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Poverty and Women's Social Work in Russia

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Abstract

Although poverty in Russia has been trending downward since the early 2000s, certain worrying elements of persistent poverty are likely to continue. Women are working across networks to address social marginalization in Russia. They have been able to mobilize voluntary contributions, but stronger support from the government is needed as well. The president has promised to increase support, but evidence thereof remains to be seen. In addition, there are many potential scenarios in terms of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and poverty in Russia, but it is as yet too early to evaluate the consequences.

On Poverty, Cycles of Poverty, and Their Causes

After increasing throughout the 1990s, the Russian poverty rate fell in the early 2000s. The official proportion of the poor declined from over 30 percent in 1999 to 13.3 percent in 2007. The crises of 2008–09 and 2014–16 interrupted the process of falling poverty: in 2019 the poverty rate was once again over 13 percent. The initial shocks of 1991–92 immediately following the dissolution of the USSR, a major financial crisis in 1998–99, and the international economic crisis of 2008–09 represented setbacks to households, enterprises, and the government in Russia. The 2014–16 crisis in Russia, resulting from the falling international price of oil and economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union (EU) and the US following the Russian seizure and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014, has also had significant consequences.

The post-Soviet transition entailed a dramatic decline in living standards for most people. The increasing incidence and severity of poverty was associated with a significant fall in cash income. The real wages of the poor were eroded, as wage arrears were quite frequent in the aftermath of transition. Wage disparities increased: an increasing number of households found that their wages were now below subsistence level, with the minimum wage set at a level lower than the minimum pension. With wages often impossible to live on, many Russians took on a second or even a third job, leaving no reserve for outside changes. The smallest backlash could cause ordinary households to fall into deep poverty. This phenomenon can unfortunately still be seen some 25 years later. Adjustment in the labor market has also taken the form of declines in employment and increasing numbers of people in short-term work and on involuntary leave.

The high number of working people with low wages clearly remains an important characteristic of ordinary life in contemporary Russia. While wage differentiation has increased, the disparity in the relative wages

of male-dominated and female-dominated sectors has largely remained, and women today, just as in the Soviet times, earn about 30 percent less than men on average. Wages also remain low in sectors that were not priorities of the Soviet economy, while the heavy reliance on natural resources persists. This is the result of a failure of the economic system: the system has been unable to promote the development of the non-oil economic branches, which employ a large share of the population, and thus increase the capacity of those branches to pay decent wages. Continued low wages and the loss of social services has meant that it is common for ordinary people's expenses to be higher than their incomes, trapping people in vicious cycles of poverty.

COVID-19 and Poverty

There are a few different reasons why the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to cause already vulnerable people to fall into poverty. One reason is problems related to limited access to medicines. Another is effects related to poor workers' rights and working conditions. One new group faced with poverty are those running small businesses that already earned very little and could not afford employees. Another is those working without contracts, who are not entitled to support from social services or unemployment benefits. Those who cannot pay rent will lose their flats.

Nevertheless, Russia has resources to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. In March–April 2020, Russia adopted two anti-crisis economic packages. These were composed of fiscal benefits, a mixture of social benefits, increased unemployment benefits, credit subsidies for individual citizens, tax concessions for smaller firms and corporate subsidies. These relief packages notwithstanding, the poverty rate is expected to increase significantly in 2020 due to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A tendency toward increased violence in private homes has been noted during the pandemic, while the

possibility of escaping to shelters is limited due to quarantine restrictions.

The closing of borders as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected migrant workers, especially those coming from Central Asia and the Caucasus. For instance, Azerbaijani labor migrants in Russia have been affected by the closing of workplaces in Russia. Some of them have been locked in due to quarantine restrictions and caught in a situation in which they have lost their jobs and salaries, but are unable to return to their own countries.

Gender and Poverty

In the Soviet Union, female politicians were often responsible for social policies, and women continue to hold this responsibility at all political levels in post-Soviet Russia. It also seems clear that female officials view women's organizations as allies in the social sphere, being potential providers of social services and filling gaps in the badly shredded Russian safety net.

Gender is closely related to poverty. The feminization of poverty is widespread: women earn lower wages than men on average; more women than men have incomes below the poverty line; it is often women who work as social workers, who receive very low pay; women perform most of the unpaid work within households; and it is quite evident that most single parents are women. It is also clear that the Soviet-era gender segregation of the labor market persists: women dominate in education, health, social services and textile manufacturing, where average wages are substantially lower than the national average.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has most often been women who have stayed at home to take care of children when schools and kindergartens are closed. They have had to work from home or find other ways of earning money in this difficult situation. The majority of mid- and low-level employees in the health care sector are also women. During the pandemic, many of them have been overworked and faced the risk of infection. In addition, most social services staff (who have been exposed to an increased workload during the pandemic) are women. Many of them are quite poorly paid and have bad working conditions.

There exists a preponderance of evidence that women often have the capability to cope with transformation and take responsibility for finding solutions to everyday problems within households. In the post-Soviet space, women have maintained and even developed the "entrepreneurial skills" that they displayed in the Soviet era. The men, meanwhile, have struggled to fulfill the expectation that they will be the primary breadwinners and have often failed in their attempts to build businesses.

Inequality

The first period of transition was marked by increasing income inequality. The Gini coefficient of income inequality suggests that inequality remains high in 2020, and wealth concentration is even more evident. Since the early 1990s, the trend has been clear: publicly owned wealth has been declining and private wealth increasing. Looking at the number of Russian billionaires, their wealth as a percentage of national income rose rapidly from about one percent in the year 2000 to 42 percent in 2008. Following the global financial crisis, the percentage fell to about 27 percent in 2010 before rising to 40 percent in 2013; it then fell again due to the decline in the oil price. As for the asset-poor part of the population, they clearly lost a major share of their wealth in the period 1995–2015. One reason for this might be that they sold off assets in order to cover their daily expenses. More concretely, they may have sold off vouchers—which were distributed to workers and pensioners during privatization—or gardening plots.

Women's Role in Social Policy

It has probably been fruitful to give women responsibility for solving social problems in Russia—to rely on women's loyalty and willingness to promote non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with social aims. Women have addressed social problems that have not been solved through the state's social policy. Women in social services or local administration often go beyond the scope of their formal duties in their efforts to tackle social issues. Despite all the problems with the functioning of the system, there are local tendencies toward collaboration between women inside and outside administration who seek to solve social problems, including those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. But it is still mostly about charity rather than empowerment. Women who are responsible for social welfare must themselves find sponsors for their regular activities. They have created their own support networks for this, combining old networks from Soviet times with new ones featuring entrepreneurs and NGOs. They use connections with authorities and donors and apply for project funding to try to secure resources.

Poverty on the Agenda

Russia's president stated before his reelection in 2018 that poverty should be more than halved between 2017 and 2024, falling from 31.2 percent to 6.2 percent. This statement has since been followed by official documents laying out concrete measures and new state programs. These include directives about how to increase incomes through stricter wage-setting principles, higher wages in the budget sector, the indexation of wages, and yearly increases in pensions. Direc-

tives also include higher social benefits to families with children, including additional support to those below the poverty line. The consumption basket, which provides the basis for the minimum subsistence level, is to be redefined. Special programs directed at poor families in outlying regions are to be created. Some concrete goals are specified: for example, that life expectancy should reach 80 years by 2030. Another measurable goal mentioned is that five million families should obtain improved housing each year.

In another speech just before the vote on the new constitution in Summer 2020, the president guaranteed nine types of compensation to the Russian population for the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These promises included an additional one-time payout of 10,000 rubles in 2020 for each child, extended extra payments for doctors and social workers working with COVID-19, extra payments to families in which both spouses are unemployed, beneficial loans for buying newly-built flats, 100 billion rubles to the regions for handling the effects of the pandemic, and a two-percent income tax hike for those earning more than five million rubles per year.

