



Cornell University  
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School  
**DigitalCommons@ILR**

---

Child Labor

---

6-1-2002

# Child Labour in the Russian Federation

Svetlana Stephenson  
*University of North London*

International Labour Office

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/child>

 Part of the [Labor and Employment Law Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Child Labor by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact [hlmdigital@cornell.edu](mailto:hlmdigital@cornell.edu).

---

# Child Labour in the Russian Federation

## **Abstract**

Working paper on child labor written in 2002 for the ILO by Svetlana Stephenson, in preparation of the ILO Declaration entitled A Future Without Child Labour, under the mandate of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

## **Keywords**

abolition, Catherwood, child, children, Cornell, declaration, elimination, employers, employment, federation, forced, freedom, fundamental, global, globalization, government, ILR, international, IPEC, labor, labour, law, legislation, NGO, organization, organization, paper, portal, principles, report, rights, Russia Russian, university, work, workers, working, workplace

## **Disciplines**

Labor and Employment Law

## **Comments**

InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work  
DECLARATION/WP/07/2002

# Child Labour in the Russian Federation

Svetlana Stephenson

DECLARATION/WP/07/2002

Working Paper

**Working Paper**

# **Child labour in the Russian Federation**

**Svetlana Stephenson  
School of Social Studies  
University of North London  
United Kingdom**

**International Labour Office  
Geneva**

June 2002



---

## Foreword

In June 1998 the International Labour Conference adopted the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up. The Declaration obligates all member States of the International Labour Organization to respect, promote and realize freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.<sup>1</sup> The *InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration* is responsible for the reporting processes and technical cooperation activities associated with the Declaration Follow-up; and it carries out awareness-raising, advocacy and knowledge functions – of which this Working Paper is an example. Working Papers are intended to stimulate discussion of the issues covered by the Declaration. They express the views of the author, which are not necessarily those of the ILO.

Dr. Stephenson was commissioned by the ILO to write this Working Paper, as an input into preparation of the ILO Director-General's report to the 2002 session of the International Labour Conference, under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration, entitled *A Future Without Child Labour*. Based on the author's own research, as well as secondary information sources, the paper reviews emerging trends and issues in child labour in the Russian Federation over the transition period. It highlights some of the key challenges to be faced, if vulnerable groups of children are to be protected from child labour, and particularly its worst forms, in a period of rapid and profound change in economic and social structures.

Svetlana Stephenson is a Senior Lecturer in Comparative Sociology and Social Policy at the University of North London. Her research interests are in the areas of poverty, social exclusion and social justice in Eastern Europe, and her recent research has been on street children and homelessness in Russia. She is a member of the National Committee of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies and has worked as a consultant to the British Department for International Development.

Readers are invited to share their comments and views on the paper, directly with the author and with the InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration.<sup>2</sup>

W. R. Böhning,  
Director, InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration

June 2002

---

<sup>1</sup> For the text of the Declaration, please visit our website at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/decl/declaration/text/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> The author can be contacted by email at: [TheStephensons@compuserve.com](mailto:TheStephensons@compuserve.com), and the InFocus Programme Secretariat by email at: [declaration@ilo.org](mailto:declaration@ilo.org)

---

## *Contents*

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword.....	iii
Contents .....	iv
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Child labour in the USSR.....	1
3. Mass impoverishment.....	3
4. An increase in single-parent families .....	4
5. Social exclusion.....	5
6. The growth of the informal economy.....	6
7. A crisis in the child protection and education systems.....	7
8. Value changes.....	9
9. Social construction of child labour .....	10
10. Existing data on the incidence and the main characteristics of child labour .....	12
11. Worst forms of child labour .....	14
12. Russian legislation on child labour .....	17
13. Conclusion.....	17
List of Declaration Working Papers .....	19

---

## 1. Introduction

The transition to a market economy, following the break-up of the USSR, affected the lives of children in the Russian Federation in many different ways. One of the most profound consequences has been the increased involvement of children in economic activity.

Television news and newspaper articles report almost every day how children, either as unaccompanied minors or with their parents, are forced to move to the big cities in search of a better life or for their basic safety. Some children leave home to live and work on the streets; others stay at home, but work on the streets to help support their family. They engage in a variety of activities, including petty trading, singing or playing musical instruments, offering unwanted services like washing car windows or just begging. In the worst cases, they can be seen on the streets offering their bodies for sale.

How did this happen? Why has child labour become an issue after seventy years of socialism, with its insistence on children as “the only privileged class” in Soviet society? Has child labour emerged as a reaction to the stresses of transition and is it thus directly linked to poverty, social and geographical dislocation and new mechanisms of social exclusion? Or must the Russian Federation, by joining the Western world, experience social changes that undermine collective institutions and traditional social controls and that allow children to act as free economic agents?

The dearth of statistical information and survey data on child labour in the Russian Federation, both pre- and post-reform, means that we cannot systematically examine the direct links between the larger social, cultural and economic factors at play and specific child labour practices. However, it is possible to use findings small-scale research on child labour in conjunction with available indicators on phenomena such as income dynamics, processes and mechanisms of social exclusion, transformation of labour markets and changes in social policies, to show how the increasing incidence of child labour in the Russian Federation may be connected to larger-scale social change.

## 2. Child labour in the USSR

There is no evidence of large-scale independent activity by children in the labour market in the USSR, except during the periods of social and economic upheaval associated with the revolution, the civil war and the Second World War.

The Soviet State proclaimed, from the start, its intention to eradicate the exploitation of children. In 1922, employment of children under the age of 16 was prohibited, although children aged between 14 and 16 could still be employed in exceptional cases with the agreement of the Labour Commissariat and the trade unions. Since 1956, legislation has allowed children of 15 years of age to be employed in exceptional cases with the agreement of the enterprise concerned and of local trade union committees. Additional legislation in 1974 stipulated the conditions under which children over the age of 14 could work: no contraindications on the grounds of health, agreement of one of the parents (or guardians) and agreement of the child’s educational institution and the trade union of the enterprise concerned. In 1988, the minimum age for work was established as 14 years.



---

Child labour in the USSR was not just ideologically and legally unacceptable, it also had no real place in the command economy. The Soviet economy operated in conditions of mainly administratively controlled labour mobility and a regulated job market. Informal economic activity did exist, but even this was usually connected to the operation (sometimes in the form of additional illicit production) of the enterprise, collective farm or scientific institution. Almost full employment, strict administrative control, tight local communities organized around the enterprises, and shared group ethics: all precluded any large-scale independent social and economic activity. The phenomenon of street children who would need to engage in survival strategies did not exist, apart from during the periods following the revolution, the civil war and the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> Any runaway children were quickly picked up by police and returned to their families or placed in residential care.

