

# UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

## UNICEF INPUTS

### Russian Federation

#### 1. Background and Framework

1. Russian Federation became an independent country in 1991 after having been part of the former Soviet Union. The population of the country has been steadily declining starting with 1992. During last 15 years more than 2 million people were dying each year which is twice higher (per 1000 people) than in European countries. At the same time only 1.2-1.5 million were born. Infant, child and maternal mortality ratios are all gradually declining, but the overall life expectancy trends and fertility rates are stagnant, despite small increases in fertility rates in very recent years. Currently, the fertility rate stands at 1.3 while the replacement level is 2.15. Life expectancy trend that has been basically flat for over 40 years. It is estimated that if this trend continues, by 2050 the population would fall from 140 to 104 million. The main causes for this trend are unhealthy life-styles and risky behavior. A particular concern is child and adolescent mortality (0-19 years) which at 75.7 per 100,000 is almost four times that for Western European countries (comparing to Germany at 23.1 per 100,000 and Sweden at 17.3 per 100,000). The result is a rapid aging of the population, which presents a potential risk to social policies that could potentially continue not to provide sufficient attention to children and youth. Extensive migration is also considered to play a role in the waning population size.

2. The Russian Federation economy has grown in a sustainable manner over the past 8 years. Poverty levels have halved and the population's purchasing power has recovered to that of 1990; the period before the beginning of an extremely difficult decade for most of the population, culminating in 1998 with a major financial crisis. Economic growth has to a great extent been driven by high oil prices. With approximately 20% of the world's hydrocarbon energy reserves, the Russian Federation is today the second largest energy exporter after Saudi Arabia. Foreign trade has more than tripled, and the volume of trade with the European Union has grown five-fold between 2000 and 2006.

3. Although Russia has met most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the national level, large disparities, particularly interregional ones, underlie these relatively good average rates and trends. The most relevant of the Russian government's policies towards MDGs are found in its National Projects on Health and Education. These projects constitute two of four national projects: education, health, housing, and agricultural development. Originally planned for two years (2006-2007), these programs have been extended until 2010. In 2006 alone, the government invested almost USD 6 billion on education, health care, agriculture, and housing. Funds for housing and agriculture rose 30%. For health care, the figure increased 60%, and for new housing, the figure rose 400%. While the National Projects represent a good vehicle for implementing social policy, the approach tends to be inputs-oriented and not results-based

4. Despite of growing economy, socio-economic inequality in the Russian Federation has significantly increased since 1985, with the Gini coefficient evolving over this period from 0.24 to 0.42 in 2007. Socio-economic inequalities result in reduced access for the poor to education and health services. The economic growth was not translated into well paid jobs for much of the country's population, particularly in the regions and rural areas. The country's progress still lags seriously on the social front as is portrayed by incomplete system reforms (child welfare, health, education). For example in the health sector reform, the focus has been on capital-intensive efforts, installation of modern diagnostic equipment, rehabilitation and construction of hospitals while preventive health care, got very limited attention. Limited progress in the agricultural sector is apparent when traveling through rich agricultural lands in the south and passing through poor villages along the way. Although agro-industrial complexes are emerging, ineffective collective farms still predominate the agricultural landscape and they have been unable to transform the lives of the rural population. Likewise, the housing sector has not yet delivered large scale tangible results as Russian citizens, still have no access to mechanisms of acquiring homes based, for example, on affordable 30-year mortgages as in other European countries.

5. Fast growing HIV epidemic (448,459 officially registered cases of HIV-infection in the country as of the end of October 2007) with young people being particularly affected (80% are those between 15 to 30 years) and a clear trend of increased infection through heterosexual intercourse instead of the traditional intra-venous drug intake. As a result, 43% of all newly registered HIV cases are women of childbearing age/ almost 100 new cases of HIV are registered every day).

6. The Russian Federation was one of the first to ratify the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stated in its concluding observations to the third periodic report of the Russian Federation (CRC/C/RUS/CO/3, 23 November 2005), that it welcomes the legislation developments which has taken place after the second periodic report including increased protection of minors against harmful working conditions; a more humane approach in the procedure for trials of child offenders that focuses on the child's rights and provides guarantees that they will be respected, and which have resulted in a reduction in the number of minors brought before the criminal justice system and the number of minors sentenced to deprivation of liberty; introduction of torture definition; introduction of norms prohibiting the trafficking of human beings; increase of the degree of responsibility for using children in the production of pornography; increased penalties for the exploitation of minors in prostitution-related activities; increase the age of the consent from 14 to 16 years; introduction in the school curricula of the subject "Citizenship", which includes education on human rights. the ratification in December 2003 of ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor; numerous specific measures and targeted programs for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In 2008 the Russian Federation has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts

7. Though there is no lack of the legislation on the child rights, the enforcement of the legislation is still poor and the structures responsible for child rights issues are still not well developed. The Child rights ombudsperson institution has started to gain momentum and is gaining high level political recognition, nevertheless these developments are still at a fragile stage requiring significant technical support. Out of 83 regions of the Russian Federation Child rights Ombudspersons are appointed only in 24 regions and there is still no federal level child rights ombudsperson. The juvenile justice is still an issue under discussion and specific federal procedures and courts for juvenile offenders to be dealt with separately under the justice system are not yet established.

8. National report on the situation with children in the Russian Federation is prepared and published annually by the Ministry of Health and Social Development. In this report the key issues related to children's rights are addressed. Since 2000 there was no National Action Plan in the interests of the Children. Some key child rights issues are reflected in the Federal Program Children of Russia.

