

Factors of the Economic Adaptation of Migrants

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Abstract. The paper is focused on economic adaptation of migrants which is understood as the process of their integration into the economic system of the host community. It involves the acquisition of knowledge about its functioning, assimilation of economic norms adopted in it, formation of practical skills of economic interaction, and accumulation of work experience. Economic adaptation aims at the realization of interests and needs, at the first stages related to economic survival, and at the final stages associated with the achievement of material well-being. Accordingly, economic adaptation involves, firstly, getting a job or starting business, and secondly, labor, professional, commercial self-realization, which is confirmed by career advancement, obtaining a more prestigious job and a higher economic status, wage growth or increase business profitability. It is shown that migration itself is a value-neutral process and the benefits and threats associated with migration are, for the most part, only the consequences of political and managerial decisions. Threats increase when the paths of adaptation of migrants are blocked by artificial barriers, while benefits appear as a result of concerted actions of migrants, the host society, and the state, based on respect, recognition and mutual interest.

1. Introduction

Migration is traditionally regarded as “the movement of people between regions or countries” [1]. However, the social aspects of migration cannot be reduced to the movement in physical space: it is just a precondition for their formation. A person becomes a migrant only after arriving to the new region and is not regarded as such after sustainable integration into the host community. In the contemporary world, movement in the physical space is often just a brief prelude to a much longer and complex movement in the social space. In the course of the latter, a person, as a rule, acquires a new place in the social structure, rising to higher or falling to lower positions, and establishes various ties with members of the host society, gradually reducing the social distance with them. Thus, migration in social space is a special form of adaptation to a new social environment.

Since the conditions of social life (especially in the age of globalization) are quickly transforming, a person always has to look for new ways to adapt to them, constantly revising his or her relations with other people. In the case of large-scale civilizational shifts, as well as in the case of moving to a country with a different culture, conditions of life change in a revolutionary way, disorienting people and forcing them to radically revise the ideas about society and their place in it. Not only economic well-being, but also elementary survival of migrants often depends on the answers to the challenges of the environment. In crisis conditions, the value of adaptive resources (material, social, cultural ones) and the importance of the ability to effectively manage them greatly increase. In addition, the

achievement of stability in society depends on the actions of the state and various social groups that can both facilitate the adaptation of migrants and build barriers on the way of their integration.

The development of effective measures aimed at the adaptation of migrants is impossible without knowledge of types, models, indicators of adaptation, i.e. without a solid scientific foundation, presupposing an understanding of the essence of adaptation processes, their socio-economic features and main factors, ensuring their success.

2. Theoretical and methodological foundations

Adaptation in general can be understood as the process by which a system achieves dynamic equilibrium with its environment. Among the main types of adaptation – physiological, psychological, societal – the latter is the most complex and multidimensional. Thus it is societal adaptation which lies in the focus of migration research. L. V. Korel defines it as “the state of adaptation or the process of adapting a social system (person, social group, organization, community, institution, society, civilization, etc.) to internal and external changes that occurs by changing both social stereotypes of behavior, social practices, values, ways of informational and interpretative reflection (construction, reconstruction) of reality, and its internal (system) structure and functions” [2].

Accordingly, the societal adaptation of migrants presupposes their active interaction with the host society, the development of new patterns of behavior, values, norms and practices, and revising the picture of social reality on this basis. Moreover, adaptation, like any other human activity, involves not only internal changes, but also a transformation of environment. As a result, adapting to social reality, migrants actively influence it, change its fabric, adapt it for themselves, and make it more comfortable.

In the general framework of societal adaptation, various subspecies of adaptation can be distinguished. The specific reasons for their differentiation, as a rule, depend on research objectives. In relation to migration issues, it seems reasonable to distinguish three types of adaptation, reflecting the main areas of public life. Among them:

1. *Economic* adaptation, involving actions of migrants aimed at finding a job or organizing business; obtaining a stable and high income; labor and professional self-realization, accumulation of savings; orientation in prices and market conditions; features of taxation, etc.

2. *Cultural* adaptation associated with knowledge of laws and customs; respect for traditions, moral standards and accepted values; language proficiency; raising the level of education and culture.

3. *Social* adaptation, which is understood as the establishment of social ties, the creation of sustainable networks of social interaction, membership in public organizations and associations, the strengthening of trust, the increase in social status, and social recognition.