Considerations

Although a general downward trend in poverty has been noted in Russia since the early 2000s, poverty has increased in recent years. The poverty rate is expected to further increase in 2020 due to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

About the Author

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Certain worrying elements of persistent poverty within some population groups are likely to continue, while levels of inequality in general also remain high. This leaves some groups of people in a situation of chronic poverty in which expenses are constantly higher than income. In his speeches to the nation before the presidential election in the spring of 2018, Vladimir Putin stated that poverty in Russia would be more than halved in the next six years, and in 2020 he guaranteed compensation for the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As for Russian social policy, citizens are compensated for losses in social entitlements using the state's income from oil and gas. Russia does not have a developed welfare state but social policy has helped to improve the lives of ordinary people, for example with respect to housing conditions. The state relies heavily on women's unpaid work, which is also a risk. It remains to be seen how well the government's new compensations will meet existing needs. No matter how active the women who take on responsibility for social welfare, whether formally or informally, this activity will not be enough to solve the basic problems of poverty in Russia. Voluntary agency is clearly not enough; stronger support from the government is needed as well, as has become particularly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measuring Income Inequality in Russia: A Note on Data Sources

By Ilya Matveev (Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration – RANEP, St. Petersburg)

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Abstract

Income inequality in Russia is increasingly discussed in academic circles and society at large. However, different data sources produce different estimates of inequality. According to household surveys, income inequality in Russia corresponds to that of European countries. Official Rosstat figures indicate a higher level of inequality closer to that of the United States. Finally, various attempts at augmenting survey data with tax records produce even higher estimates, placing Russia among the world's most unequal nations, such as Brazil and South Africa. Due to the dramatic underrepresentation of the top incomes in the survey data, it is likely that tax-based estimates are the closest to the truth. While it is safe to say that income inequality in Russia is very high, the direction of its change in the last 20 years remains unclear. This issue cannot be resolved without more detailed statistics from the Federal Tax Office over a longer period of time.

Public Debate on Inequality in Russia

For several years, economic inequality has been at the forefront of public debate across the world, and Russia has been no exception.

Inequality was widely discussed in the 1990s in the context of the traumatic transition to capitalism. During the next decade, however, the debate on this issue was somewhat muted. The Kremlin preferred to talk about poverty, not about inequality: it was easy to sidestep the issue of inequality by focusing on the remarkable achievements in poverty reduction of the 2000s. The opposition, in turn, was predominantly liberal and preferred to talk about the threats to property rights emanating from the all-powerful *siloviki*, not about inequality—a topic many liberals thought reeked of populism. However, the situation began to change in the mid-2010s. Unlike other liberal opponents of the Kremlin, anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny was not afraid of populist language. He began to criticize the owners of Russia's largest businesses—the so-called oligarchs—and not just the top government officials, as he had done before. This new populist line culminated in the slogan used prominently during Navalny's 2018 presidential campaign: "Prosperity for all, not affluence for the 0.1%." Navalny's campaigning brought the rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street to Russia—and Vladimir Putin was forced to respond. During his annual press conference in 2018, he noted: "Speaking about the [income] gap. First, unfortunately, it does exist. Second, which is also unfortunate, as a rule, this is a global trend. In any case, this is what is happening in large economies." However, Putin quickly went back to the issue of poverty: "Of course we must take this into consideration. At the very least we must decrease the number of poor people." Nevertheless, the topic of inequality was now firmly on the agenda.

Income Inequality in Russia: Comparing Data Sources

Still, to have a serious discussion about inequality, one needs a reliable estimate of it, and in the Russian case, such an estimate is hard to come by. A common measure of income inequality is the Gini coefficient. The latest figure from Rosstat, Russia's statistical agency, is 0.411 for 2018—a rather high number by international standards and comparable to that of the United States. However, in an article published in 2018, Philip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, and Gabriel Zucman presented a much higher estimate: 0.545 in 2015. This number places Russia among the world's most unequal nations, such as Brazil and South Africa. Yet if we calculate the Gini coefficient directly from household surveys, without any additional transformations (more on this below), the number is around 0.31—lower, not higher, than the official estimate. This corresponds to the level of inequality in developed European countries with strong welfare states, such as Germany and France.

Apart from the level of inequality at any specific point in time (which allows one to make international comparisons), there is also the question of trend estimation. A dynamic picture of inequality allows for a better understanding of the economic, social, and political factors behind it. However, in the Russian case, different data sources produce trend estimates that are not just different, but diametrically opposed. For example, relying on the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey, a group of World Bank researchers found a significant decrease in inequality in the 2000s driven by strong economic growth. By contrast, Thomas Remington identified "a secular trend of rising inequality since the early 1990s, interrupted only by periods of recession"; this trend is confirmed by official Rosstat data. So who is right? What is the actual level of inequality in Russia and how has it changed over time?

There are three sources of empirical information that allow us to estimate income inequality: household surveys, fiscal data, and macroeconomic data. Currently, household surveys are the gold standard; however, they have the well-known weakness of underrepresenting top income earners, as the latter are largely inaccessible to survey conductors. This weakness can be partially rectified by augmenting survey data with macroeconomic data (which reveal the general level of economic activity) and especially with fiscal data, which capture top income earners much better than household surveys. However, publicly available fiscal data are often limited, limiting the reliability of the final inequality estimates produced by researchers. In the remainder of the article, I will examine all three sources of data on inequality available in Russia and compare the results.

There are three household surveys in Russia that gather information on incomes. Two of them are administered by Rosstat: the Household Budget Survey (HBS) is conducted quarterly and the Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP) is conducted annually. In addition, the Higher School of Economics administers the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) annually. All three surveys have different methodologies. HBS and SIPSP have large samples (50,000–60,000 households). They are conducted in all Russian regions. However, whereas SIPSP includes a direct question about the household's monetary income, HBS calculates income indirectly by adding up the household's consumption, loans, and savings. RLMS is a much smaller survey, with a sample of 4,000–5,000 households. It differs from both HBS and SIPSP in that it has a panel component: the same households are surveyed multiple times. Microdata for all three surveys are available online. Figure 1 presents Gini calculations based on these microdata. RLMS has been administered since 1994, with the exception of 1997 and 1999. HBS has been conducted since the Soviet period, though the microdata are only available from 2003 onwards. Finally, SIPSP has been administered since 2011, with the exception of 2012.

Remarkably, despite important differences in methodology, all three surveys show quite similar results in terms of both trend and actual numbers. All three demonstrate a significant decline in inequality since 2000. In order to investigate the nature of this decrease, I calculated the change in the share of total income for each decile group based on HBS and RLMS figures for the period 2003–2018 (2003 is the first year for which the HBS microdata are available; SIPSP was omitted because it was launched quite recently and thus the period for comparison is too short). The calculations are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

Again, both surveys show remarkably similar results: the decline in inequality since 2003 is largely explained by the declining share of income of the top 10%. However, this result is still problematic due to the underrepresentation of the top incomes in the survey data. In order to reveal the extent of this problem, I calculated average and median incomes for the whole population as well as average incomes for the top 10%, 1%, and 0.1% of the population for the year 2018 using the three surveys. The numbers are in rubles and euros (Table 1) and represent individual monthly income (household income divided by the number of people in it).

These results demonstrate that even the very top of the distribution in the surveys represents the successful middle class rather than the truly rich. Overall, the survey data can be interpreted as data on low-to-middle income groups, with the top earners not represented at all. Recognizing this, Rosstat adjusts the HBS survey data using the average income calculated from the macroeconomic statistics. Not only is the resulting Gini coefficient higher than the one based on survey data, but the long-term trend is indeed, as Remington claims, toward higher inequality, particularly during periods of strong economic growth.

What Do Tax Records Tell Us about Income Inequality?

