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Middle class in the regions of the Northwestern Federal District: quantity and reproduction capabilities*



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Abstract. The priority of the government policy in the current economic and social situation is to maintain constant innovation development in all social spheres; therefore, the formation of middle class as the guarantee of social stability appears to be particularly relevant due to certain characteristic features of middle class representatives. These features include responsibility, high social activity and consciousness. Therefore, research into the size and structure of middle class is one of the main goals of modern sociology.

The article analyses the middle class in the region on the basis of sociological surveys conducted in 2008–2013 in the Vologda Oblast and in the Northwestern Federal District. The authors present approaches to studying and assessing the middle class, and make an attempt to determine its size. The article proposes

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an internal structure of the middle class in the region and draws a portrait of a typical representative of this category. The authors have found out that social mobility of the middle class in the region is low due to a number of socio-economic factors; this fact hampers the growth of the middle class up to the quantity determined in the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Vologda Oblast for the Period up to 2020.

Key words: social structure, middle class, self-identification, social mobility.

Social stratification is one of the most discussed and important issues in modern economics. Society is a hierarchical structure in the form of a pyramid, consisting of groups with higher status on the top and lower status at the base. In general, we can distinguish three social strata – the upper, the middle and the lower, among which the middle layer is seen as the most significant for the development of society and the state.

Many researchers are of the opinion that it is the middle class that can become the foundation for the promotion (implementation) of modernization reforms [6, 7, 9, 17], since the people constituting the middle class have considerable creative potential and high social activity, i.e. characteristics that play an important role in the formation of high-quality human capital required for the formation of innovation economy. The middle class consists of highly qualified personnel, professionals with stable income, which they spend on purchasing goods and services with the best price/quality ratio, thereby forming the market by their demand and stimulating the development of industry and services. At the same time, the middle class “is the main producer and consumer of mass, urban culture that represents the basis of national culture” [5].

Experts point out that the formation and development of strong civil society should be based on “public policy aimed to strengthen

the position of the middle class able to act as a guarantor of Russia’s stable and progressive development, as well as the bearer of its innovation potential. The pace of economic, political, and social transformation will largely depend on the possible rapid formation of the middle class, which is the basis for any developed modern state” [13].

Continuous increase in the size of the middle class, which by 2020 should be at least 55–60% of the RF population, is one of the important targets set out in the Concept for long-term socio-economic development of Russia till 2020 [12, p. 7]. The importance of the study of the middle class for Russia’s society, which is on its way to modernization, is defined by its ability to act as the foundation for stable development of Russia and to increase its innovation capacity.

The necessity to form the middle class has been substantiated many times in the Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation since 1998 (*tab. 1*). V. Putin in his pre-election article published in 2012 pointed out that in Russia the middle class “should grow further and become a majority in the society, to grow at the expense of those who drags the country on their backs: doctors, teachers, engineers, skilled workers” [16].

Understanding of the importance of the middle class and care about its well-being is a priority of state policy in many developed

Table 1. Objectives and importance of the middle class in the Addresses of Russia's President to the RF Federal Assembly

President	Understanding of importance of formation of the middle class
B.N. Yeltsin	A large and stable middle class is the foundation of civil society and stability of the constitutional system; improvement of the country's economy and formation of the middle class are closely interrelated objectives; it is the middle class that is able to become the backbone and driving force of Russia's economic recovery [1998 Address].
V.V. Putin	It is necessary to form the middle class through the growth of small and medium business, which needs state support [2007 Address].
D.A. Medvedev	An "ideal" representative of the middle class (i.e. the ideal, which we should try and reach in the future, according to D.A. Medvedev), is largely similar to the representative of the middle class in Western countries. It is a talented individual capable of critical thinking, in a spirit of intellectual freedom and civic activeness, a responsible citizen who appreciates social stability and respect the law and at the same time is willing to assume responsibility for the situation in his/her own village or town, and realizes that only an active position can set the heavy machine that is government bureaucracy in motion. [2009 Address].
Source: Address of the President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation: With joint efforts – to the rise of Russia". 1998. Available at: http://www.intelros.org/lib/elzin/1998.htm (accessed March 24, 2014); Address of the President of Russia V.V. Putin to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. 2007. Available at: http://www.rg.ru/2007/04/27/poslanie.html (accessed March 24, 2014); Address of the President of Russia D.A. Medvedev to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. 2009 Available at: http://www.rg.ru/2009/11/13/poslanie-tekst.html (accessed March 24, 2014).	

countries. In his 2013 Address to the U.S. Congress B. Obama pointed out that "the main long-term objective of the current U.S. Government is to restore the role of the middle class as the driving force of American economy" [21]. French President F. Hollande in his election campaign proposed "to put France back on its feet" by creating a public investment bank financing the development of small and medium enterprises, promoting environmental and energy conversion of industry, the transformation of small and medium enterprises into economic priority for France, support of new technology and "digital economy" [8], focusing on the strengthening of the middle class in the country.

