Evaluation of the Russian Labor Market Model Effectiveness Before and after COVID-19

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Keywords: Russian labor market model, The impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus epidemic, The effectiveness of labor market institutions, The main factors of the model transformation.

Abstract: In 2020-2021, our civilization experienced the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, unprecedented in terms of speed and scale of spread, after which a new socio-economic reality came to the world: in two years, the structure of markets, the social policy of states, employment and the way of life of people changed. The article is devoted to the study of the impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus epidemic on the transformation of the Russian labor market model, which was qualitatively transformed twice - under the influence of the crisis of the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the global financial and economic crisis of 1998. To study the evolution of the Russian employment model after the pandemic, the work uses a cliometric method of analysis and content analysis of a wide range of analytical and information sources.The article shows the radical changes in the Russian labor market under the influence of the pandemic: a natural demographic decline following high mortality and a reduction in the workforce, an increase in the employment rate of the labor force, unprecedented low unemployment, total staff shortages and record wage growth. The main conclusion is made about the decrease in the effectiveness of these model, the advantage of which before the pandemic was a high adaptation to macroeconomic instability and market shocks by reducing the wages of workers and maintaining underemployment. Recommendations are offered for the inclusive development of the labor market, the institutionalization of flexible employment models; development of the regional workforce.

1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic was not only an epidemiological disaster, it caused a humanitarian shock in the world and had a strong destabilizing effect on the economy and labor market. The economic shocks caused by the pandemic are considered by all researchers as a global cataclysm. The pandemic has dealt a blow to the global employment market, leaving millions of people unemployed. Boston Consulting Group (BCG) conducted a large-scale study of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the labor market. The study took place from October to early December 2020. More than 200 thousand people from 190 countries were surveyed.

According to the results of a BCG study, it was found that as a result of the pandemic, about 36% of workers were laid off or their working hours were reduced, 50% of employees continued to work, including using remote work, and only 14%, on the contrary, increased the amount of work. The situation hit two categories the hardest: the lowest-skilled employees and young people under 20 years old. About 40% of them were fired. Mexico, Congo, Great Britain, Indonesia, Angola, and Cameroon became the leaders among the countries where there were the most dismissed. But in Thailand, Singapore, China and Malaysia, on the contrary, most people have retained their jobs (Decoding Global Reskilling and Career Paths, 2021).

The pandemic also affected the Russian labor market: due to the forced downtime of enterprises and

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organizations during the quarantine period, disruption of economic relations, and bankruptcy of many small and medium-sized enterprises, there was a drop in production and demand for labor: about 28% of employees were laid off or their working hours were reduced . More often than others, this happened to young workers under 20 years old and people of pre-retirement age, 51-60 years (https://trends.rbc.ru/trends/education/60ae308e9a7947daf82dcdd9). The Russian labor market model, formed since the early 2000s, effectively maintained a high level of employment and low unemployment through wage flexibility and a reduction in hours worked before the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus infection. During the COVID-19 epidemic, this model essentially lost its adaptability: the number of unemployed increased from 3.5 million people. in March 2020 to 4.5 million people. in May of the same year, and the unemployment rate over three months increased from 4.7% to 6.4% (Lavrova A., 2022). Since the beginning of the pandemic, for the first time, the Russian state has quickly developed and implemented systemic measures to directly and indirectly support business and employment, which has kept the economy from a deep recession. An important feature of the labor market has been the widespread use of remote employment; the pandemic has become an impetus for the development of new directions, professions, and online services.

The spread of coronavirus infection COVID-19 has led to high excess mortality among the population of Russia: in the first 15 months of the epidemic, 1,188,036 deaths were recorded (https://zona.media/coronadeaths). Against the backdrop of problems of declining birth rates and general aging of the population, the COVID-19 epidemic contributed to a sharp deepening of the demographic crisis due to high mortality rates: 2.12 million people died in 2020, 2.45 million people died in 2021, and in Russia in 2022 1.91 million people died, in January-August 2023 – 1.17 million people. Taking into account the lower birth rate, the natural population decline in Russia was: 688.7 thousand people, 1.04 million people, 559.6 thousand people and 319.5 thousand people, respectively (https://gogov.ru/articles/natural-increase). In 2022, war began in Ukraine, which led to a noticeable reduction in the country's labor force. The outflow of labor resources into the Russian Armed Forces from the labor market continues in 2023: from January to October 2023, 357 thousand people entered into contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6268549), and in December the number of contract soldiers increased to 452 thousand people (https://m.business-gazeta.ru/news/615620).

