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ON THE ISSUES OF THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES PROVIDED FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

SUMMARY. This article deals with the problems of assessing the quality of public services provided for the unemployed citizens. Monitoring research to assess the availability and quality of public services is considered as one of the ways to assess the effectiveness of managing the employment process by the government.

The authors presented a brief account of the results of the research aimed at identifying the quality of one of the public services provided by the Department of Labour and Employment of the Tyumen Region. This public service is called "Information on the situation in the labour market of the Tyumen region". This study analyzed various aspects of the quality and accessibility of the service, namely the organization of information on how to obtain services, territorial and physical accessibility of the facilities providing services; comfort conditions for obtaining services, evaluation of consumers with the respect to the behavior and the skills of the authorities; the financial cost of the services, compliance with deadlines of waiting in a line when filing and receiving documents, as well as limiting the time and duration of service administration.

According to the results of the study, the authors concluded that the quality of the service is quite high, which results in an effective solution of the problems of the unemployed, as well as in combination with other factors, the low level of unemployment in the region.

KEY WORDS. *State service, quality, monitoring, unemployed.*

Unemployment is a common social phenomenon in countries with a market economy, where a certain portion of the population of active working age cannot be employed due to a lack of jobs. The rate of unemployment in the country depends on many factors – from the economic structure and the level of economic development of the state to the demographic situation. Anyway, high unemployment rate has a negative impact on the society.

The researchers of unemployment indicate that it can adversely affect health conditions, the average life expectancy rate, longevity and mortality rates, and it can cause frustration and the loss of self-esteem [1, 4]. In addition, unemployment leads to underutilization of human resources, deepening on social differentiation, a significant reduction in potential domestic product and national income, worsening of people's financial conditions, and the increase in the number of deviations and social instability [2; 3].

It is possible to state that unemployment is one of the main problems the authorities face in any state. At the same time it should be noted that in Russia the complexity of its solution lies in the necessity to simultaneously solve the problems of the transition period (to overcome the strains in the sphere of employment and to regulate unemployment), as well as to create the modern labor market and, consequently, to solve employment problems typical of developed countries [3; 3]. The solution of the problems of unemployment, as a rule, is provided in two main directions. The first direction is the macroeconomic management of economy and unemployment, the second is the provision of social security for the unemployed. The second direction of combating unemployment is considered in more detail in this article. In accordance with Article 3 of the Russian Federation Law "On Employment in the Russian Federation", the unemployed are the citizens of active working age who do not have work and earnings, who are registered in recruitment bureaus to find a suitable job, who are looking for a job and ready to be employed [4]. The state implements labour market policies to ensure the employment of these individuals and their social support, creating working places for the citizens, as well as assisting socially vulnerable and insecure groups of the population.

At the regional level this policy is implemented by the appropriate authorities and their subordinate institutions. In particular, in the Tyumen region, the Department of Labour and Employment has major authority to implement state functions to supervise and control the provision of state guarantees in employment of the population. Within the framework of its competence, the Department of Labour and Employment provides more than ten kinds of public services [5].

The centers of employment, subordinate to the Department of Labour and Employment, available in each municipality, provide all kinds of services for the citizens and solve the problems of unemployment at the regional level. Effectiveness of this activity can be assessed in two ways: either on the basis of statistics that characterize the condition of the labour market, or on the basis of surveys researching the satisfaction of the unemployed with the quality and accessibility of services received in employment management institutions.

These statistics allow concluding that the level of unemployment in the south of the Tyumen Region is not high. In particular, in 2012 the total unemployment rate in Russia as a whole was 5.5%, in the Ural Federal District it was 6.0%, whereas in the Tyumen region this proportion fell to 5.2%. To compare, the lowest unemployment rate was recorded in Moscow – 0.9%, and the highest – in Ingushetia – 47.3% [6].

