

MODEL OF LABOR

MIGRANTS' ADAPTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROCESSES IN MODERN RUSSIA

MODELO DE ADAPTACIÓN DE LOS MIGRANTES LABORALES EN EL CONTEXTO DE LOS PROCESOS SOCIOECONÓMICOS EN LA RUSIA MODERNA

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to identify and develop a model for adapting labor migrants to the conditions of modern Russia. The research tasks include the following: creating a concept to assist the adaptation of foreign citizens, assessing potential risks, and formulating an effective system to regulate labor migration based on national economic and social interests. The study employs humanistic, systemic-complex, and holistic approaches as its methodology. The main research methods include document analysis, classification and grouping, expert evaluation, comparative analysis, synthesis, statistical methods, and structural-functional analysis. The study revealed two opposing trends in the settlement of foreign workers. The first is the formation of compact settlements by immigrant groups, while the second trend is their dispersed settlement. Labor migrants immediately find themselves marginalized within the social structure of Russian society, forming a new, disadvantaged lower layer. Psychological effects of deprivation and isolation significantly impact their adaptation to the new environment. Migratory processes display characteristics of assimilation, integration, and segregation. The findings will help authorities better understand migrants' motivation and behavioral psychology, prevent the emergence of nationalist and religious radical sentiments among them, build an adequate migration policy system, and guide labor migrants toward integration into society.

Keywords: Adaptation, Integration, Migrantophobia, Migration, Labor migrants, Migration policy.

RESUMEN

El artículo tiene como objetivo identificar y desarrollar un modelo para la adaptación de los trabajadores migrantes a las condiciones de la Rusia moderna. Las tareas de investigación incluyen lo siguiente: crear un concepto para ayudar

a la adaptación de los ciudadanos extranjeros, evaluar los riesgos potenciales y formular un sistema eficaz para regular la migración laboral en función de los intereses económicos y sociales nacionales. El estudio emplea como metodología enfoques humanísticos, sistémicos-complejos y holísticos. Los principales métodos de investigación incluyen análisis de documentos, clasificación y agrupamiento, evaluación de expertos, análisis comparativo, síntesis, métodos estadísticos y análisis estructural-funcional. El estudio reveló dos tendencias opuestas en el asentamiento de trabajadores extranjeros. La primera es la formación de asentamientos compactos por parte de grupos inmigrantes, mientras que la segunda tendencia es su asentamiento disperso. Los trabajadores migrantes se encuentran inmediatamente marginados dentro de la estructura social de la sociedad rusa, formando una nueva capa inferior desfavorecida. Los efectos psicológicos de la privación y el aislamiento afectan significativamente su adaptación al nuevo entorno. Los procesos migratorios muestran características de asimilación, integración y segregación. Los hallazgos ayudarán a las autoridades a comprender mejor la motivación y la psicología conductual de los migrantes, a prevenir el surgimiento de sentimientos nacionalistas y religiosos radicales entre ellos, a construir un sistema adecuado de políticas migratorias y a orientar a los migrantes laborales hacia la integración en la sociedad.

Palabras clave: Adaptación, Integración, Migrantofobia, Migración, Migrantes laborales, Política migratoria.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Russian Federation has faced a labor resource situation characterized by relatively high workload levels. This stems from structural economic changes, low labor market inflow due to declining birth rates, and extended education periods for young people (Polevoy & Shunyaev, 2012).

Russia's workforce is generally well-educated, professionally qualified, and employed in roles matching their skills. However, local workers tend to avoid unskilled, low-paid, and unattractive jobs, leading to a shortage of low-skilled labor. Without migrants, Russia's working-age population is forecasted to drop to 18–19 million by 2025, which could cause severe labor market imbalances (Voronina, 2019).

This issue has been addressed by attracting labor migrants, primarily from post-Soviet countries with surplus unemployed populations, such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This process has become crucial for certain sectors of the Russian labor market. Despite increasing costs for hiring foreign workers due to sanctions and

legislative changes, companies remain unable to replace them with local citizens.

The active integration of foreign labor into the Russian economy necessitates creating favorable conditions for their successful adaptation. Migrants face social adaptation challenges, including finding a new residence, seeking employment, and dealing with misunderstanding or hostility from the local population. Addressing these issues is vital for ensuring social harmony and sustainable development.

Adaptation involves migrants adjusting to new living conditions, forming new behavioral stereotypes, and adopting a new lifestyle. Lifestyle refers to a system of repetitive, stable, and typical behavior patterns shaped by the host country's historical and cultural context to meet basic human needs.