Over the 2 years since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian labor market has experienced an increasing shortage of personnel; in October 2023, unemployment dropped to its lowest level in the entire history of Rosstat observations of 2.9% of the working population, and the peak employment rate of 61.1% was reached. Experts note that there were 4.7 vacancies per registered unemployed person, taking into account seasonality, in October, which was a historical maximum (https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/articles/2023/11/29/1008489-rosstat-zafiksiroval-minimum-bezrabotitsi). Scientists at the Labor Research Institute note a decrease in underemployment and hidden unemployment. According to their research, industrial enterprises that move to two and three shifts tend to attract additional workers (https://www.rbc.ru/economics/03/07/2023/649ea4cc9a7947b29e9db05a). The number of workers in idle and part-time modes has decreased so much that the interdepartmental working group for restoring the labor market of the Russian Government has stopped monitoring these indicators on a weekly basis (https://manpower.ru/media/blog/russian-labor-market-q3-2023.html.html).

The newest phenomenon of personnel shortage in the Russian labor market has led not only to record low unemployment and a sharp increase in wages, as a necessary measure and the only way to quickly fill vacancies. In September, the average monthly earnings of Russians increased by 13.6% compared to last year and reached 70,922 rubles (https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/articles/2023/11/29/1008489-rosstat-zafiksiroval-minimum-bezrabotitsi). According to the Russian news agency Interfax, employers expect the largest forced increase in wages in 2024 in the IT industry– 65%, construction and real estate sector – 63%, retail trade – 63%, mining and mineral processing – 51% and heavy industry – 50% (https://www.vedomosti.ru/management/articles/2023/02/10/962540-professii-naibolshim-rostom-zarplat).

In any labor market model, wage growth should be a consequence of increased labor productivity, but in 2022, according to Rosstat, it fell by 3.6% (https://www.interfax.ru/business/924578). Thus, the COVID-19 epidemic triggered a profound transformation of the national labor model. This transformation has been explored in considerable depth by academic publications by foreign authors who believe that the path the world followed after the

2008 financial crisis (stable geopolitics, low inflation and interest rates) has been disrupted during the COVID pandemic, and the world faces an uncertain future (Baert S., Lippens L., Moens E., Sterkens P., Weytjens J., 2020; Barrero J. M., Bloom N., Davis S. J., 2020; Bartik A. W., Bertrand M., Cullen Z. B., Glaeser E. L., Luca M., Stanton C. , 2022; Campello M., Kankanhalli G., Muthukrishnan P., 2020; Fabeil N.F., Pazim K.H., Langgat J., 2022). Recent Russian works on the labor market focus on the problems of the impact of sanctions on employment (Akhmedov F., 2023; Slatov D., 2022). And only a few authors explore the fundamental impact of COVID-19 on the labor market and the resulting socio-economic consequences (Bylkov V., 2023; Chekmarev O., Ilves A., Konev P., 2023)

The purpose of the work is to assess the directions of transformation of the Russian labor market model under the influence of the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus and systematize the latest trends in the Russian labor market.

2 METHODS

To study the dynamics of labor market parameters, the work uses statistical data from Rosstat. “Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment in Russia” (https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/210/document/13211), “Labor and Employment in Russia” (https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/210/document/13210). The authors also conducted a qualitative content analysis of Russian business and analytical sources, scientific research on the transformation of national labor market models under the influence of COVID-19 crises.