The social role of children was tightly defined by the boundaries of family socialization and education. In the Soviet social structure, individuals were divided into substantive, ideologically defined categories, and a child's major role was to be prepared to become a "constructor of communism".<sup>4</sup> Children were not regarded as independent economic agents, and their role as providers for the household was very limited.

Officially, child work could only take place if it was to prepare children for future employment, within the framework of education.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that involving children in forced labour was a widespread practice.<sup>6</sup> It appears that this was the case when children were made to participate in harvesting on collective farms, sometimes well into the school year. This activity was organized by schools at the "request" of political authorities. Such forced labour, although perhaps affecting children and young people disproportionately, was not confined solely to them, but was part of a widespread practice of compulsory participation in agricultural work, which also involved students, industrial workers and other urban dwellers.

One may say then that although child labour in the USSR was not eradicated, as was claimed by officialdom<sup>7</sup>, for children younger than 14-16 years of age it took place mainly within the system of education, and its compulsory elements were controlled by schools. Although the shortage of low-skilled agricultural workers created some demand for child labour, tight regulations prevented its use on a large scale in other sectors. Despite the existence of poverty,<sup>8</sup> there were no conditions for unregulated use of child labour. Rather, it took place within a heavily controlled framework of education and non-market political and ideological relationships.

---

<sup>3</sup> See M.K. Stolee: "Homeless children in the USSR 1917-1957", *Soviet Studies* (London), 1988, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 64-83 and W.Z. Goldman: *Women, the state and the revolution. Soviet family policy and social life, 1917-1933* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), for information on children working on the street in the 1920-30s in the USSR.

<sup>4</sup> H. Pilkington: *Russia's youth and its culture* (London, Routledge, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> V.N. Yagodkin: *How child labour was eradicated in the USSR: integrating school and society, population and labour policies*, Working paper No. 109 (Geneva, ILO, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> V.A. Mansurov: *Child work in Russia* (Geneva, ILO, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> V.N. Yagodkin, *op.cit.*

<sup>8</sup> The figures which appeared in Soviet literature of the mid-1970s and the 1980s, suggest that the officially designated poor (or *maloobespechennii*) constituted about 15-20% of the Soviet population. B. Silverman, B. and M. Yanowitch: *New rich, new poor, new Russia. Winners and losers on the Russian road to capitalism* (Armonk, NY and London, M.E. Sharpe, 2000), p.38.

---

### 3. Mass impoverishment

With the transformation of the socialist planned economy into a market economy, new pressures emerged for children, particularly for those from the poorest groups, to become contributors to family income and even, in the worst cases, to provide totally for themselves. The new, largely unregulated market conditions mean that almost any kind of child activity in the labour market has become possible.

For the majority of the population of the Russian Federation, transition to the market economy has meant adaptation to seriously decreased incomes and greater insecurity. Among the key contributing factors has been the economic decline. In terms of measured output, real GDP was down by 42% in 1998, compared with the 1989 level.<sup>9</sup>

Although the available estimates of the number of poor people in the Russian Federation vary, most of them show a sharp increase over the transition period. Real wages in the Russian Federation in 1998 were 40% of what they were in 1989.<sup>10</sup>

The state sector employs 64.2% of the working population in the Russian Federation.<sup>11</sup> This sector is disproportionately affected by underemployment, low wages, administrative leave and wage arrears.<sup>12</sup> In 1998, 45% of the workforce was not receiving regular pay and 8-10% had not been paid for more than six months.<sup>13</sup>

Families with children face a greater risk of living in poverty. In 1996, according to the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS),<sup>14</sup> some 21% of households without children were living in poverty, with the figure rising to 24% for two-parent households and 28% for single-parent households.<sup>15</sup> Younger people are disproportionately represented among the unemployed or in low-skilled jobs throughout the post-Communist region.<sup>16</sup> These changes were accompanied by a new political dogma, requiring the State to withdraw from redistribution. Fiscal pressures and the political ideology that promoted the reduction of state intervention created a situation where the social safety nets upon which the poor could have relied were very weak or non-existent. Non-payment, or delays in payment, of benefits, including child benefits, further undermined the

---

<sup>9</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD): *Transition report* (London, EBRD, 1999)

<sup>10</sup> TransMONEE database, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (Florence, Italy), 2000.

<sup>11</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD): *Transition report 2000: Employment, skills and transition* (London, EBRD, 2000), p.101.

<sup>12</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): *The social crisis in the Russian Federation* (Paris, OECD, 2001), pp. 64-65.

<sup>13</sup> UNDP: *Human development report* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> The Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) is a household panel survey administered by the University of North Carolina. The first four rounds of the survey (1992-1994) were partly financed by the World Bank and were carried out in collaboration with the Russian Statistical Agency. Subsequent rounds have been carried out in collaboration with the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation, with financing from the United States Agency for International Development.

<sup>15</sup> J. Klugman and A. Kolev: "The welfare repercussions of single parenthood in Russia in transition", in A. Motivans and J. Klugman, eds.: *Single parents and child welfare in the new Russia* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> EBRD, op.cit., p.101.

---

position of poor families. In 1998, 83% of eligible households did not receive child benefits, according to RLMS data.<sup>17</sup>

While the system of welfare in the USSR was to a significant extent linked to the system of organized employment, very few provisions and services existed for those individuals who might find themselves outside the formal labour market, such as disabled or homeless people. No coherent policies for reorganizing the welfare system so that it takes into account the new social and economic realities have emerged since the start of the transition period. Residence permit regulations prevent access of migrants to social security and social assistance. There is no systematic provision of cash allowances, based on need, to individuals and households, apart from emergency relief on an ad hoc basis.<sup>18</sup> A crisis in social protection and social services has made it impossible to rely on the State at a time of hardship. Moreover, very poor households have less access to cash transfers and subsidies than those households that are better off.<sup>19</sup>

All this has created a situation in which child labour may have become necessary for the survival of many households.

#### **4. An increase in single-parent families**

A growth in poverty and a crisis in social protection go hand-in-hand with the continuing breakdown of traditional family structures. The proportion of single-parent families who are at serious risk of poverty has been increasing since the 1960s<sup>20</sup>. In 1989, one in seven children (i.e. under 18-year-olds) in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) lived with only one parent; in 1994, this figure had risen to one in five children.<sup>21</sup> Low earning capacity of the custodial parent and low child benefits seriously undermine the capacity of single parents to look after their children. While most single-parent families are headed by women, female employment has fallen disproportionately compared to that of men.<sup>22</sup> From 1989 to 1996, labour force participation rates of women aged 15-59 years dropped by 12 percentage points; among women aged 15-29 years they dropped by 17 percentage points.<sup>23</sup> Employment opportunities for single parents, which were already scarce, have decreased further as a result of cuts in child-care facilities.<sup>24</sup> There is evidence that a disproportionate number of children working on the street are from single-parent families.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> OECD: *The social crisis in the Russian Federation* (Paris, OECD, 2001), p.23.

<sup>18</sup> OECD, op.cit., p.19.

