

Adaptation and integration of labour migrants from the EAEU in Russia on the example of migrants from Kyrgyzstan

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Received 2 February 2020 ♦ Accepted 28 February 2020 ♦ Published 31 March 2020

Citation: Poletaev DV (2020) Adaptation and integration of labour migrants from the EAEU in Russia on the example of migrants from Kyrgyzstan. *Population and Economics* 4(1): 20–37. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.4.e50747>

Abstract

The study of labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, conducted by the author in Russia in 2017–2018, showed the limited character of integration of migrants from the EAEU. Only about a third of respondents do not want to obtain Russian citizenship, however, those who wish to acquire citizenship are mainly impelled not by the desire to settle in Russia, but by the convenience of staying and working in the country. The emergence of “glass walls”, built by Russians and migrants, and preventing migrants from full adaptation and subsequent integration into Russian society, gradually becomes the norm of life of the Russian society. The current insufficient conditions for integration and adaptation make it necessary and rational to revise Russia’s migration policy in relation of migrant workers from the EAEU in terms of elaboration, implementation and targeted funding of integrated adaptation and integration programs.

Keywords

adaptation and integration of migrants; EAEU; labour migration

JEL codes: J61, J68

Introduction

Prior to Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the EAEU, the Union was not focused on long-term strategy in migration management, however, Kyrgyzstan’s joining in 2015 gave a powerful impetus to the adjustment of the migration policy of the EAEU as a whole and each of its member countries separately. In this regard, a detailed study of the adaptation and integration of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in Russia and the attitude towards them in Russia is important for a deeper understanding of the integration processes in the EAEU. Due to limited

official statistical data on migration processes in the EAEU, the sample survey dealing with integration of Kyrgyz migrant workers in Russia appears a significant empirical source.

The topic of adaptation and integration of migrant workers in Russia was developed by Russian researchers such as Zh.A. Zayonchkovskaya, E.V. Tyuryukanova and Y.F. Florinskaya (2011), V.I. Mukomel (2012), E.B. Demintseva and V.M. Peshkova (2014), S.V. Ryazantsev (Ryazantsev et al. 2017) and others. Researchers such as S.B. Aliyev (2016) and I.V. Ivakhnyuk (Ivakhnyuk and Kuzmina 2017) also paid attention to the development of labour migration processes in the EAEU. However, the migration situation in the EAEU and Russia is rapidly changing (Volokh 2017; Postavnin and Vlasova 2017; Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation 2016; Decree of the President of the Russian Federation 2016), and recent studies show how migrants' practices in the EAEU follow these changes. Adaptation and integration of migrant workers within the EAEU was studied by the author in 2016 (Nasritdinov et al. 2016), and a new research showed that migrant workers' opportunities for adaptation and integration of labour migrants in the EAEU area still meet obstacles.

Methods

The study was conducted in 2017–2018 in the cities of Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Yekaterinburg.

The following methods of primary data collection were applied:

1. semi-structured interviews with experts in the field of migration (eight interviews in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Yekaterinburg);
2. in-depth interviews with migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan (three interviews in Moscow, three in Saint Petersburg and two in Yekaterinburg);
3. questionnaire survey of 702 migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan staying in three cities of Russia: Moscow (300 questionnaires), Saint Petersburg (201 questionnaires) and Yekaterinburg (201 questionnaires). The sample was structured according to age (34% – 18 to 25 years; 33% – 26 to 35 years; 33% – 36 to 60 years), sex (50% – men, 50% – women), work experience in Russia (50% – with 1 to 2 years of work experience, 50% – with work experience of 3 years or more). Among the interviewed migrants those working officially and non-officially were specially identified (those who replied that they receive a salary on a bank card or sign for it in the list, and those who get paid in cash “in an envelope”).

Results

Relations between Russians and migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan

The level of adaptation (for newly arrived migrant workers) and integration (for migrant workers who have passed through the adaptation phase and are already embedded in the life of Russian society more deeply) can be judged by self-estimates of migrants on attitudes towards them in the receiving society and the level of interaction with local residents.

According to respondents, the local population of the Russian Federation has generally a rather well-intentioned attitude to migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan. Thus, almost two-thirds (61%) of respondents declared a positive attitude the local population towards them and a quarter (26%) – a neutral attitude (Fig. 1,2). Measurements of the Levada-Center also show that attitudes towards labour migrants in Russia have improved by the time of our re-

search (Levada-Center 2017), which coincides with our results related specifically to Kyrgyz migrants (Poletaev 2018a). Later, in 2019, xenophobia began to grow again (Levada-Center 2019); this further confirmed the main findings of our research on the slow pace of adaptation and integration of migrant workers from the EAEU in Russia and systemic failures in this area, which impedes consistent reduction of xenophobia towards migrants in Russia.

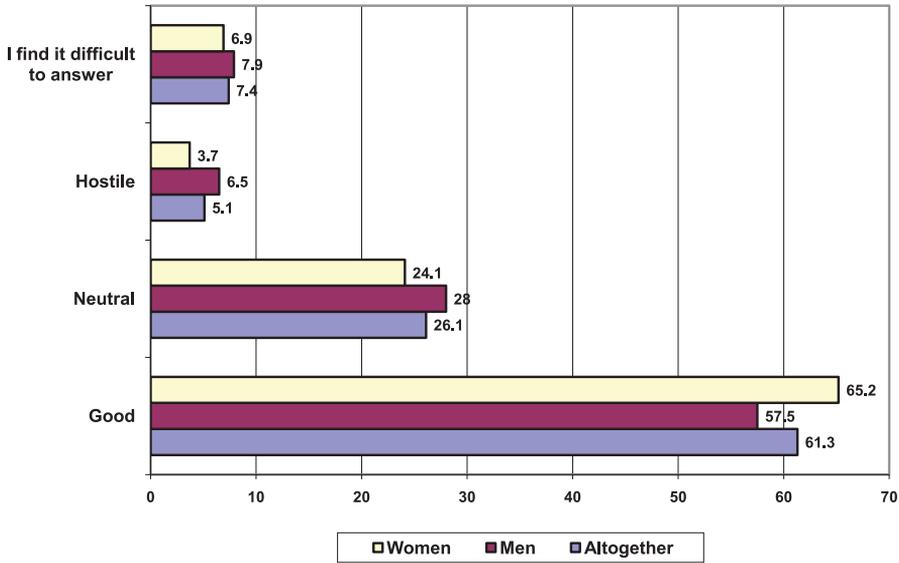


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by assessment of attitude towards them of the local population in the city of their stay, by sex, %. **Source:** author's data