3 PRESALTS

Russia's transition to market economic conditions led to the formation of a system of markets, the most important of which was the labor market. The country's leadership chose a course of rapid radical market transformations (shock therapy), which quite rigidly determined the directions of transformation of the system of institutional regulation of social and labor relations. In the most general form, an assessment of the efficiency of the economy during the period of market reforms of 1992-2000. was determined by practically a single criterion - how productive the distribution and use of resources is on the market. In relation to social and labor relations, this approach meant that in the process of interaction between employers and workers, the total number of employees and the level of wages are formed, and these two indicators are a priori connected by the logic of the market: the more expensive labor is, the less demand for it is; accordingly, increased unemployment. It was believed that the operation of the market should not be distorted by unjustified restrictions. The market logic at the first stage of market reforms led to the minimization of wages in order to maintain employment. The question fundamental to understanding the effectiveness of the functioning of the labor market: “Which result of the labor market can then be considered the best - the one in which workers receive “fair” pay, or the one that ensures lower unemployment?”, as a rule, had a purely market answer: “ The very concept of fair pay has no meaning outside of an efficient market. It is fair to pay for labor as much as the added value the worker creates.” Although this indicator could not be accurately calculated in the Russian economy.

Thus, the main characteristic of the Russian labor market at the stage of its creation (1992-1998) was, according to D.E. Sorokina, L.V. Nikiforova, N.Yu. Akhapkin and other Russian scientists, in a conceptual orientation towards an extremely liberal market model, which involves minimizing the social obligations of the state to citizens and the employer to employees; weak resource provision and chronic underfunding of the social and labor sphere; reliance on purely market regulatory mechanisms; weak consideration of national traditions and established labor values in the social and labor sphere; lack of effective mechanisms for enforcement of existing labor standards (Socio-economic conditions of the transition to a new model of economic growth, 2017). Adopted in 1991, the Federal Law “On Employment in the Russian Federation” defined, but did not provide the legal, economic and organizational foundations of the state policy of promoting employment, including state guarantees for the implementation of the constitutional rights of citizens of the Russian Federation to work and social protection from unemployment (Federal Law No. 1032-I, 1991).

In August 1998, Russia experienced a deep economic crisis; for the first time in world history, the state defaulted on its domestic debt, followed by a multiple collapse of the ruble, galloping inflation, bank refusals to issue deposits, and delayed wages. The deformations in social and labor relations that had developed at the beginning of the financial crisis (degradation of the structure and content of employment, the strategy of minimizing wages, growing inequality of income and living standards), as well as the weakening of the state’s presence in key

areas of non-material production, acted as a serious limitation on the development of the market economy of Russia, led to the degradation of human capital in most regions of the country, the spread of poverty among the working population and threatened the economic security of the country (Economic security of Russia, 2005). Structural reforms of the Russian economy after the 1998 default required fundamentally different approaches to regulating the labor market, in particular, the creation of a comprehensive system of economic and legal mechanisms that took into account the interests of all subjects of labor relations, guaranteeing the protection of social and labor rights of workers, promoting more effective employment of the population.

The foundations of the new labor market model, in fact, were laid during the implementation of the Federal Target Program for Promoting Employment in the Russian Federation for 1998-2000 (Federal Target Program for Employment Promotion of the Population of the Russian Federation for 1998-2000, 1998). It included, in addition to market ones, government regulators. In particular, an institutional framework was created for support (within the framework of national, sectoral and territorial programs) and job preservation (by replacing them with public or temporary work), especially for socially vulnerable groups of the population; the foundations of a territorial system for the development of human resources were laid (career guidance, vocational education, advanced training, mentoring and retraining, training for the unemployed and unemployed population).

Over two decades (2000-2020), Russia has developed a national model of the labor market, which is well described in a number of studies by Russian scientists (Kapelyushnikov R., 2002; Gimpelson V., Kapelyushnikov R., Ryzhikova Z., 2012; Kapelyushnikov R., Oshchepkov A., 2014). Its key feature was the high adaptation of the labor market to fluctuations in economic conditions, mainly due to changes in the price of labor, and not due to a reduction in employment and an increase in unemployment. Statistical analysis shows that regional-sectoral employment and unemployment in the period 2000-2020 changed little (at least in relative terms), while working hours and wages were always flexible. That is, the amortization of the negative consequences of market instability in the Russian economy occurred not so much through a fall in employment and rising unemployment, but through a compression of working hours and a decrease in the price of labor. This time and price adjustment allowed companies to avoid mass layoffs. This was fundamentally different from the previous liberal model of the labor market (1992-1998), when, faced with a crisis situation, enterprises immediately resorted to large-scale layoffs of workers.

