Unemployed Strategies in the Youth Labour Market: Rural – Urban Differences in Russia

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: An empirical analysis of strategies in the youth agrarian labour market, to identify the attitude of the rural unemployed youth towards professional training, acquiring a new specialty and choosing job search channels, and to understand their conception of “suitable employment”. Methods/Statistical Analysis: Our research based on the micro-data of the nationwide survey Comprehensive monitoring of living conditions. Findings: The specific features of the rural young people’s behavior on the Russian labour market are identified. The results of the study show that the proportion of young people living both in the city and in the countryside who do not see the point of additional training is high. An important feature of a suitable job, meeting the young people’s requirements, is a good wage and the degree to which the work matches the specialty. A certain part of the young unemployed consider any job they would manage to find suitable. Applications/Improvements: Understanding of the age features of behavior of the young people on the agrarian labour market would improve the efficiency of the public employment policies.

Keywords: Labour Market, Rural Russia, Strategies, Unemployment, Youth

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the structure of the theoretical and practical problems of the labour market actively discussed in the academic debate the focus is made on disproportions in the rural employment sphere, the mismatch between the labour market and the market for educational services, the lack of a system of continuous education, and active policy measures. Much less attention is paid to subjective aspects of life of the young rural unemployed, the value judgments about “suitable employment”, the readiness for additional professional education, and the availability of labor market infrastructure. At the same time, most authors have come to understanding that studies in youth rural unemployment cannot be limited to analyzing the economic parameters. The heterogeneous space of the youth agrarian labour market is hard to describe only with the help of average statistical indicators and economic evaluations, when the employment preferences, interests and value orientations of different social groups of the unemployed remain out of focus. The value orientations, preferences and motivations often critically determine the personal efforts made by the young man.

The young rural unemployed, just like graduates from educational institutions, do not always have enough working experience, professional knowledge, skills and competencies to get immediate employment. In this case, rather than striving for immediate employment, they elaborate a strategy, which is a set of certain actions and steps to employment. A strategy of getting out of unemployment implies, in particular, some interim activities related to additional training, advanced training, retraining or change of specialization to match the structure of vacant jobs on the agrarian local labor market. The active rural unemployed always diversify their job search channels, appeal not only to public employment services, but also to relatives, friends, private agencies, companies, they browse newspapers and the Internet. In order to get out of unemployment, one may choose to start a private business or move to another region experiencing labor deficiency. It is not only the features of the

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One of the causes of youth unemployment is the lack of working experience. Active policy programs on the labor market are aimed at reducing the rate of unemployment. However, studies on the problems of unemployed young people on the agricultural labour market are much fewer, and not a lot of research is focused on examining rural – urban differences. In different countries, rural labour markets are experiencing of the technological changes. The technological modernization is accompanied by the emergence of new jobs, which requires retraining of the workers. Reduction of the share of the employed in agriculture should be accompanied by the development of the services sector and growth of non-agricultural economic activity.

The main objective of the study is to perform an empirical analysis of strategies in the youth agrarian labour market, to identify the attitude of the rural unemployed youth towards professional training, acquiring a new spe-

1.2 Review of Literature

Young people are the most vulnerable group on the labour market, especially in periods of economic recession. The position of young people is more sensitive to the demand for labour, which is reduced during the crisis period. Both in times of crisis and economic growth, the rate of youth unemployment is significantly higher than the overall rate. The highest rate of youth unemployment in the European continent is observed in Greece, Spain, Italy, as well as in Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia. The rate of youth unemployment is the lowest in such European countries as Austria, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland, where the system of education, including professional training, to the largest possible extent takes into account the labour market needs. Studies carried out by different authors show that long-term unemployment produces a negative impact on the future life of young people. Unemployment reduces the quality of life and well-being of people, increases the criminal activity of young people, often leads to social exclusion and psychological costs. Young unemployed people choose different strategies on the labour market, which depends not only on their age and sex, but also on the level of education, working experience, social capital and the degree of activeness. The factors and determinants of reducing youth unemployment are discussed in the literature. Different authors investigate the effects of political and economic factors on unemployment. Using economic and social variables authors conducted an empirical analysis of the factors affecting regional youth unemployment in European and Asian countries. In scientific literature also discussed the paradoxes of post-crisis labour market in Russia.

