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## INTERNAL MIGRANTS IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE HOST POPULATION OF KAZAKHSTANI CITIES

The purpose of this article is to identify and comparatively analyze the perception of internal migrants by representatives of the host urban society. In the study, a series of focus groups were conducted in three cities to collect data, namely, Astana, Almaty and Shymkent. Discussion questions focused on the following topics: the image of the city in the minds of residents; urban identity, sense of attachment and urban culture; attitudes towards internal migration and internal migrants; practices of interaction with internal migrants. The article presents some results of the research project IRN AP09058370 "Social integration of internal migrants into the local community of large cities: social networks, social capital and development of urban space", funded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The results of the study show that residents of the three cities understand the processes of internal migration, which they regard as a natural phenomenon. In the cities, there is a division into «us» and «them», distancing citizens from internal migrants. The findings can be further used to forecast and adopt certain measures in migration and urban policy.

**Key words:** city, internal migrants, perception, host society.

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### Қазақстандық қалалардың қабылдаушы тұрғындарының ішкі мигранттарды қабылдауы

Берілген мақаланың мақсаты болып қабылдаушы қалалық қоғам өкілдерінің ішкі мигранттарды қабылдауын анықтау және салыстырмалы талдау табылады. Зерттеу барысында үш қалада, атап айтқанда, Астана, Алматы және Шымкентте деректер жинау үшін фокус-топтар сериясы жүргізілді. Талқылауға арналған сұрақтар келесі тақырыптарға арналды: жергілікті тұрғындардың көзқарасындағы қала бейнесі; қалалық сәйкестік, ынтық болу сезімі және қала мәдениеті; ішкі көші-қонға және ішкі мигранттарға қатынас; ішкі мигранттармен өзара әрекеттесу тәжірибесі. Мақалада Қазақстан Республикасы Білім және ғылым министрлігі қаржыландыратын IRN AR09058370 «Ірі қалалардың жергілікті қауымдастығына ішкі мигранттардың әлеуметтік интеграциясы: әлеуметтік желілер, әлеуметтік капитал және қала кеңістігін дамыту» зерттеу жобасының кейбір нәтижелері берілген. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, үш қала тұрғындарының ішкі көші-қон процестері туралы түсінігі бар, оны табиғи құбылыс деп санайды. Қалаларда «біз» және «бөтен адамдар» деп бөліну бар, бұл қала тұрғындарын ішкі мигранттардан алшақтатады. Нәтижелер болашақта көші-қон мен қала саясатының белгілі бір шараларын болжау және қабылдау үшін пайдаланылуы мүмкін.

**Түйін сөздер:** қала, ішкі мигранттар, қабылдау, қабылдаушы қоғам.

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### Внутренние мигранты в восприятии принимающего населения казахстанских городов

Целью настоящей статьи является выявление и сравнительный анализ восприятия внутренних мигрантов представителями принимающего городского общества. В исследовании для сбора данных была проведена серия фокус-групп в трех городах, в частности, в г.Астана, г.Алматы и г.Шымкент. Вопросы для обсуждения были сфокусированы на следующих темах: образ города в представлениях местных жителей; городская идентичность, чувство привязанности и городская культура; отношение к внутренней миграции и внутренним мигрантам; практика взаимодействия с внутренними мигрантами. В статье представлены некоторые результаты исследовательского

проекта IRN AP09058370 «Социальная интеграция внутренних мигрантов в местное сообщество крупных городов: социальные сети, социальный капитал и развитие городского пространства», финансируемого Министерством образования и науки Республики Казахстан. Результаты исследования показывают, что у жителей трех городов есть понимание процессов внутренней миграции, к которым они относятся как к естественному явлению. В городах наблюдается деление на «своих» и «чужих», дистанцирующих горожан от внутренних мигрантов. Выводы в дальнейшем могут быть использованы для прогнозирования и принятия тех или иных мер миграционной и городской политики.

**Ключевые слова:** город, внутренние мигранты, восприятие, принимающее общество.

## Introduction

The need to study the integration of internal migrants and their perception by the host society in the Kazakhstan context is due to the continuous urbanization of the population and the increasing intensity of internal migration in the country. A significant part of the migration flow and urban population is concentrated in large cities such as Astana, Almaty and Shymkent, which make up 37% of the total urban population of the country (Shaimardanova, 2022).

