
From the Researcher's Notebook

Features of Housing Provision for Rural and Urban Populations

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Abstract—The results of assessing the housing provision of the rural and urban populations of Russia are presented. On the basis of the author's methodology for identifying the level of housing provision, its actual characteristics were compared with social standards, that is, regulatory requirements for area, spaciousness, and comfort of a house or apartment. It is shown that in the city, in contrast to the countryside, housing conditions are characterized by a higher level of comforts but, at the same time, more constrained living conditions (in terms of the area of the dwelling and its spaciousness). The groups of the rural and urban populations differing in terms of housing provision have been identified. It was revealed that the share of rural residents living in housing poverty (in terms of area and living conditions) is more than two times higher (87.8%) than in the country as a whole (41.6%) and more than three times higher than residents of cities (25.1%). Ways to solve this problem are suggested.

Keywords: housing provision, living conditions, social housing standards, population groups by the level of housing provision, housing provision for rural and urban population, housing inequality, housing poverty.

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The socioeconomic development of the village is an important vector of state policy; attention is paid to it considering both the importance of the share of the Russian citizens working and living there and their lag behind the city by a number of criteria. As noted at the meeting of the RAS Presidium on December 22, 2020, despite the implementation of a number of federal programs since 2003, the village is still noticeably lagging behind the city in terms of the level and quality of life [1]. In order to advance in solving these problems in 2019, the state program “Integrated Development of Rural Areas” (hereinafter, the Program) was approved, envisaging the creation of conditions for providing affordable and comfortable housing, mod-

ernizing infrastructure, and increasing the level of human resources [2].

Improving the living conditions of the rural population, including its housing provision, is consistent with Russia's national development goals for the period up to 2030, determined by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of July 21, 2020, No. 474 [3]. These goals are consistent with those set out in the UN Declaration “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” adopted in 2015 (which sets the goal to ensure universal access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services by 2030) [4]. They are consonant with the conventions of the International Labor Organization, in which housing provision is included among the main indicators of people's living standards [5].

For our country, the relevance of the implementation of these goals is determined by the large scale of housing poverty and the high level of inequality in the field of housing [6, 7], that is, inequality in access to a decent standard of living by one of its basic components. In Russia, the share of citizens who do not have

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Table 1. Housing provision characteristics

Components of social standards	Social standards for housing provision			
	First (lowest)	Second standard	Third standard	Fourth (highest)
Dwelling area	Living area at least 6 m ² /person	Total area no less than 16 m ² /person	Total area no less than 23 m ² /person	Total area no less than 40 m ² /person
Home comforts	Availability of centralized water supply, central heating, and centralized sewerage	Not lower than the requirements specified in the first standard, as well as the availability of hot water supply, bath/shower, floor stove (gas/electric)	Not lower than the requirements specified in the second standard, as well as the availability of Internet access	Not lower than the requirements specified in the third standard
Housing spaciousness	—	—	One room per person	More than one room per person

Sources: [6, 10].

access to middle housing standards is very high [6]. The stratification of the population is manifested not only in the level of housing provision but also in the quality of housing conditions, depending on the place of residence (rural/urban areas) [7, 8].

In this article, the housing provision of the rural population is assessed as of 2019 (baseline for the aforementioned state program) in order to identify its differences from the provision of urban residents. This will take into account the starting conditions in which the implementation of the Program began and will also contribute to the expansion of the scientific and informational basis for updating public policy measures, as well as relevant projects and programs.

Methodological foundations of research using social standards. The topicality and relevance of scientific research on the problems of housing provision in Russia are evidenced by numerous works in this area [6–21]. They consider various aspects of housing provision [6, 13], housing inequality in urban and rural areas [15, 19], and state policy to improve the living conditions of the population [17, 18]. Russian and foreign scientists have proposed a variety of methods and tools for studying these problems [10, 16, 22, 23], including the use of indicators tracked by statistical agencies and international organizations [24–26]. In our works, we used specially developed social standards [6, 10] that make it possible to identify the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the dwelling. At the same time, it was taken into account that the regulatory requirements for them increase with the transition from the standard of the first level, lowest, to the fourth, highest—each of them is determined by the area of the dwelling, its spaciousness, and livability (Table 1).

