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**TRANSCAUCASIAN POPULATION IN THE CHUVASH**  
**REPUBLIC: MIGRATION AND ETHNOCULTURAL**  
**ADAPTATION**

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**Abstract**

Transcaucasian communities of Chuvashia began to form in 1960-1970s and kept growing mainly due to migration inflows. The Armenian diaspora was expanding most intensively, then Azerbaijani and least intensively – Georgian. The Transcaucasian diasporas mainly include migrants of the first, second and slightly third generations. Currently, their number is growing mainly due to a natural growth of their own population. The Transcaucasian population resides mainly in the cities of the republic, as well as in rural areas that have raw materials or federal railways, highways, and airports. Migrants tend to resettle in an uneven manner suggesting that a basic requirement for choosing a place of residence is personal contacts and a well-tailored social and ethnic network. Migrants settle down in places enabling favorable conditions for employment, offering a permanent housing solution, where relatives or close friends live, which facilitates the socio-psychological adaptation of migrants, reduces social costs and risks associated with resettlement. The local Transcaucasian communities living in the republic indicate that there is a mature kinship-territorial network of “ethnic economy”. All three nations are framed both organizationally and institutionally. The target ethnic groups try to preserve traditional rituals, but this is not possible caused by migration and changes in the socio-economic sphere and everyday life. Being invited to various events, relatives try to bring all necessary traditional drinks and some dishes, sweets, dried fruits, nuts. All this makes it possible to preserve at least some ceremonial elements and to continue the traditions adopted in traditional culture.

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*Keywords:* Diaspora, family bonds, marriage, migrants, socialization, tradition



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## **1. Introduction**

Large-scale geopolitical changes, interethnic conflicts, sanctions, military clashes give rise to migration processes across the globe. Many regions of Russia have become centers of attraction for migrants. With this process, the tasks of regulation and assistance in adaptation arise. There are new elements of material and spiritual culture, though, penetrating into the alien ethnic environment. They are further transformed in a foreign cultural environment.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Challenges facing modern historical and ethnological science are partly attributed to the world around, ongoing processes of integration, internal and external migration, coexistence of populations, ethnic contradictions and conflicts. Resettlement is followed by regular changes in birth rate, reproductive activity, traditional ethnic culture, etc. varying significantly subject to ethnicity, region of origin, social status, education, age and incentives of a resettler. In multinational Russia, each region has its own specific ethnic and religious traits. The activities of responsible governing institutions should be based on the results of a scientific analysis of factors and mechanisms designed to promote adaptation of various nations in a different ethnic and cultural environment. In the Chuvash Republic, there is a required legislative framework in the field of national ethnic policy, a mechanism to ensure the implementation of a dialogue between state institutions and public organizations, the following legal acts adopted in the field of national ethnic policy and aimed at preserving interethnic and interfaith peace and harmony.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject of research was the conditions and factors to ensure adaptation of migrants who come from Transcaucasia on the territory of Chuvashia, the transformation of various dimensions of material and spiritual culture in the conditions of a foreign ethnic and foreign cultural environment.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The paper aims to characterize the migration situation on the territory of Chuvashia, to identify and compare the factors of socio-professional and ethnocultural adaptation of migrants who come from Transcaucasia, to analyze the role of national public associations geared to promote adaptation of migrants.

## **5. Research Methods**

The paper relies on universal general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, analogy, systematization and classification with a comparative historical method dominating over others. During the preparation phase, diaspora groups were compared, their ethnic culture before and after resettlement, common and special features in traditional culture, in particular family and religious rituals, were identified. A historical-genetic method made it possible to analyze chronologically a range of phenomena

and events, to determine the progress and prospects of the region. A structural-typological method was used to identify specific local transformations of the material world, family structure, food culture, religious rituals, social activities of migrants in a different ethnic environment. It helped collect local features of ethnic culture, national mentality, psychology influenced by a foreign cultural environment, mixed marriages. A comparative-historical method is crucial to trace the general patterns of ethnic migration and its impacts on the host population in different historical epochs, to compare the processes onwards.