The low level of unemployment in the Tyumen Region is due, in our opinion, especially to the regional structure of the economy, the presence of a sufficiently large number of businesses that have undertaken innovative development, contributing to the emergence of new areas of production and services, and hence, to the emergence of new professions, occupations and jobs. Thus, according to a survey conducted by Tyumen State University in 2012*, many respondents noted the introduction of various innovations at their workplaces, which contributed to the improvement of the employment situation. In particular, 20.4% of respondents noted the appearance of new production lines at the enterprises they are working for, 37.3% indicated the introduction of new software products; 18.8% identified the appearance of new professions; 23.8% noted the availability of new retail services; and 28.6% noted the appearance of new workplaces.

With regard to the second direction in assessing the effectiveness of employment management, it is worth mentioning that its implementation is possible by means of monitoring studies or surveys of people receiving the analyzed services. Such studies are conducted by a number of research organizations. In particular, the Institute for Public Administration of the State University – High School of Economics – commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation in 2008-2009 implemented the project “Research and analysis of the use of administrative regulations of the performance of public functions and provision of public services” [7], in 2011 the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under supervision of the President of the Russian Federation together with the Research Foundation “The Institute for Public Administration” and the Center for Economic and Financial Advisory Services commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Development conducted a survey on citizens’ satisfaction with the quality of public authorities’ and local governments’ activity [8]. The concept of administrative barriers’ reduction and improvement of accessibility to public and municipal services for the period of 2011-2013 justifies the need for annual monitoring of the sphere [9].

Since 2011, the Department of General and Economic Sociology of Tyumen State University, commissioned by state administration institution “Information and Analytical Center of the Tyumen Region” (in collaboration with the authors of the article), has been carrying out “The monitoring of the quality of public and municipal services in the south of the Tyumen Region”. During this period they have been analyzing the availability and quality of the provision of certain services. Some results of the study included in the monitoring program have been published.

In 2012 the service “Information on the situation in the labour market in the Tyumen Region” provided by the Department of Labour and Employment of the Tyumen Region and employment centers of municipalities was included in the Monitoring list of services. Within the Monitoring program 130 respondents from 8

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municipalities of the south of the Tyumen Region were surveyed (it made 12.9% of the total number of the respondents on all the services included in the Monitoring). We are analyzing the results of this study according to the following scheme: at first we consider the process of preparing the consumer to receive services, then we observe the process of applying for the service itself (including the satisfaction with the conditions of receiving the service), and finally we turn to analyzing the result of receiving the service.

The preparatory process for getting the service starts when a potential consumer obtains information on the procedure of service provision and begins collecting documents necessary to obtain the service. The study showed that the majority of the respondents (43.8%) preferred to receive information personally and directly in the appropriate institution – during a personal appointment with a specialist. Many respondents (23.8%) preferred to visit the facility which provides the service only after the preliminary information on the provision of services was obtained via phone. Only 12.3% of the respondents received the information about this service on the Internet, and 4.6% made a formal request to obtain the service.

It does not usually take much of citizens' time to collect the documents required to obtain public services – the majority of the respondents (73.1%) spent not more than a week collecting necessary documents. Moreover, more than 40 % of respondents generally spent only one day on this procedure. However, about a quarter of the respondents spent from a week to a month on collecting documents, and 3.9% – even more than a month. Obviously, this can be explained by the fact that these respondents were receiving not only the analyzed service but other services as well (e.g. registration as an unemployed).

The surveyed respondents rated the accessibility of information on the package of documents required to obtain a public service as being quite high: the total percentage of respondents who rated the availability of the information about the package of documents for obtaining the services, as being perfect or good, made 86.2% (this correlates with points 5 and 4 on the five grade scale). The average rating of the information availability here was 4.42 points (which is above the sample average estimated as 4.2 points).

The availability and completeness of the information on the stands in the centers of public and municipal services was rated quite high by the respondents: the total share of positive ratings (“the information is quite accessible and complete” + “it is more probable that the information is accessible and complete”) was 86.2%, whereas the total proportion of negative ratings (“the information is rather inaccessible and incomplete” + “the information is completely inaccessible and incomplete”) made only 6.2% (the average value of the sample – 77.9% vs. 6.5%).

