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ADAPTING OF THE MIGRANT COMMUNITY OF RUSSIA TO
THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of adapting the migrant community of Russia to the conditions of the pandemic of a new coronavirus infection. 2020, which has become the year of epidemiological challenges for the whole world, has actualized many global problems, the most convex of which were the food and migration crisis. Many countries have imposed either full or partial lockouts on the movement of people to prevent the widespread spread of the virus within borders, including limited communication with other countries. The pandemic of COVID-19 has revealed the vulnerability of migrant workers as a social group, a problem common to the vast majority of the world. There is a persistent concern among international researchers involved in the sociological study of sentiment among migrants about potential food shortages and possible outbreaks of xenophobia. The author analyzes the problem associated with the socio-economic situation of representatives of the migrant community of Russia. Considerable attention is paid to the past 2020, as the period in which the most acute crisis phenomena related to the migration issue in Russia were manifested. The author points to the multidimensional nature of the problem with the migrant community of Russia in the context of the pandemic of a new coronavirus infection. The extent to which restrictive measures by states of the world affect global migration mobility is also addressed. The author states that there are shadow aspects of the problem associated with the socio-economic situation of Russian migrants in a pandemic.

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1. Introduction

The pandemic of new coronavirus infection affected more than 1,430 cities around the world, and 95 % of the total number of cases were recorded in urban areas (Il'ina & Ovdenko, 2020). As the Bangladeshi scientists Ahsan et al. (2021) point out in their work, "this pandemic, which does not recognize borders, has put a spotlight on the relationship between migration and public health policy. The pandemic will inevitably change the scope of global migration and, with it, politics. The world has changed, and migration policies have changed" (p. 2). The same authors note not the departure of the topic of migration on the global agenda due to the actualization of the new world problem, but a change in the entire spectrum of debates about migration. It is also worth noting that the decrease in migration mobility has affected not only labor migration, but also international university mobility, which is reflected in the complication of international scientific and educational contacts, the abolition of mobility programs, academic mobility of students and scientific and pedagogical workers, the suspension of international travel and research expeditions (Akhmadeev et al., 2020).

2. Problem Statement

The European Commission encouraged European Union member States to treat seasonal migrant workers as regular workers who should be allowed to move freely (Ahsan et al., 2021). Given the growing threat of mass infection with a new coronavirus infection, socially vulnerable groups are a major concern among urban authorities in all countries. In the study, which was conducted among socially vulnerable New York City populations during the 2020 lockdown period, the authors concluded that marginal populations would have low social distancing. They also tend not to trust science and social institutions and are more receptive to misinformation and "fake news". Among the socially vulnerable groups, the authors include various minority groups, especially ethnic groups (Xinyo & Wei, 2021). In the context of the global pandemic, the most vulnerable group in the Russian Federation was the migrant population, many of whom were in difficult social and economic situations. The pandemic of coronavirus infection has updated the social situation of migrants in the Russian Federation, to the greatest extent, in large cities of the country. According to the latest data, there are 272 million migrants in the world who are quite different social groups, but the largest of them are formed by working migrants who feel the brunt of this crisis (World Migration Report 2020, 2020). Since January 2020, millions of people around the world have been difficulties in international travel, as more than 170 countries have introduced various restrictions on migration mobility (Ryazancev et al., 2020). As it is specified in the Global plan of humanitarian response of COVID-19 initiated by the UN, the present pandemic very quickly turned into crisis of mobility (Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19, 2020).

3. Research Questions

With regard to the Russian Federation, the problem had three dimensions.

Aspect one. Restricting the ability of representatives of migrant communities to leave the Russian Federation home.

Aspect two. Potential migrants cannot come to the Russian Federation to work, visit relatives, etc.

Aspect three. Representatives of migrant communities had serious concerns about leaving the Russian Federation because of the uncertainty about returning there soon, owing to the closure of borders and the deterioration of the economic situation in the most sought-after sectors of the economy.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to analyze the essence of the problem of adapting the migrant community of Russia to the conditions of the pandemic of a new coronavirus infection and to determine at least approximate ways to minimize socio-economic expenses.

