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EMPLOYMENT CENTER SERVICES: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT OR A BUREAUCRATIC PROCEDURE?¹

Abstract: The development strategy of the Russian Federation is implemented through a number of federal projects. One of them is focused on promoting employment, transforming state employment centers and increasing the level of service recipients' satisfaction (90% of satisfied recipients by the end of 2024).

The aim of this study is to analyze the state of employment policy implementation based on the assessments of recipients of employment services.

The information base of the study is the data of a questionnaire survey of registered unemployed conducted in 2020 in one of the typical regions of the Russian Federation (4,800 people). The survey evaluated the following parameters: clarity of procedure for receiving services, satisfaction with the quality and speed of providing services, satisfaction with the qualifications of employment centers staff, subjective assessment of the usefulness of provided services for future employment. Descriptive statistics methods were used to analyze the data.

It was found that over the past 3 years, respondents have noted positive changes in the work of state employment centers - expanding opportunities to receive services via the Internet, reducing queues in employment centers, increasing the availability of information about services. At the same time, low speed of service delivery, a large list of necessary documents, and insufficient customer orientation of employment centers staff have a negative impact on the satisfaction of service recipients. These areas are zones for development and improvement of the population's satisfaction with the public employment centers' performance.

Keywords: Unemployment, public employment services, employment centers, customer satisfaction, Russia

1. INTRODUCTION

The development strategy of the Russian Federation is implemented through several federal projects. One of these projects is the "Labor Productivity and Employment Support", which was adopted by the government in 2018 and is valid until the end of 2024. The purpose of this federal project is to support employment through training of employees of Russian enterprises participating in the project and modernization of the employment infrastructure in the regions of the Russian Federation. The effectiveness of the implementation of the federal project is evaluated through some indicators. One of the main indicators is the satisfaction of citizens with the services received in the employment center. In 2018, the value of this indicator was equal to 60%, and it is planned to reach 90% of citizens satisfied with the services of employment centers by the end of 2024.

A literature analysis has shown that there are many works by Russian and foreign authors that are devoted to assessing the customer satisfaction of state employment centers. Research conducted by Russian authors shows that recipients of public employment services are not satisfied with their quality and availability. As for disadvantages, they call the

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inconvenient working hours of employment centers, long waiting time for receiving the service, and the low customer orientation of the staff (Ogneva, 2010, Bushmin & Kalneus, 2012). Foreign authors also mention bureaucratization as one of the reasons for dissatisfaction with the services of state employment centers (Redman & Fletcher, 2021). Moreover, the satisfaction of citizens with provided services largely depends on the emotions that a person experiences while receiving the service (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997). The results from an empirical study of customers' experiences of the services of a labor force bureau show that negative emotions have the largest impact on customers' satisfaction.

It is also of interest to assess the satisfaction with public employment services of recipients with different socio-demographic characteristics. It was found that women generally have higher expectations regarding the importance of service delivery issues than their male counterparts. However, no differences were found between men and women reporting their actual satisfaction with the service received (Ross, Fleming, Fabes & Frankl, 1999).

2. RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to analyze the implementation of the state employment policy based on the assessments of citizens who receive employment services. The information base of the study is the data of a questionnaire survey of registered unemployed in one of the typical regions of the Russian Federation (Omsk region). The survey was conducted in 2020 and the sample size was 4,800 people. There were used descriptive statistics methods to analyze the data.

Let us consider the main results of the study.

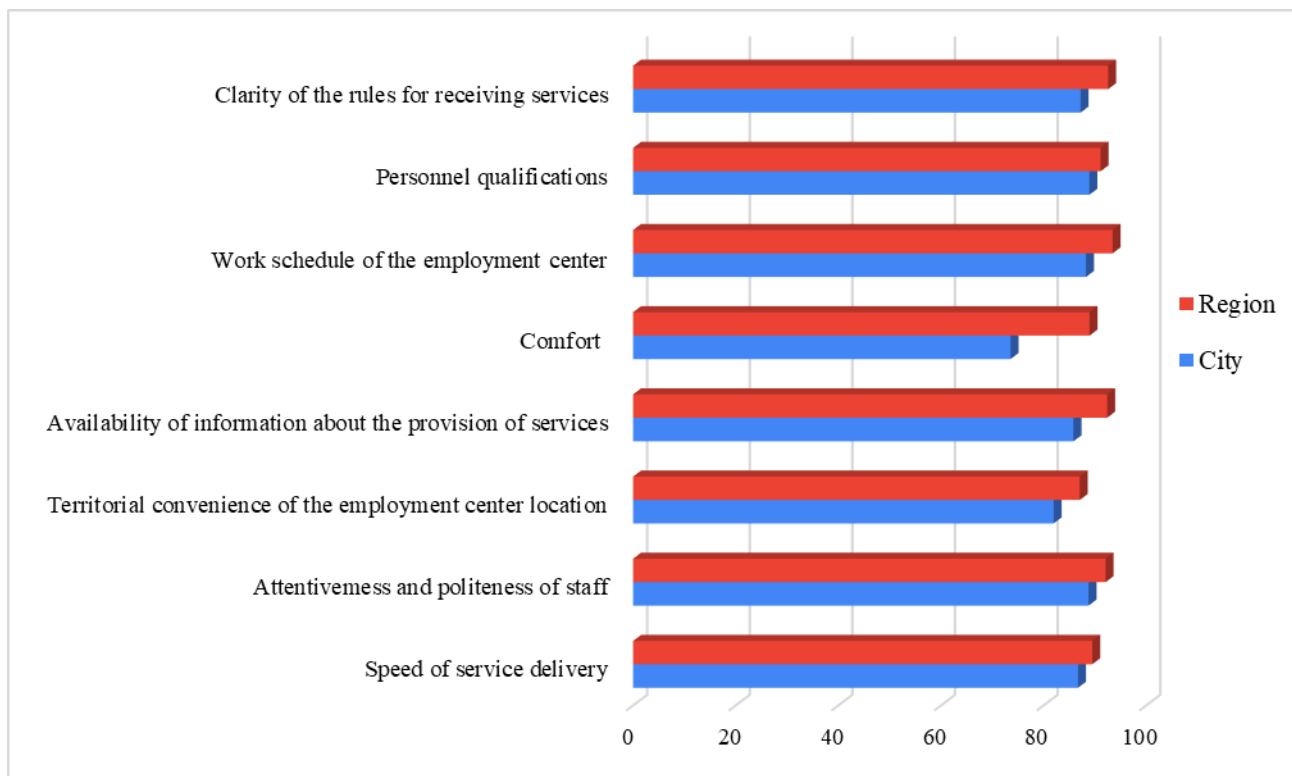
First, the respondents were asked to assess the extent to which different characteristics of the employment centers' performance are developed.

