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## **Employment of University Graduates Across the Post-soviet Space: Problems and Solutions (The Example of Kazakhstan)**

**Valentina Vladimirovna Fursova<sup>1</sup>, Alla Yuriyevna Shakirova<sup>2</sup>  
Tatyana Nikolaevna Nikitina<sup>3</sup>,  
Tatyana Anatolevna Spirchagova<sup>4</sup>, Machpal Syzdykova<sup>5</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The article analyzes the prospects of work search by the graduates of higher educational institutions across the post-Soviet space using the example of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Currently, the problem of the employment selection strategy among the graduates of the post-Soviet space countries remains as a priority. Graduated experts at the labor market experience a complex of institutional problems: a small number of jobs, bureaucratization, inadequate knowledge for vacant posts, the lack of infrastructure at higher education institutions for the interaction with enterprises. All this leads to the dissatisfaction of specialists with their professional and social status, to the choice of a work place which does not correspond an acquired specialty, or to the use of personal ties of their family to the detriment of their own desires and qualifications, and, consequently, to the reproduction of disproportions in the economy. As a research in the field of economic sociology, the article relies on conflictological and structural-functional paradigms. A questionnaire is used to reveal the research topic. The objectives of the study are the following ones: the problems of graduate employment and the ways of their solution in Kazakhstan. The result of the conducted research showed that the successful adaptation of graduates at the labor market makes it necessary to develop and introduce effective educational programs in the teaching process, including practical-oriented disciplines that give the opportunity to obtain knowledge required by employers. The students of senior courses should study practical courses, preferably on practice bases, they should actively participate in the development and the implementation of specialized projects, grants, in scientific competitions, conferences, which will allow them to develop creative thinking, to understand the content of future profession, to master the basic theoretical and practical material.

**Keywords:** Graduates, Economics, Labor market, Employment, Higher education institutions.

<sup>1</sup> Kazan Federal University, Candidate of sociological sciences, assistant professor of department of general and ethnic sociology. E-mail: [vafursova@yandex.ru](mailto:vafursova@yandex.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Kazan Federal University, Candidate of historical sciences, assistant professor of department of general and ethnic sociology. E-mail: [alla-shakirova@mail.ru](mailto:alla-shakirova@mail.ru)

<sup>3</sup> Kazan Federal University, Candidate of sociological sciences, assistant professor of department of general and ethnic sociology. E-mail: [nita101@mail.ru](mailto:nita101@mail.ru)

<sup>4</sup> Kazan Federal University, Candidate of philological sciences, assistant professor of department of the theory and practice of electronic. E-mail: [1114.69@mail.ru](mailto:1114.69@mail.ru)

<sup>5</sup> Kazan Federal University, Graduate student of department of general and ethnic sociology.

## **Introduction**

Professional mobility of labor resources, in particular, among the graduates of universities, is observed all over the world, including the countries which were the part of the Soviet Union. Despite the differences in the social, political and economic order of the CIS states, the social essence of the graduates' professional mobility is not fundamentally different, like its causes and consequences, to which it leads. Therefore, the study of professional mobility social problems among the experts in the context of different social-economic, political and legal systems of modern society has great theoretical and practical significance. The graduates of universities that have received the degrees in education (a bachelor, a master, an expert) make the part of the labor force, "... the education of which requires higher costs, the production of which costs more time and which therefore has a higher cost than a simple workforce" (Marx & Engels, 1960: 208-209).

The research topic is at the junction of a number of topical problems of modern society, such as population employment, the deviations in the youth environment and the management of youth policy. The research interest in the stated problem is also conditioned to the fact that Kazakhstan is one of the first countries in the post-Soviet space, and the first in the Asian region that adopted the European education system and joined the Bologna process. The government documents of the republic emphasize the role of youth in the formation of New Kazakhstan of the 21st century: developed, competitive and respected by the world community. The implementation of the youth policy is directly related to the country innovations and its intellectual competition.

The issues of professional mobility and the employment of young people are studied by foreign and Russian experts in the field of sociological, economic, pedagogical, and psychological scientific directions.

The conceptual framework is represented by the scientific research of the labor sphere by the labor founders of economic science and domestic scientists - Karl Marx, V. Radaev, V. Kostakov. The theoretical bases of the social problem study caused by the absence of workplaces corresponding to the received education, are incorporated in the works of employment theory classics written by A. Smith, D. Ricardo, J. Mile, J. Keynes, P. Samuelson and F. Hayek. In the works written by T. Parsons and N. Smelser economic action is viewed as a kind of social element, objectively conditioned by society.

A well-known British sociologist J. Goldthorpe, analyzing the labor market, introduces the concept of "labor situation" and defines it as a complex of social relations in which "a person is involved in work through his position in the division of labor" (Goldthorpe, 2009: 214).

The manifestation of the market situation "through the combination of material rewards and life chances" was considered by R. Erickson (2012: 176). Schultz (1993) substantiated the conditionality of national education system development, of its institutionalized forms, by the accumulation of human capital.