Successful adaptation requires resources to sustain life, often achieved through employment. Sometimes, income generation involves illegal means. The primary source of income significantly determines one's lifestyle. Moreover, adaptation is linked to household activities, health maintenance, child-rearing, housing, and leisure, which replenish physical and spiritual energy.

The goal of this article is to develop an effective model for adapting labor migrants that aligns with Russia's national economic and social interests.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology of the study included: the humanistic approach, which prioritized addressing the life challenges faced by labor migrants and their search for value orientations, and the systemic-complex approach, which enabled identifying and substantiating the impact of external factors on the adaptation process of foreign workers.

Analyzing the object and subject of the study in the context of modern socio-economic processes provided insights into the relationship between the effective use of foreign labor and their successful adaptation to the host country's conditions. The development of the labor migrants' adaptation model was based on a holistic approach, emphasizing that the success of the migration process is continuously influenced by both external and internal factors.

Research methods included the analysis of statistical data on the employment of foreign workers, expert evaluations of migrant adaptation to living conditions and urban infrastructure, and the analysis and synthesis of scientific research and articles.

The information base of the study comprised scientific works by domestic researchers on the effective

management of labor migration, official websites, and international resources relevant to the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Employment and Settlement of Labor Migrants

The central issue of migration and the social adaptation of newcomers is their employment. Finding a job enables a labor migrant to seek permanent housing. Typically, employment requires registration and housing, a hurdle most migrants manage to overcome. However, securing a job that matches their education and qualifications (if any) is significantly more challenging.

The settlement of foreign workers is characterized by two opposing trends. The first involves immigrant groups forming compact settlements based on ethnic lines, often controlled by their respective national diasporas from neighboring or distant countries. The second trend, dispersion, promotes the integration of migrants from diverse national backgrounds into urban spaces, weakening intra-ethnic ties while increasing interactions with the local population.

In Moscow, foreign workers tend to localize in districts such as Koptevo, Lyublino, Lianozovo, Ochakovo, and Tekstilshchiki. It is difficult to estimate the population in these areas due to the high number of undocumented migrants who avoid interaction with official authorities.

The legal status of “guest workers” often limits them to employment in the informal sector. A key challenge is the requirement by local and federal authorities for proof of residential registration to secure employment. In many cities, both foreign workers and their employers must obtain work permits. An interdepartmental commission reviews the employer's documents and decides on the feasibility of hiring foreign workers for a specific enterprise. Many employers find this bureaucratic process too lengthy.

The legal restrictions and lack of Russian citizenship create obstacles for formal employment, leading to the proliferation of informal employment. These fuels the “shadow economy,” where employment contracts are not officially registered. Such practices result in significant tax losses for local and federal budgets. Strict work permit procedures and complex registration rules further encourage informal employment. Migrants, facing uncertain legal statuses, often accept jobs without employer guarantees.

Informal employment typically involves irregular working hours, a lack of collective agreements or unions, higher workplace risks, vulnerability to sudden dismissal, low wages, no vacation or pension benefits, and no social security payments. Consequently, migrants often prefer working

for their compatriots, who can guarantee minimum payment and housing.

Labor migrants frequently find employment in vegetable and clothing markets, construction sites, services, and municipal utilities—sectors avoided by locals due to perceptions of low prestige, lack of skills required, and low pay.

The complicated and frequently changing system for obtaining official work permits contributes to the growth of the shadow economy, arbitrary treatment of migrant workers, and corruption within law enforcement and regulatory agencies. Estimates suggest there are 3 to 10 million undocumented migrants in Russia (Ivakhnyuk, 2015a).

Some experts argue that foreign workers take jobs away from locals, increasing unemployment. However, “guest workers” do not directly compete with local labor, as they occupy a specific niche in the labor market, performing jobs that locals deem unattractive (Zinchenko, 2012).

Vacancies requiring unskilled or semi-skilled labor often go unfilled by locals due to the nature of the work and low wages. With higher educational and professional qualifications, local workers prioritize job content, conditions, and nature alongside wages (Ivakhnyuk, 2015b).

Certain economic sectors, such as construction, utilities, and services, heavily rely on labor migrants for functioning. Even amid economic crises and unemployment, foreign workers remain indispensable for hard, low-prestige, and low-paid jobs that require little to no qualification. Reducing migrant labor does not lead to more jobs for locals; on the contrary, it may result in decreased production and employment in some sectors (Stepanov, 2012).

The extensive use of foreign workers has become a hallmark of the Russian economy. Labor-exporting countries support this trend, as it reduces social tensions at home and provides their citizens with vital income opportunities.

