

GENDER RESEARCH

DOI: 10.15838/sa.2023.1.37.8

UDC 331.5 | LBC 65.240

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WORKING LIFE OF RUSSIAN MEN DURING THE YEARS OF INSTABILITY (ON THE MATERIALS OF LARGE CITIES AND DISTRICTS OF THE VOLOGDA OBLAST)



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The instability caused by the consequences of COVID-19 and the escalation of geopolitical tensions leads to serious changes in various areas of life. In terms of the functioning of society, the focus is on employment, which reflects the ability to provide a habitual level of well-being. In this case, the situation of men, who are more affected by the interaction with the turbulent external environment, is of interest. Taking into account the importance of the territorial factor, the purpose of the study was to analyze the dynamics of working life indicators of Russian men in large cities and beyond during the period of socio-economic instability. The peculiarity of the work lies not only in shifting the focus to men, which is very rare in the domestic literature, but also in the disclosure of problems from the position of a continuous process of harmonization of personal interests of individuals with the objective conditions of the external environment (as a rule, the working life is considered in the context of purely qualitative characteristics). The information base is represented by official statistics and monitoring data on the quality of labor potential of the Vologda Oblast population for 2018–2022. The results of the analysis show that despite the pressure of macroeconomic factors, the overall situation in the regional labor market remains very stable, which besides low unemployment is reflected in the spread of primary employment and open-ended employment contracts, the wage increase, etc. The concern is caused by the specifics of the working life of men (mostly older men) living on the periphery, where there is limited growth of the income base with a noticeable increase in the tension of the labor process, the development of secondary and informal employment, and employment is more often divorced from personal interests. All this leads to an increase in migration attitudes, especially among young men. The prospects for future work are related to deepening the results obtained through a series of qualitative studies.

Working life, employment, large cities, youth, COVID-19, wages, labor market, quality of employment.

Introduction

Under the conditions of an unstable external environment and increasing geopolitical uncertainty, great importance is given to the issues of the population's employment which characterize the opportunities to ensure the usual level of well-being. At the same time, the mere availability of work and earnings in the modern world is not able to fully reflect the trends that occur in working life and subsequently become a factor in profound transformations in society. As a result, the discussion of the problems related to the specifics of labor potential realization, where the subjective perception of employees' position in the sphere of labor and employment plays an important role, is becoming increasingly relevant. Such an angle makes it possible to identify the preconditions for impending changes, as well as a variety of practices, fixed in the behavior of people who are forced to adapt to new challenges.

In light of recent events, the working life of men in Russia is of interest. First, men suffered worse from the COVID-19¹ coronavirus pandemic¹ (Islam et al., 2021), and second, they found themselves in the focus of attention due to the special military operation. However, while the epidemiological crisis resulted in a global but relatively short-lived lockdown, the socioeconomic effects of which have been described in the scientific literature (Gurevich et al., 2021; Oslon et al., 2021), the magnitude of the changes to come remains to be seen. Leaving aside the foreign policy agenda, it is safe to say that the country is entering a new reality, which, among other things, will inevitably affect the working life of the population. Due to the social stratification of Russian society, men living in large cities may be the first to feel it, while the periphery will retain the old way of life and economic system, including due to the migration loss of population and the "washout" of talented young people. In this sense, it is

difficult to ignore the territorial aspect. Since the turbulence of the past years contributes to the contours of the outlined changes, the purpose of our work was to analyze the dynamics of working life indicators of men in large cities and beyond them during the period of socio-economic instability.

Even in isolation from the national context or specific historical events, this topic is not a subject of active scholarly discourse. As a rule, social and labor studies focus on women, most of whom combine reproductive function and family responsibilities with paid work (the so-called "double burden")². In this regard, their position in the labor market is very vulnerable, which cannot be said about men in general³. However, in crisis years the situation can change dramatically, depending on the priorities of social policy of the state or the most affected sectors of the economy (Alon et al., 2020; Périvier, 2014). In turn, the analysis of the situation of men is most often carried out in relation to separate groups, distinguished by the criteria of age, ethnicity, marital status, etc. For this purpose, both familiar categories for economic science (for example, "employment") and more abstract concepts are used, one of which is "quality of working life" (Basova, Belekhova, 2020; Schoepke et al., 2004). The advantage of this approach, which has become very popular in the academic community, is an expansive interpretation of working conditions, which makes it possible to apply a wide variety of methodological tools that go far beyond the scope of official statistics.

The development of the theory of working life quality has been going on since the second half of the 20th century and has led to the emergence of a variety of viewpoints on its study and evaluation (Martel, Gilles, 2006). Today, the number of analyzed parameters varies from literally a few to ten or more, including the content and organization of work, the workplace, the system of work incentives,

¹ Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation: Men die from coronavirus more often than women. *Вести.ру*. Available at: <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2088211>

² Women's employment: Global trends and actions of the ILO. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_312616.pdf

³ Differences in men's and women's work, care and leisure time. European Parliament. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/regdata/etudes/stud/2016/556933/ipol_stu\(2016\)556933_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/regdata/etudes/stud/2016/556933/ipol_stu(2016)556933_en.pdf)

the work team (Milyaeva, 2019), etc. Here it is important to emphasize that our article is not so much about working conditions, although this aspect will also be touched upon, but rather about the life activities of people, reflecting the process of harmonization of personal interests with the objective conditions of the external environment. Hence the broader horizon of the study, which will be discussed below. This kind of work is practically absent in domestic literature, which, coupled with the acuteness of the current situation, requires increased attention to the problems of men's working life in Russia.

As for foreign sources, men's working life issues are often revealed through the lens of gender analysis, which emphasizes women's vulnerability, for example in terms of equal career opportunities (Pace, Sciotto, 2022), sharing responsibility for housework and childcare (Del Boca et al., 2020), access to formal employment and different segments of the labor market⁴, wages for work of equal value (Reskin, Padavic, 1994), etc. Far fewer publications are devoted to the specifics of employment in urban and rural peripheries, where labor migration and the division of labor are central (Fan, 2003; Evans, 2019). Thus, we see that the working life of men is largely out of the field of global scientific thought and very rarely comes into the focus of research.

Materials and methods

In order to achieve the goal set, we divided the study into two stages. At the first stage we turned to the data of official statistics to analyze the situation in the labor market of the Vologda Oblast, which allowed us to form a general idea about the quality of employment in conditions of instability in recent years⁵. The choice of the region is primarily due to

the availability of empirical base, namely, to the possibility to further use the materials of long-term monitoring⁶ conducted by Vologda Research Center of RAS with the author's direct participation, and to deepen the research results in the sphere of peculiarities of men's labor life. In addition, the Vologda Oblast is often positioned as a typical subject of the Russian Federation by most demographic and socio-economic indicators (Ilyin et al., 2015, p. 175), which to some extent ensures the similarity of the observed processes with the all-Russian dynamics. This perspective is especially important when scaling the findings to the level of the whole country.

