

Being highly skilled Russian migrant in Turkey

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Abstract

In the last 25 years, thousands of Russians, mostly women, have migrated from Russia to Turkey. These purposes are mainly employment and marriage. Russians, today, cluster in metropolitan cities such as İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, as well as in touristic cities such as Antalya and Muğla. Due to the restrictions on foreign employment in Turkey, even if majority of Russians hold at least a bachelor's degree, they are obliged to work in low-qualification jobs and often without social security. As for those Russians who have married a Turk, they resign totally from working life, in order not to face any problem during the years they await gaining citizenship. This study aims at revealing the highly skilled Russian migrants' experiences in a developing country as Turkey, based on interviews made with the migrants and representatives of transnational Russian migrant institutions in İstanbul.

Keywords: Turkey, Russian, migrant, highly skilled

1. Introduction

Istanbul, the biggest city of Turkey, is a center of industry and services that offers various job opportunities to people. These characteristics made the city the most important destination of internal migration movement especially after 1950 and international migration after 1990s (Toksöz, Erdoğan, & Kaşka, 2012). Among these migrants, there are skilled ones as well. As it is known, more interest has started to be shown to high-skilled migrants in both developing and developed countries (Khoo, Hugo, & McDonald, 2008; Marmo, Grigg, & Ryder, 2014; Voigt-Graf, 2003). These migrants having a university degree or/and work experience and specialty in various areas have become more visible as global migrations increase (Iredale, 2001; Koser & Salt, 1997; Plöger & Becker, 2015). In this visibility, migration policies have directed themselves to attract skilled migrants and international skilled migrant mobility has become one the main topic of academic researches since the end of 1980's (Hao, 2013; Sott, 2006). These policies are based on the fact that skilled migration is considered as the international migration type that causes the least conflict in Europe (Scott, 2006). At this point, it is not surprising that 26 million skilled migrants holding a university degree, live in OECD countries (Widmaier & Dumont, 2011). Western countries are perceived as the destination for migrations of professionals and from labor from Asia traditionally in the migration literature. On the other hand, studies on South-Southeast worker migrations have been seen recently within the "Asian Tigers" conceptualism (Lan, 2011). This outlook shows that destinations targeted for skilled migrants have diversified in time. Although policies for attracting skilled migrants interest with the migrants in terms of their economic efficiencies only (Castles, 2006; Ho, 2009), migrants do not decide to migrate just for economic reasons. Migrants care about satisfying their personal expectations other than the economic ones while they are migrating (Larsen, Allan, Bryan & Smith, 2005).

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Identifying skilled migrants who have important impacts on both the destination and departure countries (Docquier & Rapoport, 2007; Grossmann & Stadelmann, 2012; Mahroum, 2001) is an important issue. One of the criteria that is used for identifying high skilled migrants is to take education for at least 16 years and professionals, scientists, executives, engineers and teachers can be counted within this group (Özden, 2005). On the other hand, since education, skills and human capital are multi-dimensional determinants, it is not always necessary that they are always together and education quality is also very variable (Fratesi, 2014: 1588). In identifying the skilled migrant, work experience in specialty level in a particular job other than having a high-education degree is an important criterion (Iredale, 1999). Attendance of skilled people to cross-border movements does not always mean that they will work in jobs that are suitable for their qualifications. Some skilled migrants are obligated to work in low-qualify jobs and this situation is conceptualized as brain waste' or 'brain abuse' (Mattoo, Neagu, & Özden, 2006; Özden, 2005; Pecoraro, 2011).

Structure of transnational spaces that are created by multi connections sustained by the migrants between the countries migrated and their homelands, are also effective in migrant mobility and its addition to the labor market (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; Smith, 2005; Yeoh & Huang, 2011). In addition to this, it is known that people's specialties, gender, ages and ethnicities also have effect on their participation to the business life after migration (Liversage, 2009a,b; Thompson, 2000). Under all these influences, negotiation of business and family lives of skilled female migrants is as important as their career experiences in participating in the business life (Cooke, 2007; Liversage, 2009a,b; Kōu, van Wissen, van Dijk, & Bailey, 2015). Although changing political and economic conditions lead to flexibility of norms related to gender (Pessar, 1999), problems encountered by migrant women in the countries they go become common regardless of their qualifications. The fact that language of the migrated country is different, stress and pressure to satisfy needs of traditional families are effective in the fact that skilled and non-skilled migrant women encounter the same challenges in the countries they go. In addition to this, skilled migrant women usually face with difficulties in finding the job they want and sustain their own professional careers (Iredale, 2005; Nowak, 2009; Purkayastha, 2005).

