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**POTENTIAL FOR OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY OF THE  
WORKFORCE IN RUSSIA**

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### Abstract

The paper summarizes social attitudes of the employed Russian population in relation to work and professional activity, willingness for occupational mobility, etc. to encourage high employment and social welfare. A study seeks to identify the potential for occupational mobility of the employed population in Russia. A potential for occupational mobility was evaluated based on characteristics of the labor force, occupations and sectoral spheres of employment, as well as the reasons leading to the labor mobility of workers. An empirical part of the study follows the feedback of the all-Russian sociological survey on Sociological Analysis of Social Attitudes and Dispositions of the Population of the Russian Federation in relation to New Forms of Employment: Estimation, conducted in 2018. The paper evaluates the willingness of Russian workers to acquire a new profession, identifies the features of attitudes towards occupational mobility by gender and age groups, level and profile of education, occupations and industry sectors of employment. The relationship is inferred between the potential for occupational mobility and the interest among workers in their profession. The workers' opinion as to whether their specialty is on-fire has no significant effect on the willingness to acquire a new profession. The paper shows that satisfaction with payment received from primary employment, as well as a potential prospect that their profession might be no longer sought-after are not currently the dominant reasons for an attitude among workers to acquire a new profession.

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*Keywords:* Potential for occupational mobility, labor attitudes, profession



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## 1. Introduction

In the context of growing transformations in the Russian labor market posed by digitalization of the economy, the most important prerequisite for ensuring decent employment for the population is the flexibility of the labor force, i.e. its adaptability to changes. Subject to ongoing changes, professional flexibility of the workforce is of particular significance, which is reflected in its occupational mobility.

The survey showed that already now a third of the employed population of Russia is ready for various changes in their working life, incl. getting a new profession. The use of this potential for occupational mobility (with respect to the identified features and reasons) in the medium term will facilitate the achievement of such economic and social impacts as:

- reduction of a structural mismatch between supply and demand for labor, structural unemployment;
- preservation and development of the labor potential of certain regions and spheres of activity, prevention of unwanted outflow of qualified personnel, especially from among young people;
- expansion of self-employment and entrepreneurship;
- prevention of a decline in the living standards of the population, rise in labor income.

## 2. Problem Statement

Issues of occupational mobility are fragmentary in Russian and foreign studies, although in recent years fundamentally new approaches are emerging towards the interpretation of “fading” professions and professions of the “future”, the need for digital skills, adaptation to an ever-changing labor market for certain categories of the population, the development of in-demand skills in life-long learning, etc. A number of researchers question the promotion of a professional labor division in the future, others argue that the differentiation in professional qualifications will grow. Thus, Andy Hines believes that work will gradually lose its central role due to the development of automation, artificial intelligence, gradually reducing the need for human labor. However, this process can be hampered by three main factors: 1) work remains an important characteristic of a person; 2) it streamlines daily life; 3) it provides the basic income (Hines, 2019). As per another point of view, the importance of research in the field of professional preferences is increasing. Saks (2020) writes about professions as a special kind of occupation, because the role of professions in a changing world is growing and it is necessary to take into account two approaches – determining the signs of revered professions and functionalist ideas about professions.

Various relations in the area in question are explored by foreign researchers: gender professional preferences (Hearn et al., 2016), development of professional strategies (Hasselbalch & Seabrooke, 2018); development of new forms of professional expertise in foreign practice (Saks & Brock, 2018); the impact of new digital technologies on professions both destructive (substitution of workers by machines) and transformative (human performance improvement) (Fossen & Sorgner, 2019).

HSE experts Lavrinenko and Shmatko (2019) underline the need for competences required for the banking sector to deal with large amounts of data, which would determine the competitiveness of future

banks and the prospects to tackle most banking-related challenges (predicting customer behavior, mainstreaming the product line, assessing default risks, etc.).

The labor demand for elderly workers and pre-retirees is explored in a number of publications. For example, in connection with a retirement-age increase, the issues of relevant competences that would minimize the prerequisites for discrimination of elderly age groups in the labor market have become acute (Ivanova, 2019). Shifts in the professional and sectoral structure of employability of elderly Russian workers coincide with other age groups. In general, trends in the employability structure for the elderly are likely to prevent an unemployment surge among older age groups of the population due to a low demand for their competences (Lukyanova & Kapelyushnikov, 2019).

Occupational mobility should be examined together with occupational risks, since failing to assess them adequately entails a lower attractiveness of a number of professions. Solomin (2019) is concerned with the interpretation of the category of “occupational risk”. He distinguishes two approaches: realistic (the probability of a real threat and damage to workers due to various production hazards) and constructivist (a set of possible decisions (actions) of the subject, conditioned, on the one hand, by “life world” framework of the profession (knowledge, skills, experience, norms), on the other, subject’s ideas about possible costs/benefits gained in the implementation of professional activities).

