

Marit Aure, Department of Planning and Community Studies, University of Tromsø
marita@sv.uit.no

Title: "How people become labour migrants"

Abstract:

Early October 1999 a bus arrived Båtsfjord, a northern community in Norway. Sixteen women and men came from Teriberka, a small coastal village at the Kola Peninsula in North-West Russia. This is labour migration from east to west, a new migration process dominated by female migrants. It is temporary migration, to unskilled work, and is an example of current international migration trends. I analyse the recruitment process of migration workers, the processes taking place prior to the migrants' arrival in Båtsfjord. The actors practice is contextualised and related to social, cultural and economic processes both in Teriberka and Båtsfjord. This makes it possible to differentiate between female and male migrants, and to study the gendered processes of migration. I focus on how inhabitants are being constructed as labour migrants, and I do so by studying a small scale process of organised migration. This study is based on interviews, observations and document studies in Russia and Norway.

Through the migration process, women are constructed as the most appropriate workforce in the fishing industry. The Norwegian and Russian partners share a traditional perspective on gender. The concepts of decency and respectability are related to perceptions of gender and sexuality, as well as age, marital status, children, and being a foreigner versus a local. This contributes to a feminising of this migration process, and reinforces stereotypic perceptions of Russian women. The process of migrant recruitment, the immigration policy, and the migrants' orientation towards their home community, all contributes to maintain a systematic temporariness and a subordinate position for the migrant. The migrant's vocational qualifications are devaluated and well-educated migrants have to accept working as unskilled workers.

The household, conflicts of interests in their household, and relatives and friends outside the household may play a role in migration decisions. The uncertainty of the Russian situation has high impact on the Russian migrants. Self-support (e.g. with agricultural products) and exchange economy are alternative strategies, and make migration one possible option to the migrants in their home community. Migration also depends on a certain spirit of adventure and a willingness to travel away from home. The migration organisation provides practical arrangements of the work migration, they also increases the feeling of security for the migrants in a situation perceived as highly insecure. Recruitment of migrants depends on the individual's access to social networks. Those migrating are therefore among the better-off in their community. To avoid creating restraints in the agency of the migrants, and avoid victimising, it is necessary to include the migrants' alternative options, as well as acknowledge the resources reflected in their willingness to seek new challenges.

The causes of migration are assumed to be associated with the effects of migration. We need to integrate analyses of the practice and processes of the multiple actors to understand why and how migration is started and who is migrating. This is vital to understand the consequences and effects of migration, and the processes of integration and disintegration in the receiving community.