

Ростовская Т. К., Ситковский А. М.**УСТАНОВКИ ИНОСТРАННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ НА ДАЛЬНЕЙШУЮ ЖИЗНЬ И КАРЬЕРУ В РОССИИ**

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Международная интернационализация высшего образования набирает обороты на фоне серьезных демографических изменений в развитых странах (старение населения, низкая рождаемость), что стимулирует правительства привлекать и удерживать молодежь из менее развитых регионов. В этих условиях актуально изучение миграционных установок иностранных студентов — их мотивов, планов и факторов, влияющих на решение остаться в России либо покинуть страну после обучения.

Цель настоящего исследования — определить ценностные ориентиры и установки иностранных студентов относительно продолжения обучения, работы и жизни в России, выявить ключевые влияющие факторы.

В 2024 г. проведен опрос 168 иностранных студентов англоязычной магистерской программы НИУ ВШЭ «Население и развитие» с использованием анкеты (шкала Лайкерта) и статистического анализа; дополнительно привлекались данные официальной статистики (форма ВПО-1 Минобрнауки России).

Показано, что ожидания студентов относительно обучения в России в целом оправдываются: большинство высоко оценивают качество образования и жизни в России, доступность жилья, относительно невысокую стоимость жизни. Высокие оценки получили также доступность медицинского обслуживания и правовая защищенность студентов. Вместе с тем существенная часть студентов не уверена в перспективах трудоустройства в России: около двух третей респондентов считают, что им будет сложно найти работу по окончании обучения, что обусловлено, по их мнению, недостаточно благоприятной политикой, недоверием работодателей к иностранцам и слабым участием университетов в трудоустройстве выпускников. Около половины опрошенных не ощущают себя комфортно в России и планируют уехать после выпуска. Примерно 40% иностранных студентов хотели бы получить российское гражданство, тогда как столько же не планируют этого.

Ключевые слова: социологическое исследование; социологический опрос; иностранные студенты; образовательная миграция; миграционные установки; ценностные ориентиры; социокультурная адаптация.

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Rostovskaya T. K., Sitkovskiy A. M.**THE ATTITUDES OF FOREIGN STUDENTS TO THEIR FURTHER LIFE AND CAREER IN RUSSIA**

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The world internationalization of higher education is gaining momentum against the background of significant demographic changes in economically developed countries (aging of population, low natality) that encourage governments to attract and retain the youth from less developed regions. In these conditions, it is relevant to study migration attitudes of international students — their motives, plans and factors influencing decision to stay in Russia or leave the country after graduation.

The purpose of the study is to determine value guidelines and attitudes of foreign students regarding continuation of their education, work and life in Russia and to identify key affecting factors.

In 2024, the questionnaire survey of 168 foreign students-participants of the English-speaking Master program “Population and Development” in the Federal State Autonomous Educational Institution of Higher Education “The National Research University the Higher School of Economics” was carried out. The questionnaire based on the Likert Scale and further statistical analysis were applied. Additionally, official statistics data was used (VPO-1 form of the Minobrnauka of Russia).

It is demonstrated that expectations of students regarding education in Russia are generally justified. The majority of respondents rates very high quality of education and life in Russia, accessibility of habitation, relatively low cost-of-living. The higher marks received accessibility of medical care and legal protection of students. At the same time, significant portion of students have no confidence in prospects of their employment in Russia. About two thirds of respondents believe that it will be difficult for them to find job after graduation that is conditioned, according their opinion, by not adequately favorable policy, mistrust of employers to foreigners and poor involvement of universities in job placement of graduates. About half of respondents feel themselves uncomfortable in Russia and plan to leave after graduation. About 40% of foreign students would like to be admitted to citizenship of Russia. While the same number do not plan it.

Key words: sociological research; sociological survey; foreign students; educational migration; migration attitudes; value orientations; sociocultural adaptation.

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Introduction

The President of the Russian Federation has set a goal that, by 2030, the number of international students in Russian universities should reach at least 500,000, shifting the focus from exporting educational services to employing talented graduates and encouraging them to acquire Russian citizenship.¹ This paradigm shift is embodied in the federal project “Russia — an Attractive Country for Study and Work”², which aims to attract promising young people to Russia, i.e., to foster high-quality educational migration. Special emphasis is placed on supporting the socio-cultural adaptation of foreign students, integrating them into Russian values, and facilitating their entry into the labor market. In 2019, Russia hosted 298,000 international students; in 2020, 315,000; in 2021, 324,000; and in 2022, 354,000 [1]. In 2022 alone, the number of foreign students in Moscow exceeded 50,000, making Moscow the undisputed leader among Russian cities [2]. Nevertheless, the value orientations, cultural characteristics, and socio-demographic profile of this community of international students remain insufficiently studied. Without a deep understanding of their perceptions, experiences, and decision-making motivations, it is difficult to develop effective strategies to support their integration and retention as a workforce reserve.