At the same time, in the period 2000-2020, the Russian labor market experienced an increase in professional and qualification imbalance associated with the outflow of labor from industries in the real sector of the economy, ensuring innovation and saturation of the consumer market, employment growth in the informal sector and industrially primitive service sectors with higher level of remuneration (trade, delivery, transportation, beauty industry, clearing, etc.). For example, in Russia the number of couriers is growing rapidly, but the demand for them is growing even faster. According to the Russian Association of Electronic Communications, in 2021, 830,000 people worked in the delivery sector, in 2023 – already more than 1 million people (https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2023/06/07/978993-rossiyu-obsluzhivaet-uzhe-1-mln-kurerov). It is enough to note that 40% of Russian couriers have higher or incomplete higher education, according to a Yandex Delivery study conducted in August 2023 among 5,700 workers (https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2023/06/07/978993-rossiyu-obsluzhivaet-uzhe-1-mln-kurerov). Most often this is a temporary part-time job. At the same time, every third certified specialist working in delivery services has an engineering specialty, 17% of them received an economic or financial education, and 10% are IT specialists. The survey showed that the prestige of the specialty has increased due to competitive salaries, flexible schedules and the ability to combine with the main job.

In addition, the country has developed a special type of wage differentiation. In the configuration of factors affecting wages, the dominant role belonged to such factors as the economic sector (export-oriented or manufacturing); region (oil and gas or non-resource); the size and location of the settlement, the financial condition of the enterprise, and such factors of wage differentiation as education, qualifications and work experience in Russia were not fully taken into account, which reduced the capitalization of existing human potential (knowledge, skills and competencies). At the same time, in the world economy, the place of leaders has confidently been taken by those countries that have learned better than others to form and use these qualities. It is no coincidence that the 20th century

was called by S. Goldin, the 2023 Nobel laureate in economics, the century of "human capital" (Goldin C. and Katz L., 2009). Goldin C. argues that in the 21st century, development will depend even more on the availability of "human capital" and the ability to use it effectively.

In addition to the underestimation of the factors of capitalization of human potential, the weak side of the Russian labor market model was its insufficient institutional efficiency. The emerging adaptation model of the Russian labor market was based on the configuration of the complementary institutions described in Table 1.

Table 1: Institutions of the Russian labor market model 2000-2020.

Labor market institutions	General characteristics of the institutions of the Russian labor market model 2000-2020
Labor legislation	Regulates quite strictly, including issues of hiring and dismissal
Minimal salary	Regularly increased, but always remained significantly below the subsistence level of the territory
Unemployment benefits	Minimum, not tied to average or median wage
Rules and procedures for the formation of wages	formally stipulated in collective agreements, which actually provided flexible salary mechanisms and supported a non-dismissal policy
Institutions for implementing labor market policies	1) public employment services - organizations that formally guarantee employment, minimum wage, compensation (in case of illness, job loss, maternity leave) and timely payment of wages; 2) public and trade union organizations, which in some cases create and implement qualification standards, requirements for job seekers and employers within the industry, promote initiatives to supervisory authorities; 3) non-governmental organizations involved in employment of the population - recruitment agencies, industry job fairs, internship departments at commercial structures; 4) mechanisms for disseminating information about the regulatory framework, needs and quotas for hiring employees; 5) enforcement (courts and labor inspectorates), etc.

Source: based on the results of content analysis

Research allows us to state that this model had serious institutional limitations: in practice, a passive policy of employment services has developed (low coverage of the actually unemployed population, offering the most unattractive and low-paid jobs, formal retraining and issuing unemployment benefits); the role of labor collectives and trade unions was reduced to a minimum, which was reflected in the formal conclusion of labor contracts in order to comply with labor laws; the role of labor inspectorates was often leveled by the management of organizations; accordingly, the effectiveness of judicial enforcement was not widely assessed. The underdevelopment of the institutional infrastructure of the labor market was expressed in the virtual absence of affordable housing, which significantly limited the territorial mobility of the population. The weak market connectivity of Russia's economic space has led to increased social inequality, which has a regional dimension. As a result, high regional differentiation of the Russian labor market has developed (Sobolev E., Soboleva I., 2014)