Housing Provision

Migrants often cannot afford to rent apartments due to high monthly rental costs. As a result, they frequently resort to illegal accommodations, such as living in construction site trailers or creating overcrowded housing situations—for example, renting a one-room apartment for 15–20 people who sleep in shifts.

Since rental prices remain relatively stable while migrant wages do not increase, the housing situation remains largely unchanged. It's important to note that foreign workers come to earn money and send a significant portion of their

income back to their families in their home countries, forcing them to economize on everything. Constructing temporary housing centers could be a potential solution to the housing challenges faced by labor migrants.

Depolarization of Migrants

Beyond employment and housing, a larger issue is the formation of large ethnic migrant diasporas. A diaspora refers to the compact settlement of an ethnic group as a national minority outside their traditional territory. It represents a specific system of formal and informal relationships aimed at preserving a national lifestyle in a host country with a different ethnic majority.

Diasporas can serve as tools for integrating labor migrants into the host society or act as barriers to such integration. In recent years, knowledge of the Russian language, behavioral norms, and the ability to navigate urban social environments while adopting a modern urban lifestyle have become standard for labor migrants. As a result, the profile of the modern labor migrant is gradually changing, along with their behavior and level of integration into Russian society.

However, amidst the rotation of foreign workers, the internal structures and ties within ethnic communities have strengthened and expanded. This trend reflects the development of national diasporas, which often form insular worlds. These closed communities result from the migrants' circumstances in an unfamiliar country and the specific features of their national cultures.

Particular attention should be paid to trade and food markets, as they are hubs for foreign workers, serving as spaces for their socialization and adaptation to the host country. These markets are significant economic centers where national diasporas control substantial financial resources. They act as bases for further integration into the economic and social fabric of Russian society.

A substantial number of local residents now work in these markets in various capacities or provide professional services. Daily interactions at these sites result in a minimal level of interethnic conflict and foster a mutual understanding of necessity and benefit.

At the same time, local authorities often face challenges related to the operation of such trade and food markets, including transportation issues, sanitation concerns, combating corruption, and addressing tax evasion.

Psychological Health of Labor Migrants

The success of adaptation to the conditions of life in the host country largely depends on the psychological state and mood of the arriving migrant. While most migrants fail

to improve their professional and social status during their stay in Russia, many manage to enhance their financial situation.

Labor migrants often lack realistic opportunities to approach "generally accepted" social consumption standards, yet they remain psychologically drawn to them. This dynamic results in a perception of foreign workers marked by an emotional dominance over rational judgment. For instance, certain material and cultural goods accessible to them become more prestigious, enhancing the "energizing" role of consumer function (Kozhevnikova & Ter-Akopov, 2013).

Among foreign workers, a new, disadvantaged lower class emerges, positioned "between two worlds." On one hand, they are significantly detached from their native culture due to being in a foreign country. On the other, they remain excluded from the host society's public life for extended periods.

Upon arrival, labor migrants are often marginalized within the social structure of Russian society. The subculture of the immigrant environment, along with its accompanying lifestyle, acts as a feedback mechanism in forming a social group, furthering the "marginalization" of a new generation even before they enter independent life.

Some believe that in major cities, migrant workers are a primary source of crime. While the crime rate among them is indeed high, this is largely attributed to the marginal subculture they inhabit and the unemployment prevalent within their ranks. At the same time, migrants themselves frequently fall victim to crime (Dmitriev & Pyadukhov, 2011).

Hostility and discrimination from certain segments of the local population often stem from socio-psychological attitudes rather than personal grievances—for example, "I don't like 'the newcomers,' although our plumber is a decent person." Discriminatory views toward labor migrants are closely tied to the economic circumstances of local residents and reflect their own uncertainty and insecurity about the future. Some locals attempt to compensate for this by displaying national superiority, thereby reinforcing their own social position (Ivanova, 2010).

The first year of a migrant worker's stay in Russia usually has a profound impact on their psychological state. Living in a foreign cultural environment is almost always associated with extreme events that cause psychological and physiological stress.

Drastic changes in external conditions—such as relocation, disruption of familiar lifestyles, and ethnic intolerance from some locals—create conditions for psychological

disorders affecting key aspects of a migrant's personality, including behavior, emotions, communication, and cognition. These disorders may manifest as indifference, depression, irritability, and aggression. Migrants often experience shifts in their hierarchy of needs and values, leading to lowered aspirations and expectations, a decline in self-esteem, and difficulty accepting the impossibility of meeting the consumption standards of local residents.