However, the recognition of the importance and understanding of the need for the formation and support of the middle class has not formed a clear theoretical and methodological approach to the assessment of its scale.

Let us refer to the essence of the category of "middle class". The formation of the concept "middle class" has a long history, but the meaning embedded in it at different stages of the development of scientific knowledge varied depending on the socio-economic conditions of society. Aristotle divided society into three parts: the rich, the poor and those between them. He noted that "the state where the middle class is more numerous and powerful than the other two classes combined, is the most stable and better manageable" [2, pp. 148-151]. Basic approaches to the understanding of this category are presented in *table 2*.

The task of identifying this stratum is no less difficult. There are several options for determining the size of the middle class, which differ by the content of evaluation criteria. Experts in different countries identify the middle class according to various, although largely similar, criteria (*tab. 3*).

Table 2. Main approaches to the interpretation of the term “middle class”

Author	Middle class is
K. Marx, V.I. Lenin, M.I. Tugan-Baranovsky and others	A social stratum located between the two main opposing classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat).
M. Weber	A status group formed by the life chances of individuals: their individual abilities (education, qualification, worldview) and characteristics of their lifestyle, way of obtaining education and profession.
L. Warner, K. Davies, W. Moore, P. Sorokin	An element of social structure that performs social functions specified by that structure (functions of social stabilizer, conductor of social mobility, the main consumer of goods and services, integrator of public interests, etc.).
J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, D. Grusky	A “service class” (professionals, managers, administrators), the main characteristics of which are mental labor and trust in work relationships, and the sources of its replenishment are the chances of social mobility and personal qualities of individuals.
E.M. Avramova	A social group located at the intersection of main identification features, which include: material wellbeing, higher professional education and social identification with the middle stratum.
M.K. Gorshkov, N.E. Tikhonova, S.V. Mareeva	A class characterized by “high social attitudes and consumption practices”.

Sources: Marx K., Engels F. Rabochii parlament [Working Parliament]. *Sochineniya* [Works]. 2nd ed. 1958. Vol. 10. P. 124; Weber M. Osnovnye ponyatiya stratifikatsii [Basic Concepts of Stratification]. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya* [Sociological Studies], 1994, no.5, pp. 169-183; *Srednii klass v sovremennoi Rossii* [Middle Class in Modern Russia]. Executive editors: M.K. Gorshkov, N.E. Tikhonova; RAS Institute of Sociology. Moscow, 2008. 320 p.; Warner L. *What is Social Class in America*. New York, NY: Irvington Publishers, 1949; Tikhonova N.E., Mareeva S.V. *Srednii klass: teoriya i real'nost'* [Middle Class: Theory and Reality]. Moscow: Al'fa-M, 2009. 320 p.; Avramova E.M., Grigor'ev L.M., Kosmarskaya T.P., Maleva T.M., Mikhailiuk M.V., Ovcharova L.N., Radaev V.V., Urnov M.Yu. *Srednii klass v Rossii: kolichestvennye i kachestvennye otsenki* [Middle Class in Russia: Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment]. *BEA* [Bureau of Economic Analysis]. Moscow: TEIS, 2000. 286 p.; Davies K., Moore W. Nekotorye printsipy stratifikatsii [Some principles of Social Stratification]. *Sotsial'naya stratifikatsiya* [Social Stratification], 1992, issue 1, pp. 160-177; Goldthorpe J., McKnight A. *The Economic Basis of Social Class*. *Sociology Working Papers*. University of Oxford, 2003. 245 p.

During the panel session “The BRICS’s Middle Class Starts to Flex Their Muscles” carried out within the framework of Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum-2013 the chief economist of Renaissance Capital investment group Charles Robertson noted that “representatives of the middle class, regardless of their country of residence, are characterized by the desire for better standards of education and health. In addition, the middle class is interested in the transparency of relationship between business and authorities and, therefore, in the fight against corruption” [19].

Thus, the concept of “middle class” is characterized by a rather broad set of criteria, however, the basis, upon which an individual

can be referred to a particular stratum, is his/her financial situation and level of education. At the same time, representatives of the middle class should be considerably involved in social and cultural life.