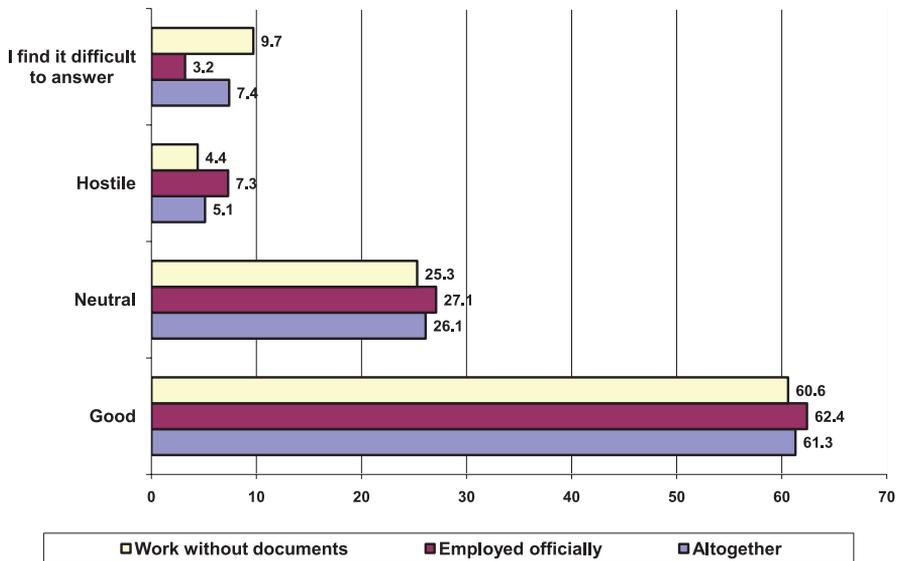


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by assessment of attitude towards them of the local population in the city of their stay, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author's data

Migrants from Kyrgyzstan, when in a critical situation, most often turn to relatives or fellow countrymen in Russia (75%), while only about 5% of them will seek help from local residents, and 9% seek help from relatives or countrymen in their homeland. Among those who work in Russia officially, there are more people who will apply to relatives or fellow countrymen in the homeland (12%), than among those who work without documents (8%) (Fig. 3, 4).

Let's try to understand who the locals are hostile to. According to our research, there are more men (64%) than women (36%) who feel unwelcome; they are mainly young people (47% in the age group 18 to 25 years and 78% in the age group 18 to 35 years); among them, there are significantly more people with secondary or below secondary education (69.2%) than among those who are well treated (41%). In addition, among those who have arrived in the last 1–2 years, there are fewer people who have declared hostility to themselves (44%) than among those who have lived in Russia for more than 3 years (56%). In our opinion, this is due to the fact that in case of longer stay in Russia, migrants move from primary adaptation to deeper “immersion” in the Russian society, and start feeling sharper isolation from it and the coldness of the attitude towards them by the locals.

These are mainly low-income people – 44% only have enough money to cover basic needs (food, clothes, etc.) and 19% do not have enough money even for that. When in a critical situation, these migrants never ask for help from local residents. Almost half of them have serious difficulties with Russian language when filling out documents (44%). People from this group think about obtaining Russian citizenship or residence permit less often (61% of them), and those who still think about it want to get Russian citizenship solely for the convenience of life in Russia (86%), and not to become its full-fledged citizens.

Therefore, the hostility of local residents is more likely to be directed towards young male migrants, with a low level of education and engaged in hard, unskilled and low-paid jobs (in particular, in construction), with poor knowledge of Russian language, most isolated in the society, who want to get Russian citizenship or residence permit less often than others, and if so, they seek for more convenient conditions of living and working in Russia, rather than being an integral part of Russian society.

Among those most actively involved with the local population, there are more men (63% in this group) than women (37% of the group), older people (53% in this group are between the ages of 36 and 60, 32% between 26 and 35 and 16% between 18 and 25), working in Russia for over 3 years (74% of the group), departing for Russia for work from Bishkek (21%) or another big city (40%), people with a higher level of education (50% in this group have higher or incomplete higher education), financially better off (26% can buy everything necessary and make savings and 47% – can cover their basic needs, but they did not manage to make savings). They are more likely than others to be employed in industry (11%), know Russian better than others (82% of them have sufficient Russian writing skills). As a rule, these people are more likely to think about getting Russian citizenship or residence permit in order to become full-fledged citizens (69% of those from this group who wish to obtain citizenship or residence permit).

Thus, most integrated in the Russian society are migrant workers of older ages with considerable experience of stay and work in Russia, who arrived from big cities; they know Russian language better than others; they were financially better off and intended.

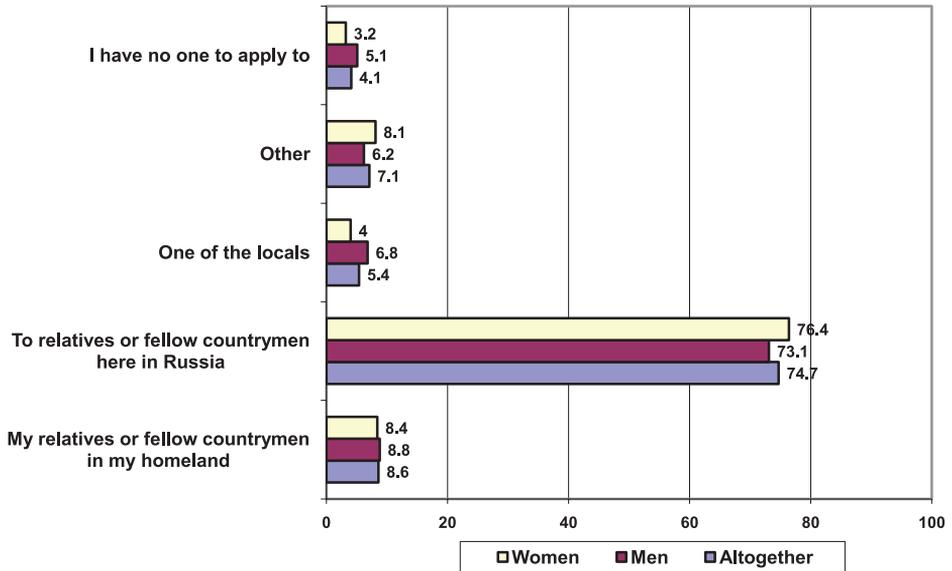


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by preferred source of assistance in a critical situation, by sex, %. **Source:** author's data

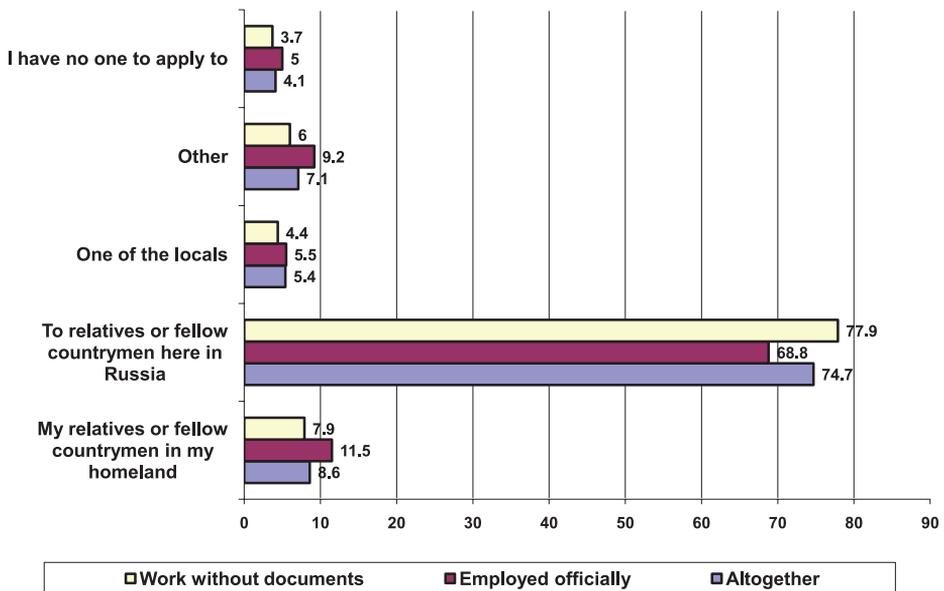


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents by preferred source of assistance in a critical situation, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author's data