The second stage of the study is devoted to a more detailed immersion in the specifics of men's working life outside of large cities using regional monitoring data. We considered large cities of Vologda and Cherepovets where the population exceeds 250 thousand people and municipalities with small settlements located on the periphery of the Vologda Oblast. The period of 2018–2022 is chosen as a time interval (due to the fact that the survey is currently conducted once in 2 years – 2018, 2020 and 2022), where the reference point is 2018, characterized by relative stability in the economy and society. In this regard, the following years are markers of growing changes, because they are associated with events that led to large-scale socio-economic shocks (the pandemic of the COVID-19 coronavirus and the beginning of a special military operation). Moreover, while much has already been said about the 2020 lockdown, the effects of geopolitical tension in the world have yet to be studied.

The list of indicators of working life analyzed in the second stage of the work is entirely based on the tools that are reflected in each of the waves of monitoring, which somewhat

⁴ Gender at Work: A Companion to the World Development Report on Jobs. WorldBank. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/worldbank/document/gender/genderatwork_web.pdf

⁵ Dynamic series are often limited to 2021 due to the lack of up-to-date information, while the lower limit of the interval is set based on the availability of data after the crisis events of the late 90s.

⁶ Monitoring of the quality of the labor potential of the Vologda Oblast population has been carried out since 1997 in the cities of Vologda and Cherepovets, as well as in eight districts of the region (Babaevsky, Velikoustyugsky, Vozhegodsky, Gryazovetsky, Kirillovsky, Nikolsky, Tarnogsky and Sheksninsky). The object of the study is the population of the Vologda oblast of working age. Sample type: quota by gender and age. The sample size is 1500 people, the sampling error does not exceed 3–4%.

Table 1. General characteristics of the working-age male sample

Age group	Territory				Total	
	Large cities		Districts			
	people	%	people	%	people	%
2022						
Young people (under 35)	123	57.5	91	42.5	214	100.0
Adults (over 35)	231	55.3	187	44.7	418	100.0
2020						
Young people (under 35)	118	55.9	93	44.1	211	100.0
Adults (over 35)	216	53.5	188	46.5	404	100.0
2018						
Young people (under 35)	144	59.0	100	41.0	244	100.0
Adults (over 35)	194	50.7	189	49.3	383	100.0

Sources: data of the monitoring of the quality of labor potential of the Vologda Oblast population, VoIRC RAS, 2018–2022; own calculations.

narrows the problem area of the study due to regular adjustments to the questionnaire. In conclusion, we also focused on the distribution of answers to the question about the respondents' intentions in 2022. However, the most significant methodological point is the study of men's working life in the context of the youth (up to and including the age of 35) and older (taking into account the increase in the retirement age – from 36 to 62 years old) groups. The logic of this division lies in the fact that young people traditionally face serious barriers to finding a job and stable employment (Popov, 2022, p. 172), which inevitably affects the perception of their own working life. Later the situation is largely smoothed out, as evidenced by the unemployment rates among the adult population⁷. People over working age, who also experience difficulties in the labor market (along with women, migrants, people with disabilities, etc.), do not participate in the monitoring. General characteristics of the sampling population are presented in *Table 1*.

The analysis of the monitoring data was carried out using the method of frequency distribution, which served as the basis for the construction of conjugation tables. Despite the triviality of the tools used, it allows us to clearly reflect the changes that occurred in the

working life of men during the period under consideration, taking into account the age factor. The index method is not applicable in this case, first of all, due to the heterogeneity of the selected indicators. Let us turn to the results of the study.

Peculiarities of employment in terms of socio-economic instability

The general unemployment rate is one of the key indicators, which characterize the stability of population's employment. As can be seen from *Figure 1*, the dynamics of unemployment in the Vologda Oblast fully correlates with the all-Russian trend. Despite the crises of the last decades, the values of the indicator did not rise above 9%, and during the period of active coronavirus restrictions they were even lower (6.1% in 2020). With the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine (hereinafter referred to as SMO), unemployment in the region reached an all-time low in the history of modern Russia – 3.4% in 2022 (3.8% for the country as a whole). The reasons for this lie not only in maintaining the stability of the national economy amid unprecedented sanctions pressure, but also in the already chronic problem of personnel

⁷ Labor force, employment and unemployment in Russia (based on the results of sample surveys of the labor force) – 2022: statistical collection. Rosstat. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Rab_sila_2022.pdf

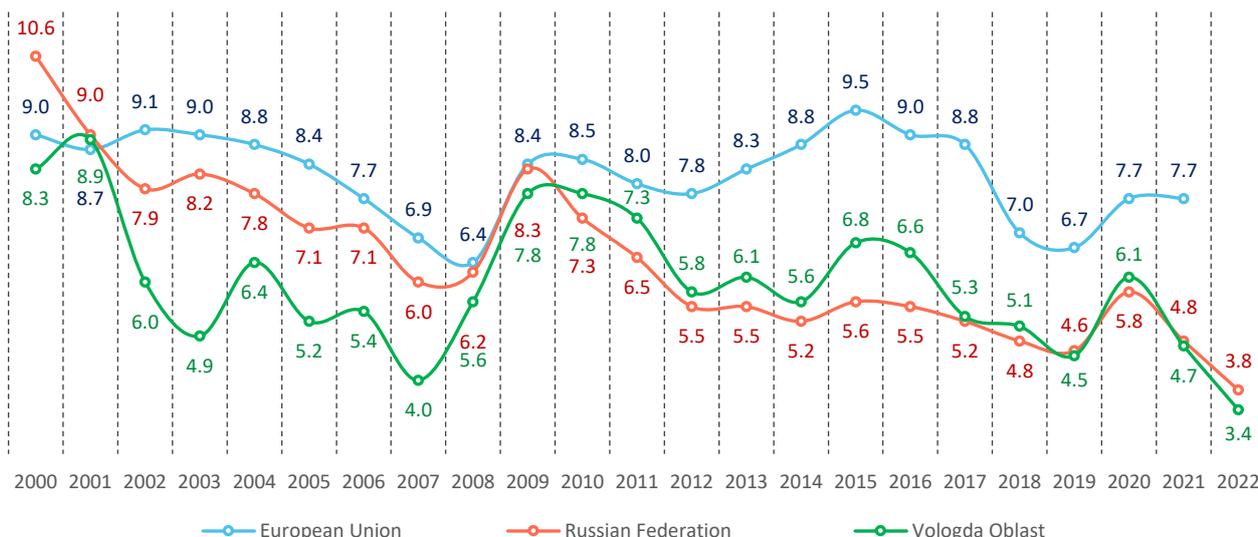


Figure 1. Total unemployment rate in the Vologda Oblast, %

Note: data on Russia in 2022 are given for the III quarter.

