

“Come, or welcome to Europe?”

A comparative analysis of the inside-out views of Russian-speaking migrants in selected European countries.

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Abstract: The article analyses data obtained during the investigation of the process of adaptation of Russian speaking migrants in Germany and Norway. The comparative analysis of the following problem fields is presented: 1. Perception of migrants by the local population 2. Satisfaction of migrants with the level of knowledge and contacts across cultural boundaries 3. The necessity and expectation of the external support by the migrants. 4. Realisation of this support from the side of state and other sources. 5 Initial attitudes toward migrants and changes in these attitudes.

Key words: Migration, Russian speaking migrants, Germany, Norway.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many Russian-speaking migrants found it attractive to move to European countries such as Germany and Norway as a result of different push- and pull-factors, expecting to find a friendly environment and a new home.

Most of the migrants to Germany hoped to experience Europe as an inclusive environment on the basis of having a common ethnic background, and expecting at least to some extent a feeling of returning home. Other migrants were attracted by different factors, but regardless of their reasons, the migration to Germany was mainly a migration of two ethnic groups: ethnic Germans and their family members, and ethnic Jews and their family members.

The majority of migrants to Norway moved due to family reunion. On this basis, they hoped to find an understanding in their new home, as well as relying on 1000 years of long-lasting friendship and undisturbed borders between the countries as a guarantee for an easy inclusion.

To answer questions related to peculiarities in the processes of adaptation for Russian speaking migrants a pilot research was performed in 2008-2009 which included quantitative investigations with 190 respondents in Germany and 62 in Norway, as well as qualitative in-depth interviews in both countries.

Migration, it seems, is a complex topic influencing the growth and prosperity of nations, governmental policies and decisions, the attitudes of the local population, as well as the ideas, wishes and ambitions of the individuals who live in a particular country. On top of this, the question of cultural barriers will, most probably, present another level of complexity:

“The Cultural barriers will always be present. It is up to you not to feel limited by it and make it a subject for misunderstanding, or somehow convince yourself that everything is hopeless.” (Norway)

Migrants live in and with these questions on an everyday basis. And, when confronted with the demands for integration from a new society combined with one’s own history and roots, each person must deal with them on a very personal level:

“In the process of integration, the most important is not to loose oneself!” (Norway)

“The most important thing is to have the opportunity to develop and learn.” (Germany)

However, the question of integration does seem to be more than just a matter of adapting to new surroundings – it is a matter of developing oneself:

“The integration is first and foremost a self-realization and an opportunity to find a workplace. Because once you have acquired a job, it is a totally different status, feeling and mood.” (Germany)

“For me, personally, to integrate – is not just to become the same as others. There is no such thing as «a German» or «the German.» To me, integration is the process of enrichment, acquisition, and personal growth.” (Germany)

“A person may become fully integrated into the German society when he lives, works and has friends in this society. This does not happen instantly, but he will gradually live according to the local laws and accept these as his own.” (Germany)

Analysing the inside out views of Russian speaking migrants in Germany and Norway, several areas of interest may be defined which, when combined, depicts the situation for people moving to these countries from the former Soviet Union.

The areas covered in this text firstly related to the attitude of the local population towards the migrants, if they feel that they are treated on equal bases as the locals, who assisted the migrants and how, and, finally, how the State facilitates the migration process through policies, courses and other kinds of support.

From the descriptions provided, it is our opinion that we may provide sufficient insight into the everyday life of the migrants to suggest an answer to the question of whether these Russian-speaking migrants feel they were welcomed in these countries of Western Europe, or if they were simply allowed to come.

The first area to be evaluated, is how the migrants themselves were perceived by the local population. Table 1 summarizes the findings. When comparing the answers based on their level of expressed distance and scepticism, it would appear that migrants to Germany felt a more profound gap between themselves and the local population with 78,8% of the migrants having this perception, than was the case in Norway with 57,4%.

Table 1: How do you assess the attitude of the local population towards immigrants?

Answer	Germany	Norway
Sympathy, friendliness	18,5%	39,3%
Indifference	20,7%	14,8%
Indifference and alertness	5,4%	0%
Alertness	33,2%	32,8%
Hostility	4,3%	0%
Hard to answer	15,2%	9,8%

*In this table the answers which have more than 2 items are not included.

