

Russia Country Report

General conditions and the situation of children Russia

The number of children under the age of 18 years at the end of the analysed period (1998-2001) was 31.6 million, which is 22 % of the Russian Federation's total population; 21.8 million children lived in cities and 9.7 million in rural areas.

The demographic situation of the country was characterised by a low fertility rate and an ongoing decrease in the number of children: from 35.8 million at the beginning of 1998 to 31.6 million children at the beginning of 2002. The decrease in the number of children in cities was most apparent.

Beginning from the mid 90s there has been a continuous decrease in infant mortality and the death of children under five years of age. However, these figures are notably higher than corresponding figures in the developed countries.

The natural population decrease only partially compensates for the migration influx from CIS countries (1.5 million people migrated to the Russian Federation during 1998-2001, including 287 thousand children).

The situation of children is adversely affected by the fact that families with children remain a major group of the poor population of Russia; the average per capita income of approx 60% of the children is at or below the subsistence level.

Children at risk of needing care outside of the family. Other risk groups. Trends during 1998-2001

The category of children at risk of needing care outside the family is comprised mainly of children who lack proper care, attention, supervision and the positive influence of parents or persons replacing them.

The number of families who do not fulfil their parental responsibilities is on the rise. In 1998 they were 202.3 thousand; in 2001, 289 thousand. The number of parents who are legally deprived of their parental rights is not decreasing. Every year 100 thousand children are discovered to be without parental care.

Hopelessness leads to the social mal-adaptation of children, to deviant behaviour and a higher crime rate. In 2001 there were 390.6 thousand teenagers on record at the Ministry of the Interior. The number of teenagers addicted to alcohol has risen, and the age of those using drugs has gone down.

Children with disabilities are in a social risk zone. During the period under analysis, their number has increased, which is linked to the deterioration of the ecological system, an increase in child injuries and a weakening of children's health, but also to the recent liberalisation of rules for officially acknowledging the status of handicapped children. In 1998 there were 563.7 thousand handicapped children receiving a social pension; in 1999, 592.2 thousand; and in 2000, 675.4 thousand.

National policies and special strategies on children at risk

Government policies on children during the period under analysis were targeted at: doing the maximum possible within the framework of current resources to retain the basic guarantees ensuring the development of children, thereby minimising the decline in the living standard; retaining free education and medical care for children; treating children more humanely on the basis of children's rights; and creating new mechanisms of prevention and the social rehabilitation of children who have been exposed to the new social risk factors. In the course of achieving these targets of the government policies, special strategies targeted at various categories of children at risk of losing parental care were defined and implemented. These envisaged:

- Activation and consolidation of inter-departmental co-operation in solving problems of children at risk of being deprived of family care;
- Orientation of institutions of social welfare, health and education toward early prevention of violation of children's health, deviant forms of behaviour, conducting parallel work with the child and the family in averting the risk of the child being deprived of parental care;
- Further development of the network of institutions with a range of departmental affiliations, giving social, legal, socio-medical, psychological-cum-educational help to children and their families in socially vulnerable situations;
- Creation of the conditions for the effective prevention of child disability, far-reaching rehabilitation of disabled children and their successful integration into society;
- Humanisation of the work of educational institutions for orphaned children and children deprived of parental care;
- Search for new types of family placements for children who have temporarily or permanently lost contact with their blood relatives.

Children in residential institutions. Trends during 1998-2001

Residential institutions of various types and under the subordination of various departments have been created for orphans and children deprived of parental care.

Children's Homes within the health care system provide medical treatment and educational rehabilitation and the social adaptation of children between 3 and 4 years of age. Between 1998 and 2001 there were few changes in the number of such institutions and the children they accommodated; in 2001 there were 246 children's homes accommodating 19,356 children.

A majority of the children coming to these institutions come as a rule from troubled families and have a number of health problems. In 2001 handicapped children constituted 27% of the total number of children in the children's homes.

Social indicators show that the work of the children's homes have improved as a result of the emergence of new rehabilitation technologies, the introduction of modern methods of medical rehabilitation and the implementation of individual rehabilitation programmes for handicapped children. During the four-year period 1998-2001, the number of children placed in foster families increased from 71 to 75%.

Orphanages and residential schools under the education system.

A majority of the children deprived of parental care (110.9 thousand in 2001) are raised in these institutions. The process of reforming the institutions, initiated some years earlier,

has continued during 1998-2001. The main objectives are to create family-like conditions to facilitate children's activities and prepare them for an independent life as adults.

Of the 658.1 thousand handicapped children in 2001, more than 50 thousand live and study in **residential schools** for children with limited health capabilities; 29.3 thousand children with severe mental and physical defects are being cared for in 156 **boarding homes** of the social welfare system. During the analysed period measures were taken to review the norms for maintaining the children in care, strengthen the material and technical base for care, modernise rehabilitation equipment and give the staff corresponding training. These measures have played an important role in improving the conditions for more humane fostering and a high quality of rehabilitation for children.

Specialised institutions for minors in need of social rehabilitation provide for the maintenance and social rehabilitation of children in difficult life situations. As in earlier years, there was a sharp rise in the number of such institutions during the analysed period as well (at the beginning of 1998 – 614; at the beginning of 2001 – 911).

The introduction of effective methods of working with children and their parents helps to reduce psychological tension, facilitates the preliminary adaptation of the child to life in a healthy social environment and restores the child's social status in the family and educational institution.