Sources: Rosstat data; Unemployment. WorldBank.

Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sl.uem.totl.zs>

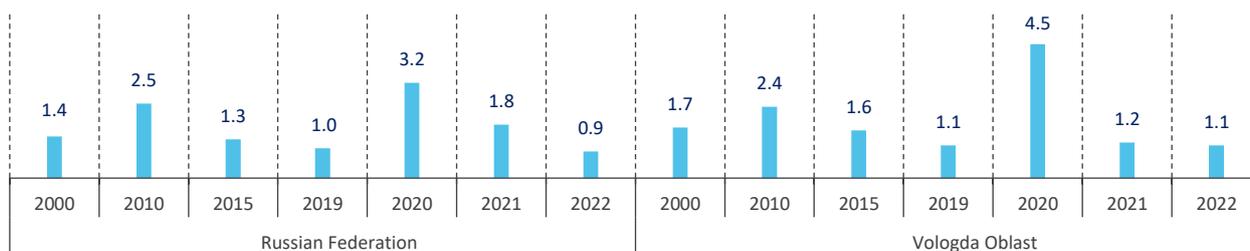


Figure 2. Registered unemployment rate in the Vologda Oblast, %

Note: data on Russia in 2022 are given for the III quarter.

Source: Rosstat data.

shortages. Taking into account the situation abroad, we can confirm the well-known thesis that the relatively low level of unemployment is a distinctive feature of the Russian labor market (Kapelyushnikov, 2009). At the same time, there are no special differences between men and women⁸.

The level of registered unemployment in the Vologda Oblast is not subjected to serious changes (Fig. 2). The exception is the year of 2020, when the values of the indicator showed an increase to 4.5% (3.2% on average in Russia), which is due not only to a decrease in business activity because of the introduction of restrictive measures aimed at combating the spread of coronavirus infection, but also

to easier access to benefits and increasing their size to the value of the minimum wage (Abdrakhmanova et al., 2021). Afterwards, the situation stabilized at the same level, which was not prevented even by the SMO.

Although registered unemployment is a fairly rare phenomenon in domestic practice, we can see a certain differentiation in the context of municipalities (Fig. 3). In particular, in the Vologda Oblast the values of the indicator vary from 0.5% in Sheksninsky District to 3.2% in Ustyuzhensky District. As a result, we can state that greater sustainability is characteristic of workers employed in large cities and adjacent areas due to the positive impact of agglomeration effects. In turn, the

⁸ Indicators of decent work. Rosstat. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/ind_dtr_07-2022.xlsx

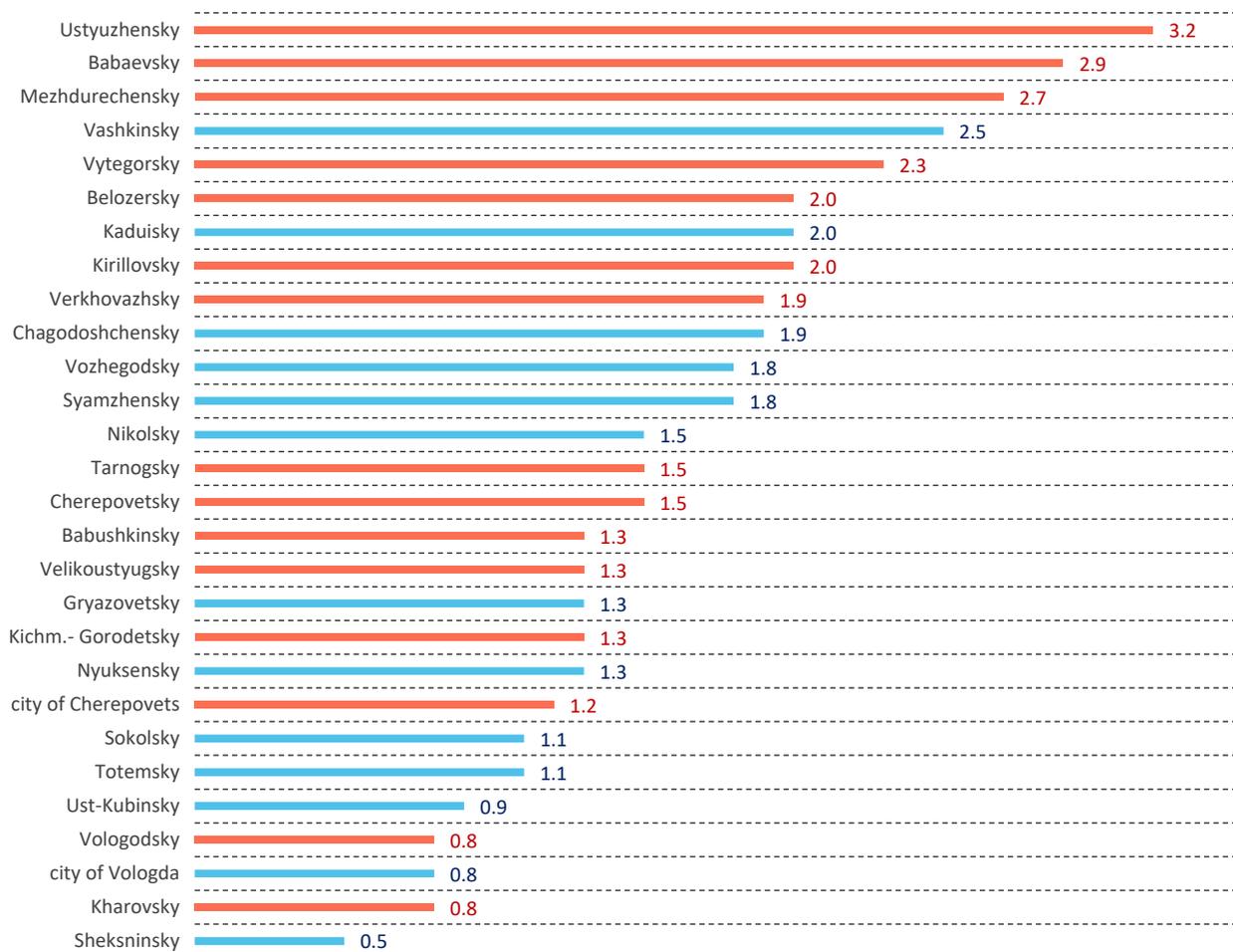


Figure 3. The level of registered unemployment in the Vologda Oblast districts, 2021, rub.

Note: red and blue colors indicate territories with a predominance of rural and urban population, respectively.

