



DISCRIMINATION AND XENOPHOBIA AGAINST LABOUR MIGRANTS – RESULTS OF THE SMALL SCALE SURVEY IN ALMATY, REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

As part of the regional programme on migration for Central Asia and Russia being implemented jointly by the International Organisation for Migration, UN Women and the World Bank with the financial support of the Government of the United Kingdom, gender-sensitive strategies are being developed for the social integration of labour migrants in host societies in four pilot regions: Moscow, St. Petersburg and Almaty cities and South Kazakhstan oblast. In every region, working groups have been created and are working actively. Members include representatives of sectoral government bodies, local authorities, NGOs, the mass media, labour migration experts, gender experts and others. Every working group is following a work plan, which includes analysis, regular meetings, public hearings and so on. Local partners are assisting with general coordination: in Almaty, the local partner is Podrugy Crisis Centre.

Currently, the strategies prepared for all the pilot regions are being actively discussed with local partners. As part of strategy development, note was taken of good practice in various states of resolving issues around the adaptation and integration of migrants in the following categories: legislation regulating the integration of migrants; target groups for integration measures at various levels; the responsibilities of the state authorities; ensuring the rights of migrants and providing them with access to social and other services, in various fields; the functions of organisations providing integration services; and others. Particular attention was paid to the various methods and mechanisms by which governments can resolve issues around the integration of migrants in the host community with the maximum benefits for all parties to the migration process.



Social integration is the process of establishing optimal links being relatively independent loosely-interlinked social objects (such as individuals, groups, social classes, or states), and their subsequent transformation into a single integrated system consisting of harmonious and interdependent parts. It is based on common values and interests. Integration is a two-sided process, which is based on the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of migrants and the host community. On the one hand, the host society is responsible for upholding the economic, social, cultural and civil rights of immigrants. On the other, immigrants should respect the norms and values of the host country.

The essence of integration is that newly-arrived persons become a part of the environment to which they have moved for whatever reason, and have enough **opportunities to realise their potential**. The **integration policy** of a country should be based on a system of legal measures and practical mechanisms to regulate the processes of including immigrants in the host society, in accordance with the economic, demographic, geopolitical, social and cultural aims of that society. Integration policy should pursue the following **aims of integration**:

- To allow migrants to realise their personal, economic and social potential and ensure protection of the human rights of migrants;
- To reduce the level of alienation and marginalisation in society; and
- To allow for the achievement and preservation of social unity, cohesion and harmony in society and the state.

Social cohesion of society requires that all population groups belong to it; enjoy recognition and legitimacy, and are involved in and participate in the life of that society. Such a society is not necessarily demographically homogenous. Rather, on the basis of respect for diversity it utilises the potential of social diversity (ideas, opinions, skills and so on). Therefore, such a society is less prone to destructive forms of tension and conflict when there is a collision of differing interests.

In global practice, promotion of social integration is undertaken in three areas: the resolution of problems of discrimination; adaptation and integration of migrants in the host society; and family reunification. The issue of social integration of migrants in Kazakhstan and Russia, the largest recipients of migrants, is becoming more urgent every day. However, until recently it has not been taken seriously for various reasons. Firstly, destination countries of labour migration are not prepared to consider this component of it. Secondly, labour migrants are unaware about the existing opportunities for integration into the local society. Thirdly, the one-sided perception of social integration in host countries is also problematic, as it assumes that just labour migrants need to make an effort to integrate.

At the present time, a social integration strategy for labour migrants in the host society is being developed for Almaty city in Kazakhstan. The main aim of the strategy is to create a favourable migration climate in Almaty city, taking into account the needs and requirements of labour migrants and members of their families. The strategy will be

based on effective measures to prevent discrimination and ensure social cohesion.

In this connection it is very important to regularly monitor the psychological wellbeing of labour migrants and their families, and the state of the social environment which they inhabit.

With this aim in mind, the Podrugy crisis centre



conducts surveys of labour migrants in order to explore the social integration of labour migrants and members of their families in the host society in Almaty city. The areas covered in this survey, conducted in September 2012, were selected based on the results of social research carried out in 2010 to develop a socioeconomic portrait of labour migrants in Kazakhstan.

The study report states that “In Kazakhstan, a steady tendency of territorial differentiation of labour migrants has emerged: in Almaty city, people from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are employed. Migrants from Kyrgyzstan prefer to work in trades and services, as do migrants from Tajikistan.

During the survey respondents were asked questions to assess their stays in Almaty city, and the factors influencing the level of tolerance of labour migrants in the host society.

The interviews with labour migrants (a total of 150 persons, of whom 70 had come from Kyrgyzstan and were trading, mainly, in consumer goods; 50

men - from Tajikistan and were working in the field of street trade and agriculture; and 30 people (of whom 20 were women) citizens of Kazakhstan who had come to Almaty city from neighbouring southern regions and are conducting street trade) were conducted in the following places: Barys, the central clothing market (fleamarket); Bolashak; Olzha; Alatau; Kayagoz; the Altyn Orda wholesale market; vegetable stalls on the city’s street; KSK; a private cattle-breeding complex; a private construction site; and the Tiana supermarket.