In our opinion, the middle class should be understood as busy, socially active people with higher and secondary vocational education, who identify themselves with the middle class, and who possess significant cultural capital and stable income to satisfy a wide range of needs.

The size of the middle class in Russia, according to expert assessments, ranges from 3% (“ideal middle class”) to 30–60% (“promising middle class”), depending on the method of assessment [1, pp. 28-36].

Table 3. Comparison of the criteria for selection of the middle class

Country	Criteria for defining the middle class	Quantitative values
Russia	High level of professional education Level of income Patterns (level of consumption) Lifestyle Level of self-identification	> 6 subsistence levels
Ukraine	Level of self-identification Level of education Financial wellbeing Type of employment	1000 U.S. dollars per month
Belarus	Property Level of income Level of education Prestige of the profession Level of self-identification Lifestyle System of values and mentality	2-3 minimal consumer budgets
Germany	Level of income Level of education Professional affiliation	1130-2420 euro per month
China	Level of education Level of income Professional affiliation	10-100 thousand yuan
USA	Level of income Level of education Level of self-identification The use of loans	25-100 thousand U.S. dollars per month

Source: Sokolova G. Sostoyanie i vozmozhnosti razvitiya srednego klassa v Belarusi [Current State and Opportunities for Middle Class Development in Belarus]. *Obshchestvo i ekonomika* [Society and Economics], 2010, no.7-8, pp. 199-218; Dobrova T.G. Srednii klass v Ukraine: sub"ektivnoe vospriyatie i real'nost' [Middle Class in Ukraine: Subjective Perception and Reality]. *Vestnik ONU im. I.I. Mechnikova* [Bulletin of the Odessa National University], 2012, volume 17, issue 2, pp. 67-75; Zhou Xiaohong. Zhongguo zhongchan jieji: xianshi yi-huo gouxiang. *Tianjin shehui kexue*, 2006, no.2, pp. 60-66; Grigor'ev L., Salmina A., Kuzina O. Rossiiskii srednii klass: analiz struktury i finansovogo povedeniya [Russian Middle Class: Analysis of its Structure and Financial Behavior]. Moscow: EkonInform, 2009. 148 p.; Dolya srednego klassa v Germanii [The Share of the Middle Class in Germany]. Available at: www.dw.de/dw/article/0,14772101.html (accessed March 24, 2014); *Who is the Middle Class?* Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/middleclassoverview.html> (accessed March 24, 2014).

Specialists identify this category mainly by using the following criteria: financial situation (income, savings, property), education level, professional status, cultural values, etc.

Over the last 10 years the share of the middle class in Russia's population has increased from 29 to 42%. Researchers at RAS Institute of Sociology in their report "Middle class in modern Russia: 10 years later" point out that women constitute almost

two-thirds of it, and officials form its basis. The middle class in Russia can be considered as relatively young and urban, since most of its representatives are people under 40 (60% of its population), who live in cities and metropolitan areas. Representatives of the middle class feel more confident in the labor market, but in recent years their willingness to invest in their education and qualification has been declining, which is a national trend [18].

An increase in the size of the middle class (particularly its part formed by bureaucracy) is understandable, given the fact that in the recent years the salary of officials has been growing three times faster than that of the rest of the population. As a result, the income gap between civil servants and average Russians has almost tripled [11].

An important source of information on the middle class is sociological research in the regions; therefore, we will build our further reasoning and conclusions on the results of such research conducted by the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of the Russian Academy of Sciences in the Northwestern Federal District and in the Vologda Oblast¹.

According to the survey, performed by ISED T RAS in 2013, a significant share of residents in the NWFD regions consider themselves to be the middle class (*tab. 4*).

In the scale “city/village → region → country” there is a noticeable decline in the proportion of the population, identifying themselves as the middle class (from 42 to 59%), and an increase in the values of indicators characterizing people’s identification as the lower strata of the society (from 5 to 13%).