The lack of professional education and working experience reduces the chances for successful employment. One of the causes of youth unemployment is the lack of working experience. Active policy programs on the labor market are aimed at reducing the rate of unemployment. However, studies on the problems of young people on the agricultural labour market are much fewer, and not a lot of research is focused on examining rural – urban differences. In different countries, rural labour markets are experiencing of the technological changes. The technological modernization is accompanied by the emergence of new jobs, which requires retraining of the workers. Reduction of the share of the employed in agriculture should be accompanied by the development of the services sector and growth of non-agricultural economic activity.

The main objective of the study is to perform an empirical analysis of strategies in the youth agrarian labour market, to identify the attitude of the rural unemployed youth towards professional training, acquiring a new spe-
cially and choosing job search channels, and to understand their conception of “suitable employment”. To describe the strategies of getting out of unemployment we use a number of indicators, including “suitable employment”, “search channels”, willingness to undergo additional professional training, and the use and availability of the Internet.

2. Materials and Methods

Our paper based on the micro-data of the nationwide survey Comprehensive monitoring of living conditions, conducted by Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) in 2014. The comprehensive monitoring of living conditions was conducted in all regions of the Russian Federation on the basis of a sample survey of the representatives of different groups and strata of the population. A multi-stage sampling based on the territorial principle was used. Representation of the results of the monitoring is provided for the population of the country as a whole, for the regions of the Russian Federation, urban and rural areas, social-demographic groups of the population and households. The sample consisting of 113138 people, of which 78542 people (71.0%) live in urban and 34596 (30.6%) in rural areas. The number of the unemployed in the structure of the sample is 3284 people, 1733 of them live in the urban and 1551 in rural areas. In accordance with the objectives of our study we form a subsample of respondents aged 15-29 years, searching for a job, and the analysis is made on the basis of the study of the responses of the 1099 young unemployed of this age. 632 of them are the urban unemployed (57.6%) and 467 the rural unemployed (42.5%). The total subsample includes 117 young unemployed aged 15-19 years, 521 young people aged 20-24 years and 461 aged 25-29 years. We also use the data posted on the official website of the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat). For assessment the young unemployed distribution by job search channels, we used statistical pocketbooks, such as Labour and Employment, Labour and Employment and others.

The supply on the agrarian labour market formed by young people is determined not only by their share in the structure of economically active population, but also by the specifics of preferences of the young people who make decisions about their participation (non-participation) in the labour force. In this regard, a multidisciplinary approach which allows to take into account not only the needs of firms for labor, but also the employment preferences of rural youth, should be applied to analyzing the supply and demand on the labor market, as well as to formulating the employment promotion measures.

3. Results and Discussion

The rural and urban youth unemployed. Rural youth is the most vulnerable category on the labor market. The overall rate of unemployment reached 6.0% (2016), with the rate of rural unemployment (8.8%) being higher than for urban (5.1%)\(^9\). The rate of rural unemployment is higher than urban for all age groups. It should be noted that the share of youth in the age structure of the rural unemployed is higher than that in the structure of the working-age rural population. The probability of getting out of unemployment mirrored by the duration of job search or unemployment is much lower in the countryside than in the city. According to Comprehensive monitoring, the urban and rural young unemployed included in the sample also demonstrate considerable differences in terms of the level of education. The unemployed “teenagers” in the city have a higher level of education than in the countryside. 25.4% of the urban and 24.1% of the rural unemployed aged 15-19 years have basic general education or lower. About 37.3% of the urban and 43.1% of the rural unemployed of this age group have secondary general education. 16.9% of the urban and 19.0% of the rural unemployed of 15-19 years of age have primary vocational education, and 20.3% of the urban and 12.1% rural unemployed of this age have secondary vocational education. The structure of the unemployed “graduates” of 20-24 years living in the city is featured by a higher share of those with secondary vocational education (24.1%) and higher education (35.2%) compared to the countryside. The share of young people with primary vocational (16.9%), secondary general (19.0%) and basic general (5.2%) education is lower in the city. Compared to rural youth, the share of the urban unemployed aged 25-29 years with higher vocational education is higher (35.0% and 19.1%, respectively). The share of the unemployed of this age with basic general education is higher in the countryside (19.7%) than in the city (7.4%). Thus, in rural areas there goes accumulation of the young unemployed with low level of education and often no profession.

