

Vocational Education and Training Schools in Terms of Student Migration in Russia: Challenges and Prospects

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The paper considers social, economic, and demographic effects of attracting foreign students to vocational education and training schools in Russia. The authors investigate challenges and prospects of increasing national share in the export of educational services in this sector.

Key words: student migration, vocational education and training schools, adaptation, integration.

The article presents the findings of the research project aimed at investigating and evaluating social, economic, and demographic effects of attracting international students to vocational education and training schools in Russia as a part of the programme to increase national share in the export of educational services in the medium and long term.

Priority of student migration development is enshrined in the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2025. However, the mechanisms to reach the migration priorities in vocational education are not effective [1]. To address this issue, it is essential to investigate challenges and prospects of attracting foreign students into Russian vocational education. This would permit a more complete description of the status of Russian education on the global market of vocational education services, which, in its turn, is required to develop adequate mechanisms for increasing and supporting competitiveness of the country on the global market. We believe that the income from the flow of international students into Russian vocational training schools (training colleges, vocational schools, etc.) is rather insignificant, whereas the potential for

providing qualitative educational services is high. In addition, student migration could also contribute to increasing the number of skilled working age employees who are in demand on the labor market and have been successfully integrated into Russian society.

The possibility to establish certification centers on the basis of vocational training schools has not been adequately discussed yet. These certification centers would conduct the procedures aimed at recognizing and evaluating skills, knowledge, and competencies of migrants. It would be of great demand on the domestic and global market. Inclusion of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan into the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) customs union in 2015 offers additional opportunities for such retraining on the basis of international partnership. The position of Russia on the global education market has been strengthened over the past years. This is due to the steady increase in the number of international students, which is the result of the great project 5-100 aimed at supporting leading universities of the RF. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of vocational education.

Today, the Russian economy needs an influx of migrants. According to the forecasts from the Federal State Statistics Service

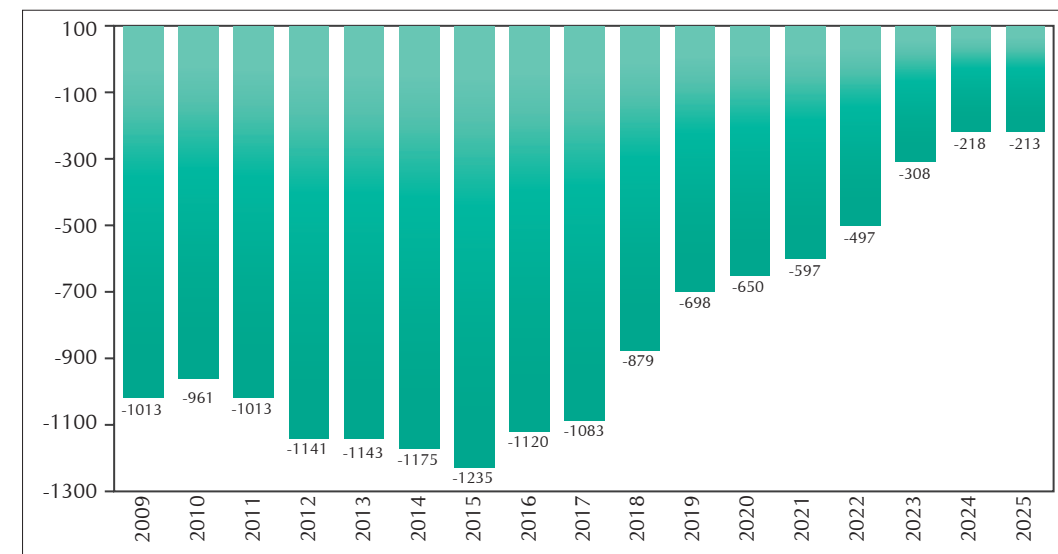
(Rosstat), the number of working age employees is decreasing in Russia (Fig. 1). The working age population is predicted to decline by 14 million people in 2009-2025.