An important area of research is the mobility of migrants, including occupational. A group of authors analyze the paths and factors of the qualification mobility of migrants in the Russian labor market, which are of practical importance for its regulation, since the results indicate segmented assimilation and the formation of a special segment of the labor market in Russia (Varshavskaya & Denisenko, 2019).

Cherednichenko (2019) addresses the correspondence of the skills acquired by graduates of the secondary vocational education to the needs of the labor market. He specifies that an overwhelming majority of such young people succeed in applying for a job, but employment rates are lower than those of university graduates. Major complaints from employers involve low skills of graduates, training lagging behind the needs of the market in popular and promising professions, etc.

An important dimension in occupational mobility is satisfaction with working environment. Some authors proposed to embrace four indicators that determine professional satisfaction with work (working conditions, a sense of self-worth, career prospects, relations with other employees), on the basis of which they spotted similarities and differences among the older and younger generations (Matveychuk et al., 2019).

### **3. Research Questions**

Studies towards occupational mobility provide such categories as “horizontal occupational mobility”, “inter occupational mobility” and “career switch”, etc. (Popova, 2018). The authors of the paper focused on identifying attitudes towards labor mobility in its various forms, studying the awareness by workers of its necessity and willingness for labor mobility, including occupational mobility, particularly career switch. The researchers consider professional mobility from two angles – individual’s decision that can depend on education, skills, work experience, social environment, place of living, or as a

result and indicator of the flexibility of the labor market. Occupational mobility can have different social impacts depending on whether it is forced or voluntary. The authors discussed in detail the issues of occupational mobility in a series of publications (Omelchenko et al., 2019).

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

The study aims to identify the potential for occupational mobility of the employed population of Russia based on the willingness of workers to acquire a new profession in the context of digital transformation of the working environment.

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

An empirical part of the study follows the feedback of the Russian sociological survey on Sociological Analysis of Social Attitudes and Dispositions of the Population of the Russian Federation in Relation to New Forms of Employment: Estimation, conducted in 2018 by the Russian Research Institute of Labor of the Ministry of Labor of Russia and St. Petersburg State University. The target group for a study was Russian citizens aged 18–59, engaged in labor activities that generate income. A representative sample involved 1,634 people. A sampling error amounted to 5 %. It was calculated based on gender, age, place of living (types of settlements, federal districts). Distribution by education level, areas of employment, type of main place of work, economic sector, marital status and level of wages was randomly obtained during the survey. A random sample for the given strata gives reason to believe that the resulting distribution reflects the actual situation in the country.

The potential for occupational mobility was evaluated by the authors within the characteristics of the labor force (gender, age, educational level and profile of education, marital status, minor dependents), occupations and sectoral spheres of employment, as well as based on the reasons leading to occupational mobility of the labor force. The following were considered as the main reasons for occupational mobility of the labor force, namely: employees' commitment/lack of commitment in their profession; subjective estimation as to whether their specialty is on-fire; payment received from primary employment (satisfaction with earnings from primary employment); differentiation of salary by occupation and types of activity; employees' awareness of the consequences entailed by digitalization of the economy for their professional field.

#### **6. Findings**

A general assessment of the potential for occupational mobility of the employed population of Russia showed that about 30 % of the surveyed workers declare their willingness to acquire a new profession, with work attitudes to be differentiated by gender, age and socio-professional groups as follows:

- with age, the willingness to acquire a new profession decreases markedly (from 36 % in the 18-29 age group to 14 % in the 50–59 age group);

