

SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDIES AND MIGRATION

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**RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MIGRANTS OF “ADVANCED WOMEN” CATEGORY
IN EUROPE: COMMUNICATION AND INTEGRATION COMPETENCES
(RESULTS OF SURVEY)**

**РУССКОГОВОРЯЩИЕ МИГРАНТЫ ИЗ КАТЕГОРИИ
ВЫСОКООБРАЗОВАННЫХ ЖЕНЩИН В ЕВРОПЕ:
КОММУНИКАЦИОННАЯ И ИНТЕРГАЦИОННАЯ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЬ
(РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ)**

Аннотация:

Исследование, проведенное НКО Институтом миграционных и гендерных исследований, позволяет ответить на вопрос об отношении русскоговорящих мигрантов к европейским ценностям. Институт начал свою деятельность в 2009 году в Брюсселе. Категория высокообразованных женщин имеет высокоразвитые навыки межкультурной коммуникации, но в половине случаев это не решает проблемы самореализации в карьере и обществе; для данной категории эти понятия неразделимы. Для «нашей» категории мигрантов, число которой увеличилось в Европе, требуются специальные интеграционные

программы, основанные на предпринимательстве, т.к. наш проект RESTART (2011-2014) доказал его эффективность. Исследование проводилось на основе взаимодействия с мигрантами и мониторинга процессов, которые активизировались в русской диаспоре. В фокусе находится женская группа миграции. По данным многих исследований, женщины составляют большинство проживающих в Европе, представляя различные сектора миграции: семейная миграция (создание и воссоединение семьи), интеллектуальная миграция (профессионалы и специалисты как члены одной семьи) и трудовая миграция (в основном с постсоветского пространства, но не из России). По данным экспертов, они являются «невидимым большинством» русской миграции в Европе. Однако работая над проектом, касающегося женщин-мигрантов, устанавливая контакты с многочисленными общественными организациями, консультирующими экспертами, мы обратили внимание на то, что, прежде всего, женщины являются не только значительным большинством иммиграции, но и очень социально и культурно активной ее частью.

Ключевые слова: социальная адаптация; русскоязычные мигранты; продвинутые женщины-мигранты (WMA); межкультурные коммуникации; предпринимательские навыки мигрантов; уровень толерантности.

Abstract:

The research, conducted by the IMAGRI – Institute in Europe (NGO), allows answering the question about the attitude of the Russian-speaking migrants to European values. The Institute started its activities in Brussels in 2009. The category of WMA (Women-Migrants Advanced) has highly developed cross-cultural communication skills but in about half the cases it does not solve the problem of self-realization in their careers and in the society; for the category these concepts are inseparable. “Our” category of migrants, whose number has increased in Europe, requires special integration programs through entrepreneurship, as our project RESTART (2011-2014) has proved its effectiveness. The research is conducted on the basis of communication with migrants and monitoring processes that are currently activated in Russian diaspora. The focus of the research and monitoring is a gender (women’s) group. According to many reports, women make the majority of living in Europe, being present in a significant number in all sectors of migration: family migration (both creation and family reunification), intellectual migration (both professionals and specialists as family members) and labor migration (mainly from the post-Soviet space but not from Russia). According to experts, they are the “invisible majority” in the Russian migration to Europe. However, by working on research projects in the sphere of migrant women, establishing contacts with various community organizations, consulting experts, we draw attention to the fact that, first of all, that women are not only a significant part of immigration but also extremely active (both socially and culturally) part of it.

Keywords: social adaptation; Russian-speaking migrants; Women-Migrants Advanced (WMA); cross-cultural communication; entrepreneurial skills of migrants; level of tolerance.

Introduction

The relevance of the article is due to the increasing flows of highly qualified migrants from Russia and the CIS countries to Europe. The purpose of the article is to summarize the changes in the Women-Migrants Advanced (WMA) category over the past 5-7 years. The article presents the results of a long-term sociological survey based on the study of the WMA category from the former USSR to Belgium.

IMAGRI has been studying the social adaptation of Russian-speaking migrants of the WMA category in Europe since 2009, on the example of Belgium, Germany, and France. The NGO "IMAGRI" was the first to enter European institutions with projects of forums on entrepreneurship for women migrants. The series was titled "Forums Advanced Women" with the year indicated. Our initiative to integrate WMA in Europe through entrepreneurship was later intercepted by well-known women's organizations: Women Lobby (EWL), Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) and other umbrella NGOs.

WMA strive to self-realize in a new country, to reach heights in new socio-cultural conditions. In 2012 the research project Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) studied business-migrant in Europe. It has become clear that migrants' entrepreneurship is important, both for the host countries and for the countries where migrants have moved from; especially "through the transfer of knowledge and information, global trade, job creation and other benefits" [4].

It is important to underline that, according to many sources, women of the WMA category constitute a hidden majority in Russian-speaking migration to the Old World [1].

"When answering the question about who their children should feel, women in the WMA category actively choose answers that imply close concepts for them: a "citizen of the world", "citizen of Europe" but at the same time emphasize that children should remember their origin roots." [3].

