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The Study of Standard of Living in Russia's Small Towns¹

The paper studies the standards of living in small towns of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. The logic of the research implies sequential analysis of the small towns grouped by the population size according to nominal and real incomes of the population, subsistence rates, regional minimum wages and pensions, what enabled the authors to make conclusions about the standard of living by comparing small towns' indicators with those of Russia's constituent entities. The paper performs a comparative analysis of the principal indicators of the standard of living in three entities of the Russian Federation, namely Vladimir and Tula oblasts and Perm kray, selected on the basis of displayed differences in economic potential, dynamics and level of socioeconomic development, specialisation. The number of small towns in these regions is comparable (18 towns in Vladimir oblast and Perm kray, and 13 towns in Tula oblast); each has small towns both with stable socioeconomic situation and with sad state of affairs in socioeconomic sphere. As a result of the study, the authors put forward suggestions on how to improve the government policy at regional and municipal level in relation to the standard of living in small towns.

JEL classification: R11

Keywords: small towns; territorial differentiation; constituent entities of the Russian Federation; standard of living; real incomes; subsistence rates; sustainable development.

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Introduction

Problems of small towns occupy a special place in Russia's socioeconomic policy. Under the global economic recession and the crisis in the national economy, the problems peculiar exclusively to these territorial entities have aggravated. Among the most serious of them, we can point to low financial self-sufficiency of municipalities, practically absent job vacancies and substantial outflow of working age population, especially young people, and, as a result, significant demographic imbalances, poor urban and suburban infrastructure and some others. All the factors negatively affect the standard of living in these municipalities or lead to a marked decline in it, undermining social and economic stability in both regions and the country as a whole.

A number of acute socioeconomic problems faced by the majority of small towns are quite common and systemic, and solutions to them lie outside the municipalities' competence and require active involvement of federal and regional authorities. A significant deterioration of socioeconomic situation of citizens accompanied by social, economic, legal, political and some other problems of territorial development dictate the need of theoretical consideration, comprehensive analysis and design of a corresponding strategy to support these settlements making the present study increasingly relevant.

The principal objective of the work is to study the standard of living in small towns of the Russian Federation on the basis of comparative analysis of the main socioeconomic indicators.

Maintaining a decent living for the country's citizens is an important task of the state. The Constitution of the Russian Federation says, 'the Russian Federation is a social State whose policy is aimed at creating conditions for a worthy life and a free development of man.' Addressing the problems of improving the standard of living of the population crucially influence the directions of the key reforms and transformations in the country and the ability of these transformations to ensure economic stability of the society. To handle these tasks the state needs efficient managerial decision-making to develop effective social mechanisms for raising the standard of living in the country.

Theoretical background

The issue of standard of living and improving it has been explored in the works of domestic and foreign scholars. The present study theoretically and methodologically is based on the fundamental works of J. Galbraith, K. Marx, A. Pigou, P. Samuelson, A. Sen, L. Erhard [8; 18; 25; 29; 30; 33]. Several generations of foreign and domestic economists devoted their works to the problem of the standard of living and provided a wide spectrum of opinions on the content of this concept, as well as investigated factors, indicators, their dynamics and transformation. A meaningful contribution to the theory and practice of the standard of living was made by such Russian scientists as Ye. G. Animitsa, V.N. Bobkov, V.P. Babintsev, N.I. Buzlyakov, N.A. Gorelov, V.F. Mayer, I.A. Medvedeva, D. Popova, N.M. Rimashevskaya, L.S. Rzhانيتsyna, V.M. Rutgayzer, V.M. Zherebin, et al. [1–6; 11; 17; 20; 26; 27; 28; 31; 37].

In the West, this problem was theoretically and practically considered by J. M. Keynes, A. Maslow, Ph. Kotler, S. Fischer, et al [19; 34–36], who developed various national models of the standard of living, tools, indicators for their evaluation and regulation methods. In Russia, the works of the domestic authors (V.F. Mayer, N.I. Buzlyakov, V.M. Zherebin, N.M. Rimashevskaya, V.M. Rutgayzer [6; 11; 17; 28; 31]) and some other economists were focused on the study of the concept "standard of living" per se and a set of indicators along with the problems of raising it. The All-Russian Centre for the Standard of Living under the leadership of V.N. Bobkov [5] has also contributed substantially to practical and theoretical research of the problem.

It is essential to emphasise that the problem of raising the standard of living remains one of the key tasks faced by the Russian science, especially in current conditions, because it directly affects socioeconomic and political stability in the country. In this instance, studying

the concept “the standard of living” gains increasing importance. The concept “the standard of living” is known to be first applied by K. Marx, who regarded it not only from the viewpoint of satisfaction of needs of physical life, but also as the satisfaction of certain needs generated by those social conditions, in which people are brought up and live, thus attributing some influence on the standard of living to a set of social, historical and regional factors [18]. The aforementioned definitions indicate that currently economists are not unanimous about the content of the concept “standard of living” (Table 1).