Mass expert sociological surveys conducted by Russian researchers D.V. Didenko and G.A. Klucherev in 2009-2011 showed that the model of not overtaking but catching up education characterized by a weak connection with enterprises - potential employers - is implemented in 90% of higher education institutions (2013: 183, 198).

They studied the mechanisms of interaction between the employers and the graduates of higher education institutions in the qualitative strategy (semi-structured interviews with employers and the focus groups with recent graduates), using the example of Estonia (Saar et al., 2013).

In 2016 the scholars of the Kazan University studied the gender aspect of expert employment at the industries with harmful and dangerous working conditions (Shakirova, 2016).

The article is devoted to the study of the factors contributing to / hindering the employment of young experts who graduated from higher education institutions of Kazakhstan and the prospects of national employment policy.

## **Methods**

In 2016, the questionnaire survey was performed among the graduates who graduated from Kazakhstan universities. The aim of the study was to study the problems faced by the graduates of universities. The survey was conducted with the participation of employment centers of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The participants of the study were 400 young experts (at the age of 22-29 years). The gender distribution is the following one: 200 girls and 200 young men. By confessional affiliation, the respondents were distributed as follows: Islam (326), Orthodoxy (74).

The participants were offered the questionnaire, including open and closed questions. The authors of the article asked the following questions: What are the difficulties faced by graduates at the labor market? What are the ways of their looking for a job according to their specialty? What is a determinant when a place of work is chosen? Did they receive an idea of their future specialty and specific activities at their universities? Do graduates assess their professional training highly?

## **Results and discussion**

The International Labor Organization defines the problem of youth unemployment in the world at the "crisis level". According to the ILO, about 13% or about 75 million people at the age of 15 - 24 are unemployed all over the world. The organization report indicates that 13% of young people in the world are unemployed ones. The problem of youth unemployment in the countries of the post-Soviet space is one of the most urgent ones (RESCUE, 2017).

The problem of youth unemployment in the Republic of Kazakhstan is being solved within the framework of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Youth Policy", the Concept of Youth Policy until 2020. Currently, about 76 socially significant projects are being implemented in the sphere of youth policy. "Rural youth", "To the village with a diploma!", "Youth is reserve staff", "Youth is to the Fatherland" and "Youth practice", "The employment - 2020" are among them. State regulation in the sphere of youth employment is integrated with the issues of patriotic upbringing, people's spirituality and the strengthening of faith in the future (Nikitina et al., 2016: 109). Youth is a strategic resource of the society. Governments try to solve the problem of employment among the country young potential at a state level.

The transition of higher education in Kazakhstan to the Bologna system and the introduction of world educational standards in 2010, first of all, solves the problem of higher education correspondence to the realities of the world economic system. But it is early to talk about the adaptation of graduates to market conditions, 64 percent note the lack of basic knowledge for the work within market conditions. When respondents were asked about the impact of gender influence on employment, the majority of respondents in the range of 51-62 percent answered about the absence of a prejudice during the process of hiring. The next question concerned the knowledge required for the employment within the market economy sector.

The graduated youth of the post-Soviet space reveals the problem that is characteristic of the former CIS countries. On the one hand, young people constitute the majority of the able-bodied population at the modern labor market of Kazakhstan. Obviously, this age group is socially responsible for the future of the country. Young people are not only labor potential, they are an active political subject, the subject of social transformations. At the same time, despite the responsibility faced by youth, this is the most vulnerable group, which requires special attention on the part of state structures and society.

Is it possible to find a job after graduation? The experience of the respondents shows that the majority is employed according to the specialty with a great difficulty, or, with considerable effort.

During the determination of the problems associated with the lack of work, 24% of respondents indicate the lack of work experience and, therefore, the difficulties in work obtaining, 11% of respondents experiences negative emotions associated with the risk of losing their jobs, 23% noted the high cost of food and utilities, 10% of respondents indicated the shortage of money for quality treatment, 32% of respondents consider their wages are low.

The majority of university graduates (78%) noted a high degree of discomfort during the probationary period of employment, insecurity and the absence of care on the part of management bodies, the uncertainty about the future, housing problems, weak housing contracts, the dissatisfaction with housing.

**Table 1.** The Reasons Preventing the Employment of Young People of Kyzylorda

	<b>Kyzylorda</b>	<b>Aral</b>	<b>Casaly</b>	<b>Karmakshy</b>	<b>Zhalagash</b>	<b>Syrdarya</b>	<b>Shiely</b>	<b>Zhanakorgan</b>
Absence of jobs in a region	40%	80%	30%	70%	85%	50%	30%	80%
Bribery from employers, corruption	49%	45%	70%	35%	60%	35%	50%	80%
Lack of work experience	34%	30%	10%	40%	35%	40%	50%	80%
Discrepancy between knowledge and profession requirements	14%	40%	15%	30%	5%	30%	5%	-
Low competitiveness among young experts at labor market	9%	5%	10%	-	35%	-	10%	20%
Ethnic prejudices	9%	-	-	5%	10%	-	5%	-
Necessity of caring for a child	2%	10%	-	-	5%	5%	10%	-

The lack of work experience negatively affects the employment of graduates. Most of the professions presuppose the availability of practical skills rather than theoretical knowledge (Caprile, 2007: 2).

