



Labor migrants and their families in the Russian Far East: A sociological analysis

Los trabajadores migrantes y sus familias en el Lejano Oriente ruso: un análisis sociológico

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ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses the main trends characterizing the migration process development in a particular Russian region, namely, the Primorye Territory, which is unique region of the Russian Federation in terms of both the geographic location as well as cultural and social aspect of people's lives. However, the Primorye Territory is characterized also by detected negative demographic trends, among which a special role belongs to population growth due to migration. In this regard, the article examines objective and subjective factors influencing the migration dynamics in the context of regional development and social transformation. Also, the authors present the basic results of the expert survey and unstructured interviews that reveal the attitude of ordinary local residents towards migrants and their families, problems of their integration in the Primorye Territory, as well as assessment of the state of migration problems and their development trends in the region by the officials of the different authorities. The conducted study has shown that on the one hand, both experts and indigenous population are aware of the need to attract labor migrants. On the other hand, there

RESUMEN:

El documento analiza las principales tendencias que caracterizan el desarrollo del proceso de migración en una región rusa en particular, el Territorio de Primorie, que es una región única de la Federación de Rusia en términos tanto de la ubicación geográfica como cultural y social de las vidas de las personas. Sin embargo, el territorio de Primorye también se caracteriza por tendencias demográficas negativas detectadas, entre las cuales un papel especial pertenece al crecimiento de la población debido a la migración. En este sentido, el artículo examina los factores objetivos y subjetivos que influyen en la dinámica de la migración en el contexto del desarrollo regional y la transformación social. Además, los autores presentan los resultados básicos de la encuesta de expertos y entrevistas no estructuradas que revelan la actitud de los residentes locales ordinarios hacia los migrantes y sus familias, los problemas de su integración en el territorio de Primorye, así como la evaluación del estado de los problemas de migración y sus tendencias de desarrollo en la región por parte de los funcionarios de las diferentes autoridades. El estudio realizado ha

are opinions expressing concern regarding the inflow of labor migrants from the former Soviet republics and countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The informants also show a high level of anxiety due to the uncertain prospects of their own life. The authors conclude that currently there are number of specific features characterizing migration in the Primorye Territory: firstly, changing Chinese migration trajectory, and secondly, the increased influx of migrants from former Soviet republics. However, the survey findings show that respondents assess the relations between local residents and migrants as quite calm that does not violate the usual atmosphere of the Primorye cities, characterized by relative tolerance toward migrants.

Keywords: migration, migration strategies, social transformation, regional development, labor migrants, labor migrants' families, attitude towards migrants, migration threat.

demostrado que, por un lado, tanto los expertos como la población indígena son conscientes de la necesidad de atraer trabajadores migrantes. Por otro lado, hay opiniones que expresan preocupación con respecto a la afluencia de trabajadores migrantes de las antiguas repúblicas soviéticas y los países de la región de Asia y el Pacífico. Los informantes también muestran un alto nivel de ansiedad debido a las perspectivas inciertas de su propia vida. Los autores concluyen que actualmente hay varias características específicas que caracterizan la migración en el Territorio de Primorye: en primer lugar, el cambio en la trayectoria de migración de China, y en segundo lugar, la mayor afluencia de migrantes de las antiguas repúblicas soviéticas. Sin embargo, los resultados de la encuesta muestran que los encuestados evalúan las relaciones entre los residentes locales y los inmigrantes como bastante tranquilas, lo que no viola la atmósfera habitual de las ciudades de Primorie, caracterizada por una tolerancia relativa hacia los migrantes.

Palabras clave: migración, estrategias de migración, transformación social, desarrollo regional, migrantes laborales, familias de trabajadores migrantes, actitud hacia los migrantes, amenaza de la migración.

1. Introduction

Global changes occurring currently in present-day society, in varying degrees affect all spheres of human activity without any exception. The dramatic changes peculiar to the current social medium are most often referred to by the term "social transformation". Social transformation is the process of acquiring by the society of new traits corresponding to the imperative of our time, changes in living standards, patterns of behavior and needs. Transformation processes are observed in both advanced and emerging countries. They are especially evident in contemporary Russian conditions.