Everyday communication, as well as ways of seeking help in a critical situation, clearly show that the concept of “parallel society” is quite applicable to migrants from Kyrgyzstan to Russia. Migrants mainly communicate with co-workers also migrants (81% of respondents declared it), countrymen (80%), relatives (70%), and women communicate with relatives more often (76%) than men (64%) (Fig. 5, 6). (When answering the question about everyday communication respondents could choose several options, so the total answers are over 100%).

Job search also takes place mainly “via their own people” (Fig. 7, 8), and co-workers are often countrymen or migrant workers from other countries (Fig. 9, 10). The study showed that over half of the migrants surveyed did not really compete with local residents (52.4%, taking into account migrants working not in teams, but in a separate working place or as domestic workers), i.e. they occupy typical “migrant niches” of the Russian labour market. Among those who confirm that they enter into competition with Russians (12%), there is a significant difference (4 times) between migrant workers, who are officially registered at work (compete with Russians in 24% of cases), and those who are employed unofficially (compete with Russians in 6% of cases). Only about a third of respondents are employed in teams where migrants work alongside local residents (“equally local and migrant workers are employed”). Thus, it can be concluded that migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan rarely compete with Russians for jobs (12% of cases), and at workplaces where they work alongside Russians, they often occupy their niches (housing and utility services, service sector, etc.), where competition is low. As a rule, the level of competition increases if migrant workers are employed officially, but, according to the survey, only 31% of respondents were legally employed (received salary according to the official sheet or through the bank on the card).

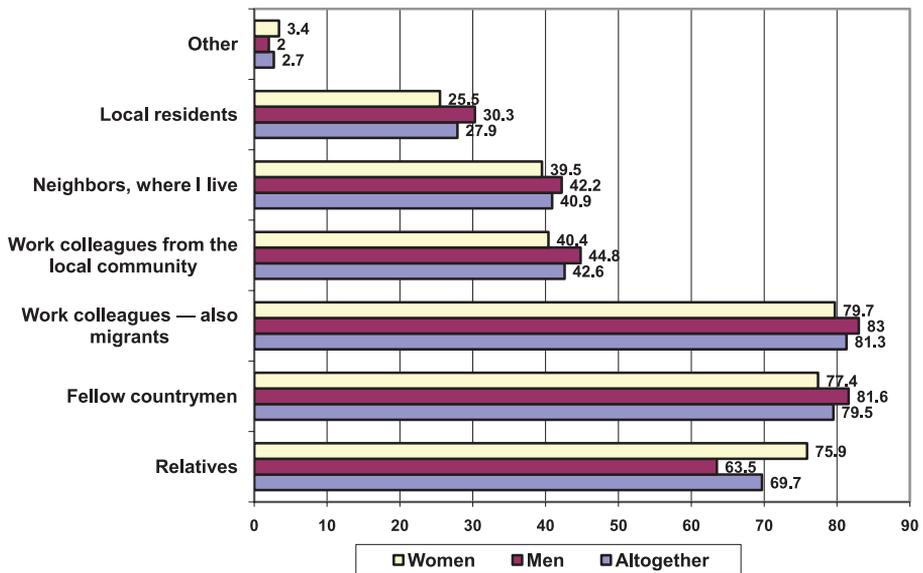


Figure 5. Distribution of respondents by preferences of everyday communication in the city of their stay, by sex, %. **Source:** author’s data

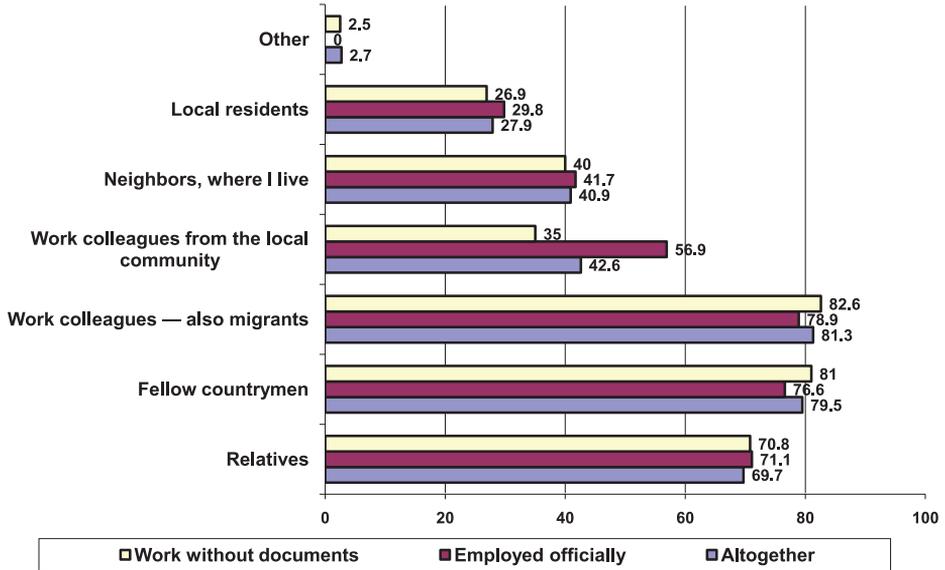


Figure 6. Distribution of respondents by preferences of everyday communication in the city of their stay, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author's data

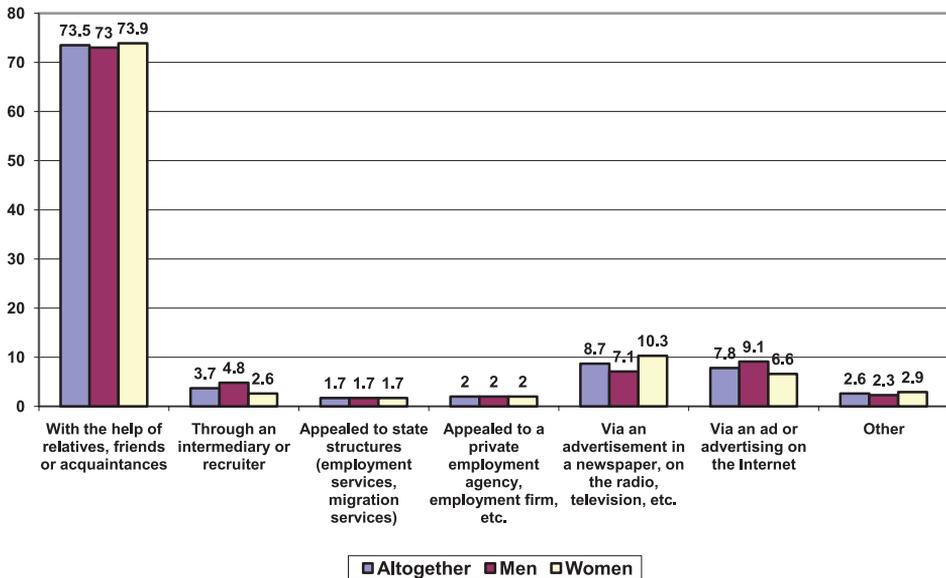


Figure 7. Distribution of respondents by method of job search, by sex, %. **Source:** author's data

