

SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF ORALMANS IN KAZAKHSTAN: DIFFICULTIES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract. *In this work the authors highlight the issue of ethnic migration in the Republic of Kazakhstan and analyze the problems of adaptation and integration of repatriates into Kazakhstani society. It is a complicated socio-demographic process and many researchers believe that prediction and management of ethnic migration significantly contribute to the establishment and development of a democratic state, while the loss of control over this process is likely to lead to the serious socio-economic and demographic consequences. The authors consider such issues as the ethnic identity of migrants, the linguistic adaptation of repatriates, the social and economic difficulties they face, and culture shock. Special attention is paid to the significance of language skills in the process of adaptation.*

Keywords: *oralmans, social adaptation, repatriation, language identity, cultural difference, ethnic migrants.*

Introduction. The issue of integration of oralmans today is among the most vulnerable topics in Kazakhstan as it is related to the process of immigration and internal stability and prosperity of the state. After the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan faced the considerable decrease of population due to emigration of Slavs nations from the country. It resulted on the adaption of the "On Immigration" in 1992 according to which ethnic Kazakhs were given the right to return to their "Historical homeland." Following the data of the press service of the Ministry of Health and social development of the Republic of Kazakhstan about 953000 ethnic Kazakhs returned to their historical homeland, and obtained the status of oralmans, representing 5.5 % of the total population of the country.

However, the process of repatriation seems to be continuous and effective, there are a number of difficulties which oralmans experience after returning to Kazakhstan. The poll of the social site Wechat, conducted among our compatriots in China, showed that 90 % of the Kazakhs have a strong desire to return to Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, the majority of oralmans face social problems such as place of residence, unemployment, citizenship and language obstacles. The return of oralmans to the Republic of Kazakhstan on a significant scale is characteristic for the contemporary stage, so the solution of successful integration of oralmans in Kazakhstani society is of a big importance.

Thus, the lack of a deliberated state strategy in the field of immigration policy has a negative impact on many sides of management of these processes, which have not yet been adequately reflected in research materials. Thus, the relevance of the research topic is determined by the need for a comprehensive institutional research framework for the integration of oralmans in the developing Kazakhstani society.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has suffered significant decrease of its population due to emigration of ethnic Germans and Russian from the country. According to statistics in the period of 1989 to 1999 the population of republic was decreased from 16.5 mln. to less than 15 mln.

These economic and social changes played a crucial role in determining the immigration policy of Kazakhstan. In 1992 the law "On Immigration" was adopted according to which ethnic Kazakhs were given the right to return to their "Historical homeland." From the economic and historical points of view the return of ethnic Kazakhs was aimed at preserving the national identity of the state, strengthening the internal stability and increasing its population. During the years of the so-called "Soviet" period many Kazakh customs were significantly declined and the use of Kazakh language was sufficiently reduced not only at the official level, but even in its informal setting. Therefore, the Kazakh language and elements of Kazakh culture were at the state of extinction. In this context, the return of ethnic Kazakhs was one of the key issues of the state migration policy aimed at preserving the Kazakh culture.

The process of repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs to Kazakhstan was many-sided and complicated. Today more than five million of Kazakhs live outside of Kazakhstan. The biggest number of ethnic Kazakhs abroad is descendants who had left the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s in order to escape from political repression, violent collectivization and the hunger and starvation. [1] For about 200,000 Kazakhs had left the Soviet Union and moved to China, Mongolia, India, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. According to the official statistics from the Committee on Migration Policy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, since the time of independence, for about one million of ethnic Kazakhs had returned to Kazakhstan from foreign and neighbouring countries. In legal documents this category of citizens is described as oralman or returnee. The term “oralman” is derived from a Kazakh verb that means “to repatriate” or “reunite”.