The characteristics of housing provision were formulated using the standards of the Housing Code of

the Russian Federation [27], taking into account the parameters of the classification of the housing stock by the level of comfort, and expert assessments of Russian specialists obtained in the course of a survey organized by us [10]. When establishing the requirements for the area of a dwelling, statistical informative indicators were also used, which were determined by a hybrid model built on the basis of a lognormal model of the population distribution and the Pareto distribution model [10] (see Table 1).

The identification of housing conditions and the level of housing provision of the population was carried out by comparing the actual characteristics of the dwelling with the normative ones defined in social standards (Table 2). These standards also serve as the basis for distinguishing between different models of living standards (and their corresponding population groups) according to one of the basic criteria of material security, determined by the level of comfort of the dwelling, its spaciousness, and area, where at one “pole” is well-being, and at the other is housing poverty, characterized by the inaccessibility of minimum requirements. In this context, the proposed system of social standards, in particular the first (lowest) social standard of housing provision, develops the methodology for measuring poverty in terms of its nonmonetary aspects and complements the practice of its multidimensional identification when measuring the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, in which housing conditions are among the indicators of the standard of living [28].

We have proposed a criterion boundary for housing poverty in relation to the conditions of our country, assessed by the livability taking into account the area. It is determined by the minimum standard established by Russian law. The practical application of such a criterion boundary allows us to assert that the level of poverty determined by housing conditions is several

Table 2. Identification of housing conditions, the level of housing provision of the population and its grouping

Population grouping by level of housing provision	Level of housing provision	Characteristics of living conditions	Compliance with social standards (SS) of housing provision
Housing poorest	Lowest	Very bad	Not reaching the first (lowest) SS
Housing poor	Low	Bad	Matching the first SS, but not reaching the second SS
Below middle	Below middle	Below middle	Matching the second SS, but not reaching the third SS
Middle	Middle	Middle	Matching the third SS, but not reaching the fourth SS
Housing wealthy	High	Good	Matching the fourth (highest) SS

Sources: [6, 10].

times higher than the level of monetary poverty determined by monetary incomes and the subsistence minimum [29, p. 68].

For a more detailed analysis of the reasons for the large scale of ill-being that we identified earlier [6, 10], in this study, the compliance of actual living conditions of different quality with the requirements of social standards was assessed according to individual components: requirements for dwelling area, spaciousness, and livability. At the same time, the emphasis was placed on identifying differences in the provision of housing for the rural and urban population and comparing them with indicators for the country as a whole.

The estimates were obtained on the basis of data of the 28th round of the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey—Higher School of Economics (RLMS).¹ The sample is representative for Russia as a whole (by gender, age, and type of settlement) [30]. For the assessment based on the RLMS microdata, an array of data was obtained (N = 11 755 people, of which 26% are rural residents, and 74% are urban residents), which are necessary for a component-wise and comprehensive identification of housing provision. These are data on the size of the dwelling area (residential, that is, the area of living rooms and total), the number of living rooms, and livability.

For the purposes of assessing livability based on housing standards, the requirements of the standards were operationalized taking into account the information available in the RLMS database (based on positive answers to questions) about the availability of hot

water supply, centralized water supply, central heating, centralized sewerage, main gas, floor electric stove, and access to low-speed or high-speed Internet. The requirement of the standards regarding the presence of a bath/shower, due to the lack of the necessary information in the RLMS database, was not taken into account; however, positive answers to the questions about hot/cold water supply and sewerage suggest that a bath or shower is available.