Finally, several researchers have attempted to augment survey data with tax records. The most famous recent attempt was made by Novokmet, Piketty, and Zucman. However, they were criticized by Rostislav Kapelyushnikov, a prominent Russian economist, for making certain problematic assumptions when adjusting the available fiscal data (which are indeed very limited). Nevertheless, another attempt by Kristina Butaeva resulted in an estimate similar to that of Novokmet et al.: a Gini coefficient of 0.53 for 2014. Finally, in 2006 Sergei Guriev and Andrei Rachinsky analyzed the leaked tax records of Moscow citizens and arrived at an even higher estimate: a Gini coefficient of 0.63 in 2004. These estimates are added to the survey data in Figure 4.

Figure 4 demonstrates that the official Rosstat figures—and especially the tax-based estimates—are much higher than the purely survey-based estimates. However, the direction of the trend is unclear. While the survey data shows a gradual decline in inequality, Rosstat data finds gradual growth. Among the tax-based estimates, only the research of Novokmet et al. contains data for multiple years. However, the Federal Tax Office started to publish statistics on tax declarations only in 2008 and the source of Novokmet et al.'s estimates before that date is uncertain. The Gini coefficients they computed for the period after 2008 show a decline in inequality, but what happened before 2008 remains a mystery.

Conclusion

Based on all the available data, we can draw two conclusions. First of all, the current level of income inequality in Russia is higher than the surveys show and probably higher than the official Rosstat figure. All tax-based research indicates that inequality in Russia is closer to that in its fellow BRICS countries Brazil and South Africa than that in the developed world (the Chinese data appear to be even more problematic than the Russian data in this regard). However, the dynamics of inequality in the post-Soviet period are unclear. It is safe to say that there was a dramatic spike in inequality in the early 1990s compared to the late Soviet period. However, whether the strong economic performance of the 2000s helped to reduce inequality or made it worse remains an open question. Survey data and Rosstat figures point in opposite directions. This issue could be resolved only if the authorities were to publish more detailed information on tax records for a longer period of time.

In any case, all evidence points to the fact that current income inequality in Russia is very high. Research shows that Russian citizens take this issue to heart: according to a survey conducted by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2018, 69% of the population felt strongly about income inequality—more than about any other type of inequality. In tacit recognition of this, Putin announced in June 2020 that the flat income tax rate of 13%, a signature liberal policy of the early 2000s, will be replaced by a slightly progressive scale: a yearly income of over 5 million rubles will be taxed at a rate of 15%. All extra revenue, amounting to some 60 billion rubles, will be spent on the medical treatment of children with rare and serious conditions. The superficial nature of this 2% tax increase is readily apparent. In a country with some 250,000 dollar millionaires and 21 million people living below the poverty line (which is a monthly income of about 11,000 rubles), such a reform will not quench the thirst for social justice.

About the Author

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- Remington, Thomas F. 2018. “Russian Economic Inequality in Comparative Perspective.” *Comparative Politics* 50 (3): 395–416.

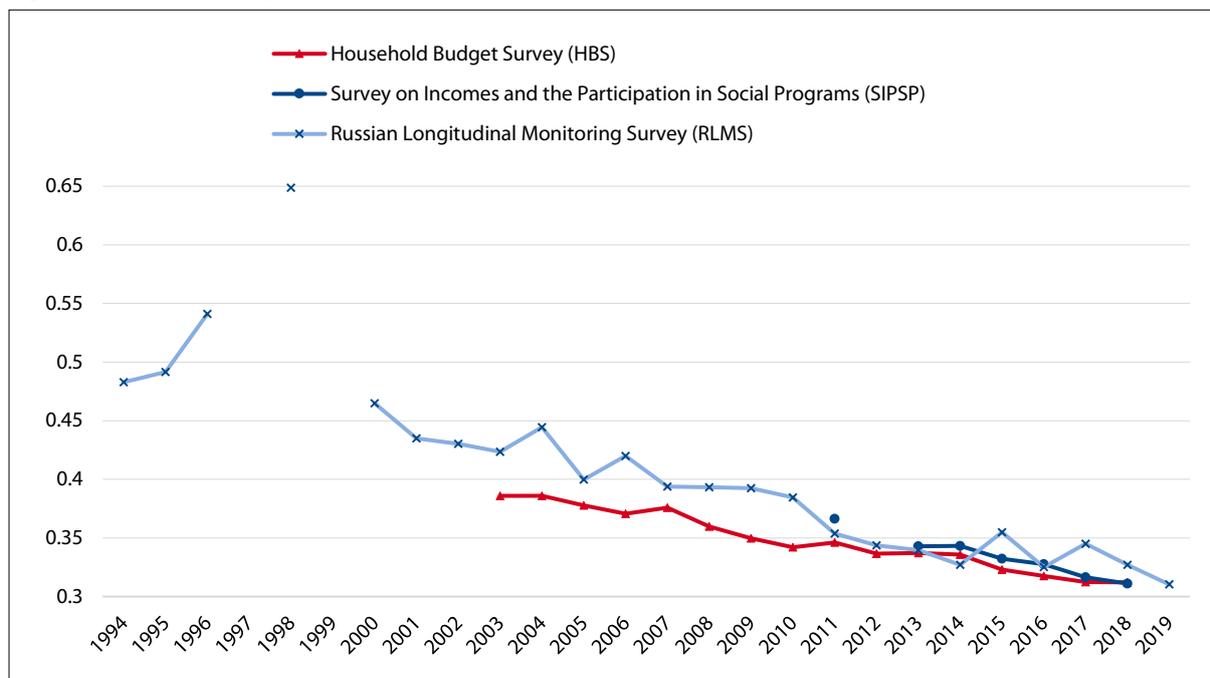
Data Sources

- Microdata for the Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP) is available at https://rosstat.gov.ru/itog_inspect
- Microdata for the Household Budget Survey (HBS) is available at <https://obdx.gks.ru/>
- Microdata for the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) is available at <https://www.hse.ru/en/rlms/>

STATISTICS

Income Inequality in Russia

Figure 1: Income Inequality in Russia: Gini Coefficient by Year, Household Survey Data

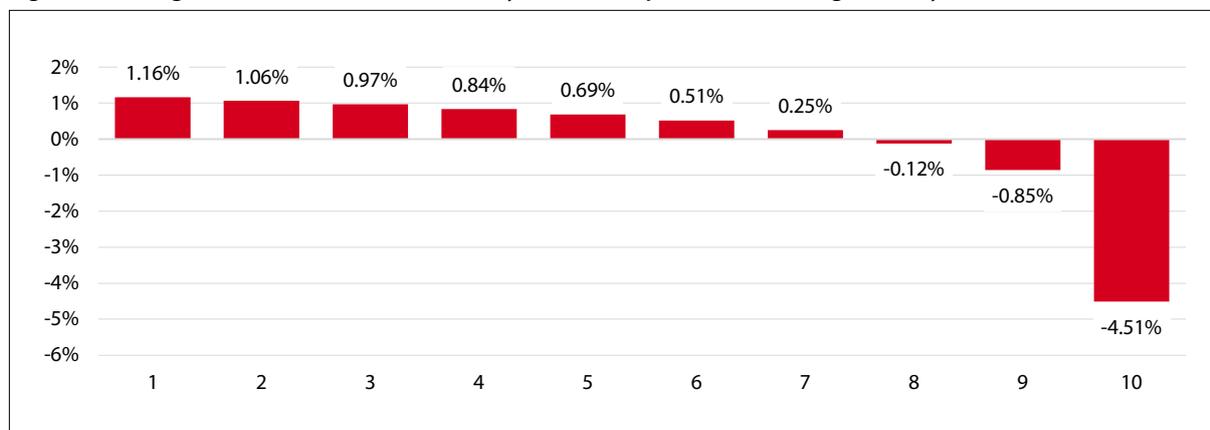


	Household Budget Survey (HBS)	Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP)	Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)
1994	no data	no data	0.4828517
1995	no data	no data	0.4917067
1996	no data	no data	0.5410358
1997	no data	no data	no data
1998	no data	no data	0.6487618
1999	no data	no data	no data
2000	no data	no data	0.4647909
2001	no data	no data	0.434957
2002	no data	no data	0.4302021
2003	0.3859498	no data	0.4233991
2004	0.3859627	no data	0.4444799
2005	0.3777715	no data	0.3996855
2006	0.3707383	no data	0.4199959

