



# Migration motivation of agriculturally educated rural youth: The case of Russian Siberia



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## ABSTRACT

The migration of young people from rural areas is common in all agricultural regions of Russia, and Altai Krai, located in southwestern Siberia, is no exception. Out-migration, aversion to working in agriculture and the aging of farmers and farm managers are serious problems that raise questions about who will work in agriculture in the future. This paper aims to investigate factors that affect the decisions of agricultural students from Altai Krai to out-migrate or to return to their rural parental municipalities after finishing their university studies. We conducted a questionnaire survey of students at the Altai State Agrarian University in Barnaul and analyzed their migration intentions using a logit regression model. Migration motivation is studied in relation to personal and family background characteristics, employment expectations and quality of life, with a particular focus on references to agriculture. Our results show that the probability of leaving the parental municipality decreases if i) the respondent's parents support the study of agriculture, ii) the respondent's family owns agricultural land, iii) the respondent intends to work in agriculture, and iv) the respondent believes that it is not difficult to establish one's own business in the parental municipality. Women are more likely than men to leave their rural parental municipalities, and the probability of out-migration increases as respondents' life satisfaction increases. Our findings indicate that agricultural roots in the respondent's family stimulate young university graduates to return home and continue in the family tradition. Some of the factors that push young people, especially women, to out-migrate to cities (such as territorial isolation or the social roles of rural women) may be changed only over a long-term period. The recovery or enhancement of relationships between agricultural schools and agricultural enterprises, access to credits for business establishment and the purchase of agricultural land, and better living conditions in rural municipalities could encourage agriculturally educated youth to remain in rural areas and work in agriculture.

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## 1. Introduction

Youth out-migration is a common feature of most rural areas in both developed and developing countries (Chen et al., 2014; Mihi-

Ramirez and Kumpikaite, 2014). The out-migration of young rural people is often related to participation in higher education and entrance into the labor market (Thissen et al., 2010). Many youth who leave school view the progression to college or university and, accordingly, leaving the home community as a natural process (Stockdale, 2006). Consequently, the propensity to return to the parental municipality after graduation in the city is a selective process that differs according to several characteristics, including the socio-familial, migration and professional trajectories of graduates (Rérat, 2014).

The Russian Federation has long suffered from a demographic crisis whose main features are depopulation, increased mortality and the demographic aging of the population. Russia is

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characterized by a great diversity of territorial demographic situations. The marginal values of key indicators of demographic development in individual regions deviate from the average values in Russia. Until the 1990s, changes in the Russian population (such as changes in the birth rate and population growth) were not a priority in politics and research. Additionally, the interest of both federal and regional authorities in the problems of depopulation, the high mortality crisis and migration flows was negligible (Eremin and Bykov, 2011). The demographic situation in rural areas of Russia has changed in recent decades, largely due to migration from less economically developed regions to more economically developed regions, both within Russia and abroad (Shibaeva, 2012; Krikunov, 2012; Kareva, 2003). Rural depopulation in Russia has been endemic for a long time (Perevebencev, 1990). Between 1960 and 1970, the number of rural inhabitants in Russia decreased by at least 1 million people annually; in some years, the number was even higher. As a result of this process, numerous large cities have appeared (Leyzerovich, 2008). Moreover, nearly all demographic trends that originated during the period of “developed socialism” in Russia have accelerated. One such trend is population growth in cities (Tumanov et al., 2000); in 2013, the share of the population living in cities reached 74%<sup>2</sup> (RSY, 2014). The depopulation trend in rural villages is mirrored by the structure of rural settlements. Between 1989 and 2010, the number of villages with up to 6 inhabitants increased by 60%, and the number of municipalities with more than 5000 inhabitants increased by 32%. In addition, significant changes in the age structure of rural populations occurred between 2006 and 2011. Specifically, the proportion of 10- to 19-year-olds decreased by 3.6%, whereas the proportion of 50- to 64-year-olds increased by 4.9% (RSY, 2014).

It is evident that the decline and aging of rural populations coincide. One of the primary drivers of these processes is the increasing out-migration of rural youth to cities. Russian rural areas (except the rural areas closest to cities) lost 20%–25% of their young people due to migration during the 1989–2002 period; in some regions, these losses reached 40% (e.g., in the Buryatia, Omsk and Tomsk regions) (Karachurina and Mkrtychyan, 2012). The majority of people who migrated from villages to cities between 2007 and 2010 were between the ages of 17 and 29 (Mkrtychyan, 2013). The migration of young people from rural areas is occurring in all agrarian regions in Russia, which has led to the shrinking of this age group in rural villages (Kareva, 2003; Sanzhiev, 2009).

