

# Inclusion of the Muslim migrant women in host cross-border regions of Russia

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the analysis of the peculiarities of feminization of labor migration in the Altai Region. The paper deals with the gender aspects of the adaptation of migrants, manifested in assessments of satisfaction with different aspects of life activity. The specifics of the attitude towards the local population are described; an assessment of the degree of trust in basic social institutions, which determines the specificity of the activities of Muslim women in the border region of Russia. The author substantiates the conclusions about the increasing tendency of the growing number of women in the process of immigration from Asian countries to the Altai Territory, changes in the structure and content of the emotional and cognitive components of the ethnic self-awareness of migrant women. The presence of two mutually conditioned processes is described – the growth of assimilation and the preservation of ethnonational identity. The latent conflict of migration is a gender specific. The author presents a systematic analysis that identifies the ambiguous aspects of migration processes in the Russian border area, both with regard to the host population and the migrant women themselves. The author shows how migration intensifies the process of women's inclusion in the social and cultural space of the Russian territory. The activity of women depends on the social capital of the woman herself, the level of her initiative, her self-reliance, and flexible adaptability. The most successfully adapt and assimilate women with a higher or secondary special education; the presence of a prestigious specialty, crafts; knowledge of laws and migration documents; the presence of relatives who successfully adapted in the region earlier; the presence of Russian friends; a young and able-bodied age. In the cross-border territory, there is a formation of gender symmetry, which is not always characteristic of the countries of the outcome of women, especially those who preach Islam.

**Keywords:** migrant, migrant women, gender, Muslim, adaptation

## 1. Introduction

The prevalence of migration, including transit migration, is due to several global trends, in particular, due to the internationalization of the economy. The change in gender balance in the direction of increasing feminization was facilitated by the transformation of the migration legislation of the most countries in the world. The demand for women's labor also increased significantly. There have been significant changes in gender relations in the donor and recipient countries. At present, the share of female migration is about the second part of all international migration flows [1-5]. From the Muslim regions of the former USSR, the proportion of women leaving goes up to 40% [6, 7, 8].

However, the international community still underestimates the role of women's work and its contribution to reducing the poverty of recipient countries. There is not only an objective but also a

subjective component of the benefits of migration, which consists in leveling sexual discrimination, obtaining new rights and freedoms, forming a new, more positive quality of life for women migrants, especially from Muslim countries. Like any social phenomenon, female migration includes the negative pole associated with the lack of social, economic guarantees for women, and in the context of managing the risks and threats associated with this phenomenon. The processes of women's migration are growing in modern Russian society, forming specific female labor niches that require a comprehensive and integrated scientific analysis. The features of integration and assimilation of the visiting Muslim population are that Islam is able to absorb elements of different cultures and is more effective in countries with a high degree of secularization, in particular Russia [17], [18]. Modern sociologists note the irreversibility of the secularization process, its dual nature, associated not only with the weakening of religion, but also with its modification, manifested in the increasing importance of its updated samples [9], [10], [11], [20].

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The empirical base of the research consisted of the results of a sociological research on the topic "Transit Migration, Transit Regions, and Migration Policy of Russia: Security and Eurasian Integration (2017-2019)". Migrants were interviewed, as well as the population of the seven border areas of Russia. Our sample was 4,600 people. We conducted and analyzed in-depth biographical interviews with female and male migrants (n = 1300). The relevance of the described results and trends was achieved through the use of mathematical statistics, modeling methods, and systems analysis.

## **3. Results**

The migrant women accounted for about 15% of all migrants arriving in the cross-border territory of Russia. Half of them is in the Russian Federation from 1 to 5 years. The same is from 1 month up to half a year. The study presents the main groups – female applicants and students (18-25 years old). Cooperation between universities of the Asian direction and the cross-border territory is intensifying in the regions. Muslim students are easier and faster than other age groups of women adapt to Russian values, master technical and technological achievements. Adapting to new conditions for them, they accept what they can receive from life in Russia and its cultures, trying to preserve as much of their cultural and religious values as possible. The largest group of women studied is accompanied by a husband and a family (28-45 years old). Every tenth woman of mature age is single because of divorce or widowhood.

