

Volunteering and Social Integration of Ex-Soviet Immigrants in Israel

Authors : Natalia Khvorostianov, Larissa Remennick

Abstract : Recent immigrants seldom join the ranks of volunteers for various social causes. This gap reflects both material reasons (immigrants' lower income and lack of free time) and cultural differences (value systems, religiosity, language barrier, attitudes towards host society, etc.). Immigrants from the former socialist countries are particularly averse to organized forms of volunteering for a host of reasons rooted in their past, including the memories of false or forced forms of collectivism imposed by the state. In this qualitative study, based on 21 semi-structured interviews, we explored the perceptions and practices of volunteer work among FSU immigrants - participants in one volunteering project run by an Israeli NGO for the benefit of elderly ex-Soviet immigrants. Our goal was to understand the motivations of immigrant volunteers and the role of volunteering in the processes of their own social and economic integration in their adopted country - Israel. The results indicate that most volunteers chose causes targeting fellow immigrants, their resettlement and well-being, and were motivated by the wish to build co-ethnic support network and overcome marginalization in the Israeli society. Other volunteers were driven by the need for self-actualization in the context of underemployment and occupational downgrading.

Keywords : FSU immigrants, integration, volunteering, participation, social capital

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