

Migrant Crime in the Moscow Megalopolis: Reality and Public Opinion

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of migrant crime in the Moscow megalopolis, Muscovites' perception of the advantages and disadvantages of migration for the megalopolis, types of crimes committed by migrants, and the image of a migrant criminal in the eyes of Muscovites. Upon the analysis of scientific literature and results of sociological research, the authors thoroughly examined the reasons and factors of migrant crime. The article is written based on the contrast of the official data provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the populist opinions of Muscovites about migrant crime in the Moscow megalopolis.

Keywords: Migration; Migrant crime; Reasons for migrant crime; Types of migrant crime; Migrant's image as a criminal.



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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Definition

One of the most challenging problems faced by Russia in particular and the contemporary world in general is rising crime that is closely connected not only with socio-economic conditions in specific countries and regions but also, to a large extent, with rising migration, especially the illegal and uncontrollable one.

As fairly noted by some Russian and foreign researchers ([Migrants In Germany Arouse Public Awareness, 2018](#)); ([Polonsky, 2015](#)); ([Epkhiev and Moiseyev, 2017](#)); ([Bormotova and Yudina, 2016](#)); ([Yudina et al., 2017](#)), an increase in crime is driven by peculiarities in the migrant environment. Crimes committed by migrants are primarily caused by the fact that they do not understand the language spoken in a receiving country, their weak integration into the society, the demographic structure of migrants and countries they come from. Furthermore, most migrants have a low level of education or qualification and have to work, as a rule, not in line with the education obtained. For this reason, in a receiving society, migrants are initially at the lowest social stage and their ability to achieve their goals and improve social status depends above all on improvement in their material welfare. Among other important crime factors researchers name the age of immigrants and refugees, countries they come from, which both economically and culturally differ from receiving countries and regions.

Migrants primarily come to Russia from former Soviet republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Needless to say, most migrants are law-abiding people, but some prefer to become criminals, committing both street and domestic crimes and forming criminal groups to control areas of criminal business ([Epkhiev and Moiseyev, 2017](#)). According to the Prosecutor General's Office of Russia, in 2017, foreign citizens and stateless persons committed 41,047 crimes in Russia. Meanwhile, 36,233 crimes were committed by citizens from CIS member states, or 88.3% of all crimes committed not by Russian citizens. Crimes committed against foreign citizens and stateless persons totaled 14,679 in 2017 ([Alexandrov, 2018](#)). Migration flows to Russia are both legal and illegal. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, there are around 2.6 million illegal migrants in Russian territory ([Ministry of Internal Affairs Records 2.6 Million Illegal Migrants In Russia RBC, 2017](#)).

Most migrants come to Moscow, which is the country's biggest migration center due to its economic strength. I.N. Zubov, Secretary of State and Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Russia, thinks that "...in Moscow, the influence of migrants on criminal conditions is much higher than in Russia" ([Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017](#)). According to the official data provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia for 2017, 3.5 million people came to Moscow excluding illegal migrants ([Separate indicators of the migration situation in the Russian Federation, 2017](#)). According to the Prosecutor General's Office in Moscow, over 140,000 crimes (Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation) were recorded in the territory of the capital in 2017. Out of

this number, nearly one fourth (roughly 20%) was committed by citizens from other countries or stateless persons ([Social portrait of crime. Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation, 2018](#)).

So, there is a contradictory situation. On the one hand, the megalopolis's economy needs immigrants because Moscow's socio-economic development needs additional labor resources. In addition, there are some niches, in which Muscovites refuse to work, but this entails more migrant crimes in the megalopolis and the negative attitude among Muscovites towards foreigners as potential offenders and criminals.

In this article, under migrant crime we will understand "an overall criminal phenomenon that constitutes an aggregate of illegal, dangerous to the public, mercenary offences that inflict substantial damage in various areas of activity of a person, the society and a state on the part of persons whose main activity is to cross borders of one or another territory, with a change in permanent residence or with a regular return to permanent residence" ([Sobolnikov, 2011](#)).

2. Methods

In the article, we applied statistical methods of analyzing data provided by federal statistical authorities (the Federal State Statistics Service); statistical data provided by the Chief Information Analytical Center of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs; data from analytical reports on the topic "Research of the public opinion about the operation of bodies of internal affairs (police) in 85 constituent entities of Russia for 2013-2015" ([Maloletko et al., 2014](#)), and sociological quantitative and qualitative methods of research.

