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# Key Causes of Workforce Shortages in the Russia's Public Sector and Human Resource Management

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## ABSTRACT

The **purpose** of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the personnel shortage problem in Russia's public sector. Based on statistical data from the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) and materials from recent academic publications, the key causes and factors behind the imbalance of labor resources in the social sector of the national economy are identified. A detailed analysis of the dynamics of public sector wages in comparison with the national average has been conducted, as well as an examination of the main trends in employment numbers. Special attention is given to the issue of precarious employment in the public sector, manifested in unstable labor relations, excessive workload, and lack of social guarantees. A direct correlation is revealed between low wage levels, high workloads, and staff shortages. From a managerial perspective, practical recommendations are proposed to overcome the personnel imbalance in the public sector. These include improving the wage system, optimizing workloads, and developing human resource planning under current conditions. The **findings** of the study may be useful for the heads of public institutions and government authorities responsible for implementing personnel policy in the Russian Federation.

**Keywords:** workforce shortage; social sector; imbalance of labor resources; precarization; wages; workload; personnel policy; social workers; regional disparities

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## INTRODUCTION

The relevance of this study is determined by the growing imbalance between society's demand for high-quality social services and the workforce capacity available to support this sector. Under contemporary demographic challenges, particularly those associated with population ageing, these issues acquire strategic significance.

The aim of the study was to identify and examine the key causes of staffing shortages in Russia's public sector. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were addressed:

- an analysis was conducted of labor resource imbalances in the public sector;
- the problems of labor precarization<sup>1</sup> among public sector employees were identified;
- the influence of wage levels and workload intensity on staffing shortages was examined.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in conducting a managerial analysis of the causes of staffing deficits in the public sector, focusing on quantitative imbalances, qualitative characteristics of labor, and the development of targeted human resource policy measures. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying the relationship between processes of precarization and the outflow of qualified specialists, which requires systemic managerial intervention at both federal and regional levels.

The methodological foundation of the study was a systems-based approach to examining the staffing deficit problem, incorporating statistical, comparative, structural-functional, and time-series analyses. The information base of the research consisted of data from the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat).

<sup>1</sup> Labour precarization refers to the shift from stable, secure employment relationships toward unstable forms of work, resulting in the near-complete erosion of employees' social and labour rights. This includes, inter alia, wage underpayment, the absence of paid leave and sick leave, and the loss of other social protections.

## LABOR RESOURCE IMBALANCES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: SCALE AND TRENDS

### The Current State of Workforce Provision in the Public Sector

Rosstat data indicate a stable trend toward a decline in the number of employees in Russia's public sector over the period from 2017 to 2022.<sup>2</sup> During this time, a systematic reduction in workforce capacity was observed across various categories of specialists (*Table 1*).

The analysis of the data presented in *Table 1* indicates that over the six-year period the most substantial reductions occurred among junior medical personnel (−35.2%), higher education faculty (−14.4%), social workers (−14.1%), and supplementary education teachers for children (−13.0%). By contrast, the numbers of preschool and general education teachers remained relatively stable, showing only slight increases of 1.4% and 0.1%, respectively, as did the number of physicians, which rose marginally by 0.5%.

These trends point both to the systemic nature of staffing challenges in the public sector and to the need for comprehensive measures to address the situation. It is also important to note that the decline in public sector employment is occurring against the background of improving overall labor market indicators and decreasing unemployment rates in the country, which suggests the presence of problems specific to the social sector.

### Disparities in Workforce Provision in the Public Sector

An important aspect of labor resource imbalance in the public sector is the presence of substantial regional disparities, as confirmed through the analysis of statistical data.

The situation is particularly acute in rural areas and remote territories, where staffing shortages in the public sector become critical. The severity of the problem varies depending on the type of

<sup>2</sup> Federal State Statistic Service (Rosstat) URL: <https://www.fedstat.ru>