The role of vocational education and working experience. Receiving vocational education by young people reduces the risks of unemployment and, vice versa, there is a positive correlation between high unemploy-
The young rural unemployed who have a profession and a properly certified diploma choose strategies of getting out of unemployment that differ from that chosen by those who have no profession. Employment policy measures are also different in relation to different groups of youth who continue to search for a job. The rural unemployed who have a profession, need assistance in getting employed, they benefit from information on job vacancies and they also need help in starting their own business. Persons who do not have a profession and working experience need vocational training and getting at least some speciality. The results of the Comprehensive monitoring show that among the urban unemployed aged 20-24 and 25-29 years, the share of those who have a properly certified profession is 75.9% and 70.7%, respectively, while for the rural unemployed of the same ages the respective figures are 62.7% and 51.6%. About 37.2% of the urban and only 32.8% of the rural unemployed of 15-19 years of age have a certified profession.

Beside profession, an important factor of getting out of unemployment is working experience. Many employers prefer to hire workers who have not only professional education of a certain level, but also professional working experience. They seek to reduce the costs of hiring, training and professional adaptation of the workers. According to the sample survey, the urban unemployed are more likely to have an experience of working full-time than the rural unemployed. For instance, 22.4% of the urban and 20.3% of the rural unemployed aged 20-24 years had a steady job before becoming unemployed. The situation is similar for the unemployed belonging to the age group 25-29 years: 45.9% and only 30.9% of them had a steady job in the city and in the countryside, respectively Table 1.

Of particular concern is the concentration in rural areas of the young people staying out of job for a long time. For instance, 55.0% of those aged 20-24 years and 32.0% of the people aged 25-29 years have never worked before the period of unemployment. This means that a significant share of the young people staying in rural areas is in fact long-term unemployed. Probably, some of them are engaged in non-commodity subsistence farming with their parents or independently, but there are also those who are content with doing odd jobs, do not search for a steady job.

Choice of job search channels. The number of job search channels young people use is an important feature of the strategy of getting out of unemployment. Searching for a suitable job, the young unemployed usually use one or several channels, including support from relatives, friends and acquaintances, they appeal to local public employment services, private recruiting agencies or directly to the employer, place ads in the newspapers, look through specialized magazines offering job vacancies and browse the Internet. Of course, much depends on the specific features of the local labor market, current economic situation and availability of vacant jobs. At the same time, much also depends on the job search strategy chosen by the unemployed. Using several job search channels instead of one is more effective and shows that the unemployed has chosen an active job search strategy. Our analysis of the distribution of the unemployed according to ways of searching a job allows concluding the following. When searching for a job, most of the unemployed “teenagers” (15-19 years) seek for support from relatives, friends and acquaintances - from 54.8% in 2002 to 65.1% Table 2.

The number of those appealing to the public employment service dropped from 30.6% in 2002 to 23.5% in 2014 in favor of placing ads in the media and responding to the ads available there (from 15.8% to 42.7%). Appealing directly to the employers are on average 21.2% - 26.6% of the unemployed aged 15-19 years, while