The desire of graduates to work according to the specialty is reflected in the following indicators. "Yes" - (65.4%), "no" - (28.9%), "I do not think about it" - (5.7%). Among the graduates there was the category of those who did not want to work according to the specialty. The reasons of such a practice are related both to external events concerning the profession, and to the internal qualities of a personality. The gender differences should be emphasized particularly when you answer to this question. Young men named the lack of practical knowledge, the lack of work experience (33.3%), and low wages (26.7%) were the reasons for the unwillingness to work according to the specialty. The girls answered that the lack of a desire to find a job according to the specialty depends on the availability of job opportunities (36.4%), and also if there is no interest in a chosen profession (27.3%).

According to the results of the survey "Assess your ability to work" in order to determine the ways young people characterize their future, the majority of respondents (88%) answered that they are confident in their labor abilities. Accordingly, 5% showed uncertainty about their abilities.

In most cases, the statistics does not fully reflect the state of young men at the labor market. Employment services can show only the part of the supply and demand for labor. Thus, not all data about hidden unemployment are disclosed fully. The problem of rural youth migration to cities is acute for Kazakhstan. According to statistics, the number of young people who moved from villages to cities increased by 2.5 times as compared to last year (Ministry of national economy, 2016).

In 2014, out of the total number of people who performed internal relocations, the share of young people was 41.4%. Naturally, the main reason of young people migration to a city is education and job search (Sidirovich, 2014: 104).

Kazakhstan is represented by towns and a large number of rural settlements. It should be noted that unemployment in rural areas is low, and 46.2% of graduates are ready to go and work in the countryside immediately after graduation.

The current situation at the labor market activates the activity of young people for the search of work, while many are guided by the use of personal ties and contacts. 15.8 percent use the media channels (radio and television, newspapers) to find work. 13.5 percent attend job fairs and a career forum. Only 11.2 percent turn to employment agencies and state employment services. The work of employment services is conducted jointly with educational institutions,

future specialists are aware of joint activities, as evidenced by the figures: 90% of young men and 91.2% of girls will turn to employment services in a case of emergency.

The willingness to find a less paid job suggests a low level of claims and a low motivation to achievement. Unfortunately, the graduates of higher educational institutions are in professional stratification at the border of the precariat class like everyone in many post-Soviet countries. This is evidenced by the following figures: there are 77.5% of young men and 83.9% of girls willing to work for less paid jobs.

## **Conclusion**

The obtained results allowed us to formulate the following conclusions:

1. Universities do not prepare students for future work in a proper measure.
2. Social well-being and satisfaction with life are higher in large settlements.
3. Gender does not affect the employment process.
4. The graduates of higher educational institutions are not ready to start working in the current conditions of the labor market, experience a complete lack of actual skills and abilities.
5. The bulk of graduates has great objective difficulties during employment and they can find work only due to the social relations of their parents.
6. Over half of the graduates of the humanitarian profiles wish to work according to the acquired specialty.
7. Actively moving to a city, rural youth devalues the labor market in rural areas although the return to auls provides not only with housing, but also the opportunity for career growth.
8. Young people value their knowledge at a high level and they are firmly convinced of their abilities to work.
9. The services of employment centers are used by a small number of university graduates. The reason is that employment centers are a very inefficient model in the employment system and graduates solve their problems on their own.

Analyzing the problems of graduate employment using the example of Kazakhstan, we determined the ways of this problem solution, which may be adequate for all countries of the post-Soviet space. The ways of problem solution:

The development of work program sections within disciplines should be coordinated with potential employers who are well aware of the main needs in modern production and are guided in the technical and technological base of the modern labor market. During the training of students, it is necessary to strengthen the development of practical skills and specific skills, which are aimed strictly at a job search and self-employment.

Also, a rational step in an educational program should be represented by the strengthening of self-presentation and self-promotion skills during an interview and the potential employment.

An employer should clearly see not only a diploma with honors, but also the practical results of successful studies, the most significant indicators of abilities in professional development. The central point here should be an active student's position, as well as the readiness for a change, communication skills, a desire to work and the dedication in the search for their future job.

Young experts need additional knowledge in related industries, in a special training concerning the changes at the labor market and the ability to adapt in modern conditions. The consideration of all employment peculiarities will strengthen the adaptation potential of higher education institution graduates and the graduates of other educational institutions, will reduce the risks of unreliability and unsuccessfulness, and increase the level of psychological preparedness at the modern professional labor market.

The results of the conducted research can be used in comparative scientific analysis, in the reconstruction of the personnel policy among universities, in the educational planning of higher education programs. The obtained results can influence the employment mechanism of university graduates.

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