Table 1

Approaches to defining standard of living in the studies of the Russian researchers

Author of a study	Definition of standard of living
N. I. Buzlyakov [6. P. 7]	Standard of living is defined in terms of the amount of material, social, domestic and cultural goods consumed and degree of satisfaction of needs in them in accordance with the level of development of the forces of production
V.N. Bobkov, P.S. Maslovsky- Mstislavsky [5. P. 5]	Standard of living is considered in terms of the level of development and degree of satisfaction of the population's needs
V.N. Bobkov [3. P. 58]	The concept of standard of living is regarded as a characteristic of incomes and an indicator of consumption of various consumer sets, reflected in monetary and conditionally monetary form
V.I. Guryev [9. P. 67]	The standard of living is a complex socioeconomic concept, expressed in the degree of satisfaction of the population's material and spiritual needs and consisting of a number of components, such as real incomes of the population, consumption of material goods and services, provision of housing, health care and educational services, the state of culture and the environment
I. I. Yeliseeva [10. P. 34]	The standard of living is considered in the context of sufficiency with the necessary material goods and services and the degree of satisfaction of peoples' needs within reasonable limits
V.M. Zherebin, A.N. Romanov [11. P. 36–41]	The standard of living is an integrated indicator that reflects the satisfaction of material, spiritual needs over a particular period of time. The quantity and quality of goods and services is estimated by the system of indicators
I. V. Levashov [16. P. 60]	The standard of living is defined both as an economic concept and as a social standard, which reflects the degree of satisfaction of the physical, spiritual and social needs of people. The key elements of the standard of living are income and expenditure, housing, health, social security, etc.
V.F. Mayer [17. P. 8]	The standard of living is defined as the degree to which the population is sufficient and satisfied with the necessary material and spiritual goods for its needs, while indirect indicators of the standard of living are the formation and distribution of incomes
V.M. Rutgayzer, S. P. Shpilko [31. P. 6]	This approach implies that the cost of living is a monetary value of goods and services, and the standard of living reflects sufficiency with them. At this, the cost of living depends on changes in the people's needs and patterns of consumption, and the dynamics of prices
A. S. Bulatov [7. P. 33–34]	The concept is regarded as a set of real socioeconomic conditions of living aimed at satisfying the population's material and spiritual needs

However, we should highlight that a diversity of opinions speaks in favour of significance and complexity of the concept. Some researchers determine living standard from the standpoint of production, i. e. the starting point is interface between the standard of living and public production. In this case, standard of living is regarded as the quantity of material, cultural, domestic and social goods consumed and degree of satisfaction of needs in them in accordance with the level of development of the forces of production. Description of the people's consumption, needs, their development and degree of their satisfaction (changes in incomes,

expenditure and consumption of goods and services) is the main element, determining living standard which is expressed in the quality and quantity of goods and services consumed. This approach was named “narrow” in the scientific literature, pursuing it in most cases implies speaking about material and essential spiritual needs.

A broader interpretation of the concept supposes giving characteristics to living standard through the prism of socioeconomic conditions, which ensure the satisfaction of a number of material and spiritual needs, including the need for safe environment, personal security, health care and others. A distinct feature of any wants is cumulative nature of their growth, i. e. appearance of new wants does not imply disappearance of the old ones, at this the needs are formed both under the impact of subjective factors (tastes, aptitudes, preferences, customs) and objective factors such as economic, socio-psychological and organizational. The list of needs varies depending on classification selected by a researcher. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs [19] is a reference point for some economists, whereas others rely on a wider range. Characterising living standard from the standpoint of needs’ satisfaction raises no doubts. However, the possibilities and conditions for their satisfaction are not taken into account.

At the present stage, the structure of consumption acquires special significance, having a profound impact on the growth of production, and in this sense, the concept of living standards is expanding. In recent years, the approaches to the content of the concept have been changing, particularly, the emphasis has shifted from quantitative, material characteristics towards qualitative ones, and the concept is often applied along with the term “quality of life”.

Thus far an approach has been developed, which initially considers standard of living both in terms of the level of consumption and the degree of needs’ satisfaction, and in terms of the level of human development (the state of health and population’s possibilities to meet their needs) and living conditions of the population (the state of the environment and people’s safety) [26. P. 75]. It seems that definitions that have an integrated character (V.I. Guryev’s [9], I.I. Yeliseeva’s [10], V.M. Zherebin’s [11]) most fully reflect modern conditions and allow examining standard of living more exhaustively. In the study, we will adhere to this approach, and consider standard of living as a complex multifaceted concept, which depends on multiple of factors, including the composition and quantity of society’s needs, opportunities to meet these needs, the state of political, economic and social affairs in the country, the efficiency of the national economy, progress in science and technology, culture, education, and others.

Numerous sociological studies have significantly contributed to the research of standard of living, particularly, the ones commissioned by Rosstat (Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation) and various research organisations (Independent Institute for Social Policy, Yuri Levada Analytical Center, and others), among which it is worth pointing to the Higher School of Economics that annually monitors people’s economic status in conjunction with their health [23].