Nearly 62% of the 129.3 thousand children undergoing rehabilitation in such institutions in 2001 were reunited with their families of origin.

Specialised open-type teaching and educational institutions within the general education system provide psychological, medical and social rehabilitation to minors having problems in their studies and displaying unlawful behaviour by creating conditions for them to receive a general education and vocational training. In 1998 there were 1.4 thousand children in such institutions; the figure for 2001 was 1.7 thousand.

By a court decision a minor between the ages of 11-18 can be placed in a special **closed-type teaching and educational institution** if the minor has committed a socially dangerous act as defined by the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation but who is not judged as being criminally liable or who is legally exempted from prosecution. The number of such children during the analysed period remained stable: between 1998 and 2001 they constituted 4.3 thousand, of whom 0.4 thousand were girls.

As of 1 January 2001 there were 64 **educational colonies** for minors in the Russian Federation accommodating 17,190 persons convicted of having committed crimes. These institutions offer the opportunity for obtaining a general high school education and basic vocational training. Sentencing practices are being gradually liberalised, psychological and pedagogical measures are given greater priority in the work to influence the interns in a positive direction, they are being granted a wider range of civil rights, and paroles are being used more liberally.

Children's homes have been set up within 11 medium control correctional colonies for women in which 417 children between the ages of 0-2 years were fostered in 2000 and 472 in 2001.

Alternatives to residential care

The national policy on children at risk of losing or who have already been deprived of parental care is targeted at implementing the child's right to grow up in a family environment.

With this aim in mind, measures are being taken to *retain the natural family of a child who has come into a socially dangerous situation*. a number of measures to support families with children have been developed in the context of the new economic situation; various preventive steps were introduced for families in the risk group in the early stages

of trouble; general social services institutions acted to end the difficult life situation of families and reunite children with their families once they completed their individually adapted social rehabilitation programmes.

Traditional forms of family placement for orphans and children deprived of parental care

The most widespread type of family placement for orphans and children deprived of parental care in the Russian Federation is still guardianship. In 1998, of the 110.9 thousand children deprived of parental care, 59.2 thousand were placed under guardianship; the figure in 2001 was 69.7 thousand children of 128 thousand.

In 1998 and 1999 the spreading of guardianship slowed down due to full payments and in-time payments not being made for children under guardianship. From 2000 the situation has normalised.

The rate of adoptions during the years under analysis remained slight and was characterised by instability because of the negative effects of the economic recession (reaching crisis proportions in August 1998) and the subsequent drop in living standards.

A certain rise was noticed in year 2001 when 23.2 thousand children were placed in adoption; 5.8 thousand of them were adopted abroad and the remaining in Russia.

Mastering new forms of family placement and family care of children deprived of parental care

A foster family programme is taking shape, but this alternative is still relatively undeveloped because of weaknesses in the financing mechanisms in different regions, low awareness on the part of the general public regarding the option of taking a child into one's family without having this registered as adoption. Since 2000 the number of regions where this type of support system is being practiced has risen, and the number of foster families has increased as a result (there were 876 foster families in 1998, 1369 in 1999 and 2440 in 2001).

The sphere of alternatives for securing the right of children deprived of parental care to be cared for under family-like conditions is expanding thanks to substitute families. So-called **patron families** affiliated to orphanages and **family educational groups** in the general social welfare system are being developed, which will make it possible for people to foster and educate children without being forced to shoulder full parental responsibility.

These alternatives have a multifaceted social effect: they help combine the interests of the child, the children's institutions and general public people; they give a positive dynamic dimension to the health, development and social adaptation of children of different ages. Families participating in these alternative forms of care are experiencing that their social status is changing and that, with the passage of time, they will acquire the status of caring adoptive families.

Financing

The work of institutions mentioned in this country report is financed by the federal budget, as well as by the budgets of the subject states of the Russian Federation and of municipalities.

The average cost per child in residential institutions, in accordance with the norms, is between 54,712 and 97,099 roubles per year.

Within the framework of the federal programmes in operation since 1993, 1,342.5 million roubles were earmarked for the improvement of children's situation for 1998-2000 and 3,751.5 million roubles for 2001-2002.

Conclusion

The acuteness of the problems of social orphanage in Russia requires the modernisation of government policies and the implementation of new strategies to combat child neglect on the one hand, and the re-education of expenses for the residential care of children deprived of parental care on the other.

These ambitions are reflected in the 'National Plan of Action in the Interest of Children', approved on 26 December 2002 by a decision of the Interdepartmental Commission for the Co-ordination of Work on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children by the Russian Federation. The key objectives of the National Plan in this field require:

- The unfolding of a comprehensive programme for the prevention of family problems, child neglect and social orphanage through inter-departmental co-operation;
- Development of and governmental support to a range of alternatives, including innovative alternatives for the well-being of children deprived of parental care;
- Actions against the spread of alcoholism, drug abuse, AIDS/HIV and criminogenic situations in child and teenage environments; the re-socialisation of children caught up in alcohol and drug abuse and criminal behaviour;
- The break up of educational institutions for orphans into smaller units and sub-units, the abolition of age gradation, improvements in the maintenance conditions and education for inmates, teaching them the vital skills they need for an independent life in the community;
- The achievement of full coverage for expenditures on behalf of children placed under guardianship and with foster families, and the creation of a system for training guardians and fosterers for new social roles;
- Reformation of the network of residential institutions for handicapped children on the basis of new concepts of work that give priority to medical and social rehabilitation and the maximum possible development of children with severe disabilities and other health problems.