The following objectives to attract migrants are stated in the State Migration Policy Concept of the Russian Federation [1]: "Migration flows into the Russian Federation is one of the ways to increase the population of the country in general and its regions in particular, while the attraction of qualified specialists and other foreign workers needed on the Russian labor market is an essential part of sustainable development of the country". The foreign students graduated from Russian vocational training schools, on the one hand, would make good the deficit of workers faced by the Russian economy over the past years, and, on the other hand, would contribute to dealing with the demographic imbalance in the country [2].

The overall assessment proves that there is certainly a high potential to increase the number of international students enrolled in vocational schools. In 2014/2015, 24.9 thousand of international students studied (full-time and part-time) at Russian vocational schools, representing

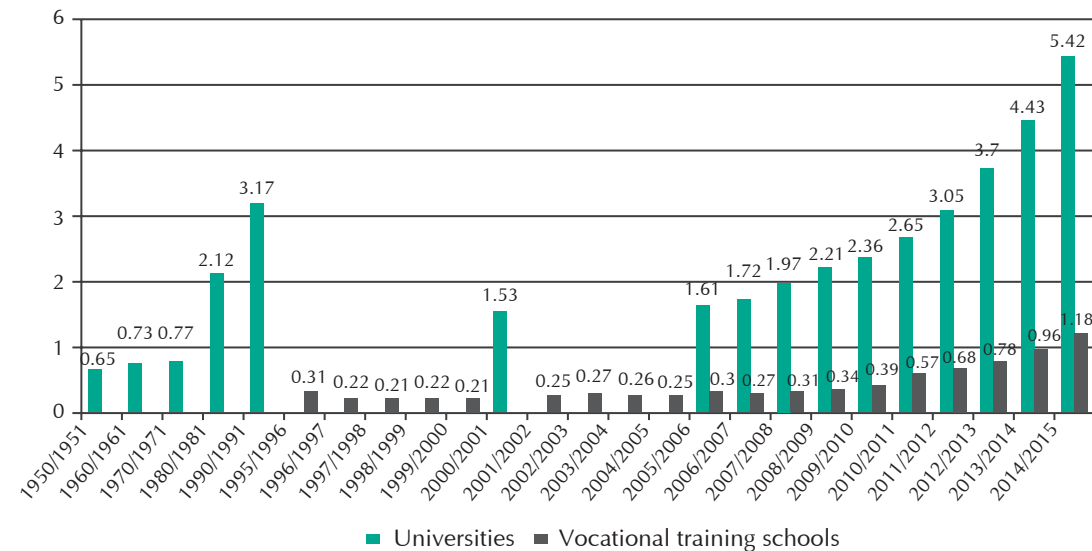
1.18% from the total number of students. At the same time, the Russian universities had the total undergraduate enrollment of 5209, including 282.9 thousand of international students (5.42%). Benefits to the RF economy from the international students increased 7 times and by the end of 2015 reached 73 billion rubles. Thus, it can be stated that the education sector is not only cost intensive, but also export-oriented [3]. It is worth noting that the number of international students hosted by Russian vocational training schools is rather small, and the annual growth of its share in the total number of students is slow (Fig. 2). Increasing global competition for international students accounting for approximately 5.1 million people (according to the data of Institute of International Education) is one of the trends that fosters national economies to develop international education. The share of Russian education on the global market grows slowly, therefore, the emphasis in elaborating the strategies for vocational education development should be made on the increasing number of students from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) [4].

Fig. 1. Decline in working age population in Russia in 2009-2025 (Rosstat)



Source: Rosstat data

Fig. 2. The proportion of foreign students in total student number in vocational training schools and universities from 1950 to 2015 in RSFSR/RF, thousand people.



Source: [3].

The current research is predominantly empirical and based on the interviews: 40 expert interviews and 40 in-depth interviews with the international students studying at the vocational training schools were conducted in Tomsk, Ekaterinburg, and Moscow from March 2016 till August 2016. The experts include scholars, faculty members of vocational training schools, relevant authorities, and potential employers. The interview instrument was developed as a flexible guide, including sets of questions that cover various aspects of international student enrollment into the vocational training schools of the country. The interviewed international students were basically from CIS: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Azerbaidzhan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Armenia.

