

# ATTITUDE TOWARDS MIGRANTS OF DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES AS A FACTOR OF SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL QUALITY

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## Abstract

Problems of the human capital quality of a territory and the social identity of its inhabitants are strongly interrelated. The key idea of this article is to explain the importance of the attitude of a host community towards foreign migrants in the system of social identity formation for both of these groups, since this influences the quality of human capital. From the perspective of social construction theory, the authors of the article analyze the problems of forming a common Russian identity among the citizens of Ekaterinburg (Russia) and migrants of different ethnicities from Central Asia. Using the methods of questionnaire survey, correlation analysis, analysis of social distance based on the Bogardus scale, and analysis for study groups, the authors define a set of cultural factors that determine attitudes towards migrants of different ethnicities. The authors of the article are sure that forming a common social identity for members of the host community and migrants of different ethnicities is complicated by the divergence of their cultural norms and rules and the reluctance of the host community to change under the conditions of the transformation of the external environment due to migration streams. The fact that the hosts do not understand the expedience of receiving so many external migrants also has a large impact.

**Key words:** migrants, social identity, attitude towards migrants, cultural distance, social distance

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## Introduction

Educational background, age, and professional qualifications are considered to be the most important characteristics of human capital in all countries. Developed countries compete with each other for migrants able to boost the economic, political, and social development of their territories. On the one hand, this allows them to solve the problem of labor scarcity and increase the demographic potential of the country. On the other hand, increasing migration flows might

result in the identity dilution of the territory's inhabitants, which might provoke negative consequences. Foreign migrants do not always choose the strategy of adopting the identity of the host territory. The choice of identification made by the migrants depends, among other things, on the attitude of the host community towards them. An important role is also played by the cultural distance perceived by the local population subjectively, which, in turn, determines the social distance with migrants of different ethnicities.

## Literature review

The problem of the interrelation between human capital and a country's welfare has been studied by many authors. Mussarat Khadija Khan mentions that the significance of human capital is widely recognized, and is deemed to be one of the most important factors of economic growth due to increases in the educational level and improvement in the health of the population (Khan, 2016). Nimesh Salike, describing the structure of human capital characteristics, suggests using six indicators: endowment, utilization, demography, productivity, support and health (Salike, 2016).

The notion of identity has a very blurred definition in the present scientific context. Such polysemy reduces the productivity of using this term both as an analytical category and as an object of practical activities. Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper point out the necessity of formulating a clearer definition for the term (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). As Philipp Schröder and Manja Stephan-Emmrich aptly note, the identity of migrants of different ethnicities is multi-layered: migrants possess both the identity of their native country and that of the host country. Besides, according to these authors, some ethnic groups of Central Asian countries may draw on pre-Soviet identities reflecting their "nomadic heritage" (Schröder & Stephan-Emmrich, 2016). Susanne Thieme, studying migrants from Central Asia, proposed to analyze "transnational migrations" alongside problems of the "means of existence" (Thieme, 2008).

An important role in the processes of forming a common identity for locals and migrants is played by the multi-layered identity possessed by citizens of the host country. Russian researchers note that the civil (citizenship) identity of Russian citizens prevails over the ethnic one (Drobizheva, 2017).

A prominent place in contemporary studies of migration problems is held by the problematic of cultural incompatibility of locals and migrants. Philipp Schröder and Manja Stephan-Emmrich, defending the use of the term "translocal" as compared to "transnational", claim that cultural and language borders can be of greater importance than national ones

(Schröder & Stephan-Emmrich, 2016). Gisela Waisman and Birthe Larsen suppose that the attitude towards migrants in Sweden on the part of the local population influences the revenues and the overall quality of life of the migrants (Waisman & Larsen, 2016). Studies carried out in Russia demonstrated that all major ethnic groups in general perceive Ukrainians and Moldavians as potential neighbors, but are more unfriendly towards people of Caucasian and Central Asian descent (Bessudnov, 2016).

## **Methodology**

Attitude towards migrants is viewed in the present article as a factor influencing two social processes: 1) the formation of a common social identity for the host community and migrants of different ethnicities and 2) the formation of the human capital of a territory. These two processes are closely interrelated. Readiness to form a common social identity between the host community and migrants of different ethnicities increases the potential of the human capital of a territory and gives a new impulse to its social and economic development. A common social identity is based on an understanding of a common affiliation with the specific territory shared by both groups and of the fact that cooperation is more beneficial than confrontation.

The authors of the article rely on the approach of V. A. Yadov, who distinguishes between two notions: identity as clear self-perception of a person alongside a clear understanding of the concepts of “they” and “us”; and identification as a process of achieving this understanding by means of exploration, comprehension of and choosing the rules and the regulations of different social structures (Yadov, 1995). Studying the problematic of forming social identity from the point of view of social constructivism, the authors, taking their cue from V. V. Kochetkov, deem it necessary to take into account the influence that “perception by others” has on personality: if a person finds him or herself in the state of an outsider when entering a new environment, he or she starts considering him or herself an outsider, which will become an integral part of his or her identity (Kochetkov, 2012).