### Table 1. Working experience of the young unemployed in urban and rural areas

| Job search channels          | 2002 15-19 years | 2002 20-24 years | 2002 25-29 years | 2014 15-19 years | 2014 20-24 years | 2014 25-29 years |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
appealing to commercial employment agencies is not widely practiced yet. Most of the unemployed aged 20-24 years, when searching for a job, seek for support from relatives, friends and acquaintances, and the share of such people grew from 54.2% in 2002 to 65.1% in 2014. This age group of the unemployed has a persistently high share of those who appeal directly to the employers (28.8% in 2002 and 30.6% in 2014). Appealing to commercial employment agencies is insignificant. The share of the unemployed aged 25-29 years expecting their relatives, friends and acquaintances to help them find a job increased from 55.6% in 2002 to 61.7% in 2014. It should be noted that the share of those who appeal to public employment services and directly to the employer in this age group is quite high. The share of those placing ads in the media or responding to them grew from 26.3% in 2002 to 44.1% in 2014. So, seeking for support from relatives, friends and acquaintances is the dominating job search channel. Appealing to public employment services and directly to the employer, as job search channels, is less practiced by all the age groups of youth. The least in-demand is the appealing to commercial employment agencies. The share of the young unemployed who place ads in the media or respond to such ads is constantly on the rise. The media specializing in mediation in employment include Internet technology.

**Access to the Internet for the urban and rural unemployed.** The availability of the Internet allows the unemployed to behave more flexibly on the labor market, contributes to an active job search, and offers the opportunities of distant education, vocational guidance and adaptation to the new economic environment. However, access to the Internet in rural areas is limited both technically and economically. The research shows that 73.2% of the urban and only 51.4% of the rural unemployed, regardless of the age, have practical skills of using the PC. 69.5% of the urban and only 48.1% of the rural unemployed have the opportunity to use the Internet. Doing so regularly (more than once a week) are 82.5% of the urban and 69.6% of the rural unemployed. Surprisingly, 11.0% of the rural unemployed do not use the Internet, although they do have access to it. In the city the share of the unemployed having access to the Internet, but not using it, is about 4.6%, which means they are not skilled enough in using the Internet or unaware of the opportunities it offers or both.

Analyzing the purposes of using the Internet, we find that the vast majority of the content downloaded by the unemployed, regardless of where they live has to do with leisure, entertainment or household needs. Most of the unemployed in the city use the Internet for social networking (37.1%), watching movies, listening to music, playing on-line games (27.5%), reading the news (27.3%) and looking for information about goods and services for everyday life (21.4%). The rural unemployed Internet users mostly pursue the same purposes. The new opportunities of the Internet technology allowing adjust the strategy of behavior on the labor market are largely ignored by the urban and rural unemployed. Only about 32.9% of the urban and 15.4% of the rural unemployed go online to search for and take up paid employment 2.5% of the urban and 1.8% of the rural unemployed use the Internet for distant education purposes. 9.4% of the urban and 4.8% of the rural unemployed Internet users prepare or register documents on the websites of various public authorities, government institutions or agencies. So, we have to admit that the potential of the Internet is poorly used by the unemployed to expand their job search channels or undergo additional training with the view to improve their chances for employment. “Territorial inequality of the mediatization process creates prerequisites for differentiation of preferences in the selection of the socio-communicative practices in the Internet”.

**Readiness for additional training.** The deficiency of skilled workers in most sectors of the economy on the background of high youth unemployment (involving persons with higher or secondary vocational education) indicates that both the structure of supply and demand and the labor market regulation mechanisms are somewhat imbalanced. Model “profession for life” is considered absolutely inappropriate today, when in the face of global

| Having a job before the period of unemployment | Urban | Rural |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Had a permanent job                           | 0.0   | 22.4  |
| Had a casual job                              | 23.7  | 27.6  |
| Never worked                                  | 76.3  | 50.0  |
| Source: Authors’ calculation based on Labor and Employment in Russia 2003 and Labor and Employment in Russia 2015 data.
changes both in economically developed countries and Russia there is emerging a pattern of continuous throughout the entire working life. Education, additional training or retraining is the basis of an active strategy of getting out of unemployment.

In order to assess the readiness for vocational education or additional training, we analyzed the distribution of the answers to the question “Would you like to undergo additional training according to the program you find appropriate?” The results show that the different age groups of the unemployed, irrespective of the place of living, include approximately equal shares of those who wish, but have no opportunity, to undergo additional training according to the appropriate program. Wishing to undergo vocational training, but having no opportunity to do it, are 16.6% of the urban and 23.8% of the rural unemployed aged 20-24 years and 17.7% of the urban and 23.6% of the rural unemployed aged 25-29 years.

