SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF THE PUBLIC: COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION AND FORECAST SCENARIOS

[a]TATYANA N. SAVINA, [b]LIUDMILA A. PONIMATKINA, [c]OKSANA T. TSUTSIEVA, [d]MADINA V. TSUTSIEVA, [e]BORIS R. KALLAGOV

[a]*National Research Ogarev Mordovia State University, str. Bolshevistskaya, 68, Saransk, Republic of Mordovia, 430005*
[b]*Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Leningradsky prospekt, 49, Moscow, Russian Federation, 125993*
[c, d]*North Ossetian State University named after K. L. Khetagurov, str. Vatutina 44-46, Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia – Alania, Russian Federation, 362025*
[d, e]*Vladikavkaz Institute of Management, str. Borodinskaya, 14, Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia – Alania, Russian Federation, 362025*
[e]*Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation – Vladikavkaz Branch, str. Molodozhnaya, 7, Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia – Alania, Russian Federation, 362002*

email: [a]*savinatn@yandex.ru,* [b]*LAPonimatkina@fa.ru,* [c]*ottsutsieva@mail.ru,* [d]*nint@mail.ru,* [e]*visit-den@mail.ru*

Abstract: The objective of the research is to provide comprehensive evaluation of social stratification of the public and suggest forecast variants of indicators influencing the phenomenon under study. Methodological basis of the research are both general scientific cognition methods and particular methods for evaluation and forecasts of social inequality. Approaches to subdivision of the public into social classes have been identified. Based on statistic data, indicators representing the extent of income differences have been explored. Forecasts have been compiled that allow seeing the future progress of the phenomenon under study in terms of individual indicators. The research findings can be used by the state authorities for substantiating social policy and in elaborating social security doctrine.

Keywords: social inequality, income of the population, subsistence minimum, income difference, wages.

1 Introduction

In Russia, the process of market transformation faces numerous challenges in the plane of problems of social stratification of its public. Excessive wealth disparity and social differentiation of the population having established in the contemporary society leads to noticeably expanding split of the society into two completely opposite social groups – the super-rich and the extremely poor.

The brightest and most direct expression of market transformation processes taking place in the Russian economic system is the change of principles and actual condition of material differentiation of the public. The new principles of payment for labor declared at the beginning of the reforms actually resulted in building such a distribution system for incomes, material, and social goods which failed to stimulate the most complicated and qualified kinds of labor yet preserved rewards (in the form of privileges) for the managerial stratum. Alongside this, there appeared new social actors – entrepreneurs; as the market reforms were rolled out, they mastered social roles which were new for the contemporary Russian society and have won quite a high social status and prestige. However, regrettably, meritocratic principles of social stratification arrangement were not embodied in Russia in the years of the reforms; moreover, they have generated urgent issues of material inequality, dangerous for both society and morals at that (Smirnova, 2010).

Nowadays, within Russia's geographical space, there are in fact two social estates coexisting. One of them (a relatively small one) unites healthy, free, having a modern education, enjoying full rights, and very rich citizens. They are the new "nobility" residing in the living space specially created by them for themselves. They have special living environment, quite specific way, quality, and styles of life. The other estate is vast in number and represented by mass strata of the society, barely earning their living. The majority of it is made up by lower-income, less educated people having limited rights. They are not distinguished by good health, they do not get the necessary medical aid, and they are doomed to a short life, as compared to the contemporary standards (Book Review "Social Inequality and Public Policy", 2007).

The relevance of the problem under study is dictated by a number of serious challenges and threats. Among the latter, unemployment is assuming special dimension, and poverty is gaining a global scale. The society having formed is characterized by a significant gap between low-income and high-income groups, plus over a third of all revenues focused under control of less than 15% of the population. Clearly, in the resulting situation, the only thing social stratification could do was exacerbating (Zherebtsova, 2003).

2 Literature Review

The issue of social inequality finds extensive theoretical elaboration within studies of both foreign and Russian economists and sociologists.

The first scientific explanations of the origin of inequality and stratification of the society are found in the work of the prominent sociologist Emile Durkheim (1996) saying that the society evaluates different activities differently. E. Durkheim (1996) singled out two aspects of social inequality: the inequality of abilities and the socially reinforced inequality. American sociologists K. Davis and W. Moore (2004) developed the society subdivision concept within structural functionalism: each element of the society has to perform certain functions, and only this helps the society exist and develop.

