

The impact of migration on family transitions: Russians in Russia and in Estonia

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Extended abstract

The second half of the 20th century has been recognised as a remarkably dynamic period that has witnessed a profound transformation in family and partnership patterns throughout Europe. Declining marriage rates, the spread of non-marital cohabitation, postponement of childbearing towards higher ages, the rise of childbearing outside marriage, growing divorce rates and rising proportions of higher order unions have been unprecedented in all societies where they have emerged. In literature these changes have been treated as manifestations of the Second Demographic Transitions (SDT) (Van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 2010). Empirical studies reveal that the SDT-related new family behaviours have spread in different social, cultural and economic settings, but a considerable cross-country variation in terms of the onset and pathways of the SDT does exist as well (Sobotka 2008). While most of the evidence on the progress of the SDT pertains to total or majority populations, the investigation of the extent to which the new family behaviours are adopted among populations with migrant origin is still limited in terms of the countries covered and family transitions addressed. Also, usually the migrants are compared to the majority population in the host country, while only rarely the analysis involves the populations both in receiving and sending countries.

In this study we investigate the emergence and spread of the SDT-related changes in partnership and childbearing patterns from the 1960s onwards among Russian migrants and their descendants in Estonia, comparing them with native populations in Russia and Estonia. The major contribution to previous research stems from the fact that, by employing the data from Russian and Estonian Generations and Gender Surveys, we can compare the detailed life

histories of migrants with native populations in the countries of origin and destination. This approach enables to discuss the impact of migration on family patterns as well as to reveal whether the “distance” between migrant-origin population and native populations remains constant or varies across family transitions that represent the progress of the SDT.

Large-scale migration from Russia and other regions of former Soviet Union to Estonia started in the 1940s and continued nearly five decades (Sakkeus 1994). In terms of population composition, the post-war migrants and their descendants form currently around 27% of total population in Estonia (ESA 2015). Due to early onset of migration close to 50% of the migrant-origin population has been born in Estonia, forming a second generation. With regard to origin, a strong majority (70%) of migrants to Estonia came from Russia. This makes it feasible to focus the analysis on ethnic Russians, and distinguish between migrants and the second generation among them.

Although the demographic “distance” between Russia and Estonia is smaller than that between current labour migrants to Europe (who are often addressed in literature) and their host countries, there are still noticeable differences, both in historical and contemporary family patterns, between the two countries. For instance, the spread of cohabitation started later in Russia compared to Estonia (Puur *et al* 2012). On the other hand, however, there are several similarities like very high divorce rates and childbearing at a relatively young age in both countries until the 1990s (Council of Europe 2006; Katus 2000; Zakharov 2008). A recent study about partnership patterns in Estonia demonstrated that the SDT-related family behaviors tended to be less prevalent among migrants and their descendants compared to native population (Rahnu *et al* 2015). However, since the study did not include the population in the country of migrants’ origin, it was not possible to draw direct conclusions on how closely do the migrants follow the patterns in their countries of origin.

In order to increase sample size for Russian origin population, the study pools Estonian data from three life history datasets: Estonian Generations and Gender Survey (2004–2005), Estonian Family and Fertility Survey (1994) and Estonian Minority Survey (1997). In case of Russia, the study uses Russian Generations and Gender Survey (2004). According to common approach in demographic studies the study focuses on women. The initial sample size for Russians in Russia is 5680, Estonians in Estonia is 6396, 2nd generation Russian-origin migrants is 1395 and 1st generation Russian migrants is 1746.

The study employs proportional hazards models for the following family transitions: formation of first and second partnerships (distinguishing direct marriage and non-marital cohabitation as competing pathways), outcomes of cohabitation in first and second partnerships (distinguishing convergence to marriage and dissolution as competing pathways), dissolution of first partnership and first birth (distinguishing marital and non-marital births).

The preliminary results suggest that compared to Russians in Russia the shift to cohabitation as a dominant pathway to first partnership, for instance, took place somewhat earlier among Russians in Estonia, but was clearly heading behind the native population in Estonia. In terms of the comparison between migrants and their descendants no significant difference was detected. The study investigates other SDT-related family transitions to see how consistent the reported pattern is. The systematic comparison of the migrant-origin population with the populations in the sending and in the receiving countries enables to discuss both short- and long-term impact of migration on family transitions.

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