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**ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN THE  
SOUTHERN REGIONS OF RUSSIA**

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*Abstract*

The socio-economic situation of the rural population is difficult. Rural population face problems of employment, lack of social infrastructure and low incomes. The article discusses the socio-economic situation of the population in three regions of southern Russia: the Republic of Kalmykia, Astrakhan and Volgograd regions. According to the statistics, the average per capita income of the population of the Republic of Kalmykia is the lowest in the Southern Federal District, and the average income of the population of Astrakhan and Volgograd Oblast is slightly higher. In order to determine a subjective assessment of the economic situation, a survey was conducted in three southern Russian regions. According to the survey, the low economic situation often indicates the population of Astrakhan region. The comparison of answers depending on the place of residence indicates that urban and rural residents of the Astrakhan region equally assess their economic situation. In the Volgograd region, the economic situation of about half of the rural respondents meets the criterion "In general there is enough money, but we get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods," rural residents less often than city residents give the lowest and highest assessments to their economic status. In Kalmykia, rural residents of the republic are in more difficult economic conditions than citizens. The study indicates the regional and intraregional differentiation of the socio-economic situation of the population.

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**Keywords:** Rural population, socio-economic situation, income of population, subjective assessment.



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## 1. Introduction

The rural population is in difficult socio-economic conditions. Unemployment, migration of population, destruction of social infrastructure and low standard of living are typical for the modern rural regions. The researchers note that “the development of Russian rural areas over the past couple of decades has reached a critical level, plunging them, for the most part, into a state of protracted systemic crisis” (Rodionova, 2018, p. 102). This situation determines the interest towards the problems of rural areas.

**Table 01.** Assessment of the economic situation depending on the region (in %)

Assessment criterion	Astrakhan region	Volgograd region	The Republic of Kalmykia
Have not enough money	15.9	11.3	7.7
Live paycheck to paycheck	26.9	17.9	18.6
It is enough money for everyday spending, but it is difficult to buy clothes	11.0	17.3	16.6
In general there is enough money, but we get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods	30.3	37.5	33.2
The purchase of expensive goods does not cause great difficulties, but it is not available to buy such a property as a car	11.0	11.3	15.4
At present we not deny themselves anything	4.8	4.8	8.5

**Table 02.** Assessment of the economic situation depending on the place of residence (in %)

Assessment criterion	City	Rural area
Have not enough money	10.1	12.1
Live paycheck to paycheck	20.7	19.8
It is enough money for everyday spending, but it is difficult to buy clothes	12.7	18.7
In general there is enough money, but we get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods	30.8	36.6
The purchase of expensive goods does not cause great difficulties, but it is not available to buy such a property as a car	18.1	8.4
At present we not deny themselves anything	7.6	4.4

## 2. Problem Statement

The socio-economic situation of the rural population of the regions is complex and has regional differentiation.

## 3. Research Questions

The economic situation of the rural population is determined through economic indicators and subjective assessment.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research is study the socio-economic situation of the rural population in the regions of Southern Russia.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The study used the analysis of statistical materials and the results of the survey in three regions of Southern Russia: the Republic of Kalmykia, Astrakhan and Volgograd regions. In total 580 people were surveyed, including 262 men and 318 women. In addition 147 respondents live in the Astrakhan region, 171 in the Volgograd region and 262 residents of the Republic of Kalmykia, including 281 respondents living in urban settlements, and 284 - in rural settlements. For a subjective assessment of the economic situation, it was proposed to choose the appropriate level of the six proposed.

#### **6. Findings**

In modern studies, a negative assessment of the development of rural areas and the socio-economic situation of the rural population is often made. Studying modern problems of rural regions, Namrueva (2017) writes: “the unresolved nature of many social problems suggests that at present rural population live in a difficult socio-economic situation” (p. 110). The results of monitoring of the dynamics of poverty, income, and well-being of Russian households, carried out by the National Research University “Higher School of Economics”, show that rural areas are one of the factors of a low quality of life. The socio-economic situation of the rural population is determined primarily by the high level of unemployment and employment problems. Specialists draw attention to the high level of unemployment in the Russian village, “exceeding the level of urban unemployment by several times” (Capitals and regions of modern Russia: myths and reality fifteen years later, 2018). Another problem of rural regions is the state of social infrastructure. In recent years, the number of educational institutions, medical organizations and cultural and leisure institutions is declining everywhere.

It is “extremely weak social infrastructure” that is one of the reasons for the unattractiveness of rural settlements for young people and the economically active population (Lexin, 2014). The analysis of the age structure of the population of the Southern Russian regions shows that “the proportion of young people aged 15–35 years in the structure of the rural population is lower than in the structure of the urban population” (Nuskhaeva, 2017, p. 174). This situation has negative consequences for agricultural development, which are pointed out by researchers: “an unfavorable environment provokes a further outflow of the population, especially young people, which again reduces the possibilities of turning agriculture into a powerful reserve of growth for the entire economy” (Toshchenko, 2017, p. 89). Pacirkovsky (2010) writes about the need for the development of social infrastructure: “diversification and modernization of production, engineering and social infrastructure of small cities and rural areas should be the main guideline for post-industrial development” (p. 285). Currently, the level and quality of life of the population depends on the region, the type of settlement and its remoteness from regional centers.