Table 1

## Dynamics of the Average Number of Public Sector Employees on the Payroll in Russia, 2017–2022, people

Employee category	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change 2022/2017,%
Physicians and employees with higher medical education	566 015.8	560 172.0	565 162.3	571 152.2	573 514.6	568 993.9	0.5
Mid-level medical personnel	1 353 192.7	1 320 540.8	1 314 265.3	1 305 127.2	1 291 815.8	1 264 774.9	-6.5
Junior medical personnel	423 939.7	286 904.4	264 794.1	271 772.9	284 892.8	274 746.0	-35.2
Preschool education teachers	611 574.9	612 996.2	617 924.0	623 004.9	626 160.8	619 899.1	1.4
General education teachers	1 229 415.2	1 235 402.8	1 241 272.1	1 244 895.7	1 247 048.7	1 231 015.1	0.1
Teachers and instructors in secondary vocational education	154 647.7	153 629.9	154 027.6	155 072.4	155 421.5	154 069.5	-0.4
Higher education faculty	208 531.4	196 496.1	189 367.2	184 435.6	180 925.3	178 506.9	-14.4
Supplementary education teachers	242 470.3	227 861.0	219 035.8	214 797.2	212 801.1	210 879.6	-13.0
Cultural institution employees	529 346.4	497 754.5	493 678.7	492 162.6	489 989.6	489 358.7	-7.6
Research staff	77 437.2	71 036.4	72 207.7	72 108.4	71 543.1	71 199.6	-8.1
Social workers	127 243.4	120 764.5	118 295.2	115 699.7	112 697.4	109 358.9	-14.1

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of Rosstat data, [1]. URL: <https://www.fedstat.ru>

settlement and the level of socio-economic development of the region, creating conditions for the intensification of territorial disparities in the accessibility and quality of social services.

An examination of the ratio of regional employment to the working-age population (*Table 2*)

makes it possible to identify regional differences in labor resource availability.

According to the data presented in *Table 2*, the most favorable situation is observed in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, where the ratio of employed persons to the working-age population exceeds

Table 2

## The Ratio of Employed Population to Working-age Population by Federal District, 2020–2024 (%)

Federal District	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Russian Federation	84.2	85.4	85.7	85.7	–
Central Federal District (FD)	92.8	93.0	92.6	92.2	92.3
Moscow	117.0	115.8	113.7	112.5	111.3
Northwestern FD	87.2	88.0	88.9	88.0	88.7
Saint Petersburg	98.7	99.5	100.3	100.5	101.4
Southern FD	79.5	81.7	82.6	83.4	84.7
North Caucasus FD	64.1	65.1	68.0	67.9	69.7
Volga FD	81.5	83.4	83.9	83.8	84.7
Ural FD	89.1	90.6	89.6	91.1	92.0
Siberian FD	79.6	81.5	81.9	81.7	83.0
Far Eastern FD	83.4	83.9	83.4	84.2	85.5

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of Rosstat data, [1]. URL: <https://www.fedstat.ru>

100%, indicating the attraction of specialists from other regions. By contrast, in the North Caucasus Federal District this indicator amounted to only 69.7% in 2024, suggesting a significant shortage of jobs and a potential outflow of labor resources from the region.

Such disparities exacerbate the problem of staffing shortages in the public sector. This is particularly relevant for regions experiencing an overall shortage of qualified personnel, as under these conditions the social sector becomes less competitive than other branches of the economy, leading to the outflow of qualified workers.

Structural imbalances become especially evident when examining workforce provision across different areas of social services. A comparative analysis of salary data for specialists across various categories of the public sector (*Table 3*) reveals substantial differences in the attractiveness of particular fields for potential employees.

The data presented in *Table 3* indicate substantial differences in wage levels across various fields of social services. In healthcare and social service activities, as well as in the cultural sector, wages in 2022 approached the national average (93.9% and 94.9%, respectively); however, this does not apply to all categories of employees. Particularly low levels of remuneration are observed in services such as home-based assistance for persons with disabilities (54.8% of the national average in 2022) and residential nursing care (63.4%).

### LABOR PRECARIZATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AS A FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO STAFFING SHORTAGES

#### The Concept and Features of Precarization in the Public Sector

Precarization is understood as a process of increasing instability in employment relations, characterized by a reduction in social guaran-

Table 3

## Average Monthly Nominal Accrued Wages of Public Sector Employees by Activity Type, 2017–2022 (rubles)

Field of Activity	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share of the National Average in 2022,%
Economy wide	34 421.6	39 016.68	42 263.2	46 674.06	49 516.3	55 717.0	100.0
Healthcare and social services activities	29 370.44	37 617.62	40 739.93	44 564.81	49 633.0	52 302.2	93.9
Cultural, sports, leisure and entertainment activities	31 671.59	41 338.96	43 959.12	46 737.42	46 696.5	52 862.0	94.9
Residential care activities with accommodation	–	–	–	39 785.5	39 106.3	42 248.9	75.8
Residential nursing care activities with accommodation	–	–	–	32 870.9	32 770.5	35 339.1	63.4
Home-care services for persons with disabilities	–	–	–	28 174.3	27 410.3	30 554.4	54.8
Residential care for the elderly and persons with disabilities with accommodation	–	–	–	38 282.7	34 588.8	37 855.7	67.9