As part of the project, we conducted an online poll among Muscovites (300 respondents). The poll was conducted in March-May 2018. The method of quota sampling was applied. Quoted indicators were as follows: the fact that a respondent was born in Moscow, age and gender of respondents. The purpose was to determine respondents' attitude towards immigrants and the migration process in general, to reveal their worries, and to learn what Muscovites think about the efficiency of migration policy pursued.

A quantitative survey was supplemented by high-quality empiric information obtained by a projective technique Cinquain. This technique included respondents' creative work on the topic "Migrant, Migration" that had the form of a short poem consisting of five unrhymed lines:

Line 1 includes one noun expressing the main idea of a Cinquain;

Line 2 includes two adjectives expressing the main idea;

Line 3 includes three verbs describing actions within the topic;

Line 4 includes a phrase bearing some sense;

Line 5 includes the conclusion in the form of a noun (association with the first word). By studying these texts, we learned how respondents treat migrants, the image of a foreigner in the eyes of a Muscovite, and stereotypes associated with their behavior and lifestyle.

During the study, we applied an expert poll. Experts were officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs with different periods of professional experience and holding various positions. The expert poll aimed to obtain expert estimates about migrant crime in the capital.

Materials obtained in the course of a visual survey were also applied. Wanted posters were analyzed. The main criterion of selecting wanted posters was good readability of the text and precision of a criminal's photo. The sampling includes 15 posters that were publicly available on information boards near police stations. The study was conducted in May 2018. The purpose of the visual analysis was to determine the dominant nationality, sex and age, types of a crime that are typical for people of one or another nationality.

The application of various methods to collect empiric information made it possible to look at the problem under review from different angles.

3. Results

3.1. Muscovites on Migrants, Advantages and Disadvantages of Migration for the Moscow Megalopolis

The study showed that most respondents (83.9%) had contacted migrants one way or another. More than half of the respondents (64.4%) view a migrant as an unqualified Muslim who knows Russian poorly. Characteristics given by every tenth Moscow respondent include harshly negative comments on migrants (dirty, troublemaking, criminal). Only every fifth Muscovite thinks that a migrant is a hard-working family person. In addition, roughly two per cent of the respondents classify a migrant as an honest, decent and qualified employee.

Advantages of migrant flow to the Moscow megalopolis, as the polled think, primarily concern economic activities. Muscovites believe that migrants are of benefit only as unqualified workers in the capacity of serving staff (Table 1).

Table-1. Breakdown of the respondents by the positive migrant attitude

Migration advantages	Number of respondents, % of all respondents
Migrants take jobs, which are not in demand among Muscovites	61.7
Migrants produce a positive impact on the capital's demography	3.2
Migrants provide the city with cheap and high-quality food	5.9
Migrants contribute to cultural diversity	8
Migrants develop the city's economy	4.8
Migrants contribute to higher living standards and quality of life, development of the services sector (renovation, construction, retailing, etc.)	24.5
Migrants contribute to improvement in the city's infrastructure, planting of greenery, cleaning	44.7
There are no advantages from attracting migrants to the city	13.3
Difficult to answer	6.9

Muscovites believe that migrants drive up crime and illegal activity in the city (65.4%) and other illegal offences. Specifically, every second polled Muscovite claimed that migrants are a source of ethnic and confessional conflicts. It should be noted that there is some contradiction in the answers given by the respondents. The point is that when asked about advantages of migration the respondents said that migrants are of benefit as a workforce, but, at the same time, they pointed out that there is tough competition for jobs (34.6%) between locals and foreigners (Table 2).

Table-2. Breakdown of the respondents by migration disadvantages

Migration disadvantage	Number of respondents, % of all respondents
Migrants are a source of diseases (VIH, hepatitis, tuberculosis, etc.)	19.1
Migrants drive up crime and illegal activities in the city	65.4
Migrants put pressure on the social sphere (healthcare services, subsidies, etc.)	39.9
Migrants wire funds from Moscow and Russia in general	29.3
Migrants cause competition in the labor market, thereby increasing unemployment among locals	34.6
Migrants have a negative impact on the capital's overall culture	38.8
Migrants are a source of ethnic and confessional conflicts	50
There are no disadvantages from attracting migrants to the city	3.7
Difficult to answer	3.7

More than half (56.4%) of the polled believe that around 10% of those who come to the city commit crimes. Overall, what Muscovites think about criminal conditions match the real state of affairs. As Moscow police officers claimed, around 20% of all crimes are committed by migrant ([Around 20% of all crimes in Moscow are committed by illegal migrants, 2016](#)).