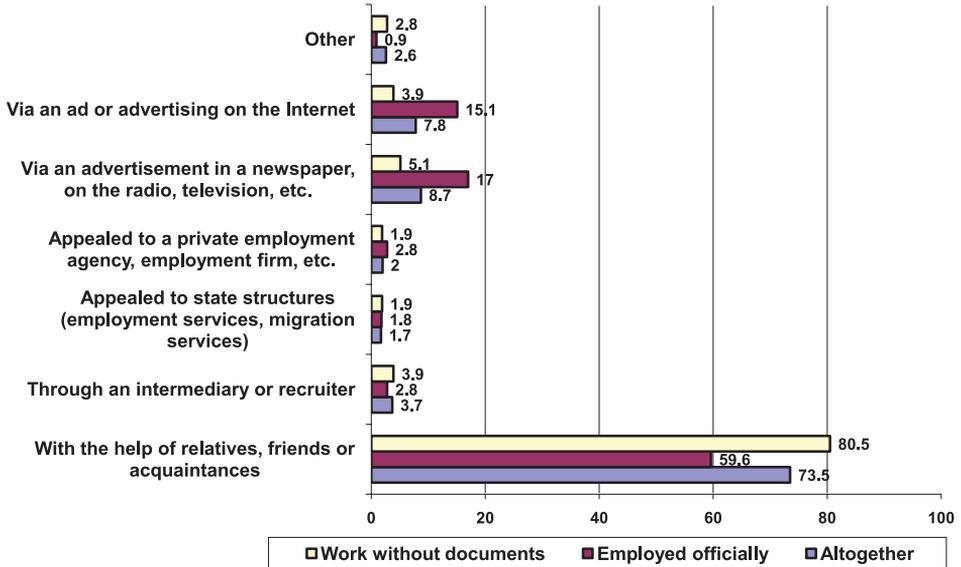


Figure 8. Distribution of respondents by method of job search, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author’s data

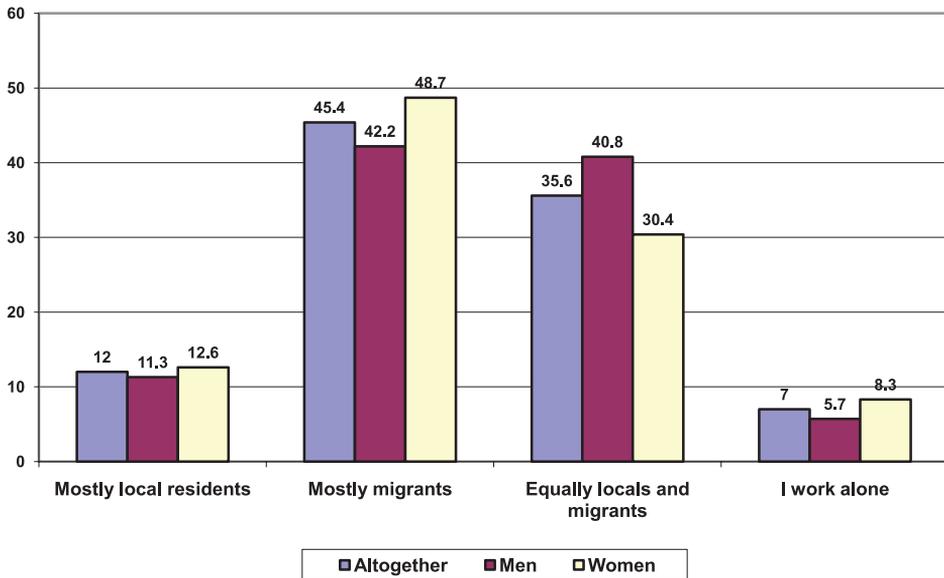


Figure 9. Distribution of respondents by type of co-workers, by sex, %. **Source:** author’s data

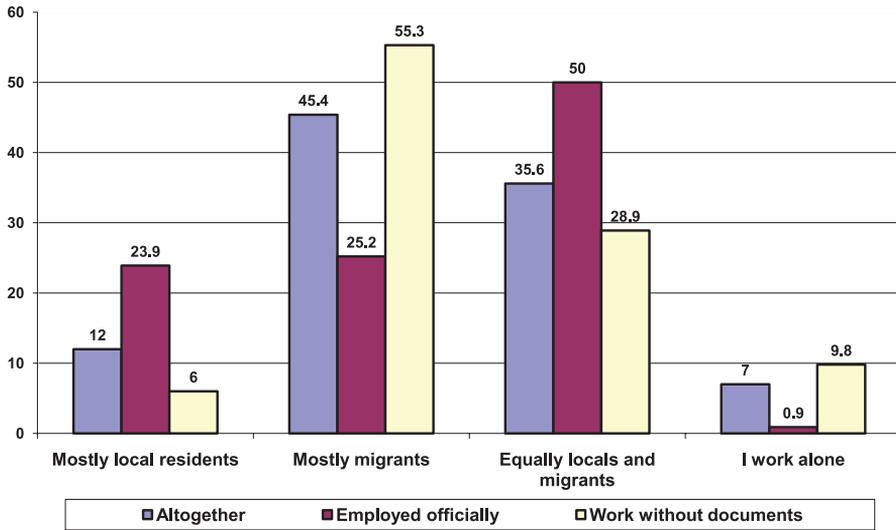


Figure 10. Distribution of respondents by type of co-workers, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author’s data

Adaptation and integration of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan in Russia

According to earlier studies (Nasritdinov et al. 2016; Yatsenko et al. 2008), migrants from Kyrgyzstan know Russian better than migrants from other Central Asian states in Russia. Our research confirmed that fact. Thus, 87% of respondents said that their level of knowledge of the Russian language is sufficient for communication at work (Fig. 11, 12).

