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Russians' Anxiety Over Economy Grows as Talk of Crisis Becomes Reality

By The Moscow Times

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Russians' anxiety about the state of the economy is growing as they confront inflation and falling incomes, a poll released Wednesday showed.

Almost four-fifths of working Russians are worried about the crisis closing in on the economy, a survey by consumer researcher Synovate Comcon found — 8 percent more than last month and just below the peak of angst recorded by the company in 2009, when 84 percent of Russians were spooked by the economy's 8 percent contraction that year.

The poll showed that 91 percent of respondents said they or their relatives had suffered from price rises over the last month, a 5 percent increase from December and far more than in 2009, when 79 percent felt the pinch of inflation.

Russia's economy is expected to shrink this year by up to 5 percent due to low oil prices and Western sanctions over Moscow's role in Ukraine. A halving in the value of the ruble over

the past year has pushed inflation into double-digits, and food price rises in particular are accelerating.

The shocks are beginning to feed through to wages: 48 percent of respondents said they or their relatives had felt their salaries and bonuses shrink, 2 percent more than in December. Many have begun trimming their spending, particularly on holidays and leisure, the poll found.

In a sign that the economic trauma might become a political problem, Russians placed the economic crisis above the conflict in Ukraine on a list of problems facing the country — a reversal from the previous month.

Less than half of respondents named sanctions and Russian counter-sanctions as an important issue.

The poll was conducted from Jan. 13-16 and questioned adults aged between 18 and 45 in Russian cities with a population over one million. No margin of error was given.

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