Women, who come to Turkey from Russia for working, are within the definition of skilled migrant mentioned above with their high education levels and professional skills and they sustain practices that are common and different from other migrant women living in other places of the World. In this study, how the experience of articulation to labor markets by skilled Russian women took place in time and within the frame of diversified power motivations are tried to be understood on the basis of interviews made with representatives of 2 Russian associations and 5 Russian migrants in Istanbul.

2. Being highly skilled Russian migrant woman in Istanbul

Although there aren't strong policies that have been developed directly for skilled migrants in Turkey, regulations made for foreigner's entry to the country constitute main frame of the skilled migrant activity. When this frame is viewed from Russian perspective, which is the research group, it is seen that the banderol practice that was performed in 1992 had developed relations between many countries, including Russia and Turkey, that it has created an easiness to circulate and made contribution to people to sustain their daily lives (Toksöz, Erdoğan, & Kaşka, 2012). Removal of visa between Russia and Turkey for short trips later also encouraged people from

both countries to be active. In addition to visa application, facilitating obtaining residency permit after acquisition of property in Turkey by foreigners, has made legal status of Russian migrants, who are at the level of acquiring a property, more secure. Again practices that encourage foreigners to take education in Turkey have directed Russian people to many cities of Turkey, led by Istanbul, to have education. Another practice that influence lives of Russian people is related to the working permits given to the foreigners. Ministry of Labor and Social Security (ÇSGB) strictly implements the criteria in granting the working permits. Reason of the employer to employ foreign worker is evaluated and it searched if there is any personnel with the same qualification exists on province basis based on Turkish Labor Agency (ISKUR) records. For example, demands for salesperson that knows Russian in Osmanbey, Istanbul are accepted by checking export and trade relations of the company. Since the personnel must have a specialty according to the officials, it is an objective criteria to provide a wage that is a few time more than the minimum wage (Toksöz, Erdoğan, & Kaşka, 2012). Therefore a skilled migrant can also work upon request of a workplace that is suitable for his/her qualification.

When reports of ÇSGB on the foreigners whom were given working permit in Turkey for 2011-2015 periods, it takes attraction that an increase took place in the number of foreigners obtaining working permit and that generally, young and highly skilled foreigners were among those who obtained working permit. Along with the foreigners who are registered by obtaining a working permit, it is real that there are many foreigners living for a long time without registration or working short-terms jobs. Russian people are at the top places among the foreigners that obtain working permit and the status acquired by the migrant with working permit means to secure working in a job that suits his/her qualification not all but for many migrants. However, of course there many unregistered Russian women living and working in Istanbul Furthermore it is also known that Russian women who migrated to Istanbul after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, initially they were obligated to work in low-quality jobs (Yükseker, 2003).

Starting from the field study in Istanbul, it is useful to start with how Russian migrants are identified as qualified. Actually there is a differentiation in the literature on being highly qualified and highly skilled. Whereas being highly qualified is associated with education background, being highly skilled is considered as the ability to transfer knowledge to the destination. All these characteristics create human capital and bring qualification to the migrant with components such as knowledge of the language of the destination, previous work experiences and education quality (Csedö, 2008). When it is considered that the education taken brings skills to the person and is very effective in determining the future job (Chiswick et al., 2005), it is understood that being highly qualified and highly skilled are actually very associated with each other. Therefore, in this study conducted in Istanbul, care was taken for choosing the participants from among people that have at least university degree and work experience. Women participating in the study were from different vocational groups and between the age of 30-45. Five of the women were married, one was divorced and one was single.