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of Rosstat data, [1]. URL: <https://www.fedstat.ru>

tees, growing uncertainty, and heightened vulnerability of workers [2–4]. Precarious forms of employment include temporary, daily, part-time, seasonal, contingent, informal employment, self-employment, and others. However, the features of this process may be observed in both standard and non-standard employment arrangements [5], manifesting in very low wages, irregular employment, extremely flexible working schedules, and harsh and exhausting working conditions [6]. The academic literature emphasizes that precarization in employment leads to precarization of life itself, namely a reduction in social activity due to regular overtime work and, consequently, a decrease in

leisure time, loss of income, and limited access to social and cultural goods [7].

In the public sector, precarization manifests in the form of:

- instability of employment and labor relations;
- high workload combined with low remuneration;
- absence or insufficiency of social guarantees;
- informal employment and the use of civil-law contracts instead of labor contracts;
- psychological strain and a high risk of professional burnout.

### The Impact of Precarization on Human Resource Capacity in the Public Sector

Precarization exerts a substantial negative influence on the human resource capacity of the public sector, manifesting in several ways:

1. Instability of employment relations, high workload, and low wages make the profession of social work unattractive for young specialists. A significant psycho-emotional burden combined with insufficient material incentives increases the risk of professional burnout. The problem is further aggravated by inadequate workforce planning, which leads not only to staffing shortages but also to serious imbalances across personnel categories.

2. Under conditions of excessive workload and insufficient motivation, the quality of social services inevitably declines. This shapes a negative public perception of the public sector and further reduces its attractiveness as a field of professional activity.

3. Employment instability and low remuneration levels contribute to the outflow of professionals from the public sector.

The managerial dimension of precarization is reflected in the fact that the spread of non-standard employment forms and the deterioration of working conditions often result not only from objective economic constraints but also from deliberate human resource policies aimed at reducing short-term institutional costs in the public sector [8]. However, such policies generate strategic risks, including the loss of key competencies, a decline in the quality of state and municipal services, and rising operational expenditures due to the continuous training of new personnel.

In the context of digital transformation, the phenomenon of “digital precarization” has emerged, affecting the public sector as well, particularly academic and teaching staff [9]. This phenomenon is expressed not only in unstable employment relations but also in the imposition of flexible working formats that blur the boundaries between working and personal time,

thereby intensifying professional burnout without adequate compensation. The managerial task in this context is the development of regulatory and organizational mechanisms that prevent the erosion of labor rights in the digital environment.

### LOW WAGES AND HIGH WORKLOAD AS KEY CAUSES OF STAFFING SHORTAGES

#### Analysis of Wage Dynamics in the Public Sector

Low levels of remuneration in the public sector represent one of the key causes of staffing shortages. Despite the implementation of the Presidential “May Decrees,” aimed at increasing wages in this sector, pay levels remain significantly below the national average.

From a managerial perspective, this problem cannot be reduced solely to the volume of funding. Equally important are such aspects as the wage structure and the incentive system. In many public sector institutions, wages continue to be formed with a high proportion of variable (bonus-based) components, which reduces income stability and reinforces employees’ sense of insecurity [3]. Improving managerial decisions in this area requires a transition toward transparent and predictable remuneration models that ensure an adequate guaranteed income.

For a more detailed analysis of the situation across different sub-sectors of the public sphere, let us examine the dynamics of employee numbers across institutions of various ownership forms (*Table 4*).

The data presented in *Table 4* indicate that the most substantial decline occurred among junior medical personnel both in federal (–26.1%) and regional institutions (–33.7%). A marked reduction was also observed in the number of social workers in institutions under municipal ownership (–21.0%) as well as those owned by constituent entities of the Russian Federation (–12.2%). In addition, the number of higher education faculty in federal institutions decreased considerably (–14.3%), as did the number of cultural institution employees at the municipal level (–12.4%).

