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**SOCIAL BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO THE FAR EASTERN  
SETTLERS IN 1861-1940**



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**Abstract**

This paper compares the public policies for the settlement of the Far East as implemented before the Revolution vs. in the 1920s-1930s. It describes the timeline of resettlement to the Far East within this timeframe; the article also covers the strategic objectives of such policies. The authors further analyze the social benefits available to the settlers. We highlight the general aspects of the social policies and describe the particulars of each period on this timeline. Before the Revolution, public assistance for the settlers mainly came in the form of tax exemptions, the provision of land plots, and lends. In 1920-1940, the state would mainly provide land, grant lends, and issue low-interest loans. This period was particularly characterized by collective resettlement and increased social assistance. Such procedures helped attract more settlers to the region and replenish its workforce; however, they failed to compensate for the lack of livability. Public assistance discussed herein shows that public authorities were indeed interested in populating the region. When developing social programs intended to convince people to stay in the region today, it is imperative to duly consider the positive outcomes of social policies supporting the Far East and its people during the analyzed timeframe. The existing socioeconomic measures whose purpose is to increase the Far Eastern population so far have failed to address the region's demographic crisis; this calls for a comprehensive historical analysis of the problem.

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*Keywords:* Social benefits, social assistance, Far East, resettlement, public policy, socioeconomic development



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## **1. Introduction**

Demographics remains the most pressing issue of the Far East. The government has introduced multiple measures to help the region retain its people: the Far Eastern Hectare Program, low-interest mortgage for young newlyweds, and increased social payments for large families; yet all of these measures have failed to prevent the depopulation of the region. Rosstat reports that from January through November 2018, 331,424 people left the Far East. Immigration totaled 301,671 people (Shcherbakov, 2019). Detailed analysis of the statistics shows that as of year-end 2018, the region had a negative migration balance of 29,753.

VCIOM reports that the Central Federal District, the Southern Federal District, and the Crimean Peninsula are the most popular destinations for domestic migration in Russia. The Far East, however, is a popular destination as well, as it ranks 4th on the list. The key opinion drivers were: potential employment, good environmental conditions, and regional socioeconomic programs (Dalny Vostok..., 2020).

The situation is paradoxical: on the one hand, the Far East is a potentially popular destination for immigration; on the other hand, people keep leaving it.

The authors hereof believe it makes sense to analyze the history of settlement incentives retrospectively and to highlight the positive outcomes of implementing the state policies that sought to develop and populate the region. The paper emphasizes the resettlement of Slavs and does not cover social benefits for immigrants from abroad.

## **2. Problem Statement**

This paper discusses the effectiveness of social benefits available to people who resettled to Russian Far East in 1861-1940.

## **3. Research Questions**

This article investigates social benefits available to the Far East settlers in 1861-1940.

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

The goal hereof is to analyze what the government did to populate the Far East of the country.

## **5. Research Methods**

This research utilizes historical comparative analysis, historical typological analysis, historical system analysis, and quantitative analysis. The documents available to, and the methods employed by, the authors enable a comprehensive investigation of the well-being of Far Eastern settlers before the (October) Revolution and in the 1920s-1930s. Social benefits have been covered in detail by Gamerman (2014), Grigoriev (2017), Yelizarova (2017), Zinoviev (2016), Ryabichenko (2016), Moon, (2020).

## 6. Findings

Historians identify several stages or periods of resettlement in pre-revolutionary Russia. Each such period had its own strategic objectives, as each period-specific policy targeted specific social strata and provided a unique set of social benefits.

The Far East settlement policies began when the need arose to reinforce the borders in the area. Thus, the first people to resettle were Cossacks tasked to found a military outpost in the Far East. Understanding the importance of this process, the government provided the settlers with multiple benefits.

To boost the regional economy, the government also tried to lure workforce into the region. Since the mid-19th century Russian Empire had had no history of industrial colonization and failed to resolve the matters of social assistance for workers, the plan to populate the region quickly failed. Only in the 1880s did the resettlement process gain traction thanks to a newly constructed railway and the resources provided by the Volunteer Fleet.