It is possible to distinguish other types of adaptation, but, as a rule, they play a lesser role in the process of migrants' adaptation (for example, political adaptation can be fully realized only after obtaining citizenship and sufficiently strong integration of the migrant into community).

Distinguishing the types of societal adaptation has conditional character: in real life they are intertwined so closely that they make up a single and inseparable whole. For example, obtaining a good education is a difficult task without a sufficient level of economic well-being, and success in economic activity is dependent on close social ties with certain people. Any kind of adaptation, taken in isolation from others, is thus an ideal type, meaningful only for research purposes. Any exhaustive examination of one of the types of adaptation sooner or later turns out to be a study of societal adaptation as a whole: it is only a matter of perspective and emphasis.

The choice of a particular perspective for consideration of adaptation depends largely on the current challenges that migration poses to society. The features of migration flows are determined primarily by spatial and temporal factors, i.e. the configuration of these flows and specific historical reasons that provoked large-scale migrations of people. Historical data show that the migration flows in post-Soviet countries were to a considerable degree caused by the crisis events of the late XX century, when many former fellow citizens were separated by state borders and driven out (due to their nationality or lack of knowledge of the titular languages) to the periphery of social life. Specifically, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian-speaking citizens of the newly independent states

massively repatriated to Russia, perceiving it as a center of cultural and historical attraction [3]. However, in the 21st century this flow has dried up. Most of those who wished to move to Russia have already did it, while compatriots who have remained abroad have integrated into the new social and cultural reality, and are less eager to return to their historical homeland (at least without significant incentives). Accordingly, the nature of migration has changed: it has received mainly an economic orientation, and the main flow of migrants to Russia was made up of residents of less economically prosperous CIS countries. In 2014, the situation changed briefly due to events in the Ukraine, provoking a spasmodic increase in the number of internally displaced persons, but by 2017 the situation was again determined by the economic reasons, and now the main flow of labor migrants to Russia is provided by the countries of Central Asia with a lower standard of living [4].

The current wave of labor migrants has its own characteristics that distinguish it from the previous waves of repatriates. Migrant workers (born or brought up, as a rule, in new independent national states) are less closely connected with Russian culture: interviews show that many of them have difficulties with the Russian language and a vague idea of Russian values, laws, customs and traditions. Moreover, some were brought up in an ideological confrontation with Russia, in contrast to which the national identity of many post-Soviet countries was formed. For most of these migrants host country is associated only with hopes for a higher standard of living. Thus a negative change in the economic situation, bureaucratic barriers and a negative attitude of the population, can easily reorient migration flows from Russia to the European Union (which is observed in migration from Ukraine and Moldova), developed Asian countries (South Korea, the UAE), and other centers of economic growth with close culture (for example, Kazakhstan, to which migrants from other countries of Central Asia are increasingly moving). Since 2018, migration growth in Russia has decreased to such an extent that it is no longer able to compensate for the natural population decline [5]. As a result, the country is losing the resource, without which further economic development is impossible. To change the situation, measures to ensure the process of social adaptation are required. Taking into account the interests and needs of contemporary labor migrants economic view on the process of adaptation seems to be the most preferable.

When determining socio-economic adaptation in relation to migrants, we can distinguish resource and innovative approaches. In the first case, the role of accumulated resources, which predetermines the successful integration of migrants, is emphasized. Socio-economic adaptation from this position is “the ability of individuals, various socio-economic strata and groups of the population to rationally and efficiently use the available professional qualification resources, personal potential for integration into the current economic situation in order to realize their needs and interests” [6].

In another case, adaptation is understood not so much as the use of available resources, but rather as the active production of new forms of interaction with the host community, new answers to complex challenges that arise before a migrant. In this process the environment surrounding the migrant also changes. Proponents of this position argue that socio-economic adaptation is “a process of interaction between migrants and the new socio-economic environment, during which, on the one hand, the most appropriate behavioral patterns are selected, from the point of view of migrants, to ensure the success of their life strategies, with another, under their influence, the transformation of regional socio-economic systems, the emergence of new elements in it” [7]

It seems that both approaches complement each other: successful economic adaptation, on the one hand, requires investment of social, cultural, economic resources, and on the other, involves active (and often non-standard and even risky) investment actions to capitalize these resources.