Housing area characteristics. Evaluation of the actual housing area in comparison with the standard requirements (see Table 1) at different levels of housing provision showed that about 11% of our country's population live in dwellings that do not meet the minimum requirements (6 m²/person of living space is the first, lowest, standard of housing provision) (Table 3). According to the estimates obtained, in rural areas the share of the population living in extremely cramped housing conditions was slightly lower (10.1%) than in the country as a whole (11.1%) and in cities (11.4%).

Slightly more than a third of the population on average in the country is provided with housing below the second level: at least 6 m²/person of living space, but below the standard level of 16 m²/person of total area. Among the urban population, the share of those living in such cramped conditions (36.7%) is slightly higher than in the country as a whole (34.2%) and almost 1.5 times higher than among the rural population (27.2%) (see Table 3).

Slightly more than a quarter of Russians have a total area of 16 to 23 m²/person (housing conditions are below middle), which meets the requirements of the second standard, but does not reach the level of requirements of the third standard, which determines the middle level of housing provision. In cities, the share of the population living in such conditions (26.4%) is comparable to the indicator for the country as a whole (26.2%), while it is slightly less in rural areas (25.7%).

¹ Russia Longitudinal Monitoring survey, RLMS-HSE, conducted by National Research University Higher School of Economics and OOO Demoscope together with Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Institute of Sociology of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. (RLMS-HSE web sites: <https://rlms-hse.cpc.unc.edu>, <https://www.hse.ru/org/hse/rlms>).

Table 3. Population distribution based on compliance with the requirements of housing standards to the size of the dwelling area, 2019

Dwelling area size	Characteristics of housing conditions	Housing level	In percent of the population (estimate based on data of the 28th RLMS round [30])		
			total	urban population	rural population
Less than 6 m ² /person living area	Very bad	Lowest	11.1	11.4	10.1
From 6 m ² /person living area to 16 m ² /person total area	Bad	Low	34.2	36.7	27.2
From 16 m ² /person to 23 m ² /person total area	Below middle	Below middle	26.2	26.4	25.7
From 23 m ² /person to 40 m ² /person total area	Middle	Middle	20.3	18.4	25.8
At least 40 m ² /person total area	Good	High	8.2	7.1	11.2

Table 4. Population distribution based on compliance with the requirements of housing standards for the spaciousness of the dwelling, 2019

Dwelling spacious indicators	Characteristics of housing conditions	Housing level	In percent of the population (estimate based on data of the 28th RLMS round [30])		
			total	urban population	rural population
Less than one room per person	Very bad, bad, below middle	Lowest, low, below middle	58.7	61.3	51.5
One room per person	Middle	Middle	23.4	23.9	21.8
More than one room per person	Good	High	17.9	14.8	26.7

Only about 20% of the population have housing conditions corresponding to the third level in the country as a whole (total area from 23 to 40 m²/person). Among the urban population, the share of those with such housing conditions (18.4%) is less than in the country as a whole (20.3%) and almost 1.5 times less than in the rural population (25.8%).

The fourth level, not less than 40 m²/person of total area, corresponds to dwellings of only 8.2% of the country's population: 7.1% in cities and 11.2% in rural areas.

In Russia as a whole, only 28.5% of the population has housing conditions that are characterized as middle and good (at least 23 m²/person of the total area). The housing of the majority (71.5%) does not meet regulatory requirements. At the same time, according to the estimates obtained, in cities the share of the population provided with housing space below the middle level is 74.5%, which is higher than the national average and compared to rural areas (63%).

Housing spaciousness characteristics. An assessment of the actual indicators of the spaciousness of the dwelling for compliance with the requirements of housing standards (see Table 1) revealed that the majority of the country's population (58.7%) lives in houses or apartments in which there is less than one room per person (Table 4), which is below the third standard. In cities, the share of the population with insufficient spaciousness of housing (61.3%) is higher than in the country as a whole and in rural areas (51.5%).