Recent studies emphasize the complex and dynamic nature of students’ migration intentions, shaped by numerous factors in both their home and host countries [3–4]. International student migration is traditionally explained via a push–pull framework — “push” factors motivating departure from the home country and “pull” factors attracting students to the destination country [5–6]. However, this structural approach has limitations, as it does not account for migrants’ personal aspirations and desires [7]. As Carling and Collins observe, migration aspirations are largely socially constructed and depend on subjective factors beyond purely objective conditions [8]. Indeed, international students’ decisions are multifaceted: on the one hand, employment opportunities and the host country’s labor-market quality exert significant influence on their willingness to stay; on the other, psychological attachment to their homeland, family ties, and cultural bonds play a critical role. For example, the perception of suitable job opportunities and working conditions is a key factor in the decision to re-

main; if the labor market fails to meet expectations (forcing work outside one’s field), the desire to stay diminishes. Simultaneously, strong cultural ties to the home country may discourage long-term relocation. A Canadian study identified four concepts of “home” — the host country, ancestral homeland, cosmopolitan identity, and uncertainty — which correspond to different migration decisions (to stay, return, or remain undecided) [9]. Graduates who perceive their place of study as “home” are significantly more likely to stay and work there after graduation, compared to those who regard their birthplace as home.

Against the backdrop of government initiatives to attract foreign students and retain graduates in Russia, there is a clear need for a comprehensive analysis of their migration attitudes. This study, based on empirical research, examines foreign students’ motivations, their assessment of living and studying conditions in Russia, and their plans regarding future employment and migration. Special attention is given to the influence of career aspirations, socio-cultural adaptation factors, and prospects for obtaining citizenship on students’ intentions to remain in Russia.

Materials and methods

A sociological survey was conducted in the summer of 2024 among foreign students studying in Moscow. The sample comprised 168 master’s students enrolled in the English-language program “Population and Development” at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Approximately 60% of respondents came from African countries, primarily Ghana (41%, 69 respondents) and Nigeria (19%, 32 respondents). Chinese students comprised the third-largest group (approximately 5%, 9 respondents). The remaining participants represented more than ten other countries across Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe. The vast majority (72.6%) indicated that English was the primary language spoken in their households. Among the respondents, 60% were male and 40% female, with the predominant age range being 22–25 years.

The survey was administered via an online questionnaire in English. The questions were formulated as statements to which respondents expressed their level of agreement on a four-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 4 = “strongly agree”). The questionnaire comprised three thematic blocks of factors expected to influence students’ migration attitudes: (1) career-related factors (expected employment prospects in Russia, attitudes toward foreign workers in the labor market, financial stability, etc.); (2) quality of life in the host country (living conditions, cost of living, quality of advanced education, accessibility of healthcare, legal protection, etc.); and (3) cultural-linguistic integration (adaptation

¹ President of the Russian Federation. (2024, May 7). Decree No. 309 “On national development goals of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030 and for the perspective up to 2036”. Official site of the President of Russia. Retrieved May 8, 2025. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/50542>

² Government of the Russian Federation. (2021). Federal project “Russia — attractive for study and work”. Official site of the Government of Russia. Retrieved May 8, 2025. Available at: <http://static.government.ru/media/files/SV35n26lWRbVXNQfHPf59wn3BgYyA8a.pdf>

to the language environment, cultural affinity, religious factors, attitudes toward intercultural marriage, etc.). Descriptive statistical methods (frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores) were used for quantitative analysis. Official statistical data — specifically, Form VPO-1³ on the number of foreign students in Moscow's universities — were also utilized to contextualize and compare the survey results.

It should be noted that the survey primarily covered students from English-speaking backgrounds (Africa and Asia) studying at a single university in Moscow. This limitation constrains the generalizability of the findings, although it enables the identification of characteristic trends. Furthermore, this article does not compute an integrated Migration Intention Index (as proposed in a previous study [10]), focusing instead on a detailed analysis of factors and attitudes.

Results

The survey revealed a roughly equal split of opinions regarding continuing to live in Russia after graduation. Most respondents either definitely or somewhat agreed that they would consider remaining in Russia upon completing their studies, whereas a substantial portion (approximately 48%) disagreed and planned to return to their home countries or relocate to a third country. To gauge the stability of these attitudes, respondents were also asked about their classmates' plans: 50.6% believed that their foreign peers would also like to stay in Russia, while 39.3% thought their peers were more likely to leave. This suggests a degree of optimism regarding others' intentions — possibly influenced by external factors—whereas individuals tend to assess their own migration plans more cautiously.