The adaptation process typically unfolds in five stages:

1. Initial Optimism: Migrants feel hopeful about improving their lives in the host country.
2. Depression: As they confront an unfamiliar environment and local hostility, their mood deteriorates, and they increasingly turn to their compatriots for social interaction.
3. Realization of Limitations: Migrants understand that they cannot drastically improve their standard of living. Those unable to adapt often return to their home countries.
4. Stress Resilience and Renewed Optimism: Over time, resilience develops, optimism about life prospects resurfaces, and migrants renew their desire to integrate.
5. Full Adaptation: Migrants achieve complete adaptation to the host country's conditions (Gerasimova, 2019).

However, not all challenges arising from labor migration—such as lifestyle changes, immersion in a different language environment, and separation from family and friends—lead to negative psychological outcomes. These challenges can also serve as positive “drivers,” fostering professional and personal growth by providing valuable new experiences.

Deprivation and Isolation

The process of adapting to a new environment and living conditions is significantly influenced by the psychological effects of deprivation and isolation. Deprivation refers to the reduction or complete inability to meet social and psychophysiological needs, which can provoke aggression. Understanding this phenomenon is crucial for addressing the psychological challenges faced by migrant workers.

A key feature of deprivation is the immediate onset of social isolation, defined as a lack of contact with the surrounding environment. This isolation strongly impacts the psychological state of labor migrants, complicating their social adaptation. Another complicating factor is frustration arising from the perceived discrepancy between expected opportunities to meet one's needs and the reality of their fulfillment.

The degree of deprivation and isolation experienced by foreign workers largely depends on the social indicators of the host country. The success of migrant adaptation and integration is significantly influenced by its migration policies. Two other critical factors also affect adaptation: the distinct characteristics of migrants, such as language, race, religion, and lifestyle, and the cultural distance between local residents and the cultural traits of incoming national groups. Practice shows that migrants find it harder to adapt in regions characterized by ethnic and cultural homogeneity and a unified national identity. Conversely, in large cities with diverse local populations that are accustomed to various cultural lifestyles, the adaptation process is less painful.

Other factors influencing adaptation include the emerging status-role structure of relationships between locals and labor migrants within the “guest-worker and host” dynamic, their numerical ratio, the settlement patterns of migrants (compact or dispersed), the presence of professional and skill-based opportunities for foreign workers, and the prevalence of migrantophobia in the region.

In interactions with local residents in different sociocultural settings, migrants encounter challenges stemming from differing traditions, customs, social attitudes, and values. Locals often react to the distinctiveness of migrant workers with misunderstanding and irritation.

As the recruitment of foreign workers has intensified, some Russian regions have seen noticeable changes in their ethnic composition, leading to anti-immigrant sentiments and, in some cases, migrantophobia. Hostility from segments of the local population has encouraged migrants to isolate themselves and rely on their diasporas. These national groupings have become stable targets for negative social attitudes, increasing tension with locals and sometimes leading to conflicts.

Migrants from both distant and neighboring countries face difficulties in their relationships with the local population. Intercultural relations are particularly challenging for migrants from distant countries due to their lack of Russian language skills and unfamiliarity with local traditions and customs, leaving them in complete social isolation. These migrants often become subjects of derogatory attitudes and, in some cases, aggressive actions.

Psychological difficulties resulting from isolation and deprivation are especially pronounced among migrants living in compact urban neighborhoods. While such concentrated living arrangements may help them during the initial period of their stay, they can lead to the “ghetto effect” over time.

Cultural Shock

Upon arriving in Russia, migrants encounter an unfamiliar culture. The state they experience when entering this new cultural environment—marked by confusion and disorientation—can be described as “cultural shock.” This emotional reaction arises from the uncertainty of norms and expectations, the inability to understand others’ behavior, and the lack of control or predictability over their surroundings. As migrants struggle to psychologically adapt, they experience inner tension, including the loss of friends, status, and sometimes even their profession, along with a rejection of the new culture. These challenges lead to role and expectation conflicts, difficulties in self-identification, and emotional confusion regarding values. Initially, this awareness of significant cultural differences evokes surprise, which later escalates to frustration and resentment. This process generates anxiety, and as migrants fail to cope with their situation, they may develop feelings of inferiority.

This state emerges because the symbolic, sensory, verbal, and non-verbal systems that had reliably supported their lives in their homeland cease to function adequately in the new country. Consequently, confusion and anxiety persist until migrants develop new cognitive frameworks for understanding the unfamiliar culture and establish appropriate behavioral patterns. Notably, a moderate level of cultural shock can positively influence the personal growth of “guest workers,” as it forces them to mobilize their internal resources. Essentially, cultural shock is a normal reaction and an integral part of the adaptation process, which can ultimately lead to the adoption of new attitudes, values, and behavioral models (Nikolaev, 2018).