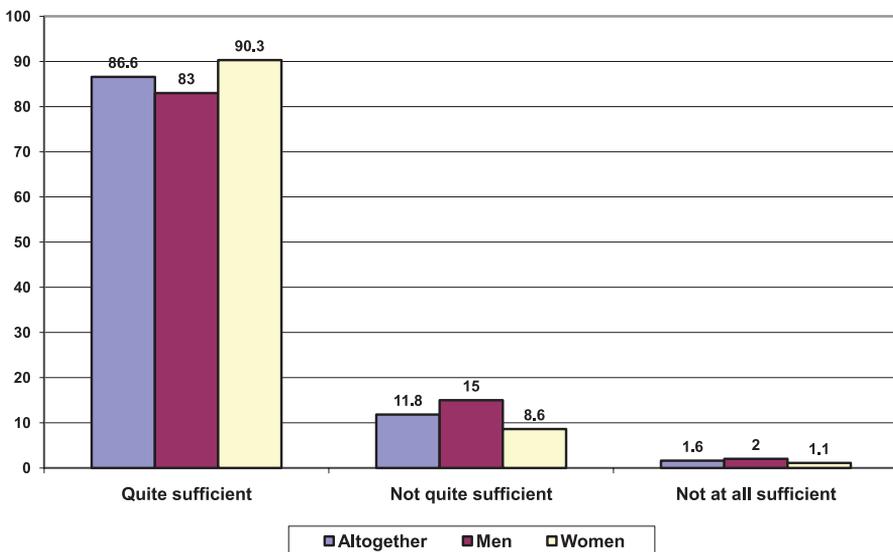


Figure 11. Distribution of respondents by self-assessment of knowledge of Russian language for communication at work, by sex, %. **Source:** author’s data

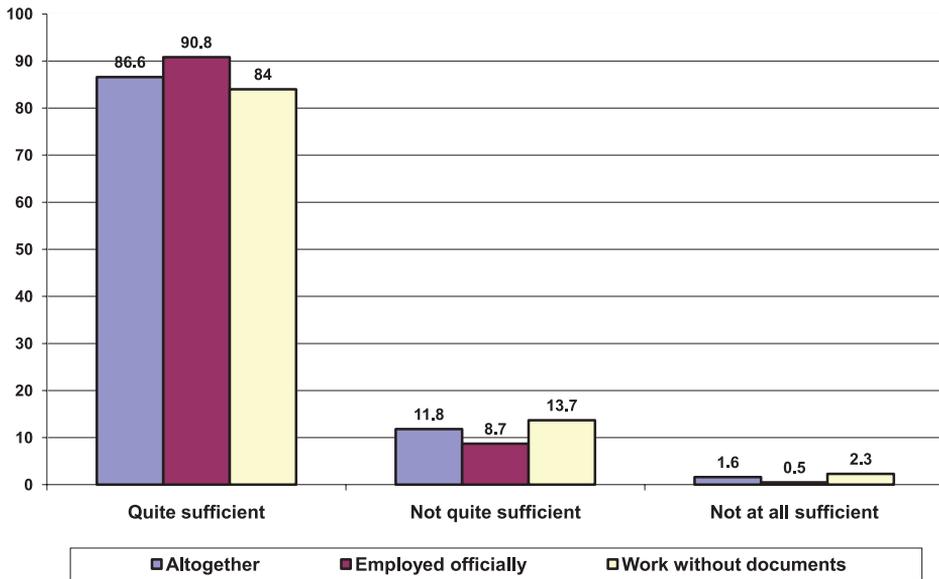


Figure 12. Distribution of respondents by self-assessment of knowledge of Russian language for communication at work, by sex, %. **Source:** author’s data

However, only about half of the respondents (52%) have good Russian language writing skills (Fig. 13,14), so communication in Russian at work and real knowledge of Russian language by migrants from Kyrgyzstan are not the same thing.

About a quarter (23%) of the surveyed migrants from Kyrgyzstan stated that their level of knowledge of the Russian language was not at all sufficient to fill in documents.

Among those who do not have enough knowledge of Russian to fill in documents, over half (52%) are young people aged between 18 and 25 and 30% are respondents aged between 26 and 35. Among those who do not have sufficient knowledge of Russian to fill in documents, 71% have lived in Russia for less than 3 years, among them there are slightly more men (54%) than women (46%). There are almost no residents of the capital among them (4%) and few inhabitants of big cities (23%); most of them are from small towns (39%) or rural areas (34%). In this group, there are few people with higher or incomplete higher education (9%), however, more respondents with lower secondary education (12%) and those who have secondary (37%) or secondary specialized education (42%) compared to all other groups. This is the group of people with the lowest income – only 10% of them can cover their basic needs and make savings, while among those who have sufficient knowledge of Russian to fill in documents there were 29% who earn enough to cover basic needs and make savings. Among those who do not have sufficient knowledge of Russian to fill in documents, 36% can buy everything necessary, but they fail to make savings, for 47% of them there is enough money only for basic needs (food, clothing, etc.), while 7% do not earn enough even to cover basic needs.

As we can see, a higher level of knowledge of written Russian is a kind of marker of higher earnings, higher level of education, longer living in an urban environment, and, of course, longer migration experience.

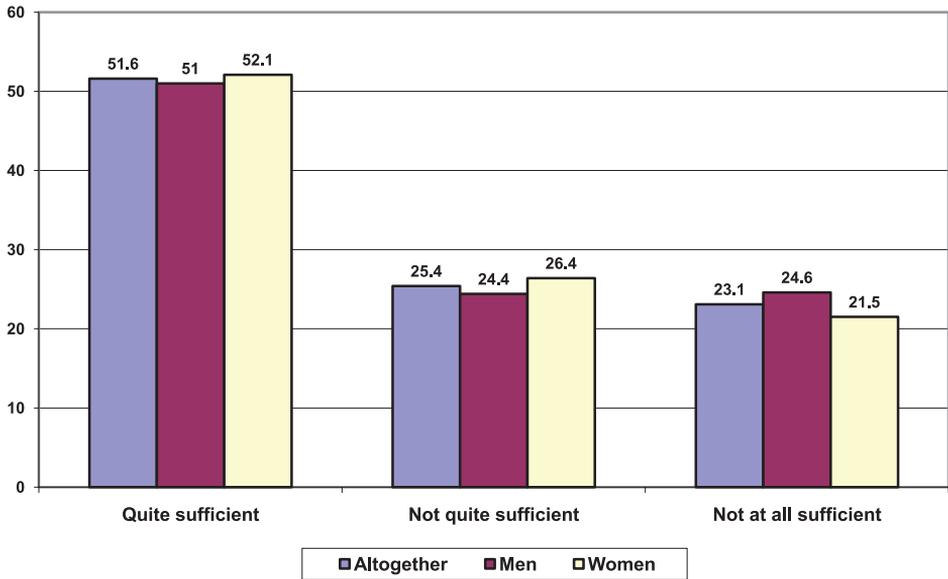


Figure 13. Distribution of respondents by self-assessment of knowledge of Russian language for filling in documents, by sex, %. **Source:** author’s data