Despite the fact that methodology and methods in the field of studying and measuring standard of living at macro-level have been shaped [2; 28; 38], economic literature lacks a uniform approach. Consequently, there is no consensus about the system of indicators. At the same time, the choice of an integrated indicator, which characterises standard of living, is a very complicated task, because it should reflect the interdependence and multidimensionality of a variety of factors, including not only personal income, but also natural and climatic, ecological conditions, opportunities to get education, access to health care, infrastructure endowment, provision of utilities, etc. [12].

To evaluate standard of living international statistics uses the recommendations of UN Statistical Commission¹, which suggest applying subgroups of indicators characterising the quantity and quality of goods and services consumed, including:

¹ Official website of UN Statistical Commission. Available at: <https://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/statcom/9th-session/documents>.

- demographic characteristics of population (birth, mortality, morbidity rates, life expectancy, etc.);
- incomes (real and nominal ones), expenditure and savings of the population;
- indicators of working conditions, employment/unemployment rates;
- the cost of living;
- consumer prices and food and services consumption;
- indicators of housing conditions and sufficiency with durables;
- indicators of leisure and social interactions;
- indicators of social security;
- indicators of accessibility of education, health care, culture and sport, tourism and recreation.

In Russia, standard of living is assessed by a system of qualitative and quantitative indicators. The list of them contains total amount of consumed goods and services; average per capita and real incomes of the population; the level of differentiation of the population by income; the number of poor people whose incomes are below the subsistence rate; level of pension provision; social payments; accumulated property and savings; working and rest conditions; employment rate, etc. [15].

At territorial level it is advisable to study living standard using a system of targeted indicators, which characterise particular sides of standard of living in dynamics, and, depending on objectives of the study, they may be aggregated on the basis of different criteria. Within the present research we will limit the assessment to consideration of the group of income indicators (average per capita incomes; average nominal gross salary; average amount of pensions; structure of incomes; ratio of incomes, pensions, salaries to subsistence rate; share of population with incomes below the subsistence rate; etc.), which will allow evaluating the material conditions of the population that affect citizens' consumption behaviour.

The study of the RF constituent entities and small towns according to the basic indicators of standard of living

Russia can be called the country of small towns for a number of reasons, including natural and climatic, geographical conditions, specifics of the national historical development and to a large extent the peculiarities of economic development. The majority of methodologies and definitions say that small towns are towns of less than 50,000 population, and this criterion is applied in Russia as well. According to the classification given in the former Town Planning Code of the Russian Federation¹ this category encompasses more than 70% of all towns and cities, and out of 1,112 cities and towns, 788 are small towns, where more than 16% of the Russian population live².

Currently, problems of development of small towns are very important and rather knotty and it is difficult to overestimate the necessity to provide constructive suggestions for improving situation in them. Among common problems of small towns we should indicate the following:

- low level of diversification, mono-dependence;
- low level of technological development of most enterprises;
- deterioration of fixed assets;
- limited choice for employment;
- high unemployment rate;
- lack (absence) of well-qualified workforce;

¹ Town Planning Code of the Russian Federation introduced by the Federal Law of May 7, 1998. (in Russ.)

² Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2015, 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru/>

- demographic problems (outflow of youth, population aging and decline);
- infrastructural problems;
- low level of cultural and educational spheres development [21].

The object of our study is three constituent entities of the Russian Federation, namely Vladimir and Tula oblasts and Perm kray (Table 2).

Table 2

**Grouping of small towns of Vladimir and Tula oblasts and Perm kray
by the size of permanent population in 2016**

Indicator	Small towns					Small towns, total
	of less than 3,000 residents	of at least 3,000 and less than 5,000 residents	of at least 5,000 and less than 10,000 residents	of at least 10,000 and less than 20,000 residents	of at least 20,000 and less than 50,000 residents	
<i>Vladimir oblast (23 towns with 1,033,277 population totally)</i>						
Small towns, units	–	–	3	12	3	18
Population, people	–	–	24,578	180,342	108,420	313,340
<i>Tula oblast (19 towns with 1,067,802 population totally)</i>						
Small towns, units	1	–	3	5	4	13
Population, people	965	–	25,541	76,922	118,655	222,083
<i>Perm kray (25 towns with 1,873,003 population totally)</i>						
Small towns, units	–	2	3	6	7	18
Population, people	–	8,252	22,416	89,450	206,778	326,896

Note. Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2015, 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

When analysing the role of small towns in regional economy it is important to understand that small town are systemically important elements of a region drastically affecting its development. Their labour, natural and climatic, resource and production potential is the basis of their sustainability and a condition for strengthening their role in regional development [32].

In the RF constituent entities under consideration, small towns with the population of 10 to 20 thousand people dominate. The analysis of the size of the population in small towns in these subjects of the Russian Federation as of January 1, 2016 reveals that:

- in Vladimir oblast the population of small towns accounts for 30.3% of the total population, i. e. almost a third;
- in Tula oblast it equals 20.7%, i. e. a fifth;
- in Perm kray it amounts to 17.45%, which is just over the national average. Taking into account that in most cases small towns are administrative centres, which concentrate a substantial number of rural settlements around them, we can state with certainty that they play an influential role in the regions [14].