The current state of research on international student flow into Russian vocational training schools

The issue of international student flow into Russian vocational training schools has not been adequately addressed yet. In contrast to government-supported higher education, vocational education in Russia and precisely the number of international

students enrolled in such schools are beyond the scope of scientific interest. The lack of research on this issue proves this fact. Most of the studies which focus on student migration basically concern higher education (Zh. Zayonchkovskaya, A. Aref'ev, L. Ledeneva, O. Korneev, Mukomel', etc.). There is no research that investigates social, economic, and demographic effects of attracting international students to vocational education and training schools in Russia. Foreign scholars also state that the issues of student migration within the vocational education and training programmes (VET, ISCED levels 3-4) have not been studied well in comparison with that within other education programmes [5]. The existing research carried out by Russian scholars basically focuses not on investigating practical aspects of and benefits from enrolling international students in Russian education institutions, but on evaluating scientific potential of the RF and the risk of "brain drain", i.e. the problems which are peripheral to the issue of the status of Russia on the global education market. In addition, these studies do not contribute to managing the existing facilities efficiently, which is

of particular importance in developing the migration policy oriented to the support of international student flow into Russia. This focus is essential today given the current state of the Russian education and science.

The statistical book by A.L. Arefiev, F.E. Sheregi "Export of educational services in Russia" (2016) presents a large amount of factual data and statistical information about student migration into Russia. It also includes data on the number of international student enrolled in Russian vocational training schools in 1995/1996–2014/2015 academic years. In addition, the book outlines the courses "Russian for Foreign Students" provided the Centers for Russian Science and Culture and representatives of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, living abroad compatriots [3]. The research presented in book "Study migration from the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic States: potential and prospects for Russia" (2012) is also noteworthy. Based on the large factual data, the authors have summarized the trends in student migration into Russian universities and outlined its prospects [6]. The research carried out by D.V. Poletaev and S.V. Dement'eva also focuses on student migration and international student adaptation at the universities of Moscow, Tomsk, and Krasnoyarsk [7-9].

However, the findings of the above-mentioned research are not sufficient to provide complete description of the possibilities to attract international students into Russian vocational training schools. This is due to the fact that universities and vocational training schools train specialists for different labor market segments, offer different education programmes, and, as a result, have distinct niches on the global education market [9].

The main limitation of the discussed research is that authors concentrate on this or that aspect of student migration within higher education instead of analyzing this issue from the point of possible benefits from the flow of international students into country. This stipulates the investigation

of Russian professional education market within the framework of the international professional training standards. The main purpose of this research is to contribute to an inflow of skilled workers and attraction of investments into the vocational education [9]. Therefore, despite the fact that it is far from being finished, the current research is rather relevant and is of particular practical interest.

Law enforcement practice: review

The number of cases in which foreign citizens (students of vocational training schools) are involved is insignificant. According to the Consultant Plus legal reference system, there were only 5 court judgements as at February 2017, including a judgement by the Supreme Court of the RF, 2 judgements of the court of general jurisdiction, and 2 judgments of Moscow courts and courts of Moscow region. In all cases, legal proceedings were initiated to challenge administrative court decisions concerning illegal working. The court judgements were analyzed in accordance with the procedure to monitor and maintain law reinforcement, approved by the Decree of the Government of the RF from 19 August, 2011 N 694, and the criteria developed within the current research:

- 1). Asserted claim.
- 2). Violated/challenge right.
- 3). Challenge decision, acts or omissions of the officials against international students enrolled in vocational training schools.
- 4). The core of court judgement, i.e. whether violation has been found or not, the claim has been sustained or not.
- 5). The revealed conflicts of law norms, mistakes of technical and legal nature, varying interpretations of law norms, violation of judicial practice uniformity.
- 6). Final evaluation and recommendations.

The list of the studied judicial acts published in the Consultant Plus legal reference system is given at the end of the article [10-12].

