

THE ADAPTIVE CAPACITY OF YOUNG MIGRANTS FROM KYRGYZSTAN IN MOSCOW

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ABSTRACT

The significant numbers of migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow and the difficulties in adapting to the new conditions recorded by our research highlight the need to explore the adaptive capacity of young Kyrgyz. The lack of scientific know-

edge about the potential adaptive capacities of different groups of young Kyrgyz hinders the creation of optimal conditions that would allow them to internalize norms, values, and rules of behavior, increases the potential for conflict in the Moscow community, makes the

life of migrants less comfortable, and complicates integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The purpose of this study is to characterize the adaptive capacity of young people from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow that helps them fit into the social environment, allows them to overcome the discomfort caused by the contradictory social context and unfamiliar living conditions, and influences their success in the host community and their attitudes to integration. The analysis presented in this article rests on empirical data obtained from a structured interview with 823 migrants, citizens of Kyrgyzstan aged 17 to 30 years, conducted in 2020. The novelty of the study lies in a systemic examination and comprehensive assessment of the social adaptation capacity of this social community, because up to now publications on this topic have considered only some aspects of the phenomenon.

In this article, “adaptive capacity” refers to the set of individual characteristics of migrants that ensures their inclusion into the host society, a change in previous norms and models of behavior, and the socialization of new behavior models emerging in the process of interaction between the individual and the new socio-cultural conditions of life and work as the synergistic effect of the relationship and interaction between the adaptive capacity of the individual and that of the environment. Its analysis is based on a description of expectations, perceptions, and social attitudes; the level of empathy, openness and complementarity with regard to the host community; and the degree of tolerance for people of other nationalities and identities. The article shows how migrants evaluate the adaptive

capacity of the environment as resulting from coordinated, concerted, and friendly action by all stakeholders: government, employers, and local population. It also analyzes the associations that arise in connection with Russia. The study reveals the impact of migrants' adaptive capacity on their attitudes to integration processes in the EAEU.

It was shown that notions about the nature of the interaction between Muscovites and migrants that is necessary to harmonize the individual and the environment (assimilation, bicultural adaptation or separation) determine the depth and direction of the activities of young migrants and their assessments of concrete social reality, while their strategic preferences with regard to the cultural norms and values of other peoples determine the adaptation attitudes and strategies that largely characterize their adaptive capacity. These strategies are as follows: marginalization of young Kyrgyz in the Moscow community, complementarity, and internalization of dominant norms.

The research conducted suggests the need for measures to improve interaction between migrants and the host society and provides grounds for the Eurasian Economic Commission and social institutions in Russia and Kyrgyzstan to develop measures designed to create conditions for adaptation, as well as to determine the appropriate instruments and mechanisms for this purpose. This research paves the way for developing a theory of social adaptation of migrants, for empirical research into migration processes in the post-Soviet space, and for a better understanding of the specific features of social adaptation of young people from Kyrgyzstan.

KEYWORDS: *adaptation, adaptive capacity, young migrants, Kyrgyzstan.*

Introduction

Our attention to the problem of the adaptive capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan is due to larger migration flows from that country compared to other EAEU member states and more fre-

quent problems with their adaptation to the new conditions, as established by our research. The situation is contradictory because young people migrate to Moscow in order to improve their position and help their families, but they are not always ready to accept the new norms and conditions and may overestimate their own competencies and capabilities, which makes the life of migrants less comfortable, increases the potential for conflict in the Moscow community, and complicates integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

The social adaptation of migrants from Kyrgyzstan in recent years has been analyzed in a number of articles, but all of them address specific problems: adaptation in particular regions of Russia, conditions for “acclimation” of migrants,¹ changes in social attitudes and value orientations, and ethno-cultural identification factors.² Articles on adaptation of migrants in Moscow also analyze its particular aspects: migrants’ “career trajectories” and accommodation models,³ infrastructure of migrant workers⁴ and diaspora,⁵ and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market and the position of migrants from CIS countries in general⁶ and Central Asia in particular.⁷

In recent years, the gender aspects of migration problems have been introduced into scientific discourse because of the increasing feminization of migration flows. A number of research papers consider the adaptation of migrant women,⁸ explore the trends and socio-demographic structure of labor migration in Russia and in the sending countries, and identify the key problems of female migrants in Russia.⁹ Thus, no systematic study has been made of the social adaptation capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan living in Moscow.

Purpose and Methods of Research

The purpose of this study was to characterize the adaptive capacity of young people from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow that allows them to adapt to the new social reality, internalize the new norms, values, and rules of behavior, and overcome the discomfort caused by the contradictory social context and unfamiliar living conditions, influencing their success in the Moscow community and their attitudes to integration.

¹ See: E. Dzhambangulov, “Problema adaptatsii kyrgyzskikh trudovykh migrantov,” *Vestnik NGU*, Series: History, Philology, Vol. 5, Issue 3, 2006, pp. 93-97.

² See: E.A. Yagafova, V.V. Golovanov, “Samarskie kirgizy: osobennosti etnicheskoi identifikatsii i sotsiokulturnoi adaptatsii v politicheskom gorodskom prostranstve,” *Izvestia Samarskogo nauchnogo tsentra Rossiiskoi akademii nauk*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2), 2018, pp. 553-556.