Source: Socio-economic situation by municipal districts and urban districts of the Vologda Oblast in 2021.

VologdaStat: Vologda, 2022.

situation of the population in the periphery, including rural areas, is particularly vulnerable. It is often only possible to avoid the influence of conjunctural factors through commuting, shift work, or relocation.

Based on the data obtained, we can assume that the level of total unemployment in urban areas will also be steadily lower than in rural areas due to the concentration and efficient use of production and labor resources, financial assets, investment capital and innovation. However, since 2021 there is a parity in the values of the indicator in the Vologda Oblast, primarily due to the reduction of unemployment outside cities (Fig. 4). The reasons for this may be related both to the progressive reduction in the rural population and to the unfavorable socio-economic situation, forcing people to look for

work more actively. However, the justification of such a point of view requires a deeper analysis of municipal specifics, which is hindered by the limited nature of official statistics.

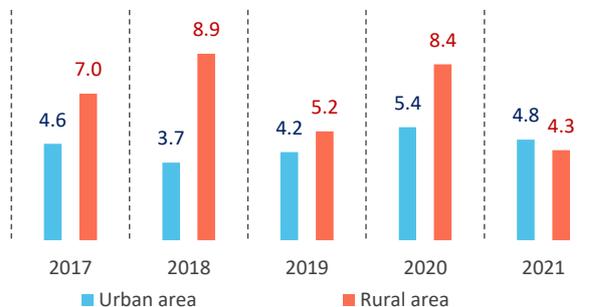


Figure 4. Total unemployment rate in the Vologda Oblast by urban and rural areas, %

Sources: Socio-economic situation by municipal districts and urban districts of the Vologda Oblast in 2021. Vologdastat: Vologda, 2022; Results of a sample survey of the labor force. Rosstat, 2017–2021.

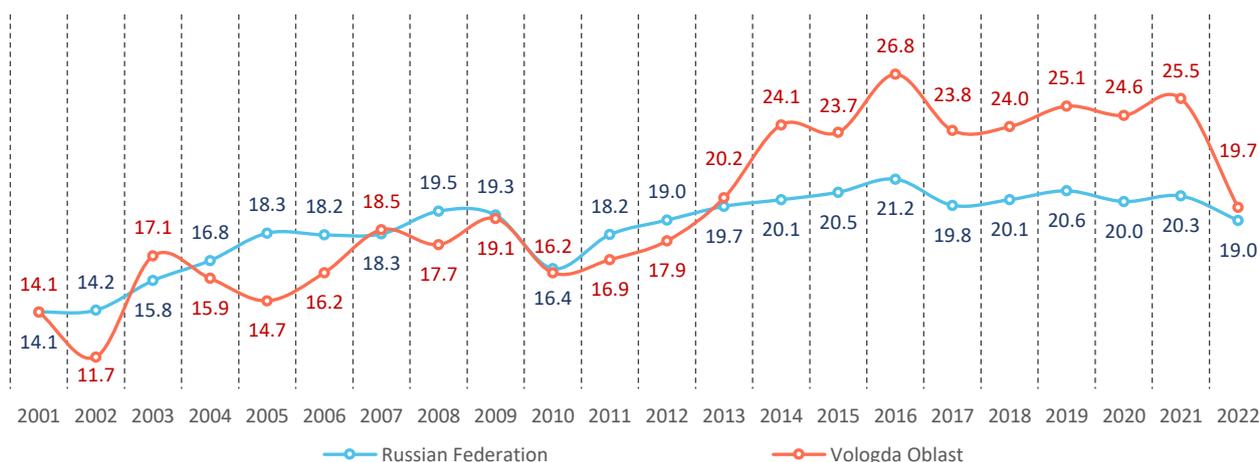


Figure 5. The share of the employed in the informal sector in the total number of the employed, %

Note: data on Russia and the Vologda Oblast in 2022 are given for the III quarter.

Source: Rosstat data.

If unemployment trends indicate the stability of employment in the region, the situation is quite different when it comes to the dynamics of the share of informal sector workers (Fig. 5). Thus, in 2001–2021 in the Vologda Oblast the values of the indicator increased from 14.1 to 25.5%, closely approaching the maximum in 2016 (26.8%). A similar trend is recorded at the all-Russian level. In 2022, the scale of the unincorporated sector of the economy slightly decreased. Experts attribute this to the redistribution of workers between different sectors of the labor market, a decrease in the solvent demand of the population and employers' need for "gray" staff, the outflow of migrant workers⁹, etc. It is also important to emphasize that the prevalence of employment in the informal sector does not allow us to unequivocally assert the development of the "shadow" labor market, but such practices themselves are less sustainable than the standard employment model¹⁰. As a rule, it is men who resort to them somewhat more often¹¹, which can be explained both by the sectoral structure of employment (including by forms of ownership) and by their greater

gravitation towards risky, but highly paid work (Shabunova et al., 2017, p. 134). However, these aspects are interdependent in many respects.

The issues of labor earnings are directly related to the quality of employment, as they reflect the ability to reproduce the labor force. To analyze the situation in this area we used the median wage indicator, which allows us to get a more objective picture compared to its average values at the expense of "cutting off" the most wealthy strata of society. As in the previously cited examples, we see that the result for the Vologda Oblast fully confirms its "typical" status: the size of earnings in the region corresponds to the national level (Tab. 2). While over the last 15 years the indicator values have increased by 85.9% and reached 39.0 thousand rubles by 2021. Despite the positive dynamics, it was not possible to return to the pre-pandemic level (44.9 thousand rubles), which is somewhat different from the data for the country, where there was a slight increase. By gender, men traditionally have a higher level of wages: the ratio of absolute values in the country as a whole barely exceeds 70%¹², while the share of women with low wages is about 30% (20% for men)¹³.

⁹ Employment in the informal sector has sharply decreased in Russia. RBC. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/21/09/2022/632989989a79471c92e0fd96>

¹⁰ Labor force, employment and unemployment in Russia 2020. Employed in the informal sector. Preface. Rosstat. Available at: https://gks.ru/bgd/regl/B20_61/Main.htm

¹¹ Indicators of decent work. Rosstat. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/ind_dtr_07-2022.xlsx

¹² Average accrued wages of men and women by the surveyed types of economic activity. Rosstat. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/sr-zpl5.xlsx>

¹³ Indicators of decent work. Rosstat. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/ind_dtr_07-2022.xlsx

Table 2. Indicators of the material well-being of the population

	Year					2021 to 2005, %
	2005	2011	2015	2019	2021	
Median salary of employees of the organization (in prices of 2021), rub.						
Russian Federation	17880.7	30231.6	32816.5	39043.0	40245.0	225.1
Vologda Oblast	20992.1	29418.9	30940.0	44915.2	39029.0	185.9
The minimum subsistence level of the able-bodied population, rub.						
Russian Federation	3302.0	6710.0	10187.0	11510.0	12702.0	384.7
Vologda Oblast	3283.0	6932.0	10455.0	11659.0	12761.0	388.7
The ratio of the median wage to the minimum subsistence level of the able-bodied population, times						
Russian Federation	5.4	4.5	3.2	3.4	3.2	59.3
Vologda Oblast	6.4	4.2	3.0	3.9	3.1	48.4
Ratio of average wages of 10% of the most and 10% of the least paid workers, times						
Russian Federation	24.9	16.1	14.5	13.0	13.5	54.2
Vologda Oblast	16.3	12.1	11.9	8.4	8.2	50.3

Source: Rosstat data.