As protection of foreign students' rights is of practical value, the judgement by the Supreme Court of the RF from 30 June, 2016

N 78-AD16-30 is of particular interest. The Supreme Court sided with a foreign student enrolled in one of the vocational training schools.

The Court found the third-year student guilty of having committed administrative offence under article 18.10, part 2, of the Administrative Offences Code of the RF "Illegal work by a foreign citizen or by a stateless person in the Russian Federation", and imposed a fine of 5 000 rubles and rendered the decision on administrative expulsion of a student from the Russian Federation. The defense objected to this decision and requested the Court to revoke them and close the case. It was found during the trial that the student, a citizen of Turkmenistan, was performing work without corresponding permits or patent for work in summer 2015. This fact served as a ground for bringing her to administrative liability. The case file shows that she was a third-year student (full-time mode of education) of the vocational training school in a specified period.

According to par 1 article 13.4 and par 6, 4 article 13 of Federal Law № 115-FZ "On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation", a foreign resident who is undergoing general education course and reached the age of fifteen has the right to enter into employment agreement during vacation period without a work permit. In this proceeding, the Supreme Court decided that there was no evidence of illegal employment, and the administrative charges against a foreign student were not proven. The defense's complaint was satisfied, whereas the rights of the foreign student were restored. The increase in legal competence among international students is noteworthy. The analysis of the cases has revealed that international students actively defend their rights and seek advice and guidance from the relevant legal offices. The remaining court judgements were not found in international students' favor - a fine of 5000 rubles was imposed on students with administrative deportation from the territory of the Russian Federation.

Challenges and prospects for stipulating international student migration into Russian vocational training schools

The current research has revealed that Russian vocational training schools and the whole system of vocational education are not ready to enroll international students. In order to sustain a strong market position in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States, significant investments in the sector of vocational education, as well as development of a long-term target-oriented programme "Promotion of international student mobility within vocational education" are required. In modern global society, migrants and their children can choose any country to study. Therefore, the vocational education programmes offered at Russian training schools should meet the international education standards. In addition, vocational training schools should be adequately equipped, have up-to-date facilities and skilled faculty members. Various preparation courses including Russian language training should be available for international students. The experts interviewed noted that many vocational training schools are trying to enter the market of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States independently without any support from the Government. However, most of them are not on track to do so. Unlike vocational education, higher education institutions actively cooperate with the Commonwealth of Independent States. Most international students studying in Russia are from the Commonwealth of Independent States (the situation is similar for vocational education), Kazakhstan being a major sending country (roughly 1 in 4 international students studying full-time or part-time in Russia are from Kazakhstan). The standard-bearers of the Russian education abroad are Joint Slavonic Universities in Kirgizia, Belorussia, Tadzhikistan, and Armenia. Over the past three years, the Ministry of Education and Science of the RF has provided support to these countries by implementing development programmes in cooperation

with Russian universities [3]. The similar cooperation pattern can be implemented within the vocational education. To bring Russian vocational training schools onto the global education market, the embassies and consular posts could possibly initiate shows and conventions of educational programmes offered by the Russian vocational schools. In addition, the existing migration legislation also poses significant challenges to the vocational education in Russia. The interviewed experts expressed the opinion that the staff of vocational training schools should also involve the position of a passport officer to register the international students. Such a post is provided only in the institutions which offer international students campus housing. It is a great challenge for a vocational training school to employ a person to register international students. Therefore, we believe that Russian vocational training schools are still not ready to enroll a large number of international students. Another factor to be taken into consideration is that labor migrants also make money to pay for children's education. Obviously, the education system of the RF can count on this finance. However, the main problem is that most labor migrants wish their children could receive a better job. They wish their children could work at offices and have a possibility of career growth. On the one hand, this fact is in line with the interest of Russia in qualified workers. Skilled labor jobs can pay well, even very well if an employee is constantly improving his/her qualification. On the other hand, the career expectations that most migrants have for their children are far from the reality. They are trying to help their children attain higher education, however, having graduated from universities, these international graduates could hardly find a job in Russia. This is due to that fact that the only niche for them on the labor market of Russia is worker occupations and positions of mid-level specialists. High tuition costs in polytechnic and sport colleges are of great concern. This fact forces migrants to choose the degree programmes with tuition and fees