The main purpose of the stay of women in Russia is work, education. Other reasons for coming were associated with concerns about improving the life prospects of their children, etc. Secondary general education prevails among women, only 10% have higher or secondary vocational education. Every fifth woman who arrives has a primary education and doesn't know enough Russian and understands only if they speak simple phrases and slowly. About 40% have an advanced level of knowledge of the Russian language. 73% of women confirmed the equal importance of both their native (ethnic) and Russian languages. Every tenth woman considers it more significant to have a greater degree of Russian, and as many are conservative, speak only their own national language.

In the process of analyzing the characteristics of the adaptation of women, a curious pattern was revealed, which consisted in better knowledge of the language, and hence a higher level of social and professional activity, and socialization of single women in comparison with married women. Women accompanying the husband and family, as a rule, do not work, they are fully occupied with children and life. Thus, the status of a single woman was a certain "emancipator" in the process of living in the cross-border territory. The financial situation was assessed as being average. It is indicated that there is enough money for food, cheap clothes, badly needed things and utilities for about half of the women. Every fourth woman evaluates themselves to be well off, and every fifth woman is very poor. Most of the single migrant women work more than 10 hours a day, the other part has 7-8 hours. About 10% of women have significant workloads and work more than 12 hours. Despite the fact that the

salary of Muslim women varies from 5 to 15 thousand rubles, certain optimistic hopes for an increase in material well-being after moving to Russia were justified in half of the women. However, a third of women still do not notice significant changes for the better.

Most of the women rent housing, and some of them live in non-residential premises. According to interviews, immigrants encountered discrimination in renting housing, which was manifested either in refusals or in overpriced rental prices. Most of them rent a house as a group, which creates conflict conditions with the local population. Often, the Muslims rent housing without special conditions – without water, electricity, etc. Half of single women are planning to stay in Russia for permanent residence, one third for a period of 1-3 years. Every third, widowed or divorced woman, plans to transfer her family to Russia, but most of them have no such intentions and are considering a temporary stay in Russia for financial support of family members remaining in their home country.

The main economic niche of women's labor is agriculture, trade, public catering, and non-productive services. In connection with the problematic labor market of the Altai Region, where even the local population lacks work, the sphere of employment of Muslim women's women is very limited, such as cleaners, dishwashers, employees of halal cafes, etc. The job of cleaning women in large supermarkets is a great success for them. Most women (40%) found work through networks, acquaintances, and 17% through relatives. Unfortunately, the demand for employment services, as well as the migration service, was low to receive a significant assistance (only 4% of migrants could use its services). About 40% had difficulties with finding a job and were looking for it from 1 month to 1 year. The fact that the Muslim women adhere to a religious dress code reinforces the problem of employment, which stimulates hostility and even fears of employers and the local population.

Consequently, the young, unmarried, educated Muslim women who are more adapted to Russian values are in an advantageous position. They perceive their employment as meaningful for an independent and free life. However, such women are few. About half of the men answered that they were helping their family completely, and every third – only half of it. A somewhat different picture is characteristic of single migrant women. About 70% of single women send most of the money they earned to their homeland, helping their children or parents left there. Every third woman provides only half her family at home. Thus, single women migrants equally with men and even more intensively than they provide for their relatives. A noteworthy example is an interview with a resident of Uzbekistan, "In two years, my engyai-Uzbek woman was able to earn and send home to the family (Kokand, Uzbekistan) more money than her husband, my cousin tried to earn in Russia in the previous six or seven years. But this is a case, as we all understand, a very rare exception!" [12].

The forced nature of the labor migration of the Muslim women in Russia due to the problems of poverty, harsh economic conditions encourages them to fulfill the roles of earners and breadwinners that are unusual for the Muslim world. In an interview, a woman from Uzbekistan explained her visit to the Russian Federation by the fact that she needed to support children. Her husband left her and started another family [13], [14], [16]. In the process of Muslim women's adaptation, the significance of cultural and religious problems are revealed. The need to keep the commandments of the Koran, faces both men and women with the difficulties of their implementation in a society where the religion of citizens is their private affair, as if being "privatized". The contradictory influence of the surrounding reality on the Muslim women's religious self-consciousness is also reinforced by the fact that the way of life, intensive work for "survival" does not always leave room and time for adequate and deep observance of the Muslim religious rites. Thus, as other researchers have confirmed, the process of erosion of Muslim identity, the assimilation of new values and secular patterns of behavior, begins [10]. For example, in some interviews, both men and women indicate that being at work, it is difficult for them to keep their prayers during the day or fast during the main Muslim holiday of Ramadan, without losing a high level of efficiency.