## **2. Promotion and Protection of Child rights on the Ground**

9. The key right of a child to live in its family is not sufficiently protected in the Russian Federation. Almost 732,000 children in the Russian Federation are living outside of their biological families, 425,000 of which are in institutions. Institutions are notoriously ineffective in preparing children to integrate into society once they reach adulthood, with estimates from Russian experts being that only 5% of children leaving institutions are able to effectively integrate into their communities. Recent efforts have increased the transfer of children from institutions to alternative family care, but monitoring and follow-up of these children has been practically absent. At the same time, little attention has been given to the increasing inflow of children into institutions, generated by a growing trend of deprivation of parental rights and abandonment of children at birth.

10. Lack of acceptance and discrimination against children with "differences" frequently occurs within the Russian society. For example, HIV-infected and affected children face stigma that lead parents to abandon them in hospitals, where they may stay for months or even years before their status is determined. As these children grow, their rights to education are often violated, with educators' and administrators' unjustified fears of transmission of HIV causing the children to be denied access to pre-school and school. Physical difficulties for disabled children also result in their exclusion from society,

as access is denied through lack of ramps or other structural barriers. Professionals often employ a “medical” approach where they try to “cure” the disabled child to fit his or her community or learning environment before thinking of integration.

Attacks against ethnic minorities and foreigners, particularly those of colour, have been numerous and appear to be growing. Reports of public beatings or killings outside the metro or in markets are frequently categorised as “hooliganism” rather than racist attacks. Often these acts go unpunished and even uninvestigated. While few members of society participate in such violence, the level of “acceptance” and the lack of outrage from both the public and the authorities are of concern and appear to indicate deep levels of prejudice against non-Slavic peoples.

11. In spite of the unfavourable demographic situation and low fertility rates, the number of abortions still exceeds the number of births (107 abortions per 100 births). Thus the basic right of a child to life remains violated. The efforts of the government to promote healthy behaviour and contraception are resulting in the substantive decrease of the number of abortions (from 205 per 100 births in 1990 to 107 per 100 births in 2006) but the government still need to take measures to prevent abortions and especially those for first-time pregnant women.

### **3. Achievements, best practices, challenges and constraints**

12. Demography and health are the two key challenges faced by the Russian Federation. Along with these challenges the additional challenges which require greater attention are: socio-economic inequality and child poverty (each one of the five children live in poverty), poor education and health services; low kindergarten enrolment compared to Soviet times, but growing, still 38% of pre-school aged children not attending kindergarten; fast growing HIV epidemic with young people being particularly; increasing flows of children into institutions; limited attention to and investment in services to support retaining or returning children to their biological families; stigma towards children with, or born of, HIV positive mothers; disabled children and among people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds

### **4. Key National Priorities, initiatives and commitments to overcome challenges and constraints and improve child rights situation on the ground**

13. Key national priorities as outlined in the Presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly and other political statements are – increase of birth rates, decrease of the number of children in the institutions, support to children in difficult life situations. To address the latter challenge in 2008 the president of the Russian Federation has established the special foundation which will provide support to children in a difficult life situations all over the country. The government pays special attention to disability issues. The year of 2009 is declared the year of support to disabled.

14. To address the problems in the social and other spheres, the Government favors “expansion of dialogue with civil society, joint work to ensure human rights, including the rights of minorities, migrants, children, media freedoms, electoral rights, protection from xenophobia, racism and neo-nazism (*and to this effect*) one cannot overestimate the role which can and must be played in this respect by various European organizations and the UN system<sup>1</sup>.”

### **5. Capacity building and technical assistance**

15. UNICEF has played a substantive role over the past decade in support of children in the Russian Federation. Interventions have evolved from humanitarian support in the North Caucasus, advocacy and technical assistance in regions for the development and strengthening of young people’s health and development, child welfare reform, and optimal development in early childhood through universal salt iodization and breastfeeding – to greater emphasis on strengthening knowledge management, policy and legal frameworks, and capacities at federal and regional levels to address children’s needs and rights.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gunnar Myrdal Lecture by Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation “Future of European Cooperation – a View from Moscow”*

16. UNICEF supports national processes to address the needs of the most vulnerable children across Russia. Greater emphasis is placed on policy analysis and advocacy regarding social welfare issues. Three key focuses of the UNICEF activities in the Russian Federation are: (i) Children's right to grow up in their biological families - promotion of the right of a child to live in its biological family through support to families' caretaking capacities and reduction of the number of children in state institutions; (ii) Greater focus on preventive health care - the right for healthy lifestyle including reproductive health, and the potential of the next (increasingly small) generation; HIV prevention, and in particular prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, the consolidation and expansion of youth friendly health services; promotion of breastfeeding and better parenting practices; prevention of micro-nutrient deficiencies, especially iodine; (iii) Building of an inclusive and tolerant society - advocacy and promotion of non discrimination, tolerance and inclusive education for disadvantaged children and children with disabilities, taking the best interests of the child as the main consideration. .

17. The global Child Friendly Cities initiative of the UNICEF launched in the Russian Federation allows promoting children's rights at the municipal level through creating child friendly environments and involvement of children in decision and policymaking. The cities interested in the CFC initiative implementation focus their economic and social policies at the child rights issues and support to the families. The initiative allows to combine advocacy, capacity building and technical assistance and to improve child rights situation in the cities of the Russian Federation.

18. UNICEF has also played a catalyzing role in support to the Russian government's development of the history-making Junior 8, which was emulated in Germany (2007) and was carried forward in Japan (2008) and will be continued in Canada (2009).