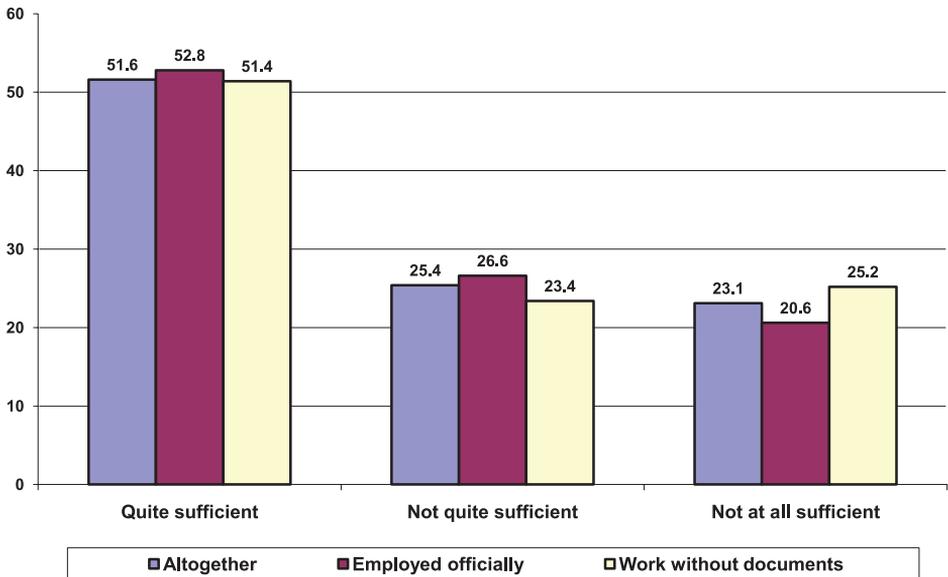


Figure 14. Distribution of respondents by self-assessment of knowledge of Russian language for filling in documents, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author’s data

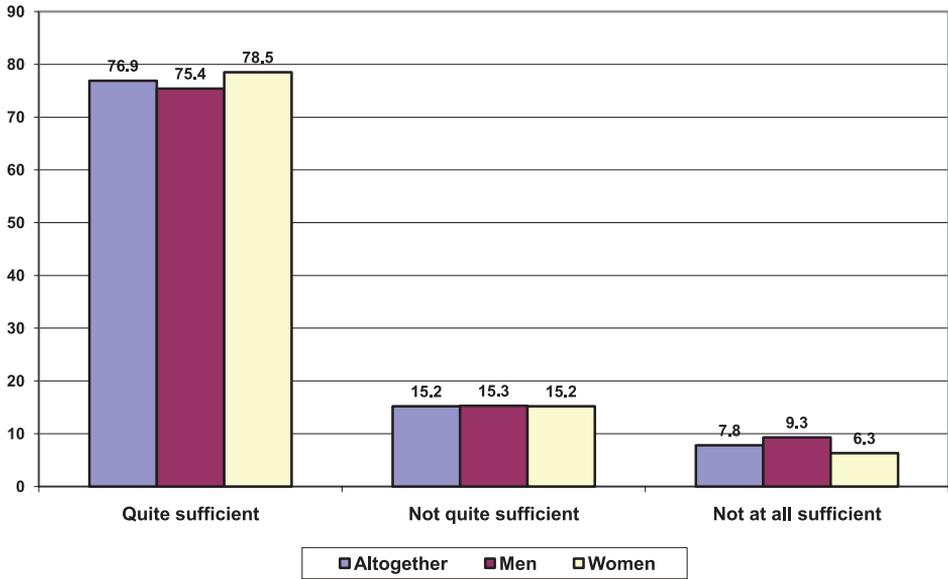


Figure 15. Distribution of respondents by self-assessment of knowledge of Russian language for communication in a shop, pharmacy, at the post office, by sex, %. **Source:** author’s data

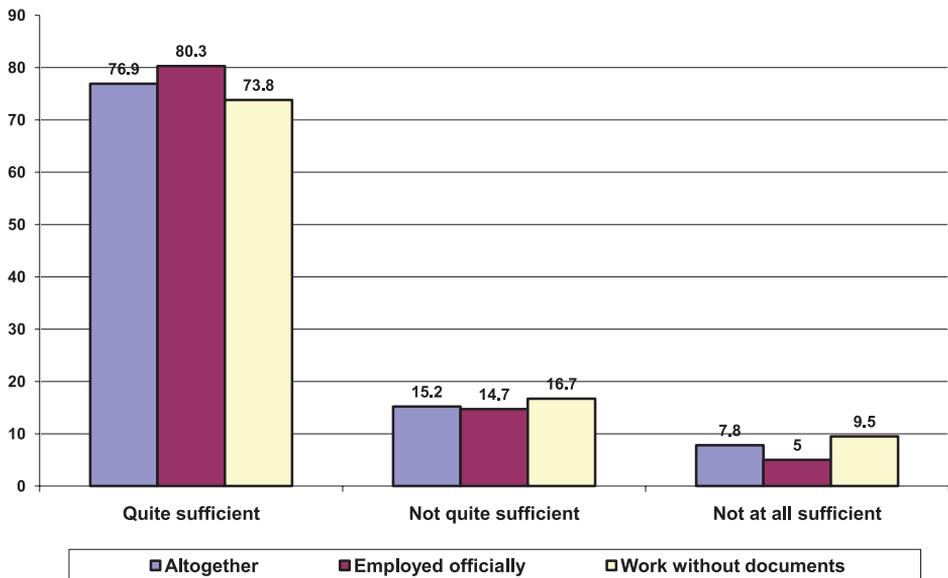


Figure 16. Distribution of respondents by self-assessment of knowledge of Russian language for communication in a shop, pharmacy, at the post office, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author’s data

Knowledge of Russian language sufficient for communication in a shop, pharmacy, at the post office provides for the potential of migrants from Kyrgyzstan to adapt to everyday life in Russia and, as we see, this potential is good (Fig. 15, 16).

The intention of migrant workers to acquire citizenship of the host country is at least indicative of their long-term stay and work plans in that country, and, at most, of their intention to acquire a new homeland for themselves and their family.

The study showed that among the respondents only about a third (34%) do not want to obtain Russian citizenship (Fig. 17, 18). Among them, more than a half have lived in Russia for less than three years (56%). In the group of those who want to obtain Russian citizenship and have already submitted documents, there are 39% of those who have lived in Russia for less than three years. Among those who want to obtain Russian citizenship and is going to file the documents, there are 33% of those who have lived in Russia for less than 3 years. Among those who do not want to obtain Russian citizenship, the majority are either young people (40%) or adults aged 36 to 60 (35%), while middle-aged people (26–35 years) are less represented (25% of the group). Therefore, the group of migrants who do not want to obtain Russian citizenship consists of either young migrant workers who have not decided on long-term plans, or mature people who have already decided that they will not connect their future with Russia.