Having arrived to their historic homeland, oralmen face certain difficulties which influence on their successful adaptation and integration into accepting society. As Khaliman noted in her work “the problem of adaptation in different ethno-cultural environment is one of the most complicated ones, and the resettlement into socio-cultural communities requires big changes in social and personal life of not only the migrants but also the population of the hosting country.” [2]

According to researchers, adaptation takes place at several levels: first, it is the language adaptation which requires the knowledge of language of the receiving country. Second, it is a social adaptation which is manifested by oralmen’s aspiration to become members of the new society. Language is a fundamental tool for any interaction and, therefore, language integration is among the first problems deemed to be necessary. Good knowledge of language of the receiving state is one of the main indicators of the migrants’ successful integration into social, labour relations and cultural life of the country. Arriving to the country oralmen face language difficulties because along with the Kazakh language, the Russian language is widely used everywhere. It has an official status, spread all over the country and prevails in everyday communication. Insufficient knowledge of the Russian language might be a big obstacle for repatriates in their successful integration into the labour market, as well as the participation in social and cultural life of Kazakhstan.

One more problem for migrants is the linguistic differences in the alphabet of the Kazakh language. The thing is, that in today’s world there are three Kazakh alphabets: Cyrillic in Kazakhstan, Russia and in some other countries of CIS, Latin in Turkey and Western Europe, ancient Kazakh alphabet (based on the Arabic alphabet) in China, Iran and Pakistan. As a result, having arrived in Kazakhstan repatriates from China, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey can not adequately master the Kazakh language, and so immediately upon arrival they are faced with language problems. Very often they even can not carry out the most essential action, for example, to fill an application for acquisition of oralman’s status.

As a primary element of general integration into the new society, participation in the labour market is a fundamental factor. The results of the research show that the degree of economic integration of oralmen in Kazakhstani society remains rather low. According to official statistics of the Committee on Migration, only 61.5 percent of oralmen of working age are actively occupied and engaged in the labour market. Unemployment among oralmen in comparison to the national unemployment level of 8.4 percent shows that oralmen are significantly more likely to be unemployed. [4]

The high level of unemployment among oralmen can be explained by a number of reasons. Firstly, legal obstacles have an impact on oralmen’s ability to get a job. A similar legal obstacle relates to proof of residency. In order to be legally employed in Kazakhstan, oralmen must receive citizenship, or at least residency to be able to receive equal rights of Kazakhstani citizens. However, for receiving citizenship or a residence permit, proof of residence must be obtained. Those who do not have temporary or permanent accommodations must find someone who will agree to register them.

A second factor of low economic integration relates to language barrier. Oralmen who do not speak Russian may have big problems finding a job, particular in northern regions. In southern regions where the Kazakh language is more widely used, it is more possible to overcome the linguistic barrier. A lot of oralmen who had returned from countries whose cultural and social environments strongly differ from those in Kazakhstan found it difficult to adapt with Kazakhstani socio-cultural realities and they speak neither Russian nor Kazakh. In this instance, having insufficient skills in both languages creates a situation in which it is nearly impossible to find job place. As a result, repatriates returning from China, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey can not fully master the Kazakh language, so they immediately face the difficulties due to the language. [3].

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, nowadays no measures have been taken to provide oralmen with language training courses. Some schools and university administrations try to organise Kazakh and Russian language courses but the government does not elaborate any official programmes

to improve the situation. According to the questionnaire, part of respondents has difficulties because of low skills of the Russian language (36 %) and Kazakh language (33, 3 %). [6] The lack of knowledge of the Russian language influences on employment of repatriates. It is difficult for them to get reliable and truthful information, to work with the documents, to get education etc. Repatriates` professional skills and the ability to learn a new language, mostly Russian are the key points of economic stabilization. Professional adaptation is one of the main factors contributing to the rapid socio-cultural and psychological adaptation.

Oralmans face considerable challenges as one of the country`s most vulnerable groups, and remain largely excluded from the general society, despite relatively high economic growth in Kazakhstan. Returning to their historical homeland and having contacts with the Kazakh host communities of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the repatriates consider themselves as "other Kazakhs" and have "stress of acculturation." [5] The main reason of acculturation stress is ethno-cultural differences which are resulted from long-term interethnic contacts, language barriers and socio-cultural differences.