To evaluate socioeconomic development of the RF subjects the system of regional motoring is used. In 2016 the RIA Rating agency compiled the “Ranking of the subjects of the Russian Federation on the basis of socioeconomic situation: The results of 2015”¹ using the key indicators of regional development, which allowed assessing the position of an RF subject and determining disproportions in regional development. To prepare the ranking the agency used objective indicators of official statistics from the websites of Rosstat, the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation and the Federal Treasury.

¹ Ranking of the subjects of the Russian Federation on the basis of socioeconomic situation. Available at: <http://riarating.ru> (in Russ.)

The ranking was based on a comprehensive analysis of socioeconomic situation in the RF subjects (Table 3). The regions were compared by a wide range of indicators, characterising various aspects of region's socioeconomic development and further applied for calculation of an aggregated indicator, which allowed identifying the position of an RF subject among other regions.

Table 3

**Ranking of the subjects of the Russian Federation
on the basis of socioeconomic situation**

RF subject	Integrated ranking, 2015	Rank in the Russian Federation	
		2015	2014
Vladimir oblast	44.298	39	35
Tula oblast	52.025	23	23
Perm kray	57.946	12	13

Note. Compiled using the data of the Ranking of the subjects of the Russian Federation on the basis of socioeconomic situation. Available at: <http://riarating.ru> (in Russ.)

According to the results of this ranking Perm kray does not only rank quite high, but has also improved its rank compared to 2014. Tula oblast demonstrated stability. As for Vladimir oblast, it is located around the middle of the ranking, and its rank has deteriorated by four points in 2015.

The relevance of the presented ranking increases in line with the necessity to enhance information transparency of the RF subjects as well as a growing need for updated information about the state of affairs in regions and imbalances in regional development expressed by federal authorities, local government and businesses community [22].

It is worth pointing out that the constituent entities of the Russian Federation perform their own evaluation using a number of socioeconomic indicators and prepare their rankings of municipalities on this basis. For instance, in 2015 in Perm kray, All Russia Public Organization "Business Russia" and an audit company "Invest-Audit" conducted a study of such indicators as the size of the population, unemployment rate, demand for workforce, average salary and some others, as well as the average price of a square meter of residential real estate. This enabled the organisations to assess and rank municipalities of Perm kray with regard to their socioeconomic development. Of 18 municipalities, administrative centres of which are small towns, the top ten included only three municipal districts, namely Usolsky, Dobryansky and Chernushinsky districts as well as Osinsky municipal district, which demonstrated quite high average salary (it exceeds 26, 000 rubles) and high employment rate, which results from the presence of the production facilities in the district. The poorest socioeconomic indicators were in Cherdynsky (15.25 points), Kizelovsy (17.25 points) and Kudymkarsky (20 points) municipal districts¹. These municipal districts occupied the last places in the ranking (Table 4).

Such rankings principally aim at getting information about a decrease in standard of living in municipalities and identifying social risks to eliminate them timely.

Let us examine the dynamics of the key indicators of standard of living in the RF subjects under consideration compared to small towns.

One of the indicators of decent labour recommended by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is inequality in income distribution judged by decile ratio. In the Russian Federation, this indicator remains rather high for a number of years, what causes social tension in the country and constitutes a threat to social stability.

¹ Ranking of the municipalities of Perm kray on the basis of territories' economic development. Available at: <http://deloros-perm.ru/?p=epmrejcvji&paged=4> (in Russ.)

Table 4

Ranking of some municipalities of Perm kray (administrative centres, small towns)

Municipality	Total points in socioeconomic indicators	Total points in region	Total
Chernushinsky municipal district	38.75	37.5	76.25
Usolsky municipal district	33.50	42.5	76.00
Osinsky municipal district	31.00	40.0	71.00
Nytvensky municipal district	35.50	35.0	70.50
Ochersky municipal district	29.75	37.5	67.25
Gubakha urban district	37.00	27.5	64.50
Kudymkar urban district	31.25	30.0	61.25
Vereshchaginsky municipal district	31.50	22.5	58.00
Chusovskoy municipal district	34.75	22.5	57.25
Gornozavodskoy municipal district	28.50	25.0	53.50
Gremyachinsky municipal district	23.75	12.5	36.75
Aleksandrovsky municipal district	27.25	7.5	34.75
Krasnovishersky municipal district	17.50	15.0	32.50
Kizelosky municipal district	17.25	10.0	27.25
Cherdynsky municipal district	15.25	10.0	25.25
Kudymkarsky municipal district	20.00	5.0	25.00

Source: Ranking of the municipalities of Perm kray on the basis of territories' economic development. Available at: <http://deloros-perm.ru/?p=epmrejcvji&paged=4> (in Russ.)

Hence, of particular attention are the issues of exploring the dynamics of indicators proving the income differentiation among the Russian population, as well as peculiarities of this problem in the country's regions (Table 5). At the same time, some independent experts argue that the data of the Federal State Statistics Service on the decile ratio in Russia are erroneously low [14].