The forms which the citizens have to fill in when applying for services were also positively rated by the vast majority of the respondents: the total share of positive ratings of forms' accessibility (“quite accessible” + “more accessible than not”) prevailed over the total share of negative assessments (“rather accessible” + “completely inaccessible”) – 95.4% versus 4.6% (the average value of the sample – 91.8% vs. 4.6%).

There is a special Regulation for the procedure of providing the analyzed service, which requires compliance with certain requirements of accessibility and comfort of getting the service ensured by the competence of the staff, providing the service, and the time of its provision. During the survey the respondents were asked a series of questions to check how well the requirements are met on a number of service parameters described in the relevant Regulation.

These results suggest that not all institutions providing public services are territorially accessible for consumers: the majority of respondents answering the question of territorial accessibility preferred “average” response options, and noted the institution providing services for them as quite accessible or more accessible than not. The total share of negative assessments (“rather accessible” + “completely unavailable”) was lower, though, than the total share of positive ratings of territorial accessibility (“maximum accessible” + “relatively accessible”) – 27.7% versus 43.1%.

The accessibility of the institutions certainly implies that it should not be located on top floors of a building, so that people with disabilities could also receive appropriate public service. In this respect, the places of providing public services turned out to be as accessible as possible – 91.5% of respondents indicated that the institutions where they received services were located on the ground floor (the sample average of the similar proportion is much lower – 66.1%). In addition, 6.9% of respondents received the necessary service in a facility located on the first floor of the building, and 0.8% of respondents – on the second. Moreover, we should note that many institutions providing the analyzed service work according to the system of appointments: the presence of this system was indicated by 48.5% of the respondents.

The analysis of estimating comfort conditions of service provision for consumers according to a five-grade scale showed that overall conditions were assessed by consumers as quite comfortable: the total share of positive ratings (“5” + “4”) was 86.2%, while the total share of negative assessments (“1” + “2”) was only 3.8%. The average assessment of comfort conditions of servicing visitors was 4.23 points (slightly higher than the sample average grade – 4.10 points).

As for the individual parameters of comfort of service provision, 94.6% of respondents indicated the presence of a special area for visitors waiting to be served, (the sample average was 85.6%). The total share of positive ratings of comfort was 84.6% (the sample average was 76.4%). Absolutely negative assessment of comfort conditions was made by only 4.6% of respondents indicating that there was no area for visitors in the institutions they applied to, as a result they had to fill in the documents “on the lap”, and stand waiting to be served.

In most institutions providing the analyzed public service, consumers could quite easily find their way – 86.2% of the respondents said that the doors there had signs informing about the positions and competencies of the employees, and also pointed at the availability of information about the working and reception hours. In many cases, as pointed out by 76.2% of respondents, the specialists wore badges indicating their full names and positions. The presence of the WC facility available for the visitors was noted by 86.9% of respondents and the presence of the wardrobe – by 54.6%. At

the same time, among those surveyed only few institutions were equipped with modern electronic queue systems – their presence was indicated by only 10% of clients of the analyzed public service.

An important comfort parameter of receiving the service is the time spent waiting when submitting documents, having an appointment with a specialist, as well as receiving documents as a result of the service provision. The study showed that the majority of the respondents did not have to spend much time waiting in line when applying: 94.6% of the respondents waited in line for not more than half an hour, while 60% of the respondents waited less than 15 minutes. The requirements limiting the duration of waiting in line when submitting documents stipulated by the Regulation (20 minutes) were met in 83.8% of the analyzed cases. Receiving documents as a result of the public service 91.6% of the consumers spent waiting in line for not more than half an hour (the sample average was 81.5%), with 81.6% of the respondents waiting for no more than 15 minutes. Only 3.8% of the respondents waited for more than an hour to receive the documents. In general, the consumers of the analyzed service were waiting in line, either submitting or obtaining documents, for much less time than the consumers of many other services.

Appointments with officials also do not take long: the majority of the respondents (70.8%) were having an appointment with an official for less than 15 minutes, another 25.4% of the respondents spent less than half an hour, and only 3.1% – more than 30 minutes. The duration of service administration (30 minutes) prescribed by the Regulation was ensured in relation to 97% of the consumers of the surveyed service.