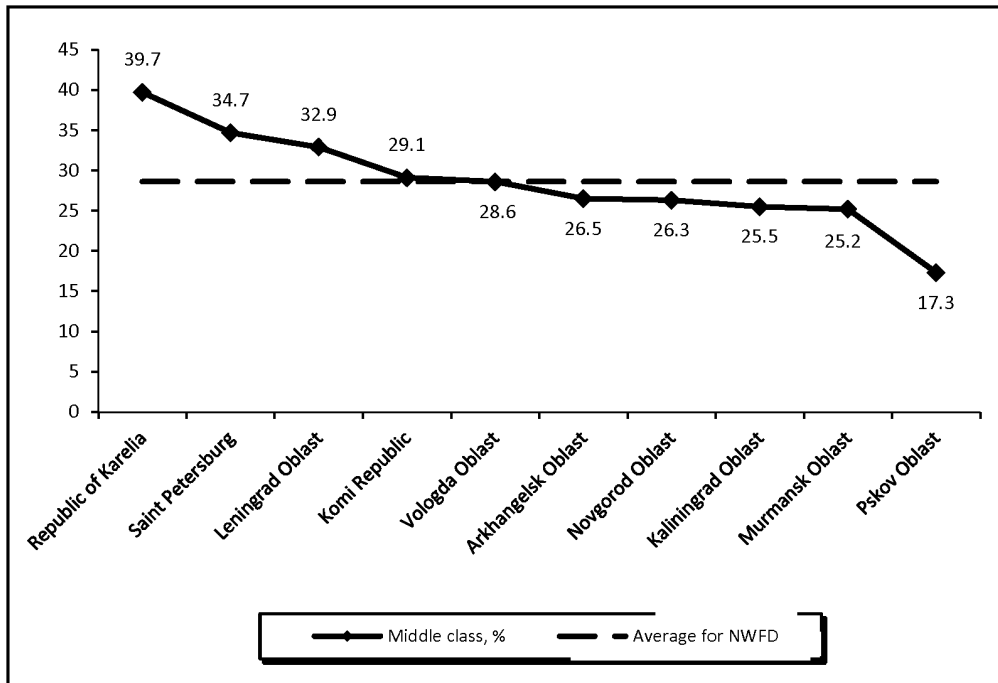
The middle class most representative for its region is noted in the Komi Republic (70%) and Karelia Republic (67%), and least representative – in the Murmansk Oblast (52%). The size of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast is approximately equal to the average district value – 56–58%. The representation of the upper social strata (upper and above middle) is the most extensive in the Leningrad Oblast, and Saint Petersburg (15–22%). It should be noted that the share of those, who are not sure which category they belong to, increases in

Table 4. Distribution of answers to the question: “What social strata do you belong to: in your city (village), in the region and in your country?”, NWFD (in % of the number of respondents)

Answer options	In your city/village	In the region	In the country
Upper class	1.7	0.9	0.9
Class above middle	9.4	6.5	4.7
Middle class	58.8	51.7	42.2
Class below middle	17.9	22.6	24.5
Lower class	5.0	6.9	13.2
It is difficult to answer	7.2	11.5	14.6

¹ The sample is more than 5000 people in ten regions of the Northwestern Federal District (the Arkhangelsk, Vologda, Kaliningrad, Leningrad, Murmansk, Novgorod, Pskov oblasts, republics of Karelia and Komi, Saint Petersburg). The sample size for each region is not less than 400 respondents, which ensures a high degree of confidence (sampling error does not exceed 5% with a confidence interval of 95%) in evaluating the situation in a particular region and in conducting cross-regional comparisons.

Figure 1. Representation of the middle class in the NWFD regions in 2013



proportion to the size of the territory, within which the self-identification is made (from 7% for their own locality to 15% nationwide) [20].

The selection of the middle class is more accurate, when it is based on the intersection of several criteria, for example, by the methodology of L.A. Belyaeva², using the data on material wealth, self-identification,

² According to the methodology of L.A. Belyaeva, the boundaries of the middle class and its size in the region are defined using three criteria: 1) self-identification with the middle stratum of society; 2) financial wellbeing at the level of the wealthy and prosperous; 3) at least secondary vocational education. **The intersection of these criteria allows us to select a group that can be identified as middle class.** You can find more information on the subject in: Lapin N.I., Belyaeva L.A. The program and standard tools “Socio-cultural portrait of Russia’s region” (Modification – 2010); Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy. Moscow: IFRAS, 2010. Pp. 60-61.

professional status and educational level of the population (*fig. 1*). In general, the scale of the middle class in the Northwestern Federal District is about 30%. The Republic of Karelia (about 40%), Saint Petersburg (35%) and the Pskov Oblast (17%) distinguish themselves among the rest of the regions. This is caused by a higher self-evaluation of financial situation and level of self-identification with the middle class in Karelia and Saint Petersburg and, consequently, lower indicators in the Pskov Oblast.

Using different methodological approaches, each of which assumes a certain set of criteria, let us take a closer look at the size of the middle class on the example of the Vologda Oblast (*tab. 5*).