The resettlement of peasants was a major contributor to the process. This was in fact the largest group to resettle; their migration was managed by the government. Peasant resettlement in 1861-1917 could be conventionally mapped to the following timeline:

- 1861-1881: wealthy peasants migrate eastwards without need for social assistance. Potential settlers have to meet strictest criteria, as poor, elderly, or disabled people are not allowed to move;
- 1882-1891: the government attempts for the first time to organize state-funded resettlement and provides social benefits to settlers both on the go and at the final destination. The goal now is to populate the region. Dobrovolny Flot or the Volunteer Fleet assists with resettlement.
- 1892-1900: the government attempts once again to arrange self-funded resettlement of peasants with minimum funding; the idea is to attract economically independent settlers. The process is now facilitated by the Ussuri Railroad of the Siberian Railway.
- 1901-1905: resettlement is seen as a way to mitigate the agricultural crisis in Central Russia. No socioeconomic criteria apply to potential settlers;
- 1906-1913: resettlement as a result of P.A. Stolypin's agrarian reform. Everyone allowed to move, and the government provides social benefits;
- 1914-1917: World War I brings the resettlement policy to an end.

For clarity, Tables 1 and 2 detail upon the social benefits available to settlers in 1861-1917.

**Table 1.** Social benefits available to Cossacks moving to the Far East in 1861-1917

Period	Regulatory framework	Social benefits for Cossacks
1865-1862	Decree of Emperor Alexander II on the establishment of the Amur Cossack Host, Dec. 12, 1858; Statute on the Amur Cossack Host, June 1, 1860.	Provision of land plots: 200 to 400 dessiatins for officers, 30 dessiatins for privates (State Archive of Khabarovsk Krai, 1860). Cash allowance of 15 rubles and food rations for two years.
1879, 1880s	Decree to raise the living standards of the Amur Cossack Host, May 22, 1879 (Codes of the Russian Empire, 2020).	Cossack units relieved of, and exempted from the levy of, debts.

1894 to early 20th century	State Council Resolution on the resettlement of Cossacks along the borders in Priamursky Krai, June 3, 1894 (Codes of the Russian Empire, 2020).	Cossack families exempted from county duties for three years, from commune duties for one year. Exemption from service in units-on-duty for five years. A RUB 600 settlement lend.
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This data suggests that the government was interested in moving Cossacks to the Far East for the entire timeframe from 1861 through 1917.

**Table 2.** Social benefits available to peasants moving to the Far East in 1861-1917

Period	Regulatory framework	Social benefits for peasants
1861-1881	Russian and Foreign Settlers in Amurskaya and Primorskaya Oblasts Act, March 26, 1861 (Codes of the Russian Federation, 2020).	100 dessiatins of land with a purchase option. No land use fees for 20 years. Permanent exemption from poll tax.
1882-1891	State-funded Resettlement to South Ussuri Act, June 1, 1882. State Council Resolution on amendments to the rules and benefits of resettlement to Priamursky Krai, January 26, 1882 (Codes of the Russian Empire, 2020). Voluntary Resettlement of Countrymen and Commoners to Public Lands and Census of Earlier Resettled Countrymen and Commoners Act, July 13, 1889 (Codes of the Russian Empire, 2020).	The government paid for the settlers' upkeep on the way. Exemption from county duties for three years. Food aid for resettled families for 1.5 years. Exemption from taxes and duties for five years. Exemption from treasury fees for three years. Gratuitous loans in the form of seeds.
1892-1900	State Council Resolution to extend and amend the rules of the resettlement of Russians and foreigners to Amurskaya and Primorskaya Oblasts, June 18, 1892. (Codes of the Russian Empire, 2020).	Five-year exemption from taxes and fees upon resettlement, and 50% tax discount for another five year afterwards. Write-off of arrears on fees.
1901-1905	Siberian Railway Committee Statute on the allocation of plots for resettlement in Amurskaya and Primorskaya Oblasts, June 22, 1900 (Collection of Resettlement Statutes and Orders, 1901) Provisional regulations on voluntary resettlement of countrymen and commoners to state-owned lands, June 6, 1904 (Codes of the Russian Empire, 2020)	15 dessiatins of land granted to each man (the rule applied since January 1, 1901). Rules and regulations of June 6, 1904 did not provide any social assistance for settlers.
1906-1913	Council of Ministers Resolution on the application of the June 6, 1904 Regulations on the resettlement of countrymen and commoners to state-owned lands, March 10, 1906 (Codes of the Russian Empire, 2020)	Land provided as earlier. Certificates issued for discounted travel.
1914-1917	No regulations regarding resettlement	Government efforts focused on wartime needs.

As can be seen in the Table, social benefits were always bound to the objectives of resettlement and came mainly in the form of tax/duty exemptions, land grants, and lends.

From 1917 through 1925, resettlement to the Far East happened sporadically and on a low scale.