5. Research Methods

To do this, we will use common methods of analyzing data, sociological reports, socio-economic statistics, as well as data from government agencies. Reports from international organizations will be used and foreign researchers reviewed on this topic and related topics.

6. Findings

Migrant social and ethnocultural organizations in Russia have signaled that some persons in the Russian Federation are coming to the end of the permitted period of stay in the country, and they cannot leave the country so as not to violate the current law. Concerns were identified among patent workers related to the extension of labor documents. There were emergency situations that arose during the lockdown at airports in Moscow. There are cases when several thousand representatives of the migrant community were kept in the walls of air stations for at least a week, not allowing them to leave their limits. The airports themselves for holding migrants were divided into several zones, while there were no conditions of detention. People parted porolon directly on the floor, on which they slept, volunteer and human rights organizations brought food, specialized food zones were also not equipped. Representatives of the embassies of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as human rights and volunteer organizations, urgently intervened to resolve the problem. There were cases when tickets up to countries taken by labor migrants in advance (for example, in January) were canceled in March, before the departure itself. In return, it was proposed to buy new tickets, without the right to exchange.

Social support was provided by the All-Russian Public Organization "Federation of Migrants of Russia," the country's leading organization representing the interests of the migrant community, in order to combat the problem of social disaster in which socially vulnerable groups could find themselves. The organization selected the most critical points of the city of Moscow, as a rule, hostels to which food sets were sent. According to the head of the Federation of Migrants of Russia V. Kozhenov, "about 80 % of migrants living in these hostels lost their jobs," and, thereby, were on the verge of hunger. It is worth noting that, generically speaking, the pandemic of a new coronavirus infection has exacerbated the global food problem. The UN has officially recognized that a pandemic will COVID-19 increase hunger in the world. Official statement – the number of starving people in the world by the end of 2020 will grow from

135 million people to 265 million people. I.e. in fact, the number will double. The official statement of April 21, 2020, the executive director of the UN World Food Program, David Beasley, says about the likelihood of "hunger of biblical proportions in a few months" (As famines of 'biblical proportion' loom..., 2020). The problem with Russia migrant community in the context of the pandemic of a new coronavirus infection exacerbates not only the food situation of these people, but also other social difficulties. The issue of rental of housing and other premises is acute, which, in turn, is not solved only by the allocation of food sets.

Another dimension of the problem of the migrant community of Russia in a pandemic is the criminogenic factor, the risk of which was actively discussed in Russian society in the spring of 2020, at the very beginning of restrictions (Sokolova, 2020). The increase in crime by migrants was confirmed by the leaders of migrant organizations of Russia themselves, stipulating that this increase is not significant. The reasons for public fears about the increase in crime by representatives of the migrant community of Russia in the pandemic can be considered the following:

Internal cause. It is associated with alarmist statements by the leaders of the migrant community themselves about a possible increase in crime among migrants. President of the Federation of Migrants of Russia V. Kozhenov said that "growth will be explosive," while "crime growth in Moscow is insignificant" (Steshin, 2020).

External cause. Some of the journalistic community of Russia, specializing in migrant topics, developed this topic as potentially popular from the point of view of consumers of information (Chibisov, 2020). The thoughts consonant with them were also expressed by politicians who hold certain political views. Deputy of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation A. Zhuravlev on the air of the program on central state television said: "Migrants will not die [from hunger], they will go stealing, take something away" (Air of the TV show "Time Will Show", 2020). The foreseeable consequences of such public rhetoric can be considered an increase in radical sentiments in the ultranationalist environment, which was expressed in the increase in cases of acts of aggression against foreigners. However, according to the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, compared to April 2019, in the four first months of 2020, the number of criminal acts committed by foreigners decreased, on the contrary (MVD RF, 2020). We can agree with the statement of E.A. Warsaw that "an outbreak of migrant crime" and, in particular, an increase in property crimes, contrary to some forecasts, did not occur. Crime has not become a massive strategy for coping with the difficult situation that migrants in Russia fell into during the epidemic" (as cited in Varshaver, 2020, p. 122).