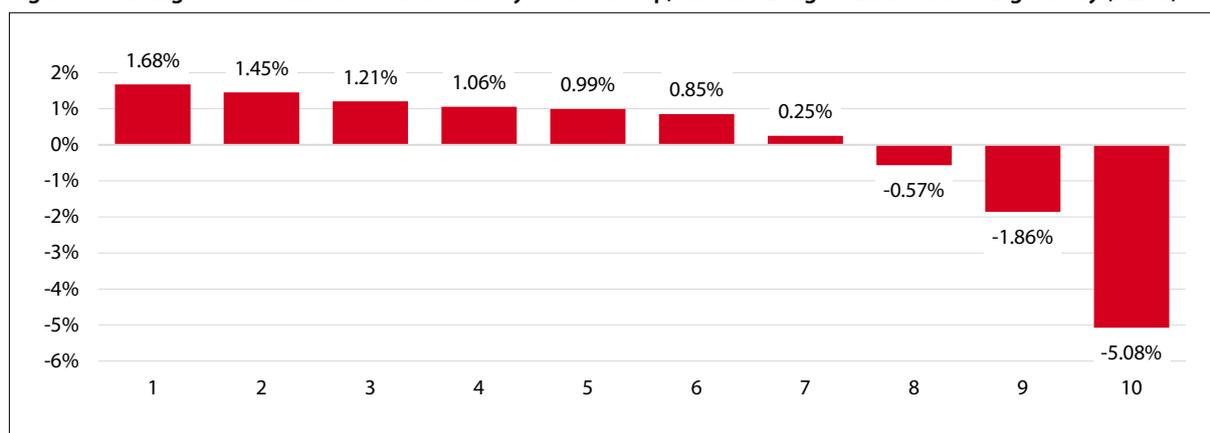
	Household Budget Survey (HBS)	Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP)	Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)
2007	0.3759148	no data	0.3938085
2008	0.3598261	no data	0.3933436
2009	0.3495722	no data	0.3923329
2010	0.3421338	no data	0.3844631
2011	0.3461321	0.3662477	0.3537482
2012	0.3365659	no data	0.3436677
2013	0.3370891	0.3429063	0.3396348
2014	0.3356903	0.3432348	0.3269654
2015	0.3229381	0.3322712	0.3548614
2016	0.3176174	0.3276128	0.3251255
2017	0.3124098	0.3164906	0.3449323
2018	0.3121151	0.3111129	0.3272206
2019	no data	no data	0.310354

Gaps in a line indicate a lack of data.

Sources: Household Budget Survey (HBS), <https://obdx.gks.ru>; Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP), https://rosstat.gov.ru/itog_inspect; Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), <https://www.hse.ru/en/rlms/>.

Figure 2: Change in the Share of Total Income by Decile Group, Household Budget Survey (HBS)

Source: Household Budget Survey (HBS), <https://obdx.gks.ru>.

Figure 3: Change in the Share of Total Income by Decile Group, Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)

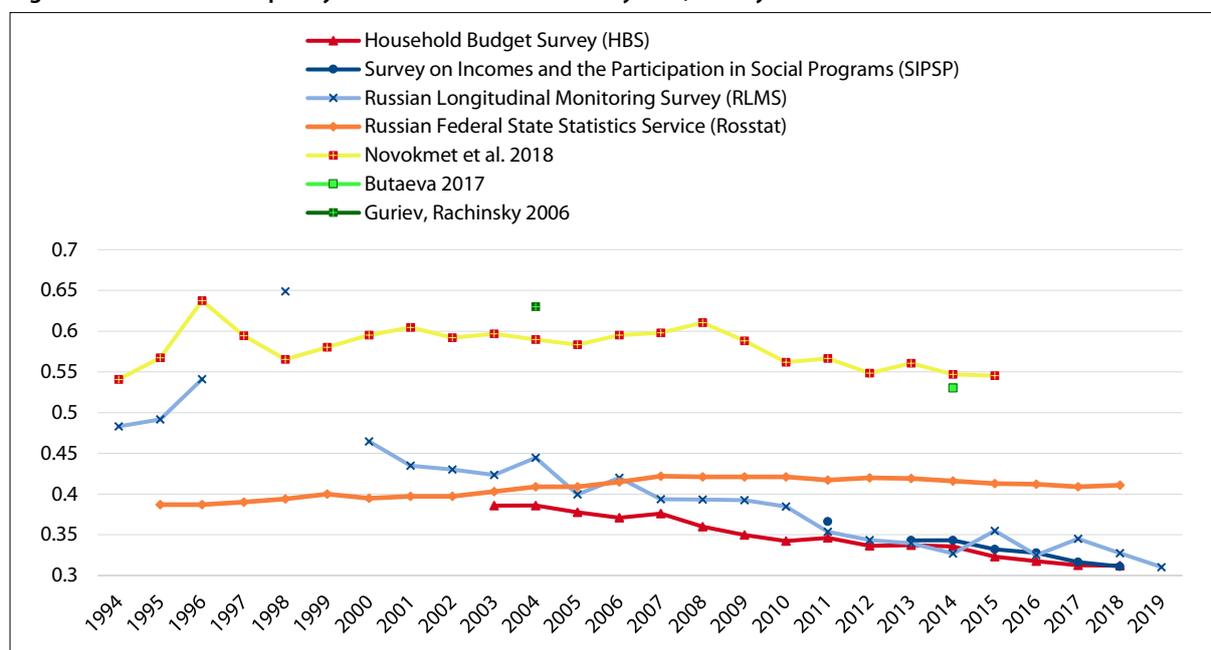
Source: Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), <https://www.hse.ru/en/rlms/>.

Table 1: Individual Income Information, Survey Data (Roubles)

	2018		
	Household Budget Survey (HBS)	Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP)	Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)
Average income	18,904 (255 Euros)	19,669 (266 Euros)	21,461 (290 Euros)
Median income	15,812 (214 Euros)	16,445 (222 Euros)	17,500 (236 Euros)
Average income (top 10%)	47,049 (636 Euros)	49,419 (668 Euros)	58,096 (785 Euros)
Average income (top 1%)	99,267 (1,341 Euros)	91,652 (1,239 Euros)	163,459 (2,209 Euros)
Average income (top 0.1%)	247,006 (3,338 Euros)	153,287 (2,071 Euros)	735,155 (9,935 Euros)

Sources: author's calculations based on data from Household Budget Survey (HBS), <https://obdx.gks.ru>; Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP), https://rosstat.gov.ru/itog_inspect; Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), <https://www.hse.ru/en/rlms/>.