In the history of social thought, no-one has argued about the sources of social development and substantiated class structure of the society as definitely as K. Marx (Karl Marx and the Modern Philosophy, 1999). Alongside Marx, the decisive part in establishing the modern ideas about the essence, forms, and functions of social inequality was played by the classic of the world sociological theory M. Weber (1990). In the Modern Age, social functions of the state were also studied by philosophers J. Locke (1985-1988), G. Hegel (1978), and P. J. Proudhon (1908).

Analysis of the recurrent nature of social processes is presented in structuration theory of A. Giddens (1979) considering the effect of causal cycles.

At present, the cumulative nature of social processes is paid much attention in the concept of social exclusion. Unlike the established in previous decades tradition of studying poverty as a static phenomenon, the new concept focuses itself on dynamic aspects of inequality (Abrahamson, 2001; Martin, 1996; Paugam, 1996).

In the last decade, Russian researchers have started using the notion of social exclusion, too. With regard to this, the most well-known are works of F. M. Borodkin (2000). Russian literature on the relevant problems has also taken up discussing poverty issues in terms of the cumulative nature of social processes (Boikov, 2001).

Among the contemporary foreign researchers of the problem range of social inequality, redistribution, and welfare state, one can name A. Daguerre (2011), P. Copeland (Copeland & Daly, 2014), I. Koch (Koch et al., 2021), and M. Zajko (2021).

Works of E. Balatskiy (2010), L. A. Belyaeva (2001), T. N. Zaslavskaya (2004), N. M. Rimashevskaya (Rimashevskaya & Migranova, 2016), and some others have won renown among the leading contemporary Russian scientists exploring various aspects of the said problem in the format of social stratification and income distribution inequality.

Debating social policy as a necessary measure contributing to overcoming social stratification is a long-standing and rich tradition. For quite some time now, questions of the effect of social policy on economic development have been extensively considered in Russian economic science in the works of L. Abalkin, L. Lvov (Abalkin et al., 2000), S. Glazyev (2001), et al.

In recent time, there has been a broad and extensive discussion of innovations in the dimension of middle class formation, and particularities and criteria for identifying middle class have been studied in detail. With regard to this, one can note works of E. M. Avraamova (2008), E. Sh. Gontmakher (Gontmakher et al., 2008), T. M. Maleva (2007), et al.

3 Research Methodological Framework

The objective of this research is to provide integrated evaluation of social inequality and develop forecast scenarios. So, this research implies completing the following tasks:

1. studying approaches to subdivision of the public into social classes;
2. evaluating social inequality in terms of indicators determining the society stratification extent;
3. developing forecast scenarios for a number of indicators determining the society stratification extent.

The study of changes occurring in the area of social inequality in the contemporary Russian society relies on using a wide range of general scientific and special methods: structural and functional, institutional, comparative analysis, scientific generalization, the methods of index numbers and graphic construction, correlation regression analysis. The Russian context of actual reality in relation to social inequality has been analyzed based on the results of studies of T. Yu. Bogomolova (Bogomolova & Tapilina, 2001), S. Yu. Glazyev (2003), I. L. Lyubimov (2016), and a number of other authors. Methods of comparison and index numbers, systemic and structural analysis are used as the methodological framework. In particular, the comparison and index methods have enabled the authors to provide an integrated evaluation and analyze social inequality change trends. As for the systemic and structural analysis, it has contributed to identifying their unity and diversity. This research into social inequality change trends in the contemporary Russian society relies on works of the leading Russian economists, sociologists, analytical and theoretical concepts of the modern Russian researchers which grant a deeper insight into social inequality change pattern in the contemporary Russian society.

4 Results and Discussion

Discussing the concept "inequality", it should be borne in mind that there is objective inequality associated with gender- and age-related particularities which can change but are basically irremovable and objective. Separation of the society into strata, or social stratification, is a process of the public's getting categorized into social and economic levels based on certain factors. As the Western way of life and market economy won their recognition, the humanity succeeded in getting rid of subdividing people or groups according to racial, national, sexual, age-related or religious criteria, and classes have become the world's most popular categorization. In the narrow sense, there are three categories of classes (the upper, middle, and lower ones), but some scholars use a broader structure. So, the American sociologist W. Warner (1963) considers 6 classes (see Table 1) in his work "Yankee City".