<sup>19</sup> OECD, op.cit., p.22.

<sup>20</sup> A. Motivans and J. Klugman: "Single parents and child welfare in the new Russia, in A. Motivans and J. Klugman, eds.: *Single parents and child welfare in the new Russia*" (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), p.9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF: *Women in transition*, Regional Monitoring Report No. 6 (Florence, Italy, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> ILO: *Yearbook of labour statistics* (Geneva, ILO, 1992 and 1997).

<sup>24</sup> TransMONEE database, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (Florence, Italy), 2000.

<sup>25</sup> ILO/IPEC: *In-depth analysis of the situation of working street children in Saint Petersburg* (St Petersburg, 2000); S. Stephenson: "The abandoned children of Russia: from 'privileged class' to 'underclass' ", in S. Webber and I. Liikanen, eds.: *Beyond civil society: education and civic culture in post-Communist countries* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001).

---

## 5. Social exclusion

Income poverty can arguably be one of the key determinants in families' need for children's economic participation. Yet in a society with strong social control and collective institutions, a low standard of living alone may not lead to child labour on a large scale (as was the case in the USSR). There seem to be other structural factors contributing to the proliferation of child labour. Among these are the processes of marginalization and informalization, with people becoming progressively excluded from the distributive institutions of mainstream society: the labour market, the housing market and access to education, public health care, social benefits and pensions. These processes determine both the supply of child labour coming from the excluded families, and the forms this labour takes.

Unemployment in the Russian Federation increased from about 3.6% of the economically active population in 1992 to 13% in 1999.<sup>26</sup> According to the World Bank, the real level of social security benefits in the Russian Federation and in the other former republics of the USSR has declined so much that most eligible unemployed people do not claim them.<sup>27</sup>

To the "indigenous" population affected by unemployment and underemployment can be added new migrants and refugees from outside the Russian Federation. Migration from depressed regions to economically more healthy areas, forced migration from areas of war and conflict, and movement of Russian-speaking inhabitants from the former republics of the USSR to the Russian Federation resulted in dislocation for millions of families. Between 1992 and 1996, 3 million people migrated to the Russian Federation from the former republics. Approximately 1 million of these people were registered by the authorities.<sup>28</sup> In 1999, there were about 500,000 refugees and internally displaced persons in the Russian Federation.<sup>29</sup>

These families have arrived in the Russian Federation at a time when the labour market situation is extremely unfavourable. Research shows that economic difficulties, the animosity of the local population, ethnic stereotypes and the reluctance of local authorities to provide support make integration for many of them extremely hard.<sup>30</sup>

A powerful factor in social exclusion in the Russian Federation, which directly affects the life chances of migrants and which may be responsible for the incidence and forms of child labour, is the preservation of the institution of residence permits. Strict residency rules prevent those with nowhere to live from getting legal jobs or even access to welfare rights such as unemployment benefits or pensions. These Soviet-era restrictions, enforced particularly harshly in big cities,

---

<sup>26</sup> V. Zaslavsky: "The Russian working class in times of transition", in V.E. Bonnell and G.W. Breslauer, eds.: *Russia in the new century: stability or disorder* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 2001), p. 203.

<sup>27</sup> World Bank: *ECA social protection strategy: balancing protection and opportunity*, World Bank, Human Development Sector Unit, Europe and Central Asia (Washington DC, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): *The state of the world's refugees. Fifty years of humanitarian action* (Oxford, UNHCR and Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR, op.cit., p.208.

<sup>30</sup> G. Vitkovskaia: "Vinuzhdennaia migratsiia i migrantophobii v Rossii", in G. Vitkovskaia and A. Malashenko, eds.: *Neterpimost' v Rossii: starii i novie phobii* (Moscow, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 1998), pp. 151-191.

---

make migrants either avoid urban centres (where there are possibilities of jobs) or live there illegally.<sup>31</sup>

A poll of 888 internally displaced persons in 1997-1998 in five regions of the Russian Federation, showed that only 48% of migrants found a permanent job after moving. Of the remainder, 13% had temporary jobs, 11% had occasional jobs, and 22% had no job at all.<sup>32</sup>

Children make up a significant part of the migrant population. In 1997, 18.1% of all migrants in the Russian Federation were under 18.<sup>33</sup> Child refugees and forced migrants find themselves completely outside the systems of social protection. According to existing legislation, children cannot be granted refugee status and must be sent back to the place from where they came. Children who have no residence permit for the area where they live also have no right to public health care (apart from emergency hospital treatment).

Homelessness is the strongest indicator of social exclusion and of the failure of public and private safety nets. The 1990s saw an increase in homelessness in the Russian Federation, with homeless people changing from being predominantly ex-prisoners and long-term alcoholics to being recent migrants, families with children, and a growing number of young people.<sup>34</sup> The current number of homeless people in the Russian Federation remains uncertain – partly because of problems with the definition of homelessness, and partly because of a lack of large-scale surveys. A survey of homeless people conducted in 1995 in Moscow, showed that 15% of the children of the Moscow homeless lived with them in the street (the rest lived with relatives or in institutions).<sup>35</sup>

## 6. The growth of the informal economy

Unemployment, migration and homelessness, in the absence of integrative state policies, have forced millions of households to survive at the margins of “normal” society. As elsewhere in the world, in the absence of access to the formal labour market – be it because of a lack of adequate jobs or because of institutional discrimination – socially excluded and marginal groups attempt to make a living in the informal economy.

According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), “many of the CIS countries still expect a large share of social safety net benefits to be provided by the large enterprises that made up the bulk of the former planned economy. Many of these enterprises no longer have the means or the inclination to provide such support. The result is poverty among the unemployed and among workers who have not been paid in cash or in kind for months on end. As a result, a widespread informal economy has developed. Unlike the Central European and Baltic states, such informal activities have mostly been due to a lack of opportunities in the formal sector and ...are undertaken as a survival strategy.”<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> G. Vitkovskaia, op.cit., p.174.

<sup>33</sup> A. Vishnevskii, ed.: *Naseleniie Rossii. Pyatii ezhegodnii demographicheskii doklad* (Moscow, Centre for Demography and Human Ecology, 1998), p.109.

<sup>34</sup> S. Stephenson: “The Russian homeless: old problem, new agenda”, in S. Hutton and J. Redmond, eds.: *Poverty in transition economies* (London, Routledge, 2000), pp. 14-34.

<sup>35</sup> S. Stephenson: *Bezdomniie v sotsialnoi strukture bolshogo goroda* (Moscow, INION RAN, 1997), p.25.

<sup>36</sup> EBRD, op.cit., p.6.

