tours for fellow migrants, which quickly evolved into a sustainable source of income: "I also started organizing one-day hikes to the mountains, just to test it out. It went really well—people paid what they thought was fair. Now I'm planning longer routes, with overnight stays and fixed prices" (SRB3/F/older). These networks foster narratives of shared professionalism and competence, reinforcing the belief that those who chose or managed to leave Russia are the best in their field.

However, inclusion in these professional networks is not universal. Migrants without in-demand skills or transnational connections—particularly those from the humanities, mid-level management, or nondigital sectors—often find themselves excluded from the most dynamic and lucrative parts of the migrant economy. These individuals describe feelings of alienation from the dominant IT- and service-driven communities, as well as limited access to job opportunities and community resources. A historian from Saint Petersburg, now living in Kazakhstan, shared his frustration at the lack of opportunities for retraining: "I would gladly change my profession altogether, but I need to spend for six months or more on retraining, and I cannot afford to do that. I don't have the savings to sustain myself while I study" (KAZ2/M/

older). Similarly, a waitress in Astana, Kazakhstan, described feeling out of place at a social event populated by IT specialists: "Their conversations were on another level. . . They talk about high income, investments, moving to Italy. Meanwhile, I'm working service jobs and can barely cover my rent" (KAZ3/F/younger).

Some migrants report that the pricing structures of Russian-run businesses in host countries replicate the economic divides of prewar Moscow and Saint Petersburg. A woman in Serbia reflected on the high prices charged for events and services catering to Russian migrants: "I got an invite to a workshop on Yugoslav design—2,000 dinars. That's expensive here. My kid's chess club costs the same for a month. These new places charge Moscow prices, and it's just not realistic for many of us" (SRB4/F/older). Over time, these dynamics contribute to the reproduction of inequality within Russian migrant communities. Professional networks offer stable incomes, access to transnational opportunities, and longer-term mobility—but primarily to those already well positioned to benefit from them. Those excluded from these networks remain on the margins, often reliant on job opportunities in local labor markets.

Professional identity has thus become both a strategy for economic inclusion and a mechanism of exclusion. It determines not only who can build a sustainable life abroad but also who is left behind in the emerging social and economic structures of post-2022 Russian migrant communities. While professional communities offer opportunities for collaboration and growth, they also risk reinforcing existing hierarchies and limiting access to economic resources for those outside their networks.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how Russian migrants who left the country after February 24, 2022, are building new forms of solidarity and how these solidarities shape their economic lives across five institutionally distinct host states. What emerges is a picture of communities that are far from unified—instead, they are fragmented, multilayered, and often divided by profession, ethnicity, political views, and migration experiences. Our findings extend previous research (e.g., Guarnizo et al. 1999; Ciabarri and Simonsen 2024; Bonnin and Oubad 2025) by demonstrating that fragmentation has an additional consequence that has received much less theoretical attention: It structures unequal access to economic opportunities within the same migrant population.

Rather than operating as a common resource available to all migrants, solidarities function as differentiated infrastructures of economic embeddedness. Professional, ethnic, religious, and political solidarities each provide access to distinct networks of employment, entrepreneurship, information, legitimacy, and mutual assistance, while simultaneously establishing boundaries that differentiate insiders from outsiders. Access to jobs, business partnerships, customers, housing, legal advice, and transnational opportunities therefore depends not simply on migrants' human capital or on the institutional environment but on their position within overlapping and partially disconnected solidarity networks. Fragmentation should not be read as the erosion of solidarity: Solidarities remain remarkably effective precisely

because they are selective, and this same selectivity generates both inclusion and exclusion simultaneously.

This perspective also refines the concept of mixed embeddedness (Klosterman and Rath 2001). Previous work has emphasized that migrants' economic trajectories emerge through the interaction of social networks and institutional opportunity structures. Our comparative design allowed us to isolate a further finding: Social embeddedness cannot be treated as a homogeneous resource available equally to all migrants from the same country of origin. Migrants are differentially embedded because access to social networks is mediated by fragmented solidarities, meaning mixed embeddedness operates through differentiated rather than collective forms of social incorporation. Post–February 2022 Russian migration offers a particularly useful setting for observing this dynamic: Professional identity, shared political experience(s), ethnicity, religion, and a perceived community of fate replace national belonging as organizing principles of cooperation.