Table 1 – Names of social classes and their representatives according to W. Warner (1963)

No.	Class name	Representatives of the class
1	Upper-upper class	The rich and the noble
2	Lower-upper class	Ones of the lower or middle class origin who have succeeded in becoming rich
3	Upper-middle class	Intellectuals and higher paid professionals, the well-to-do ones
4	Lower-middle class	Office or white-collar workers, ones having stable income and property
5	Upper-lower class	Workers
6	Lower-lower class	Ones at the poverty line or below it, the unemployed, the homeless

Source: author`s own processing

For comprehensive evaluation of Russia's social stratification, let the following indicators be analyzed: number of the population with money income below the subsistence minimum value, per capita money income of the population, Gini coefficient, and decile ratio (R/P 10% ratio).

1. Number of the population with money income below the subsistence minimum.

Table 2 presents statistic data on the analyzed indicator for the period from 2015 through 2020.

Table 2 – Number of the population having money income below the subsistence minimum

Years	Number of the population with money income below the subsistence minimum		Subsistence minimum value, rubles per month
	million people	percentage to the total population number	
2015	19,5	13,3	9 701
2016	19,5	13,3	9 828
2017	19,3	13,2	10 088
2018	18,8	12,8	10 216
2019	18,5	12,3	10 609

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

Analysis of the data of Table 2 allows concluding that the country's proportion of the population having money income below the subsistence minimum is changing. In 2015-2016, the population whose money income was below the subsistence minimum value counted 19,5 million people. The figure corresponds to 13,3% of the total population number, which exceeds the permissible value almost twice (the threshold value is 7%). This gives evidence about the fact that exactly the bulk of the Russian crisis affected social and economic welfare of the population of the RF in an extremely negative way. In 2017, this indicator went down amounting to 19,3 million people. So early as in 2018 and 2019, the number of the population having money income below the subsistence minimum was 18,8 and 18,5 million people, respectively, which represents 12,8% and 12,3% of the total population number. Thus, decrease of this indicator characterizes reduction of the country's poor population.

2. Per capita money income of the population.

Nominal and real incomes of the RF population over the period of 2015-2020 are given in Table 3.

Table 3 – Nominal and real incomes of the RF population

Years / Indicators	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Per capita money income of the population, rubles	30 466,6	30 747,0	31 477,4	33 178	35 247	35 361
Real income of the population, %	97,7	95,7	99,5	100,05	100,8	96,5
Inflation level, %	12,91	5,38	2,52	4,3	3,0	4,9

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

According to the data of Table 3, per capita money income of the population has an evident upward trend. In 2019, the increment

rate for real money income of the population was slightly higher, making +0,8% versus the previous year. Faster growth of real money income was first of all promoted by the considerable decline of the consumer inflation level. As of the 2019 results, consumer price index amounted to 3,0% (December to December) after 4,3% in 2018.

3.   Gini coefficient.

Otherwise termed income concentration index, Gini coefficient is a parameter used by economists in their calculations to characterize the existing economic inequality between individual strata of the population of one and the same country. Thus, it demonstrates how unevenly the incomes or aggregate wealth are distributed among members of the society. The value of this coefficient can range from 0 to 1; meanwhile, the higher the indicator value is, the more non-uniformly the incomes are distributed among the population (Koch et al., 2021). Table 4 shows the behavior of Gini coefficient.

Table 4 – Behavior of Gini coefficient in the RF over 2014-2018

Years	Gini coefficient
2014	0,412
2015	0,398
2016	0,397
2017	0,396
2018	0,411

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

By considering Table 4, it can be seen that Gini coefficient features a very slight decline over the period in question. This suggests that income differences inequality does not have an upward trend, yet it remains high enough. This situation is also indicative of the considerable non-uniformity of income distribution and vast distinctions between individual groups' levels of life. Alongside this, it entails social tension among the public and serves as the determinant of social clashes occurring and progressing, disruption of stability of the social system, which as a total creates a direct threat to the country's economic and social security.