The ratio of the median wage to the minimum subsistence level of the able-bodied population (3.9-fold in 2019 against 3.1-fold in 2021 in the Vologda Oblast) also testifies to the deterioration of the quality of employment in the past years. If in the last decade the reduction of the gap between the indicators in question was due to an increase in the lower limit of social guarantees (almost a fourfold increase), then later it was the fall in labor earnings that came to the fore.

Against this background the trend of social inequality reduction looks positive, if we judge by the change in the ratio of the average salary of 10% of the most and 10% of the least paid workers. According to statistics, since 2005 the values of the indicator in the Vologda Oblast have demonstrated a steady decline, reaching 8.2 times by 2021. At the same time, the average ratio in Russia is noticeably higher (13.5-fold in 2021), which characterizes the quality of employment in the Vologda Oblast even better. However, taking into account the indicators of material well-being in the aggregate, it is difficult to assess the current situation as optimistic.

At the same time, the level of wages in the cities and municipal districts of the Vologda Oblast has significant differences that reach almost two times (*Fig. 6*). So, as of 2021, the maximum amount of average monthly nominal accrued wages was registered in Cherepovets (58.2 thousand rubles), and the minimum one – in the Nikolsky District (31.0 thousand rubles). In the territorial context it is quite difficult to identify any regularities. However, among the ten regions-outsiders seven are mostly rural. If we refer to the data of the monitoring of labor potential quality of the Vologda Oblast population for 2022, we can see that the differences in the average earnings of the urban and rural population are about 11.9 thousand rubles (35.7 vs. 23.8 thousand rubles).

It is important to understand that the outlined trends do not take into account the negative effects of SMO in 2022, as a result of which the rate of decline of real wages in Russia has noticeably accelerated (the situation with real disposable income is not so unambiguous)¹⁴. Negative dynamics of the indicator is observed all over the world, and many people will face a global recession in the coming years as well¹⁵.

¹⁴ Review of economic indicators, October 17, 2022. EEG. Available at: http://www.eeg.ru/downloads/obzor/rus/pdf/2022_10.pdf

¹⁵ Global Wage Report 2022–2023. The impact of COVID-19 and inflation on wages and purchasing power. ILO. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_862569.pdf



Figure 6. Average monthly nominal accrued wages in the Vologda Oblast districts, 2021, rub.

Note: red and blue colors indicate territories with a predominance of rural and urban population, respectively.

Source: Socio-economic situation by municipal districts and urban districts of the Vologda Oblast in 2021. VologdaStat: Vologda, 2022.

Given the tense geopolitical situation, it is difficult to foresee the prospects for maintaining the usual level of prosperity, especially in the face of harsh sanctions from the Western world. Overcoming negative trends, some of which are of a “stagnant” nature, requires the implementation of deep reforms in various spheres of life (social, financial, regional governance, etc.) (Aganbegyan, 2022).

Men’s working life in large cities and beyond

According to the monitoring data, seeking employment through friends, acquaintances and relatives remains the key strategy of men’s behavior in the labor market regardless of age

and territory of residence (*Tab. 3*). The instability of recent years has not had a significant effect, making other ways of employment less popular. There are no tangible differences among young and adult men, but the residents of the region’s districts more often resort to informal channels of job search, which may be due to close interpersonal relationships. In turn, in large cities there are more cases of finding a job through advertisements and specialized websites (hh.ru, superjob.ru, rabota.ru, etc.). State employment services, despite the increased attention of the authorities to their activities recently, are still not popular, especially among urban youth.

Due to the prevalence of informal channels of employment, it is very difficult to draw a direct

Table 3. Main methods of job search among men, %

Search method	Large cities						Districts					
	Young men			Adult men			Young men			Adult men		
	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022
Through friends, acquaintances or relatives	48.4	46.6	53.3	51.1	47.1	55.3	63.5	63.3	56.0	62.5	62.0	62.5
Through an advertisement	19.5	16.4	10.7	16.5	12.4	11.1	8.3	13.3	4.4	6.0	6.4	4.3
Through a recruitment agency	9.4	10.3	10.7	7.1	14.3	9.7	11.5	6.7	16.5	10.1	10.2	11.4
Through the State Employment Service	7.8	11.2	6.6	10.4	15.2	11.9	12.5	11.1	15.4	10.7	16.0	16.3
Via job search sites	7.8	5.2	10.7	6.0	2.9	5.3	0.0	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	0.0
Placed an advertisement (CV)	4.7	6.9	7.4	2.7	4.8	3.5	4.2	3.3	6.6	4.8	3.7	4.3
Other	2.3	3.4	0.8	6.0	3.3	3.1	0.0	1.1	0.0	4.8	0.5	1.1

Sources: here and further – data on monitoring the quality of the labor potential of the population of the Vologda Oblast, VolRC RAS, 2018–2022; own calculations.

Table 4. Correspondence with profession (main job) of men..., %

Correspondence	Large cities						districts					
	Young men			Adult men			Young men			Adult men		
	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022
Skills and aptitudes*	62.5	68.6	70.7	70.1	66.2	67.5	48.0	57.0	54.9	56.6	56.9	43.9
Vocation*	55.6	62.7	67.5	70.1	56.5	56.3	45.0	50.5	54.9	51.9	50.5	47.1
Specializations**	54.0	54.2	62.6	64.9	49.5	59.3	48.0	52.2	61.5	55.0	53.5	47.1

* The answer option is “yes”.
** Sum of the answer options “yes” and “I work in a close (similar) profession”.

parallel between men’s employment strategies and the correspondence of their main job to their own beliefs, as well as to the education received. Nevertheless, we can see that more than every second respondent in the Vologda Oblast is in harmony with his inner world (*Tab. 4*). First of all, this is specific to large cities, where employment more often correlates with people’s abilities, aptitudes, and vocation. It is also noteworthy that while in 2018 most adults talked about it, later young people, including those living in the country, came to the fore. The increase in internal consistency with the work performed may be associated with an increase in the share of men employed in their profession, but even in this case the dynamics are not so unambiguous, especially when we are talking about representatives of the older age groups outside of large cities.