Professional identity and common economic activity uniting people with different professions into common businesses have emerged as the dominant axes of this fragmentation. In high-demand sectors like IT, design, and media, professional communities have become lifelines—providing access to jobs, partnerships, and business opportunities extending beyond any single host country. These networks are not just spaces of mutual support; they are engines of transnational mobility and economic resilience. For migrants who manage to tap into them, they offer a way to rebuild lives and careers, sometimes even improving socioeconomic standing compared to what they had before leaving Russia. Yet these same networks reproduce exclusion: Professional communities frequently recreate the exclusive spaces and practices familiar to Russia's urban centers—cafés, coworking hubs, and social events that cater to wealthy IT specialists and entrepreneurs and "charge Moscow prices." These dynamics reflect broader mechanisms by which migration regulates labor markets, often reinforcing inequalities between different categories of migrants and between migrants and local workers (Bauder 2006).

Quantitative evidence corroborates this pattern: Access to social capital among Russian post–February 2022 migrants is strongly conditioned by employment status, family structure, and gender—with unemployed migrants, remote workers, and men consistently scoring lower on measures of social integration (Kozlov et al. 2024; Sokolova et al. 2026). Our research reaffirms previous findings (e.g., Kamalov et al. 2023; Krawatzek and Sasse 2024; Zavadskaya et al. 2026) that the very solidarities that provide opportunities for some create new barriers for others. Those outside relevant professional, ethnic, or religious circles find themselves excluded from access to key resources. As a result, deep divisions that mirror, and sometimes magnify, inequalities that existed back home, emerge within migrant communities.

More broadly, this suggests a conceptual shift in the study of migrant solidarity. Rather than asking whether migrant communities are cohesive or fragmented, future research should examine how different solidarities are translated into differential access to resources. Fragmented solidarity is therefore not simply an empirical description of heterogeneous migrant communities; it is a mechanism through which inequalities are produced, reproduced, and negotiated within migration itself.

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APPENDIX 1

PROFILES OF THE INTERVIEWEES WITHIN THE ENTIRE SAMPLE

	Armenia	Israel	Kazakhstan	Serbia	Turkey	Total
Entire sample						
Interviewees	14	17	16	13	14	74
Gender						
Male	6	10	10	7	7	40
Female	8	7	6	6	7	34
Age group						
18–39	9	10	9	7	10	45
⩾40	5	7	7	6	4	29
Marital status						
Single	5	7	6	4	3	25
Couple, no children	6	4	5	3	6	24
Single, with children	2	2	2	2	0	8
Couple, with children	1	4	3	4	5	17
Type of employment						
Entrepreneur	5	6	5	5	7	28
Employed in the country of residence, low qualified job	1	3	3	1	1	9
Employed in the country of residence, high qualified job	2	4	3	4	1	14
Remote work for another country	5	3	4	3	4	19
Other	1	1	1	0	1	4

APPENDIX 2

PROFILES OF THE INTERVIEWEES CITED IN THE ARTICLE

	Interviewees	Gender	Age	Marital status	Type of employment
Armenia					
1.	ARM1/F/older	F	⩾40	Single, with children	Private speech therapist, working at a school and as an individual entrepreneur
2.	ARM2/M/younger	M	18–39	Single	Professional musician and entrepreneur in the event industry
3.	ARM3/M/younger	M	18–39	Single	Remote creative producer employed by an international company
Israel					
4.	ISR1/F/younger	F	18–39	Single	Cultural project manager, temporarily working as hotel receptionist
5.	ISR2/M/younger	M	18–39	Couple, no children	Entrepreneur, cofounder of an international company specializing in merchandise production
Kazakhstan					
6.	KAZ1/M/younger	M	18–39	Couple, no children	Education manager, taking on remote freelance projects in Russia