Figure 4: Income Inequality in Russia: Gini Coefficient by Year, Survey and Tax Data



	Household Budget Survey (HBS)	Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP)	Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)	Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat)	Novokmet et al. 2018	Butaeva 2017	Guriev, Rachinsky 2006
1994	no data	no data	0.4828517	no data	0.540713914	no data	no data
1995	no data	no data	0.4917067	0.387	0.567129311	no data	no data
1996	no data	no data	0.5410358	0.387	0.637260458	no data	no data
1997	no data	no data	no data	0.39	0.594143951	no data	no data
1998	no data	no data	0.6487618	0.394	0.565461466	no data	no data
1999	no data	no data	no data	0.400	0.580278540	no data	no data
2000	no data	no data	0.4647909	0.395	0.595242093	no data	no data
2001	no data	no data	0.4349570	0.397	0.604675404	no data	no data
2002	no data	no data	0.4302021	0.397	0.591828793	no data	no data
2003	0.3859498	no data	0.4233991	0.403	0.596623700	no data	no data
2004	0.3859627	no data	0.4444799	0.409	0.589747883	no data	0.63
2005	0.3777715	no data	0.3996855	0.409	0.583456300	no data	no data
2006	0.3707383	no data	0.4199959	0.415	0.595283064	no data	no data
2007	0.3759148	no data	0.3938085	0.422	0.597794379	no data	no data
2008	0.3598261	no data	0.3933436	0.421	0.610234356	no data	no data
2009	0.3495722	no data	0.3923329	0.421	0.587956663	no data	no data
2010	0.3421338	no data	0.3844631	0.421	0.561785233	no data	no data
2011	0.3461321	0.3662477	0.3537482	0.417	0.566507597	no data	no data
2012	0.3365659	no data	0.3436677	0.42	0.548577630	no data	no data
2013	0.3370891	0.3429063	0.3396348	0.419	0.560536183	no data	no data
2014	0.3356903	0.3432348	0.3269654	0.416	0.547022088	0.53	no data
2015	0.3229381	0.3322712	0.3548614	0.413	0.545334788	no data	no data
2016	0.3176174	0.3276128	0.3251255	0.412	no data	no data	no data
2017	0.3124098	0.3164906	0.3449323	0.409	no data	no data	no data
2018	0.3121151	0.3111129	0.3272206	0.411	no data	no data	no data
2019	no data	no data	0.3103540	no data	no data	no data	no data

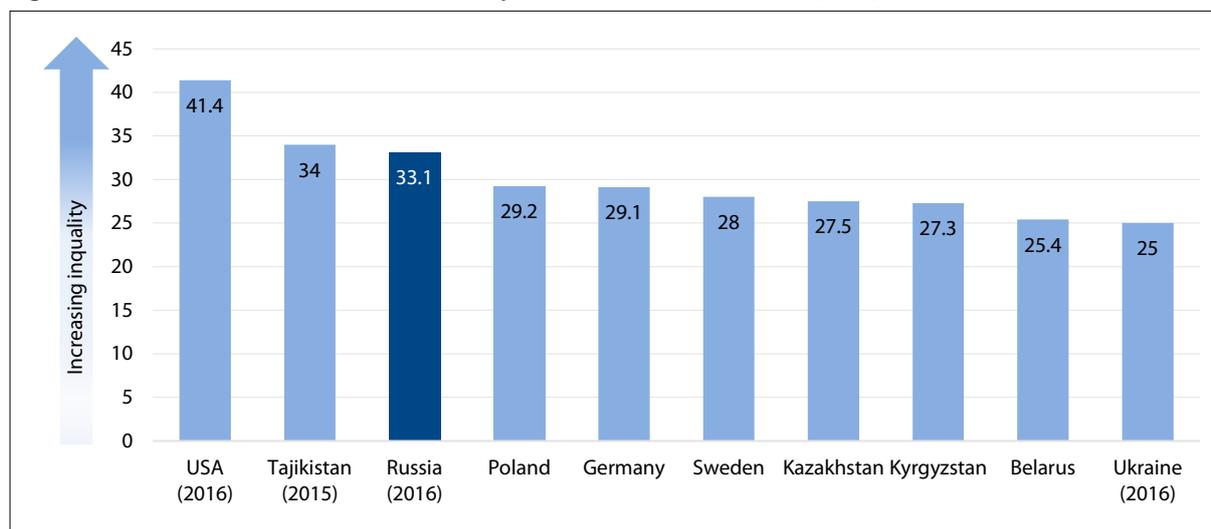
Gaps in a line indicate a lack of data.

Sources: Household Budget Survey (HBS), <https://obdx.gks.ru>; Survey on Incomes and the Participation in Social Programs (SIPSP), https://rosstat.gov.ru/itog_inspect; Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), <https://www.hse.ru/en/rlms/>; Federalnaya sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki (Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat)), <https://rosstat.gov.ru>. Novokmet, Filip; Thomas Piketty, Gabriel Zucman: From Soviets to Oligarchs: Inequality and Property in Russia 1905–2016, in: *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 16. 2018, Nr. 2, S. 189–223; <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23712.pdf>. Butaeva, Kristina: Sovmeshchennaya model raspredeleniya dokhodov naseleniya Rossii, in: *Sovremennaya ekonomika: problemy i resheniya* 5, 2017 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17308/meps.2017.5/1699>. Guriev, Sergei; Rachinsky, Andrei: The evolution of personal wealth in the Former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe, WIDER Research Paper, No. 2006/120, ISBN 9291909041, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki.

STATISTICS

Russia's Gini Coefficient in International Comparison (2016/17)

Figure 1: The Gini Coefficient: Russia in Comparison to Selected Countries (2017)



The Gini coefficient, also called the Gini index, measures income and wealth inequality within a country. The higher the value of the coefficient, the higher the inequality of income and wealth. A Gini coefficient of 0 would indicate that the entire wealth of a nation is distributed equally, whereas a Gini coefficient of 100 would mean that all wealth is owned by one person. The Gini coefficient is calculated using official income statistics and is thus of limited value for countries with a large shadow economy, which can be measured statistically only with great difficulty.

Source: World Income Inequality Database, UNU-WIDER, Stand 6. Mai 2020, <https://www.wider.unu.edu/database/wiid>.

RANKING

Number of Billionaires: Russia in Comparison (2020)

Table 1: The Ten Countries with the Most Billionaires 2020

Country	Number of billionaires	Number of billionaires per 100,000 inhabitants
USA	636	0.190
China	419	0.030
Germany	119	0.149
India	116	0.009
Russia	101	0.071
Hong Kong	65	0.895
Brazil	52	0.024
UK	51	0.077
Canada	46	0.121
France	44	0.065

Source: "The real-time billionaires list", <https://www.forbes.com/real-time-billionaires/>, 25 August 2020; population data: The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>

Mitigating the Social Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Russia's Social Policy Response

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the political context of the spread of COVID-19 in Russia, identifies major social support programs, and evaluates their impact on mitigating undesired consequences for the population. Relying on the analysis of state support programs, expert evaluations of their impact, and academic papers devoted to the political and socioeconomic context, the paper reaches several conclusions. First, the particularity of the political regime and its dynamic account for (1) the prioritization of the political agenda to adopt amendments to the Constitution over preventive measures to contain the pandemic, (2) the leading role of presidential decrees in identifying the main priorities of state support, and (3) the limited managerial capacities and financial resources of regional authorities to contain the pandemic and its consequences. Second, the particularity of the social policy response, including the focus on families with children and the categorization of beneficiaries of state assistance, mirrors the existing principles and priorities of welfare provision in Russia. Third, the scope of financial support is seen as inadequate by experts. The introduced temporary measures and the absence of additional measures of support during the autumn rise in the number of COVID-19 cases show that the political leadership has underestimated the long-term consequences of the crisis.

The Political Context of the Outbreak in Russia

There were two main starting points of COVID-19 spread in Russia. First, two Chinese citizens in Tyumen (Siberia) and Chita (Russian Far East) were confirmed as having tested positive on January 31, 2020. Second, as in many other countries, metropolitan areas—including Moscow and St. Petersburg—were hit first and hardest. The limited mobility of the population was the key explanation for the slow spread of COVID-19 in the very early days of the pandemic. However, by March 25, 2020, the number of cases had increased to 57, provoking an outbreak of up to 500 cases by March 31 and 7,000 cases by April 30, according to worldometers.info. Despite having the advantages of quite a lot of time to respond and low popular mobility, the national government did not react promptly by promulgating preventive measures. Moreover, the state TV channels actively misinformed people, making light of the threat posed by COVID-19 and suggesting conspiracy theories to explain mass media coverage around the globe. The working group under the State Council of the Russian Federation on prevention of pandemic spread in the Russian Federation was created by presidential decree on March 15. The closure of air (March 27) and land borders (March 30) could not prevent the rapid spread of the virus within the country. As a result of the slow and incompetent initial response, cases had been confirmed in all Russian regions by mid-April 2020, requiring tight isolation regimes in many territories.