As a part of the Kazakh diaspora, most of the oralman keep and maintain the certain aspects of Kazakh culture, traditions and the way of life. This fact may contribute or, on the contrary, prevent to successful cultural integration. In this connection we should take into account two points: the country from which the migrants had arrived and the region of their resettlement. In South Kazakhstan (South Kazakhstan Oblasts, Kyzylorda, Mangistau regions), where local population demonstrate their greater adherence to national Kazakh culture and traditions the social and cultural adaptation of repatriates occurs easier than in the northern and central parts of Kazakhstan.

Another important factor affecting the level of cultural adaptation among oralman is country of origin. This is clearly observed with regard to clothing and household utensils. Oralman women, particularly in southern regions, wear traditional clothes, including a long high-necked dress covered with a camisole and a kerchief to cover their heads. Most Kazakh women coming from Turkmenistan, Iran, and Afghanistan do not adopt the clothing styles of local Kazakh women, as they consider such styles to be too loud or immodest. Men who came from Uzbekistan wear a skull-cap, while men who came from Iran and Pakistan usually wear a turban. There are some differences in everyday life. Most oralman do not purchase furniture as they use *korpe*, which are hand-made patchwork quilts, pillows and rugs. At mealtimes, they sit at low tables.

Cultural differences were not found to be a source of tension between oralman and the local population. But the attitude of the local population towards oralman is, however, not always so tolerant. According to a survey conducted by the independent analytical Center for Social Technologies the attitude of the local population towards oralman is graded as follows: good (34 %), tolerant (25 %), indifferent (22.5 %), bad (10.1 %). [6]

On December 2, 2008 the governmental decree №1126 of the Republic of Kazakhstan had accepted the program "Nurly Kosh" for the period of 2009 - 2011.[7] The Program`s main objective was to settle and assist in setting up of ethnic Kazakhs living abroad, former citizens of Kazakhstan arrived to work on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the citizens of Kazakhstan living in the depressed zones of the country. The category of participants includes ethnic immigrants of former citizens of Kazakhstan arrived to the country to work, and citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan living in the problem areas. Program participants and their families are eligible to receive a number of benefits that are differentiated by categories of participants of the "Nurly Kosh" Program.

This program provides governmental assistance to all oralman that includes pension payments, grants for oralman for enrolling post-secondary institutions, exemption from consular fees for required visas, determent from military service, provision of employment assistance and vocational training, assistance in learning Kazakh and Russian, exemption from custom duties. However, as it has been mentioned above the government has not implemented the compulsory extensive language courses of Russian for those oralman who do not have skills of Russian language. These courses will increase the number of oralman who will be able to apply for a job and get more social contacts with other people, as a result of which will be successful adaptation of oralman in social life. At present time Kazakh repatriates returning to their historic homeland affect the dynamics in growth population and improves the demographic situation of the country.

Conclusions. To sum up all mentioned above, we can point out that the issue of adaptation is very significant as it has influential impact on the internal situation of the state, its stability and economic and social development. Oralman face considerable challenges as one of the country`s most vulnerable groups. They meet some difficulties that considerably influence on their successful adaptation and integration into hosting society. Firstly, it includes limited skills of Russian language,

the differences of written form of Kazakh alphabet and the proficiency of migrants in the language of the receiving country. Secondly, the high level of unemployment among oralmans caused by bureaucracy and the language barrier. Thirdly, the considerable cultural differences in everyday life of the new society and the system of values.

Thereby, we can conclude that the significance of socio-cultural and linguistic aspects plays an influential role on the successful adaptation of the returners into new environmental area. The issue of language barrier should be strongly taken into account and emphasized as the foreground priority of oralmans resettlement. Kazakhstan as one of the significant recipient countries in the Central Asian region should continue to work on improvement of the processes of adaptation and integration of ethnic Kazakhs into Kazakh society and make it more efficient. The importance of these measures is obvious. Repatriates who have preserved the traditions and customs of the people can make a significant contribution to the consolidation of the Kazakh ethnos and enrich the national culture. Resettlement of Kazakh Diaspora will not only affect the demographic situation in the country but will also contribute to the revival of traditional culture.

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