In the literature on migration, the term “socio-economic adaptation” is usually used, suggesting that achieving social well-being is associated with achieving economic goals: “Successful adaptation has two dimensions – economic and social. Economically successful adaptation means that it ends with raising or maintaining primarily a high standard of living, and socially successful results in achieving high social status” [8].

For the purposes of the current study, it is important to focus on the economic dimension of migrant adaptation. From this perspective, the main object of consideration is the process of

integration of migrants into the economic system of the host community, which involves the acquisition of knowledge about its functioning, assimilation of economic norms adopted in it, formation of practical skills of economic interaction, and accumulation of work experience. The goal of this type of adaptation is oriented on the realization of interests and needs, at the first stages related to economic survival, and at the final stages – to the achievement of material well-being. Accordingly, economic adaptation involves, firstly, getting a job or starting business, and secondly, labor, professional, commercial self-realization, which is confirmed by career advancement, obtaining a more prestigious job and a higher economic status, wage growth or increase business profitability.

The analysis of the peculiarities of the process of economic adaptation was conducted on the basis of the expert questionnaire conducted in 2018 with 25 representatives of the executive authorities working with immigrants from different regions of Russia (Republics of Mordovia and Chuvashia, Penza, Saratov, Samara Regions). The results were supplemented with the materials of 32 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2017-2019. Informants were migrants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Armenia with different age, family status and level of education.

3. Results

Adaptation is the interaction of a migrant and the environment. Therefore, when identifying adaptation factors, one should take into account both the biosocial characteristics of the individual and the characteristics of the environment (both native and host societies).

Factors affecting adaptation include some natural characteristics (which are primarily related to the biological side of human life), the change of which is completely impossible or associated with a number of serious difficulties: gender, age, nationality, temperament, health status. Natural factors can both contribute to adaptation and serve as barriers to it. For example, it is easier for young men to find job (that is, there are manifestations of age and gender discrimination). It is more difficult for migrants of certain nationalities to find housing. Migrants are often perceived as carriers of serious diseases. At the same time, really sick migrants often have problems with treatment.

Societal characteristics (related to the social side of human life) can be considered as individual resources, the mobilization of which contributes to the successful adaptation of a migrant. These resources can be accumulated or wasted, as a result of a personal choice. Both migrants and state can appreciably affect the quantity and quality of these resources; accordingly, when studying its adaptive potential and developing support measures, societal (economic, cultural, social) resources should be given special attention.

Economic capital is crucial for migrant adaptation. First of all, it includes material resources like the money the migrant came with and which are able to support him and his family while they are looking for job, waiting for first wages or business income. The process of adaptation (especially in the case of forced migration) can be significantly facilitated by material benefits, privileges, charitable assistance. The group of material resources can include housing, car and other property. Some experts also consider the qualification of a migrant, his professional skills, previous work experience as resources related to economic sphere. In addition (taking into account the difference in living standards between donor and recipient countries), it is often necessary to consider the willingness of migrants to work for less money than the local population. On the one hand, this allows them to compete in the labor market; on the other hand, it places them to the low-paid labor sector, which it is not easy to leave.

The interviews show that in the case of migration, an important role is played not only by economic, but also by *cultural capital*. The smaller is the distance between the native culture of the migrant and the culture of the host society, the higher is the rate of adaptation. Adaptability also depends on the degree of language proficiency, knowledge of the traditions and customs of the host society, the level of general and professional education, personal qualities and skills. It should be noted that an important factor in adaptation is knowledge not only of the culture of the host country, but also of the native culture. Some migrants set up in business (like national cafes, the production of ethnic food), relying on the models common in the country of origin and thereby use their own

ethnicity as a resource. In certain aspects, even a different lifestyle can be perceived as an advantage (for example, some employers prefer to hire Muslims because of their negative attitude to alcohol).

Finally, successful adaptation depends on the level of accumulated *social capital*: personal connections, influential acquaintances, support from friends, effective network interactions, level of interethnic trust, etc. Social capital seems to be especially important for post-Soviet societies (both for Russia and for countries of origin of migrants), since in the conditions of economic transformations of the late 20th century, due to which huge masses of people were deprived of savings and stable wages, it was social ties that turned out to be the most useful survival resource.

Thus, the main resources of social adaptation in the personal perspective of its consideration are economic, cultural and social capital. If the level of these resources is high enough for a migrant, it can be assumed with a high degree of certainty that adaptation will be successful.