Table 1: Assessment of development of some characteristics of employment centers' performance, % of responses

Performance characteristics	Type of settlement	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor	N/A
Speed of service delivery	City	60,46	26,23	2,90	1,48	8,93
	Region	59,04	30,43	2,16	1,66	6,72
Attentiveness and politeness of staff	City	67,65	21,12	1,45	1,28	8,50
	Region	63,38	28,68	1,57	1,39	4,98
Territorial convenience of the employment center location	City	54,89	27,06	2,36	1,24	14,45
	Region	52,90	34,13	2,01	2,20	8,76
Availability of information about the provision of services	City	57,09	28,72	2,43	1,33	10,42
	Region	61,16	31,21	1,46	1,46	4,71
Comfort (availability of parking, comfortable seats, etc.)	City	48,96	24,60	4,94	1,31	20,19
	Region	55,53	33,40	1,79	2,33	6,95
Work schedule of the employment center	City	62,96	25,31	1,29	0,95	9,48
	Region	62,61	30,82	1,21	1,14	4,21
Personnel qualifications	City	66,27	22,63	1,34	0,90	8,85
	Region	68,71	24,39	1,25	0,93	4,72
Clarity of the rules for receiving services	City	63,96	23,23	2,10	1,32	9,38
	Region	64,43	28,14	1,48	1,23	4,71

Source: Authors, 2021

All the characteristics of employment centers' performance were evaluated in the context of the settlement type - city or region. It was found that respondents who live in the Omsk region rate the performance of employment centers higher (the sum of excellent and good ratings) than those who live in the Omsk city. This situation is observed for all the evaluated characteristics (the gap in ratings ranges from 2.2% to 15.4% for different characteristics). In general, it can be noted that the respondents rather highly assess the characteristics of employment centers' performance, the sum of excellent and good ratings was more than 80% for almost all characteristics.



Picture 1: Assessment of development of some employment centers' performance characteristics (the sum of excellent and good ratings), %
Source: Authors, 2021

It can be explained by the fact that the employment centers located in the city have more requests from citizens and, consequently, the specialists of these centers are busier. In addition, people living in the city have more opportunities to find a job independently or to apply to non-state recruitment agencies. This can also affect their assessment of the employment centers' performance.

Among the respondents who took part in the survey, some had already applied to the state employment center before. The number of such people was 40.5% of the total number of respondents. We were interested in how these people assess the changes in the quality of service delivery over the past time.