Respondents view migration as a social threat to Moscow, with 71.2% of the polled thinking that to a certain extent migrants are of danger. However, when asked whether the respondent himself/herself or his/her close relative had been a subject of illegal actions taken by migrants, the respondents answered as follows: 42% never faced any illegal actions from migrants and those who suffered or find difficult to answer the question equal 35.1% and 22.9%, respectively. Such a big percentage of ambiguous answers can be explained by the fact that a criminal's identity is unknown for certain, but there is a certain suspicion about a migrant, and no more than this.

The number of the respondents who think that a criminal can be both a legal and illegal migrant and those who believe that criminals more often include illegal migrants is approximately the same (48.4% and 47.9%, respectively). Such breakdown of answers reflects Muscovites' biased attitude towards migrants, with virtually half of Muscovites associating migrants with criminals regardless of the ways (legal or illegal) they used to cross borders and get registered.

Most respondents think that migrant crime is organized. Specifically, over half (60.1%) of the polled think that foreigners who committed offences or crimes belong to a relevant ethnic criminal group.

The visual analysis of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' wanted posters showed that most crimes are committed by people who came from CIS member states. This is also confirmed by data from the Moscow Unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. According to the Migration Directorate of the Chief Directorate of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in Moscow, over 80% of foreigners in the territory of the capital came from former Soviet Union republics (Separate indicators..., 2018). Dominant groups are people from Uzbekistan (more than 20%), Tajikistan (roughly 17%), Kyrgyzstan (around 15%), Ukraine (about 14%) and Belarus (11%). The expert poll confirmed a viewpoint expressed by polled Muscovites and the visual analysis of wanted posters that people from Central Asia and North Caucasus commit crimes more often than other foreigners. An expert pointed out that it is these categories of migrants that cause major concerns about terrorist and extremist activities in Russian territory, including in

Moscow. So, the results of the study and official statistical data confirm findings made by European researchers that migrant crime directly correlate in terms of the countries migrants come from and the size of migrant flows from the countries.

The study of sex and age of migrant criminals revealed that around 80% of crimes were committed by men and 20% by women. A migrant criminal's age averages 36 years. These results also confirm that young men primarily become criminals.

The content analysis of Cinquain showed that respondents' attitude towards migrants is mixed (neutral and negative). Not a single Cinquain reflects a strictly positive opinion about a migrant and the migrant environment as a whole. Muscovites associate a migrant with poor and dirty workers who violate Russian laws and produce an adverse impact on the social comfort of the locals. In the context of a respondent's negative attitude towards migrants, we highlighted such descriptions as "animal", exonyms, "criminal", "illegal", and "fraud". It should be noted that not a single respondent described a migrant's appearance positively. The most common definition of the sub-category is "dirty". The polled emphasized many times that migrants neglect Russian law as they "take drugs", "kill", "steal", "trade drugs", "rape" and "stick to young women". When viewed as apartment neighbors, Muscovites note that migrants are noisy, leave litter, use bad language, cheat, become impudent and do not understand Russian at all.

3.2. Kinds of Migrant Crimes in Moscow

The phenomenon of migrant crime, which has long been discussed, is most often observed in big cities. The social space of a modern city becomes a favorable place for the emergence of all possible forms of criminal conduct. Forms of this favorable environment in big cities include the emergence of "enclaves" where migrants and the lower classes live. These "enclaves" give rise to youth crime, street gangs are established, and consequently, this can translate into the formation of organized crime (Polonsky, 2015). Many problems faced by European cities, including Paris and Marcel, are caused by the fact that their territory includes real "ghettos", which are home to people who came from Asia or Africa. For example, the Goutte d'Or district of Paris is called Little Africa because the district's population is mainly Senegalese, Congolese and of people from other African countries. As for Marcel, around 50% of the city are migrants from North Africa who occupy entire districts of the city, which the police do not venture to enter even using big and well-armed squads. The most key aspect of Russia's migration policy is to prevent ethnical enclaves from emerging in large Russian cities. Moreover, Russian authorities have set the goal of relocating migrants to regions that are far from big cities (Media, 2017).

During the study, the experts primarily mentioned such crimes committed by migrants as theft, robbery and attempts at personal security, i.e. rape. An expert pointed out that largely migrants commit the same crimes as Russians do, they simply commit crimes without much thought and in a harsh manner, when "Russians thoroughly plan their actions, while a migrant can put in his pocket anything he sees and just run". Only one of the polled experts said that migrants can be involved in drug trafficking, although statistical data show that around 12% of migrants commit this offence (Media, 2017). Muscovites, in turn, think that crimes committed by migrants are more serious by nature (Table 3).