The interrelation between attitude towards migrants of different ethnicities and forming a common social identity is scrutinised on the basis of materials obtained during an empirical study. In May 2016, the authors of the article carried out a survey of a representative sample of 485 Ekaterinburg citizens. The selection of respondents was carried out in accordance with a quota sample, taking into account age, gender, and district of the city. We were interested in the attitude of the respondents towards migrants of different ethnicities from Central Asian countries (Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmens), as these are the largest groups of migrants represented in the city. We fixed the ethnic affiliation of an individual according to

his or her self-identification. Social distance was measured using the classical Bogardus scale. The indices obtained were interpreted using the methodology proposed by researchers from the Institute of Sociology of the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences (Sergeev, 2008).

## Results

Ekaterinburg is a large and dynamic Russian city with a population exceeding 1.5 million people. Its geographical location on the border between Europe and Asia has brought about a relatively high influx of migrants from Central Asian countries. In the framework of the study carried out, the attitude of Ekaterinburg citizens towards migrants of different ethnicities was assessed through the social distance they felt and their attitude towards the growing numbers of migrants of different ethnicities from Central Asia in the city.

We measured social distance in the following way: from 1 point (possible to enter into a marriage with a representative of another ethnic group) to 7 points (impossible to be citizens of the same country). The scale was based on a cumulative principle. Thus, the closer the index obtained as a weighted average of all responses was to 1, the shorter the social distance between ethnic groups as perceived by the respondents.

**Tab. 1: The index of social distance with migrants of different ethnicities from Central Asian countries**

Group rank	Ethnic group	Social distance index	Interpretation of the index
1	Kazakhs	4,49	Tolerance
2	Kirghiz	5,14	Isolation
3	Turkmen	5,17	Isolation
4	Uzbeks	5,18	Isolation
5	Tajiks	5,25	Isolation

Source: author's own data.

The calculations show that Ekaterinburg citizens feel that the social distance between themselves and migrants from Central Asia is relatively high: more than 4 points. At the same time, it must be noted that ethnic Kazakhs are perceived by Ekaterinburg citizens as a social group closer to them than migrants from other Central Asian countries. Interpretation of the indices obtained allows us to define the attitude towards migrants from Central Asia on the part of Ekaterinburg citizens as a drive for isolation. Russian citizens of Ekaterinburg display a tolerant attitude only towards ethnic Kazakhs: they do not want to interact with other ethnic groups and try to isolated themselves from them.

Along with measuring social distance, in our study we used a direct method of measuring the attitude displayed by Ekaterinburg citizens towards the increasing numbers of migrants of different ethnicities through a respective question. Analyzing the data obtained, one

can note that a negative attitude is prevalent (60.2 %). 30.9 % of Ekaterinburg citizens do not have a clear position (they are indifferent to this trend or undecided). Only 8.9 % of respondents answered that they had a positive attitude towards the growing number of migrants in the city.

The detected interrelation between the attitude towards the increasing number of migrants and the evaluation of this process as a problem for Ekaterinburg speaks of the stability of a negative attitude. 76 % of the respondents who expressed a negative attitude towards the increasing number of migrants consider it to be a problem for the city. Among the respondents who do not have a clear position, less than one third of those surveyed think so (28.7 %). Among those who have a positive view of this situation, only 18.6 % consider that the increasing number of migrants is a problem for Ekaterinburg. These data confirm the commitment of Ekaterinburg citizens to social isolation from the majority of the ethnic groups from Central Asia.

When analyzing the factors influencing the attitude towards the increasing number of the migrants of different ethnicities, we have not revealed any statistical dependence on the characteristics of the respondents, such as their gender, age, education, nationality or confession. We have fixed the influence of two factors on the attitude of Ekaterinburg citizens towards the increasing number of migrants: the presence of actual contact with representatives of ethnic groups and the prevailing identity of the respondent. Thus, 60.5 % of the respondents with a positive view of the increasing number of migrants of different ethnicities note that there are migrants from Central Asia in their social networks. Among those who have shown a negative attitude towards the increasing number of migrants, less than half (41.4 %) have had contacts with the mentioned ethnic groups.

**Tab. 2: Influence of prevailing identity on the attitude towards the increasing number of the migrants of different ethnicities from Central Asia in Ekaterinburg (%)**

Which community do you consider yourself to be a representative of in the first place?	Attitude towards the growing number of non-Russian migrants from Central Asia in Ekaterinburg			
	Positive	No clear position	Negative	In general
Russian citizen (on the basis of citizenship)	32,6	18,7	26,0	24,3
Russian national (on the basis of place of birth)	18,6	18,7	24,0	21,9
Representative of a certain national group	7,0	9,3	11,0	10,1
All three variants	16,3	29,3	32,2	29,9
Undecided	25,5	24,0	6,8	13,8
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: author's own data. Value of the chi-square criterion: 34.767.

We can draw a conclusion that those respondents who have shown a positive view of the increasing number of migrants of different ethnicities are either characterized by the prevailing identity of a citizen or are undecided about their identity. Those who have shown a negative attitude are characterized by a close connection between the identity of a citizen and ethnic identity.