that cost less, i.e. humanitarian programmes. However, most of them are not in demand on the labor market. Relating to this issue, it would be essential to conduct career guidance in the countries that are major senders of international students. The main purpose of this career guidance is to explain the advantages of vocational education in terms of future employment in Russia. The economy will always need skilled worker even in a case of economic stagnation. The interviewed experts expressed the view that vocational education for international students can be both fee-paid or free. They can study for free within the framework of the interstate agreements between the Eurasian Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States. In this case, education is free only for students, the country itself will pay tuition fees for their citizens. The question is whether the Russian Federation is ready to pay tuition fees for the international students who would return to their native land after graduation. This question requires taking a reasonable decision at the Government level. Despite the fact that the majority of migrants from Central Asia come to Russia in search of work, there are certain risks not to see concrete efficiency gains from the investments made. There is also another possibility to foster the influx of international students into the Russian vocational training schools, i.e. to attract financial support from the potential employers. However, the employers are not willing to invest money into training migrants, they are waiting support from the Government that will bring up new workers for the labor market of the country. Thus, there is continuing tug-of-war between the Government and employers. Therefore, it is reasonable to rely on the money of migrants themselves who save for their children's education or retraining. The main task is to convince them that to invest money into vocational education is economically reasonable as qualified workers are always in demand even in the current fragile economic environment. In this context, the opening of representative offices of the vocational training schools

abroad (similar to higher education when students study in their native country and have an opportunity to obtain Russian university diploma) is rather promising. It is possible to count on money which labor migrants send back to their families in their country of origin. A special attention should be paid to dissemination of the information about Russian vocational education. A role of the Government, as a main coordinator of economic development of the country, is of particular importance. As known, economic development of the country depends on the qualified foreign workforce. Priority of student migration development is enshrined in the Concept of State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation. This fact is obvious for everyone, however, the theory is inconsistent with the real actions aimed at attracting international students to the Russian vocational training schools.

To sum up, the most significant findings to emerge from this study are as follows:

1. Based on the in-depth interviews with the international students studying at the vocational training schools of the RF, social, economic and demographic aspects of student migration were revealed.

2. The lack of research focused on social, demographic, economic, and humanitarian benefits from the international student flow into Russian vocational schools was identified. Therefore, the approaches developed by foreign and Russian scholars to analyze study migration within the higher education from 2008 to 2016 were applied. The foreign scholars also emphasize the fact that the issues concerning international students' enrollment into vocational training schools have not been adequately addressed. This makes the current study relevant.

3. The research proved that the vocational education in Russia is not ready for a great influx of study migrants. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the possibility to study at Russian vocational schools has already become attractive for young migrants due

to new perspectives in finding job or even applying for citizenship. Earlier and more intensive career advice and guidance in the countries which are the basic senders of study migrants would, on the one hand, contribute to the increase in the number of in-demand qualified workers on the labor market and, on the other hand, assure additional financing to the vocational training schools.

4. The challenges to be addressed in order to attract the influx of international students into Russian vocational training schools:

a) Recruiting talented specialists who will be able to improve vocational training in accordance with the international education standards.

b) Enhancing the existing facilities of vocational training schools to guarantee high quality of student teaching. This will require serious financial injections.

c) Student internship should be regulated at legal level so that vocational schools do not face any challenges in its implementation and reinforcement.

d) Receiving assurance from potential employers or countries (both RF and native countries of migrants) that the money spent on migrant education will be reimbursed.

e) Similar to student migration in higher education, it is required to develop an effective regulatory device that would include a possibility of employer-sponsored education of migrants within the sector of vocational training.

5. Many Russian vocational training schools are trying to enter the education market of the Commonwealth of Independent States independently, without any support from the Government, and have already gained certain experience. Assistance in advertising, promoting (shows and conventions of educational programmes) Russian vocational education in the Commonwealth of Independent States by the embassies and consular posts would significantly contribute to fostering student migration into Russian vocational training schools.

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