The spread of the pandemic in Russia coincided with big political changes related to the adoption of the new Constitution, which mainly aimed to allow the current president to maintain power in the future by removing the limitations on running “more than two times in row” (Teague 2020). These changes could certainly have been postponed until after the crisis, since the presidential elections are scheduled for 2024. However, the entire political system and federal government were immersed in this process, impeding a prompt reaction to the evolving pandemic. Despite worrying developments in other countries and in Russia, April 22 was officially declared the “All-Russian voting day” on the new Constitution in Presidential Decree #188, adopted on March 17, 2020. This shows, among other things, the extent to which the evolving pandemic was underestimated by the political leadership in mid-March, even though the potentially high risk was obvious, with more than 20,000 new cases being identified daily around the world (according to worldometers.info). Evidently, in the minds of politicians, this political agenda outweighed the need for caution related to large gatherings to inhibit COVID-19 transmission among the population. In light of the outbreak that happened in Russia in the spring, the vote was ultimately postponed. However, despite the potential danger posed by mass gatherings, the so-called All-Russian voting day was rescheduled for July 1, 2020, with the opportunity to vote from June 25. This demonstrates the priority of the political agenda over the potential consequences of mass gatherings due to the All-Russian voting day.

Particularity of COVID-19 Regulations in Russia: Legislative versus Executive Regulations

Three main types of regulations have been used as legal instruments for mitigating the consequences of the pandemic in Russia: first, presidential decrees, accompanied by governmental decrees, which mainly target social benefits toward families with children; second, national government decrees and regulations, which also serve as a basis of social support for medical personnel and social workers, unemployment benefits, etc.; and third, national legislation adopted by the national parliament, which mainly aims to deregulate various spheres of the economy and reduce bureaucratic barriers. The composition of regulations mirrors the previously existing pattern of executive power, with the president on top as the key actor who is in charge of distribution policy, including budgetary spending, and the parliament as a technical and secondary actor without any political role—including budgetary spending—during times of crisis.

Governmental and presidential regulations are well-known in Russia as a source of generosity, while all welfare retrenchments come from the State Duma (national parliament), as with the increase in pension rates in 2018, for example. Almost all measures related to the pandemic, including family benefits, unemployment benefits, tax relief, a moratorium on bankruptcy procedure, etc., were introduced by the president in his proclamations of March 25, 2020. The vast majority of further state measures were adopted in compliance with and in order to implement these presidential proclamations. This domination of executive power over legislative power explains why the first and key measures were introduced through presidential decrees and why those regulations related to business, for example, were promulgated by federal laws. It is also important to keep in mind that the President's Address, which took place on January 15, 2020, had already announced the development of National Priority Programs and additional support and benefits for children. A couple of the social support programs announced in January 2020 as part of his political agenda were used as instruments for mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

Despite centralized decision-making and the domination of the federal level of governance, the responsibility for containing the spread of COVID-19 and implementing federal support measures (for example, social benefits for the population and tax reductions for businesses) was forced on the regional authorities. They were free to regulate the mobility of the population and health care services as well as social measures

to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. However, the existing “power vertical”—which holds all levels of governance politically, financially, and administratively accountable to the central government and the president (Smyth et al. 2020)—and the negative selection of politically loyal governors during previous years encouraged the maintenance of weak and dependent regional authorities. As a result, regional reactions to contain the COVID-19 pandemic were suboptimal. For example, the governor of St. Petersburg demonstrated ineffective management, trying to transform high-tech cancer and similar hospitals into COVID-oriented treatment facilities. The mayor of Moscow, meanwhile, began to use digital monitoring to impose sanctions (fines) on residents who broke the isolation regime. In contrast to other countries, technologies were employed not to trace the infected and isolate them but to punish those who violated rules. Another set of regional cases that deserves attention is the republics of the North Caucasus, in particular the Republic of Dagestan. Dagestan demonstrated an extremely high level of deaths and the inadequate reaction of the regional authorities resonated globally (Washington Post 2020; The Moscow Times 2020). This outbreak, the largest in Russia, is explained by Cook and Twigg (2020) as resulting from distrust in government and poor health care infrastructure.

All in all, the political regime, the power vertical, and the particularity of decision-making in general (and the federal system of government in particular) comprise the peculiar context for the initial response to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic in Russia.

Categorization of Beneficiaries: Families, Health Care, and Social Workers

The central government supported several policy spheres, including assistance for families with children, the unemployed, health care and social workers, housing (mortgages and loans), business (tax reductions and moratorium on bankruptcy), etc. The set of support measures was published on the national government's official website to spread information among the population.¹ The main features of social benefits introduced or enhanced during the pandemic reflect the underlying principle of Russian welfare provision in general, namely the stratification and categorization of beneficiaries. Two main social groups—families with children and health care workers—were divided into several groups. Each of these groups became eligible for different levels of monetary benefits, creating inequality of support within these groups.

The dominant government response was support of families with children and the subsidizing of salaries at

1 The official website of the national government with the description of all existing measures of support (in Russian): http://government.ru/support_measures/category/social/

a minimal level (Discussion Paper #4, 2020) with the help of newly introduced measures and the extension of existing ones. Three new policy measures have been adopted in response to the pandemic, while funding within existing policies has been increased. The first new policy was a single payment per child aged 3–16 years (10,000 rubles, equivalent to 130 euros as of June 1, 2020). According to national government estimates, 19.7 million children received this support, with 197.2 million rubles allotted in the federal budget for the implementation of this program (Discussion Paper #4, 2020). Second was a monthly payment (5,000 rubles, equivalent to 65 euros as of June 1, 2020) for each child in a family under 3 years old eligible for three months (April, May, and June 2020). This payment was available for 5 million children. Third was a monthly payment (3,000 rubles, or approximately 40 euros) for each child under 18 if his/her parents were officially registered as unemployed after March 1, 2020. According to Governmental Decree #485, adopted on April 12, 2020, there are 33.36 billion rubles allotted in the budget for this purpose. Overall, experts estimate that these payments will add 288 billion rubles to the income of the Russian population, comprising 0.5% of the total income of the population in 2019 (Discussion Paper #4, 2020).

The existing measures were extended and include two main monthly payments for children. First is a monthly payment for each child 3–7 years old whose family income is less than or equal to the minimum living wage in their region, which was announced in January 2020. Due to the pandemic, it came into effect one month earlier than planned (on June 1 instead of July 1). Second, the existing allowance for care of the first child under 1.5 years provided to unemployed parents, including students, was doubled to 6,752 rubles (86 euros) from June 1. As a result, this support reached the same level as the existing one for the second child on within a family. In the Far North, an additional amount is added due to the unfavorable climatic conditions. The cost of these two measures will reach 120 billion rubles in 2020, which is equal to 0.2% of the population's total income in 2019 (Discussion Paper #4, 2020, p. 4). Some regional authorities introduced their own support measures in addition to the federal ones. For example, the Lipetsk region introduced a family allowance (12,130 rubles, or approximately 155 euros) for those parents with children who were forced to take unpaid vacations due to the epidemiological situation. In the Krasnodar region, each child whose parents received minimal unemployment benefits became entitled to 3,000 rubles (39 euros). In several regions, including the Leningrad region, Sverdlovsk region, and Krasnodar region, single payments for families with three or more children, families with disabled children, and low-income families were introduced (Discussion Paper #4, 2020, p. 6).