The middle and high levels of housing provision for the considered component of standards characterize 41.3% of Russians, whose households have one room per person (23.4%) or more (17.9%) (see Table 4). According to the indicators of housing spaciousness typical for the middle level, the share of the population in rural areas (21.8%) is lower than in the whole country (23.4%) and in cities (23.9%). The share of the population with a high level of housing provision (more than one room per person) is 17.9% in the

Table 5. Population distribution based on compliance with the requirements of housing standards to the level of housing amenities, 2019

Dwelling livability level*	In percent of the population (estimate based on data of the 28th RLMS round [30])		
	Total	Urban population	Rural population
No (partially or completely) minimum level of livability	33.2	14.4	85.6
Minimum level of livability	6.4	6.8	5.0
Basic level of livability	8.8	11.2	2.4
Socially acceptable level of livability	51.6	67.6	7.0

*Minimum level of housing livability: not lower than the requirements for housing livability defined in the first (lowest) standard. Basic level of housing livability: not lower than the requirements for housing livability defined in the second standard. Socially acceptable level of housing livability: not lower than the requirements for housing livability defined in the third standard.

country as a whole: 14.8% in cities and 26.7% in rural areas.

Housing livability characteristics. On the basis of social standards (see Table 1), the levels of housing comfort and the corresponding distribution of the population were identified (Table 5). Estimates showed that the dwelling of a third of Russians is partially or completely not provided with even minimal living conditions, and among the residents of villages there are six times more of them than among the townspeople (85.6% vs. 14.4%). The percentage of Russians living in housing that is equipped only at the minimum level is 6.4% (5% in rural areas and 6.8% in cities). Living conditions not lower than the basic level are provided for about 60% of the country's population, while more than 50% have access to the Internet. Compliance with the basic and socially acceptable level is more typical of the city (78.8%), while in rural areas the share of the population with such a level of comforts is more than eight times less (9.4%).

The above makes it necessary to rethink critically the data on the level of livability and plans for improving the rural housing stock, outlined in the subprogram "Creating Conditions for Providing Affordable and Comfortable Housing for the Rural Population" of the state Program. According to this document, the share of the total area of comfortable residential premises in rural settlements was 32.6% in 2017 (baseline), and by 2025 (the year of completion of the Program) it should be increased to 43.2% [2]. However, given the large share of the population living in a dwelling that does not have a minimum level of amenities (see Table 5), as well as the share of the total area of such residential premises in the countryside (more than 50% by 2025), it is necessary to find resources to exceed the planned indicators or provide for the prolongation of the Program for the period after 2025.

The appendices to the Program allow us to conclude about standardized characteristics that serve as guidelines for improving the provision of villagers with

housing: in relation to housing provided under a lease agreement, as well as to one that is built (purchased) using social benefits. It must be suitable for permanent residence; provided with centralized or self-contained engineering systems (electric lighting, water supply, sewerage, heating, and gas supply (in gasified areas)); and its area should not be less than the accounting rate per family member established by the local government [2]. The implementation of these standards will provide housing of the minimum required area and amenities for those in need. However, in order to improve qualitatively the living conditions of citizens in rural areas, it is necessary to find opportunities for a phased transition to the standards we justified in terms of area, spaciousness, and amenities not lower than the middle level.

Comprehensive characteristics of the housing supply of the population. Based on the assessment of the conformity of the dwelling with the requirements of the standards, we identified five groups of the population (Table 6). The first includes those whose dwellings do not meet the minimum regulatory requirements: their share reaches 41.6% in Russia as a whole. In rural areas, the level of housing poverty (87.8%) is more than two times higher than this indicator for the country as a whole, and, in comparison with the city (25.1%), it is 3.5 times higher.

In the second group (low provision), housing exceeds the minimum regulatory requirements, but does not reach the second standard in terms of area and/or livability. This group comprises 28.2% of the population of Russia. In the city, the scale of low housing provision (35.8%) is higher than in the country as a whole and is more than five times higher than the indicator for rural areas (6.9%) (see Table 6).