Young people move to cities where institutions of vocational education that provide employment opportunities in the city after graduation are located. Once they receive higher or vocational education, young professionals do not return to rural areas. A low level of wages and unsatisfactory working and living conditions in rural municipalities are unattractive for young graduates. Therefore, the number of graduates of university and secondary vocational educational institutions who return to rural areas is many times lower than the number of people who travel to the cities for professional education. This situation causes problems in producing a specialized workforce in rural areas. The collapse of the Soviet

Union and the aggravation of interethnic relations led to the emergence of new categories of migrants, including refugees and internally displaced persons from the countries of the former Soviet republics. An excessive proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled workers employed on a seasonal or temporary basis has been found in the structure of the flow of foreign labor migrants. The potential to use cheap, unskilled foreigners does not force employers to enhance the quantity and quality of jobs that are attractive to residents of rural regions and young graduates (Karachurina and Mkrtychyan, 2012).

Significant amounts of financial and material resources are invested in national and regional programs to promote agriculture, which is considered the main driving force for rural development. However, government support is not enough to motivate people to work in agriculture (Rybakova, 2013). This aversion to working in agriculture is also evident in our case study area, Altai Krai, which is located in southwestern Siberia on the border of Kazakhstan. Altai Krai is a leading agricultural region in Siberia and the Far East and plays an important role in ensuring food self-sufficiency for the regions. During the Soviet period, Altai Krai received the title of the “granary of Siberia” (Akstat, 2014).

The attractiveness of traditional jobs in agriculture has diminished, which has led to a deficit of experienced workers and specialists in agriculture. From 2005 to 2014, the share of people working in agriculture decreased from 20.7% to 19.2%. The aversion of young people to working in agriculture – and in agricultural specialties in particular – combined with the unwillingness of agriculturally educated people to work in remote agricultural enterprises can have negative consequences for agricultural and agro-industrial businesses, agricultural labor markets and regional development (Shibaeva, 2012; Sergienko et al., 2013; Chekavinskiy, 2012).

In this paper, we focus on the migration motivations of students at the Altai State Agrarian University in Barnaul (the capital of Altai Krai). These students are expected to work in the agricultural sector and, in the best case, to return to the parental municipality. This university is the only agricultural university in Altai Krai, and anecdotal evidence considers its students agricultural specialists who can promote regional agriculture. Agriculture represents an irreplaceable factor for regional development, so we decided to study what this cohort can tell us about migration in the region. The availability of support for this study also played an important role. The main objective of our research is to analyze and evaluate the factors that motivate young people who study agricultural sciences to either migrate from or return to their rural parental municipalities in Altai Krai after finishing their university studies.

Despite the relevance of this issue, we are aware of no previous systematic quantitative studies in the region. This study analyzes the migration motivations of students at the agricultural university with regard to their personal and family background characteristics, employment perceptions, quality of life and relation to agriculture.

This paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents the theoretical background of this study, which provides a context for the development of a questionnaire and the interpretation of the findings; section 3 describes the study area; section 4 presents the data and methodology; section 5 introduces the empirical results regarding the migration intentions of young people and discusses the findings; and section 6 closes the paper with a presentation of conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## 2. Factors that influence the migration decisions of educated rural youth

Much is already known about youths' migration decisions.

<sup>2</sup> The publication of data on migration flows by statistical offices began in the mid-1990s. Because it is very difficult to monitor migration flows between cities, the actual amount of migration can differ from the statistical data by up to 30% (Mkrtychyan, 2013). Another issue that impedes the monitoring of migration flows and of developments in rural-urban settlements is the absence of an official definition of “rural area” in Russia. The Russian internet encyclopedia *Akademik* (2014) states that the main difference between rural and urban settlements is that “the majority of the economically active population in urban settlements is not employed in agriculture” and that “[t]herefore, some villages are larger than cities”. *Akademik* (2014) also notes that the list of settlements with city status changes constantly for three main reasons: they transform into rural settlements, become incorporated into another city or simply disappear from the map.

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