The late 1920s and then the early 1930s were a milestone in the socioeconomic history of the Far East. The Soviet government saw strategic and economic potential in the region. Central and local authorities believed the economic potential of the region could only be fulfilled by populating it to cover its HR demands.

Social infrastructures saw major development, which helped retain settlers. A road network was built to connect small settlements to the regional centers; land was reclaimed for agricultural purposes. All these efforts improved the quality of settlers' life (Vologdina et al., 2020).

In 1925, they started planned resettlement to the Far East, namely to Amurskaya and Primorskaya Governorates. Family resettlement was a priority.

Table 3 shows the social benefits available to settlers in 1925-1940.

**Table 3.** Social benefits available to peasants moving to the Far East in 1825-1940

Period	Regulatory framework	Social benefits for peasants
1925-1928	<p>ACEC and Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR Decree on planned resettlement in 1925-26, May 17, 1925 (Collection of RSFSR Statutes, 1925)</p> <p>ACEC and Council of People's Commissars of the USSR Decree on resettlement and land management benefits for peasant, September 9, 1926 (Izvestia of the USSR Central Executive Committee, 1926)</p> <p>Statute on the Narkomzem agencies responsible for the movement of settlers, August 26, 1926 (Bolshakova, 1927)</p>	<p>Three-year conscription postponement.</p> <p>Exemption from the uniform agricultural tax for one to five years.</p> <p>Free provision of forest areas for construction purposes.</p> <p>Discounted railway fares for family and luggage transport.</p> <p>Agricultural loans</p> <p>Lends for up to 15 years at 2.5%/year, first instalment in the sixth year.</p> <p>3.5 to 5 hectares of land granted per family member.</p>
1929-1932	<p>Revolutionary Military Council Resolution on the engagement of the Red Army in the construction of collective farms in the country, January 30, 1930.</p> <p>Council of Labor and Defense Resolution on the resettlement of Red Army soldiers to the Far East, November 5, 1930 (State Archive of Khabarovsk Krai, 1930)</p>	<p>Provision of housing.</p> <p>construction materials.</p> <p>Lends increased by 15%.</p> <p>Short-term (9 months) loans for food.</p> <p>Increased food supply.</p> <p>Provision of products other than foods.</p>
1933-1936	<p>CEC and CPC Resolution on benefits for residents of the Far East, December 11, 1933 (Codes of the USSR, 1933)</p>	<p>Exemption from taxation-in-kind (in food) for 10 years.</p> <p>A gratuitous allowance of 1000 rubles.</p> <p>Supply of construction materials.</p> <p>Write-off of all arrears in the former place of residence.</p> <p>Exemption from taxes and fees, from compulsory public insurance, and from the road-and-labor duties. Exempt persons would also not be sent to logging or gold</p>

1937-1940	CEC and CPC Resolution on benefits for agricultural resettlement, November 17, 1937 (Codes of the USSR, 1937)	<p>mining sites for three years after settlement.</p> <p>Two-year conscription postponement</p> <p>Free travel and transportation of livestock and property of up to two tons.</p> <p>Exemption from arrears on agricultural tax, insurance premiums, and taxation in kind for 5 to 10 years.</p> <p>Food lending of up to three hundred kilograms of bread to be repaid in kind over two years.</p> <p>Provision of housing.</p> <p>Five-year loans to buy cattle.</p> <p>Short-term lends at 2%/year.</p>
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Thus, the socioeconomic assistance available to settlers in 1925-1940 mainly came in the form of land allocation, lending, and low-interest loans.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper highlights the following general social benefits provided to the settlers of the Far East in 1861-1940:

- gratuitous land allocation as the primary social benefit;
- new settlers were granted funding through lending;
- benefits in kind: food, clothing, etc. provided for free;
- settlers had tax benefits and were exempt from some taxes;
- conscription reliefs for Cossacks before the Revolution, all men in the 1920s.

However, the 1920s saw some innovation in the social benefits available to Far Eastern settlers. The policies of this period were focused on collective resettlement and sought to establish major cooperative production facilities in the east of the country. Accordingly, the government increased the benefits available to settlers. Loaning system and social infrastructures in the region saw advancement.

Notably, today's social projects and benefits available in the region must live up to the people's expectations. The Far Eastern Hectare Program remains problematic, as many of its provisions are legally inconsistent. Besides, some of the land plots allocated under the program have a geographic disadvantage. Therefore, focus should be on creating the social infrastructure and a hospitable environment that would be good for business.

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