In order to summarize the changes in the category of WMA migrants over the past 5-7 years, the article provides a general description of women from the WMA category and the results of a long-term monitoring of the given group using the example of Belgium according to the following criteria: geography of immigration from the former USSR to the EU, reasons for moving to the EU, plans for the future, education and development of children, educational level of migrant women, professional interests, marital status, employment sphere, psychological problems.

The novelty of the survey is also due to the fact that the category of WMA migrants has never been in the focus of special attention before; research on this category of migrants is conducted almost exclusively at our International Migration and Gender Research Institute. The results are presented in the article.

1. Terminology and brief history of the problem

By WMA we mean a migrant woman who comes to Europe from the ex-USSR country, who has at least 1-2 higher educations and takes an active social position. WMA has highly developed cross-cultural communication skills. The category of women actively adopts culinary habits, clothing style, business and everyday communication traditions, as they want to continue

their successful life and career in the new country but in about half of the cases it does not solve the problem of self-realization.

WMA differ significantly from other European immigrants, including those from Russian-speaking migration. They have a very good education but they do not set career goals, and have moved to another country just to “be married in Europe,” for example.

2. Data and Methods

In the first surveys in several EU countries, we compared each category of migrants with WMA. So, we were able to identify the attitude of Russian-speaking migrants to European values. The ratio was different for WMA and other migration categories. WMA had the highest result in striving to positively perceive, develop a love for European values and a new country of residence in their children. And at the same time, work on preserving the native language and native culture of children and this level also turned out to be very high.

For four years IMAGRI implemented the original RESTART project in Belgium, France, Czech Republic and Scotland, made possible by EU grants. The idea of the project was to help migrants develop new business skills. In RESTART only WMA participated.

We also tested colleagues' assertion that “intercultural training is a fairly new, modern and successful method for improving the quality and speed of the learning process, representing a guided process of individual and group experiences and the ability to test the level of intercultural competence of an individual and the entire work group or collective.” [2].

Over the course of four years, a total of more than 200 WMAs from Belgium, France, Czech Republic, Great Britain (Scotland) took part in surveys, focus groups and seminars. At several thematic seminars in different countries, we offered WMA respondents questionnaires. We received somewhat more information about the women who participated in the survey than is usually contained in the responses to standard questionnaires (in particular, background: social origin, previous and current living conditions, education, etc.). IMAGRI managed to compile a typical portrait of a “woman - cross-cultural communicator-2014”, however, monitoring continued until the beginning of 2020.

The work was carried out using modern online technologies that do not require personal meetings. Today we can compare the first and new results on the WMA group and see how its structure, mood and activity have changed over the past time. Since 2014, IMAGRI research has shifted mainly to Belgium. However, we consider the obtained data to be correct for analysis and generalization for the entire European Union as this country is objectively quite difficult for WMA migration, especially for a Russian-speaking one: many bureaucratic obstacles prevent high-skills migrations from getting here; in Belgium there are no programs similar to the existing ones, for example, in Croatia, Czech Republic, Montenegro, where over the past 10 years there has been a huge increase in the Russian-speaking population.

3. Results and Discussion

By the end of 2016, 90% of our research and sociological observations had moved to social networks in the Internet. In just 6 years, in Belgium there formed a network of social associations where highly educated and female migration is present to a large extent. These are the groups on Facebook:

- *Friends' Meetings* – the most massive one (4,000 participants and their families) has existed for almost 10 years;
- *CultureConnection “ClickCLUB”* (more than 1,800 participants, 90% women);
- *Active mothers of Belgium* (1,300 people, 100% women).

To a very diverse audience of the first and for a long time the only site “Russians in Belgium” (<https://www.russian-belgium.be>), which has existed for more than 15 years, several groups mentioned above have added and quickly become popular, thus, revealing an interesting migration section. We have got confirmation: WMA in Belgium really prefer the named groups on social networks.

The survey results are certainly interesting in dynamics, since they allow predicting the development of the situation with respect to WMA in European countries in the coming years. The summarized results of our work, monitoring of social networks and social groups are presented in the tables below. The left column reflects the geography, activity, interests, WMA activities in 2014, the right one – data for the end of 2019-beginning of 2020.

Table 1

Causes and aims of migration to the EU

2014	2014	2019 (data in Belgium)
Moving to her husband		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving with a family (with a husband who got a job; mostly an IT specialist) (see note 1). • Women – former top managers in serious areas of business, striving to self-realization (not for the sake of earning money, the family does not experience financial problems), participate in creative projects (perhaps not corresponding to their qualifications). • Focus on what they love, not to make money. An occupation can also bring money but less than a complex business. Pleasure first, then commerce. (Conclusion is based on analysis of social media.) • Striving to “save oneself” in a new country (see note 2)
Getting married with a local after moving		
Arrival for temporary work or study and subsequent marriage with a European		

Notes.

1. Several years ago, in the Benelux, there appeared a “new Russian-speaking migration”: IT specialists, their family members from the ex-USSR, as well as “Russian Israelis” who had previously left for the Middle East. However, over time, their plans have changed and now they strive to remain as IT-specialists in Europe. The cost of living in these countries is comparable but the quality of life of a particular family depends on the demand in the labor market; moreover, migrants are not satisfied with Russian and Israeli domestic policies. This migration is very young in age, families live separately, keeping “Russian-speaking” contacts to a minimum. Sometimes they are due only to the presence of children who attend “Russian” classes. These migrants have practically no need for communication within the diaspora.