Table-3. Breakdown of the respondents by the question "Which crimes, in your opinion, do migrants commit most of all?"

Type of crime	Number of respondents, % of all respondents
Economic crimes	10.6
Stealing, robbery	76.1
Storage and sale of drugs	64.4
Extremist activities	30.9
Personal crimes (murder, rape, etc.)	65.4
Do not commit crimes	5.3

When comparing viewpoints of the polled Muscovites with the official data from the Chief Information Analytical Center of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, we made the following observations. Migrants who come to Moscow, in most cases, commit less serious crimes, such as forgery of documents (25%) and theft (24%). Furthermore, as we noted above, migrants in Moscow are often involved in illegal drug trafficking (12%). Opposed to the opinion of Muscovites, robbery is committed not by 76%, but 7% of migrants (Moscow Authorities Name Most Frequent Migrant Crime RBC, 2017).

This revaluation is typical not only for the Moscow community. Christian Walburg, a criminologist from Muenster, wrote about this issue in his expert report "Migration and Juvenile Delinquency", in which he assumed that many people tend to exaggerate the frequency of these crimes and the degree of probability of this danger (Statistics against populists: migrant does not mean a criminal, 2016). Around half of all crimes committed by migrants or refugees are forgery (e.g. forgery of documents, bank cards, etc.) and theft (30% and 27% of all crimes, respectively). This category of crime also includes fare dodging (roughly two-thirds of total offences of this kind). Theft is committed in stores in most cases. It's important to point out that one of the reasons behind high crime statistics among migrants is the fact that the police record migrant crimes twice as often as the same offences committed by Germans (Why does a migrant inflow drive up crime in Germany, 2018).

Migrant crime does not remain unnoticed for Muscovites and is a reason of their concern. Half of the polled said that they feel uncomfortable in the native city due to migrants (Table 4). If Muscovites' attitude towards migrants is

to be measured on the 10-point scale, the average is 4. In other words, Muscovites' attitude towards migrants can be characterized as close to negative.

Table-4. Breakdown of the respondents by the question "How do migration conditions in Moscow influence your social well-being?"

Assessment of social well-being	Number of respondents, % of all respondents
I am comfortable to live with migrants within one territory, they positively influence my social well-being	1.1
I am comfortable to live with migrants within one territory, they do not produce any influence on my social comfort	19.7
I am uncomfortable in the city, migrants have a negative impact on my social comfort	50
My social health does not depend on migrant conditions in Moscow	29.3

4. Discussion

Many Russian and European researchers consider the problem of migrant crime from various positions, with much attention paid to relevant reasons. European scientists point out that most migrants come from less economically developed countries and regions that are absolutely different in terms of culture (Kofyrin and Politics, 2018); (German Criminologists See Connection Between Crime Growth And Migrant Inflows TASS, 2018); (Kobets, 2017). This is so because informal control over the behavior of members is higher in traditional communities. In such communities, people will simply have no chance to commit a crime, and if committed, punishment will be inevitable and will follow not only from law enforcement bodies but also from the social circle (State Of Law Enforcement In The Russian Federation And Main Results Of Interior Bodies And Internal Troops, 2012). However, having entered the modern European society, which is deprived of strict rules, some migrants quite easily commit crimes and offences, sometimes within organized ethnical criminal groups. First and foremost, it should be noted that once migrants find themselves in new and hostile social environment migrants can show dramatic changes in key characteristics of their behavior. At issue is the demonstration of criminal and illegal conduct by those people who never showed criminal traits of character in their native countries. Many countries and regions, which labor migrants come from, are marked by substantially fewer criminal rates than receiving developed societies.

Researchers also name the following cause of migrant crime. Young people who are deprived of their families, parental influence and represent the lower class tend to accept behavioral standards, which justify violence and violation of the law (Why does a migrant inflow drive up crime in Germany, 2018). Most refugees in European countries are young men who are known to be the most active, including in criminal terms. Crimes they commit stem from unfavorable living conditions in orphan asylums, the lack of jobs, weak integration into the European community, an uncertain status of stay and the threat of being repatriated (Kofyrin and Politics, 2018).