According to the three-stage theoretical model, the social integration of internal migrants is a complex and multidimensional process that can be divided into three successive stages: circular or educational migration, urban settlement, and urban integration (Sun et al., 2022). Each of these stages has its own characteristics related to the purposes of migration, the identity of migrants, aspects of social integration, and the role of urban policies. Urban integration is the final stage, in which migrants interact with the local population and take part in the life of the city. This stage promotes the establishment of social ties and the formation of social capital, which is a key aspect of successful integration. Cultural factors such as linguistic and urban identity also play an important role in this process, determining the «visibility» of internal migrants. Social interaction between rural-urban and urban migrants and the local population becomes a bridge that promotes mutual understanding and strengthens socio-cultural ties. Thus, the understanding of integration encompasses a mutual, two-way process of adaptation that develops between migrants and the host community.

The purpose of this article is to identify and comparatively analyze the perception of internal migrants by representatives of the host urban society. The main research focus was to answer the question: *How are internal migrants perceived by the local population?* Understanding these processes is important for the formation of effective urban policies

aimed at supporting the social integration of internal migrants and creating a harmonious urban society, where each member has the opportunity to realize their potential and contribute to its development.

## Literature review

In the Kazakhstani context, various issues of urbanization and internal migration are covered in detail in the works of foreign and domestic researchers (Tazhin&Tazhimbetov, 1993; Abzhaliyeva, 2000; Kozhamkulova, 2000; Alexander et al., 2007; Asanbayev, 2010; Sultangaliyeva, 2010; Zhusupova&Kenesov, 2012; Danzer, 2013; Nurusheva, 2013). The peculiarities of adaptation and perception of various categories of internal migrant groups by urban residents, including rural, intercity (Zabirova, 2002; Makhmutova, 2012) are determined by their lifestyle, social identity, socioeconomic status and cultural differences, inequality in terms of their power and resources (Yessenova, 2005; Bissenova, 2017). However, more research is needed that raises important issues of integration of internal migrants and at the same time highlights the role of the host society in this process. It is these aspects that this study seeks to update and explore in addition to the existing body of knowledge.

## Materials and methods

This study examines the attitude of local society towards internal migrants as the main structural and cultural conditions that determine the success of the integration of internal migrants into urban society.

The empirical basis of the study was formed by the data of focus groups with local residents of the cities. In order to identify the attitude of representatives of the host urban society towards internal migrants, a series of focus groups (Belanovsky, 1996) were conducted in three cities: Astana, Almaty and Shymkent.

The study participants were divided into two age groups: the first group included people aged 18 to

35, the second group – from 36 to 52 years. The total number of participants was 52 people, including 26 men and 26 women. The discussion questions focused on the following topics: the image of the city in the minds of local residents; urban identity, sense of attachment and urban culture; attitude towards internal migration and internal migrants; practice of interaction with internal migrants.

Conceptualization of concepts and categorization of cases and coding were carried out by means of inductive and then deductive analysis. At the same time, data collection and analysis, periodically replacing each other, represented an interconnected and intertwined process. Processing and analysis of qualitative data were carried out in the MAXQDA program.

### Results and discussion

Astana, Almaty and Shymkent have a common origin, associated with the creation of military fortifications during the times of Tsarist Russia. However, despite this common historical beginning, each of these cities has undergone a unique development, which has formed their «character». Migration is one of the key factors influencing the formation of urban culture in these cities. Throughout the history of these cities, they have attracted migrants from different regions and countries. Migrants brought with them their own cultural heritage, contributing to the formation of a multi-layered urban culture of each of these megapolises.

**Attitudes towards internal migration and internal migrants.** Residents of large cities view internal migration as a natural and necessary phenomenon caused by various factors, including economic difficulties such as unemployment, low wages, and unfavorable living conditions in rural and other regional areas. They also believe that internal migration provides cities with the necessary labor potential:

«As for migration, why not, let them come. Labor is always needed in any field. Even people from the village can demonstrate the qualities of workers that city dwellers don't have. Why not, let them come» (female, 37 years old, Astana);

«This is a completely natural process, our attitude towards it is the 20th thing because it is the same all over the world, there is a migration from small towns, from villages to big cities... and we have to put up with it, we have to adapt to it, that is, nothing can be done about it» (male, 47 years old, Almaty).