In the framework of the presented research, the economic situation of the population in three regions of southern Russia: the Republic of Kalmykia, the Astrakhan and Volgograd Regions was considered.

According to the RIA Rating, the Volgograd region occupies 34th place, the Astrakhan region - 59th place and the Republic of Kalmykia - 80th [Rating] on the basis of the socio-economic situation of the subjects of the Russian Federation in 2017. This situation persists for several years; changes are slightly, within 2-4 points.

One of the criteria is the average income of the population. According to Russian Statistics Agency, the average income of the population of the Southern Federal District in 2017 is 26,928 rubles (per capita income). Among the subjects of the Southern Federal District the lowest rates are in the Republic of Kalmykia. In 2017, it is equal to 14,730 rubles, in the Astrakhan region - 22,519 rubles, and in the Volgograd region - 21,357 rubles. The lowest average income is in the Republic of Kalmykia. This situation persists over the last decade. In 2010, the average income of the population in the Republic of Kalmykia is 7,774 rubles. In the Astrakhan and Volgograd regions it amounts to 14,697 rubles and 13 775 rubles respectively. Thus, the average incomes of the population in the Republic of Kalmykia are the lowest; the average incomes of the population of Astrakhan and Volgograd regions have similar values.

The next analysis criterion is the level of poverty of the population. According to Russian Statistics Agency more than a quarter of the population of Kalmykia had an income below the minimum subsistence level in 2017 (27.3%), and a third of the total population of the Republic was in the same situation in 2011 (Population). In the Astrakhan region, the proportion of the population with incomes below the minimum subsistence level is 14.2% and 16.0% in 2011 and 2017 respectively. A slight increase in the proportion of the population with incomes below the minimum subsistence level in the region may be noted. In the Volgograd region, the population with incomes below the minimum subsistence level in 2011 and 2017 accounted for 15.1% and 14.4% respectively (Population). Thus, in the Republic of Kalmykia, the largest share of the population is with incomes below the minimum subsistence level.

Considering the socio-economic differentiation of the Russian regions, Chistik (2015) identifies four clusters in terms of the population income level: high, relatively high, medium, low. According to this classification, Astrakhan and Volgograd regions are included in the group "average income of the population", and the Republic of Kalmykia - in the group of "low income of population". The analysis of socio-economic indicators shows a low economic situation of the population of the Republic of Kalmykia. This circumstance forces the population to search for possible solutions. Badmaeva (2016) comes to the conclusion that "the most common adaptation models are patterns characteristic of poor groups of people, namely, the rejection of certain goods and services, loans and borrowings, and the search for additional occupation" (p. 300).

In order to make a subjective assessment of the economic situation, the authors consider the survey results (Table 1). The analysis of answers depending on the region shows that respondents from the Astrakhan region more often than others report a low economic situation: 15.9% of respondents indicate that "have not enough money" and 26.9% choose the option "we live paycheck to paycheck". In the Republic of Kalmykia, these assessments are twice as rare: 7.7% and 18.6%, respectively; in the Volgograd region, 11.3% of the respondents "do not have enough money to pay" and 17.9% of respondents "live from paycheck to paycheck". Buying clothes causes difficulties for 11.0% of respondents living in the Astrakhan region. A similar answer is given by 17.3% in the Volgograd Region and 16.6% in the Republic of Kalmykia. About a third of respondents in every region gets a loan or borrows money to buy expensive

goods: 30.3% in the Astrakhan region, 37.5% in the Volgograd region and 33.2% in the Republic of Kalmykia. A small proportion of respondents give the highest rating to their economic position. In addition, for 11.0% of respondents from the Astrakhan region, 11.3% of respondents from the Volgograd region and 15.4% from the Republic of Kalmykia, the purchase of expensive goods do not cause difficulties. Thus, respondents living in the Astrakhan region often give a low assessment of their economic position. It is worth adding that in the study of subjective assessments of social hazards of residents of the Astrakhan region, it is “poverty which is indicated in the first place in the hierarchy of social hazards” in 2016 (Kargapolova, 2017).