The satisfaction of the population with the quality of public services is largely dependent on how skilled the employees are and how they behave during the procedure of service provision. According to the majority of the respondents (87.7%), behavior of officials during the procedure of public services' provision was assessed as appropriate if they were not distracted by anything while working.

The skills of the employees involved in the public service provision were highly rated by the participants of the study: the total share of positive ratings ("4" + "5") was 85.4%, while the total proportion of negative ratings ("1" + "2") was 4.6%. The average grade in the evaluation of professional skills of workers providing the public service was 4.46 points (higher than the sample average – 4.31 points). Moreover, the vast majority of the respondents did not have conflicts with the staff involved in the provision of services: only 10% of the respondents indicated that they had conflicts with employees providing the service for themselves, and about 1.5% of the respondents said that conflicts arose, but they were not connected with the provision of the service.

When answering the question: "Evaluate the amount of financial means spent on receiving the state service" 113 respondents (86.9%) indicated that the analyzed service was provided free of charge and did not involve any additional expenses. Other respondents usually indicated a small amount of transportation costs or photocopy services, etc. As a result, the average amount of money spent on one customer was 160.1 rubles (considerably lower than the sample average – 585 rubles).

The final result of receiving state services determines clients' assessments of the quality of the services. Here, first of all, we should note that 80% of the respondents

indicated the compliance of employees with all the necessary sequence of actions while providing the service. One should not forget that the majority of the respondents (73.8%) managed to submit the documents during their first visit, yet 16.2% of the respondents managed to do it during the second visit, and 5.4% – during the third.

Judging by the consumers' responses, time limits for getting the public service (from the initial application to the actual result of receiving the service), vary considerably from one day to several months. The Regulation of the service provision prescribes its provision on the day of application, whereas according to the responses of the consumers, the regulatory requirements were met only for 38.5% of them. It is obvious that this fact is due to the misinterpretation by the respondents of the final part of service provision. Thus, consumers of the service refer to the category of the unemployed who receive the service in conjunction with other services (e.g., being registered as unemployed) and assume the time for receiving the service to be the period during which they were able to find a job, rather than the time during which they received a list of suitable vacancies (actual result of the service).

The majority of the respondents had positive impressions of the procedure of providing public (municipal) services. In particular, 83.1% of the respondents estimated the procedure as comfortable (the total percentage of the respondents whose ratings of the procedure were "4" and "5"), while 3.8% found it uncomfortable (the total percentage of the respondents whose ratings were "1" and "2"). The average rating of the general impressions in this case was 4.41 points (much higher than the sample average – 4.17 points).

Over the course of the experiment, 29 test purchases were made, which also led to the conclusion that the quality of public services is quite high. The participants of the test purchases noted that the collection of the required documents was fairly simple and the application forms for services were accessible and understandable. The conditions of waiting and the procedure of applying were estimated as excellent and good by most consumers. Waiting time for admission, as well as its duration, was estimated as acceptable by the majority of clients. The qualification of the employees involved in the provision of services was mainly assessed as high. The overall impression of public services' provision was rated as excellent by the majority of the participants. The number of claims was irrelevant and was mainly connected with the quality of information stands, a small number of vacancies, and low territorial accessibility of the institution providing the service.

Analysis of the results of the Monitoring enabled the author to develop a series of recommendations to improve the quality of public services. The most important ones in our opinion are the following:

1. To improve the ways of informing people about the service provision procedure, as well as about the necessary documents to obtain the service.
2. To increase the accessibility of services by creating territorial division centers, using the post and the Internet.
3. To organize the application procedure by appointment, via the Internet; to introduce the electronic queue.

4. To improve the conditions in the centers, which will reduce conflicts among a large number of people and dissatisfaction with the quality of received services.

5. To monitor compliance with the requirements of the Regulations regarding service deadlines and long waiting lists when it comes to filling and receiving documents.

6. To formulate the standard results of obtaining a specific type of service.

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