Table 5. Share of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast in accordance with various approaches (in % of the number of respondents)

Approaches to estimation of the middle class and their criteria	Share in %*		
	2010	2012	2013
I. Criterion of self-identification of the population with the middle class	51	54	50
II. Criteria according to the methodology of L.A. Belyaeva 1. Self-identification 2. Financial wellbeing 3. Level of education (not lower than secondary vocational)	30	25	29
III. Criteria set out by the Foundation of the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) 1. Financial and property situation 2. Educational and professional status 3. Self-identification of an individual with the middle class	3.2	n/a.	3.5
IV. Criteria set out in the Concept for long-term economic development of the Russian Federation 1. Average per capita income over 6 subsistence levels 2. Motor car 3. Savings in a bank 4. Affordability of annual vacation abroad	1	n/a	1
V. Criteria set out by the All-Russian Center of Living Standards 1. Higher education 2. Comfortable dwelling of two types (in town and in the country) 3. Motor car 4. Half of the income goes to savings 5. Healthy lifestyle 6. Ability to provide children with higher education, necessary treatment, the initial capital for the purchase of housing	0.1	n/a	0.1
* Hereinafter the calculations are performed by A.N. Gordievskaya, ISEDT RAS Research Engineer			

The calculations were carried out using the data from surveys of the population, conducted by ISEDT RAS in 2010–2013³.

Depending on the applied methodology, the representation of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast is from 0.1 to 50%, which

³ The polls are held annually in Vologda, Cherepovets, and in eight districts of the Vologda Oblast (Babayevsky District, Velikoustyugsky District, Vozhegodsky District, Gryazovetsky District, Kirillovsky District, Nikolsky District, Tarnogsky District and Sheksninsky District). The method of the survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents. The volume of a sample population is 1500 people aged from 18 and older. The sample is purposeful and quoted. Representativeness of the sample is ensured by the observance of the proportion between the urban and rural population, the proportion between the inhabitants of settlements of various types (rural communities, small and medium-sized cities), age and sex structure of the oblast's adult population. Sampling error does not exceed 3%.

corresponds to the nationwide data [6]. In accordance with the first approach (identifying oneself with one of the social classes) about half of the Vologda Oblast residents say they belong to the middle class. Moreover, in the scale “city/village → region → country” there is a reduction in the proportion of people who identify themselves as the middle class, and an increase in the proportion of the population, who think of themselves as the lower strata of the society (*tab. 6*). The indicators obtained on the basis of public opinion, as a rule, have high values, because a rather complex process of social identification is influenced by socio-economic conditions of life of an individual.

Table 6. Distribution of answers to the question: "What social strata do you belong to: in your city (village), in the region and nationwide?", 2014 (in % of the number of respondents)

Answer option	City/Village	Region	Country
Upper class	0.7	0.5	0.7
Class above middle	7.3	5.1	3.7
Middle class	55.8	50.9	41.7
Class below middle	20.1	23.9	24.8
Lower class	6.1	6.3	12.7
It is difficult to answer	10.1	13.2	16.5

Table 7. Dynamics of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast (% of the number of respondents)

Year	Indicator		
	City/Village	Region	Country
2010	13.7	11.6	8.5
2012	24.5	23.5	17.7
2013	28.6	26.5	20.7

Most people identify themselves not so much as the middle class in the classical sense, but rather as a middle economic stratum.

By increasing the number of indicators to three (self-identification, financial wealth and level of education (not lower than secondary vocational education), we calculate the size of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast: this figure for the locality is 29%, for the region – 27%; for the country – 21% (*tab. 7*). This means that in the direction from settlement to country there is a reduction in people's self-identification with the middle class. However, over the last five years this indicator within each territory has increased steadily, with the exception of 2010, when there was a sharp decline in self-identification of the population with the middle class in the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis.

Calculations according to the methodologies that take into account more narrow

criteria (savings, own car, education not lower than higher, etc.) show that the share of the middle class in the region does not exceed 3%. The main factor limiting the expansion of this category is a low level of income, which entails a low level of savings and provision with material goods, the inability to fully meet the needs of recreation and entertainment.

The middle class in the Vologda Oblast is more often represented by women (*tab. 8*). Age interval is 30–55 years. Education is essentially higher and postgraduate. The middle class, as a rule, is represented by family people, most of whom live in cities. The backbone of the middle class consists of "wealthy" people not in a position of authority, who have obtained secondary and higher professional education, and are satisfied with their lives.