*«I understand the newcomers, they are not coming to Almaty because they have a good life, they are fleeing from dying villages» (male, 26 years old, Almaty);*

*«We welcome people who come to the city. Shymkent is expanding, we have no objections or bad thoughts. They can come and increase the population of this place and contribute to its development» (male, 36 years old, Shymkent).*

**The image of a migrant in the minds of city dwellers.** An analysis of the opinions of city dwellers allows us to conclude that the city of Shymkent is experiencing an influx of predominantly young migrants from villages and small towns. The category of young migrants can be divided into two subcategories: students who come to the city to obtain higher education, and young workers looking for work and employment:

*«Young people come to Shymkent to work, for example. They mainly come from Turkestan and other regions. There are many young people... students, for example...» (male, 29 years old, Shymkent);*

*«The leading universities are in Shymkent. Our students come to study from remote areas. Young families from villages and regions often come to us. Because now the city of Shymkent is expanding. Being a metropolis, many residential buildings are being built for the residents of Shymkent. It's right that they come. We don't mind» (male, 36 years old, Shymkent).*

Thus, in Shymkent, migration from neighboring rural and small towns predominates, while migration from large cities, including Almaty and Astana, is less common. This observation confirms that the city's characteristics, such as its traditional character and the prevalence of the Kazakh language, may influence the choice of migration destination for the population.

Almaty residents distinguish internal migrants by gender and age structure, noting that mostly young migrants of both sexes come to the city. Among young migrants, the category of students predominates, who come to Almaty to get higher education and stay in the city after completing it, becoming qualified specialists. City residents recognize this category of migrants as «benefit», which may be since these young people contribute to society by working and paying taxes. In addition, the successful integration of this category of migrants indicates their ability to accept the norms and values of the city of Almaty:

*«In my opinion, these are students. A lot of students come, and many go on to find employment... A lot of people come from northern Kazakhstan. From my observations. And you can also notice that in the summer our public transport is much freer than during school. We have significantly fewer people during the three summer months. What does this mean? That students go home in the summer. Therefore, I think first of all it is the youth, a lot of youth, newcomers in particular.» (female, 30 years old, Almaty);*

*«Both genders, not very highly qualified, mostly rural population, in my opinion. Well, work, well, probably, if there is a good job... they generally work everywhere» (male, 47 years old, Almaty).*

According to observations by urban residents, three categories of migrants are distinguished within the urban environment based on their place of origin: «rural», «from other/northern regions» and «southerners». The attitude of urban residents towards each of these categories may vary. The first category – «rural» includes migrants who have moved from rural areas or villages. The attitude of the urban population towards this category may be mixed. On the one hand, they may be perceived as less educated, which may be accompanied by stereotypes about a low standard of living and mentality. On the other hand, their migration may be perceived as a result of the desire to improve their living conditions or find better economic opportunities. The second category – «from cities/northern regions» includes migrants who have come from other regions of the country or cities, especially northern regions. The attitude towards this category is usually more favourable, since they come from regions similar to the urban environment in culture and language. This may contribute to a more harmonious adaptation and be more easily accepted by the urban population:

*«I think they are from the countryside. Because they are students again, these are grants. And grants are issued more to rural areas, there are certain quotas there. They are easier to accommodate in dormitories and so on. I think, percentage-wise, I think it's more from rural areas. But there are also just from cities. Usually those from big cities are like that, you know, it's even difficult to distinguish them. For example, from Karaganda, from central Kazakhstan, there from Taldykorgan, it's difficult to distinguish them from Almaty residents, I don't know, I noticed that» (male, 27 years old, Almaty).*

The third category – «southerners» includes migrants who came from other southern regions of the country. The attitude towards this category of

migrants may be associated with the assumption of some differences in language, culture and lifestyle, as well as with special economic conditions in their original regions. This can lead to various stereotypes or prejudices:

*«Well, our migrants in Almaty are mostly southerners. Most come from Dzhambul, Shymkent and regions. Well, I don't know, I'm not particularly delighted with these people. We don't need these southerners» (woman, 48 years old, Almaty).*