³ See: A.L. Rocheva, “Issledovanie pozitsiy ‘karyery kvartiroyomshchika’ i modelei prozhivaniia v Moskve migrantov iz Kirgizii i Uzbekistana,” *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2015, pp. 31-50.

⁴ See: V.M. Peshkova, “Infrastruktura trudovykh migrantov v gorodakh sovremennoi Rossii (na primere migrantov iz Uzbekistana i Kirgizii v Moskve,” *Mir Rossii*, No. 2, 2015, pp. 129-151.

⁵ See: A.V. Shipilov, “Kirgizskaia diaspora v Rossii: novyi etap mezhkulturnogo vzaimodeistviia,” *Vestnik KGU*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 75-77.

⁶ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, I.N. Molodikova, A.D. Bragin, “Vliianie pandemii COVID-19 na polozhenie migrantov na rynkakh truda stran SNG,” *Baltiiskii region*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2020, pp. 10-38, available at [Doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2020-3-2].

⁷ See: S. Ryazantsev, Z. Vazirov, M. Khramova, A. Smirnov, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Position of Labor Migrants from Central Asia in Russia,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, 2020.

⁸ See: E.S. Tarkhanova, “Spetsifika zhenskoi trudovoi migratsii v Rossii,” *Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo v Rossii: sostoyanie, tendentsii, perspektivy*, No. 1 (4), 2015, pp. 187-193; D.V. Poletayev, “Feminizatsiia soobshchestv trudovykh migrantov iz Srednei Azii: novye sotsialnye roli tadhichek i kirgizok,” in: *Transnatsionalnye migratsii i sovremennye gosudarstva v usloviakh ekonomicheskogo krizisa*, RSMD, Moscow, 2016, pp. 263-283; N.L. Mikidenko, S.P. Storozheva, “Zhen-skaia trudovaia migratsiia: informatsionnye aspekty adaptatsii,” *Vestnik Kemerovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, Series: Political, Sociological, and Economic Sciences, No. 2, 2016, pp. 35-42.

⁹ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, T.K. Rostovskaya, S.N. Peremyshlin, “Genderne aspekty trudovoi migratsii v Rossii: trendy, posledstviia, regulirovanie,” *Zhenshchina v rossiiskom obshchestve*, No. 4, 2019, pp. 53-65.

The methodological strategy included structured interviews with migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow under the project *Monitoring of Integration Processes in the EAEU* (Project Manager G.I. Osadchaya). A total of 823 people were interviewed in 2020: citizens of Kyrgyzstan aged 17-30 years who had arrived in Moscow after 2015 and had lived there for more than a month. The sampling method employed was snowball sampling based on certain characteristics. Empirical subjects were selected using the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants from Kyrgyzstan, and the number of respondents was determined based on the need to identify statistically significant groups of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in terms of the level of social adaptation.

The Concept of Adaptive Capacity of Migrants

By “adaptive capacity” of a migrant we mean the set of their individual characteristics that ensures their inclusion into the host society, a change in previous norms and models of behavior, and the socialization of new behavior models. It is formed in the process of interaction between the individual and the new socio-cultural conditions of life and work as the synergistic effect of the relationship and interaction between the adaptive capacity of the individual and that of the environment. An increase in human and social capital means an increase in adaptive capacity and successful integration of migrants and their children into the host community.

The adaptive capacity of migrants is determined by the dynamics of expectations, perceptions of their own possibilities in the form of subjective images, evaluation of their personal abilities, and opportunities to satisfy their needs, and can be described by value orientations and social attitudes; level of empathy, friendliness, and openness to the host community; degree of tolerance for people of other nationalities, complementarity with regard to the host community, positive attitudes towards acculturation of values, and perceptions of the host society’s adaptation policy. One must agree with I.B. Korotkova and N.O. Gavrilova, who suggest that the willingness of migrants to see Russia as their permanent place of residence, “the presence of positive and permanent contacts and ties with local residents and the lack of close ties and relations with the country of origin,” and a readiness for “marriage with a representative of the local community” could be used as an indicator of the seriousness of their intentions to integrate into the host environment.¹⁰

The adaptive capacity of the host community is characterized by how its social institutions ensure equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities for all participants in socio-economic processes. The success of migrants’ social adaptation depends in large part on the level of complementarity/hostility of the host authorities and society, on the existence of well-established ties with a prosperous ethnic community.

As our analysis shows, notions about the nature of the host society’s policy for harmonizing the individual and the environment so as to bring their needs, interests, attitudes, and value orientations into accord are the main determinant of the social adaptation capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in the Moscow megalopolis. These notions can be regarded as the respondents’ need and readiness for certain activities or actions in concrete social reality, as well as a measure of successful integration into the Moscow community. For example, only 4 in 10 respondents say that the host society’s adaptation policy should be geared towards assimilation, about as many are oriented towards adaptation in accordance with the logic of biculturalism (bicultural adaptation), a small percentage prefer separation, and a relatively large percentage (13.2%) find it difficult to say (see Table 1).

¹⁰ I.B. Korotkova, N.O. Gavrilova, “Migrants in Russia: The Degree of Severity of the Problem and Solutions,” *Problemy nauki*, No. 4 (40), 2019.

