

# Far Eastern border of Russia: socio-economic characteristics and orientations of the population (case study of the Republic of Buryatia)

## Extremo Oriente de la frontera Rusa: características socioeconómicas y orientaciones de la población (Estudio de caso de la República de Buriatia)

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#### ABSTRACT:

The article studies the economic and social development of the frontier region of Russia – the Republic of Buryatia. Authors analyze the indicators of socio-demographic and socio-economic aspects of population of Buryatia based on statistical data. Special attention is given to individual social expectations of the republic's inhabitants: attitude towards job, ideas about a "good life", near-term plans and long-term aspirations. As the research methods, the authors use economic and statistical analysis and sociological survey (sample of 300 persons). The current socio-economic conditions in the region speak for a tense situation on labor market, especially in rural areas. Low incomes of the population emphasize the importance of employment as a source of means of subsistence, and social objectives and near-term plans of the inhabitants of the region are mainly connected with ensuring financial independence and wellbeing, while family and moral values are secondary. The results of the survey help define the most urgent socio-economic problems of the region, which can be used for Buryatia's development forecasting and searching for the growth points for strategic planning.

**Keywords:** regional development, Republic of Buryatia, standard and quality of life, social wellbeing, value orientations

#### RESUMEN:

El artículo estudia el desarrollo económico y social de la región fronteriza de Rusia, la República de Buriatia. Los autores analizan los indicadores de los aspectos sociodemográficos y socioeconómicos de la población de Buriatia en base a datos estadísticos. Se presta especial atención a las expectativas sociales individuales de los habitantes de la república: actitud hacia el trabajo, ideas sobre una "buena vida", planes a corto plazo y aspiraciones a largo plazo. Como métodos de investigación, los autores utilizan el análisis económico y estadístico y la encuesta sociológica (muestra de 300 personas). Las condiciones socioeconómicas actuales en la región hablan de una situación tensa en el mercado laboral, especialmente en las zonas rurales. Los bajos ingresos de la población enfatizan la importancia del empleo como fuente de medios de subsistencia, y los objetivos sociales y los planes a corto plazo de los habitantes de la región están relacionados principalmente con garantizar la independencia financiera y el bienestar, mientras que los valores familiares y morales son secundarios. Los resultados de la encuesta ayudan a definir los problemas socioeconómicos más urgentes de la región, que pueden utilizarse para el pronóstico del desarrollo de Buriatia y la búsqueda de los puntos de crecimiento para la planificación estratégica.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo regional, República de Buriatia, nivel y calidad de vida, bienestar social, orientaciones de valor

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, in the context of the transformation of modern Russian society, the task of determining the priorities of the economic and social development of the regions is coming to the fore. This is largely due to the fact that the regional specificity of our country has its own unique features in each territorial community. Often there are situations when it is difficult to give detailed, scientifically sound recommendations and forecasts of future development for a particular region from the federal center. All this facts are fully applied to the Republic of Buryatia.

The Republic of Buryatia is a subsidized region, which receives gratuitous revenues from federal budget for regional budget execution. As well as many other regions of Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Buryatia has a number of unfavorable social trends and characteristics:

- negative changes in the level and quality of life of the population (decrease in real incomes, rising prices for goods and services, etc.);
- deterioration of the state of social infrastructure (exacerbation of housing and material problems, reduced opportunities for access to free high-quality medical care, inaccessibility of the services of preschool education institutions for many families, etc.);
- the aggravation of the problems of labor employment and the wide distribution of secondary employment as one of the sources of additional income;
- increased differentiation of the population and adverse changes in the social structure of society.

It is important to focus on the fact that all emerging problems are directly embedded in the regional context. In other words, there is a kind of regionalization of the negative social processes noted by us above, which, superimposed on geopolitical, economic and sociocultural features, acquire an originality and regional flavor (Tsyrenov, 2019 ). All this predetermines the need to take into account regional characteristics in solving common problems for the country.

The research object is the Republic of Buryatia. The purpose of the research is to reveal the problems of socio-economic development and current social objectives of Buryatia's inhabitants. The authors are going to give special attention to the challenges and problems of socio-economic development of Buryatia, which affect the citizens' attitude towards their work, their near-term plans and long-term aspirations, namely, the earning yields of companies in different sectors, the unemployment rate, incomes of the population, living standards and migration.