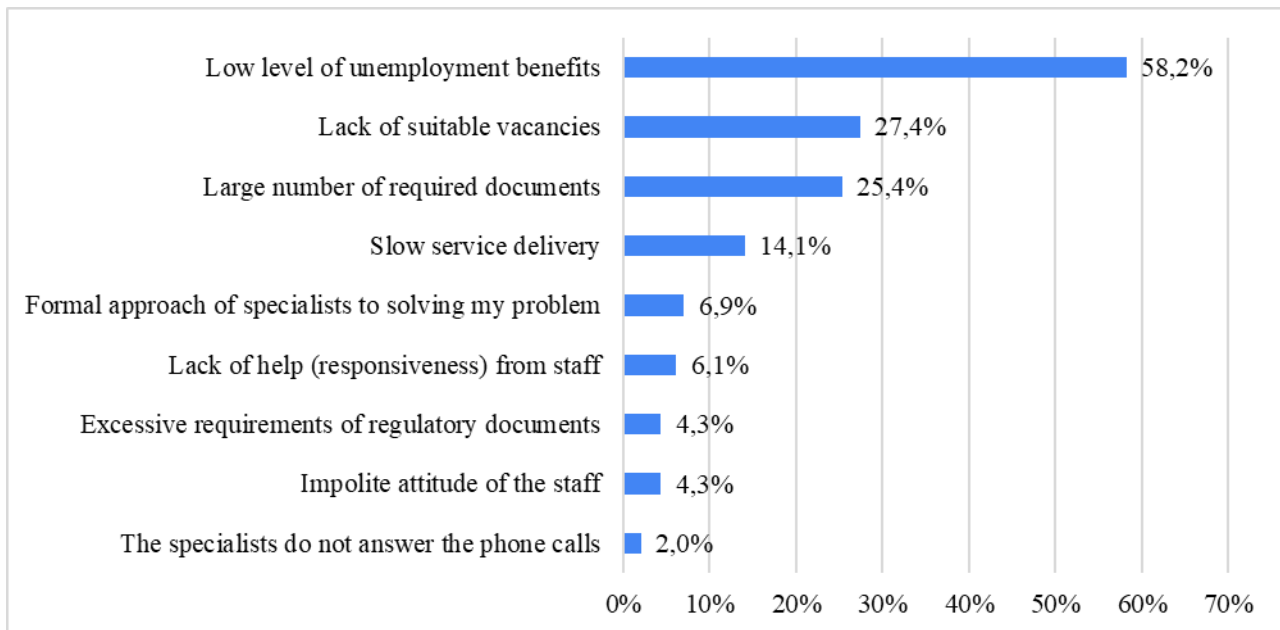
Table 2: Changes in the performance characteristics over the past 3 years, % of responses

Performance characteristics	Changed for the better	Not changed	Changed for the worse
Ability to receive the service via the Internet	82,3	13,7	3,9
Comfort (availability of parking, comfortable seats, etc.)	45,6	49,0	5,3
Queues at the employment center	58,0	37,5	4,5
Attentiveness and politeness of staff	51,8	46,8	1,4
Work schedule of the employment center	51,1	47,4	1,5

Source: Authors, 2021

As can be seen from the table, respondents note that some characteristics of the employment centers' performance have changed over the past 3 years. In particular, the majority of respondents say that it has become possible to receive services via the Internet. Despite the fact that employment centers have been working in this direction for a long time, this has largely become possible due to the coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown introduced because of it. More than half of the respondents noticed changes for the better over the past 3 years. These are a more convenient work schedule, a more attentive attitude of the staff, and a reduction in queues at the employment center.

Next, the unemployed were asked specifically about what they did not like about the work of employment centers. 7.24% of all unemployed people who took part in the survey admitted that they are not satisfied with the work of employment centers. The following responses were received (Picture 2). More than half said they were dissatisfied with the unemployment benefits and considered them too low. At the time of the survey, the maximum unemployment benefit was 12130 rubles, which corresponds to 158 US dollars and is the minimum wage in the Russian Federation.



Picture 2: Reasons for the dissatisfaction of the unemployed with the work of employment centers), %
Source: Authors, 2021

The responses of the unemployed confirm that the provision of services in state employment centers is a bureaucratic procedure. So, every fourth unemployed person (25.4%) notes that it is necessary to collect a large number of documents in order to receive a service. Every seventh respondent (14.1%) is dissatisfied with the speed of service delivery and considers it low. Excessive requirements of regulatory documents were also mentioned as the reason, which makes it impossible to get the necessary service (4.3%).

Another group of reasons for citizens' dissatisfaction is related to the staff of employment centers. Respondents note the formality and disinterest of the employment centers specialists (6.9%), the lack of their help (6.1%), impolite attitude (4.3%), as well as the fact that the specialists do not answer the phone calls (2%). In addition, the lack of suitable vacancies is also a reason of dissatisfaction for 25.4% of the unemployed.

3. CONCLUSION

First, the level of satisfaction of the unemployed with the services provided by state employment centers is quite high. More than 80% of the surveyed unemployed have a positive assessment of the employment centers performance according to most criteria (except for the comfort criterion, which characterizes the presence of parking, comfortable seats, etc.). At the same time, unemployed people living in the region demonstrate higher satisfaction with the received services than unemployed people living in the city. Although the satisfaction rate is quite high, it does not yet meet the target value that is fixed in the national project of the Russian Federation (90% by 2024).

Second, unemployed people who have previously used the services of employment centers, note positive changes in their work. Thus, the following changes were noted as changes for the better: the ability to receive services via the Internet, reducing queues in employment centers, increasing the convenience of the work schedule, and the attentiveness of the employment center specialists to clients.

Third, the study showed that the provision of services by state employment centers remains a bureaucratic procedure. A significant part of the unemployed notes that the specialists of the employment centers approach the provision of services formally, do not answer phone calls, work slowly, and in order to apply for any service, the unemployed need to collect a lot of documents.

Thus, we can conclude that, in general, there is a positive trend in the work of state employment centers and customer satisfaction with the received services. But at the same time, there are areas for further development in the employment centers' performance.

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