Table 1

**Opinions of Young Migrants
from Kyrgyzstan about the Necessary Character of
Interaction of Muscovites and Russians
with Migrants from Kyrgyzstan**

Character of Interaction of Muscovites and Russians with Migrants from Kyrgyzstan	Number of Respondents	%	Adaptation Strategy
It is necessary to encourage migrants to “merge” into Russian society	310	37.7	Assimilation
It is necessary to engage migrants in the life of the local community while recognizing their national and cultural identity	359	43.6	Bicultural adaptation
Migrants should live in the greatest possible isolation	38	4.6	Separation
Other	7	0.9	
Undecided	109	13.2	

In each group, the shares of women and men, people with a secondary and a higher education, and urban and rural residents are roughly equal.

A Characterization of the Adaptive Capacity of Migrants

The adaptive capacity of migrants from Kyrgyzstan is characterized by relations between young Kyrgyz and the Moscow multiethnic host community and the degree of openness to it. This is very important, because a common mental-communication field with the host population increases migrants’ opportunities for entering the Russian socio-cultural space. According to our study, 7 in 10 respondents communicate with people of other nationalities with pleasure; 2 in 10 say it all depends on nationality: they like to communicate with some people, but not with others. A higher degree of complementarity with respect to representatives of other cultures is demonstrated by members of the group oriented towards assimilation into Russian society (see Fig. 1).

For about a third of respondents, their friends in Moscow are mostly representatives of the titular nationality (Russians); for another third they are Kyrgyz living in Russia after 2015; for about a fifth they are compatriots who arrived in Moscow after 1990; and for 12%, people of other nationalities. In other words, for more than half of all respondents, their compatriots remain the most important people in Moscow. And although a large percentage of respondents (36.8%) in the group oriented towards the deepest kind of adaptation—assimilation into Russian society—have Russian friends, 47% mix mostly with their compatriots (see Table 2).

Figure 1

Are There Any People of Other Nationalities Among Those with Whom You Constantly Communicate? % of respondents