Those Muslim women who grew up in patrimonial families dominated by men are difficult to understand and accept the local customs of the Russian region, where divorces prevail. The divorce rate in the Altai Territory is one of the highest in the Russian Federation. Muslim women condemn the lack of due respect for women and men, the lack of special care and protection from men, etc. The

Muslims also hate some behavioral norms present in the region where they live, for example, the lack of proper reverence for their elders, too much of a race for money, etc. In the course of some interviews, informants emanated a sense of superiority of their religious affiliation, the particular significance of Islam among other worldviews.

#### **4. Discussion**

The Migrant women play a special role in preserving ethnic traditions, in particular, such as respect for their elders according to their age and social status; upholding strong family foundations, family ties, etc. Such traditions are actively reproduced during their stay in Russia. Women actively implement the ethno-protective role and function, emphasizing their belonging to their ethnic group.

However, there is an alternative group. One tenth of women are not always sure of the need to emphasize their ethnic uniqueness. In our opinion, this may indicate the beginning of the process of erosion of ethnicity. Assessing the emotional component of the ethnic identity of migrant women revealed the existence of a similar trend. The majority of respondents experience pride in their nation (ethnic group). At the same time, they are not sure, or they do not agree with this position, or a quarter of visiting women reluctantly actualizes this feeling.

The same holds that quite often ethnicity, another culture, worldview, and beliefs can cause inconvenience, be a barrier to adaptation in another socio-cultural community. An analysis of religious identity revealed a similar picture, which consists in the fact that a quarter of women do not consider themselves to be active and effective adherents of religious beliefs. Also, they do not consider a religious affiliation being an important part of their personality. However, half of the women claim that they try to carefully follow the rules of their religion in everyday life.

It was revealed that those Muslim women who are motivated not only to preserve national cultural and religious traditions but also actively and actively assimilate the customs of the country of arrival, adapt more actively and successfully in the Altai Region. A quarter of women are more conservative toward preserving their specific traditions as opposed to universal ones. The intensification of the assimilation processes of migrant women and the host community is manifested in the fact that two thirds of the respondents prefer to participate in various events, where there are the Russians and representatives of the native ethnic group. The same number of women prefers to have friends, it is pleased to communicate with representatives of different nationalities. The specificity of the evolution of the assimilation worldview is that more than half of the visitors prefer to watch the Russian TV shows, television films, celebrate joint holidays, prepare food in the local culinary traditions. In general, this is manifested in the formation of a universal attitude towards the world, people, major problems, as is typical for the recipient country and the donor country.

#### **5. Conclusion**

There is a tendency for an increase in the number of women in the migration flow of the cross-border territory of Russia, which is a consequence of objective economic and social processes that break stereotypes of male and female models of employment. The process of feminization of migration has its pros and cons. The cross-border territory of Russia receives the benefits associated with the compensation of labor resources, filling unskilled, but demanded in society, economic niches. Countries of origin of migrants receive significant financial support. The greatest gains are the women migrant workers themselves, which consists in forming a new social baggage, "fitting" a new social role. These women get new ideas, ideas, skills, which in general optimizes their social capital. Nevertheless, there are certain barriers and disadvantages, the main of which are the risk of marginalization, violation of women's rights and freedoms, gender discrimination (low salary, difficult working conditions, competition with the local population, the likelihood of sexual enslavement, etc.) Migration intensifies the process of inclusion of women in the social and cultural space of modern society. The activity of women depends on the social capital of the woman herself, the level of her initiative, independence, flexible adaptation. This generally determines the degree of assimilation potential. Women who have the following advantages adapt and assimilate most successfully: a high

level of education (higher or secondary special); the presence of a prestigious specialty; handicrafts; knowledge of laws and migration documents; the presence of relatives successfully adapted in the region before, the Russian friends. In the region of arrival, the formation of the so-called gender symmetry is taking place, which is not always characteristic of the countries of origin of women, especially those who preach Islam. The gender aspect of migration is becoming more and more decisive and requires systematic study and optimization of the formation of effective social capital, an appropriate and adequate response to social challenges.

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