3 DISCUSSION

Nevertheless, we believe that the Russian labor market model can be considered very effective in the macroeconomic dimension in the context of the need to contain the level of unemployment and high levels of poverty, because it ensured maximum employment of the population and generated wages that reflected the market balance of interests of employers and workers. In addition, this model has demonstrated the ability to quickly and constructively respond to any shocks, ensuring the transition of the labor market to new optimal employment parameters under changed conditions. As studies by Bartik A. W., Bertrand M., Cullen Z. B., Glaeser E. L., Luca M., Stanton C. T., and others show, countries vary greatly both in their ability to achieve full employment and in the speed of adaptation to shocks (Baert S., Lippens L., Moens E., Sterkens P., Weytjens J., 2020; Barrero J. M., Bloom N., Davis S. J., 2020; Baert S., Lippens L., Moens E., Sterkens P., Weytjens J., 2020; Bartik A. W., Bertrand M., Cullen Z. B., Glaeser E. L., Luca M., Stanton C., 2022; Campello M., Kankanhalli G., Muthukrishnan P., 2020; Fabeil N.F., Pazim K.H., Langgat J., 2022). Thus, in Spain and Greece after the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. unemployment rose from 8% to 25–26% within six years and ten years after that was still double its original level. In this regard, Russia has distinguished itself by its consistently high employment level, which is quickly recovering from shocks. Since 2001, unemployment in our country has never exceeded 9%, the labor

market response to the Great Recession was minimal (unemployment increased from 6% to 8%) and completely disappeared within four years (*The Russian labor market: trends, institutions, structural changes*, 2017). All this (and a number of other signs) allows us to assert that the model of the Russian labor market was effective from a macroeconomic point of view. However, this model had an insufficient level of professional-industrial, infrastructural, social and regional efficiency, which limited its ability to ensure sustainable development of Russia.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the results of a brief study of the evolution of the Russian labor market model, it can be argued that the challenges posed by the pandemic to economic development have deformed the Russian labor market model. And since the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamentally new conditions have arisen in Russia, primarily due to the new macroeconomic policy of the state aimed at supporting business and employment. The stimulating fiscal policy, which was proposed by most countries in the spring of 2020, played a positive role in economic recovery, maintaining the majority of firms and the level of income of the population. However, as demographic losses grew, mass testing of remote employment modes, rapid changes in types of employment and application of labor, and the formation of an active employment policy, it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to the latest reality in the labor market, and its consequences are not short-term, but long-term character. At the same time, the main adaptation mechanisms for adapting to new working conditions for the most part fit into global trends in the development of labor relations and business processes, which significantly intensified during the pandemic and developed after the end of the acute phases of COVID-19. Perhaps the most important change in the labor market has been the massive spread of remote employment due to the digitalization of business processes in almost all sectors of the economy. In 2022, the analytical company International Data Corporation (IDC) published a study that examines development trends in the global labor market "The IT Labor Shortage: Post-Pandemic Issue or Long-Term Problem?". Analysts note that this area will be significantly impacted by the current macroeconomic environment, the pandemic and the digital transformation of enterprises around the world. The study says hybrid work arrangements, once seen as a temporary solution to allow businesses to continue business operations amid COVID-19, have become a mainstay of the global work environment.

The pandemic has radically affected the national labor market, as a result of which it can be stated that the previous model of the labor market is undergoing a qualitative transformation and the newest model of social and labor relations is being formed in Russia. Our recent research has shown that this process is significantly influenced by demographic factors and digital technologies (Gurieva, L., Baburina, O., Dzhioev, A., 2023; Gurieva L., Dzhioev A., 2023; Gurieva L., Kaberti N., Dzhioev A., 203). We believe that in order to create a more effective model of the Russian labor market, a systematic policy of the state, business and education is needed to increase the digital skills of the workforce and the active demographic development of all Russia regions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The reported study was funded by the Russian Science Foundation grant No. 22-28-20534, https://rscf.ru/project/22-28-20534/ .

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