In general, this "social portrait" coincides with the data of RAS Institute of Sociology, according to which a typical representative of the Russian middle class is "a young female

professional, who lives in a big city, has higher education, works in her professional specialty, is satisfied with her social position, income, career and increase of opportunities for entrepreneurship. However, the proportion of entrepreneurs among the Russian middle class is small (as well as in the whole country)” [15].

The socio-demographic structure of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast has undergone some changes for the period of 2008–2013 (*tab. 8*). First, the proportion of pensioners has increased significantly (15% in 2008; 23% in 2013), especially women of retirement age (twofold increase). Secondly, the share of people with higher education has increased 1.5 times; consequently, the representation of persons with secondary vocational and incomplete higher education has decreased (1.2 and 2.2 times).

In 2010 ISEDT RAS developed its own algorithm for identifying representatives of the middle class, including the following criteria:

- average monthly income equal to 2.5 subsistence levels per person (more than 20 thousand rubles for the Vologda Oblast in the sixth quarter of 2013);
- self-evaluation of income (“I have enough money to buy necessary food and clothing”, “the purchase of durable goods is not a problem”);
- level of education not lower than secondary vocational;
- job status (worker, specialist, head) [10, p. 51].

The composition of the middle class was determined with the use of cluster analysis by the method of k-means, excluding iteration. In compliance with all criteria out of the whole

Table 8. Socio-demographic characteristics of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast, 2008–2013 (% of the number of respondents)

Socio-demographic characteristics	Middle class			
	2008	2010	2012	2013
	21.1	13.7	24.5	28.6
Sex/age				
Men aged under 30	13.3	11.7	11.2	11.7
30–60	26.6	25.4	22.4	23.8
over 60	4.4	4.4	7.3	6.1
Women aged under 30	15.5	14.1	11.6	12.6
30–55	32.0	33.7	31.7	28.7
over 55	8.2	10.7	15.8	17.2
Education				
Secondary vocational (technical school, etc.)	40.5	55.6	48.3	33.3
Incomplete higher (not less than 3 years at college)	15.5	7.8	7.3	7.0
Higher	41.5	35.1	42.1	59.7
Postgraduate (second university degree, graduate school, etc.)	2.5	1.5	2.3	–
Type of settlement				
City	83.0	74.2	72.2	83.0
Village	17.1	25.9	27.8	17.0

array of the population a category was selected, amounting to about 10% of the population, broken down into three subgroups, similar in certain features that do not go beyond the bounds of the values of the criterion that separate one cluster from another. It resulted in the formation of cluster centers, which showed the dominating features of the representatives of each group (*tab. 9*).

The methodology allows us to define three strata in the structure of the middle class:

1. The upper stratum is the “organizers” that make up about 10% of the total number of the middle class. Representatives of this group have higher education, an income of about 35–65 thousand rubles per person, and they hold leadership positions. As a rule, these are entrepreneurs, men aged 30–60, who have their own business.

2. The most representative is the middle stratum – “intellectuals” (62%) with higher education, income of 25–35 thousand rubles, and high purchasing power. These include mainly highly qualified specialists of social sphere (doctors, teachers, journalists, etc.), engineering and technical personnel.

3. The lower stratum, comprising 28% of the population, is called “workers”. It includes people with secondary vocational education, income of 20–25 thousand rubles, engaged primarily in manufacturing or in the services sector.

In case of a sharp deterioration in the financial position the representatives of the middle class twice as often as the population in general state their willingness to work. In addition, the provision with material goods in this category is significantly higher than that among the general population: twice as much people have private plots and property, which they can dispose of, foreign-made cars, and savings. The middle class is characterized by a higher cultural capital: they visit museums, exhibitions, and theatres 2–3 times more often. They do sports regularly; they keep to a balanced diet and go on vacation abroad 2 times more often.

As we can see from table 9, there has been a reduction in the representation of the upper stratum of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast under the impact of the global financial and economic crisis (in 2008 – 19%;

Table 9. Number of strata of the middle class and their cluster centers in the Vologda Oblast, 2008–2013

Criterion	Strata of the middle class		
	Lower stratum, “workers”: 2008 – 33%; 2010 – 19,8%; 2013 – 28,2%	Middle stratum, “intellectuals”: 2008 – 48%; 2010 – 69,3%; 2013 – 61,6%	Upper stratum, “organizers”: 2008 – 19%; 2010 – 10,9%; 2013 – 10,2%
1. Average monthly income per person, rub.	20 – 25 thousand	25 – 35 thousand	35 – 65 thousand
2. Assessment of their own income	I have enough money to buy necessary food and clothing	Purchase of durable goods is not a problem	Purchase of durable goods is not a problem
3. Level of education	Secondary vocational	Higher	Higher
4. Job status	Worker	Specialist	Head

in 2013 – 10%), an increase in the number of representatives of the stratum of “intellectuals” (in 2008 – 48%; in 2013 – 62%), with a simultaneous sharp reduction in the number of “workers” (from 33% in 2008 to 20% in 2010) and its subsequent growth in the post-crisis stage (up to 28% in 2013).