## 6. Findings

Migration policy is a part of general socio-demographic agenda of the state. It can significantly affect the demographic, economic and political situation, public security of the country (Dyuzedo, 2009). During the Soviet period, a rise in migration processes in the regions was not perceived as a factor influencing the social development of society. In recent decades, they have been viewed as complex political processes that directly affect the life of society at large.

The Transcaucasian communities began to form in Chuvashia in 1960–1970s and continued to grow mainly due to migration inflows. The Armenian diaspora was expanding most intensively, then Azerbaijani and least intensively – Georgian. The Transcaucasian diasporas are mainly composed of the migrants of the first, second and slightly third generations. Currently, their number is growing mainly due to a natural growth of their own population. The Internet space shows that migrants can find tips and recommendations to address real problems in social networks (Fofanova & Borisov, 2017). The dissemination of information via social networks, television telling about economic opportunities in various regions has contributed to the fact that migrants are quite fast to respond to choices for making money or doing business

Prior to trade and intermediary activities, representatives of diasporas carefully study the market, population size, access roads, interactions with authorities, etc. Migrants tend to resettle in an uneven manner suggesting that personal contacts and a well-tailored social and ethnic network remain to be a basic requirement for choosing a place of residence (Endryushko, 2018; Shevtsova, 2010). People head for such places that enable favorable conditions for employment, offer a permanent housing solution, where relatives or close friends live, which facilitates the socio-psychological adaptation of migrants, reduces social costs and risks associated with resettlement. The most numerous groups among migrants are of working age (aged 20–49).

According to the 2010 All-Russian Population Census, 2,421 representatives of the most numerous Transcaucasian peoples – Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians – live on the territory of the Chuvash Republic. Most of them are Armenians (53.3 %, 1,290 people), the second largest ethnic group is Azerbaijanis (36.8 %, 891 people) and the least of all are Georgians (9.9 %, 239 people). The Census data show that the largest migration to the Chuvash Republic occurred in 1996–2000: Armenians – 260, Azerbaijanis – 135, Georgians – 40. About 83.84 % of Armenians living in the republic were not born here, Azerbaijanis – 13.5 %, Georgians – 40 %. According to national statistics authorities (Table 01), 82 % of Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians were not born in current places of permanent residence. Given that the average life expectancy in Chuvashia is about 70 years, an overwhelming majority of

migrants from the Transcaucasian republics currently living in Chuvashia are thought to have moved after the war years (from 1944–1945). The common economic zone of the USSR, new industries established in the Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the need for qualified personnel facilitated the expatriation of Transcaucasian population (Ryazantsev & Bozhenko, 2010).

**Table 1.** Population of private households by length of inhabitancy

Ethnic group	Total	Incl. those living in a permanent place		
		Since birth	Not since birth	Did not specify the length of inhabitancy
Azerbaijanis	843	166	674	3
Armenians	1263	201	1059	3
Georgians	216	45	170	1

An analysis of the local Transcaucasian communities in the republic suggests that there is a well-tailored kinship-territorial network of “ethnic economy”. All three peoples are framed organizationally and institutionally. Thanks to state aid, they manage to solve their housing problem, children’s well-being, apply for a job. In recent years, there has been a decreased number of those who acquired the Russian nationality. This is probably due to certain difficulties in obtaining Russian citizenship. This makes it difficult to get free higher education. A number of educated among migrants is very low, predominantly having complete secondary education.

Transcaucasian population living in the Chuvash Republic is characterized by gender disproportion. The number of men is hugely more among Azerbaijanis and Georgians. Men adapt much faster, start a family. There is not so much difference among the Armenians. Marriage, family and wedding rites among Armenians living in the Chuvash Republic have transformed over time. This signifies some specific tendencies in place not only among the Armenians, and reiterates the nature and degree of cross-coupling simultaneous transformations of traditional cultures in different environments – both among the Armenians, and among the Russians, Chuvash, who are the indigenous population of the Chuvash Republic. Thus, through the lens of marriage relations, wedding and family rituals, we can observe the adaptation of migrants and predict the nature of interethnic relations in the republic for the coming decades.

The findings showed that migrants feel comfortable in the multinational environment comprising peoples who live in the Chuvash Republic. In the socio-economic and cultural life, they have carved out a niche: they create and actively develop businesses in the field of public catering and services (cafes, restaurants, bakeries, etc.); many work in medicine and education. The Armenian diaspora is one of the most numerous and active in cultural life. Christian faith brings them closer to Russian and Chuvash people (Armenians perform religious rituals in churches and monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church).