Considering the attitude towards migrants shown by the host community, an important factor influencing the process of forming a common social identity, we have analyzed the interrelation between attitude towards the growing number of migrants and readiness to perceive migrants from Central Asia countries who have already been in Russia for several years as “fellows”.

**Tab. 3: Influence of the attitude shown by Ekaterinburg citizens to the growing number of the migrants of different ethnicity from Central Asia on their readiness to perceive them as “fellows” (%)**

Attitude towards the growing number of migrants of different ethnicities	Readiness to perceive migrants as “fellows”			
	“Fellows”	No clear position	“Aliens”	Total
Positive	62,8	32,5	4,7	100,0
No clear position	31,3	57,4	11,3	100,0
Negative	25,8	25,1	49,1	100,0
Total	30,8	35,7	33,5	100,0

Source: author's own data. Value of the chi-square criterion: 99,608.

One can see that the number of respondents ready to perceive migrants as “fellows” is two times higher among those who have a positive view of the growing number of migrants in Ekaterinburg than among the citizens in general.

The possibility of forming a common social identity is related to the possibility of migrants receiving Russian citizenship, as the identity of a citizen prevails over ethnic identity among Russian citizens. It is necessary to underline that, according to the citizens, an indispensable condition for granting citizenship to migrants is that they obey Russian legislation and cultural norms.

**Tab. 4: Influence of the attitude of citizens towards the growing number of migrants of different ethnicities on their readiness to agree to granting Russian citizenship to the migrants (%)**

Attitude towards the growing number of migrants of different ethnicities from Central Asia in Ekaterinburg	Readiness to agree to granting Russian citizenship to migrants from Central Asia at their will			
	Agree upon condition that they obey our laws and cultural norms	No clear position	Disagree	Total
Positive	93,0	2,3	4,7	100,0
No clear position	72,7	14,6	12,7	100,0
Negative	59,2	2,4	38,4	100,0
Total	66,4	6,2	27,4	100,0

Source: author's own data. Value of the chi-square criterion: 65,752.

Those who demonstrate a positive attitude towards the growing number of migrants in Ekaterinburg more often agree to the possibility of granting Russian citizenship to migrants than the citizens in general. Therefore we can draw a conclusion that the group of Ekaterinburg citizens demonstrating a positive attitude towards the growing number of migrants of different ethnicities can be viewed as more inclined to forming a common social identity with them. Thus, we decided to mark out the statistically significant features of this group.

**Tab. 5: Comparison of the viewpoints of two groups of respondents (%)**

Variable	Value	Difference	Positive attitude towards the growing number of migrants of different ethnicities	Negative attitude towards the growing number of migrants of different ethnicities
Which circumstances shared by migrants and us may be considered important for increasing the "similarity" of locals and migrants?	Living in Ekaterinburg	37,1	53,5	16,4
	Affiliation with the same social group (e.g., students or workers)	25,1	51,2	26,0
	Collaborative work	23,6	46,5	22,9
	The same age	30,6	39,5	8,9
	Participation in the same events and city actions	19,8	34,9	15,1
	Neighborhood (house, yard, accommodation)	18,5	32,6	14,0
Do you think it would be better for the migrants and for us if the migrants completely assimilate with Russian culture?	It is better if they preserve their culture	34,8	69,8	34,9
To what extent are you personally ready to change under the influence of new cultural norms brought by migrants?	For reasons of security, I'm ready to partially change my cultural habits	25,0	32,6	7,5

Source: author's own data.

Thus, the respondents demonstrating a positive attitude towards the growing number of migrants of different ethnicities suppose that fellowship with migrants is, in the first instance, formed on the basis of living in the same territory and affiliation with the same social group. At the same time, they do not insist on the complete cultural assimilation of migrants. More than one third of the respondents belonging to this group are ready to partially change their cultural habits for secure co-existence with migrants, which also speaks for the potential of forming a common social identity.

## Conclusions

According to the authors of the article, a negative attitude towards migrants slows down the process of forming a common social identity among people in the same territory, which, in turn, reduces the quality of the human capital. The social distance between locals and migrants of different ethnicities is an important indicator of the success rate of the process of forming a common social identity between locals and migrants. The respondents perceive ethnic groups from Central Asian countries (except for Kazakhs) in a non-tolerant way and do not want to interact with them. This influences the fact that the majority of the respondents have a negative view of the growing number of migrants from Central Asia. At the same time, there exists a group of respondents (8.9 %) with a positive attitude towards the growing number of migrants from Central Asia. This attitude is influenced by interaction with migrants and the self-identification of the respondent being wider than an ethnic identity. This group can be characterized by features speaking for the possibility of forming a common social identity with migrants from Central Asia. A common identity may be based on recognition of residence in the same territory and affiliation with the same social group. Increasing the quality of the human capital of a territory is possible only if people staying in the territory orient themselves towards collaborative activities for its economic and social development. Thus, it is important to form a common social identity for the local population and migrants through the purposeful activities of governing bodies.

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