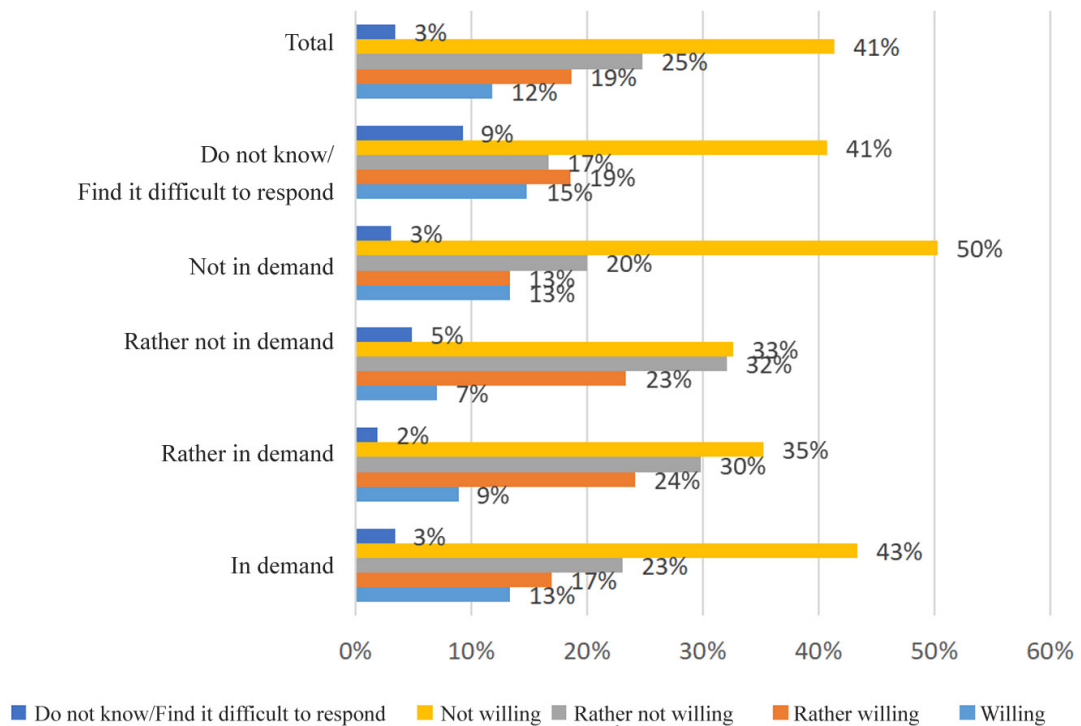
- men basically show a greater tendency towards a new profession than women (34 % and 28 %, respectively);
- people without professional education show a significantly higher (1.35–1.85 times) willingness to acquire a new profession (52 % of the respondents with a basic general education and only 28 % with a higher education think so);
- by the profile of education, the highest propensity to acquire a new profession is shown by the employed population who have received professional education in the field of defense and security of the state, military sciences, art and culture, as well;
- by occupation, the greatest potential for occupational mobility is characteristic of military personnel (47 %), and operators of production plants and machines, assemblers and drivers (42 %). Besides, the willingness to acquire a new profession is 1.6–1.8 times lower (26 % and 28 %) among specialists of the highest qualification level and employees involved in lots of paperwork, accounting and service. The former are characterized by the predominance of attitudes towards territorial mobility, and the latter – towards intersectoral;
- by the sectoral spheres of employment, the willingness to acquire a new profession is highest among workers in the spheres of education, culture and art (38 %), as well as IT sphere (36 %). The smallest opportunity to acquire a new profession is characteristic of healthcare workers (19 %), where attitudes towards changing their place of living for the sake of work (every third employee) and the lowest attitudes towards intersectoral mobility (only 15 %) dominate.

The feedback identified the relationship between the potential for occupational mobility and the degree of workers' commitment in their profession.

Thus, the highest willingness to acquire a new profession was found among the workers who do not show interest in their current profession (36.7 %), which is noticeably higher than the average for the entire employed population (30 %). In the sectoral context, among workers who do not show interest in their current profession, the greatest propensity to acquire a new profession was found to be present among construction workers (50 %), trade workers (44 %), industrial workers (41 %) and educators (40 %).

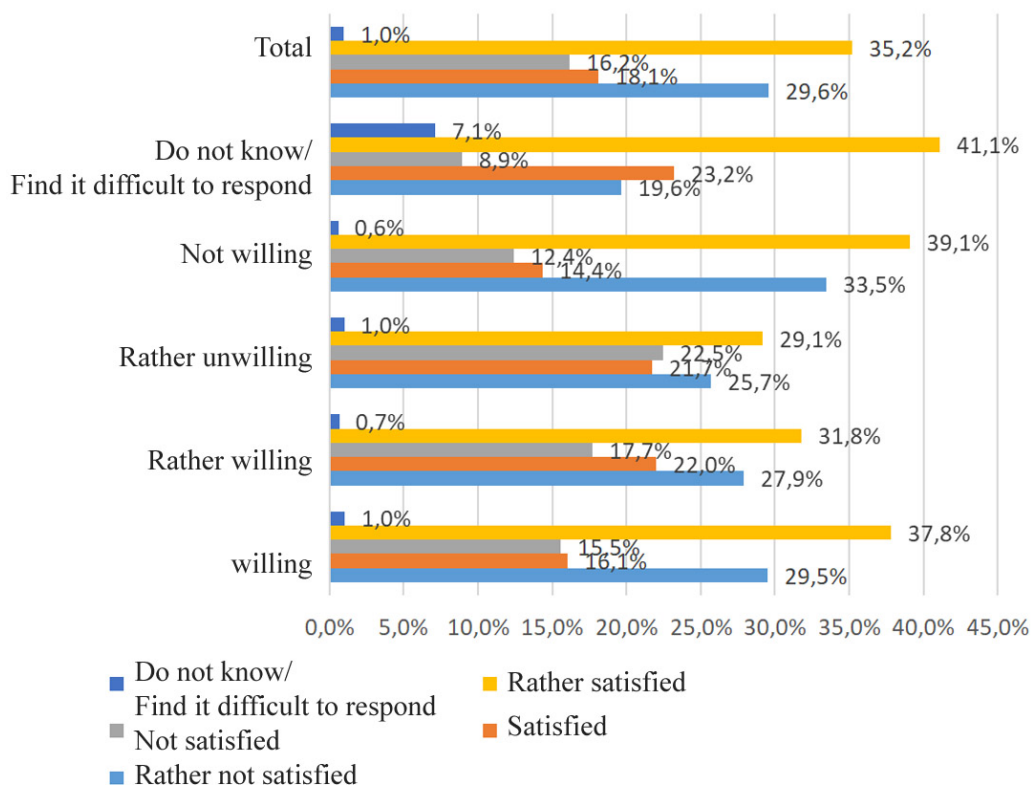
Admittedly, an opinion as to whether their specialty is on-fire does not have a pronounced effect on the willingness of Russian workers to acquire a new profession in the near future. Thus, among those who declare that their profession is in demand (inquiry returns are “in demand” and “rather in demand”), about 31 % are nevertheless ready to receive a new profession, possibly as a related one (more than 85 % of them are interested in their current profession). Among those who declare that the profession is not in demand (returns – “not in demand” and “rather not in demand”), about 28 % regard the possibility of getting a new one (Fig. 1) (of which more than 70 % showed interest in their profession).