Table 4

**Dynamics of the Average Number  
of Public Sector Employees by Form of Ownership, 2017–2022 (people)**

Form of ownership	Employee category	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change 2022/2017,%
Federal ownership	Physicians and employees with higher medical education	86 942.8	82 623.3	83 978.4	85 410.1	86 105.2	86 270.8	-0.8
Federal ownership	Mid-level medical personnel	145 201.8	140 048.3	138 803.0	138 357.9	136 383.2	134 641.9	-7.3
Federal ownership	Junior medical personnel	55 150.9	43 588.6	40 675.5	40 688.8	41 105.9	40 783.4	-26.1
Federal ownership	Higher education faculty	202 596.3	190 888.2	183 983.3	179 162.4	175 753.6	173 562.6	-14.3
Federal ownership	Cultural institution employees	49 649.3	47 909.3	48 913.5	50 684.9	51 552.9	51 591.2	3.9
Ownership of constituent entities of the RF	Physicians and employees with higher medical education	449 518.0	449 762.9	465 674.0	470 441.2	478 780.4	474 276.8	5.5
Ownership of constituent entities of the RF	Mid-level medical personnel	1 122 861.5	1 102 663.9	1 127 355.4	1 119 930.4	1 121 537.2	1 097 246.6	-2.3
Ownership of constituent entities of the RF	Junior medical personnel	347 090.6	229 939.3	219 837.1	226 619.4	239 718.2	230 230.5	-33.7
Ownership of constituent entities of the RF	General education teachers	224 592.3	227 257.3	232 295.9	237 114.9	239 309.0	238 121.3	6.0
Ownership of constituent entities of the RF	Cultural institution employees	166 388.8	160 996.1	162 420.9	162 697.9	162 508.7	163 403.8	-1.8
Ownership of constituent entities of the RF	Social workers	100 296.5	94 690.7	93 570.0	93 707.1	91 473.3	88 058.6	-12.2
Municipal ownership	Preschool education teachers	571 232.6	572 348.6	576 262.8	580 276.3	582 244.9	575 828.6	0.8
Municipal ownership	General education teachers	998 251.2	1 001 040.2	1 001 536.7	999 981.7	1 000 007.5	984 858.0	-1.3
Municipal ownership	Cultural institution employees	313 308.3	288 849.1	282 344.3	278 779.8	275 928.0	274 363.7	-12.4
Municipal ownership	Social workers	26 817.6	26 003.2	24 662.6	21 916.1	21 101.0	21 176.9	-21.0

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of Rosstat data. URL: <https://www.fedstat.ru>

At the same time, positive dynamics were noted for physicians and employees with higher medical education, general education teachers, and cultural institution staff in organizations under federal ownership (+5.5%, +6.0%, and +3.9%, respectively).

These divergent trends reflect structural changes in workforce provision within the public sector. On the one hand, they may represent objective processes of staff optimization and increased institutional efficiency; on the other hand, they may indicate challenges in attracting and retaining personnel in specific sub-sectors of public services.

Of particular concern is the significant reduction in the number of social workers across all forms of ownership, which may negatively affect the accessibility of these services for the most vulnerable population groups, especially in the context of demographic trends such as population ageing and the increasing proportion of citizens in need of social support.

The identified imbalances require the development and implementation of comprehensive measures aimed at stabilizing the staffing situation in the public sector. These measures should include enhancing the attractiveness of professions, improving working conditions, developing systems of professional training and retraining, and improving mechanisms of financial incentives for employees.

#### **The Problem of High Workload in the Public Sector**

High workload represents the second key cause of specialist shortages in the public sector. Under conditions of declining numbers of social workers while the volume of services provided remains stable or increases, the workload borne by each worker inevitably grows.

E.A. Klimentova and A.A. Dubovitsky note that one of the major challenges of human resource policy in social public sector organizations is the mismatch between established staffing levels and the actual volume of work performed [10].

As a result, social workers are forced to operate under intensified conditions, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion.

The issue of excessive workload is particularly acute in rural areas and small towns, where staffing deficits are most pronounced. In such settings, a single social worker may be responsible for a number of clients that significantly exceeds established norms, adversely affecting both the quality of services delivered and the health of the specialists themselves, and becoming, in particular, a cause of professional burnout.

An analysis of the dynamics in the number of social workers (see *Table 1*) suggests that the reduction in public sector employment is occurring against the background of an overall decline in unemployment rates. This indicates an outflow of personnel from this sector into other branches of the economy.

#### **The Relationship Between Wages, Workload, and Staffing Shortages**

The initial cause of staffing shortages is often the low level of remuneration, which does not correspond to the complexity and responsibility of work in the public sector. This leads qualified specialists to move into other sectors and discourages young people from choosing this field as a professional career path.

A reduction in staff numbers while the volume of work is maintained or increased inevitably results in higher workload for remaining employees. Combined with low wages, this stimulates further personnel outflow and thereby aggravates the problem even more.

E.P. Kostenko, examining employers' expectations regarding the level of preparation of recent graduates, notes the existence of an imbalance between these expectations and the demands of young specialists concerning working conditions and wage levels [11]. This disparity is particularly evident in the public sector, where high qualification standards and personal requirements placed on employees coexist with low material compensation levels.

## APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING STAFFING SHORTAGES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

### Improving the Remuneration System in the Public Sector

To address staffing shortages in the public sector, it is first necessary to ensure a competitive level of remuneration that corresponds to the complexity and responsibility of the work performed. An analysis of wage data (see *Table 3*) indicates that substantial increases in pay are required in the public sector in order to achieve parity with the national average.

Particular attention should be given to the most problematic fields of social services, where wage levels are especially low, such as home-based assistance for persons with disabilities (the average earnings in this area in 2024 amounted to only 44.1% of the national average).

The managerial solution to this problem should be comprehensive and should include not only an overall increase in wage funds, but also a revision of grading and incentive systems in order to ensure fair wage differentiation depending on qualifications, performance outcomes, and working conditions [12].

### Optimization of Workload and Improvement of Labor Standardization

Addressing the issue of high workload is possible only through a comprehensive approach that includes revising the following standards:

- staffing levels in the public sector, taking into account the actual volume of work and the complexity of the population served;
- workload norms, based on the specific characteristics of different areas of social work and the needs of the categories of citizens receiving support.

An important aspect of workload optimization is the introduction of modern technologies and working methods that make it possible to increase labor productivity without intensifying work. The digitalization of social services, the automation of routine operations, and the development of

remote working formats can significantly reduce labor costs associated with performing administrative functions.

### Enhancing the Prestige of Public Sector Professions

To overcome staffing shortages, it is necessary to increase the social prestige of public sector professions. This requires a set of measures aimed at shaping a positive image of social workers in public consciousness, promoting these professions among young people, and creating conditions for professional growth and self-realization of employees.

### Improving Workforce Planning in the Public Sector

Staffing deficit challenges can be effectively addressed through the improvement of workforce planning systems based on a scientific approach and the consideration of long-term trends in societal development and the public sector.

Particular attention should be given to regional aspects of workforce planning. An analysis of the ratio of employment in the regional economy to the working-age population (see *Table 2*) indicates substantial regional differences in labor resource availability.

To address this issue, a differentiated approach is required. In regions with high employment levels and low unemployment rates (Moscow, Saint Petersburg), the primary emphasis should be placed on increasing the competitiveness of the public sector as an employer compared to other branches of the economy. In contrast, in territories characterized by a significant proportion of unemployed individuals (the North Caucasus Federal District), it is necessary to create new jobs while ensuring decent working conditions and adequate remuneration.

### Development of Human Resource Capacity and Knowledge Management

Under conditions of high staff turnover and workforce ageing in the public sector, knowl-

edge management and the systematic development of human resource capacity become critically important. This requires institutional leadership to introduce mentoring programmes, continuous professional development initiatives, and the formation of internal personnel reserves. The development of corporate universities and partnerships with higher education institutions should be promoted in order to provide targeted training for specialists oriented toward employment in this sector [12].

### Strengthening the Role of Trade Unions and Social Dialogue

Enhancing the role of trade unions and developing social partnership constitute important instruments for reducing precarization and strengthening human resource capacity. A managerial approach based on constructive dialogue with employee representatives enables the timely identification and resolution of systemic problems such as excessive workload, informal employment, and violations of labor rights [13, 14]. For public sector institution managers, it is important to perceive trade unions not as adversaries but as partners in addressing shared objectives related to workforce stabilization and the improvement of the quality of working life.

## CONCLUSION

The conducted study leads to the conclusion that staffing shortages in Russia's public sector represent a systemic problem. An analysis of statistical data and academic publications

shows that the key drivers of this phenomenon include labor resource imbalances, labor precarization, low wage levels, and high workload intensity.

Labor resource imbalance manifests in quantitative personnel shortages as well as regional and structural disparities. The most critical situation is observed in rural areas and remote regions, where the lack of specialists in the public sector becomes particularly acute.

Labor precarization in this economic sector is expressed in unstable employment relations, excessive workload combined with low remuneration, and the absence or insufficiency of social guarantees. This results in declining attractiveness of these professions, increased professional burnout, reduced quality of services provided, and the outflow of qualified personnel.

Low wages and high workload create a self-reinforcing cycle of challenges. An analysis of wage dynamics and growth rates indicates that these indicators remain substantially below national averages in the public sector.

From a managerial perspective, resolving the issue of specialist shortages is impossible without revising existing approaches to human resource policy at all levels. The proposed recommendations—including improving remuneration systems, optimizing workload, developing workforce planning, and strengthening social dialogue—are comprehensive in nature and require coordinated efforts from government authorities, institutional leadership, and professional communities.

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