During the interviews it was noted that in general labour migrants were very wary of requests by Centre staff to answer survey questions. Despite the fact that the staff members guaranteed full confidentiality, the labour migrants who agreed to answer the survey questions responded in a very guarded and uninformative way, mainly limiting their answers to “yes” and “no”. Questions on whether the respondents had registration elicited confusion and embarrassment – it was clear that several respondents were not registered, while most of the interviewees were poorly informed about the rights





they saw a “document” in the hands of the Centre staff member, they felt afraid and suspicious. One of the labour migrants asked to read the survey questions independently, and was allowed to. In a few cases, requests to ask the survey questions were answered with categorical refusals delivered in very rude manner.

Centre staff members noted that male labour migrants from Tajikistan were the most active and friendly, and they were interviewed without difficulty. These migrants answered the questions fully, providing commentary, telling their personal stories. They talked about their difficulties, in particular with regard to getting their children into schools and preschool institutions, reporting that many of their compatriots, who work at the flea market, have permanent residence status or citizenship of Kazakhstan, and so have less trouble with various challenges. Members of this group stated that they all want to receive permanent residence status or citizenship of Kazakhstan.

Most of the labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan simply refused to participate in the survey. Of those who agreed, some were taciturn and suspicious. One of the surveyed migrants from Kyrgyzstan said that many people from their country receive medical assistance there. Another said that they resort to various tricks in crossing the border, including bypassing the border crossing point.

and responsibilities of foreign citizens. It should be noted that many of the respondents did not understand the meaning of the word “discrimination” at all. It is notable that at the beginnings of conversations, before the survey, labour migrants felt more comfortable, but on seeing the questionnaire, when

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The survey respondents were aged 29 to 42 years old: that is, they were of active working age.
- Most of the respondents were women (75 percent of the interviewees), and married with

children. For them issues of access to education and healthcare were pointed as a high priority as well as access to other services linked with residence in the host country for non-citizens and with opportunities for the social integration in the host community.



"... I came from Uzbekistan, and we come here every three months to work. We have a problem getting our son into school. They don't want to take him because he's a foreigner. I talked with the director and explained that we plan to apply in the future for permanent residence, but they still didn't admit him..."

- The educational attainment of most respondents was graduation from secondary school. Twenty per cent (30 persons, of whom 20 were men) had not completed secondary school, which would appear to indicate that the respondents are not competitive in their domestic labour markets, bearing in mind the high unemployment rates in their countries of origin. This is one of the reasons why they travelled to Kazakhstan to find work in the informal employ-

ment sector, which entails additional risks of violations of economic and social rights.

- Eighty per cent of respondents (120 persons, of whom 96 were women) have been in Kazakhstan for two or more years. This is long-term migration and therefore takes on certain features. In particular, extension of registration entails particular difficulties because it requires return to the country of origin and so on.

"... I prefer to receive medical treatment in my home country. Here in the municipal polyclinics they do not treat us, while private ones are very expensive..."

- Ninety per cent of the respondents (135 persons, of whom 104 were women) spoke either Kazakh or Russian, which helps them to find employment (70 per cent of respondents) and to resolve conflicts with the local authorities, including the police. Several persons who are citizens of Kazakhstan (from Zhambyl oblast) and sell fruit on the city's streets only know the state language. However, relatives nearby also know Russian, which prevents barriers to communication with city dwellers. It should

be noted that among the respondents who were citizens of Kyrgyzstan speak relatively good Russian, and they also understand Kazakh pretty well, which of course is a great help to them when communicating with the local population (they report they have no problems in this regard). However two male respondents stated that they have a problem understanding the state language, which mainly makes finding work more problematic.

"... I'm from Uzbekistan and don't know Kazakh well, so there are problems. Mainly when I'm looking for work. They offer very low wages..."

- Ninety five per cent of the respondents (143 persons of whom 109 were women) stated that they feel safe in Kazakhstan and that if

any conflict situations arise they will seek assistance from relatives and friends.



"I don't have problems with local residents. I sell things and they buy things. Nobody has insulted or demeaned me anywhere..."; "...it's better living here, there is always work. My wife and I have been working for seven years already and have almost saved enough to buy a flat in Bishkek..."; "...usually I resolve my problems myself. In exceptional cases I ask my friends for help. I prefer not to deal with the police..."; "...we don't have problems. We all have permanent residence. We don't break the law. My children are studying at school, and my wife is at home. Nobody treats us badly..."

- Three quarters of the respondents stated that the local population, including employers, treats them the same way as their co-nationals, but the police and migration service are prejudiced.

"... the district police are always demanding fines from me, I don't even know what for. I am afraid to go home after work. I have a visa for three months, but he didn't even look at it..."; "... my problems are resolved by our foreman. I don't have anything to do with the migration police. The foreman takes the documents himself where they need to go, and brings them back with a registration stamp..."

- Almost all the respondents who were labour migrants from abroad were registered with the migration police, along with members of their families. Of these migrants, 70 per cent (of whom 76 per cent were women) stated that they had paid fines (for late extension of registration) unofficially, from hand to hand.
- The fact that several respondents from Kyrgyzstan lacked registration with the migration police, in our opinion, is because labour migrants often use a "black route" when crossing the border between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic.

"...I know some compatriots who come to Kazakhstan avoiding the border post. It is much quicker, and you don't need to deal with the migration police. But if the police want to check your documents, you need to pay a fine."



Photographs by R. Kazaryan and I. Petkov (the photos used are not connected to the survey respondents).