To a much lesser extent, the work performed corresponds to the qualifications of the male

respondents. During the period of instability, the share of such men approached 50%, although in 2018 it was at the level of 40%. The distribution of those remaining has notable territorial specifics. Thus, in large cities every third noted that his professional training is higher than that required by the job, and in the region’s districts only every fifth said so. However, in both samples there are quite a lot of those who found it difficult to answer, so it is difficult to draw unequivocal conclusions. At the same time, the problem of overqualification in large cities, according to respondents’ self-assessments, looks quite real, as a result of which a significant part of the male population underutilizes human capital.

Despite the crisis phenomena of recent years, the characteristics of men’s employment have not changed significantly in the Vologda Oblast (*Tab. 5*). The main trends include a slight increase in primary employment, as well as the

Table 5. Characteristics of male employment

Characteristics of employment	Large cities				Districts			
	Young men		Adult men		Young men		Adult men	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
I only have my main job	75.0	81.3	69.6	74.5	70.0	72.5	69.3	70.1
I have a main job and additional work	9.0	9.8	14.4	13.4	11.0	13.2	12.2	16.0
I combine my main job with occasional odd jobs	5.6	6.5	9.3	8.7	10.0	11.0	9.0	7.5
I don't have a main job, I have occasional odd jobs	10.4	2.4	6.7	3.5	9.0	3.3	9.5	6.4

Note: Data for 2020 are not presented because the wording of the question has been changed.

Table 6. Distribution of men's answers to the question "How are your labor relations formalized at your main job"?

Answer	Large cities						Districts					
	Young men			Adult men			Young men			Adult men		
	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022
Open-ended (permanent) contract	51.4	65.3	66.7	60.4	66.7	61.5	65.0	58.1	64.8	72.5	62.2	59.9
Fixed-term contract of employment	4.2	7.6	4.9	2.2	2.3	5.2	3.0	1.1	11.0	3.8	3.7	4.8
Contract of employment (employment agreement / contract for performance of certain work)	17.4	4.2	17.9	16.6	6.9	14.7	5.0	12.9	3.3	4.9	8.5	17.1
No employment contract (oral agreement)	9.0	11.9	4.9	4.2	6.9	6.1	16.0	12.9	14.3	8.6	9.0	10.7
I am an individual entrepreneur / self-employed	4.9	4.2	5.7	6.7	8.8	10.8	1.0	3.2	3.3	1.7	2.7	5.9
It's hard to answer.	13.2	6.8	0.0	9.9	8.3	1.7	10.0	11.8	3.3	8.6	13.8	1.6

practice of combining main and additional work (mainly outside large cities), the scale of which exceeds 10%, which is consistent with the data obtained by scientists in the late 1990s (Roshchin and Razumova, 2002, p. 20). In general, the current situation on the regional labor market, can be characterized as stable, as evidenced, among other things, by the reduction of the proportion of men who take casual jobs instead of full-time employment to a few percent. The analysis of official statistics also confirms this fact.

The main form of securing men's labor relations in the workplace is the open-ended contract (Tab. 6). Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been used even more frequently, primarily in relation to young people in large cities. The opposite picture is observed among the adult population from the

region's districts, which is increasingly covered by contracts for certain work, although this practice, together with self-employment, is characteristic of predominantly urban dwellers. A characteristic feature of less urbanized areas is informal employment (about one in ten respondents). Most often young people encounter it, regardless of their place of residence, which, as mentioned above, is due to objective and subjective barriers that prevent not only entry into the labor market, but also the subsequent transit to stable employment.

Along with the availability of work itself, the level of well-being of the population is among the most important aspects of working life. As can be seen from Figure 7, in the major cities of the Vologda Oblast, men not only earn much more in comparison with those who live in the districts, but also have high average per

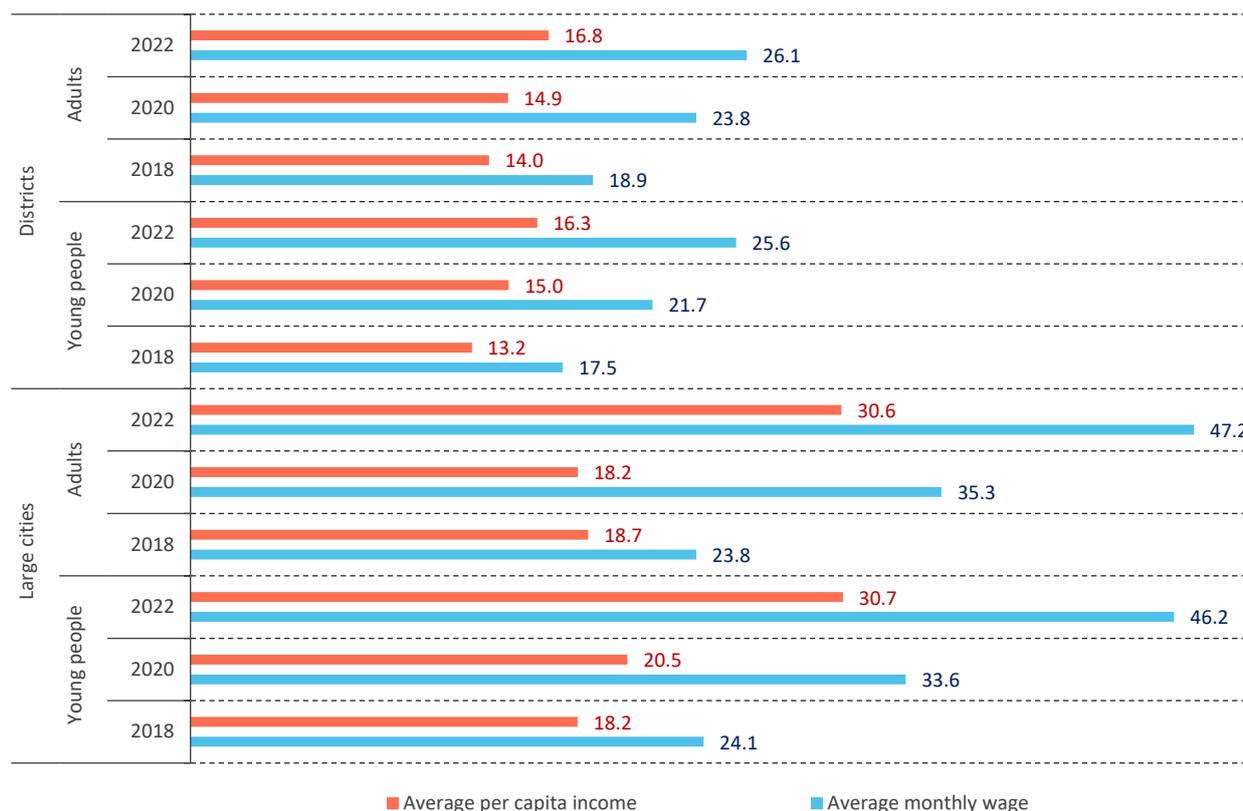


Figure 7. Average monthly wages of men, thousand rubles.