The second social group that became entitled to assistance was frontline health care workers. It is interesting to see how the regulations tend to distinguish between various categories of social and health care workers who are involved in caring for COVID-19 patients. These payments were available from April to August 2020. The presidential and governmental decrees rewarded highly-qualified doctors with the highest benefit, equaling 80,000 extra rubles per month (which is approximately twice the average monthly wage in Russia), while junior medical personnel and ambulance drivers were granted 25,000 rubles per month. (While these decrees target mainly public health care facilities, private hospitals are said to be eligible for some regional support programs.) The same logic is applicable to public social workers, who, depending on their level of professional qualification, are eligible for additional monthly payments, from 10,000 or 15,000 rubles to 40,000 or 60,000 rubles. These benefits go to public social workers who were isolated at residential facilities in quarantine with residents of social organizations (the elderly, disabled, children without parental care, etc.). The payments are limited (paid from April 15 through October 15, 2020) and target only those whose work shift was 14 days or more. The payments include an additional 4.5 billion rubles which were transferred to health care workers employed in ministry-related health care entities, including the Ministry of Defense, the National Guard of Russia (*Rosgvardiia*), the Federal Medical-Biological Agency, the Federal Security Service, the Federal Service for Law Enforcement, and the Presidential Executive Office. It is indicative that health care workers from so-called departmental agencies (*vedomstvennye uchrezhdeniia*) of various ministries are mentioned separately. This is also due to their particular place in the welfare system of Russia, with prioritized health care entities for officials and bureaucrats constituting a separate echelon of health care in Russia.

As the described differentiation of categories of beneficiaries demonstrates, there are several categories within three social groups: families with children, health care workers, and social workers. The additional categorization is based on a child's age, a worker's level within the health care hierarchy, and professional status. This principle of categorization of beneficiaries of social support is inherited from Soviet-era social policy (in particular, the several categories of veterans). The path-dependence of categorical welfare provision inhibits the introduction of means-testing. Reliant as it is on categories, the Russian government fails to identify which citizens are in fact in need of support. Experts claim that the differentiation has the potential to create social tensions and be perceived as unfair by some deprived groups (Discussion Paper #4, 2020, p. 5). It produces inequality and tension among the various categories as well as manipulations both at the individual level and at the level of regional govern-

ments. Research demonstrates that the former tend to find ways of proving more privileged status to obtain larger payments, while the latter seek to reduce regional budget costs by relying on federal budget subsidies (Alexandrova and Struyk 2007; Kulmala and Tarasenko 2016).

There are other categories of beneficiaries, including the unemployed, pensioners, migrant workers, and workers for private companies. The need to equalize the unemployment benefit and the minimum living wage has been discussed for a long time and was finally achieved during the pandemic. Governmental Decree #346, adopted on March 27, 2020, promulgated this decision and simplified the registration of unemployment status in Russian regions, reducing bureaucratic barriers and creating an option to apply for unemployment status online. The minimum unemployment benefit was increased from 8,000 rubles (90 euros) to 12,130 rubles (135 euros) and was available for 3 months notwithstanding employment experience and qualification. As Natalia Zubarevich states, this measure encouraged the population to apply for unemployment support more actively than before (Zubarevich and Safronov 2020, p. 10). Individual entrepreneurs who terminated their activity after March 1, 2020, and officially registered as unemployed were also eligible for these payments. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection calculated that 450,000 unemployed people enjoyed this support in April–May 2020. These measures were terminated on October 1, 2020, under Governmental Decree #844, adopted on June 10, 2020.

The national government compiled a list of economic sectors that are eligible for state support to help relieve the effects of the pandemic. These sectors include transport, culture and leisure activities, education, tourism, hotels, public nutrition, consumer services, health care, and retail. The small businesses operating in these areas became eligible for direct financial support. Insurance payments for small businesses (for covering pension contribution and medical insurance) were halved, going from 30% to 15%, with the percentage calculated from the salary in case it is higher than the minimum living wage. This reduction of insurance payments is available until the end of 2020. Zero-interest bank loans that can be used only for salaries were also introduced.

There are several categories of people who did not receive benefits but for whom some bureaucratic procedures were relieved. In particular, for working citizens older than 65, sick leave is now arranged remotely, and these citizens are now eligible to obtain the average salary for their region while on sick leave. Migrant workers were granted the right to prolong their residence permit or work permit and other supplementary documents auto-

matically from March 15 through June 15, 2020, under Presidential Decree #274, adopted on April 18, 2020.

As this overview demonstrates, governmental support mainly targeted families with children, health care workers, and the unemployed. Improving the demographic situation has been central to the presidential political agenda in recent years (Kainu et al. 2017), hence families with children were among the beneficiaries of state support during the pandemic. As Cook and Twigg (2020) argue, there are three groups that were left behind by the support measures: labor migrants, informal-sector workers who are not eligible for free access to the health care system, and rural populations lacking quick access to medical facilities. In addition, pensioners got monetary and in-kind benefits only in a limited number of regions.

Evaluation of Social Policy Measures in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to experts, the assistance for families with children was not sufficient because these policy measures compensated, on average, for only 43% of lost income (Discussion Paper #4, 2020, p. 7). Given that families with children had insufficient income even before the pandemic, they did not gain much in comparison to families without children. Experts claim that the percentage of families of all categories in poverty increased from 12.5% to 20%, while the poverty rate for families with children grew from 21–26% to 31–35% (Discussion Paper #4, 2020, p. 7). The authors of the Discussion Paper conclude that newly introduced measures of support indeed compensate for lost income during the pandemic but have not been able to secure recipients' wealth at pre-COVID levels. The Russian Federation had already experienced an economic slowdown at the end of 2019 due to the economic crisis, which caused a decline in the population's income (Zubarevich and Safronov 2020). The pandemic only exacerbated this trend.

There are two main strategies for adapting to economic crises in Russian regions, according to Natalia Zubarevich (2020, p. 9): more intensive usage of part-time employment and provision of unemployment benefits. Unemployment measures have several effects. As a result of the increase in unemployment benefits and the simplification of registration procedures, the number of people turning to public employment agencies increased by 250% in June 2020 in comparison to February 2020. The unemployment rate increased from 4.6% (3.5 million people) to 6% (45 million) compared with early 2019 (Zubarevich and Safronov 2020, p. 6).²

Russian experts have found that expenditure on health care grew from 4% of GDP in 2019 to 6.5% in

2 There are several methodologies for evaluating unemployment in Russia. The one used in these calculations is the methodology recommended by the International Labour Organization.

2020, while social policy expenditures grew by only 0.6% compared with 2019 (to 31.8% of GDP in 2020). Since the majority of measures were financed from the federal budget, intergovernmental transfers increased from 5.5% in 2019 to 7.1% in 2020 (Analytic Bulletin 2020). The World Bank estimates that by May 2020, the Russian Federation had invested 1.4 trillion rubles in anti-crisis measures, constituting 1.2% of GDP (World Bank 2020). The International Monetary Fund estimates that Russian budgetary fiscal support to individuals and firms is now as high as 2.5% of GDP (IMF 2020a). This level of support is, however, still lower than in other OECD countries, where these investments are more than 10% of GDP. The overall cost of the fiscal package for individuals, business, and nonprofit organizations is estimated at 3.4% of GDP (IMF 2020b). This level of budgetary support is similar to that of other BRICS countries (Analytic Bulletin 2020, p. 49). Not only is government support only moderate, but there are also a huge number of cases in which individuals eligible for benefits had to fight for them. Even the pro-government movement “National Front” admits that a lot of effort has to be invested in order to obtain the promised benefits. Thus, even the scarce resources available do not always easily reach beneficiaries.

It is crucial to mention the rise of charitable activity in Russian society in response to the pandemic. In the very beginning, the government refused to admit that hospitals and other public health care providers were not sufficiently stocked with personal protective equipment. To solve this problem, the professional union “Alliance of Doctors” and other civic organizations engaged in fundraising to purchase and distribute the necessary equipment in Moscow city and other regions across Russia. The TV channel “Rain” (“Dozhd”) and the theatre “Gogol’ Center,” run by famous artistic director Kirill Sebebnikov, were among those who arranged charity marathons. As Semenov and Bederson (2020) demonstrated, average monthly donations increased.