With this level of distance between the two groups, another significant question relates to their satisfaction with the level of knowledge and contact across cultural boundaries, and in or case, the migrants attitudes towards this, i.e., if the migrants were satisfied with such a relationship. These findings are represented in Table 2.

Table 2: Are you satisfied with the overall character of relations between local people and migrants?

Answer	Germany	Norway
No	1,1%	0%
More no than yes	33,5%	18,3%
more yes than no	55,7%	61,7%
yes	9,7%	20%

It would seem that the migrants to Germany do have a clearer view of the needs or desires to integrate better than is currently the case, as 34,6% of the respondents are not entirely satisfied with their relationship with the local population, while only 18,3% in Norway express the same attitude.

The reasons for these differences may be found in many aspects of the interactions, not only between the migrants and the local population, but also in the prevalent views in these countries of migration in general, as well as the migrants' countries of origin in particular. These questions were also among the issues covered in the in-depth interviews, which provided further insight on these aspects:

“There are some stereotypes and clichés about Russians generated by the press which we must combat.” (Germany)

While initial views and stereotypes in Europe prevailed during the earlier years of the migration from the former Soviet Union, this situation seems to be changing over time:

“In the ‘90s, there was a period in Norway when the local population met Russians, they were asked if they were prostitutes or belonging to the mafia. However, today Norwegians are occupied with other matters relating to foreigners.” (Norway)

Changing the public view on serious topics may be considered to be the domain of mass-media. This does also seem to be the case in shaping the image of a diaspora, and the its relationships towards the public:

“In the first years of my life in Norway, a week would not pass without Norwegian television showcasing some negative aspects of and from Russia; prostitutes, vodka, and so on. Eventually it has stopped, and now Russian series are shown on Norwegian television” (Norway)

Nevertheless there seems to be a sufficient number of changes occurring in relation to migrants from former Soviet Union in last years to warrant some level of optimism on behalf of the migrant diaspora:

“We must not forget that Norway is one of the oldest members of NATO, being a member since 1949. Thus, entire generations of Norwegians were brought up with a notion of a threat from the East [...] but this attitude is gradually changing. Today, they gladly acquaint themselves with Russian culture and history. But not everything is well in Russia, and this is mirrored in Norwegian [...] media” (Norway)

“Knowing the Germans, they discriminate any other nation that is not German. But nowadays, this attitude is much less apparent. People have started to think more freely. In fact, they relate well to Russians.” (Germany)

“The Germans show a healthy cautious attitude towards all migrants, including Russian.” (Germany)

Besides general knowledge and media coverage of topics colouring the public opinion towards migrants, other factors and more direct experiences sway the opinions of the local population as well. In this sense, and in Norway in partic-

ular, the migrants' education as well as their wish to actively participate in the labour market provide reasons to improve the attitudes towards them:

“The local population trust us much more now because they have found that Russian-speaking migrants have a higher level of education, greater desire to work and better stamina. It seems as they understood the Russian soul (laughs).” (Norway)

This does, however, seem to be a bit of a balancing act for the migrants in their everyday life:

“The local population is quite friendly. It seems to me that they cordially and warmly refer to the immigrant, unless they provoke some sort of distress towards the local population.” (Germany)

However, even the best intentions, insight and attitudes may not always be sufficient to ensure a level playing field in certain settings and social surroundings:

“In the everyday life, I would not say that the local population distance themselves or try somehow to separate from the migrants. [...] They are friendly. However, when doing business there is a certain level of mistrust and suspicion.” (Norway)

On the other hand, there are situations when the differences do play in the Russian-speaking migrants' favour. One such example is the culturally embedded gender roles and the gaps between such, where, in Norway local women are perceived to be extremely passionate about a career. Consequently, it may seem that more and more men turn their heads abroad in search of more traditionally oriented partners:

“Russians are very much liked, especially when it comes to the girls. There are more Russian women in Norway than there are Russian men, and among Norwegians, I have personally more friends than enemies.” (Norway)

Thus, it would seem that some cultural differences may be considered drawbacks, while other could work in favour of the migrant. Therefore, the question equality or inequality between the two groups does appear to be significant: Do the migrants just come to Europe, or are they really feeling themselves welcome? Furthermore, do they perceive themselves to be equal with the local population in a sense of being “new” Europeans?