To further characterize migration attitudes, additional statements were posed. Only 42.3% of respondents felt sufficiently comfortable in Russia that they “did not want to leave,” whereas nearly half (49.4%) disagreed with this statement, indicating a lack of attachment to residing in Russia. In other words, about half of the foreign students do not perceive Russia as their home. Moreover, fewer than half of respondents (33.3%) agreed with the proposition that “there is no point in emigrating from Russia after studying,” while the majority (56%) disagreed. Finally, fewer than half of the foreign students expressed a desire to obtain Russian citizenship (only 40.5%), and a similar proportion (around 40%) explicitly stated that they did not plan to obtain a Russian passport. These figures indicate that many students' long-term migration intentions remain uncertain or lean toward departure from Russia.

Despite these cautious plans, most students evaluate their experience in Russia positively. Approximately 88% agreed that the quality of education in Russian universities is high, and 82% rated the prestige of their pro-

grams highly. For many international students, studying in Russia is a means to enhance their competitiveness: 78% noted that the Russian education system attracts students with strong career-and-self-realization ambitions. Quality of life also received positive assessments: over 70% agreed that the cost of living in Russia is acceptable for foreign students; 75% were satisfied with the availability of goods and services; and approximately 80% rated the public transportation system positively. Notably, 64% of respondents described the Russian Federation as a safe country for living, with only 15% dissenting. Healthcare emerged as an important factor: more than 60% believed that medical assistance in Russia is accessible to everyone when needed (including emergency care), including services provided by non-profit organizations [11]. Overall, foreign students highlighted a high quality of life in the host country, aligning with their initial expectations of studying in Russia. It can be concluded that academic and daily-life motivations (quality of education, comfort, and safety) in Russia satisfy a significant portion of students and may encourage them to consider remaining.

A key deterrent to migration aspirations is foreign students' uncertainty about their professional future in Russia. The survey found that about 63% of respondents believed, “It will be difficult for me to find a job in Russia.” Only one quarter disagreed, whereas the majority held a pessimistic view of their prospects in the Russian labor market. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters of students (73%) asserted that finding a well-paid job in Russia would be particularly challenging (only 19% disagreed). At the same time, interest in employment after graduation is high: 69% stated that they would like to secure permanent employment in Russia upon completing their studies. This combination of findings reveals a significant gap between expectations and reality: international students aim to apply their education in Russia but encounter substantial barriers to employment. In open-ended comments and interviews, respondents cited several reasons. First, insufficient awareness among both students and employers regarding foreign graduates' rights and hiring procedures leads to mutual misunderstandings and caution during recruitment. Second, according to respondents, Russian employers often distrust foreign applicants, preferring local graduates (some students reported instances of covert discrimination). Third, government policies aimed at attracting young foreign specialists are perceived as not sufficiently favorable: bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining work permits, lack of tax incentives, and absence of employment support programs reduce the chances of staying. Finally, universities themselves, according to student feedback, do not adequately support career development—career centers primarily serve local students, and internships and job openings are scarcely available to international students. These factors contribute to many students' intention to leave after graduation.

Another important factor influencing migration attitudes is the level of adaptation to life in Russia. As noted, about half of respondents do not feel at home in the host country and plan to leave. The main obstacles are

³ Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. (2025). Form VPO-1: Information about organizations engaged in educational activities under higher education programs — bachelor's, specialist's, and master's programs. Official site of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia. Retrieved May 8, 2025. Available at: <https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/action/stat/highed/>

language barriers and limited contact with the local population. Although instruction is provided in English, Russian language skills are essential for a comfortable life outside the university. Only 15% of respondents are fluent in Russian; around 50% have conversational proficiency; and one-third experience significant communication difficulties. Many admit to interacting primarily within their own circles (compatriots or other English-speaking foreigners) and have limited involvement in Russian society. For instance, fewer than 30% have close Russian friends, and approximately 40% have no contact with local peers outside academic settings. Cultural differences also play a role: about one-quarter of respondents encountered unfamiliar social norms or lifestyles that hindered integration (for example, differences in religious traditions, gender-role attitudes, and family-value perceptions). Nevertheless, 55% of international students evaluated Russians' attitudes toward their culture positively and felt respect for their customs, while 20% reported instances of unfriendly or stereotypical behavior.