In the context of the development of the Russian society in terms of social transformation, there are several main features that have a negative connotation. First and foremost, these are the unfavorable changes in the level and quality of life of the population that is combined with the ongoing deterioration of social infrastructure. In this vein, important is the aggravation of the employment problems and the widespread dissemination of additional (secondary) employment as a form of adaptation of the population to the tremendous drop in the level of material well-being. There is a growing differentiation of the population and, consequently, a sharp stratification, leading to unfavorable changes in the social structure of the society.

This circumstance should be supplemented by the fact that all the emerging problem situations are directly integrated into the regional context. In other words, there is a specific regionalization of the above mentioned negative social processes, which, combined with geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural characteristics, acquire identity and regional flavor.

Priority rating of effective social development of the regions requires, first and foremost, a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of migration processes dynamics. The geographical location, the peculiarities of the regional economy, level of urbanization, and the condition of infrastructure can be considered as the main environmental factors that have an influence on these processes. When considering these characteristics in relation to the Primorye Territory, it should be noted that this region is a quite specific constituent entity of the Russian Federation. Our region is a seaport and border area, which has direct access to Asia-Pacific countries. On a nationwide scale, the Primorye Territory is situated quite far from the European part of the country and the federal authorities. At the same time, when talking about the Russian Far East, the Primorye Territory is the most favorable region in terms of climatic, economic, and transport conditions among other regions of the Far Eastern Federal District (FEFD). It is quite natural that the Primorye Territory remains one of the most populated regions of the Russian Far East,

and compared to other territorial entities within FEFD it has a certain demographic potential and most concentrated labor resources. As of January 1, 2017, the resident population of the Primorye Territory amounted to 1,923 million people. For comparison, the population in other large regions of the Far East is significantly lower: in the Khabarovsk Territory – 1,333 million people, while in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) – 962 thousand people. (Estimation of the population size as of January 1, 2017... 2017).

Nevertheless, despite the relative prosperity against the background of other regions of the FEFD, the demographic situation in the Primorye Territory remains adverse. To date, the number of residents in the Primorye Territory continues declining. So, for 2016, the population decreased by 5.9 thousand people.

We believe that in the short and medium term, positive migration balance should be considered as the main source of demographic increase. The Primorye Territory has certain attractiveness for labor migrants. This is primarily associated with the implementation of major investment projects, such as "Eastern Siberia – Pacific ocean" pipeline system, special marine oil port "Kozmino", the construction of "Nakhodka – Vostochny" transport hub, the implementation of the "Free port Vladivostok" project, and so forth.

At the same time, analyzing the migration processes and behaviors of labor migrants, we note a number of issues related to their involvement in the cultural environment of the host community, sharing the views of many domestic and foreign authors (Larin, 2009; Krepsky, 2011; Egorova 2012; Samoilyuk, 2013; Lubyanyoy, Morozova, 2014; Arutyunova, 2015; Rybakovsky, 2015; Erokhina, Trifonova, 2015; Erokhina, 2015; Barsukova, Chasovskaya, 2016; Bartram, 2013; Westcott, Vazquez Maggio, 2015). Among them we should note the difficulties of interaction with the local population, the complexity of professional identity, substandard living conditions, the formation of negative emotional states (anxiety, stress, aggression, and fears), as well as the difficulty of some migrants in learning Russian language, perception of culture and customs of the Russian people. For labor migrants, an urgent problem is to integrate into the host community, because a new cultural context, in which immigrants find themselves, leads to changes experienced in the course of adaptation. The effectiveness and the positive vector of this process depend on many external and internal factors, including public attitudes to labor migrants and their family members, as well as the perception of migration processes by local authorities.

2. Methods

The above proves the feasibility of the present study that reveals the attitude of ordinary population and officials of various regional authorities of the Primorye Territory to migrants and their family members, as well as problems of their adaptation in the region. The study of this problem was undertaken on the basis of integrative research strategy involving the use of primary and secondary analysis of sociological and statistical data. The official statistics data, in particular, the data available at the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) website served the basic information for the secondary analysis.