The high share of those who feel no need for additional educational education is a matter of particular concern. The share of the urban unemployed who do not consider it necessary to study further, increases as we move from the age group 15-19 years (45.5%) to the unemployed aged 25-29 years (63.4%). In rural areas, the highest share of the young unemployed who see no sense in additional training is observed among the persons aged 25-29 years (61.8%) and slightly less among the unemployed aged 20-24 years (59.3%) and 15-19 years (36.2%). Among those who wish and are looking for an opportunity to undergo vocational training are 34.5% of the rural and 25.5% of the urban unemployed aged 15-19 years and 16.9% of the rural and 20.0% of the urban unemployed aged 20-24 years. An important factor in the pursuit of additional training is the subjective judgment of the individual’s capabilities and limitations. What matters here is: 1. the availability of finance versus the costs of training, 2. the distribution of time for training and family duties, and 3. the accessibility of educational institutions. When making a decision in regard of additional training, resource constraints have a key influence on the rural unemployed and low-income families. In middle-income groups the decision mostly depends on the “expected result”, and not the resource constraints.

Young people, who do not wish to undergo additional training, do not understand the importance of continuous updating of the professional knowledge, skills and competencies they have. Furthermore, not all young people believe education to be a strategic asset that can help them improve their chances for employment and its quality.

Subjective assessment of suitable employment. The regulation of the labor market involves not only the economic mechanism of demand for labor by firms and supply by households, but also a social mechanism, when the demand for jobs is formed by potential workers and the supply – by firms. That is why, despite the existence of vacancies, graduates from educational institutions are not eager to accept them if they do not meet their concept of “suitable employment” and decent working conditions. All the unemployed people, regardless of age, have certain ideas regarding what “suitable employment” is, which are shaped under the influence of both objective and subjective factors. Firstly, the concept of suitable employment is shaped under the influence of the structure of the life values of the unemployed, his/her employment preferences, working experience gained earlier and livelihood strategies. Secondly, of utmost importance are the characteristics of the local labor market, the availability of job vacancies with a certain wage level or their deficiency.

Our study enabled to find out what kind of employment the young unemployed believe to be suitable. Not surprisingly, the most important feature of suitable employment, according to the requirements of the young unemployed, regardless of their place of living, age, sex and education, is a good wage. Such is the opinion of 34.6% of the urban and 42.0% of the rural unemployed aged 15-19 years, 41.4% of the urban and 42.9% of the rural unemployed aged 20-24 years, and 45.7% of the

| Would you like to undergo additional training according to the program you find appropriate | Urban | Rural |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 15-19 years | 20-24 years | 25-29 years | 15-19 years | 20-24 years | 25-29 years |
| No, I do not think I need it | 45,5 | 63,4 | 59,0 | 36,2 | 59,3 | 61,8 |
| I wish, but I have no opportunity | 29,1 | 16,6 | 17,7 | 29,3 | 23,8 | 23,6 |
| I wish and I am looking for an opportunity | 25,5 | 20,0 | 23,3 | 34,5 | 16,9 | 14,6 |

Source: Authors’ calculation based on Comprehensive monitoring of living conditions 2014 (Rosstat, 2014) data.
urban and 46.2% of the rural unemployed aged 25-29 years. Another important feature of suitable employment is its matching the acquired specialty. Among those who think employment to be suitable if it matches their specialty are 23.1% of the urban and 14.0% of the rural unemployed “teenagers”, 32.7% of the urban and 24.2% of the rural unemployed “graduates”, and 23.0% of the urban and 16.0% of the rural unemployed aged 25-29 years Table 4.