Table 5

Income differentiation in Vladimir, Tula oblasts and Perm kray in 2005–2016 (decile ratio)

RF subject	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Vladimir oblast	8.2	8.9	9.5	10.3	10.4	11.1	11.1	11.8	12.0	11.4	10.9	10.7
Tula oblast	8.1	9.8	10.0	11.2	11.5	11.9	12.0	12.9	12.7	12.2	11.5	11.9
Perm kray	17.0	18.0	18.5	18.2	18.0	17.8	17.3	17.5	17.7	17.3	17.0	15.8
Russian Federation*	15.2	15.9	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	16.2	16.4	16.3	16.0	15.7	15.7

Note. * Without the data on Sevastopol and Krym.

Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

The table 5 shows a high differentiation in income distribution among the Russian population during the last decade, which is one of the serious problems of the modern society, because the decile ratio equaling ten is considered critical. In Russia this critical level is exceeded more than one and half times. However, socioeconomic differentiation is inherent in all countries with large number of regions, where population incomes and level of regional economic development can differ dramatically and it is virtually impossible to overcome these differences. Yet it is necessary to strive to reduce the social differentiation.

The analysis of the dynamics of income differentiation in the RF subjects under consideration indicates that in Vladimir and Tula oblast the decile ratio for the whole period of 2005–2016 was lower than the national average. Nevertheless, starting from 2005 this indicator was

growing steadily until 2013 in Vladimir oblast and until 2012 in Tula oblast. The growth was followed by a moderate decrease over three–four years. As for Perm kray, the decile ratio there was higher than the national figure. This can be attributed to the fact that Perm kray is a more stable industrial region with high purchasing power of consumers. The trend for growth in Perm kray was less noticeable compared to Vladimir and Tula oblasts and lasted for three years, after that, the ratio declined modestly until 2016. Despite slight improvement of the situation in recent years, there were no remarkable changes in the dynamics, and the ratio is going down very slowly.

The study of the level of salaries and its differentiation is one of the essential issues, because salary usually remains the main and often the only source of income of poor residents (Table 6).

Table 6

Main indicators of standard of living in Perm kray compared to those of selected small towns and administrative centres within its territory in 2011–2015

Indicator	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Perm kray</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	18,773	21,821	24,716	27,102	28,528
Subsistence rate for able-bodied population, rubles	7,194	7,203	7,722	8,624	10,168
Ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population, %	261.0	302.9	320.1	314.3	280.5
Regional minimum monthly wage, rubles	4,611.0	4,611.0	5,205.0	5,554.0	5,965.0
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	407.1	473.2	474.9	488.0	428.0
<i>The city of Perm (population of 1,048,011)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	25,686.7	29,253.5	32,801.1	35,646.0	36,423.0
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	557.0	634.4	630.1	641.8	610.6
Ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population, %	357.1	406.1	424.8	413.3	358.2
<i>Cherdynsky municipal district (population of 22,393)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles			20,312.3	21,454.7	22,770.6
Ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population, %			390.2	386.3	381.7
<i>Aleksandrovsky municipal district (population of 29,353)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	18,781.2	19,313.5	20,622.6	21,746.1	22,622.9
Ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population, %	407.3	418.9	396.2	391.5	379.3
<i>The city of Kudymkar (population of 30,739)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	16,286.7	19,524.0	22,888.8	25,209.8	25,253.6
Ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population, %	353.2	423.4	428.2	453.9	423.4

Note. Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

Actual situation with population incomes in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation is reflected by the ratio between incomes and subsistence rates (Tables 6, 7, 8). In Perm kray, the ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population has increased insignificantly, just by 7% (from 2.6 to 2.8 times) during 2011–2015. In Tula oblast, the ratio has changed slightly as well (from 2.88 to 2.98 times), whereas in Vladimir oblast this indicator has even gone down (from 2.45 to 2.35 times).

Table 7

Main indicators of standard of living in Vladimir oblast compared to those of selected small towns and administrative centres within its territory in 2011–2015

Indicator	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Vladimir oblast</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	16,314	18,343	20,927	22,581	23,877
Subsistence rate for able-bodied population, rubles	6,648	6,834	7,500	8,432	10,136
Ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population, %	245.4	268.4	279.0	267.8	235.5
Regional minimum monthly wage, rubles	4,330.0	4,330.0	5,205.0	5,554.0	5,965.0
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	376.7	423.6	402.0	406.6	400.3
<i>The city of Vladimir (population of 356,158)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	20,553.1	23,097.6	25,721.4	27,993.3	29,349.7
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	474.7	533.4	494.2	504.0	492.0
<i>The city of Kameshkovо (population of 12,722)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	12,818.1	15,508.9	18,300.7	22,601.4	24,357.9
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	296.0	358.1	351.6	406.9	408.3
<i>Muromsky municipal district (population of 16,031)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	10,978.3	12,197.8	14,604.1	17,012.9	17,926.4
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	253.5	281.7	280.6	306.3	300.5
<i>Melenkovsky municipal district (population of 33,677)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	12,582.9	14,894.4	17,002.4	18,585.5	19,795.0
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	290.6	344.0	326.7	334.6	331.9
<i>Vyaznikovsky municipal district (population of 37,197)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	12,545.1	14,568.5	17,612.1	19,188.5	19,404.5
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	289.7	336.5	338.4	345.5	325.3