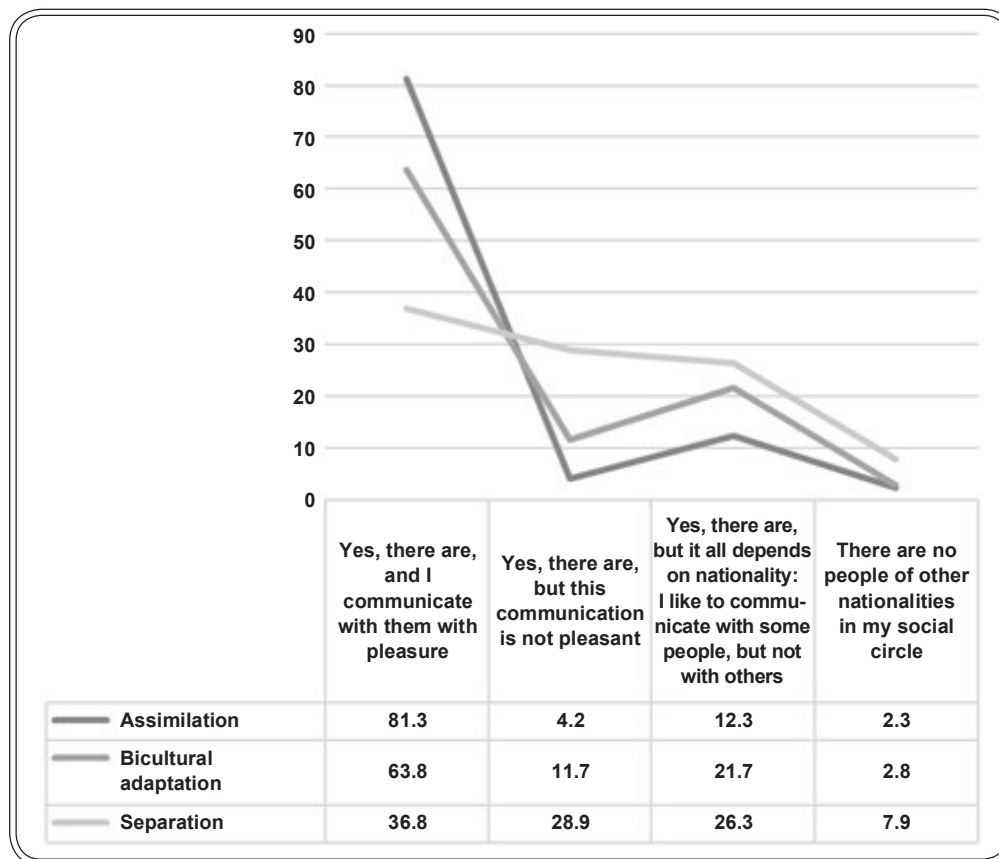


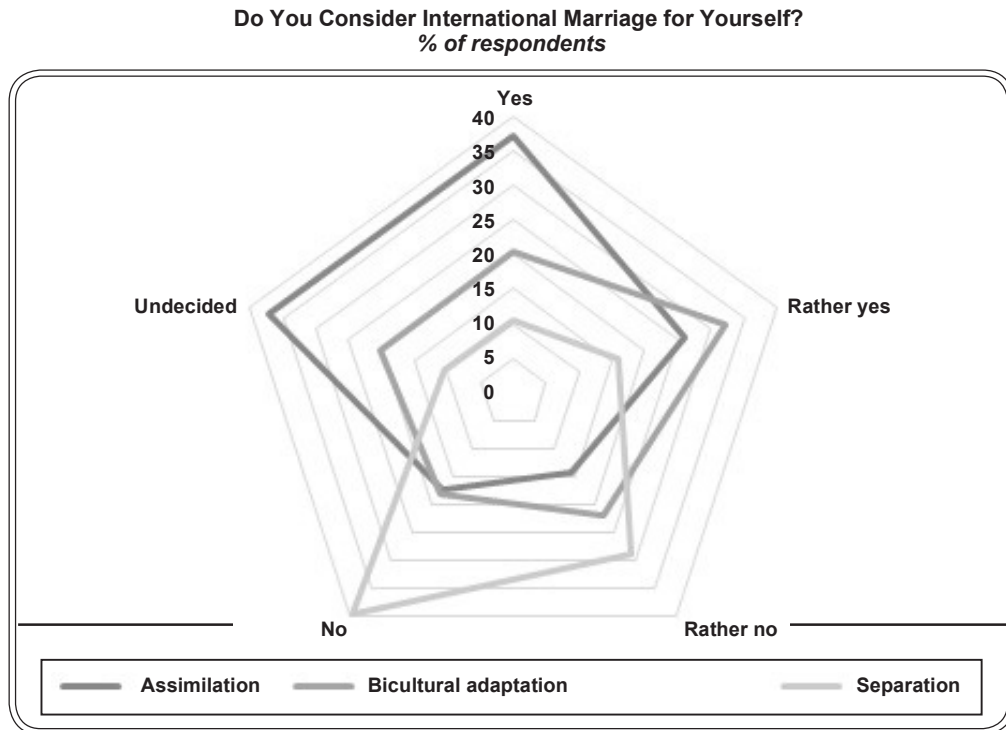
Table 2

Friends of Young Migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow

	Notions about the Character of Interaction of Muscovites and Russians with Migrants from Kyrgyzstan, % of Group Total		
	Assimilation	Bicultural Adaptation	Separation
Compatriots from Kyrgyzstan who arrived in Moscow after 1990	18.4	18.9	21.1
Kyrgyz living in Russia after 2015	28.7	38.7	42.1
Russians	36.8	30.1	15.8
People of other nationalities	12.3	10.9	10.5
I have no friends in Moscow	3.9	1.4	10.5

It should be noted that 55% of respondents consider the possibility of international marriage, and 47.5% can imagine a situation where they would give their child a Russian name. Here, too, respondents in the group oriented towards “assimilation” demonstrate the highest level of agreement with these statements (see Figs. 2 and 3).

