



Civil Society Steps Up NEW DIRECTIONS IN SOCIAL POLICY IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

New legislation in Russia has opened up a space for civil society organizations (CSOs) to work in partnership with the state. Does this mean that CSOs will emerge as a new force in Russian social policy design and implementation? Might it help overcome obstacles that have hindered Russian social policy performance? This case study, part of the UNRISD research project *New Directions in Social Policy: Alternatives from and for the Global South*, explores the current social policy shift in the Russian Federation.

Post-Soviet Policy Failures

Russia is facing acute social problems on several fronts: long-term demographic decline; relatively high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and infectious diseases; high mortality rates; and significant levels of structural inequality. At the same time, economic dependence on energy exports has exposed the national budget to volatility, creating downward pressure on social sector spending. Although fiscal stability improved following drastic spending cuts in the 1990s, the current context of low oil prices presents a serious challenge. Furthermore, Russia's welfare policies have a record of relatively poor performance considering the levels of investment, with systematically unequal expenditure and provision across regions, resulting in substantial pockets of deprivation.

While policies aiming to create a more effective welfare system have generated some concrete positive impacts, the top-down process of policy formation and implementation inherited from the country's Soviet past has restricted the participation

of experts and civil society groups in social policy processes. This has generated policies that are often unresponsive to social needs, resulting in public resentment towards government initiatives on welfare reform. As a consequence, Russia has found itself burdened with an inadequate, unpopular and uneven system of social provision.

An Emerging Dynamism

In an attempt to address the issue of inadequate service provision, Russia has taken steps to develop greater coordination between the public sector, local experts and social organizations. Initiatives to foster cooperation between the government and social sector CSOs through state grants and other support mechanisms began in 2010. In January 2015 a new law, *On the Basis of Social Services for Citizens in the Russian Federation*, extended provisions for contracting out service delivery. Based on this legislation, a partnership framework has been established that includes outsourcing some social service provision to non-state actors and providing them with greater access to resources. Although still mostly excluded from initial policy formation processes, an estimated 115,000 social welfare-oriented, non-state organizations are active in the implementation and delivery of a wide range of social services, accounting for about 10 per cent of total social services.

This greater participation by civil society in the social policy sphere has the potential to become a powerful means for improving social welfare delivery, which in turn may influence more effective policy design and ameliorate inequalities in provision across regions. However, the 2015 legislation has also raised fears that this new framework could serve to extend the Russian state's bureaucratic approach to non-profit welfare service providers, restricting their activities and freedom to advocate for social rights. Furthermore, there are concerns that Russia's current economic situation could hurt the effectiveness of reform, as civil society actors become dependent upon diminishing government budgets. Without sufficient resources, non-profit providers may have to compromise on service quality.

Case study information

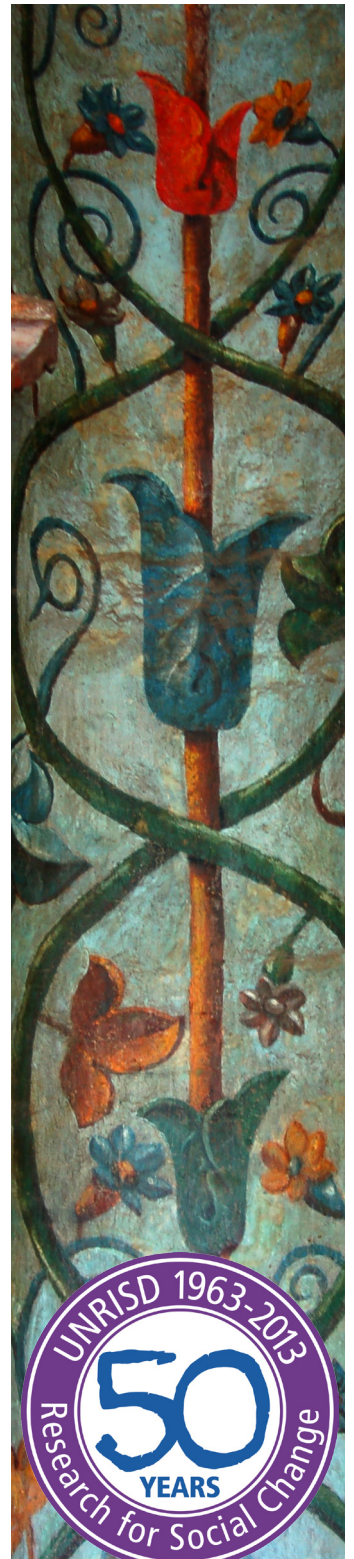
Russia is one of seven country and cluster cases for the UNRISD research project *New Directions in Social Policy*. For more information on the overall project, see www.unrisd.org/ndsp.