## 2. Methodology

The Republic of Buryatia, as the border region of Russia, has close ties with neighboring Mongolia. Moreover, the Buryats living in the Russian Federation are akin to the Mongols ethnic group. The ethnocivilizational proximity of the Buryats with the Mongols determines close cultural contacts between our two countries, which emphasizes the importance of the republic for the country as a whole and for Russian international relations (Litvinova, 2017). A number of studies by Russian authors have been devoted to the ethnocivilizational proximity of the Buryats of Russia to neighboring Mongolia (Litvinova & Zhelezniakov, 2019).

The identification of the priorities of the socio-economic development of the Republic of Buryatia requires, first of all, analysis and assessment of the dynamics of demographic processes. Being the main productive force of society, a person is the creator of all social wealth, therefore, the size and composition of the population, other demographic characteristics act as the main factors affecting the possibility of further social and economic development.

As basic methods, we used statistics data analysis, a secondary sociological analysis of research results obtained previously by other authors. We also conducted sociological survey in Autumn 2019 to reveal social attitudes of Buryatia's inhabitants (the sample of 300 people). It was devoted to the problem of employment and attitude to work, the consequences of economic transformations on social well-being and expectations of residents of the Republic of Buryatia. The questionnaire was aimed at defining social objectives of the citizens, their subjective attitude towards their job, ideas about a "good life", near-term plans and long-term aspirations.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Socio-economic situation in the region

Let us analyze the main demographic characteristics. Let's start with the total population (see table. 1).

**Table 1**  
The total population of the Republic of Buryatia in 2013-2017

Total population	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	971 810	973 860	978 495	982 284	984 134

Average resident population for the year, 2019

The presented data show that in the Republic of Buryatia the population is growing year by year, there is a positive demographic situation. At the same time, an increase does not mean anything for the total population indicator. It is important to identify why we see a general population growth. The total population growth is due to natural growth (the ratio between the number of births and deaths) and migration growth (the ratio between the number of arrivals and departures).

Information on migration growth in Buryatia is presented in table 2.

**Table 2**  
General results of population migration  
in the Republic of Buryatia in 2013-2017

Migration increase (+) / decrease (-) (people)	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
		-4022	-2079	-2675	-3706

Migration growth (decrease) in the population, absolute data , 2019

Based on the data in table 2 it can be concluded that in the Republic of Buryatia there is a migration loss of the population. The migration outflow is very impressive, in other words, this region is not migratory attractive, despite the implementation of major investment projects in them, for example, the economic zone of the tourist-recreational type "Baikal Harbor".

Thus, on the one hand, we have a continuing migration outflow of the population in Buryatia; on the other hand, there is a positive demographic dynamic. Accordingly, this is ensured by natural population growth (see table 3).

**Table 3**  
Natural population growth in the  
Republic of Buryatia in 2013-2017

Republic of Buryatia	Natural increase (+) / decrease (-) (people)				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	+5629	+5911	+5795	+5063	+3803

Natural movement of the population of the Russian Federation data , 2019

In general, the information in table 3 demonstrates that the natural growth is stably positive, but there is a slight slowdown in its pace. In other words, there is a stable excess of the number of births over the number of deaths, which is also confirmed by objectively high birth rates (Demographic Yearbook of Russia , 2018 ), and subjectively high reproductive attitudes (Fedotova, 2009), recorded by the results of sociological studies (Vinokurova & others, 2017; Lygdenova & Dashinamzhilov, 2019). What explains this, how can this be interpreted?

We believe that regional specifics in the context of a high birth rate are determined by social factors at the macro and micro levels. These include the entry into the active reproductive age of numerous generations of the 1980s birth, ethnic characteristics, persisting national customs and traditions in the field of family-domestic relations. In addition, processes in the sphere of economy, labor and employment, and the development of social infrastructure have an impact on demographic behavior, including reproductive behavior (Vinokurova & others, 2018).

One of the important factors affecting the implementation of reproductive attitudes is the financial situation. More or less objectively judge the financial situation of the population of the Republic of Buryatia can be based on the socio-economic indicators of their budgets (see table 4).

**Table 4**  
Key socio-economic indicators of household  
budgets Republic of Buryatia for 2016

Indicator	Value
Monthly average per capita cash income, rub.	25 165
Monthly average per capita consumer spending, rub.	18 835
The share of monthly consumer spending on food, %	40,8

Regions of Russia. Socio-economic indicators, 2018

Presented in the table 4 data show that a significant portion of household cash income is spent on food. In other words, almost all families are unable to make any savings due to low incomes. In terms of income among all the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, Buryatia is in 45th place (Per capita cash income of the population , 2017 ). It should be added that in Buryatia, the share of borrowers (people with loans) among the adult population is approaching 100% (Terentyev, 2018).