However, the mere availability of resources does not mean that they will be used, and used in an efficient manner. An additional adaptation factor is the migrant's ability to realize the accumulated capital, which presupposes initiative, willingness to take responsibility, ability to set and achieve ambitious goals, assert one's rights, etc.

As a rule, if a person makes a difficult decision about labor migration, it is assumed that he has enough determination to realize the available resources. The situation may be different in the case of forced migration: in this situation, external assistance is important – from the side of society and the state.

In addition to individual factors, there is a group of factors associated with environmental features which has a significant influence on the adaptation process. The specifics of the situation in the country of origin (the level of its economic development, the presence of armed conflicts, interethnic relations, etc.) acquire significance in comparison with the conditions of the host country. Important factors of adaptation are the economic situation in the country of arrival; need for labor resources, the availability of social elevators; sound national policies; development of migration institutions; the presence of national diasporas; attitude of the population towards migrants. If we talk about Russia, then, due to its size and diversity, one should take into account the specifics of not only the country as a whole, but also specific host regions: their size, proximity to borders, level of economic development, demographic structure, housing and land, climate, environmental conditions. If the host region cannot provide the institutional conditions for realizing the migrant's resource potential or does not have the appropriate infrastructure, the adaptation process will be excessively complicated, and in some cases – completely impossible. The specific place where the migrant arrives (village, provincial city, big city, etc.) also matters. Thus, a large metropolis, the economic and cultural center of a vast territory provides more employment opportunities and access to extensive ethnic networks, and in a village a migrant can more easily find housing and land and take advantage of some additional government support programs designed for agricultural producers.

However, the state is able not only to facilitate the adaptation of migrants, but also create obstacles to their adaptation. Often this happens due to the inconsistent migration policy of the state. For example, Russian migration policy assumes that external migration is an ambivalent phenomenon that brings both economic benefits to the host country and creates certain threats [9]. However, both the benefits of migration and the threats from it are, for the most part, only the consequences of political and managerial decisions of the state. Migration itself is a value-neutral process. As a rule, threats from migration appear when barriers are built on the path of adaptation of migrants.

Some migrant workers accept the situation, suffering excessive exploitation, neglect and lack of rights. Others try to circumvent them illegally by breaking laws, bribing government officials, etc. Any of these strategies may lead to the alienation of migrants and conflicts with the host society.

Expert survey and interviews with migrants show that the main barriers for adaptation are:

1. The high degree of exploitation of labor migrants; non-payment of wages; tight regulation of working hours; penalties; pressure from the employer; non-compliance with safety regulations; instability and uncertainty about future.

2. Non-observance of the rights of migrants; arbitrariness and corruption in state bodies; discrimination of migrants in the process of finding housing and work; xenophobia and migrantophobia provoked by the media; excessive bureaucratization of the migration process.

3. Low level of social support; lack of housing or poor living conditions; low availability of medical care; attitude to migrants as a deliberately low-status group; lack of interaction of migrants with the local population.

All the barriers, reinforcing each other, lead to serious failures in the adaptation process, often forcing migrants to break the law, that is, implement deviant adaptation scenarios.

4. Conclusion

An analysis of the positive and negative factors of adaptation allows us to outline three main models of adaptation of migrants. In the first case, when migrants rely on their own economic, cultural, and social capital, the ability of self-actualization becomes of key importance. The model involves activity, initiative, readiness to risk. In the case of labor migration, this model seems to be the most competitive.

If a migrant relies on external support, the migration infrastructure created by the state is of key importance: social, medical, economic guarantees, courses, benefits and preferences in the first months or even years after arrival. The model of state support should become a priority for some categories of migrants (internally displaced persons, compatriots living abroad, and students).

Finally, if the state and society pose barriers to adaptation, migrants are forced to look for illegal options for adapting to the environment. The criminal model of adaptation makes migration a threat to both the host society and the other migrants. However, the struggle with the criminalization of migration should be directed not against illegal labor migrants, but against those who impede the legalization of labor migration, that is should be focused on the causes of problems, not their consequences. that is it should not.

Thus, the success of adaptation is a result of the interaction of many individual and environmental factors. Its necessary condition is concerted actions of migrants, the host society, and the state, based on respect, recognition and mutual interest in each and the removal of artificial barriers to integration.

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6. References

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