An empirical database, obtained during the authors' sociological research, was subjected to the primary analysis. The study was conducted in April-June of the 2017, and was of reconnaissance nature. The main methods of collecting sociological information, used in the course of our study, were expert survey and unstructured interview. The experts were selected among leaders of different levels, working in regional authorities, including the law enforcement agencies, as well as representatives of academic and university community. Altogether, we interviewed 17 experts, who agreed to participate in the research upon strict conditions of anonymity without specifying their place of work and position. Expert survey was supplemented by 30 unstructured interviews with the indigenous population of the Primorye Territory residing in the major cities of Primorye, i.e. Vladivostok and Nakhodka.

The application of such integrated approach, consisting of primary and secondary data analysis,

gave us the opportunity to more fully describe the attitude towards labor migrants and their families by the host community representatives, taking into account regional specifics.

3. Results

3.1. The general trends of socio-demographic development: experts' judgment and opinions of the respondents

All the experts, who participated in the survey, are unanimous in issues concerning the reproductive capacity of regional demographic potential of the Primorye Territory. With the existing demographic structure, it is impossible to expect a significant increase in the population of the region. Also, the experts noted that a significant proportion of regional population is characterized by low living standards, i.e. financial and economic problems come to the fore.

This is confirmed by the ordinary residents of the Primorye Territory, who noted in interviews that they *"live on a stringent budget"* or *"live below the poverty line"*. Consequently, the negative natural increase and decline in the birth rate in the region are largely due to poor financial situation and a sense of growing instability in both the region and the whole country. Residents of the Primorye Territory characterize child birth as untimely event. This opinion is accompanied by comments such as: *"you never know what will happen tomorrow"*, *"we need to work and earn money, we will think about children later"*. In relation to the birth of the second child and subsequent children we often heard the opinion like: *"we even do not know how to raise the first child (to educate the child and provide material well-being)"*.

A significant number of our informants demonstrated a high level of anxiety due to the uncertain life prospects. Stress, caused by poverty, declining incomes, and lack of opportunities for their enhancement has increased so much that many people, especially youth, intend to move from the Primorye to another wealthier region.

Thus, we can assume that one of the pressing issues for the Primorye Territory in terms of effective socio-economic development is encouraging the reproduction of its own population. And, in this context, we share the view of experts that it is impossible to improve the demographic situation in the near future at the expense of natural growth. In the current crisis situation in the economy it is hard to expect rapid growth in the birth rate.

3.2. Transformation of the Chinese migration trajectory: experts' judgments and estimates

Previously, migration from China was seen as one of the base vectors of demographic development of the Primorye Territory. Some experts talked about the *"Chinese expansion"* and possible disintegration of the region in the absence of consistent state policy on strengthening Russia's positions in Asia-Pacific Region. Our informants cited various examples, characterizing in their view *"China's plans to resettle in the Primorye Territory the excess population of the North-Eastern provinces"*. The view was expressed that China encourages the penetration of its citizens into Russian territory, while the main goal of Chinese penetration into Russia is integration into economic activity and creation of economic and legal preconditions for the legal seizure of the territory.

At the same time, representatives of the academic and university communities, on the contrary, share the opinion that the danger of the *"yellow threat"* has already passed: *"... this flow is directed into a controlled channel, and thus expectation of large influx of labor migrants from China is out of question. We have "fended off" the desire of the Chinese to work in Russia, especially after their participation in the construction of the APEC summit facilities in Vladivostok. Objectively the number of "free hands" in China is reducing because redundant*

labor force in rural areas is becoming increasingly popular in the cities...".