Based on the information provided, we can try to analyze the following categories of internal migrants in Astana. «Youth» – this category, as in Shymkent and Almaty, refers to young migrants, possibly students or graduates who come to Astana in search of education or work:

*«Mainly young people come to us, young people, because they believe that Astana is the city of the future and that here you can achieve something, develop your business. Let's say, get a good education. We have a lot of young people from different cities, regions and, let's say, according to my friends, many go to the capital because they think that this is the city of the future, there are many prospects here» (woman, 37 years old, Astana).*

«Southerners» is a category of migrants who move from the southern regions of Kazakhstan. Like Almaty, in Astana this category of migrants is subject to stigmatization and is the most visible among other internal migrants:

*«As far as I have noticed, people come from the south wanting to earn more. Well, you can divide them into 2 types: the edgy ones and the kinder ones. The edgy ones can get to you, if you don't like something, they can yell at you, argue. And there are more good-natured ones, when, for example, you go to the market, they will accept you as if you were a brother» (m., 18 years old, Astana).*

«Civil servants» – this category includes migrants attracted to work in state organizations or administrative institutions. This group of migrants mainly lives on the left bank of the Ishim river and is associated with this territory. Their presence on the left bank may be associated with the predominant placement of state institutions and offices in this part of the city.

«Handymen» – this category describes migrants engaged in various physical or unskilled jobs. This may include construction workers, loaders, cleaners and market workers, etc.

*«My opinion is that the main part, I can safely say 70%, of internal migrants are government employees who want to find themselves here and ad-*



vance their careers. The remaining 30 percent, I believe, are laborers who are trying to find and feed themselves and their families, because they cannot survive in their cities with a small salary, and accordingly they are trying to find a place in the sun here. We are trying to feed ourselves. And, probably, students come too. Because they study and stay here, many work here part-time, they stay here, they like it here, and many stay here» (woman, 38 years old, Astana).

The study confirms the presence of several categories of migrants in Astana, including «civil servants», «handymen», «youth» and «southerners». Observations of the study participants indicate that the bulk of internal migrants in Astana are civil servants who seek career growth and find themselves in the city. In addition, a significant portion of migrants are general workers who are looking for opportunities to support themselves and their families, due to difficult conditions and low salaries in their hometowns. In addition, youth is also a significant category of migrants attracted by the prospects of development, education and development of their own business in Astana. With regard to «southerners» – migrants from the southern regions of the country, various opinions are expressed, including negative stereotypes associated with socio-economic and cultural differences. At the same time, the study also points to similarities in behavior and character between local residents of Astana and migrants from neighboring cities and regions such as Kokshetau, Pavlodar and Petropavlovsk.

## Conclusion

Almost all residents of the three cities have an understanding of the internal migration processes, which they regard as a natural phenomenon. They

express an understanding of the current situation: the lack of work in villages and other regions, which provokes active migration to their cities. It should be noted that in the cities of Almaty and Astana, there is a clear division into «ours» and «strangers», while in Shymkent such distancing of city residents from internal migrants is not observed. In Almaty and Astana, «ours» are those who speak Russian, who accept and replicate practices characteristic of urban norms, and do not impose their traditions and norms «brought» from their native lands. «Strangers», on the contrary, are those who speak Kazakh, who do not accept urban practices, and impose their norms and values, alien to city residents. In Shymkent, where migration flows originate from nearby villages and small towns, the division into «ours» and «others» does not occur. It can be assumed that this occurs due to the homogeneity of the linguistic landscape and the similar socio-cultural component. And this fact can explain why internal migrants from other, presumably Russified cities, do not migrate to Shymkent.

If we consider internal migrants by category, we find one common category for all cities – young people of both sexes who either go to big cities to get a higher education or to find a job. At the same time, as the city residents themselves note, this is the most «good» category, since they integrate into the urban society easily and also bring good to society. In Almaty and Astana, there is a category of «southerners», which the residents of these cities treat with prejudice. They are the most «visible», along with «rural», since they differ in their behavioral model and language factor.

Local residents of the three cities note the ambition of internal migrants who want to earn money, get a city higher education, and generally improve their living conditions.

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