A separate question addressed family formation plans in the Russian context. About 60% of respondents plan to start a family (marry, have children) in the future. However, only a minority connect these plans with Russia: over half do not consider marrying a Russian citizen, and a similar proportion do not plan to bring a future spouse to live in Russia. In other words, a significant share of students do not envision their family future in Russia, correlating with their intention to leave. This finding supports the conclusion that socio-cultural integration (including personal life and family prospects) substantially influences young people's willingness to remain abroad.

Discussion

The results provide a comprehensive understanding of foreign students' migration attitudes in Russia. On one hand, strong motivating factors are evident: high-quality education, relatively good living standards, safety, and comfort in the host country — all classic pull factors making Russia an attractive study destination. Our findings confirm that many students are satisfied with their decision to study in the Russian Federation and gain the expected benefits (academic credentials and cultural experience). On the other hand, at the planning stage for future life, a gap emerges: a positive study experience does not guarantee an intention to stay. The main obstacles are limited opportunities for professional realization and integration.

First, the labor market is perceived by foreign graduates as difficult to access. This conclusion aligns with studies in other countries. In Hungary, for example, successful careers of foreign graduates depend on entrepreneurial opportunities and support for stable employment [12]. A lack of such conditions leads to a brain drain. Our research uncovered a similar trend: even motivated students doubt their professional prospects in Russia. This situation requires attention from both government and universities. Targeted incentives should be considered: quotas for hiring highly skilled foreign

graduates, internship-to-employment programs, and collaboration between universities and employers to facilitate employment of international students. Experts also recommend aligning education export policies with regional socio-economic strategies and creating legal consulting services for foreign nationals' employment [13]. Implementing such measures could boost students' confidence in their prospects in Russia and increase the retention rate.

Second, socio-cultural adaptation and the sense of "home" are critical factors. If foreign graduates do not feel a strong sense of belonging in the host society, they are likely to depart, even if job offers exist. Our study showed that nearly half of students do not feel fully comfortable in Russia and plan to return home. Effective communication and intercultural engagement are therefore crucial. Mentoring programs, cultural exchanges, student life activities, volunteering, and social projects should be expanded. Language barriers can be mitigated through accessible Russian-language courses, events introducing Russian traditions, and mentoring by local students. International experience demonstrates that creating an inclusive environment and a sense of belonging can significantly increase the number of foreign graduates who choose to stay and work in the host country [14]. Furthermore, the realization that "home" can be the host country often develops over time. It is thus important to support international students not only academically but also during their transition to the workforce, helping them establish roots in their new environment.

Additionally, the aspiration to obtain citizenship serves as an integral indicator of migration intentions. Our results indicate that a substantial portion of those who come to study in Russia do not regard it as a permanent home. They may view their education as a stepping stone to careers elsewhere or plan to return home after gaining human capital. For Russia, this represents a missed opportunity: every year, tens of thousands of foreign graduates leave without settling, despite their potential contributions to the economy and science. This situation parallels a form of "brain drain," albeit involving imported rather than native young specialists. Retaining even a fraction of them could help alleviate demographic decline and skill shortages. Therefore, measures to enhance the appeal of Russian citizenship — such as simplifying procedures for distinguished graduates, offering professional development opportunities, mortgage programs, and social benefits — are vital components of a comprehensive migration policy.

Finally, comparisons with other studies indicate that the factors identified here are not unique to Russia. Many investigations into student migration intentions arrive at similar conclusions. De Haas and Fokkema found that strong socio-cultural integration in the host society reduces the likelihood of return migration [15]. Beck-Gernsheim viewed marriage as a significant migration pathway and noted the role of personal relationships in migrants' settlement [16]. In our context, the low tendency toward inter-cultural marriage among students also reflects insufficient integration. Interregional

educational migration within Russia results in permanent relocation in only about half of cases, with the remainder returning to their home regions [17]. Our study underscores that, in Russia, priority should be given to enhancing foreign students' labor integration and social adaptation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study hold both theoretical and practical significance. Scientifically, it is novel in its comprehensive examination of foreign students' value orientations in Moscow within the framework of migration preferences, emphasizing the interplay between career-related and socio-cultural factors. The results enrich migration theory by highlighting the importance of the subjective sense of "home" alongside objective push-pull factors. Practically, the study offers concrete recommendations for education authorities and migration policymakers. Universities and employers should engage more actively in facilitating the professional integration of international graduates. Government bodies must develop mechanisms to anchor promising young specialists — ranging from simplifying employment and work-permit procedures to including outstanding graduates in job placement and residence programs. Implementing these measures can attract and retain highly qualified talent, benefiting Russian society and helping to mitigate demographic challenges.

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