2. With the inevitable, under conditions of immigration, a breakdown of the usual way of life and the associated psychological problems, educated, thinking and reflective women usually come to the conclusion that it is more important for them to preserve themselves, the integrity of their own personality, than to ensure the previous level of personal income. Approximately 30% of Belgians, having married foreign women, take responsibility for the family and start supporting their wives – women no longer have to work. The rest (up to 70%) are determined that the wife will find a job and that it will happen as soon as possible and the spouses share the bills.

Table 2.

Plans for the future

Comparison items	2014	2019 (data in Belgium)
Immediate plans	Views are constructive, plans are specific	Shortening the time to implementing plans, increasing activity
Number of Russian schools, clubs, art courses, excursions for children and adults	100% (2014 conditionally adopted for 100%)	More than 300%
Suggestions for self-improvement, rest, training, coaching in any areas	Demand exceeds supply	Supply exceeds demand, especially in the area of programs for children
Employment of highly educated women	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Employment in the field of non-profit organizations. •Noticeable increase in the speed of language learning and integration

Table 3.

The level of education

Comparison items	2014	2019 (data in Belgium)
Higher education (1 or more diplomas)	95%	The general level of education is still high. Emigrants from Ukraine and Moldova, even with a university diploma, prefer to work in the field of low-skills services

Table 4.
Professional groups

Comparison items	2014	2019 (data in Belgium)
Areas of activity	Managers (in various fields), translators, employees of European institutions, private entrepreneurs, students of higher schools and courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large number of Russian-speaking specialists, especially in the field of IT. • Students (the cost of education is very competitive for Western Europe; preferences for future citizenship). • Private entrepreneurship (no law on business emigration; quite comfortable conditions for starting a business). • Volunteers or partially paid employees in public cultural and educational organizations. Directors of children's programs. • Russian-speaking specialists in the social sphere: sociologists, psychologists, doctors. • Most of WMA is employed by non-profit organizations

Table 5.
Marital status

Comparison items	2014	2019 (data in Belgium)
Marital status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 2/3 are married; about 1/3 are not married. • Most of the divorces took place in Europe after moving 	The ratio is approximately the same; however, now a significant part arrives in Belgium with Russian-speaking spouses

Table 6.
Appeals to psychologists
Problems are posed as they are topical in the 2014 column

Comparison items	2014-2016	2019-2020 (data in Belgium)
Children's problems	Difficulties in adapting to a new school	The problem has shifted to the 5th position

Comparison items	2014-2016	2019-2020 (data in Belgium)
Spouses' problems	Negative changes within the family in the context of migration. Problems of intercultural dialogue in international families	Problems have remained in 2nd-3d positions in terms of frequency of visits to psychologists
WMA Appeals	Lack of demand and lack of realization in new realities	Lack of demand and realization in new realities has shifted to the 1st position
Dissatisfaction with a status change in a new country	The biggest personal dramas	The biggest personal dramas (no changes)

At the beginning of the discussion, in focus groups, in chats, at specially organized online meetings, almost all the participants said: knowledge of the language, traditions, culture would remove many restrictions in self-realization. However, upon detailed elaboration of the answers, it turned out: some of the audience had diplomas of higher education, some spoke several foreign languages but their work was below the desired level or they could not find a job at all.

Almost all respondents (96%) certainly belong to the image of a “specialist in multicultural dialogue,” but in the new country (they have a good job, anticipating a better one), only half of them have been realized. The second half only dreams of the beginning of growth.

In today's reality, it is obvious: for a part of the WMA group, the question of returning to a position equivalent to that which was “in another life” (for example, in Moscow) is not urgent. For many, creativity, realization in a completely new sphere – social, which they did not even think about in a past life, have become priorities. We noticed, in particular, a great desire to self-realization through the discovery of new intellectual and cultural projects for children.

And also, there appeared a huge number of Russian-language studios for adults, mainly for women: art studios, floristry, poetry clubs, psychological and business trainings.

We asked the key question, “What prevents women migrants from developing business in a new country?” Every third answer was: “Lack of a productive idea”, and more than half: “Lack of start-up capital” and “Having young children”. Of course, “ignorance of the language” was noted as an important factor but WMA do not define it as decisive.

Conclusion

Thus, for “our” category of migrants, WMA, who are specifically surveyed by IMAGRI, there needed special integration programs. The fact that **the method of integration in a new country through involvement in entrepreneurship** works, has been proved by our RESTART project and later monitoring studies, which are going on almost non-stop until today.

This conclusion logically follows another: the standard programs of integration courses require serious revision and must take into account the different status of the migrants who have arrived. Today, almost all programs are focused on the so-called low-skilled jobs migrants.

Our conclusion contradicts the widespread notion in the EU that foreign language and excellent intercultural dialogue skills uniquely solve the problems of full realization of immigrants from the WMA category.

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