Figure 2

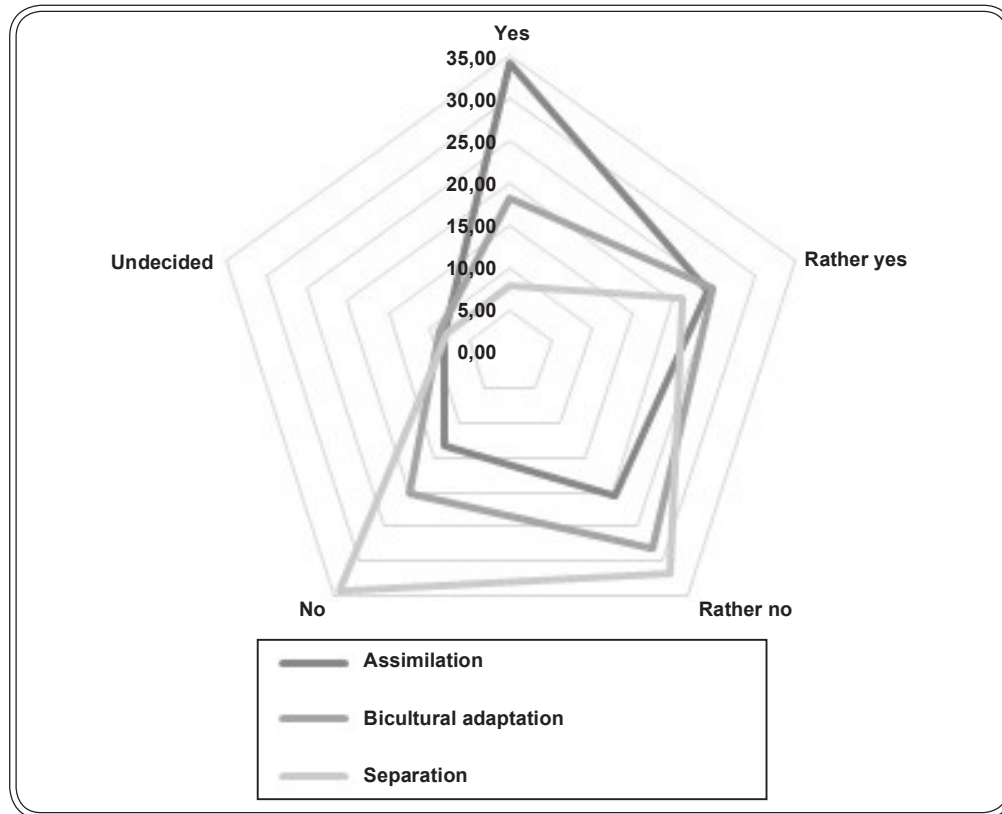


Respondents demonstrate different degrees of complementarity in relations between Kyrgyz and people of other nationalities. For example, about 9 in 10 respondents describe relations between Kyrgyz and Slavs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz and Kazakhs as friendly, warm, and peaceful. Relations between young Kyrgyz and Slavs are the most amicable: 52.5% of respondents evaluate them as friendly or warm. At the same time, the highest degree of conflict and tension is reported for relations with North and South Caucasians. Clearly, the nature of relations between Kyrgyz and other ethnic groups depends on many factors, including personal experience of communication, interethnic attitudes, religious preferences, and post-memory of historical events (see Fig. 4 on p. 120).

An important indicator of the adaptive capacity of migrants from Kyrgyzstan is identity, because it gives an idea of the extent to which they identify with the EAEU, as well as of the emotions experienced by young Kyrgyz and their willingness to act. Self-identification as a citizen of the Eurasian Union implies an awareness of its legal norms and fundamental values, solidarity with the citizens of the Union state, and loyalty to the Union. It includes a state, civic, and cultural-historical component. Eurasian identity is formed by social institutions—primarily family, school, and media—in the process of socialization. The formation of such an identity strengthens integration ties between the people of the Union, which is in the interest of the states and societies that are building a new integration community, a common economic space in Eurasia.

Figure 3

Can You Imagine Giving Your Child a Russian Name?
% of respondents



According to our data, respondents most frequently identify with their country of origin (about a third); 1 in 6 respondents identify with people of their own nationality or members of their own family; 1 in 8 see themselves as citizens of their home country and citizens of the Eurasian Union; and 1 in 10 as citizens of the world or residents of the city where they live (in the home country or in Moscow) (see Fig. 5).

From the perspective of assessing adaptive capacity, respondents' expectations about the possibility of intergroup contact and the degree of assimilation of the host society's culture by migrants are very important. Migrants' strategic preferences regarding the cultural norms and values of other peoples that were revealed in the course of research make it possible to identify the balance, as perceived by migrants, between acceptance of the dominant culture and maintenance of their own cultural traditions by identifying three types of integration attitudes that determine the adaptive capacity of young Kyrgyz.

The first type (18.7% of all respondents) characterizes an extremely low level of adaptive capacity or even its absence (see Table 3 on p. 121).

This integration attitude is oriented towards the migrants' own culture instead of adaptation to the new culture, to the new cultural environment. This strategy of marginalization in the Moscow community may lead to rejection of the host society's values by young Kyrgyz and, in the long term, will prevent them from adapting to the Moscow community and create a potential for conflict.

Figure 4

How Would You Describe Relations between You and Representatives of Other Nationalities in Your Area of Residence in Moscow? % of respondents