The Armenian migrants have a fairly high level of adaptation in the Chuvash Republic, with the region to still remain attractive for them. In recent years alone, a migration rise in the Armenian community in Chuvashia has amounted to over four hundred people, and this is despite the fact that the republic cannot boast of high per capita income (Egorova & Kazakov, 2017).

In a multicultural environment that looks like a medium for promoting interactions between representatives of different ethnic communities the language is of prominent importance for interethnic communication. A total share of Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the total population of the republic is low, less than 0.2 %. Therefore, being a mere drop in the Chuvash population, representatives of these ethnic groups basically cannot exist without knowledge of the languages spoken by the rest of the population of the republic. This is also facilitated by the fact that for almost two hundred years the Transcaucasia constituted the Russian state and the USSR, and even today bilingualism is native to Transcaucasia. People speak their native language and the language of the former metropolis. The share of Russian speakers among Azerbaijanis living in Chuvashia makes up 96.63 %, which is lower than among Armenians and Georgians, but higher than in Russia as a whole (82 %). Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis living in the Chuvash Republic more often speak Russian than the language of the ethnic group that they belong to. “Forgetting” the native language begins with the second generation living outside their “homeland”. And it is more active in ethnically mixed families. Migrants are not much committed to study the Chuvash language. They are fond of English culture rather than that of the titular nation of the republic. Some exceptions are Azerbaijanis, who show a slightly greater interest in the Chuvash language, possibly due to some common features in the Azerbaijani and Chuvash languages and the high frequency of mixed Azerbaijani-Chuvash marriages.

It would be a delusion to believe that migrants alone need knowledge of traditions, customs, and culture of the other side. The host population also needs basic knowledge of traditions, behaviors and social communications of migrants arriving from other societies. It is the mass media, mass culture and public policy that should be responsible for educating the population. Possible agents (actors) of the integration policy are national and local authorities, employers and other business structures specializing in migrant business services, NGOs (Mukomel, 2011).

In Chuvashia, 36 national and cultural associations have been recorded. Among them there are 2 national-cultural associations of the Azerbaijani people and 1 of the Uzbek. National and cultural associations help newly-arrived migrants to go through socio-cultural adaptation more easily and quickly in the Chuvash Republic. What is more, the associations help to preserve their traditions and customs. They are supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Chuvash Republic. Festivals of national holidays of different peoples living in the republic are held annually in Chuvashia. In particular, the Azerbaijani and Uzbek diasporas always vividly celebrate Nowruz, the great holiday of the Muslim people (Sergeeva, 2012). In 2017, the House of Friendship of Peoples was established in order to create favorable conditions to spur the harmonization of interethnic relations for representatives of different peoples living in Chuvashia, to promote creative abilities. In the House you can get acquainted not only with the culture of the peoples living on the territory of the republic, but also learn national languages. There is a special interest in the Azerbaijani and Georgian languages among the local population. The percentage increased by 2–3 times in comparison with the 2002 census data. Apparently this happens in nationally mixed marriages. Young people who go to schools of the republic study the Chuvash language pursuant to the school program.

## 7. Conclusion

All things considered, the living and working conditions of Transcaucasian migrants in the Chuvash Republic have convincingly shown that, on the one hand, all the necessary (equal for all nations) conditions for successful adaptation have been created in the republic, on the other, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians, almost on an equal footing, successfully use all opportunities available for choosing housing, a place of work, implementing entrepreneurial qualities and social guarantees established by the state. No major differences in these indicators between the Transcaucasian population and as compared to the population of the republic as a whole, as well as the opinions of representatives of the diasporas, indicate high tolerance and interethnic harmony in the republic, which is expressed in the successful implementation of the rights of the Transcaucasian population. Through the prism of marriage relations, wedding and family rituals, we can observe the adaptation of migrants and predict the nature of interethnic relations in Chuvashia for the coming decades. Any national and cultural society provides economic support, security and legal support, promotes educational policies, preserves and develops its national culture, provides information support to representatives of their nationality.

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