Note. Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

Table 8

Main indicators of standard of living in Tula oblast compared to those of selected small towns and administrative centres within its territory in 2011–2015

Indicator	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Tula oblast</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	17,225.0	20,121.0	23,030.0	25,873.0	27,555.0
Subsistence rate for able-bodied population, rubles	5,977	6,722	7,241	8,158	9,250
Ratio of nominal gross salary to subsistence rate for able-bodied population, %	288.2	299.3	318.0	317.1	297.9
Regional minimum monthly wage, rubles	4,330.0	4,330.0	5,205.0	5,554.0	5,965.0
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	397.8	464.7	442.5	465.8	461.9
<i>The city of Tula (population of 485,900)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	–	–	29,061.2	31,922.9	33,804.0
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	–	–	558.3	574.8	566.7

Table 8 (concluded)

Indicator	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>The city of Venyov (population of 14,198)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	–	–	20,354.4	24,200.7	25,652.1
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	–	–	391.1	435.7	429.6
<i>The city of Belyov (population of 13,448)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	–	–	17,845.0	20,745.0	21,896.6
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	–	–	342.8	373.5	367.1
<i>Odoevsky municipal district (population of 5,559)</i>					
Nominal gross salary, rubles	–	–	16,346.1	19,224.2	20,127.5
Ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage, %	–	–	314.0	346.1	337.4

Note. Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

The analysis of the changes in average nominal gross salary for the last five years (Tables 6, 7, 8) shows that in all three regions this indicator grew steadily. However, the growth rates of the real salary in these regions turned out to be insufficient to compensate for inflationary processes caused by the crisis phenomena in the country. It is necessary to point to intra-regional differentiation of nominal gross salaries. For instance, in Vladimir oblast, in spite of sustainable growth of the average nominal gross salary its value varied considerably from 17.9 to 24.4 thousand rubles across municipalities in 2015. In Melenkovsky, Vyaznikovsky and Muromsky municipalities, the average nominal gross salary did not reach the regional average. A similar situation was coming about in the two other subjects of the Russian Federation.

The ratio of the nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage in large cities and centres of the RF subjects such as Perm, Vladimir and Tula is more than one and half times higher than in small towns (Tables 6, 7, 8). For instance, in 2015 this ratio amounted to 6.11 in Perm, whereas in Cherdynsky municipal district it was 3.82. Other small towns and administrative centres of the RF subjects under consideration encounter a similar situation.

Unlike large cities, the ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage in small towns and administrative centres is more comparable to the same indicator of the RF subject, and the contrast is not that sharp. However, differentiation is present in all three constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

Analysis of per capita incomes (Table 9) reveals that per capita incomes are the highest in the Central Federal District, which occupies the first place according to this indicator among the federal districts of the Russian Federation. This federal district has the highest cost of living.

Vladimir oblast has relatively low per capita incomes, holding 18th position among the subjects of the Central Federal District and 58th position in the Russian Federation. Tula oblast demonstrates a little higher per capita income and occupies seventh place in the Central Federal District and 32nd in Russia.

Despite the fact that the Volga Federal District ranks the sixth among the federal districts of the Russian Federation according to this indicator, Perm kray being a part of it has even higher per capita incomes and ranks 24th in the Russian Federation, significantly outperforming Vladimir and Tula oblasts in terms of per capita incomes [12].

Measures of social protection and social support of the population first and foremost target the improvement of standard of living of the low-income residents and disabled members of the society [24]. During 2011–2015 the average pension amounted to just over 30% of the average nominal gross salary. In 2015, the ratio was 35.3%, i. e. there were no substantial changes for the whole period under consideration (Table 10).

Table 9

**Per capita income and its ratio to subsistence rate
in Vladimir and Tula oblasts and Perm kray in 2011–2015**

Indicator	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Position in the Russian Federation
<i>Russian Federation</i>						
Per capita income, rubles	23,221.1	25,928.2	27,767	30,467	30,738	–
<i>Central Federal District</i>						
Per capita income, rubles	30,017.6	33,466.6	34,970	38,768	39,470	1
<i>Vladimir oblast</i>						
Per capita income, rubles	14,312.2	16,228.8	18,796.4	20,569.3	23,732.3	58
Ratio of per capita income to average subsistence rate, %	232.5	257.6	271.6	264.7	254.0	–
<i>Tula oblast</i>						
Per capita income, rubles	16,975.0	19,340.0	20,903.0	23,040.0	26,286.0	32
Ratio of per capita income to average subsistence rate, %	326.5	326.2	320.2	312.7	293.7	–
<i>Volga Federal District</i>						
Per capita income, rubles	19,679.9	21,863.9	24,020	26,287	25,729	6
<i>Perm kray</i>						
Per capita income, rubles	23,328.8	26,054.3	28,315	32,043	28,726	24
Ratio of per capita income to average subsistence rate, %	318.5	348.6	361.9	349.8	346.6	–

Note. Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2015, 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru/>; Vladimir oblast in figures: concise statistical yearbook. Vladimir: Regional office of Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation in Vladimir oblast, 2016, p. 52; data of the Regional office of Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation in Tula oblast. Official statistics. Standard of living. Available at: http://www.tulastat.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_ts/tulastat/ru/; Perm kray in figures: concise statistical yearbook. Perm: Regional office of Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation in Perm kray, 2016, p. 46.

