

Towards Better Integration: Qualitative Study on Perceptions of Russian-Speaking Immigrants in Australia

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Abstract : This research conducted in response to one of the most pressing questions on the agenda of many public administration offices around the world: "What could be done for better integration and assimilation of immigrants into hosting communities?" In author's view, the answer could be suggested by immigrants themselves. They, often 'bogged down in the past,' snared by own idols and demons, perceive things differently, which, in turn, may result in their inability to integrate smoothly into hosting communities. Brief literature review suggests that perceptions of immigrants are completely neglected or something unsought in the current research on migrants, which, often, based on opinion polls by members of hosting communities themselves or superficial research data by various research organizations. Even those specimens that include voices of immigrants, unlikely to shed any additional light onto the problem simply because certain things are not made to speak out loud, especially to those in whose hands immigrants' fate is (authorities). In this regard, this qualitative study, conducted by an insider to a few Russian-speaking communities, represents a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to look at the question of integration through the eyes of immigrants, from a different perspective and thus, makes research findings especially valuable for better understanding of the problem. Case study research employed ethnographic methods of gathering data where, approximately 200 Russian-speaking immigrants of first and second generations were closely observed by the Russian-speaking researcher in their usual setting, for eight months, and at different venues. The number of informal interviews with 27 key informants, with whom the researcher managed to establish a good rapport and who were keen enough to share their experiences voluntarily, were conducted. The field notes were taken at 14 locations (study sites) within the Brisbane region of Queensland, Australia. Moreover, all this time, researcher lived in dwelling of one of the immigrants and was an active participant in the social life (worship, picnics, dinners, weekend schools, concerts, cultural events, social gathering, etc.) of observed communities, whose members, to a large extent, belong to various religious lines of the Russian and Protestant Church. It was found that the majority of immigrants had experienced some discrimination in matters of hiring, employment, recognition of educational qualifications from home countries, and simply felt a sort of dislike from society in various everyday situations. Many noted complete absences or very limited state assistance in terms of employment, training, education, and housing. For instance, the Australian Government Department of Human Services not only does not stimulate job search but, on the contrary, encourages to refuse short-term works and employment. On the other hand, offered free courses on adaptation, and the English language proved to be ineffective and unpopular amongst immigrants. Many interviewees have reported overstated requirements for English proficiency and local work experience, whereas it was not critical for the given task or job. Based on the result of long-term monitoring, the researcher also had the courage to assert the negative and decelerating roles of immigrants' communities, particularly religious communities, on processes of integration and assimilation. The findings suggest that governments should either change current immigration policies in the direction of their toughening or to take more proactive and responsible role in dealing with immigrant-related issues; for instance, increasing assistance and support to all immigrants and probably, paying more attention to and taking stake in managing and organizing lives of immigrants' communities rather, simply leaving it all to chance.

Keywords : Australia, immigration, integration, perceptions

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