Proceeding from the above understanding of the category “middle class”, the financial wellbeing of individuals who constitute the middle class should be sufficient to satisfy their vital needs; thus, we have added financial ability to buy food and pay for services to the list of criteria for estimating the size of the middle class. However, the inclusion of these criteria has not significantly changed the internal structure of the middle class in the Vologda Oblast.

Consequently, the use of a larger number of criteria reduces considerably the representation of the middle class in the region – from 30% when using three parameters to 0.1% if the number of parameters is increased to six.

Socio-economic differentiation violates the homogeneity of the middle class, which is divided into separate subclasses depending on the financial level and social status of individuals. Experts often associate the high level of inequality with greater opportunities for social mobility. In this regard, it is necessary to assess the scale of the middle class “in conjunction with the indicators of social mobility, i.e. with opportunities of transition from one class to another. The reduction of the penetrability of social boundaries is one of the primary reasons for deterioration of the position of the middle class, because otherwise, by shrinking, it is not able to reproduce at the expense of the influx of the poor strata of population” [6, p. 19-28].

In 2013–2014 ISEDT RAS carried out a study of social stratification and social mobility of the population in the Northwestern Federal District⁴; its results show that the level of mobility of the entire population three times exceeds that of the mobility of the category related to the middle class (*fig. 2*).

⁴ The study was conducted on the basis of the survey of the population in the NWFED regions in the second quarter of 2013. The volume of sample was 5113 people.

The total coefficient of mobility and the resulting indicators were calculated by the question: “Mark the changes in your social status in the society” (it became higher/lower, it did not change). The system of the following indicators was used for measuring social mobility:

1. The general coefficient of mobility is equal to the ratio of the number of persons who made transitions to the total number of population:

$$Q_0 = n_0 / N_0 * 100\%.$$

2. The indicator of upward mobility is equal to the share of people, who make transitions with the rise of their social status:

$$V_p = \sum \sum N_{ij} / N_0; (i < j).$$

3. The indicator of downward mobility is equal to the share of people, who made transitions with the decrease of their social status:

$$V_n = \sum \sum N_{ij} / N_0; (i > j).$$

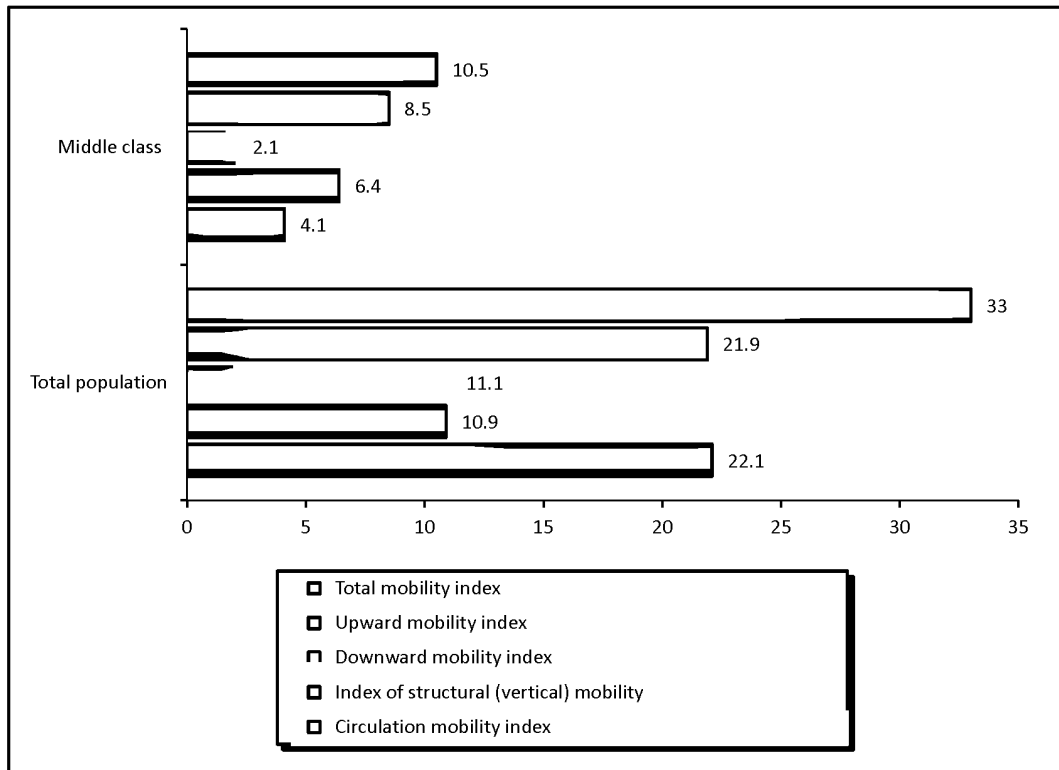
4. The indicator of structural (vertical) mobility is equal to the difference between the rates of upward and downward mobility:

$$C_v = V_p - V_n.$$

5. The coefficient of exchange mobility is equal to the difference between the total coefficient of mobility and the coefficient of structural (vertical) mobility:

$$P_0 = Q_0 - C_v.$$

Figure 2. Indices of social mobility of the Vologda Oblast population



In general, it should be noted that social mobility of the Vologda Oblast population is 33% ,which is on average by 5–10% lower than in most regions of the NWFd (the Republic of Karelia is the leader – 47%). It is most likely that the level of social status, which the middle class in the Vologda Oblast has reached, is at the moment the upper limit, and it is difficult to reach beyond it. In this case, it would be more reasonable to talk about mobility within the middle class – from its upper to lower groups and vice versa. Exchange mobility shows the degree of openness of the group – the smaller the mobility, the more closed the group and it is difficult to enter it [4, pp. 205-212].

This indicator in the strata of the middle class is only 4%, which proves that the transfer to this group is difficult. This raises concerns in relation to the reproduction of the middle class and further reduction in its number.

We can conclude from the above that the task to increase the share of the middle class up to 65% set out in the Strategy for socio-economic development of the Vologda Oblast for the period up to 2020 [14] is difficult to accomplish. In order to increase the penetrability of the middle class and enhance social mobility, it is necessary first of all to reduce the impact of factors that hamper the movement of people from lower

to higher strata. One of the main “brakes” in the growth of the middle class is the low level of income, which reduces the availability of different goods and makes it difficult to meet the demands of individuals.

Besides, a representative of the middle class should have a high level of cultural capital, active cultural leisure; he/she should advocate certain socio-political positions, have motivation to achieve definite goals, possess individual freedom, etc. The impact of restrictive factors leads to the fact that the means of social mobility work only for wealthy or very gifted people; as for the rest of the population, the level of actual wealth and, consequently, the possibility of transition to a higher social stratum reduces.

Thus, the middle class in Russia and, in particular, in the Northwestern Federal District, has not been formed properly. However, the social structure of the territorial community has a group of people (about 29%) that meets certain requirements, allowing us to refer them to the middle class, although it is very heterogeneous; nevertheless, under certain conditions it can become the basis for the formation of a strong middle class.

To distinguish the category of “middle class” in the classical sense, Russia should, first of all, overcome a large gap between the rich and the poor. This can be achieved by carrying out the following activities in the field of social policy:

- reduction of the gap between extremely low and extremely high incomes;
- increase of the real disposable income and the minimum wage;
- increase of the subsistence level up to the value of the real consumer basket;

- development of national mechanisms for regulation of prices for low-end apartments and increase of the availability of mortgage for all segments of population;

- introduction of progressive taxation.

However, it is not enough just to increase incomes; it is necessary to provide access to quality vocational education, and to strengthen small and medium business. The latter can be done through the implementation of the following measures: redistribution of net product by introducing a maximum (marginal) rate of return; introduction of the standard for breaking down the growth of net income from the business into the growth of wages and growth of profit; establishment of the legal foundations for remuneration, including through the establishment of social standards of remuneration of workers of basic professions in tariff agreements and collective agreements, etc. [3]. Social and labor mobility is essential in the formation of the middle class. However, its enhancement is impeded by the underdeveloped housing market, flaws in the system of housing loans and pension system (absence of large pension capital), the institute of registration, etc. In order to solve these problems, it is necessary to reduce barriers to mobility: to improve the efficiency of the educational system, to diversify production, to optimize the budget sector, to enhance retirement savings, to develop the institutions of civil society, i.e. to conduct an effective socio-economic policy. Only then the people from lower strata will have an opportunity to “join” the middle class, and the people belonging to the middle stratum will be able to become a full-fledged middle class.

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