4.   Decile ratio (R/P 10% ratio).

Table 5 – Distribution of the total money income volume and features of money income differences of the population
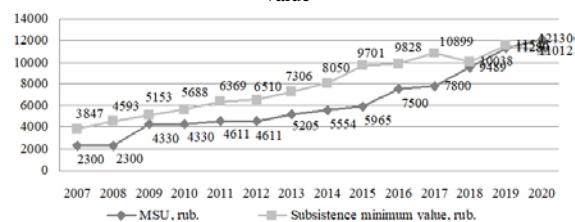
Indicators	Years			
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Money income – total, including according to 20-percent population groups, %	100	100	100	100
Group 1 (having the lowest income)	5,2	5,2	5,3	5,3
Group 2	9,8	9,9	10,0	10,0
Group 3	14,9	14,9	15,0	15,0
Group 4	22,5	22,6	22,6	22,6
Group 5 (having the highest income)	47,6	47,4	47,1	47,1
R/P 10% ratio, times	16,3	15,7	15,6	15,5

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

The conclusion can be made from the table above that within 2013-2016, R/P 10% ratio decreased from 16,3 to 15,5 times, which confirms a slight reduction in the extent of social stratification of the country's population. Notably, the threshold value for this indicator is 8 times, but the observed indicator value of 15,5 times remains quite high and exceeds the threshold one almost twice. Another point to be noted is that the most urgent issue is the high extent of income level based stratification of the population leading to tension among the public and social stratification.

The condition of social inequality cannot be evaluated objectively without analyzing the proportion of minimum statutory wage (MSU) and subsistence minimum (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Proportion of MSU and the subsistence minimum value

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)
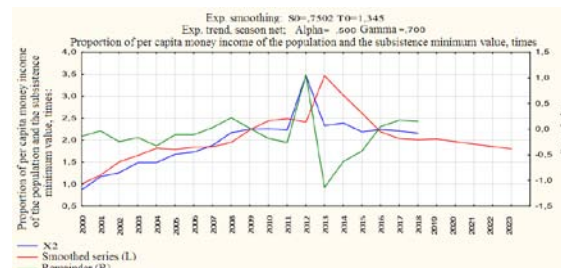
As it can be seen from the figure above, what is observed throughout the period under analysis is a paradoxical situation: the minimum income is not sufficient for purchasing goods and services of prime necessity.

In December 2017, a new procedure was adopted for determining the MSU: its size was pegged to the subsistence minimum value for quarter 2 of the previous year. As a result, from January 1, the MSU amounted to 9 489 rubles, and from May 1, 2018 – to 11 163 rubles, resting in fact at the level of subsistence minimum. The effect of the described measures is yet to be evaluated.

Without prejudice to this research, let forecast values of the indicators under study be found by the exponential smoothing procedure for up to 2023, using the case of the Russian Federation, more specifically, of its particular region – the Republic of Mordovia (RM).

Let the forecast of the proportion of per capita money income of the population and the subsistence minimum be considered (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Forecast values of the proportion of per capita money income of the population and the subsistence minimum in the RM, times
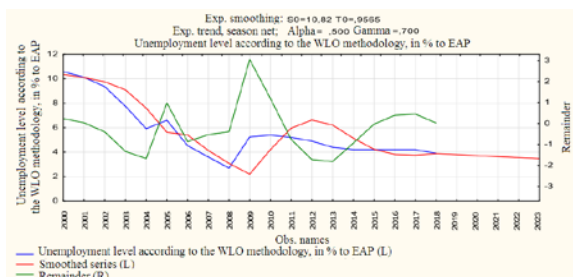

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

As it is clear from the data of Figure 2, values of the said indicator fall even much lower than the threshold one in the forecast period (the threshold value is 3,5 times). This is indicative of the region's per capita money income of the population growing more slowly than the subsistence minimum value.

A serious indicator affecting social stratification of the public is the unemployment level. Figure 3 provides the forecast for this indicator.

Figure 3 – Forecast values of the unemployment level in the RM, %

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

Proceeding from Figure 3, it can be concluded that the indicator values feature a downward trend. Such a situation is associated with the demographic factor and the seasonality one. One should also bear in mind the informal sector of the economy where the majority of people are employed and which contributes to stronger income differences of the population.

Next, let the forecast be plotted for the indicator of the population share having the income below the subsistence minimum. In Figure 4, the situation is analyzed for Russia in general.