Additional features of the problem:

A) Given the fact that a significant number of representatives of the migrant community of Russia are Muslim by religion, migrants could be held in the pre-species period largely through assistance in mosques. With the cessation of mosques and a sharp decrease in the number of parishioners, this assistance was practically stopped.

B) The lack of a centralized system of social support for migrants by the migrant community itself. A number of diasporas such as Pamirs, Armenians, Kurds, Afghans have their own management structures, with which it is easy for the state and the public sector to build a dialogue. Diasporas from the so-called "big three," which includes immigrants from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, do not

have a single management structure recognized by the diaspora itself. This objectively slows down the decision-making process on them, including in matters of social support. And in the face of a real threat of hunger among the migrant community, as it was during the lockdown of 2020, these issues require operational management.

C) Granting the representatives of the migrant community Russia certain rights of citizens Russia to grant them the right to provide assistance is also objectively difficult due to the fact that a significant proportion of migrants Russia work in the so-called "gray" and "black zones" of the economy, that is, they are not physically taken into account in various documents or are not sufficiently taken into account. In addition, due to the great corruption of the sphere, there is a serious risk of unfair distribution of state support funds. And instead of stopping the potential criminogenic threat from migrants, there is a great risk of only enriching shadow intermediary structures, and the criminogenic sphere itself will definitely not improve

In their study on the situation of labor migrants in various regions of the world in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian authors S.V. Ryazantsev, A.D. Bragin and N.S. Ryazantsev formulated three main recommendations for all countries of the world to overcome the difficult situation of labor migrants in the conditions of the coronocrisis: Firstly, safe and legal channels should be established for regular labor migration, border crossing opportunities, return to their homeland, and family reunification. Secondly, there was a need to remove the rigid link between citizenship and permits issued for work in receiving countries, that is, to legitimize the legal status of migrant workers. It is important now to extend the migration statuses and permits of labor migrants without bureaucratic delays in order to ensure legal conditions for people. Countries should be conscious of the issue of legalization of migrant workers, thus protecting them from the negative impact of external factors (Ardittis & Laczko, 2020). Third, countries must find opportunities and means to provide financial and other assistance to migrant workers who are unemployed or in emergency situations (Ryazancev et al., 2020). All this updates the need for patron support of the migrant community, which will consist not only in direct purchase of food kits for the needy, the allocation of funds, but also in the organization of an extensive volunteer network working with all and, first of all, autonomous migrant groups. These groups, which do not have a governance structure and operate "on the periphery of social life," may pose the greatest danger to society in terms of the criminal situation. At the same time, it is important to build volunteer work at the regional level, in the most remote zones.

7. Conclusion

The pandemic situation with the new coronavirus infection is unpredictable. Despite the existence of various scenarios for the development of the situation, no one can predict the exact options for the development of the problem. Despite the presence of vaccines and the beginning from the end of 2020 – the beginning of 2021 of vaccination campaign in many countries of the world, negative scenarios of the situation also persist. In this regard, the relevance of the problem related to the migrant community in large cities of Russia seems to us to remain. A particularly difficult situation will develop in the regions of Russia. Despite the significantly smaller number of migrants there compared to the city of Moscow, there is also a weaker "financial airbag" – migrants in the regions receive much less than those in Moscow.

Some experts even suggest that the State grant amnesty to those migrants who are in the "gray" and "black zones," that is, suspend the need to purchase/renew permits, but at the same time enter the statistical record, having come into the State's attention. Concerns about the increase in crime by migrants in the epidemic are justified. However, if measures are taken, the development of a pessimistic scenario in which a spike in crime occurs, and threats of anti-migrant riots are created in society, can be prevented.

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