Table 10

Average pensions in Vladimir and Tula oblasts and Perm kray in 2011–2015 compared to the data for the Russian Federation, rubles

Territory	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Rank in the Russian Federation in 2015
Russian Federation	8,273	9,154	10,030	10,889	12,081	–
Vladimir oblast	8,184	9,018	9,874	10,686	11,871	33
Tula oblast	8,112	8,998	9,804	10,688	11,875	32
Perm oblast	8,134	9,017	9,882	10,745	11,942	30

Note. Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2015, 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

Examining the data on average amount of pensions in Vladimir and Tula oblasts and Perm kray we can conclude that pensions grew steadily, but insufficiently during the whole considered period. The level of pension provision is practically the same in all three constituent entities of the Russian Federation and almost coincides with the national average. The regulations stipulate that the minimum level of pensions for citizens should not be lower than regional subsistence rate. In case the amount of pension together with other payments received by an unemployed pensioner is lower than subsistence rate in a region, s/he will receive

an additional social payment to the pension. The institution of subsistence rate was established by the Government of the Russian Federation as a poverty threshold [30]. Citizens of the Russian Federation, who have incomes lower than this threshold are recognized low-income people living in poverty and have a right for the state social support.

Having examined size of the population with incomes below the subsistence rate (Table 11) we can argue that for the decade in the Russian Federation generally and in the regions under consideration the number of people with incomes below the subsistence rate has declined. In 2005, Vladimir oblast had the highest number of people with incomes below the subsistence rate, which was 1.7 times higher than the national average, Tula oblast and Perm kray's figures. For the last ten years, the number of low-income people in the country has decreased by almost 22%. Among the constituent entities of the Russian Federation under consideration, the highest rate of decrease of this indicator (around 50%) was in Vladimir oblast, whereas in Tula oblast, it amounted to 41%, and Perm kray had the lowest rate, just 12.5%. Economic instability of the last three years caused an increase in the number of people with incomes below the subsistence rate both in Russia and in the three considered subjects of the Russian Federation.

Table 11

**Population in regions with incomes below the subsistence rate,
% of the total population**

Year	Russian Federation*	Vladimir oblast	Tula oblast	Perm kray
2005	17.8	29.5	17.4	16.9
2006	15.2	25.5	14.8	14.1
2007	13.3	23.1	14.5	13.5
2008	13.4	19.9	13.1	14.0
2009	13.0	19.5	12.5	14.2
2010	12.5	17.3	11.0	13.2
2011	12.7	17.5	10.9	14.4
2012	10.7	15.0	9.5	12.2
2013	10.8	13.5	9.7	11.4
2014	11.2	13.5	9.8	12.0
2015	13.3	14.1	10.6	12.6
2016	13.5**	14.6	10.2	14.8

Note. * Without the data on Sevastopol and Krym. ** Preliminary data.

Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2015, 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

We should draw attention to the fact that in the Russian Federation the gap between its constituent entities in the level of budgetary sufficiency is rather huge (in 2014 it amounted to 15.3 times). The maximum level of the budgetary sufficiency of a region before distribution of grants from the federal budgets calculated for one resident was in Moscow and equalled 2.585, and the minimum level was noticed in the Republic of Ingushetia (0.169)¹.

For 2017 the criteria for adjusting budgetary sufficiency of municipal districts and urban districts in Vladimir oblast amounts to 8,856 rubles per resident (8% growth compared to 2016). The minimum level of budgetary sufficiency for urban settlements is 3,706 rubles per resident (10% growth compared to 2016), and for rural settlements 3,076 rubles per resident (10% growth compared to 2016).

Understanding the complexity of the problem, the constituent entities of the Russian Federation invest a lot of effort into adjusting budgets of municipalities. In particular, government authorities initiated changes to the law “On intergovernmental relations between government

¹ Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

authorities of Tula oblast and local governments of Tula oblast¹ to establish a uniform norm of deductions from corporate property tax to budgets of urban districts in the amount of 5%. This decision allows creating conditions for increasing local budget revenues and adjusting budgets of municipalities, as well as stimulates urban districts to work efficiently with property within municipal economy. Changes introduced into the regulations of Tula oblast on calculating and providing grants concern distribution of grants from the budget of municipal district formed at the expense of subvention from the oblast's budget, what will permit to significantly bridge the gap between municipalities with the most and the least sufficient budgets. As a result, Tula oblast almost does not have the municipalities with budget deficit and maximum amount of municipal debt exceeding the level stipulated in the budgetary legislation, and the difference in budgetary sufficiency between the five most and the five least sufficient municipalities in 2017 amounts to 1.7 times (before adjustment it was 5.1 times) [22].