In addition, on the basis of statistical data, it can be concluded that in most households in the republic, a significant part of the cost is food. As you know, the higher the share of the cost of food in the family budget,

the lower its welfare. Consequently, a significant number of families living in Buryatia are characterized by a low standard of living, i.e. material and economic problems are highlighted (Bashkueva, 2015).

For residents of Buryatia, problems related to the difficult financial situation, especially in the countryside (Zhalsanova, 2016), the search for decent work, the restriction of access to quality medical care, and the services of children's educational institutions are relevant (Zhambalova, 2012). The results of sociological studies of recent years (Manzanova, 2011), conducted in the regions we are considering, indicate the presence of "4B syndrome" in the minds of people: poverty (lack of money), unemployment, lawlessness (crime, drug addiction, alcoholism), diseases (state of health, level and quality of medical care) (Sadykova & Bilgaev, 2016).

### 3.2. Social objectives of the inhabitants of the Republic of Buryatia

We'll analyze the results of a sociological survey conducted in autumn 2019.

The conducted research has revealed a significant number of non-working population in the region. One fifth of the respondents have recognized they didn't have a paid job. A significant part of the respondents were pensioners and also did not work (19 %). The research results prove the tense situation on the labor market of the Republic of Buryatia (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
Distribution of answers to the question  
"Are you currently employed?"

Values	Number of respondents	%
Total	300	100%
1. Yes, I have a full-time job	150	50%
2. Yes, I have a full-time seasonal work	10	3,3%
3. I have a part-time hourly paid job	18	6 %
4. No	59	19,7%
5. I am a pensioner	57	19,0
6. No answer	6	2%

Taking into account a tense situation on the regional labor market, we believe it's reasonable to detect the citizens' attitude towards their work (Table 6). The subjective evaluation of "work" in the offered formulations has demonstrated that the respondents mainly consider their work as a source of means of subsistence (53.3%) and as an opportunity to approve themselves and their skills (43%). The statement "my job is an ungracious duty; I wouldn't work if I could" was the least popular (5.3%). But in each variant, there are the supporters of the opposed statements, different from the opinions of the majority.

**Table 6**  
Distribution of answers to the question "What does your job mean for you? To what extent do you agree with the following statements?"

My job is...	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Partly agree, partly disagree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree	Hard to say	I don't work	No answer	Total
1. the opportunity to approve myself and my skills	43%	21 %	12,67%	1,67%	2%	2,67%	15,67%	1,33%	100%
2. a source of means of subsistence	53,33%	18,67%	9,33%	1,67%	1,33%	0,67%	14,67%	0,33%	100%
3. an opportunity	23,33%	25%	24,67%	4,67%	3,33%	1,67%	16%	1,33%	100%

to communicate									
4. a way to earn social approval and recognition	19,33%	17,67%	22%	7,33%	9,33%	6%	16,33%	2%	100%
5. an ungracious duty; I wouldn't work if I could	5,33%	4,33%	12%	14,33%	38,67%	6%	17%	2,33%	100%
6. I have plenty of free time after work	9,33%	8,67%	21,67%	11,67%	23%	4%	19,67%	2%	100%

The analysis of the citizens' answers to the question "What does the term "a good life" mean for you?" helps define the key life objectives of the inhabitants of the republic (Table 7). We see that the most important one is financial independence, wellbeing (49.7%), then goes health (33.7%), family and children (23.3%). Consequently, we see that material issues prevail over other primary needs.

**Table 7**

Distribution of answers to the question  
"What does the term "a good life" mean for you?"

Values	Number of objects	%
1. Financial independence, wealth	149	49,67%
2. Health	101	33,67%
3. Family, children	70	23,33%
4. Everything is good in the family	50	16,67%
5. Work	30	10%
6. independence, stability	23	7,67%
7. stability	22	7,33%
8. so that the apartment is	15	5%
9. good relations between people	15	5%
10. travel opportunity	12	4%
11. achieve your goals, live the life you really want	4	1,33%
12. many children	3	1%
13. live in pleasure	2	0,67%
14. no answer	36	12,00%

The analysis of the current reforms in Russia and their impact on the respondents and their families has shown that most respondents have a neutral attitude towards the reforms, i.e. they don't think they or their families have benefited or lost in the results of the reforms, or have no answer (Table 8). The survey proves the absence of any significant total results of current reforms; or the negative and positive sides of the reforms have compensated each other, or the reforms are permanently unfinished.