---

In the cities, the shadow economy has become a characteristic feature of post-Soviet urbanism.<sup>37</sup> Yet its size and composition are unclear. The Russian Statistical Agency estimates the size of the informal economy at 25% of total GDP. This figure, however, does not include such shadow activities as illicit street-level economic activities (e.g. begging, busking, window-cleaning), nor does it include more openly proscribed occupations such as the drugs trade or prostitution, which have also become an important part of the informal economy. Some indicators of household participation in the unregulated economy can be found in household surveys (although these surveys do not normally reach marginal groups). In a national representative survey of the adult population conducted in September 2000 by the Russian Centre for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM), about 12% of respondents were self-employed or had secondary employment (30% of respondents were unemployed). 69% of these jobs were unregistered.<sup>38</sup>

The practice of employing adults without official contracts is particularly widespread in the service sector, where employees are often paid cash at the end of the working day. A recent OECD report (2001) says that workers in the unregulated labour market tend to be younger, new entrants, migrants and, to a lesser extent, workers released from large-scale state enterprises. Relatively high labour turnover and a high risk of unemployment are common in this sector.<sup>39</sup> Children have to compete with adults in this unregulated job market, and the fact that their skills are low may push them into the worst forms of child labour and into particularly exploitative conditions.

## 7. A crisis in the child protection and education systems

Poverty, unemployment, migration, homelessness, insecurity and growing social isolation seriously undermine the capacity of families to look after children. This can lead to family violence, child neglect and abuse. The 1990s saw an increase in the number of neglected and abandoned children – those known as “social orphans”. Available data on the families of such children show that parental poverty and social exclusion are correlated to family instability, and can be aggravated by problems with the law and with alcohol addiction.<sup>40</sup> According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Development of the Russian Federation, 636,900 children are not looked after by their parents. The majority of these are social orphans.

The inability of families to care for their children puts a greater stress on institutional care.<sup>41</sup> In the majority of regions in the Russian Federation, orphaned children or those children whose parents have been stripped of their parental rights are put in institutions (although currently about 20 regions in the Russian Federation plan to introduce foster families). These institutions often cause further problems rather than provide solutions. A special report by Human Rights Watch in

---

<sup>37</sup> I. Szelenyi: “Cities under socialism – and after”, in G. Andrusz, M. Harloe and I. Szelenyi, eds.: *Cities after socialism. Urban and regional change and conflict in post-Socialist societies* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996), pp. 286-317.

<sup>38</sup> Vserossiiskii Tsent Izucheniia Obshestvennogo Mneniia (VTsIOM): *Obshestvennoie mneniie – 2000* (Moscow, VTsIOM, 2000), pp. 39-42.

<sup>39</sup> OECD, 2001, op.cit., pp. 67-68

<sup>40</sup> S. Stephenson: “The abandoned children of Russia: from ‘privileged class’ to ‘underclass’”, in S. Webber and I. Liikanen, eds.: *Beyond civil society: Education and civic culture in post-Communist countries*. (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001); ILO/IPEC, op.cit.

<sup>41</sup> UNICEF: *After the fall: the human impact of ten years of transition* (Florence, Italy, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, 1999).

---

December 1998 exposed the severe lack of facilities for rehabilitation or socialization of children in children's homes.<sup>42</sup>

Generally, levels of children's pre-primary enrolment rate have receded. Services aimed at supervising school-aged children after school hours (summer camps, after-school classes, "yo ung pioneer palaces"), where children could undertake a variety of educational and physical activities, have been sharply cut. The system of shelters for children is still rudimentary and insufficient. To make matters worse, the children of migrants and homeless people who lack a registration permit cannot even be accepted by state-run or charity shelters.

Civil society institutions generally remain undeveloped and, although there has been a rapid expansion of NGOs in the 1990s, they lack experience and have a very limited financial base. There are efforts by NGOs to open shelters and youth clubs, and to develop a system of monitoring problem families, but as a rule these receive no substantial support from the State.

As children have become more vulnerable, the system of education, which could play a key role in supporting and accommodating them, has itself been in crisis. There was a one-third fall in total real expenditure on education over the 1989-96 period,<sup>43</sup> with teachers widely affected by non-payment of wages. Delays in transfers of funding, freezes of expenditure, diversions, and regionalization of finances have undermined the financial position of schools.<sup>44</sup> Schools are experiencing serious problems in finding books and staff. The numbers of evening schools and secondary vocational schools (PTUs) have decreased.<sup>45</sup> Vocational training, after decades of underfunding and providing training for obsolete industrial jobs, cannot respond to the changing needs of the market.<sup>46</sup>

Tighter selection and expulsion criteria have become more common. School non-attendance is clearly an issue, and is often claimed to have become a widespread phenomenon, but figures on the extent of non-attendance vary. The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation has regularly alleged that "millions of children" do not attend school. The basis for this calculation, however, is uncertain. "RLMS data for 1996 confirm very high levels of enrolment, with less than 2% of children in the 7-14 year age group not enrolled...The non-attendance rate (numbers of children absent from school in the week preceding the survey) for children in compulsory education is 6.3%. This means that around 8% of children are not enrolled in school or are enrolled but not attending a relatively low rate by Western standards."<sup>47</sup> But, although secondary education enrolment figures are high, fewer children move to the complete secondary education stage. Upper secondary enrolment rates have fallen from 89 to 68%.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch: *Abandoned to the state: cruelty and neglect in Russian orphanages* (New York, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> UNICEF: *Education for all? The MONEE Project*, Regional Monitoring Report No. 5 (Florence, Italy, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, 1998), figure 2.11.

<sup>44</sup> S.L. Webber: *School, reform and society in the new Russia* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> OECD: *Reviews for national policies for education, Russian Federation* (Paris, OECD, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> A. Coudouel and M. Foley: "Family structure and child welfare outcomes", in A. Motivans and J. Klugman, eds.: *Single parents and child welfare in the new Russia* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), p. 213.

<sup>48</sup> J. Micklewright: *Education, inequality and transition*, Working Paper No. 74 (Florence, Italy, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000).

---

Although no data are available on the causes of non-attendance and decreasing enrolment levels, these may well be related to the growing cost of education for families. The increased cost of textbooks, shoes and clothes, together with opportunity costs resulting from reductions in family income, are all part of an increasingly heavy financial burden on families. The Ministry of Higher and Vocational Education of the Russian Federation estimates formal and informal spending by parents on education for their children at about 20% of total spending.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, there is no evidence of a decrease in the value of education for families. A qualitative survey of parents, teachers and students in schools and vocational schools in several regions of the Russian Federation in 2000, commissioned by the World Bank, showed that parents react to worsening economic conditions by investing more in the education of their children.<sup>50</sup> More research, however, is needed to see if this is true of all social and income groups.

