International migration and sustainable development in the Russian border regions: a migrant perspective on the local community

D Omelchenko1*, O Noyanzina1 and S Maximova1

1 Altai State University, 61 Lenina prosp., Barnaul 656049 Russia

E-mail: daria.omelchenko@mail.ru

Abstract. The article is based on the results of an empirical study among the migrants in seven border regions of Russia. An analysis was made of the attitude of the local population to migrants, acculturation strategies and life satisfaction as indicators of the cooperative and integration potentials of a regional society.

Keywords: migration, migration policy, local community, satisfaction, integration

1. Introduction

International migration is the most important element of the economic development of modern Russia, requiring a systematic and differentiated approach to management, taking into account the peculiarities of social and inter-ethnic relations in the country and its individual regions [4], [8]. The current stage in the implementation of migration policy is shaped by adverse external and internal factors, which include the worsening of international relations and the introduction of economic sanctions against Russia by Western countries, the economic decline and depreciation of the ruble, the deterioration of social well-being and social attitudes of the population, etc.

Despite the transition to a targeted formation of migration flows and the creation of prerequisites for the free movement of people and labor, adverse economic and geopolitical conditions, along with the active policies of the Asian and European countries, seeking to strengthen their positions in Central Asia, may lead to the loss of Russia’s leading positions as a center of migration attraction [10], [11]. It is necessary to conduct comprehensive studies on the problems of incorporating migrants into regional communities, their interaction with hosting people, diasporas and institutional structures exercising state administration in the migration sphere [6].

The research findings presented in the report focus on a number of issues. The first problem involves the social exclusion and discrimination of migrants as a threat to the sustainable development of regional society. An analysis of the scientific literature shows that the perception of an unfair attitude arising from real or imaginary, subjectively perceived discrimination increases the level of social distance between the dominant majority of the population and the “minorities,” leads to an increase in the role of the ethnic factor in the process of self-identification of migrants, reinforces the confidence that residents perceive them only in negative stereotypes [3], [14]. At the societal level, discrimination is a symptom and a factor of social disunity, loss of national identity, erosion of the idea of national unity [7], [12]. The second problem is represented by the attitudes and behavioral strategies of migrants, describing the
extent of their involvement or, on the contrary, their distance from the daily and cultural life of the regional community. For this purpose, we turn to the acculturation methodology [1], [2], which allows to investigate the variability of attitudes and behavior of migrants and the local population with regard to the most acceptable variants of incorporation into the receiving society. In conclusion, we present data on the assessment of migrants’ satisfaction with life, considered as an integral indicator of migrant-friendly migration policy, safe and resistant to external adverse effects of the social environment. Data from previous studies show that satisfaction scores are formed based on a comparison of their position with other groups (relatives, remaining at home, hosting people, other migrants), is associated with initial expectations, especially regarding the possibilities of upbringing and education of children, freedom to accept everyday decisions, opportunities to realize life goals, and with the presence of social support [13]. This study allowed us to describe the specifics of migration processes and ethnic structure in the border regions of modern Russia, to determine the role of the social context and cultural factors for the formation of favorable conditions for the interaction of migrants and hosting people.

2. Materials and Methods
Empirically, the research is based on the interviews with migrants in seven border regions of Russia (Altai Krai – n=319, Orenburg region – n=100, Murmansk region – n=100, Pskov region – n=100, Altai Republic – n=20, Republic of Dagestan – n=51, Rostov region – n=94). Different categories of migrants were interviewed, including for the purpose of stay and further migration plans. The criterion for selection of respondents was the period of residence in Russia (not more than five years, taking into account temporary returns to the country of departure).

To implement the objectives of the study, the following methods, indicators, and integrated assessment tools were used:

- A subjective assessment of the attitude of the hosting population towards migrants (a question from the questionnaire: “How do you think, the people living in this region are migrants?”);
- A comprehensive methodology for assessing acculturation and mutual attitudes of the dominant population and migrants in a multicultural society [9], on the basis of which the leading acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, marginalization and separation) were selected, calculated the integral index of the perception of ethnic discrimination of migrants by the hosting population. The following indicators for calculating the index were used: “I believe that people of other nationalities behave unfairly and unkindly towards my ethnic group,” “I feel that the hosting people do not accept me,” “I was insulted because of my nationality,” “I was threatened because of my nationality”;
- A life satisfaction scale represents a combination of nine five-point scales assessing life as a whole and its individual components (satisfaction with life as a whole at present, job satisfaction, financial situation, living conditions, relationships with colleagues, relationships with the authorities, relationships with family, support of a religious community, support of national association, communication with fellow countrymen, health).

3. Results
The study showed that the majority of migrants have a positive experience of interaction with hosting people: 33.6% of respondents reported that the hosting population treats migrants friendly, 39.0% of them tell that the hosting population is positive rather than negative (cumulatively 72.5%). At the same time, every 5th migrant surveyed reported a negative attitude of the hosting population, including 16.3% of respondents indicated that the ratio was “negative rather than positive”, 3.6% said that it was “sharply negative.” Primary answers to the scale questions and generalized index values indicated a low level of perceived discrimination: only about 10% of respondents experienced subjective rejection from the hosting population and noted that other nationalities behave unfairly and unfriendly towards their ethnic group; 8.3% heard in their address ethnically motivated insults and unpleasant statements; 4.9% indicated that they were threatened or attacked because of their nationality. The average value was 1.78 points, the median 1.5 points out of five possible. At the same time, the presence of a group of individuals
with a high index value (5.2% with an index of 3.5 points and above) indicated that migrants are not a homogeneous group, that the attitude of the hosting population and migration policies towards different groups of migrants are differentiated.