A certain part of the young unemployed consider suitable any employment they manage to get, which is largely due to the low level of their education. For instance, about a third (26.9%) of the urban unemployed aged 15-19 years and 21.8% of the rural unemployed aged 25-29 years consider any employment suitable. The reason for this is not only the low level of education, but also the scantiness of employment opportunities in rural areas, seasonality of employment, and lack of vacant jobs with decent payment. It should also be noted that the share of the rural unemployed, who do not have a clear concept of suitable employment, is quite high. The share of those who are not sure what suitable employment is, is higher among the rural unemployed aged 20-24 years (5.6%) compared to the urban unemployed of the same age (5.3%). Not sure, which employment is suitable, are 5.8% of the rural and 7.5% of the urban unemployed aged 25-29 years and 4.0% of the rural and 11.5% of the urban unemployed aged 15-19 years. A small share of the unemployed consider suitable such employment, which is located close to their place (or employment at home), which is because the sample includes women with small children, for whom both “the employment and the children” are important. They try to find a job allowing them to combine paid employment with family duties. It is important to note that in the subjective conceptions of suitable employment of the young unemployed there are considerable gender differences. Firstly, the share of those who consider suitable only such employment that matches their specialty, is higher among women. Secondly, a part of the unemployed women with children would prefer to work at home or close to home. Thirdly, the share of the unemployed women who believe that suitable employment is the one with a good wage is lower compared to men. Fourthly, women are more likely to have no clear conception of suitable employment.

### 4. Conclusion

Youth rural unemployment is an important feature of the Russian labour market that has both economic and social dimensions. Balancing the supply and demand on the agrarian labor market involves not only economic, but a social mechanism, which includes values, social attitudes, employment preferences, interests and behaviors of different social groups. The existence of different strategies of getting out of unemployment significantly affects the results of operation of the agrarian labor market, the adjustment mechanisms, and the levels of economic activity, employment and unemployment. The results show that the active and passive strategies differently affect the duration of rural unemployment and the change of status on the agrarian labor market. Readiness for retraining, diversification of job search channels and the active use of the Internet to search for a suitable job reduce the duration of unemployment. It should be noted that the behavior of the rural and urban unemployed on the labor market and their starting conditions are noticeably different. The urban unemployed generally have a higher level of education than the rural ones. The rural unemployed are more likely to have no vocational education, but only secondary general or basic general. The fact that a considerable part of the rural young unemployed feels no need for vocational training is a matter of particular concern. The settlement factor does affect the educational behavior of the unemployed, determining the degree of accessibility of educational services and vocational training. Young people living in rural areas are to a larger extent exposed to the risk of unemployment than those who live in the city. Analyzing the results of the study, we managed to find out the conceptions of the young people of different age of suitable employment. The vast majority of the young unemployed believe a good wage to be the most important feature of suitable employment.

### Table 4. Subjective preferences of suitable job of the young unemployed

| Subjective conceptions of suitable employment | 15-19 years | 20-24 years | 25-29 years |
|----------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                                              | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| Any employment                               | 26.9  | 28.0  | 17.7  | 23.7  | 18.9  | 21.8  |
| Only matching the specialty                   | 23.1  | 14.0  | 32.7  | 24.2  | 23.0  | 16.0  |
| Only close to home or at home                 | 3.8   | 12.0  | 3.0   | 3.5   | 4.9   | 10.3  |
| Only with a good wage                         | 34.6  | 42.0  | 41.4  | 42.9  | 45.7  | 46.3  |
| Do not know definitely                        | 11.5  | 4.0   | 5.3   | 5.6   | 7.5   | 5.8   |

Source: Authors' calculation based on Comprehensive monitoring of living conditions 2014 (Rosstat, 2014) data.
Employment matching their specialty is more often preferred by the urban unemployed than the rural ones. Thus, the social mechanism of regulation of the youth agrarian labor market, when the system of controllers includes value orientations and employment preferences, is no less important than the economic one.

Economic indicators fail to give a precise assessment of the state of the agricultural labor market. Agrarian labor market parameters should be measured more extensively through the use of social indicators that reflect employment preferences and values, the degree of readiness to acquire new professional knowledge. This will allow get a more complete picture of the existing situation and consider the social potential for possible changes. The youth rural labor market is a segment of the Russian agrarian economy, the social features of operation of which should be taken into account when developing and implementing employment policies.

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