## 8. Value changes

The processes of economic and social transformation, associated with an increase in poverty and social exclusion, go hand-in-hand with significant cultural changes in Russian society. Market reforms dealt a major blow to the entire system of welfare, social networks and social control organized around enterprises. The enterprises not only offered in many ways a system of public welfare similar to that of Western societies – providing housing, kindergartens, medical and leisure facilities – but also represented a locus for all types of relationship associated with close-knit communities, whether for neighbour, kin or friendship ties. Non-payment of wages and a deliberate policy of destruction of enterprise-based welfare systems have seriously undermined this social structure. In the course of the transformation, attachment and control by other institutional structures, such as schools and administrative and police apparatus, have become weaker.

One of the consequences of these changes is that people, including children, have become freer from the constraints of social control and can pursue their individual strategies more easily. Children's initiatives can now find support from adults, who seem more ready to view children as active agents. A 1993 survey of adults' attitudes to child work generally, and those of parents and teachers in particular, revealed a generally positive outlook. Some 70% of the adults in an all-Russian representative sample thought that child work was a good thing compared with 80% of teachers and 58% of parents.<sup>51</sup> Children's activity in the labour market seems to have become more legitimate in terms of social norms.

Interviews with public officials, conducted within the ICFTU survey (1998), showed that child work, even from an early age, tended to be viewed positively and was seen as an alternative to children's involvement in crime. Paradoxically, it was not seen as an alternative to education<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> OECD, 2001, op.cit., p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> VTsIOM, op.cit., p. 108.

<sup>51</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p.4. Mansurov does not specify whether the question meant work for remuneration or any work (including, for example, unpaid domestic help).

<sup>52</sup> International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU): *Child labour in Russia. Kemerovo-Moscow-Samara-Ul'anovsk* (Geneva, 1998). The study took place in Samara, Ul'anovsk and Kemerovo regions and in Moscow. It included 37 interviews with experts, 9 interviews with employers who use child labour and 97 interviews with child employees.



---

These changes in values contribute not only to a greater freedom to work, but also add to the pressure on children to earn money. There is also wider social pressure, connected with the new models of consumption required from children and from adults. Depending upon their age and specific social environment, children are expected to consume and possess various commodities, starting with Pepsi-Cola and Mars Bars and ending with expensive hi-fis and clothes with designer labels, which their parents may deny them or may just not be able to afford.

## 9. Social construction of child labour

Writers on the subject differ in their assessment of which processes and factors are mainly responsible for the proliferation of child labour in the Russian Federation. Mansurov, for example, argues that “it is not so much a matter of poverty which drives children to work, but a shift in social consciousness which creates appetites for new goods and services while changing the rules by which goods and services must be obtained. As a consequence, young people feel less constrained by traditional social mores concerning work and respond more to what they perceive as ‘practical’ values.”<sup>53</sup>

The ILO/IPEC St Petersburg survey (2000) argues that the majority of children working on the street cannot be considered disadvantaged.<sup>54</sup> They live in families, study at school and work in their free time. Work for them is simply a means of obtaining some money for things they want to buy.<sup>55</sup> Some 49.5% of children working on the street, when asked why they were working, answered that they wanted more pocket money; 49.2% answered that they needed money to buy necessary things. Two out of five of the children questioned said that they only worked in order to buy food (42.0%); one child in four worked to help his or her parents (22.1%) or brother/sister (3.5%). Some 17% of the children answered that they worked in order to survive; 6.3% worked because they needed money to buy drugs; 0.9% worked under threat.<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, this survey also indicates that poverty may be at the root of why children work on the street. Only 26.5% of all children working on the street have two parents who work. For 52.8% of children, the main source of income is from one parent only and one in ten families have no earnings at all.<sup>57</sup> Stephenson’s research on children working on the street in Moscow demonstrated that the majority of parents (according to children’s reports) were low-qualified

---

<sup>53</sup> V.A. Mansurov, *op.cit.*, p. 4 -5.

<sup>54</sup> ILO/IPEC, *op.cit.* Research data are based on in-depth individual interviews conducted with the children themselves, as well as with their employers. In total, 1,003 children working on the street were interviewed during the research, including children involved in the worst forms of child labour, such as prostitution and drug trafficking. The 50 employers questioned represented a cross-section of the formal and informal economy. Expert polls of specialists on this problem were consulted, among whom were 88 people from state and non-governmental organizations providing assistance to children working on the street, state and local authorities, and representatives of law enforcement agencies.

<sup>55</sup> ILO/IPEC, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> The sum of the variants of answers is more than 100 percent as each respondent was allowed to choose two or three most suitable answers.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

---

manual workers who were either currently or recently unemployed, had insecure, occasional jobs, were self-employed or begged on the streets.<sup>58</sup>

According to the ICFTU survey (1998), children who are forced to work by their parents tend to come from low-income and single-parent families. There is some evidence that child labour is frequent in the families of market traders, who involve their children in working with them, while disregarding the need for children to have an education. An additional factor may be that, if the traders are migrants, their children can well be excluded from access to education.

It seems likely that, in discussing child labour, we are dealing with three causative processes that have differing impacts on different groups of children. The first is the need to work as a result of pressure to help the parents. The second is the need to generate additional income to participate in a society that imposes particular standards of consumption on its members. The third, covering the more disadvantaged children, is the additional, and purely economic, pressure on children to provide for their own basic survival.

Adults' attitudes as to what can be considered suitable work for children, and how this work influences children's development, play a major role in the way child labour is socially constructed. Adults create normative boundaries for what is acceptable for children but they can also stigmatize those children who, in pursuing their survival strategies, transgress these boundaries.

Mansurov's survey (1993) showed that "in general, teachers and parents tended to value dirty or menial activities such as shoe cleaning, dog walking, and house-cleaning as less appropriate for children since they still associate these with work of servants. One indication of changing attitudes is that adults under 30 are now willing to consider former menial activities as acceptable if the conditions and remuneration are to standard. Adults viewed street trade as least desirable." Yet Mansurov found that "the children's preference of occupation is almost completely at variance with that their elders would have for them. Thus for children, street trading emerges as most desirable. Children are also willing to consider a number of activities that adults do not consider as possible occupations, among them, black-market dealing, money-changing, boxing or fighting for money, and playing musical instruments in pedestrian subways."<sup>59</sup>

As a result of conflicting expectations, there is a tendency to stigmatize those child workers who turn to normatively proscribed occupations. The ILO/IPEC St Petersburg survey (2000) says that "teachers and social workers in specialized social rehabilitation institutions believe that the psychological state of these children [working on the street] can be characterized by serious personality problems linked to a change in their system of values. Socially and psychologically these children are unable to conform to social norms. Their system of moral values, their moral conscience and their notions of good and evil are distorted: they often have only basic needs and primitive interests."<sup>60</sup> The street environment is considered detrimental to children, making them unable to establish lasting relationships with other people or to experience empathy and respect for

---

<sup>58</sup> S. Stephenson: "The abandoned children of Russia: from 'privileged class' to 'underclass'", in S. Webber and I. Liikanen, eds.: *Beyond civil society: Education and civic culture in post-Communist countries*. (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> ILO/IPEC, op.cit., p. 15.

