Labor Migration: Economic and Social Effects
(A Sociological Survey)

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Abstract—This paper is based on the results of a survey of households of labor migrants in 10 large cities of Russia: demographic composition of migrants; incidence of employment outside the native community and its geography; wealth and living conditions of the families of labor migrants. It examines the efficiency of outside employment and migration plans of migrants’ families. All problems are analyzed at the level of cities and types of employment.

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Labor migration as a new type of population mobility. Mass labor migration is a relatively new kind of work mobility both for Russia and for CIS countries. The growth of labor migration was caused by difficult economic situation and ruin of the former sphere of employment in the post-Soviet territory. In the result of labor migration rather a big sector of employment was created exclusively due to personal initiative of citizens and has become the dominant way for millions of citizens of the former USSR to earn their livelihood.

Migration had a clearly labor character as early as in the Soviet Union. Thus, movement to work used to be the main reason for change of the place of residence. But labor migration, unlike resettlement, does not imply change of the permanent place of residence. In case of labor migration it is employment on the side and travel to it for a short time, and this travel implies return either to the sending country (external labor migration), or to the city (region) of permanent living (internal labor migration). In the USSR some other types of labor migration were also present ("seasonal workers", "otkhodniks", "shabashniks", etc.), but they were of a limited character [1, p. 4].

Labor migration without change of place of residence has got a great incidence in the CIS countries. Today it is the most mass and dynamic migration flow both in "sending" and "receiving" countries.

Comparative studies made in 2000 in some CIS countries showed that the most “migrational” countries were Armenia and Moldova where the labor migration accounted for almost 30% of households, Russia and Kazakhstan for about 10% [2, p. 67].

Russia attracts labor migrants from all CIS countries. Only a one-moment presence of labor migrants from the CIS countries in Russia makes by different estimations from 3 to 5 million. In these flows, citizens from the Transcaucasian countries, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine prevail. Thus, the total number of labor migrants from the Transcaucasian countries is estimated at 1.5 million, Ukraine 1–1.5 million, Tajikistan over 600 thousand, Kyrgyzstan 300–350 thousand, Moldova 200 thousand [3, pp. 75–78].

The attraction of foreign labor to the economy of Russia on the legal basis increased from 129 thousand in 1994 to 702.5 thousand in 2005, i.e. 5.4 times. In 2005 the CIS countries accounted for about 49% of all labor migrants attracted to Russia. However, the labor migration on the legal basis does not exceed, in experts’ estimation, 10–15% of the real number of workers migrants found in the country [4, p. 5].

According to estimations based on the 2000 surveys, labor migration involved 4–5 million of Russian citizens [1, p. 10]. Of these, about 1.5–2.0 million go as guest workers to other countries, as a rule, beyond the CIS, the rest of them look for job in Russia [5, p. 180].

The analysis below of tendencies of internal labor migration of Russian citizens in terms of its economic and social role for the migrants’ families is based on the survey of 143 migrant households in 10 large cities: St. Petersburg, Smolensk, Belgorod, Krasnodar, Nalchik, Kazan, Nizhni Novgorod, Orenburg, Novosibirsk and Vladivostok.

Portrait of a labor migrant. Labor migration involved, as a rule, household heads (52% in all cities): from 21% in Smolensk to 78% in Nizhni Novgorod. Next was husband (wife) of the household head (18%: from 10% in St. Petersburg to 29% in Nalchik); father (mother) of the household head (16%). One of ten was

1 The survey of the households of labor migrants was made in 2005 within the framework of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade project (No. 17.04.6/130): “Study of Migration Plans of the Population of the Russian Federation”. The study instruments included at first a special bloc of questions about the work outside the native community over the last two years asked of the respondents and/or members of their families. The survey included 3.2 thousand households of which 4.4% had migrants. The sample of labor migrants is purposive. The representative sample was impossible because of the absence of official data on the general population of those involved in labor migration, the more so, across regions.
Labor migration involved mainly men, their participation had increased from 63 to 75% [6, p. 150]. The survey has shown that there were differences between Russia’s cities in the degree of male/female participation in labor migration. Thus the share of men varied from 60% in Orenburg to 90% in St. Petersburg. The most active participation was noted among the women of Orenburg (40%) (in St. Petersburg, one in ten).

There were changes in the distribution of men and women by types of occupational activity (Fig. 1). Thus, in the “shuttle” business male participation increased by a factor of 1.5 and female participation decreased by a factor of 1.7.

Male/female participation in work for hire or on contract changed: male participation decreased and female, on the contrary, increased. The share of women employed for hire was higher than in the “shuttle” business and much higher than in the building sector. And only the relationship of men to women employed in building and maintenance work did not change.

The labor migration involves the most active part of urbanites. Fig. 2 compares the age structures of labor migrants by the results of the surveys. The participation of persons aged below 29 increased 1.5 times, while the participation of the 40–49 age group diminished almost to the same degree. The participation of the 30–39 age group largely did not change.

The age structure of all respondents (including labor migrants) in the cities of Russia had some differences. Thus, in Novosibirsk about half were urban dwellers 40–49 years of age, in Kazan almost two thirds were in the 30–39 age group. In Smolensk the predominance (by more than a half) was of people in the age group under 29 year of age.

Labor migration involved the most educated part of the city population: persons with higher and attended higher education have the leading position. Comparing to the 2000 survey their share diminished a little (from 48% to 42%), but the number of urbanites with middle and incomplete middle education who began to participate in temporary migration doubled. Participation in labor migration of the urbanites with middle vocational education diminished by a factor of 1.5 (Fig. 3).

The cities differed in the educational structure of respondents: in Nalchik, Kazan and Belgorod persons with higher and attended higher education prevailed; in Smolensk, Orenburg, Novosibirsk and in Vladivostok...