	Interviewees	Gender	Age	Marital status	Type of employment
7.	KAZ2/M/older	M	⩾40	Couple, no children	An entrepreneur offering archival and genealogical services, currently without work due to limited client demand
8.	KAZ3/F/younger	F	18–39	Couple, no children	Waitress employed in the host country
Serbia					
9.	SRB1/F/younger	F	18–39	Single, with children	Remote employee for a French fashion company
10.	SRB2/M/older	M	⩾40	Single	Currently runs a construction business with a background as a restaurateur
11.	SRB3/F/older	F	⩾40	Couple, no children	Handcrafted jewelry entrepreneur, mountain guide
12.	SRB4/F/older	F	⩾40	Single, with children	Remote financial analyst (part-time office) at an international company
Turkey					
13.	TUR1/M/younger	M	18–39	Couple, no children	Procurement manager working remotely for a Russian company
14.	TUR2/F/younger	F	18–39	Couple, no children	Business owner who launched a café in Turkey and is concurrently developing an IT venture
15.	TUR3/M/younger	M	18–39	Couple, no children	A lawyer with plans to launch an immigration consulting services business
16.	TUR4/M/younger	M	18–39	Single	Currently runs an online info business, with a background as an online store owner

НЕ СОВСЕМ «РУССКАЯ ДИАСПОРА»: МНОЖЕСТВЕННЫЕ СОЛИДАРНОСТИ И СТРАТИФИЦИРОВАННЫЕ ЭКОНОМИКИ НОВЫХ РОССИЙСКИХ МИГРАНТОВ

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Авторы статьи выражают благодарность Алексею Воронкову за его значительный вклад в кабинетное исследование по Израилю, а также работу по сбору и анализу данных. Мы также благодарим Олега Грешнева за содействие в организации количественной части исследования, не рассматриваемой в настоящей статье, но крайне важной для проверки представленных здесь результатов и углубления их интерпретации. Кроме того, мы признательны Елене Никифоровой за участие в сборе интервью в Армении. Наконец, мы благодарим анонимных рецензентов и редакторов журнала «Laboratorium», чьи ценные замечания помогли улучшить нашу рукопись.

В статье представлено исследование миграции россиян после февраля 2022 года в Армению, Израиль, Казахстан, Сербию и Турцию – страны, ставшие основными направлениями благодаря безвизовым режимам, географической близости к России и относительно низким институциональным барьерам для въезда. На основе 74 полуструктурированных интервью, проведенных с российскими мигрантами в 2023 году, рассматривается, как они выстраивают собственные экономические стратегии в принимающих странах. Отталкиваясь от концепции транснациональной смешанной встроенности, авторы анализируют, как фрагментированные формы солидарности, базирующиеся на профессиональной идентичности, этнической принадлежности и политических взглядах, формируют экономические стратегии мигрантов и становление новых мигрантских сообществ.

Анализ показывает, что доступ к диаспоральным сетям и их экономическим ресурсам структурирует эти солидарности и коллективные идентичности. Сообщества, выстроенные вокруг общей профессиональной или этнической принадлежности, а также опыта политически вызванного перемещения, как правило, развивают разного рода социальные и экономические инфраструктуры. Такого рода солидарности предполагают соответствующие разделяющие маркеры идентичности, обеспечивая привилегированный доступ к возможностям трудоустройства, бизнес-инициативам и системам взаимной поддержки. Однако в то же время они устанавливают рамки, ограничивающие участие всех остальных, что приводит к дифференцированному доступу к ресурсам и возможностям формирующейся экономики мигрантского сообщества. Таким образом, эти фрагментированные солидарности способствуют адаптивным экономическим стратегиям и созданию транснациональных сетей, но при этом воспроизводят внутреннюю дифференциацию, определяя, кто включен, а кто исключен из новых экономических возможностей.

Ключевые слова: эмиграция россиян после февраля 2022 года; экономические стратегии мигрантов; смешанная встроенность; фрагментированные солидарности; транснациональные сети; Евразия