Research team: Research and analysis will be led by Linda Cook, Elena R. Iarskaia-Smirnova, Anna Tarasenko and Anna Gotlib.

Outputs: The Russian case study will comprise a Federation-wide overview paper and three papers on the following sub-sectors of the welfare state:

- Policies on motherhood/childhood
- Pensioners' welfare
- Health and people with disabilities

Methodology: The Federation-wide overview paper will be based on an analysis of data collected from a range of primary and secondary sources. The three policy area papers will be based on data collected using qualitative research methods: in collaboration with in-country researchers, approximately 80 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with policy makers, civil society organizations, activists, scholars and others.



New Directions in Social Policy

By examining the emergence, nature and effectiveness of recent developments in social policy in selected emerging economies and low-income countries, this three-year research project (2015–2017) aims to contribute evidence and analysis that will improve understanding of alternative policies for social development in the twenty-first century.

This research aims to shed light on the policy options and choices of emerging/developing countries; how economic, social, political and institutional arrangements can be designed to achieve better social outcomes given the challenges of the contemporary development context; how the values and norms of human rights, equity, sustainability and social justice can be operationalized through “new” social policies; and how experiences, knowledge and learning about innovative approaches can be shared among countries in the South.

UNRISD Research Team The Research Coordinator for this project is Ilcheong Yi, and Kelly Stetter is the Research Analyst.

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Research Themes

The Russia country case study will evaluate the impact of the new legislation on civil society actors and their strategies by considering two overarching questions. How can civil society actors mediate between an inflexible bureaucratic system and local interests under the new legislation? How can greater interaction and collaboration between the state and civil society actors lead to more informed, stable and effective social policy?

To respond to these questions, the country team will produce a Federation-wide overview of social policy formation and implementation, as well as three papers, each covering one of the following policy areas: motherhood/childhood, pensions, and health and disability policies. These areas are of particular interest for this study as they are compatible with extended civil society involvement in social service delivery.

Within its policy area, each paper will consider:

(I) Policy-making processes and drivers of change

The research will offer insights into the effectiveness of Russia’s bureaucratic social policy system and public perceptions of it. Key issues include:

- the nature of social policy-making processes;
- the course of multiple attempts at reform;
- the state’s failure to build coalitions with social sector experts and actors;
- public opinion on social provision; and
- indicators of the effectiveness of welfare service provision in international comparison.

(II) Political economy and social policy

Sustained increases in global energy prices fuelled welfare state expansion in Russia from 2000 to 2008 and cushioned the blow of the 2008–09 global financial crisis, but the benefits of this expansion were not shared by all. Oil rents remain unevenly distributed across the Federation, with a dozen regions and major cities prospering while the federal revenues received by 70 other regions have done little to equalize social spending. Research will explore the nature of subsequent inequalities across three contrasting regions (Moscow Region, Samara Oblast, and the Republic of Karelia) in order to understand the variation in social policy formation and implementation across rich, poor, rural and urban populations.

(III) Civil society and changing processes

Can newly established relations between the state and civil society improve outcomes in social policy? What is the extent to which societal actors can advocate, shape and monitor policy implementation in the Russian context? Can civil society groups deliver cost-effective and client-friendly alternatives to state-run programmes within a suitable policy framework? Comparing responses to these questions before and after the 2015 legislation will help to establish a clearer understanding of the effects of Russia’s recent policy reform efforts.

China and Russia: A role for civil society

Similarly to Russia, China is also designing policies which tap into civil society groups to deliver social services. In response, the number of social organizations providing these services is rapidly increasing across China. This is the focus of the investigation by Bingqin Li, Lijie Fang and Jing Wang in the China country study for New Directions in Social Policy. Investigating the increased engagement with civil society groups in Russia and China, where analogous structural limitations in state welfare provision exist, provides the project with rich opportunities for cross-country comparison.

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www.unrisd.org

Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
info@unrisd.org



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