**Table 8**  
Distribution of answers to the question "Do you think you or your family has benefited or lost in the result of the reforms in Russia?"

<b>Values</b>	<b>Number of objects</b>	<b>%</b>
I and my family have only benefited	20	6,67%
We have neither benefited, nor lost	133	44,33%
I and my family have only lost	33	11,00%
Hard to say	106	35,33%
No answer	8	2,67%
Total	300	100.00%

With regard to the near-time plans of the citizens, the survey shows that people are mostly interested in solving the problems of wellbeing, profession, employment, and are concerned about the future of their children, grandchildren, etc. (Table 9).

**Table 9**  
Distribution of answers to the question "What are your near-time plans?"

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Number of objects</b>	<b>%</b>
1. No answer	65	21,67%
2. Find a good job for the soul	43	14,33%
3. Build, repair a house, buy an apartment	39	13%
4. Get a diploma, education	31	10,33%
5. Work further	18	6%
6. Learn and arrange children	17	5,67%
7. To go to rest somewhere, to go to another city	16	5,33%
8. Helping grandchildren and children	14	4,67%
9. No plans	14	4,67%
10. See a good future	10	3,33%
11. Move to a city, another city	9	3%
12. Birth of a child	8	2,67%
13. Career growth	7	2,33%
14. Live your life further	6	2%
15. Go to work	5	1,67%
16. Start a business, business development	4	1,33%
17. Serve in the army	4	1,33%
18. Retirement	4	1,33%

19. Buy a car	3	1%
20. Get rich	3	1%
21. Buy office equipment, household appliances	3	1%
22. Improving Health	2	0,67%
23. Start a subsidiary farm	1	0,33%

The question "What are you dreaming about?" has demonstrated the main wishes and aspirations of the respondents (Table 10). The most popular is the answer "health for me, my family and children" (23%), the next variant, "more money, wellbeing" (19.7%), has proved the interest of the respondents in the improvement of their financial standing; the third variant is altruistic – "good life for everyone in the world, peace" (13%); the following answers are "wellbeing" (9.7%), "stability" (8%), "a flat or a house" (6.3%), "traveling" (5.3%), "marriage, children" (4.3%), "a good job" (3.3%), etc.

**Table 10**  
Distribution of answers to the question  
"What are you dreaming about?"

Values	Number of objects	%
1. Health, yourself and your loved ones and children	69	23%
2. More money, wealth	59	19,67%
3. No answer	57	19%
4. All people lived well, peace on earth	39	13%
5. Well-being	29	9,67%
6. Stability	24	8%
7. Apartment, house	19	6,33%
8. Travel	16	5,33%
9. Work, well-paid job	13	4,33%
10. Marry, children	13	4,33%
11. Find a good job	10	3,33%
12. To learn children	6	2%
13. Settle with a loan	6	2%
14. Livestock	3	1%
15. Decrease in credit rates in banks	1	0,33%
16. Decrease in prices for housing and communal services	1	0,33%

## 4. Conclusions

In general, we can conclude that the general trends characteristic of Russian society, in the context of socio-economic relations and specific regional features, have an ambiguous effect on the lives of people living in the Republic of Buryatia. On the one hand, there is a stratification of the population according to the level of well-being, a sharper differentiation of incomes is observed, as compared to similar all-Russian indicators. This, in turn, leads to increased migration sentiment, negatively affects social well-being.

Having analyzed the results of the sociological survey, we can conclude that:

First, the current socio-economic state in the region demonstrates the tense situation on the regional labor market, especially in rural areas. It is proved by the six-time difference between the indexes of the total and the registered unemployment rates.

Second, due to low incomes, the citizens consider their work mainly as a source of means of subsistence; the near-time plans and aspirations are usually connected with the provision of financial independence and wellbeing, while family and moral values are secondary. Besides, personal health and health of family-members is also among the priority values.

The search for the growth points, based on the differentiated approach to each region of the Russian Federation, is usually called one of the key tasks of regional strategic management. Undoubtedly, there are such growth points in the Republic of Buryatia; there are upcoming sectors of the economy, such as forestry and woodworking industry, mineral production, agriculture, electrical energy industry, aircraft industry, tourism. At the same time, strategic use of these advantages is hampered by the current migration outflow of the population from rural areas to cities, and from the republic to other regions, which develop more dynamically.

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