When we look at the Russian migrants participating in the field study conducted in Istanbul, it is seen that reasons of their arrival to the country and their experiences in entering the labor market are different and that transnational networks and their practices in using transnational spaces are effective on finding a job that suits their qualifications. Migration practices of Russian migrants in Istanbul can be examined in two categories: While the first category is created by those who came here directly for working here, the second category is created by those who are

interested in labor markets after migrating here for different reasons (marriage, education etc.). Of course these practices interlock in time and the migrant can be re-classified depending on different characteristics.

In entering labor market by qualified Russian women, social networks that also determine the target for migration, have a huge weight. In this scope, friends that migrated to Istanbul before or have a job, are in employer or intermediary positions are effective. In this context, Russian associations created by migrants in Istanbul, help skilled Russian women together with other migrants in finding a job, as an intermediary mechanism. In addition to this, transnational spaces such as churches that are used by migrants in Istanbul, bring people looking for job and worker together. In other words, the efforts of solidarity of the citizens of former Soviet countries using the same church resulting from a common history, language and culture union, are very effective. Power and quality of the network held locally in Istanbul determine the position of the migrant in the job that he/she will work. Another factor that is important in this process is that, companies that have intensive commercial relations between Russia and Turkey and frequently have offices in both countries, appoint qualified Russian women in Istanbul.

Russian women, whose migration motivation is marriage, work in short-time and temporary jobs or completely remove themselves from business life during the waiting period for citizenship. Women, who work at the workplaces that are owned by their spouses and their spouses' families, during the period until the acquisition of citizenship and even aftermath, do not receive regular wage against their efforts. Russian marriage migrants may wait for more than 2 years for their diploma equivalency in order do their job for which they were trained in Russia, even if they acquire citizenship 3 years after their marriage. It is known that qualified migrants usually work at jobs that are under their qualifications and even get education again and acquire new skills (Chiswick et al., 2005). This tendency is seen in skilled Russian migrants living in Istanbul. Re-education strategy developed as a reaction to be employed in unqualified jobs, creates a break point in the migrants' careers. They again work in low-quality jobs while they are financing their life during their study periods. Married Russian women on the other hand, provide this financing from their spouses. In order reduce the conflict they have with their spouses in taking education again, they exhibit a more negotiated attitude towards the requests of their spouses. In this context, they are trained in private universities or various skill courses as foreign student dependent on the political preference and economic potential of their spouses. Russian women, who do not work or take education again after migration depending on the training they get in their countries, sustain some common practices with skilled migrants in Europe (Fossland, 2013).

Russian women having long or short term education and internship experience in Istanbul express that they can find a job in Istanbul before returning to their countries or in short period after they return. In this case, it has become possible to learn this language during the period of stay in Istanbul. Furthermore knowing western language also helps women in finding a job. Russian women settling in Turkey without knowing Turkish on the other hand, try to learn Turkish rapidly before start working or while working. Knowing Turkish expands the area where women can work. One of the interview people has worked in Istanbul for 7 years and is married with a Turkish man. While this person was working as a doctor in Russia, she moved to Istanbul after meeting with her Turkish husband. Although she did not know any single word in Turkish, she had prepared for exams after taking language course for 1 year and managed to become a doctor at a state hospital.

Another issue that is especially emphasized by the participants is harassment at workplace. Harassment not only influences skilled women, but all women regardless of their qualifications. When we handle the situation on the basis of qualified Russian women, it is seen that it causes women continuously change job and withdraw themselves completely from business life.

3. In lieu of Conclusion

Qualified Russian women living in Turkey actually have similar experiences with other qualified migrant women or local people living in Turkey. These experiences are interlaced each other with many categories such as being a migrant, being Russian, being a woman, being regular or irregular migrant, being qualified, having social networks or being depriving of them. Approaches and policies developed for each of these categories directly affect migrants' lives. Due to reasons such as employers avoiding working permit, long equivalency for the diplomas of the migrants taken outside Turkey, not knowing Turkish in sufficient, high demand in Turkey for the job for which training was taken, qualified Russian migrants cannot work in jobs that suit their qualifications. This situation conceptualized as "brain waste", means a huge loss for Turkey, which needs qualified people for its development. In a migrant receiving country like Turkey, considering the benefit to be provided to the society by qualified migrants and developing policies for this purpose are very important in terms of economic, social and political development of the country.

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