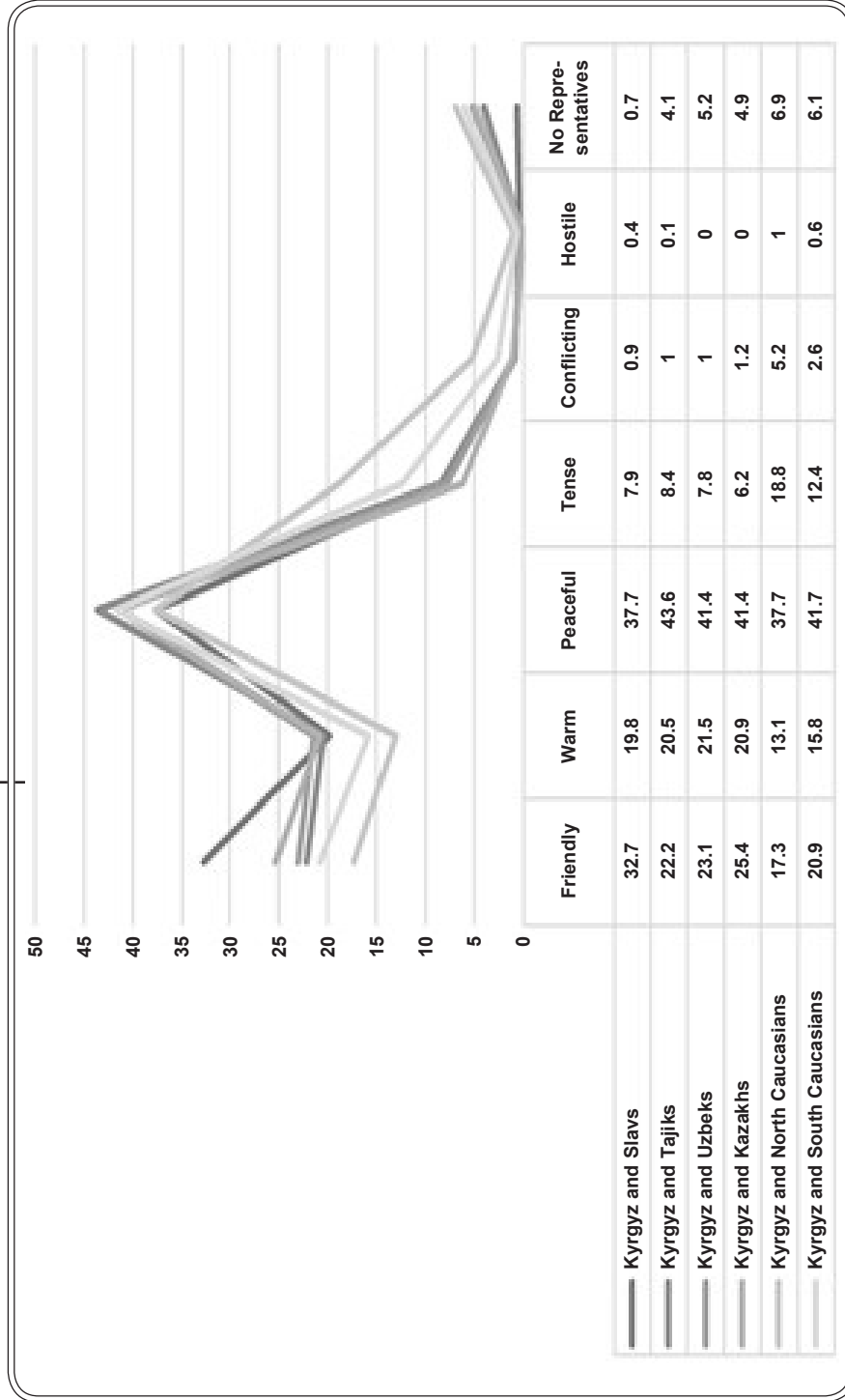


Figure 5

How Do You Primarily Identify Yourself (one answer)? % of respondents

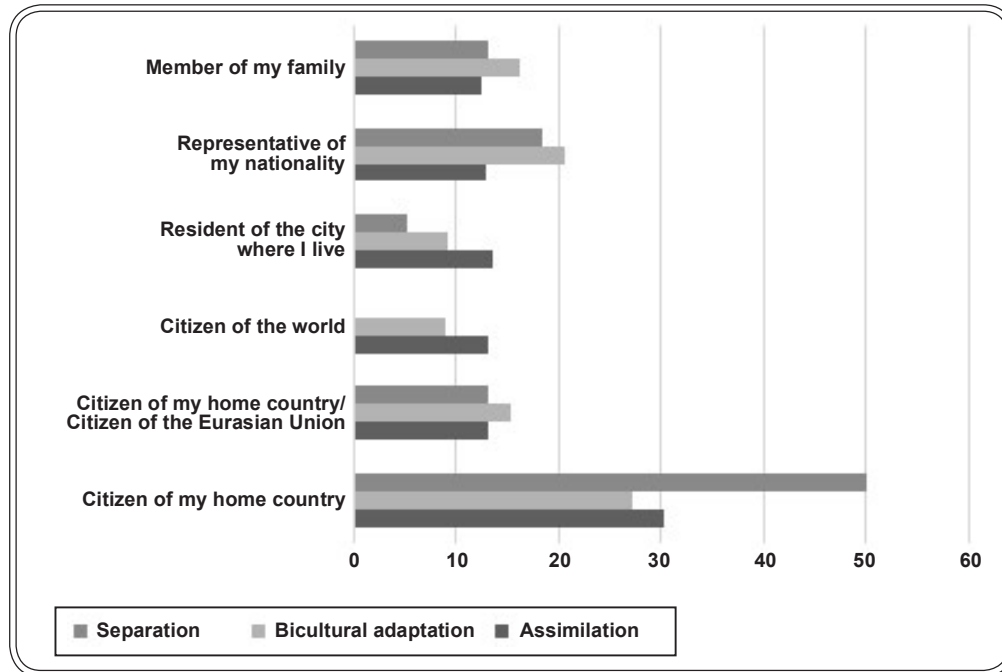


Table 3

Migrants' Strategic Preferences Regarding the Cultural Norms and Values of Other Peoples: Low Level of Adaptive Capacity

Low Adaptive Capacity	Agree/Rather Agree, %	Adaptation Strategy
I think that all people in the world share or should share the same values, the values accepted in my country	10.3	Strategy of marginalization in the Moscow community
I think that the values of a culture different from mine threaten the customary order of things and my way of life	8.4	

The second type of attitudes characterizes a medium or moderate level of adaptive capacity. It is represented by 43.1% of respondents and may be designated as a bicultural type of attitudes. It implies maintaining ties with one's native culture and assimilation of the fundamental values of the host culture. This strategy may be called a strategy of complementarity (see Table 4).

The third, high level of adaptive capacity is represented by 38.1% of respondents. These young migrants from Kyrgyzstan are willing to adapt to the host society and adopt the attributes of the new identity. This probably means a lessening of ethnic divisions, a reduction of social and cultural differences, and internalization of the dominant norms and values of Russian culture by migrants, that is, the construction of their own system they can accept (see Table 5).

