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**Title:** Agency of Migrants in interaction with the formal and informal state in Russia

**Source** (ediss Uni-Göttingen, Göttingen, 2018)

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**Abstract**

More and more people are moving to Russia with different intentions and goals. According to the United Nations, Russia ranks third in the number of international migrants worldwide after the United States and Germany. Once in Russia, migrants face a variety of complex tasks they have to complete in order to secure their stay in the country. For this reason, they frequently interact with state authorities. Compared to Western states, the situation in Russia is characterized by an omnipresence and symbiotic connection between formal and informal state structures. Some authors even refer to the situation in Russia as a historical symbiosis of organized crime with the state.

The subject of the study is the ability of migrants to act in a context that, unlike the more frequently studied European constitutional and welfare states, is characterized by a limited rule of law and the coexistence of formal and informal state structures. Are such conditions primarily perceived as limiting or as a way to implement different courses of action? Structured interviews with experts, thematically focused narrative interviews with migrants from 13 countries, as well as (participant) observations were carried out using the method of Grounded Theory and Theoretical Sampling over the period of 2013-2014. The analysis of the interview data was completed using Thematic Analysis.

Migrants described obtaining documents, finding accommodation and employment, as well as the interaction with law enforcement officers as central problems. The confrontation with informal state structures was repeatedly described, which migrants experienced to be predominantly corrupt and interwoven with the formal state structures. At the same time, migrants perceived the informal state structures as both restrictive and enabling of different options for action. These could include agreements with employers, assistance in purchasing documents, or informal agreements with the

district police officers for protection against unannounced police raids. Migrants portrayed the restrictions of the informal state migrants with examples of unpredictability and extortion by the police officers, the need to buy regular documents at a high price, rather than being able to apply for them formally, and the lack of opportunities to defend one's own rights, e.g. in a case of a wage fraud.

Within the framework conditions dominated by informal structures, migrants described their strategies for obtaining residence documents, protecting oneself from deportation or arbitrariness by police officers, and fulfilling their own security and economic interests. They adapted their strategies flexibly to the respective living conditions and the local structural conditions and, if necessary, pursued new options for action based on their previous experiences, goals and available resources. The migrants described four factors as moderating the extent of their agency: The availability of financial resources and the willingness to use them to acquire regular residence permits; social networks and their commitment to newcomers in finding housing, employment and obtaining documents; good knowledge of the local language; and, interpersonal trust in the members of their own social networks as well as systemic trust in informal state structures.