The main indicator of consumer behaviour of population is the structure of consumer expenditure. Here the most important indicator is expenditure on food. The more money is spent on foodstuffs, the lower the standard of living is, and vice versa. For developed countries, the share of expenditure on food accounts for 15% of the total household expenditure.

Table 12 shows that in the structure of household expenditure in the selected regions the share of food is high, almost two times higher than in developed countries, what indicates a rather low standard of living in these subjects of the Russian Federation.

Table 12

Share of food in the structure of household expenditure, %*

Territory	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Russian Federation	36.1	32.9	32.6	31.4	31.2	31.9	35.3
Vladimir oblast	46.2	36.6	35.3	36.0	36.2	36.6	38.1
Tula oblast	48.2	40.5	38.2	39.1	34.6	34.2	38.8
Perm kray	31.4	31.2	29.0	29.2	30.6	30.8	34.4

Note. Compiled using the data of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation. Regions of Russia. Social and Economic Indicators – 2015, 2016. Available at: <http://www.gks.ru>.

Increase in consumer demand is one of the main factors in the growth of the Russian economy, yet in 2015 against the background of worsening macroeconomic problems consumer demand went down ceasing to be a stimulus to economic growth. The index of retail turnover in physical terms has decreased in the majority of regions. This process touched Tula (93.8%) and Vladimir (89.1%) oblasts, but to a greater extent it unfolded in Perm kray (86.7%), which indirectly evidences a fall in standard of living.

Conclusion

Comparative analysis of objective statistical indicators of the standard of living in the selected regions during a ten-year period demonstrated that regional differentiation in population incomes had decreased due to a large-scale redistribution policy of the state.

However, the study revealed substantial intraregional differentiation in average nominal gross salary. In Vladimir and Tula oblasts and Perm kray this indicator varied considerably among municipalities despite its generally steady growth.

The analysis showed that in large cities of Perm kray and Vladimir oblast the ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage was more than one and a half times

¹ Edict of the Government of the Russian Federation of April 24, 2014 no. 663-r "On approval of the plan of measures for increasing the mobility of the citizens of the Russian Federation for 2014–2018" (article 2262). (in Russ)

higher than the same indicator in small towns and administrative centres of these RF subjects. In contrast to large cities, the ratio of nominal gross salary to regional minimum monthly wage in small towns and administrative centres was more comparable to the same indicator of the RF subject. Nevertheless, differentiation of the indicator was present in all three subjects of the Russian Federation.

In the structure of household expenditure in the regions under consideration, the share of food expenditure is rather substantial, almost two times higher than in developed countries, what proves the thesis about a relatively low standard of living in these subjects of the Russian Federation.

The findings demonstrated that the average amount of pensions in 2010–2015 remained at a rather low level compared to the average nominal gross salary and pensions amounted to just over 30% of salaries. There were no significant changes in the ratio between pensions and salaries for the period under consideration in none of the three constituent entities.

The results of the study give grounds to formulate a number of conclusions aimed at improvement of the government policy on raising standard of living both at regional and municipal levels. Social and economic stability of the country crucially depends on addressing this problem the most efficiently.

The first and the most urgent task is to shift to sustainable development, reduce regional differentiation and in connection with this to perfect budgetary and fiscal policy of the state using the function of redistribution of resources and revenues to lower differentiation and alleviate the poverty.

The second most relevant task in terms of raising standard of living in small towns is forming their inner economic space, creating conditions for attracting investments and developing small entrepreneurship, despite the complexing of some problems, which lie outside the competence of municipalities that possess a substantial potential for independent actions.

Third, with a view to manage the problem of unemployment (especially among young people) more fruitfully, local governments of small towns and administrative centres should direct their efforts to formation of the new economic and intellectual environment.

Forth, at the level of local government it is necessary to target the problems more accurately when providing measures of social support for specific low-income groups of residents in order to increase their social security.

Hence, the problem of improving the standard of living at regional and municipal levels is of systemic nature and success in dealing with it first and foremost depends on formation of the mechanism of support of these territories at federal level, including both methodological support and institutional development.

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Исследование уровня жизни населения малых городов Российской Федерации¹

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Статья посвящена исследованию уровня жизни населения малых городов в сравнении с субъектами Российской Федерации. Проведен последовательный анализ населенности малых городов, номинальных и реальных доходов, прожиточного минимума, регионального минимального размера оплаты труда и пенсий Владимирской, Тульской областей и Пермского края. Выбор субъектов РФ обусловлен различиями в их экономическом потенциале, динамике и уровне социально-экономического развития, специализации, а также сопоставимостью числа малых городов (18 – во Владимирской области и Пермском крае, 13 – в Тульской области), наличием в каждом из них малых городов, как со стабильной, так и сложной социально-экономической ситуацией. Результатом исследования являются предложения по совершенствованию государственной региональной и муниципальной политики в отношении уровня жизни населения малых городов.

Ключевые слова: малые города; территориальная дифференциация; субъект РФ; уровень жизни населения; реальные доходы населения; прожиточный минимум; устойчивое развитие.

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