Currently, three categories are actively used to understand the outcomes of migration processes. Assimilation involves the voluntary abandonment of one’s cultural norms and acceptance of the host country’s cultural values, resulting in blending into the new culture and altering one’s own. Integration entails adapting one’s cultural norms and values to align with those of the local community, synthesizing national and local cultural features. Segregation refers to the separate coexistence and parallel development of ethnic cultural groups, often leading to marginalization and ghettoization of the adaptation process.

Labor migration in the Russian Federation has acquired distinctive characteristics. Some foreign workers eventually return to their home countries, while others obtain Russian citizenship, resulting in changes to the internal structure of the migrant population. Migrants and their families, with their natural needs, have begun actively engaging with the social infrastructure of Russian society. The

gender and age structure of national diasporas is increasingly resembling that of the local population (Bazhan, 2024; Gerasimova, 2019).

In some cities, this situation has made labor migrants highly visible (Center for Social Adaptation of Migrants in Russia, 2023). They compete with certain categories of the local population for housing, influencing changes in urban structures. A tendency toward ethnic concentrations has emerged, leading to the development of a parallel social subsystem with its own specific needs (Dementyeva, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

The study of migrant adaptation processes highlights political-legal, economic, and sociocultural aspects. Prolonged external isolation, economic disadvantage, and only superficial elimination of political and legal marginalization could foster the formation of national concentrations. Such developments are likely to encourage nationalist and religious orientations within these groups, potentially leading to their dominance in the social attitudes of migrants. In this scenario, marginal labor immigrant groups could become a source of social conflict, creating tensions rooted in cultural differences or the rejection of other cultures, such as the emergence of Islamophobia, which some associate with terrorism. Isolation, rejection, and exclusion contribute to higher crime rates and increased social tension, thus undermining the socioeconomic and demographic benefits of labor migration.

To address these challenges, the government must strictly regulate migration processes. This includes limiting foreign labor through quotas, periodically rotating labor migrants, and implementing policies to integrate long-term foreign workers into society. Large companies employing significant numbers of migrant workers could play a vital role by providing language and professional training (Barysheva, 2017).

A comprehensive concept for supporting the adaptation of foreign citizens in Russia is crucial. This should include a range of services, such as legal assistance, employment support, medical care, housing assistance, and microcredit (for up to three months). Sociocultural adaptation can be achieved through systemic approaches, including long-term educational programs. Knowledge of the Russian language, history, and legal system will be essential for successful integration. At the same time, the host society must create a welcoming atmosphere based on mutual respect and the understanding that coexistence of different cultures is beneficial.

Regional governments must enhance their social and economic policies by effectively utilizing financial resources. Foreign labor should only be engaged when there is a proven shortage of local workers in specific professions. Regional authorities and employment agencies should forecast workforce needs based on social demand and use this data to determine the need for foreign specialists. Labor migration can then serve as a supplementary tool for regional economic policy. Public spending in this area should prioritize economic and social security.

Authorities must assess future risks, work to minimize them, and forecast regional labor migration needs. Continuous monitoring and timely adjustments to migration policy will help mitigate threats to both migrants and host regions. This includes optimizing migrant distribution based on financial and economic capacities and the availability of job vacancies. Regular Russian language training, familiarization with migration laws, and introductions to Russian cultural traditions should be established. Close cooperation with national diasporas and religious organizations could help prevent legal violations by migrants and reduce crime within their communities.

A federal legislative act is necessary to regulate the organized recruitment of foreign labor, as the lack of legal frameworks for targeted selection has hindered the creation of an effective mechanism for employing migrants. A system for assessing the qualifications and professional training of labor migrants has yet to be established.

Migrant adaptation occurs under the influence of both positive and negative sociocultural factors. Implementing the measures outlined above could enable a successful adaptation process, leading to the more efficient use of foreign labor resources in Russia's labor market. Recognizing labor migration as a critical driver of economic development underscores the importance of a well-considered state policy in this area.

The findings will assist authorities and law enforcement agencies in better understanding the motivations and behaviors of migrants, preventing nationalist and religious radicalism, and shaping an adequate migration policy. A new migration policy and its practical implementation could direct migrant behavior toward integration into society while addressing external threats associated with the radicalization of new national groups.

This study represents one approach to addressing the challenges of utilizing labor migrants. Experts should not limit themselves to a single successful model but continue to analyze the factors influencing this process. Given that the results of this study rely on macro-level scientific data,

further research through a micro-level lens would provide deeper insights into the subject

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