Among those who do not wish to obtain Russian citizenship, the residents of the capital are few (8%), while among those who want to obtain Russian citizenship and have already submitted documents, the residents of the capital are 26%, and among those who want to obtain Russian citizenship and are going to file documents, the residents of the capital are 20%. In the group of those who do not want to obtain Russian citizenship, there are 19% of migrants with higher and incomplete higher education, and among those who want to obtain Russian citizenship and have already submitted documents, there are 53% of them, and among those who want to obtain Russian citizenship and are going to submit documents,

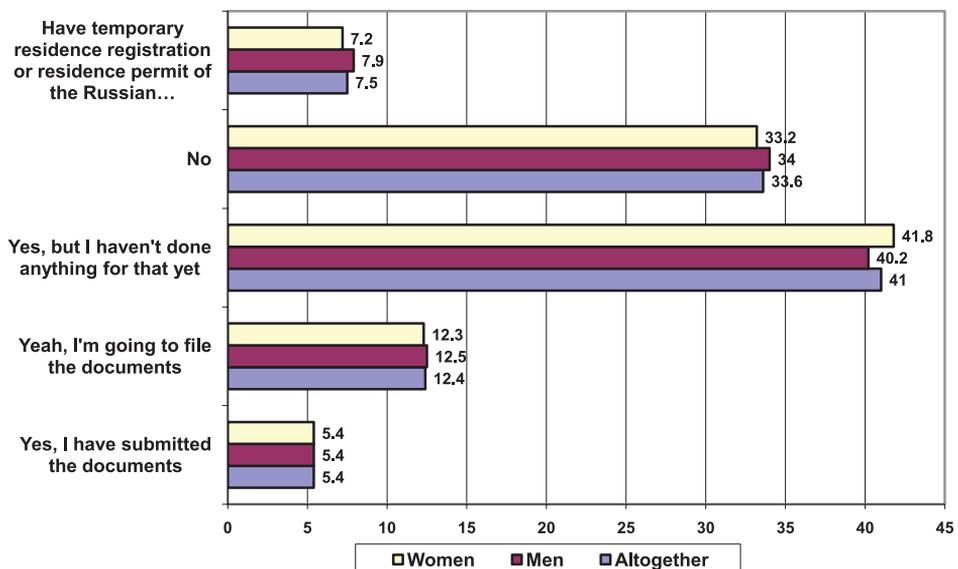


Figure 17. Distribution of respondents by their intention to obtain Russian citizenship, by sex, %.
Source: author's data

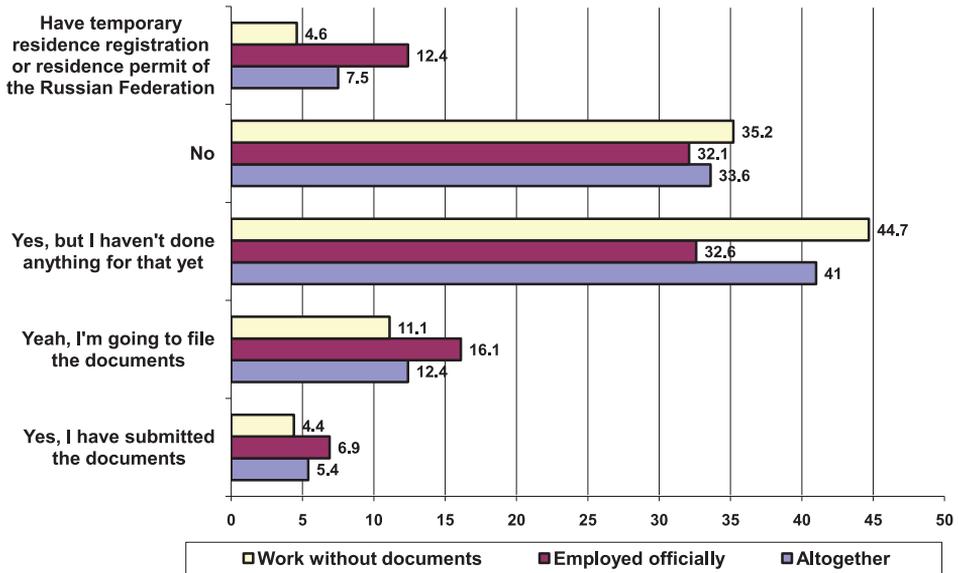


Figure 18. Distribution of respondents by their intention to obtain Russian citizenship, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author's data

there are 31% of them. Also among those who do not want to obtain Russian citizenship, there are more low-income respondents (who have money only to cover their basic needs – food, clothes, etc.) (36%) than among those who want to get Russian citizenship.

Thus, the part of migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, who intend to settle in Russia and therefore want to obtain Russian citizenship, have higher human capital characteristics and look more attractive for Russia as potential citizens than labour migrants who do not express the desire to settle in Russia. However, given the demographic situation in Russia, some of young Kyrgyz migrants from the group not intending to settle in Russia, after additional training or retraining, may move to the group of potential citizens whose settlement in Russia is promising and desirable.

Notably, the desire to acquire Russian citizenship (Fig. 19, 20) is mainly due not to moving to Russia for permanent residence or the desire to live in Russia (only 46% answered so), but to the fact that having a Russian citizenship, it is easier for Kyrgyz citizens to work and live in Russia – it is easier to get a job, receive medical care, be protected from the police. Permanent life and Russia and joining the Russian nation is not the principal motivation.

Among those who want to acquire Russian citizenship in order to live permanently in Russia, 64% have lived in Russia for over 3 years, and among those who believe that with a Russian passport in Russia it is just more convenient to live, but they do not want to permanently move to Russia, 55% have lived in Russia for less than 3 years. Among those who want to settle in Russia and for this purpose want to obtain a Russian passport, 45% are middle-aged persons and 32% are older age, and among those who need a Russian passport for more convenience of stay and work, 40% are young people and 32% are middle-aged persons. Among those wishing to settle in Russia, there are more residents of the capital (21%) and big cities (35%) than residents of small cities (26%) and residents of rural areas (18%), while among respondents who believe that with a Russian passport it is more comfortable

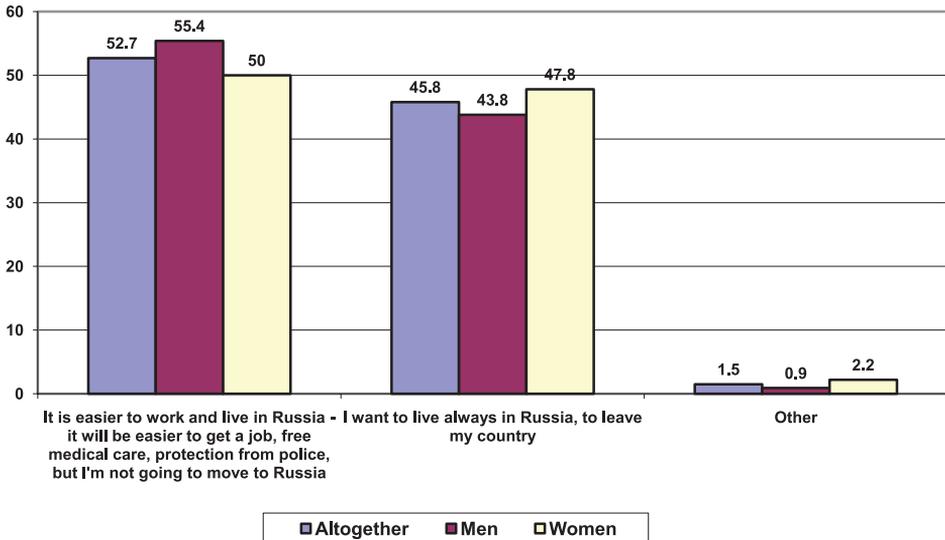


Figure 19. Distribution of respondents by reason of desire to obtain Russian citizenship, by sex, %. **Source:** author's data