Analysis of acculturation strategies showed that integration strategy is the most common among the surveyed migrants: 75.4% of respondents indicated that they expect members of their ethnic group to maintain their own traditions and at the same time assimilate the traditions of the Russian people, 69.6% preferred to participate in joint events with hosting people and countrymen, 73.2% preferred not only to keep old friends in their homeland, but also to make new ones in Russia. From 4% to 7% of respondents reported intentions to assimilate. The separation strategy was spread in about 16% of cases: 18.3% of migrants indicated that they preferred to have only their fellow countrymen as friends, 18.9% should keep only their cultural traditions and not assimilate Russian ones, 11.3% participate in events organized only by countrymen.

This strategy is rarely seen among the migrants; it indicated not only problems of adaptation to new conditions, but also identity problems, loss of communication both with the country and the culture of the outcome, and with the new country in which the migrant has to live and work, build new interpersonal relationship, acquire cultural baggage. In the study, 3.9% of respondents indicated that they have no friends either among the countrymen or among the hosting population; 2.2% of respondents expressed a desire to abandon both their ethnic and Russian culture. The largest share of migrants (11.3%) is in social exclusion. They do not take part in events (both with the participation of their countrymen and the hosting population). However, the answers to this question testified not only about marginality, but mainly about the available temporary resources and financial opportunities, allowing to spend leisure time in the campaign, about the preferences of spending free time.

Respondents were more satisfied with relationships existing with their family and relatives (83% positive responses). Satisfaction with the relationship with the authorities was approximately at the same level with satisfaction with health (68-69% positive responses), while the proportion of job satisfaction as such was 63%. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to job satisfaction and work relationships, salary satisfaction was significantly lower. For instance, only 53% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with how much they earn. The level of satisfaction with living conditions was at the level of 61%.

In addition to earnings, the lowest level of satisfaction was observed in relation to the support of national associations of countrymen (58%) and support from the religious community (53%). The overall level of life satisfaction was 68%. Satisfaction scores in the Altai Krai were comparable to the general data. In the Orenburg region, satisfaction with their lives in Russia among migrants was higher than in the sample as a whole and in most other research regions. In the Murmansk region, satisfaction scores differed evenly and lack of significant differences in individual indicators. The results of the study in the Pskov region showed that the region is very attractive for migrants, most of whom have experienced a high degree of satisfaction regarding various aspects of their life and life in general. In the Altai Republic, satisfaction scores varied significantly depending on the various aspects that they reflected. In the Republic of Dagestan, satisfaction scores were significantly lower compared with other regions. The level of satisfaction did not exceed 69% (relationships with family and relatives), the level of satisfaction with life in general left 44% (this is the minimum value of the indicator in all regions of the study). In the Rostov region, the majority of satisfaction scores ranged from 65-78%, which indicated the comfortable living and working conditions of migrants, the availability of opportunities to realize their expectations and intentions.

The analysis showed that there is no significant correlation between the level of satisfaction (integral index for all nine components) and acculturation strategies (the model included a contrast variable opposing the integration strategy to everyone else); however, both indicators are significantly determined by the level of perceived discrimination and attitudes of the hosting population (Figure 1).
Figure 1. The relationship between the perceived discrimination (Perc_disc), acculturation strategies (Acc), and the level of life satisfaction (Satis) (obtained on the results of track analysis).

4. Discussion
Interpreting the results of the study, one should take into account that the respondents represented only a part of the migrant community and were in fairly favorable conditions. In particular, they had the status of legal migrants, knew Russian, had previous experience of staying in Russia, which had an impact on the assessments. This analysis represented only the border regions covered by the study; therefore, its results cannot be extrapolated to all Russian regions.

5. Conclusion
Thus, the positive experience of migrants’ interactions with the local community, the absence of mass manifestations of discrimination, the predominance of integration aspirations among migrants can be considered a good prerequisite for long-term interethnic cooperation, educational and cultural exchanges, intercultural communications in border regions. However, the presence in the migrant environment of individuals seeking to segregate and even marginalize in the context of polyethnicity and multiculturalism characteristic of the most Russian regions, as well as the facts of intolerant attitudes of the hosting population towards foreign citizens, indicated that the social, legal and organizational mechanisms created for the integration of migrants into the Russian society act rather ineffectively. The high level of satisfaction of migrants with their lives indicated the absence of serious stresses and conflicts, rather comfortable conditions for life in Russia. The share of respondents with a low level of satisfaction was about 10%. To a greater extent, dissatisfaction was associated with low salary, poor support of fellow countrymen and religious associations, living conditions. In 2018, Russia experienced the lowest migration increase for the entire post-Soviet period. In the conditions of the loss of Russia’s financial attractiveness for foreign migrants, including from the CIS countries, non-material incentives can play a crucial role in the coming years to increase the effectiveness of migration policies.

6. Acknowledgment

References
Foundation)


[9] Tatarko A N, and Lebedeva N M 2011 Metody etnicheskoi i krosskul'turnoi psikhologii (Moscow, Russia: Higher School of Economics)