capita incomes, which is fundamental, since the income structure of rural residents has its own specifics¹⁶. The situation is aggravated by outstripping growth rates of indicators in Vologda and Cherepovets, resulting in increased social polarization in the territorial context. Moreover, if the amount of men’s earnings in the districts of the region shows a positive trend, the average per capita income is stagnating in many respects, taking into account the dynamics of inflation. Such changes are difficult to ignore in the conditions of SMO’s dragging out, because a sharp improvement of the situation in the country can hardly be expected in the future (despite the forecasts for the stabilization of the Russian economy already in 2024)¹⁷, as a result the lag between periphery and large cities will be growing. The lack of differences in income levels between young and adult men is the only source of optimism.

The distribution of answers to the question about professional prospects (*Tab. 7*) confirms the worst financial situation of the Vologda Oblast districts’ residents. Thus, 33–45% of the interviewed men (against 51–61% in large cities) are very optimistic about decent wages, depending on the year of monitoring. It is curious that there are no significant differences by age, although young people should be more optimistic about their chances of earning high wages. The best situation in the periphery is with demand and self-realization in the profession, but even in this case the gap with the major cities is very noticeable, especially when considering the answers of adult men in 2022. A similar situation is observed with prospects for professional development and career advancement, which received the least positive responses. Nevertheless, since 2018, the overall trend in responses looks

¹⁶ Avdeev E.V. (2016). Reproduction of human capital in agriculture: abstract of dissertation... Candidate of Economics. Voronezh.

¹⁷ IMF forecasts the Russian economy to grow 0.3% in 2023 and 2.1% in 2024. Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.ru/finansy/484365-mvf-sprognoziroval-rossijskoj-ekonomike-rost-na-0-3-v-2023-m-i-na-2-1-v-2024-godu>

Table 7. Distribution of men's answers to the question "How do you assess your professional prospects?" (answer options "high" and "rather high"), %

Prospect	Large cities						Districts					
	Young men			Adult men			Young men			Adult men		
	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022
Demand in the profession	70.1	77.1	77.2	71.6	72.7	73.6	40.0	67.7	60.4	40.7	54.3	44.4
Self-fulfillment in the profession	61.1	57.6	58.5	57.7	48.6	54.5	31.0	45.2	45.1	31.2	36.7	32.6
Decent pay	56.3	61.0	56.9	51.5	55.1	58.4	33.0	45.2	42.9	35.4	35.1	38.0
Improvement of professional skills	54.2	59.3	58.5	56.2	54.6	57.1	29.0	50.5	48.4	35.4	40.4	32.6
Career advancement	47.9	50.0	45.5	44.8	42.6	45.0	28.0	41.9	41.8	28.0	31.9	29.4

Note: ranked by the second column.

Table 8. Distribution of men's answers to the question "Work for you is first of all a way of..." (answer options "absolutely agree" and "agree"), %

Answer	Large cities						Districts					
	Young men			Adult men			Young men			Adult men		
	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022
To feed myself (my family)	91.0	99.2	98.4	92.3	99.1	94.8	74.0	93.5	80.2	77.8	95.2	87.2
Make money	90.3	95.8	95.9	90.7	93.1	92.6	73.0	82.8	72.5	82.5	83.0	76.5
Make a career	63.9	67.8	78.9	58.8	59.7	61.5	56.0	67.7	59.3	59.3	51.1	44.9
Achieve success	59.7	70.3	72.4	66.0	65.7	67.5	50.0	64.5	60.4	58.2	51.6	49.7
Get moral satisfaction	59.7	58.5	69.9	66.5	61.1	58.0	50.0	67.7	54.9	55.6	58.5	50.8
Achieve self-fulfillment as a person	58.3	66.9	74.8	68.0	73.1	66.7	54.0	57.0	54.9	53.4	55.3	47.1
Gain new knowledge	58.3	65.3	72.4	61.3	59.7	59.7	54.0	65.6	49.5	56.1	53.7	47.1
Feel safe	53.5	65.3	65.9	64.9	63.4	59.7	49.0	72.0	60.4	49.2	62.8	60.4
Gain respect, recognition	51.4	65.3	57.7	63.9	64.4	57.6	43.0	53.8	52.7	49.7	54.8	48.7
Earn love	35.4	45.8	49.6	42.8	43.1	42.0	39.0	43.0	56.0	41.8	44.1	42.2

Note: ranked by the second column.

encouraging amid a tremendous increase in uncertainty after SMO started.

The low level of the population's welfare determines the dominance of instrumental values in labor motivation – material and related ones (*Tab. 8*). The vast majority of men in the Vologda Oblast perceive work as a way to feed themselves, earn money, make a career and achieve success. In recent years, the importance of these aspects has increased in almost all the groups under consideration, except for the older generation living in the periphery, for whom employment, apparently, ceases to play a status role. The remaining motives reflect the terminal value of labor and play a much smaller

role in human behavior. They are most often observed among the population of large cities (especially young people, when we talk about the desire to realize oneself as a person or gain new knowledge, although in 2018 it prevailed among representatives of the older generation). The instability of the external environment has led above all to an increased need for a sense of security in the workplace, which was very evident during the acute phase of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

At the same time, serious concerns are caused by the intensification of the labor process recorded in recent years, which is expressed in a significant increase in the

Table 9. Distribution of men's answers to the question "How much do you "put yourself out there" at work? To what extent do you use your qualities and skills?" (answer option "to the fullest extent (at the limit of possibilities)", %

Qualities and skills	Large cities						Districts					
	Young men			Adult men			Young men			Adult men		
	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022	2018	2020	2022
Physical ability and health	52.1	55.1	64.2	47.9	44.9	66.2	32.0	59.1	50.0	29.1	55.3	43.5
Sociability, ability to get along with people	50.0	38.1	50.4	39.7	37.0	47.6	31.0	44.1	41.8	29.1	39.9	29.0
Psychological stability	47.9	41.5	54.5	39.2	38.9	57.8	29.0	34.4	35.2	26.5	41.5	34.4
Knowledge, erudition, qualification	41.0	39.0	48.8	40.7	42.8	52.6	25.0	37.0	37.5	24.3	33.5	26.5
Moral qualities	38.2	41.5	43.9	39.7	31.9	48.9	22.0	34.4	39.6	22.8	34.0	36.0
General culture	34.7	34.2	48.8	32.5	33.8	44.3	25.0	31.2	39.6	29.1	36.2	30.1
Striving for promotion, showing initiative and entrepreneurial spirit	25.0	28.8	37.4	24.2	23.1	35.5	20.0	32.3	37.4	19.0	23.4	26.3
Creative abilities	23.6	25.4	30.9	21.6	28.7	39.8	19.0	33.3	28.6	21.7	24.5	23.7