The distribution of answers of respondents living in urban settlements and rural areas shows that the differences are observed only in high assessments of the economic situation (Table 2). 10.1% of residents and 12.1% of villagers indicated the answer “has not enough money”. One fifth of the respondents living in urban and rural settlements (20.7% and 19.8%, respectively) live “paycheck to paycheck”. For 12.7% of urban and 18.7% of rural respondents, buying clothes causes difficulties. About a third of those surveyed in each group gets a loan or borrows money to buy expensive goods (30.8% and 36.6%, respectively). Urban respondents more often than rural give a high assessment to their economic situation and “the purchase of expensive goods does not cause great difficulties for them” for 18.1% of citizens and 8.4% of rural dwellers. The insignificant share of the respondents can refuse almost nothing to themselves (7.6% of city residents and 4.4% of rural residents). Thus, according to low assessments of the economic situation, there are no differences in the responses of urban and rural residents, more than 30% of city residents and villagers live in conditions of “having not enough money” or “live paycheck to paycheck”, but high ratings are more often given by urban respondents.

The authors analyze population assessments depending on the place of residence by region. In Kalmykia, a third of respondents living in rural areas determine their economic position according to the first two criteria. There are six times more rural respondents living under the conditions of “having not enough money” than urban ones (2.1% and 12.0%, respectively). The “live paycheck to paycheck” situation is most often found in responses of people living in rural areas (21.8%, opposite to 14.4%). Roughly equal shares of rural and urban respondents live in economic situation, when “buying clothes causes difficulties” and “for buying expensive goods we get a loan or borrow”. Thus, buying clothes causes difficulties for 15.5% of residents and 18.3% of villagers. About a third of respondents living in villages and urban settlements get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods (33.8 and 30.9%, respectively). A high assessment of the economic situation is more common among urban respondents: almost 10.3% of residents and 5.6% of villagers can deny themselves nothing. The city dwellers three times more often choose the options “the purchase of expensive goods does not cause great difficulties, the purchase of property such as a car is unavailable” than the villagers (26.8% opposite 5.6%). Thus, rural residents of the Republic more often consider themselves to be poor and, less often, give a high assessment to their economic position.

In the Astrakhan region, the distribution of answers does not depend on the place of residence. More than a quarter of rural and urban respondents live “paycheck to paycheck” (26.7% and 27.3%). The lowest assessment (“has not enough money”) is given by 15.6% of residents and 16.4% of villagers. About 30% of respondents living in urban settlements and rural areas get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods (31.1% and 29.1%, respectively). Buying clothes causes difficulties for 10.0% of residents and 12.7%

of villagers. The answer “the purchase of expensive goods does not cause great difficulties, the purchase of property such as a car is unavailable” is chosen by 10% in both groups (11.1% of urban and 10.9% of rural respondents). Nowadays, 5.6% and 3.6% of respondents living in urban settlements and rural areas may not deny themselves anything. Thus, the rural and urban population of the region gives the same assessment of their economic situation. More than 40% of the respondents are in difficult economic conditions, when “have not enough money” or “live paycheck to paycheck”. About 30% of respondents gets a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods. The subjective assessment of the economic situation of the rural population does not differ from the assessments of the urban population of the region.

In the Volgograd region, about half of the respondents living in rural areas define their economic situation as “in general we have enough money, but we get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods” (47.4%). For comparison, 30.3% of respondents chose this answer among the citizens. Less than a quarter (23.7%) of rural respondents has difficulty buying clothes. Among urban respondents, these are almost two times less (12.4%). The lowest assessment of their economic position was given by 13.5% of the city residents and 9.2% of the villagers. The answer “live paycheck to paycheck” was twice as often given by urban respondents than by rural respondents (21.3% opposite to 10.5%). It meant that a low assessment was more common for citizens than for rural respondents. More than 6% of respondents living in a village and urban settlements, at the present time could almost not deny themselves anything (6.7% and 6.2%, respectively). The economic situation, according to which “the purchase of expensive goods does not cause great difficulties, the purchase of property such as a car is not available”, was 2.4 times more common for urban respondents than rural (15.7% opposite 6.6%). The rural population of the region more often defined their economic situation as “there is enough money for everyday expenses, but buying clothes causes difficulties” and “in general there is enough money, but we get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods”. Rural residents less often than urban respondents give low and highest assessments for economic situation.

## 7. Conclusion

The statistics show a low socio-economic situation of the population of the Republic of Kalmykia, which is determined by the lowest average income in the Southern Federal District and high population with incomes below the minimum subsistence level. The average incomes of the population of the Astrakhan and Volgograd regions are slightly higher and have close values. According to subjective perception, a low economic situation is more often indicated by respondents from the Astrakhan region.

The assessments of the economic situation of urban and rural residents of the Astrakhan region had similar values: more than 40% of residents and villagers live in conditions of “having not enough money” - “living paycheck to paycheck” and about a third of urban and rural residents “get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods”. In the Volgograd region, about half of the villagers defined their economic position according to the criterion “in general we have enough money, but we get a loan or borrow money to buy expensive goods,” less often urban residents gave the lowest and highest assessments to their economic position. In Kalmykia, a third of respondents living in rural areas gave low assessments to their economic situation, and they were much less likely to give high assessments than city dwellers. It was the

rural inhabitants of the Republic who were in more difficult economic conditions. The study indicated the regional and intraregional differentiation of the socio-economic situation of the population.

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