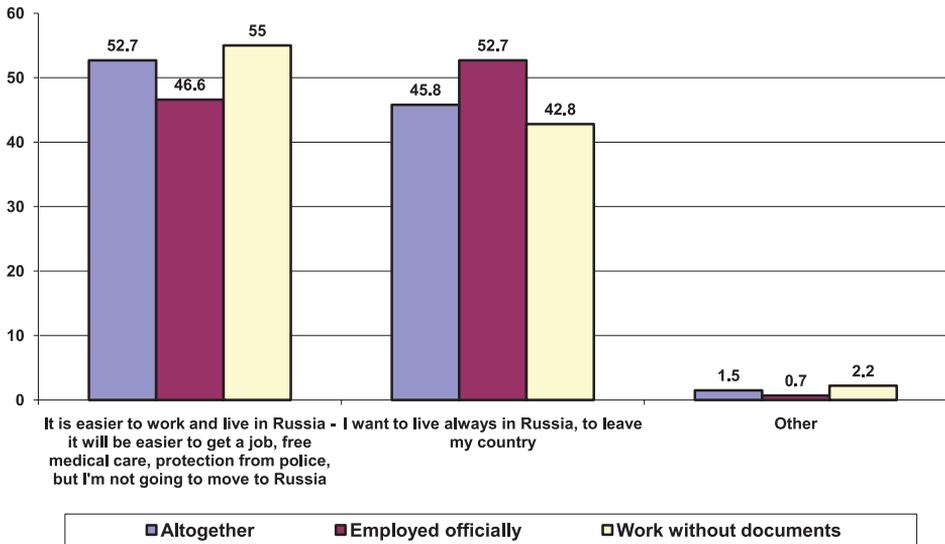


Figure 20. Distribution of respondents by reason of desire to obtain Russian citizenship, by form of employment, %. **Source:** author's data

to live in Russia, but do not want to settle, there are more inhabitants of small cities (31%) and inhabitants of rural areas (29%) and less inhabitants of the capital (13%) and big cities (27%). Among those who want to settle upon obtaining a Russian passport, there are more of those who have higher and incomplete higher (39%) or secondary vocational education (33%) and few respondents with secondary education, while among those who intend to use

a Russian passport for greater convenience of work, there are fewer people with higher and incomplete higher education (27%) or with secondary vocational education (31%) and more with secondary education (40%). Potential immigrants are also more prosperous: among them 29% can buy everything necessary and make savings, 18% have only enough money for the most necessary things (food, clothes, etc.), while among those intending to use a Russian passport for the convenience of living only 16% can buy everything necessary and make savings, and 34% earn only to cover their basic needs.

Among those who intend to use a Russian passport for permanent immigration and deep integration into Russian society, there are more people who have long lived and worked in the Russian Federation. They are mainly people with life experience; young people do not dominate among them. Immigration and integration is a life strategy of mainly urban citizens (residents of Bishkek and big cities of Kyrgyzstan) who have a fairly high level of education and sufficient level of income.

Discussion

How to break "glass walls"?

Russia is not the only country where migrants seek for citizenship in order to have more comfortable conditions of earnings and doing business. However, a significant share of migrant workers who want to obtain a Russian passport just to simplify the legalization of their employment but not to become a full-fledged citizen of Russia, makes us think, that the existing migration regime in Russia and the system of registration of documents for legal employment do not fully correspond with the needs of the Russian labour market and require revision.

In our opinion, the Russian Federation can more effectively use the status of residence permit for integration of migrant workers (including from the EAEU). By explaining the convenience and advantages of residence permit for potential applicants, with the help of information campaigns, Russia can reduce the number of applicants wishing to obtain citizenship just for convenience of work, rather than for settling in the Russian Federation.

As the study has shown, the "glass walls" phenomenon (Poletaev 2018b), built by both Russians and migrants, and preventing migrants from full adaptation and subsequent integration into Russian society is gradually becoming the norm of life of Russian society.

The clear division of labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Russia into groups with different needs in adaptation and integration enables formulating different adaptation/integration strategies which can be addressed to different migrant groups. Thus, for young migrants with a low level of education, income, knowledge of the Russian language, engaged in unskilled jobs, adaptation programs aimed at transferring practical information about life and work in Russia are necessary. It is advisable to choose Kyrgyz as the native language of this group in adaptation programs. It is reasonable to distribute such information already in Kyrgyzstan among potential labour migrants or in the process of their transportation to Russia (in planes, trains, coaches). It is necessary to disseminate information about life and norms of employment in the Russian Federation through official mass media, embassies, consulates and with the involvement of Russian NGOs in such information campaigns (supported through government grants) in order to avoid distorting or complicating access to this information when it reaches the target group of consumers through "their own people", diasporas and "word-of-mouth."

For migrant workers of older ages with considerable experience of life in Russia, who come from urban areas, information that helps in their integration in Russia is more expedient to be spread in Russia, including the use of social networks, Internet resources and media, as well as the potential of NGOs funded by the Russian state.

Conclusion

The study showed that integration processes in the migration area in the EAEU in general and for migrants from the EAEU in Russia in particular, meet obstacles, and there are several important reasons for that.

In Russia, lack of coordination between agencies responsible for regulation of stay, employment and integration of labour migrants from the EAEU countries and the absence of targeted financing of adaptation and integration programs for migrant workers, make the mechanism of adaptation “through their own people” most easy for labour migrants. As a result their “true” adaptation and integration in Russian society turns questionable. Existence of the already established practices of action “through their own people” instead of official channels makes the processes of adaptation and integration of migrants from Kyrgyzstan after its accession to the EAEU slow and largely similar to the practices applied by labour migrants from non-EAEU countries. For example, despite the fact that citizens from Kyrgyzstan do not have to obtain a patent to get legally employed in Russia, many of them (especially young people who have recently arrived in Russia for employment) would prefer to acquire Russian citizenship just to simplify their stay and work in Russia, not to immigrate for permanent residence. Previous studies of the author (Nasritdinov et al. 2016) show that in this strategy they do not differ, for example, from migrant workers from Tajikistan, i.e. from a country that is not part of the EAEU. For this reason we see revision of Russia’s migration policy in respect to labour migrants from the EAEU countries rational and urgent, particularly in terms of development, implementation and targeted financing of comprehensive adaptation and integration programs.

The article is written using the results of the project “Monitoring of respecting the rights of migrant workers from the Kyrgyz Republic and modern risks of unregulated labour migration of Kyrgyz labour migrants on the of the territory of the Russian Federation (RF) and the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) in accordance with the terms of accession to the Protocol of the EAEU” (2017–2018), implemented with the support of the Tian Shan Policy Center under the American University in Central Asia.

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