Data from our questionnaire may shed some light on this question. Our findings are that 36.4% of migrants in Germany feel (in varying degree) that they are equal with the local population, while the same number in Norway is sufficient more at 63.9%. Similarly, the migrants' feeling of inequality in these countries are 52.4% in Germany and 24.7% in Norway.

The one side of this question is if the migrants feel that they are equal with the local population. The other side of the mirror may be considered to be the feeling that the local population is accepting them as the equal, as “the same” as themselves. When answering this question, 25.5% of respondents in Germany and 60.7% in Norway concurred and felt accepted as equals, while 52.2% of respondents in Germany and 18.1% in Norway reported feeling the opposite.

Furthermore, the views indicated in the survey were confirmed through the in-depth interviews:

“Formally, people who have German citizenship are equal to Germans. But in the everyday life, it is more important to know the language – if you do or do not have an accent has more of a deciding role than having citizenship, passport, or other rights.” (Germany)

“Laws are equal for everyone, but the reality is completely different.” (Germany)

“What is written on a paper is very different from what you experience in society. For example, having a Russian-sounding name or surname may provoke mixed reactions. Young people in Germany are more democratic and tolerant to

foreign language sounding names, as opposed to the older generations.” (Germany)

These results paint one of the many colours required for a picture of the day-to-day realities of Russian-speaking migrants to Germany and Norway. Another area influencing the life of the migrants are the migration politics of these European countries; do they make the migrants feel welcome? Are their expectations for help met by the host country?

The migrants moving to Germany were well informed of their special rights and privileges for this support in Germany based on the juridical definition of their migration, their migration status, as well as having their “big family” on their side.

Conversely and unlike the migrants to Germany, Russian speaking migrants moving to Norway had, in general, only a general knowledge of the host country as having a fair social support system. Consequently, these people did not have any expectations for special privileges based on either ethnicity or other reasons.

Thus, while almost half of the migrant to Norway did only rely on themselves, two of three migrants to Germany were relying on assistance from different sources, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3: From whom did the migrant expect assistance?

Answer	Germany	Norway
Relatives that had already moved	31,0%	17,5%
Government organizations	28,2%	17,5%
Migrant organizations	4,2%	0%
Not counting on outside help	31,5%	47,4%
Other	5,2%	17,5%

When answering the question of who provided the migrants with actual assistance, the migrants in Germany received the most support from local administration, religious or cultural communities and close relatives. Migrants to Norway mentioned and evaluated the same social institutions, although in general, the percentage of expected help was much lower than in Germany.

Table 4: Who provided actual assistance to the migrants?

Answer	Germany	Norway
Local authorities	31,7%	19,4%
Community (cultural, religious)	12,7%	12,6%
Other migrants who had already moved	20,0%	24,3%
Local population	8,0%	13,6%
Close relatives	21,7%	13,6%
None	4,0%	11,7%
Other	2,0%	4,9%

In-depth interview provided additional details on actual support and from where this support may be requested. One major difference between Norway and Germany seems to be that the latter has a well developed set of supporting organizations:

“Yes, there are numerous migrant centers, services and organizations providing social and monetary support – the Germans are trying to facilitate this process.” (Germany)

At the same time, there seems to be reasons for migrants to feel that, among others, there exist some level of privileged groups of migrants:

“Russian Germans have so-called privileges. This also applies to the status they receive and the fact that majority of their degrees and diplomas from the countries of origin are recognized. Thus, for this group of migrants, it is far easier to get a job within their former profession and make a career. This particular migrant group is better supported by the German government.” (Germany)

It should be mentioned, that the understanding of the situation provided through this interview may not be entirely correct, as there are no undocumented privileges provided. However, based on the apparent complexity of the current migrant policies, it may be considered to be a valid illustration of the perceived differentiation of migrants within Germany. In addition to such subjective views giving reasons to believe that some migrant groups are treated differently than others, there are factual variation in the legal bases for migration to Germany, as different rules and regulations may apply to different family members:

“Even within ordinary families, different paragraphs and legal bases may be a reason for tension and conflict.” (Germany)

Therefore, migrating to Germany and acquiring a German citizenship does not seem to be sufficient for migrants to be able to turn their undivided attention to starting a new life:

“Numerous validation tests, three phase exam - migrants endure incredible stress, despite the fact that they already have German citizenship and are full members of society” (Germany)

As the migrants are faced with at least some level of tasks and duties to be fulfilled before they can continue living in their new societies, they will require some assistance. The needs for such help do differ between the countries, but there are also similarities, as seen in Table 5.

Table 5: How should the state help migrants?

Answer	Germany	Norway
provide free housing / medical care	14,2%	9,3%
provide the opportunity to attend free language courses	26,1%	32,9%
help resolve legal formalities	16,1%	18,6%
provide social service and financial assistance	17,3%	8,7%
help finding a job	23,3%	26,1%
do not stop the migrants from living the way they want	1,7%	3,7%
Help and provide everything the migrants need to do	0,5%	0%
Other	0,9%	0,6%

There are some distinct answers where the requested help differs from the two countries: The need for direct support – either with finances, housing and/or medical support. A total of 31.5% of the respondents wanted this kind of support in Germany, compared to 18% in Norway.

Common for migrants to both Germany and Norway is their primary need for assistance in getting to know the local language, with almost every one in four respondent in Germany (26.1%) and every third in Norway (32.9%) requesting this.

Another wish for help is in finding a job, with 23.3% of the respondents in Germany and 26.1% in Norway answering this as a main area where they would request assistance.

In-depth interviews revealed another area where assistance is provided, which does not appear in the Table 5: If there is a recognized shortage of certain specialists and education, the migration policies may facilitate recruitment to the labour market:

“... in the city of Tromsø is a special support program for immigrants who come here to work which aims to secure that people live well and wish to stay. This is not only aimed at scientists, but also their families – helping the wives to find jobs and learn the language. This program has attracted a lot of scientists from Russia.”(Norway)

However, not all is bright for migrants with significant previous education, as there appears to be a question related to the approval and acceptance of such in the destination country:

“In Germany, the view on education received in the former Soviet Union is not positive. When migrants ask official services about their chances for working in the same profession as in the home country, they are often told that they have more chances to work with a new specialty, which they should acquire in Germany.” (Germany)

As a result of this, many migrants may find that their former expertise may not be used to its full potential, or even at all:

“Many migrants came to Germany with quite good skills, but they failed to integrate professionally. Despite their good education which remained unclaimed, they had to acquire low-skilled jobs.” (Germany)

This issue may possibly be a challenge for younger migrants. However, for the older migrants, this may indeed be a significant drawback:

“Older migrants who did not study in Germany, are often forced to work in completely new areas and at workplaces that do not require special skills. It is sad to see that there is a large group of highly educated people, including engineers, who have been left out of focus in Germany, especially due to the fact that Germany is lacking such knowledge and these competences could be employed.” (Germany)

Disregarding challenges, efforts and/or opportunities related to the introduction into the labour markets of Germany and Norway, one prerequisite for integration is proficiency in the local language. In this respect both countries provide ample opportunities for the migrants:

“Children who have just arrived in Tromsø start by learning the language, going on a variety of sight-seeing, and are gradually introduced into society in order to provide a soft start.” (Norway)

“The virtue of the German policy is that people who arrived here will be provided with conditions for a normal existence and opportunities for a new life in another country without being disadvantaged in the domestic environment. The migrants are given the time to settle down, learn language and attend different courses without being pushed into a corner.” (Germany)

“The State provides primarily language-training in order to facilitate a better adaptation to society. These are free for refugees, but not for those who arrive due to family reasons.” (Norway)

Furthermore, both countries provide opportunities for migrants to develop their social spheres, developing opportunities for migrants, at least within certain areas. In Germany, focus has been on attracting entire families as well as young talents:

“The advantages of German policies are that they allow entire families to migrate and not only the young part of it. Therefore, they do not break the family, and when the old people come, they take care of them and do quite a good job of it.” (Germany)

“The students now have additional opportunities: If a person came to study here – with or without prior degrees, he has the opportunity to find a job and continue living here. I think Germany will also prosper from this.” (Germany)

While the German approach is focused on the migrants and their families, the Norwegian solution is to a greater extent regionalized in the Northern parts of the country, implementing special solutions for this area:

“The opening of the borders between the Arctic region of Russia and Sør-Varanger municipality in Norway allows the citizens of these areas to pass to Russia and from Russia without visas.” (Norway)

“In Tromsø, for example, an International Week is held in early June. Representatives of various associations from different countries can showcase their national costumes, interests, dances, concerts, etc.” (Norway)

“Can you find anywhere else where the street name has been translated into Russian? In Kirkenes, the street names are written in both Norwegian and Russian. Consequently, we have provided all the conditions.” (Norway)

As described, both Germany and Norway have their different approaches for handling migrants from the former Soviet Union. The question remains, however: What about the state's ability to properly handle the number of migrants arriving? Despite lacking clear definitions on what “proper handling” includes, the in-depth interviews provide some insight into challenges facing both country and migrant in the migration process:

“The local government regulates effectively the entry of migrants and their integration, but does not have sufficient capacity and people. The new government that came to power, has greatly improved the bureaucratic side of migration - the results are obvious.” (Norway)

However, it appears that both financing and organizing the migrant reception may be somewhat underestimated in both Germany and Norway:

“Germany cannot cope with the responsibility they have undertaken, starting to accept migrants in such numbers, they are faced with the fact that they are unable to provide for them.” (Germany)

“Unfortunately, measures that are aimed at improve the integration policies do not always coincide with the funds provided for this purpose.” (Norway)

In addition to such difficulties from the side of the governments, there are also the questions related to migrants' wish to assist their comrades:

“The problem is that there are quite few people who can speak equally good German and Russian, and at the same time are willing to help migrants.” (Germany)

And, even if the wish may be present, there is still the question if migrants should completely assimilate into the local population, or still maintain at least a part of their heritage and own identity:

“I do not like the assimilation policy which forces you to forget about the existence of your mother tongue. This is not characteristic for Norway only, but we are trying to resist it.” (Norway)

What may be considered to be a consequence of this view was also expressed in an in-depth interview from Germany:

“In order to effectively coordinate the migration, there should be a layer of the population who can speak both languages, who are already integrated, and who are ready to help new migrants to integrate.” (Germany)

From the above, it could be concluded that there are significant efforts as well as a number of success stories from both Germany and Norway with regards to the process of supporting migrants and their integration as equal members of the host societies. However, it does not immediately appear that the frameworks suggested by the States for the migrants' integration and adjustment to a new life, are optimal.

In summing up, we have found that the attitude of the local population towards the migrants was earlier that of scepticism and distance. Time and experience is turning this around, reducing the gap between migrants and the local population. Furthermore, mass media coverage and public opinion migrates from a view provoking distance, to that of integration.

Despite rules and regulations treating everybody on an equal basis, migrants seem to have a feeling of differentiation between themselves, the local population and other migrants due to the complexity of national policies related to migration.

As more and more migrants arrive, the available support for the “new-comers” improve. Still, even though people may place a great emphasis on the assistance provided by relatives and friends, the receiving government does seem to provide the most actual assistance.

Regardless of the reasons for migrating and the migrants' ambitions, the main needs have been found to be assistance with learning a new language and finding a job.

On this basis, the question arises: Do the migrants feel welcome to their new country, or do they feel that they are merely accepted?

As we have seen, the migrants to both countries are fairly satisfied with the level of their relationship with the local population and their expectations for support were to a large extent met. Furthermore, previous difficulties in both areas have improved over time, and this development does seem to be continuing. Therefore, we may conclude that migrants to both Germany and Norway do feel welcome in their new countries:

“I believe that I am completely integrated. I have no complaints at all – not to anybody, and I have no problems in my life.” (Germany)