The third group—those provided for below the middle level—includes that part of the population whose dwelling corresponds to the second standard but below the third in terms of area and/or livability. In the country as a whole, the group accounts for 20.8%

Table 6. Comprehensive characteristics of population distribution by the level of housing provision, 2019

Groups by the level of housing provision	Characteristics of the dwelling based on the requirements of the standards	In percent of the population (estimate based on data of the 28th RLMS round [30])		
		Total	Urban population	Rural population
Housing poorest	Less than 6 m ² /person living space and/or with the (partial or complete) absence of a minimum level of livability	41.6	25.1	87.8
Housing poor	From 6 m ² /person living space up to 16 m ² /person total area and with a minimum, basic or socially acceptable level of livability; 16 m ² /person total area and more and with a minimum level of livability	28.2	35.8	6.9
Housing below middle	From 16 m ² /person to 23 m ² /person total area and with a basic or socially acceptable level of livability; 23 m ² /person total area and more and with a basic level of livability	20.8	26.8	3.9
Housing middle	From 23 m ² /person to 40 m ² /person total area and with a socially acceptable level of livability; not less than 40 m ² /person total area, with one room per person or less, with a socially acceptable level of livability	7.5	9.9	1.0
Housing wealthy	Not less than 40 m ² /person total area, with more than one room per person, with a socially acceptable level of livability	1.9	2.4	0.4

of the population; in cities, 26.8%; and in rural areas, 3.9%, which is almost seven times less.

The fourth group (middle provision) includes those whose dwelling meets the requirements of the third standard for livability and area, as well as the fourth standard but with the exception of spaciousness. In the country as a whole, the group unites up to 7.5% of the population; in cities, 9.9%; and in rural areas, 1.0%, which is almost ten times less.

The fifth group (high provision) unites those whose dwelling meets the requirements of the highest standard for space, livability, and spaciousness. There are 1.9% of the population in the country as a whole; in the city they are slightly more, 2.4%; and in rural areas, six times less, less than 1%.

Housing inequality between the city and the countryside. Identification of housing provision of the population on the basis of assessing the compliance of actual housing conditions with the regulatory requirements justified in our proposed system of social standards revealed the existing high housing inequality between the rural and urban populations of Russia. Only 12.2% of those living in rural areas have access to standards not lower than the minimum, while the

overwhelming majority (87.8%) have dwellings that do not meet the minimum regulatory requirements for its area and/or amenities, being in a state of housing poverty. In cities, the level of poverty of this kind is 3.5 times lower, covering 25.1% of urban residents.

High, by about nine times, gaps in the share of middle- and high-provision in housing between the urban (12.3%) and rural (1.4%) population were identified, as well as a large (about 5–7 times) differentiation on the scale of low and below middle housing provision between the city (35.8 and 26.8%) and the countryside (6.9 and 3.9%, respectively).

The estimates obtained showed that the quality of housing conditions in the city, in contrast to the countryside, is determined by a significantly higher level of livability but at the same time by greater constraint. The dwellings of the majority (about 80%) of the city dwellers have comforts at a basic or socially acceptable level. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of villagers lack (partially, if not completely) even a minimum level of livability (more than 80%). At the same time, urban dwellers, to a greater extent than rural dwellers, do not have access to middle housing standards in terms of area and spaciousness. The urban population predominantly (over 60%) is characterized

by insufficiently spacious accommodation (less than one room per person), while almost half of the rural population has one or more rooms per person. Rural residents (37%) more often than urban residents (25.5%) are provided with a total area of at least middle standards (at least 23 m²/person).

Rural residents find themselves in a less prosperous position compared to city dwellers in terms of the area of the housing stock with more than 70% depreciation: in the countryside, it is estimated that it is three times higher than in the city; in addition, about a third of the villages are in transport isolation [1]. Living standards that are lower in comparison with the city also predetermine the problems of securing the population. Depopulation of rural areas is also associated with high unemployment, low incomes of villagers, and low availability of social infrastructure facilities [1].