It is also about changing the Chinese migration trajectory, which is changing in favor of the Central regions of Russia. *"The Primorye Territory becomes a kind of scientific and educational springboard for Chinese migrants. Establishing linkages with our universities and research institutions, after some time the former Chinese students become postgraduate students at the universities in Ural and Siberia, while Chinese universities conclude agreements on scientific-technical cooperation with academic institutions situated in the central regions of Russia".* So, out of more than a thousand and a half foreign students at the Far Eastern Federal University, about a third are Chinese citizens, the second largest group are the representatives from Uzbekistan, while the third place is occupied by the students from Ukraine. This is confirmed by the regional authority experts, who note that currently exactly education and tourism are the main purposes of the Chinese citizens' arrival in the Primorye Territory.

3.3. The attitude towards migrants from Central Asia and their family members: the views of the executives of power structures and indigenous population

A much greater concern in the indigenous population and the executives of the regional authorities is caused by the inflow of migrants from former Soviet republics, primarily from Central Asian countries. In recent years, since 2010, citizens of Uzbekistan are leading in terms of the number of arriving labor migrants. In this regard, very indicative is a note of one of our experts: *"... by the nature of my professional activity I always thought that we will be harmed by the Chinese... in fact no... people from Central Asia have much bigger force, they are coming continuously, the trains are full of migrants..."*. This emotional statement is confirmed by the dry figures of the reporting. According to official data of the Federal Migration Service Directorate of the Primorye Territory (currently, General Administration for Migration Issues of the Interior Ministry of Russia in the Primorye Territory), in the last two years citizens of Uzbekistan have replaced all the other migrants (Abroad as at home... 2013).

Indigenous population of the Primorye Territory expresses very specific attitudes in relation to labor migrants from Central Asia. Thus, among the words which, according to our respondents, most often are used with regard to immigrants from Central Asian countries, very common are descriptive words with negative connotation, such as "chinks", and various derived words like "churiki", "churkmenistan" (by analogy with Turkmenistan), and "churkobscurantism" (by analogy with obscurantism). A special place in the linguistic description of labor migrants is occupied by on-screen personalities Ravshan and Jamshut ("Ravshan" – 14 mentions, "Jamshut" – 9 mentions) from "Our Russia" TV show, which is broadcasted by the TNT channel. All this testifies to the disapproving and suspicious respect to this category of labor migrants. Here are typical comments: *"The situation here is, of course, not like in Moscow and other big cities, but the number of migrants is constantly growing ...", "There are so many chinks: bus drivers are Uzbeks, street-cleaners are Uzbeks, vendors at food stalls – also Uzbeks...", "sometimes in the evening, when coming back home, you suddenly meet these southern guys and feel somehow quite uneasy..."*.

At the same time, our informants found it difficult to clearly define what particularly worries them with regard to the Central Asian migrants. Almost all respondents considered the relationships between local residents and migrants as being quite calm. In addition, the vast majority of our informants were neutral to the fact that children of the migrants are studying at school along with their children. For a person, in the course of his adaptation to a new place of residence, the family remains the environment, where he can satisfy the needs for communication and emotional contact, recognition and self-actualization. Therefore, the family has high social and personal significance for labor migrants. We should note also that formerly labor migration had mainly a "man's face", while now it is increasingly acquiring "family contours".

According to interviewed respondents and experts, on the one hand, labor migrants and their families preserve traditional national values (standards of families with average number of children and large families, diverse family ties, priority of the older generations, and respect for religious and national customs are still widespread). On the other hand, there are widespread social practices in the migrants' environment, associated with changing their way of life. As such, we can mention the transformation of gender roles, including in the first place, changing both family and social status of women. It should also be noted that the adaptation of migrants' families to new living conditions in the host community often occurs along with the active involvement of the younger generation. We face the unusual situation, where parents recognize the high competence of their children in a number of issues related to the real values of the new society. Thus, as it was noted earlier, we can speak about the multidirectional participation of children in the adaptation of migrants' families to the new social environment, rather than about the traditional transmission of values from parents to children (Kuzina, Vinokurova, 2016). In addition, the host community offers labor migrants the opportunity to use diverse material and spiritual wealth. In other words, while maintaining traditions, the migrants' families experience changes in their lifestyle, which can be described as the conversion of horizontal relationships with the establishment of egalitarian relationships between husband and wife, and the emergence of new vertical relationships that reduce the dependence of children from parents.