Note: ranked by the second column.

proportion of men who realize the accumulated potential at the limit of their abilities (*Tab. 9*). Moreover, if during the pandemic the growth was observed mainly among the residents of the Vologda Oblast districts, in 2022 it affected the population of the region as a whole. As a result, both adults and young men in large cities began to "work out" even harder than in the periphery. This surge in labor activity can have a negative impact on the reproduction of the workforce, causing poor health, professional burnout, decreased ability to work, etc. The only positive moment in the current conditions is an increase in the demand for the skills and qualities relevant to the modern economy, the use of which was at a relatively low level (for example, creative abilities and the desire for promotion, manifestation of initiative and enterprise).

In conclusion, let us try to trace how the specifics of working life of young and adult men living in large cities and outside them are reflected in their life intentions (*Tab. 10*). First of all, the activity of residents of Vologda and Cherepovets is noticeable, it significantly exceeds the indicators of less urbanized territories in most of the studied areas of activity. In terms of labor plans, only the district youth stand out who are more strong-

ly focused on moving to another locality with more favorable working conditions. With age, the differences are completely leveled out, although for adult residents from the periphery, migration sentiments continue to prevail over other aspirations. For all groups of respondents, the main interest is in becoming a high-class specialist, achieving a high financial position, and career advancement, while creative work and entrepreneurship are paid less attention.

In turn, men's daily plans have even more pronounced age and territorial specifics. Thus, young people seek to expand their social circle, improve their physical and mental health, and raise their cultural level. At the same time, the young people from the region's districts more often think about achieving social recognition. All these intentions are also characteristic of adult men living in large cities, although to a lesser extent (with the exception of the desire to improve their health). The situation looks very depressing on the periphery, where people are mainly focused on the implementation of self-preservation practices. The results provide a clear example of how the mutual penetration of work and daily life can limit opportunities for self-realization in the broadest sense of the word.

Table 10. Distribution of men's answers to the question "What of the following is part of your intentions?" (answer option "This is part of my plans"), %

Intention	Young people		Adults	
	Large cities	Districts	Large cities	Districts
Working life				
Become a high-class professional	52.8	36.3	38.5	23.5
Achieve a high financial position	52.0	37.4	42.4	20.9
Advance in career	51.6	36.3	32.9	15.5
Increase the level of knowledge, become an erudite person	38.2	29.7	27.0	14.4
To move to another location with more attractive conditions of work*.	32.6	44.4	24.4	24.6
Engage in entrepreneurial activities	28.5	21.1	20.3	8.6
Engage (continue to engage) in creative work	17.1	15.4	9.1	7.0
Everyday Life				
Expand your social circle, make more friends, acquaintances	33.3	26.4	36.5	12.3
Strengthen nervous system	29.3	25.3	46.8	24.1
Raise cultural level	27.6	23.1	22.5	12.8
Recuperate, improve health	22.8	34.1	45.5	27.8
Achieve a high position in society	18.9	28.6	13.5	9.7
Achieve public recognition	18.7	24.2	16.9	10.7
Engage in social and political activity	14.6	13.2	3.9	5.9
* Due to the importance of assessing migration attitudes, this aspect of working life was taken from the question "How ready are you...?" (answer options "ready and already implementing" and "ready").				
Note: ranked by the second column.				
Sources: data of the monitoring of the quality of labor potential of the Vologda Oblast population, VoIRC RAS, 2022; own calculations.				

Conclusion

Thus, the results of the analysis showed that the dynamics of employment quality in the Vologda Oblast has a positive trend, although it is associated with a number of unresolved problems that are not only "stagnant" in nature, but also become more and more noticeable in the crisis conditions of recent years. On the one hand, despite the pressure of macroeconomic factors, the regional labor market is quite stable for both men and women. At the same time, there was no serious surge in unemployment even during the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, the situation quickly returned to normal, and in the year of SMO's beginning the unemployment rates reached the lowest levels in the history of modern Russia. Against this background, there is a rapid growth of the informal sector of the economy, covering up to a quarter of the employed population. As a rule, small business units (including the self-employed) operate within the current legal

framework, but they are subject to uncertainty risks more often than others, which negatively affects the quality of employment, especially for men.

At first glance, there is a positive trend in the sphere of material well-being of the population. In 2005–2021, Vologda Oblast experienced an almost twofold increase in median wages (in comparable prices), accompanied by a significant decrease in social inequality. At the same time, the trends of recent years serve as a clear example of how premature long-term optimism can be. This can be traced both on the dynamics of absolute (organization employees median wages) and relative (the ratio of wages to the subsistence minimum of the working-age population) indicators. In addition, there is concern about the persistence of a relatively high gap in average earnings between men and women, as well as at the municipal level, including in the context of urban and rural areas.

The data of our sociological survey confirm the thesis about the external stability of the regional labor market, which is expressed in the spread of primary employment and indefinite labor contracts, wage increases, etc. However, the specifics of the working life of men (mostly the older ones) living outside large cities are of serious concern. Here we can see a limited growth of the income base with a noticeable increase in the workload, and the development of secondary and informal employment practices, and employment in isolation from one's own interests. All this is reflected in professional prospects and attitude to work, the perception of which is becoming more and more instrumental. The inability to realize the accumulated potential and dissatisfaction with working conditions contribute to the strengthening of migration sentiments, which may result in an even greater decrease in activity in work and daily life in the future, although it is impossible to make a direct comparison between young and adult men belonging to different generations.

The conducted research contributes to the development of ideas about the working life

of Russian men outside of large cities from the perspective of the instability of the socio-economic system. The findings made it possible to follow the dynamics of employment and outline the range of problem areas that require close attention from the authorities. One of the most important issues in this regard is bridging the gap between the core and the periphery by creating centers of attraction for business activity in the region. Moreover, we are talking not so much about large investment projects as about favorable conditions for professional self-realization. An important role in this endeavor should be assigned not to the informal channels of employment, but to the district employment services that provide ample opportunities for job search (including professional job), training, psychological and counseling assistance, support for entrepreneurship and self-employment, etc. It is difficult to overemphasize the implications of such changes in a rapidly changing world. Promoting men's access to decent employment will have positive repercussions in other areas of life as well.

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