Table 4

**Migrants' Strategic Preferences Regarding
the Cultural Norms and Values of Other Peoples:
Medium or Moderate Level of Adaptive Capacity**

Medium or Moderate Adaptive Capacity	Agree/Rather Agree, %	Adaptation Strategy
I think that every culture has something in common with other cultures and it is always necessary to look for features that unify different cultures	23.9	Strategy of complementarity
I can say that I know Russian culture well and am willing to accept its fundamental values	19.2	

Table 5

**Migrants' Strategic Preferences Regarding
the Cultural Norms and Values of Other Peoples:
High Level of Adaptive Capacity**

High Adaptive Capacity	Agree/Rather Agree, %	Adaptation Strategy
I can live comfortably in compliance with the rules, norms, and values of Russian culture	23.7	Strategy of internalizing dominant norms
I make no distinction between Kyrgyz and Russian culture, and one might say that I myself am already a representative of Russian culture	14.4	

Migrants' Assessment of the Adaptive Capacity of the Environment

The formation of the adaptive capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan is an interactive process that implies interaction between migrants and the host society. This is why it is so important for the latter to foster goodwill and create the necessary conditions for integrating the new arrivals. In Russia, these conditions are ensured by all levels of government (federal, regional, and local) in order to accommodate those who need such help. The importance of “coordinating the activities of federal bodies of government, bodies of government of subjects of the Russian Federation, and local government bodies in the sphere of migration”¹¹ is highlighted by the new State Migration Policy Concept of the Russian Federation for 2019-2025, approved on 31 October, 2018. The results of the activities of the authorities and the local population are evaluated by respondents as follows: 46.9% say that people are friendly or very friendly towards migrants arriving from Kyrgyzstan, and 46.7% say that people are indifferent. As for government attitudes, they are evaluated less positively: 30% think that the authorities are very friendly or friendly, and 54.7% that they are indifferent (see Fig. 6).

¹¹ *Kontseptsia gosudarstvennoi migratsionnoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii na 2019-2025 gody* (approved by the President of the Russian Federation on 31 October, 2018), Art 20 (g).

Figure 6

What is the Usual Attitude towards You on the Part of Government Officials and Members of the Public in Moscow?
% of respondents

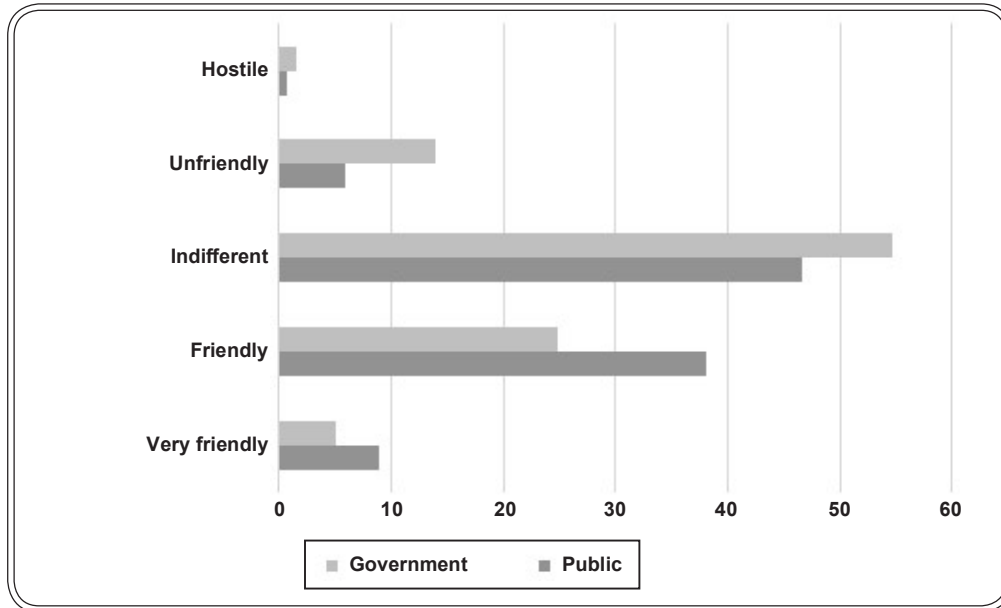
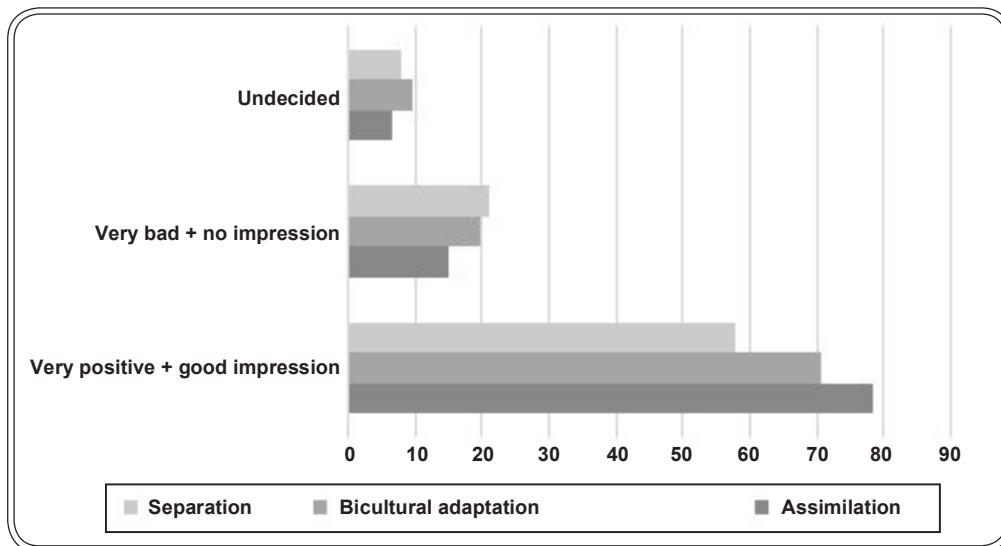