---

other people's feelings, property or concerns. It is assumed that they will be aggressive and hostile towards other people.

A recent qualitative study of Moscow street children, on the contrary, demonstrates that children enter into mutually supportive relationships with other children and adults (although there are other, exploitative relationships as well). Some manage to join quite sophisticated social networks (such as non-criminal urban youth subcultures), where they survive by pooling resources.<sup>61</sup>

## 10. Existing data on the incidence and the main characteristics of child labour

This report deals predominantly with child labour in urban areas. There is not enough hard evidence on the patterns of use of child labour in agriculture. Russian agricultural production is currently undergoing a major crisis. Most food is still produced by ineffective collective farms, with independent farmers constituting a tiny minority of the rural workforce. There are some indications that child labour continues to be used by collective farms (although to a lesser extent than in the Soviet era) during summer and autumn and that this can be detrimental to children's education.<sup>62</sup> Children are sometimes involved in work in agricultural enterprises on an informal basis (as a result of an oral agreement), and are paid very low wages.

There is generally a lack of reliable information on child labour, and published research on the incidence of child labour, its profile and children's experiences of it, is very scarce. There are no comparable data that would make it possible to form a dynamic picture of child labour in the Russian Federation, even in recent years. Most of the available data come from separate surveys of households or of schoolchildren. A significant problem with both types of survey is that they under-represent the most vulnerable groups (i.e. migrants, refugees and homeless people, whose children may be disproportionately involved in child labour, particularly in its worst forms) and children who do not attend school, either occasionally or regularly. Several sources on children working on the street make it possible, at least partially, to fill the gaps in our knowledge: the 1997-2000 survey by Stephenson of Moscow's homeless children,<sup>63</sup> and the 2000-2001 ILO/IPEC surveys of children working on the street in St Petersburg, Moscow and the Leningrad region.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> S. Stephenson: "Street children in Moscow: using and creating social capital", *The Sociological Review* (Oxford, Vol. 49, No. 4, November 2001), pp. 530-547.

<sup>62</sup> ICFTU, op.cit.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. The research project took place in 1997-2000. It concentrated on children who have to make their living in the streets and who have no guaranteed access to housing. These children do not necessarily live permanently on the streets, and in many cases they have homes from which they ran away and/or have relatives whom they may periodically visit, or they may stay in temporary accommodation provided by their employers or friends. But, as their access to accommodation is risky and the street is the main context of their lives, they can be defined as homeless street children. The project included a questionnaire, which was conducted in May-July 1998. The total sample in Moscow comprised 123 Russian-speaking street children of 7-17 years. Age distribution was as follows: 7-11 years – 22%, 12-14 years – 41%, 15-17 years – 37%. Most of the interviews took place in agencies: in the militia reception centre (67) and in charity shelters (24), and 32 interviews took place in the streets. For interviews that were conducted in organizations, age and sex quotas were used, based on the registration of all children who passed through the militia reception centre in 1997.

<sup>64</sup> ILO/IPEC: *In-depth analysis of the situation of working street children in Saint Petersburg* (St Petersburg, 2000); ILO/IPEC: *In-depth analysis of the situation of working street children in Moscow* (Moscow, 2001); ILO/IPEC: *In-depth analysis of the situation of working street children in the Leningrad region* (St Petersburg, 2001). Research data are based on in-depth individual interviews conducted with the children themselves, as well as with their employers.

---

An exploratory study, *Child Labour in Russia*, was conducted in 1998 as part of the Global Campaign to Stop Child Labour organized by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the diversity of samples and methods, most of the research points to the fact that child labour in today's Russian Federation is predominantly street-level, informal and illegal, and it is often associated with the worst forms of child labour, with occupations that are exploitative, dangerous and detrimental to children's development. These include prostitution, begging, involvement in the drugs trade and crime.

Household surveys and surveys conducted among schoolchildren give the incidence of child labour as being in the range of 10-20%. For example, in an all-Russian representative survey of the adult population conducted in 1993 for the ILO, about one-fifth of respondents said that their child worked.<sup>66</sup> Surveys conducted in schools in Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod have shown that from about 10 to 15% of schoolchildren were combining school and work.<sup>67</sup>

Research shows that children start working at a very young age. Mansurov's survey (1993, conducted in Moscow among working children aged 9-15 years) showed that the average age of the children was twelve and a half years<sup>68</sup>. The ILO/IPEC St. Petersburg survey of children working on the street (2000, with a sample from 3 to 18 years of age) revealed that 50 to 70% of these children were between the ages of 11 and 13.<sup>69</sup>

ICFTU data indicate that the majority of children begin labour activities in summertime and most stop work when the school year begins. At the same time, there exists a group of children employed all year round.<sup>70</sup>

Some 65% of Moscow school children and 75-80% of Nizhny Novgorod school children worked irregularly and for less than four hours a day.<sup>71</sup> In Moscow, almost a quarter of working children worked more than four hours a day.<sup>72</sup> Children (all ages) working on the street had an average working day of 5.9 hours. Only 66.8% went to school every day or nearly every day. Involvement in the worst forms of child labour led to even lower school attendance – only 55.5% of children involved in selling drugs go to school regularly, and only 31.7% of those involved in prostitution do so.<sup>73</sup>

---

In total, 1,003 children working on the street were interviewed in St.Petersburg, 1,500 in Moscow and 406 in the Leningrad region. Employers and specialists from state and non-governmental organizations were also consulted..

<sup>65</sup> ICFTU, op.cit.

<sup>66</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p.1; T. Yarigina: "Dopolnitelniie dokhodi i neformalnaia ekonomika: ikh mesto v sotsialnoi politike Rossii (nizhegorodskiie issledovaniia 90-kh godov)", in T. Shanin, ed.: *Neformalnaia ekonomika. Rossiia i mir* (Moscow, Logos, 1999), p. 103.

<sup>68</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> ILO/IPEC, 2000, p.9.

<sup>70</sup> ICFTU, op.cit.

<sup>71</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p. 1; T. Yarigina, op.cit., p. 103.

<sup>72</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> ILO/IPEC, 2000, p. 11.

---

While there are no data available on the gender composition of child workers in general, there are indications that boys constitute the majority. Pressure on boys to earn, and their greater proneness to expulsion, is said to be responsible for a process of ‘feminization’ of the pupil cohort of the senior grades in the schools, with, by 1998, female pupils making up almost 70% of the total number of pupils who remained in school after the age of 15.<sup>74</sup> Surveys of children working on the street in Moscow and in St Petersburg show that about 75% of them are boys and 25% girls.<sup>75</sup>

Boys start working on the streets at a younger age than girls do and they are more often involved in hard physical labour; however, a higher proportion of girls are involved in trade.<sup>76</sup>

It is easier for boys to find work, particularly doing low skilled casual industrial and agricultural work, earning money at petrol stations and selling newspapers (occupations that are considered to be too physically difficult or dangerous for girls). In rural areas, where the possibilities of getting involved in trade are also limited, this can explain why some underage girls may be dragged into prostitution or cohabitation with older men, as anecdotal evidence in exploratory research in the Samara and Ul’yanovsk regions showed.<sup>77</sup>

Generally, working children tend to be self-employed or employed on an informal basis to do odd jobs such as washing cars and filling them with petrol, loading goods, cleaning work premises, guarding goods, street trading and doing minor jobs at construction sites.