Both among those who expressed their willingness and among those who expressed their unwillingness to acquire a new profession, approximately three quarters considered their profession to be in demand on the labor market.



**Figure 1.** Willingness to get a new profession in the near future, subject to an “on-fire specialty” opinion

Satisfaction with earnings from primary employment is not a dominant reason for workers’ attitudes towards a new profession. Thus, among those who are fully satisfied with their earnings from primary employment (inquiry return – “satisfied”), about 29 % are ready to acquire a new profession, whereas among those who answered “rather satisfied” – about 33 %. However, the potential for occupational mobility is lower among those who are dissatisfied with their wages (complete dissatisfaction – less than 30 %). With that, among those who are “willing” to acquire a new profession (Fig. 2), the largest share is accounted for by those who are completely dissatisfied with their earnings (about 38 %). Among those who responded “rather willing” to the question about their willingness to acquire a new profession, a significant (and largest) part also accrues to those who are completely dissatisfied with the payment received from primary employment (about 32 %). This means that dissatisfaction with earnings is one of the main factors affecting the willingness to acquire a new profession.



**Figure 2.** Willingness to get a new profession depending on satisfaction with payment from primary employment

The survey showed that employees’ perception that their profession might be no longer sought-after is not currently a dominant reason for acquiring a new profession. Thus, a third of Russian workers demonstrated their willingness to acquire a new profession in the face of expectations that their specialty might no longer exist. What is more, those who believed that their current profession/specialty might vanish did not have an excess willingness to acquire a new profession. A similar relationship was established between the potential for occupational mobility among workers and the expectation of job cuts in their professional field.

The findings on the relationship between the willingness among the employed population for occupational mobility and the degree of their social enthusiasm is of potential practical significance for social and labor management in the context of digital transformation. The employees, who declared their propensity to acquire a new profession in the near future, assessed pay-rise likelihood significantly above the average for all respondents (3.96, with an average rating of 3.69 on a five-point scale). Having addressed the general labor attitudes of workers, the authors assumed that income growth is expected primarily due to the acquisition of additional qualifications, in-demand skills in a related profession.

## 7. Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn by the authors:

- willingness to acquire a new profession is declared by about every third of the workers surveyed, while work attitudes are differentiated by social groups, and with age, the willingness to acquire a new profession decreases markedly;
- highly qualified workers are significantly less eager to acquire a new profession, as opposed to those without a college degree;
- the highest potential for occupational mobility was demonstrated by the workers in the fields of education, culture and art, as well as in the field of information technology; the lowest willingness to acquire a new profession are characteristic of health workers that are dominated by attitudes to change their place of living for the sake of work;
- the greatest propensity to acquire a new profession is characteristic of workers who do not show commitment in their current profession;
- every third person alone showed willingness to get a new profession in the near future, driven by the anticipation that their profession was likely to vanish caused by a wide spread of information technology; a similar situation with attitudes towards occupational mobility among those expecting job cuts in their professional field;
- having assessed the impact of digitalization, the employees preferred taking another job (intersectoral mobility) to acquiring a new profession (professional mobility);
- the employees who announced the possibility of acquiring a new profession in the near future, assessed pay-rise likelihood significantly above the average for all respondents, i.e. demonstrated higher social enthusiasm.

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