Long-term measures. Overcoming the existing high housing inequality between the countryside and the city requires the implementation of a set of long-term measures, as well as extraordinary and consistent actions of the Russian authorities and business entities. In our opinion, these measures should be based on the standards of middle housing provision and step-by-step progress towards them, using various tools and mechanisms for improving the living conditions of the population. In this case, one should be guided by the indicators of already adopted national projects and programs. If necessary, it is advisable to update and prolong them.

As a model, we propose standards for the provision of housing the characteristics of which can be considered standard. We proceed from the assumption that this is a separate dwelling (apartment, house, or part of a house for one household) with a total area of at least 23 m²/person, in which there is at least one room for each, well-equipped at a socially acceptable level. The area in which the dwelling is located must have a developed social infrastructure (kindergarten, school, clinic, hospital, recreation area, etc., within walking distance). Transport accessibility is also important [6]. These standards could become the basis for a phased advancement towards the implementation of a model of comfortable living conditions: differentiated in the countryside and in the city, taking into account the peculiarities of the socioeconomic and infrastructural development of various types of settlements.

The housing provision standards considered in this article could complement the tools for monitoring the dynamics of living conditions of the population, which is currently used for cities—the urban environment quality index. The index is in demand not only for solving the problems of a radical increase in the comfort of living but also for reducing the number of cities with unfavorable conditions during the implementation of the national project “Housing and Urban Environment” [31, 32]. For rural areas, of course, taking into account its characteristics, the use of such tools is

also advisable. They can be developed even before the completion of the current state program for the integrated development of rural areas and become part of its provision during its prolongation.

To improve the quality of housing provision for the population of the city and especially the village, it is necessary to develop appropriate support mechanisms. At the present stage, only about 25% of Russians, given their current income level [6], can use mortgage lending tools on which the “Housing and Urban Environment” national project [31] and the “Integrated Rural Development” Program [2] are based. For the majority of Russians, in the absence of an effective state policy of increasing the real incomes of the population and their fair distribution, the historical chance to solve radically the housing issue in the foreseeable future, as mentioned by Russian President V.V. Putin [33], may remain unused [6].

Measures are needed to support housing construction in rural areas: expanding the categories of citizens eligible for social benefits to improve housing conditions, providing land plots for low-rise housing construction, and developing social housing stock [1, 11]. A significant increase in the scale of construction of social housing (social rental housing, rented houses, or noncommercial social rental housing) is required, which is needed by a significant part of the townspeople the incomes of which do not allow them to solve housing problems independently [6]. It is necessary to develop affordable credit instruments for improving housing security, which can be expected taking into account the instructions of the Russian President to develop proposals on the procedure for implementing preferential mortgage programs in 2021–2024 [34].

Housing preferences of Russian citizens. Given the high importance of rural problems, a program to improve the level and quality of life of Russians living in rural areas could later receive the status of a national project. Such a project will allow integrating the tasks of developing sustainable productive employment, as well as reducing poverty and increasing real incomes of the population, the quality of housing provision, and the availability of social infrastructure facilities.

The village has a great potential in terms of opportunities to provide a more comfortable model of life in comparison with the city, including the environmental component: about 70% of Russians give a clear preference to living not in an apartment but in an individual house [35]. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly increased the motivation of citizens to move to the countryside, the relevance and benefits of this model are only increasing. This potential could become one of the factors in attracting people to the countryside but, of course, with the simultaneous comprehensive improvement of rural areas, which will not only improve the conditions for agricultural work, but also make wider use of mod-

ern forms of employment, especially taking into account their increasing digitalization.

All proposed actions, in our opinion, should be coordinated to ensure that Russia fulfills its commitments by 2030 to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in terms of housing provision: universal access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services; reducing the share of households experiencing housing constraint; and increasing the number of citizens resettled from housing unsuitable for living [26].

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