We believe that exactly the family withstands to social tensions, and is a consolidating locus for the individual. This is confirmed by our experts, who talk about the absence of any reasonable evidences to support the view that labor migrants are more likely to commit crimes than the locals. At that, control from family and community plays here an important role.

The idea that migrants take jobs of the indigenous population also does not find wide dissemination neither among experts, nor among ordinary people. To the question: "Suppose you are unemployed. Is it possible that your job will be given to the labor migrant?" the overwhelming majority of respondents said that labor migrants from Central Asia are not their competitors in the labor market. Here are some examples: *"...well, you know,... they do not actually speak Russian, so how they can take my position?..", "...the Uzbek – a sailor... sounds very exciting, but very unlikely...", "...our employers take only those who have higher education, and they don't have it...", "...they have hired migrants to do repairs,... migrants showed what they were capable of... then employers called us to remake the wiring... a cheapskate pays twice...."*

However, many local employers note that they would likely hire a team of migrants rather than the local residents: *"My job cannot be occupied by migrant, but I would have hired a migrant worker. Uzbek is working all day long, he never takes breath, while our workers cannot work without the constant smoke breaks or pause for a snack"*. While positively assessing the work of migrants, the local residents express the following opinions: *"they foul up a lot, but learn quickly", "when they will master the language, will work well," "the Uzbeks are not competitors to me, but their children probably will be on equal footing with my children."* And, it is obvious that these concerns are shared by today's "children". So, recent studies in the region have shown that 37.9% of students plan on continuing training after receiving the "first diploma" to protect themselves in the labor market (Kostina, Orlova, 2016).

At the same time, we have revealed a very notable fact. According to our informants, migrants from the Ukraine can compete in the labor market with indigenous population even today. Here is a vivid illustration: *"I am a photographer... and you know, some guys arrived from Lugansk and somehow managed to take the lead in our market segment, seized the best and profitable orders – schools, kindergartens... they can push us away...", "I go in for gym, where the group coach is a girl from Donetsk; some coaches are disgruntled, because brand-new arrivals do not allow us working calmly...", "Our brigade of dock workers hired two young guys from Mariupol. Certainly, we must help them, though the number of local guys wishing to take this job is more than enough..."*

This attitude is quite understandable. Migrants from Ukraine, unlike natives of Central Asia, have a high level of proficiency in the Russian language, good professional training, applicable not only to the sphere of material production and services, but to purely intellectual work. As noted by our experts, representatives of higher educational institutions of Donetsk have worked successfully as visiting professors in the Far Eastern Federal University.

4. Discussion

Thus, there is a situation in which the early integration of migrants into the socio-economic space in the Primorye Territory depends on their level of education and knowledge of the language. It also increases the likelihood of high competition on the labor market in the part of the blue-collar jobs, and later their extension to high-tech production and intellectual labor. This trend cannot but cause concern, and is reflected in the opinions of both experts and local ordinary population. So, according to our experts and informants, the migration situation in the Primorye Territory, and the problems associated with migrants show that it is important to avoid spreading public prejudices against migrants. We should raise the quality of informing citizens on the procedure, amount, and validity of attraction of foreign labor. It is necessary to clarify the aims of migration policy. The mass media should publish reviews on the required number of workers in specific industries and areas of employment. Such information will prevent the disseminations of the trivial stereotypes about migrants as unwelcome, undesirable, and even dangerous guests.

5. Conclusion

The practice of holding the expert survey combined with unstructured interviews allows obtaining a clearer picture concerning the perception by public opinion of labor migrants and their families. For example, in our opinion, very valuable are appreciative or negative nonverbal reactions of respondents to mentioning the migrants' nationalities, bringing their own examples and personal assessments of the migration situation in the region. A comprehensive analysis of the various components of qualitative investigation of the migration situation in the Primorye Territory opens to researcher the opportunity to model the process of migrants' integration into the host regional community.

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