Figure 7

What Is Your General Impression of Young Muscovites Based on Your Experience in Moscow?
% of respondents



About a third of respondents feel a sense of danger during their stay in Moscow. Members of the group oriented towards deeper integration into the Moscow community experience such feelings less frequently. In explaining the reasons for their anxiety, most respondents say that “*Muscovites don’t like migrant workers*” (47.6%), “*Muscovites don’t like foreigners*” (25.2%), and “*Muscovites don’t like Kyrgyz*” (21.7%). For example, 47.4% of respondents state that during their current stay in Moscow they have been subjected to insults, 9.7% to threats, and 6.4% to physical assault.

Most young migrants from Kyrgyzstan have positive impressions of young Muscovites, especially respondents from the group who believe that the nature of interaction of Muscovites and Russians with migrants from Kyrgyzstan should encourage them to merge into Russian society, to learn the Russian language and Russian culture. For them, Russia is primarily associated with opportunities for good earnings (50.2%), a comfortable life for them and their family members (22.1%), and high-quality education (11.9%).

The attitude to integration processes, while characterizing the adaptive capacity of migrants, also gives an idea of the success of their integration into the Moscow community. For example, 7 in 10 respondents approve the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in the post-Soviet space and think that Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the EAEU was voluntary and mutually beneficial, and more than half say that the creation of the EAEU has led to positive changes in their life. All these assessments are more frequent in the group that supports the assimilation strategy in the adaptation of migrants from Kyrgyzstan to the Moscow community.

Conclusion

The adaptive capacity of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in Moscow is characterized by a high degree of openness of most respondents to the Moscow multiethnic host community. Seven in 10 respondents communicate with people of other nationalities with pleasure. For about a third of respondents, their friends in Moscow are mostly representatives of the titular nationality (Russians), and for every other respondent they are compatriots from Kyrgyzstan. About half of all respondents consider the possibility of international marriage and can imagine a situation where they would give their child a Russian name. An overwhelming majority of respondents (9 in 10) demonstrate a high degree of complementarity in relations between Kyrgyz and people of other nationalities, with the exception of relations with North and South Caucasians. Respondents most frequently identify with their country of origin (about a third); 1 in 6 respondents identify with people of their own nationality or members of their families; 1 in 8 see themselves as citizens of their home country and citizens of the Eurasian Union; and 1 in 10 as citizens of the world or residents of the city where they live.

Migrants’ strategic preferences regarding the socialization of the cultural norms and values of other peoples that were revealed in the course of research make it possible to identify the balance, as perceived by migrants, between acceptance of the dominant culture and maintenance of their own cultural traditions by identifying three types of integration attitudes that form the adaptation strategies of young Kyrgyz and ultimately determine their adaptive capacity: marginalization (about 19%), complementarity (about 43%), and internalization of dominant norms (38%). In evaluating the adaptive capacity of Moscow and Muscovites, migrants spoke of goodwill on the part of the public more frequently (about half of all respondents) than on the part of government (about a third). Most young migrants from Kyrgyzstan have positive impressions of Muscovites. For about half of respondents, Russia is associated primarily with opportunities to earn a good income (50.2%), and for another 22.1% with opportunities for a comfortable life for them and their family members. Seven in 10 respondents have a positive view of integration processes in the Eurasian Economic Union.

An analysis of the results obtained shows that the direction of the activities of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan in the Moscow megalopolis and their assessments of social reality are determined by their notions about the necessary character of interaction of Muscovites and Russians with migrants from Kyrgyzstan (assimilation, bicultural adaptation or separation), which can be seen as the respondents' need and readiness for certain activities or actions in the concrete social reality, as well as a measure of successful integration into the Moscow community. In fact, the deeper their orientation towards integration, the more positive are all characteristics of their personal adaptive capacity, the adaptive capacity of the environment, and integration processes between them. The research conducted shows the need for measures to improve interaction between migrants and the host society, as well as to upgrade the latter's adaptation policy. This policy should be geared towards developing migrants' qualities and competencies that would enable them to take part in the host country's economic, social, political, and spiritual life and would ensure civil unity and accord.

Our findings expand the explanatory power of the specifics of social adaptation of young migrants from Kyrgyzstan, contributing to the development of migrants' social adaptation theory and methodology for empirical research into the social adaptation of migrants from EAEU member states in Russia. And an evaluation of migrants' adaptive capacity with a characterization of groups of migrants based on this criterion will allow social institutions in Kyrgyzstan and Russia and the Eurasian Economic Commission to ensure a differentiated approach to creating enabling conditions and developing adequate tools and mechanisms for social adaptation.