Scientists who study migrant crime think that delinquent behavior of some representatives of migrant communities, in many cases, is attributable to the influence of national traditions, which have not yet been eliminated in the countries or regions that are the starting point of migration flows. In the modern world, key vectors of migration processes move from east to west and from south to north. Europe sees migrants coming from Asian and African countries who very often come from traditional societies whose lifestyle includes contrasting changes with living standards in receiving European countries. Experts believe that such behavior, which a migrant considers normal, is viewed as unacceptable and delinquent in European countries. Specifically, these traditions may include vendetta, "honor killings", loyal attitude towards slavery and slave trade, kidnapping, robbery and banditry against "outsiders". Pfeiffer thinks (Migrants And Crime, 2018), some murders "can be explained only by the fact that a criminal grew up in a country with the male dominance and the culture of honor" (The Local Should The Media Report On Refugee Crime, 2018). Last year three young refugees from Afghanistan killed their girlfriends after they broke off relations with them (The Local Should The Media Report On Refugee Crime, 2018). These murders, which were committed in various parts of the country, are a definite social phenomenon that requires research.

Among reasons related to the culture of people whose representatives as migrants arrive in a certain country, scientists note that sometimes their culture is so developed and distinctive that migrants cannot and do not want to refuse it, are unable to integrate it into the culture of a receiving country. Representatives of these nations live in an unsociable manner (within diaspora, enclaves and nationality blocks).

German scientists found over 40 "problematic zones" across Germany. The problematic zones are those with the highest concentration of migrants, high unemployment, chronic dependence on social payments in combination with urban decay, and they became incubators of anarchy. These districts turn into real ghettos, with relevant societies living in a parallel world. This is an especially acute problem in North Rhein-Westphalia (NRW), the most densely populated German land, including such big cities as Aachen, Bonn, Duisburg, Dusseldorf, Essen, etc. Nevertheless, districts of this kind have already appeared in Berlin. For example, Duisburg, with a total population of around 500,000, including roughly 60,000 of Turkish Muslims (the Kurds as well), is one of the German cities with a Muslim majority (Over 40 Dangerous Zones Formed In Germany, 2016).

This virtually prevents Muslims from adapting to cultural and social standards in a receiving country. This is also confirmed by statistical data, according to which around half of migrant criminals have general education, but have no permanent source of income.

Some European scientists noted that violence-prone criminals (regardless of their nationality or religion, social status, education and economic welfare) primarily have one thing in common, namely beatings that they suffered in childhood (Zholkver, 2018).

Russian scientists point to systemic reasons for migrant crime in Russia (Laykova, 2018): transparency of national borders, coupled with social tension in the society, and armed conflicts; an insufficiently developed legal system and insufficient integration of the Russian economy into the global economy; more crimes in the country; poor interaction of law enforcement bodies that fight against migrant crime; public non-confidence in state authorities that fight against migrant crime.

5. Conclusions

So, analysis of the study's results leads us to the following conclusions. Overall, Muscovites are contradictory in their answers to the questions regarding their attitude towards migrants. Muscovites think that main negative consequences of migration are more crimes and illegal activities in the capital and ethnic and confessional conflicts. The fact that the migration process is not considered by Muscovites as a positive phenomenon also shows that the polled have a stigmatized image of a migrant. Virtually half of the polled, regardless of how migrants crossed the border and got registered (legally or illegally), associate them with criminals. A migrant is viewed as a source of danger.

The poll showed that Muscovites feel uncomfortable when living in the same territory with many migrants. On the basis of this fact, we can come to the conclusion that Muscovites view the problem of migration and, as a consequence, migrant crime as one of the most burning and requiring immediate resolution.

Most people who live in the capital are confident that there are too many foreigners in the city, and this produces an adverse impact on Muscovites' social comfort. Such a conclusion is also confirmed by the results of Cinquain analysis. Muscovites associate migrants with poor and dirty workers who neglect Russian laws and negatively influence the capital's overall culture.

The above factors confirm that the locals refuse to accept migrants, but, nevertheless, Muscovites understand that it is necessary to attract migrants to the megalopolis. Most respondents pointed out that migrants take jobs, which are not in demand among Muscovites, thereby improving the city's infrastructure, being engaged in construction, planting of greenery and cleaning.

Analysis of expert interviews showed that there have been positive changes in migrant operations after the Federal Migration Service assigned some authorities to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The visual analysis of the police's wanted posters and analysis of expert interviews allowed us to come to the following conclusions. Overall, a wanted poster transmits the negative image of a migrant. The fact that an average Muscovite cannot exactly distinguish migrants by their appearance or confidently name a migrant's nationality, demonstrates a stigmatized viewpoint about migrants. Looking at wanted posters of this kind, a Muscovite associates a migrant with a criminal.

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