There have been talks about a possible decision by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to prolong the above-mentioned temporary measures and make them permanent. However, there are no signs of any governmental measures to extend the measures adopted in the first months of the pandemic. As the economist Evgenii Gontmakher (2020) notes, all the fixed-term measures introduced (most of them intended just for April–June 2020) ended on October 1 and current governmental rhetoric sees the pandemic as a short-term crisis, neglecting its long-term consequences in many policy spheres. The position of the federal government can be partially explained and supported by the official data on new infections and deaths, which put them at a relatively low level. Yet the official data have been called into question by international and domestic experts alike (New York

Times, Financial Times). In light of the political goal of approving the new Constitution, experts suggest that the reporting this summer was politically motivated. An insufficient supply of COVID-19 tests also accounts in part for relatively positive official reports. In addition to that explanation, Cook and Twigg (2020) assume that particularities of statistics-gathering and criteria for causes of death differ from global standards, which would explain the comparatively low fatality rate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are three main particularities of the governmental response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia. First, the dynamics of the political regime in Russia as well as particularities of its territorial composition and power vertical help to explain policy responses. Responsibility for containing the pandemic was forced on the regional authorities, which are political and financially dependent on the central government. This configuration of federal-regional relations inhibits the ability to contain the pandemic because the existing highly centralized system has never encouraged regional initiatives and only required compliance with federal policy goals. The responsibility for coping with the pandemic took many regional authorities by surprise, challenging their capacity to act independently and efficiently on their own. In some cases (e.g., the Republic of Dagestan), this led to a total policy failure. In addition, the desire to get the new Constitution—mainly aimed at allowing the current president to maintain power—adopted seems to have driven the political process, distracting the political leadership from taking prompt preventive measures at the very beginning of the pandemic. The All-Russian voting day on the new Constitution was a clear sign of prioritization of the political goal of keeping the president in power in the future over the social policy goal of ensuring the health and wealth of the population.

Second, the dominance of executive power over legislative power meant that the main social benefits and unplanned budget spending were introduced by presidential proclamations and later elaborated in presidential and governmental decrees, as well as in federal legislation. The presence of demographic growth on the presidential political agenda accounts for the support measures introduced for various categories of families with children.

Third, the long-existing categorization of various groups of beneficiaries (doctors versus junior health care personnel, families with children of varying age, etc.) who are eligible for different levels of state support persists. This differentiation creates unequal support and social tension, producing grounds for manipulation with the goal of obtaining “more privileged” status to obtain better benefits. Path-dependence accounts for the appearance of categorical provision during the pandemic instead

of means-testing. All the measures that have been introduced are temporary, demonstrating that the government

sees the pandemic as a short-term crisis and neglects its long-term consequences in many policy spheres.

About the Author

Anna Tarasenko has a political science background and holds a PhD in Political Science with a research focus on the development of the nonprofit sector in Russia. She works for the National Research University Higher School of Economics (St. Petersburg Campus) as Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Comparative Governance Studies.

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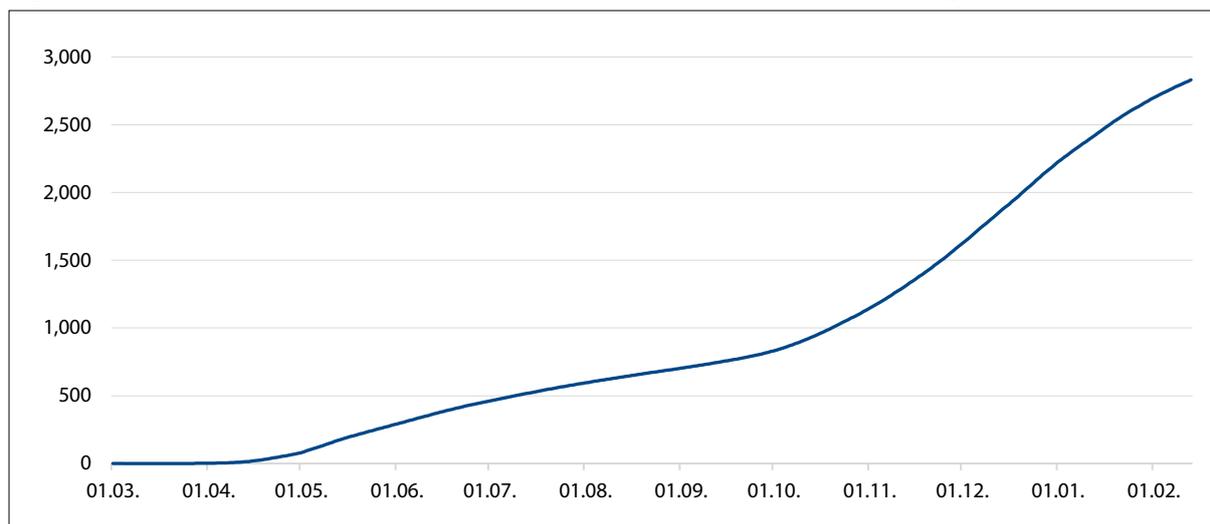
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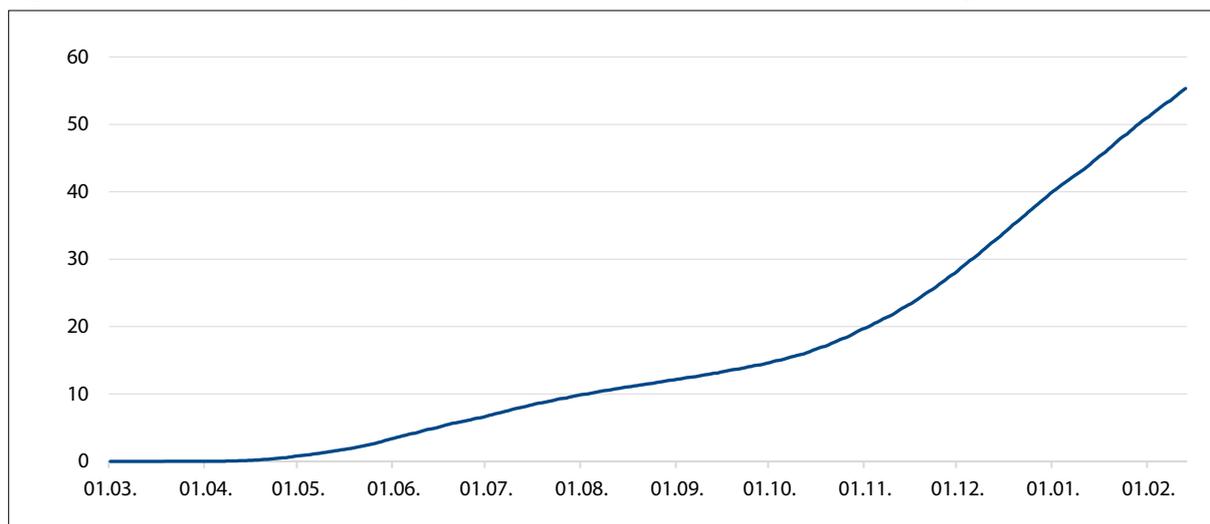
COVID-19 in Russia: Official Statistics (13th February 2021)

Figure 1: COVID-19 in Russia (Cases per 100,000 Inhabitants, 1st March 2020 – 13th February 2021)



Experts assume that the official figures are significantly lower than the actual figures. The actual number of deaths can be estimated on the basis of excess mortality data. The Russian Analytical Digest has decided to publish the official figures, as they reflect the publicly communicated assessment of the epidemiologic situation. Source: Johns Hopkins University, 13th February 2021, 2:23 PM CEST <https://oronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>; https://github.com/CSSEGISandData/COVID-19/blob/master/csse_covid_19_data/csse_covid_19_time_series/time_series_covid19_confirmed_global.csv; population data: CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>

Figure 2: COVID-19 in Russia (Deaths per 100,000 Inhabitants, 1st March 2020 – 13th February 2021)



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ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

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