Figure 4 – Forecast values of the RF population share with income below the subsistence minimum, %

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

It can be seen from the data of Figure 5 that throughout the forecast period, the said indicator values will increase, including 2023. This growth will probably be associated with that of consumer price index.

Alongside the above, it seems expedient to make a forecast of decile ratio values for the Russian Federation and the Republic of Mordovia. Let trends of this ratio values be considered in the forecast period (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Forecast values of R/P 10% ratio of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Mordovia, times
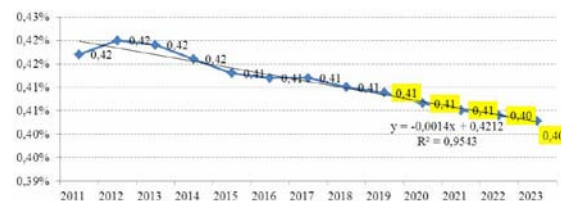

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.).

Based on the obtained forecast results given in Figure 5, the conclusion can be made that values of this ratio are reduced throughout the forecast period. However, in both cases, they exceed the limit (the threshold value is 8 times), which gives evidence about excessive inequality persisting. Let trends of

Gini coefficient values be considered in the forecast period (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Forecast values of Gini coefficient, %

Source: compiled by the authors according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service at http://www.gks.ru/ (n.a.)

As follows from Figure 7, the obtained forecast values confirm that although the indicator features a downward trend over the forecast period, it still exceeds the threshold value (0,3%). Such a situation gives evidence about high social stratification in income distribution. The approximation validity value equals 0,9543, which is indicative of the calculated curve matching the input data well.

Thus, the trend of excessive social and economic inequality among the public observed in the performed forecasts is quite probable. Its growth is associated with a lower consumption level due to the real income slump; in its turn, the latter is caused by inflation.

At present, Russia approaches the new development stage of its social structure that can be identified as institutionalization of inequality or, in P. Sztompka's definitions (2001), emergence of a solid hierarchy of privileges and deprivations in terms of access to desirable goods and values. Relying on a number of sources (Voronkova, 2007; Krasilova, 2007; Coudouel et al., 2002) and findings of this research, one can rightfully argue that social inequality is associated with the ideal which has represented people's eternal momentum toward justice and inspired mass social movements and humanist schools of social thought for centuries. Historical practice confirms that complete equality is unattainable. This is so not only because of different abilities and inclinations incorporated in people by the nature itself, but also due to dissimilarity of social status, quality, and productivity of their labor. In this sense, inequality between people cannot be eliminated; it only changes its forms and scale (Smirnova, 2010). In her research works, the well-known sociologist T. I. Zaslavskaya (2004) argues that a certain extent of social differentiation is characteristic for all human societies; the problem consists in its nature and quality. By now, profoundness and consistency of inequalities permeating all spheres of the Russian society have progressed to such a stage that it is too late to discuss this situation in terms of abstract social justice. What is actually in question is a highly serious threat to Russia's survival and successful development (Book Review "Social Inequality and Public Policy", 2007).

In recent decades, Russia has seen its social and economic inequality augment. The trends of inequality indicators over the recent six years give evidence about a certain stabilization of the social structure. Since 2008, a reduction of inequality indicators has been observed but it is quite slight, falling within the statistical error (Mareeva & Tikhonova, 2016).

5 Conclusion

Summing up the above, it should be noted that reducing social stratification is a very complicated, time-consuming, and demanding process. In the contemporary conditions, one of the principal hazards to be able to inhibit it is the risk of very slow economic development. In its turn, the latter creates a real threat of social distress and higher polarization of the society spreading wider in the country. It has been voiced repeatedly that there is direct relation between inequality and economic growth. In most cases, greater inequality is consistent with low or negative economic growth indices and a lower development level of the

human potential. With regard to this, if the sphere of economy gets controlled by the rich people more and more extensively, it is these people's prosperity that will grow at a faster pace. Consequently, less space will be left for fair distribution of income, as well as for the formation of mass middle class.

Thus, social inequality goes on being the most tangible and persistent source of social injustice for Russians. The acuteness of perception of this issue decreases as far as the income level for the bulk of the population grows and poverty level goes down. Alongside atomization and anomy, it is social inequality that remains one of the most relevant and obvious challenges to the integrity of social tissue of the Russian society.

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