## 11. Worst forms of child labour

The detrimental consequences of child labour include exploitation, risk of violence and damage to health and moral development. In Mansurov’s survey (1993), 14% of working children reported injuries or illness as a result of work. While almost half of the injuries were described by children as the result of their own negligence, 24% of them were inflicted during encounters with racketeers in the course of the children’s work on the street (car washing, selling of goods, etc.).<sup>78</sup>

Although some types of child labour, such as selling newspapers or washing cars, cannot be classified as worst forms, work of any kind, if it happens on the streets, entails danger, particularly for children. In a survey among the underage street workers in Moscow, every third child experienced actual violence and 45% experienced threats of violence.<sup>79</sup>

Children working on the street also refer to self-employment, such as collecting bottles and refuse (waste paper, scrap metal, etc.), as their most frequent occupation, and these types of jobs can also be considered among the worst forms, particularly if they involve scavenging. Another common occupation among street children is begging, both independent and organized by adults. Although organized begging involving children is notoriously hard to study, anecdotal evidence suggests

---

<sup>74</sup> S.L. Webber, op.cit., p. 182.

<sup>75</sup> S. Stephenson: “The abandoned children of Russia: from ‘privileged class’ to ‘underclass’”, in S. Webber and I. Liikanen, eds.: *Beyond civil society: Education and civic culture in post-Communist countries*. (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> ILO/IPEC, 2000, p. 21.

<sup>77</sup> ICFTU, op.cit.

<sup>78</sup> V.A. Mansurov, op.cit., p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> G.I. Zabrianskii: *Sotsiologiya prestupnosti nesovershennoletnikh* (Minsk, Minsktipproekt, 1997), p. 81.

---

that it is a large-scale practice, in which children are either made to beg by their parents or relatives who live with them, or are rented out by their parents or relatives to other people.

Illegal activities involving children include crime, drugs, prostitution and child pornography. Illegality is generally correlated to age, with evidence of movement from survivalist strategies to illegal activities as time goes by. Prostitution is correlated to being a migrant.<sup>80</sup>

Estimates of on the age composition of sex workers vary. According to the State Procuratura, about 12-15% of prostitutes in Moscow are underage.<sup>81</sup> A survey in 1998 showed that about 23% of prostitutes in Ekaterinburg were underage.<sup>82</sup> Comparing these figures with the available data on the age composition of sex workers in the 1970s and 1980s, it is possible to say that, since the transition, the proportion of children and young people among sex workers has increased significantly.<sup>83</sup>

Most child prostitutes work on their own or in small groups, without being controlled by adults.<sup>84</sup> Apart from occasional prostitution, which complements other kinds of work, some underage sex workers are involved in complex networks of organized prostitution, with territorial divisions and security provided to them by the procurers. This seems to be particularly the case in large cities such as St Petersburg and Moscow.

With national borders becoming more porous as a result of globalization, the trafficking of children for sex has also emerged in the Russian Federation. Children are trafficked abroad to work in massage parlours and brothels. The main destinations may be countries such as Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey and other European countries, Israel, Canada and the United States. The Russian Federation currently has no enforceable laws relating to trade in human beings so traffickers cannot be effectively prosecuted. The causes and manifestations of trafficking are complex and are not yet sufficiently researched.

Child pornography materials have become easily obtainable in the Russian Federation. In Moscow, for example, child-porn videos were sold until very recently at the popular Gorbushka market. Yet prosecution of pornographers is very low, and Russian legislation does not consider child pornography to be a distinct crime. If, in the process of making pornography, children get involved in sex, this does not necessarily constitute a prosecutable offence. According to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, non-violent sexual relations with a child are considered a crime only if the child is under 14.

No special organizations or provisions exist, either at state level or in the voluntary sector, to assist minors who engage in prostitution and pornography. Special “vice squads” organised by the militia are understaffed. Periodic campaigns against corrupt militiamen who take bribes from prostitutes, or demand sex, do not seem to have any effect. Not only does the militia fail to deter or

---

<sup>80</sup> ILO/IPEC, 2000.

<sup>81</sup> A.V. Borbat: “Problemi prestupnosti nesovershennoletnikh v Moskve”, in *Prestupnost’, statistika, zakon* (Moscow, Criminologicheskaiia assotsiatsiia, 1997), p. 76.

<sup>82</sup> A.B. Merenkov and M.N. Nikitina: “Sotsialnii portret prostitutki”, *SOCIS* (Moscow), No. 5.

<sup>83</sup> S. Sidorenko-Stephenson: “Prostitution and young people in Russia”, in D. Barrett, with E. Barrett and N. Mullenger, eds.: *Youth prostitution in the New Europe. The growth in sex work*. (Lyme Regis, Dorset, Russell House, 2000), pp. 108-126.

<sup>84</sup> ILO/IPEC, 2000.

---

reform prostitutes, their enforcement of laws prohibiting prostitution has aggravated corruption within the law enforcement body. In the ILO/IPEC St Petersburg survey (2000), about half of the street children involved in prostitution reported having to pay money to the police.<sup>85</sup>

Although the main thrust of current legislation seems to be to prevent people, and especially minors, from becoming involved in prostitution, this work has been ineffective. For example, by 1995 the St Petersburg Department for the Control of Prostitution and Pornography had information on about 160 procurement agencies. However, of the 28 criminal proceedings against brothel keeping and procurement instituted in St Petersburg in 1994, only one was brought to court, and that resulted in a suspended sentence. Militia personnel explain that the lack of success is a result of withdrawal of evidence by witnesses.<sup>86</sup> A similar situation was reported in the 1998 ICFTU survey carried out in Moscow.<sup>87</sup>

In the ILO/IPEC St Petersburg survey (2000), 15.7% of children working on the street had income from criminal activities.<sup>88</sup> The number of registered crimes committed by underage criminals (14-17 years) increased from 1990 to 1996 by 24.7%.<sup>89</sup> In 1996, 36.6% of the teenagers who committed a criminal act as part of a group were working with adults. Since 1993, official criminal statistics have included a special category for “underage entrepreneurs”. In the 1993-1996 period, 1,040 underage entrepreneurs were charged with criminal offences. In 1996, the number of such offences increased 1.5 times compared with 1993. According to Zabrianskii, this testifies that “many teenagers start their working career in the semi-legal and illegal economy (in the economic underground).”<sup>90</sup>

Some children join groups whose members are engaged both in legitimate activities, such as working at the market, and in various criminal activities, such as the drug trade, stealing from passers-by, market stalls and shops, mugging and house robberies. There are also other groups, with strong hierarchical relationships and intra-group sanctions, which may be defined as gangs, whose members are almost exclusively involved in crime. As a recent qualitative survey conducted in Moscow showed, these gangs can be connected with adult organized crime and their members are fully socialized in the norms and traditions of criminal society.<sup>91</sup> The motivation of gang members is not just economic; juveniles pursue specific “alternative careers” in the criminal economy, which they hope will open up possibilities of future employment, status and support from the criminal community as they grow older. This behaviour is understandable, although not condonable, in a situation where other formal social structures have collapsed, and where, with the erosion of traditional employment and social protection, organized crime has become one of the

---

<sup>85</sup> ILO/IPEC, 2000, p.30.

<sup>86</sup> V. Afanasiev: “Sotsialnii kontrol za prostitutsiiei v Rossii”, in Ya.I. Gilinskii, ed.: *Sotsialnii kontrol nad deviantnim povedeniiem v sovremennoi Rossii* (St Petersburg, St Petersburgskii filial Instituta sotsiologii RAN, Baltiiskii institut ekologii, politiki, prava, 1998), pp. 144-164.

<sup>87</sup> ICFTU, op.cit.

<sup>88</sup> ILO/IPEC, op.cit., p.36.

<sup>89</sup> G.I. Zabrianskii, op.cit., p.6.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>91</sup> S. Stephenson: “Street children in Moscow: using and creating social capital”, *The Sociological Review* (Oxford, Vol. 49, No. 4, November 2001), pp. 530-547.

---

strongest forms of social organization.<sup>92</sup> It is little wonder that joining organized crime can be attractive to marginalized children.

## 12. Russian legislation on child labour

After the fall of the USSR, Russian legislation retained all the Soviet safeguards against the use of child labour. Children aged 16 and older (in exceptional cases, from the age of 15) are allowed to work. Children aged 14 can be employed for light work that is neither harmful to their health nor disruptive to their education, but this must be undertaken outside of school time and with the consent of a parent or guardian. In 1991, the Russian Federation ratified the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), which states that the minimum age for employment should not be lower than the age at which compulsory education is completed. According to the Russian Federation Law on Education, compulsory basic education is required until a student reaches the age of 15 (unless he or she has received the necessary level of education by an earlier age). The Russian Federation has not yet ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182).

Although the Labour Code of the Russian Federation allows children to work from the age of 15, it does not contain provisions that would ensure additional protection for child employees. For example, a 14-year-old teenager can leave school under certain conditions (article 19 of the Law on Education) and work from the age of 15; however, until he/she is 16 years old he/she cannot receive unemployment benefit (article 3 of the Labour Code).

While the Labour Code acknowledges the existence of, and is designed to protect, working children by including them in its provisions from the age of 15, there is no corresponding legislation to protect working children less than 15 years old. Nor are these children protected from the need to work by other laws. This makes their position both ambiguous and vulnerable.

When teenagers over the age of 14-15 are employed officially, on the basis of a labour contract, it is possible to implement legal safeguards to protect their rights as child workers, although this does not seem to happen in a great number of cases. However, most child workers are employed on an informal basis, and so labour standards are not enforceable in these cases.<sup>93</sup>

## 13. Conclusion

Child labour and the forms it takes reflect the larger social and structural conditions of a society and cannot simply be explained by any one factor, or a combination of factors, such as the degree of poverty, education, demography or changes in values.

The key processes responsible for the proliferation of child labour in the Russian Federation are inextricably linked to the decomposition of the main institutions of the Soviet system – the

---

<sup>92</sup> P. Rawlinson: "Russian organised crime: moving beyond ideology", in V. Ruggiero, N. South and I. Taylor, eds.: *The New European criminology* (London, Routledge, 1999), pp. 242-263; V. Volkov: "Violent entrepreneurship in Russia", *Europe-Asia Studies* (London), Vol. 51, No. 5, pp. 741-754.

<sup>93</sup> ICFTU, op.cit.



---

command economy, the welfare system and the tight system of social control under communism. A large number of families and individuals have been cast adrift as a result of no longer being attached to enterprises and of marginalization and social exclusion. The crisis of social protection, and especially the lack of any protective arrangements at the margins of society where individuals are most at risk, has made the situation particularly difficult. With the decline of the formal economy, there has been a growth of informal, shadow and illegal markets where individuals can find a source of income, albeit in insecure and often exploitative conditions. Children have become players in these markets alongside adults.

It is possible to argue that child labour has been an unintended consequence of market reforms. The forms of child labour now seen in the Russian Federation may be partly attributed to an imbalance between labour supply and availability of jobs in the formal economy. When children who are below the legal minimum age for employment and whose levels of skills are low, enter the job market, they have to take unregulated jobs where they are at risk and vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Given large-scale non-payment of wages and unemployment in the formal sector, any children seeking to work will almost inevitably find themselves working in the informal economy.

At the same time, the proliferation of child labour in the Russian Federation can also be seen as one of the long-term changes associated with the erosion of traditional family and community structures, an increase in the personal autonomy of individuals in general and children in particular, and the greater openness of the Russian Federation to the cultural and economic processes that characterize the modern world. These relate not only to the culture of consumerism, but to economic globalization, which “generates exclusion through its logic as well as through its precariousness”<sup>94</sup> and makes impoverished rural and urban groups, including children, look for survival at the margins of the organized economy. Concerted efforts and solid provisions are urgently needed to ensure the social protection of vulnerable groups and, in the case of children, to eradicate the worst forms of child labour.

---

<sup>94</sup> M. Wolfe: “Globalization and social exclusion: some paradoxes”, in G. Rodgers, Ch. Gore and J. Figueredo, eds.: *Social exclusion: rhetoric, reality, responses* (ILO, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, 1995), p. 83.

---

## List of Declaration Working Papers

- No. 1 Bonded labour in Pakistan, by Aly Ercelawn and Muhammad Nauman, June 2001.
- No. 2 A perspective plan to eliminate forced labour in India, by L. Mishra, July 2001.
- No. 3 Défis et opportunités pour la Déclaration au Bénin, by Bertin C. Amoussou, August 2001.
- No. 4 Identification des obstacles à la mise en œuvre des principes et droits fondamentaux au travail et propositions et solutions au Niger, by Moussa Oumanou, August 2001.
- No. 5 Égalité de rémunération au Mali, by Dominique Meurs, August 2001.
- No. 6 Défis et opportunités pour la Déclaration au Burkina Faso, by Seydou Konate, September 2001.
- No. 7 Child labour in the Russian Federation, by Svetlana Stephenson, June 2002.
- No. 8 Intersecting risks: HIV/AIDS and Child Labour, by Bill Rau, June 2002