



Russian education in the context of the UN MDGs: current situation, problems, and perspectives

2.1. RUSSIAN EDUCATION AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Education is a key resource for development and improvement of the well-being of people, society and the country. It is natural, therefore, that matters of education (MDG Goal 2, **Achieve universal primary education**) are second only to halving extreme poverty and hunger in the Millennium Development agenda, and are also included in other Goals, such as MDG Goal 3, **Promote gender equality and empower women**, which aims to ensure that all boys and girls can complete a full course of primary and secondary education and to promote gender equality in literacy.

Russia recognizes quality of education and its adequacy for modern needs as priorities for improving competitiveness of the economy and people's well-being and quality of life. The first of the priority targets in the country's Medium-term Program for Socio-economic Development states: "It is important that efforts to create a favorable environment for competitiveness should concentrate on reform of education. Russia should maintain a higher level of education compared to that typical in countries with comparable levels of social and economic development. The whole system of education, from pre-school to higher professional level, must be reformed by improving educational programs and standards and adapting them better to labor market needs."¹ In this connection, it seems impor-

tant to analyze the Russian system of education in terms of the Goals proclaimed in the UN Millennium Declaration (Resolution adopted at the 55th UN Assembly on 18 September, 2000) and try to answer several questions, namely: how relevant are the Millennium Goals for Russia, to what extent have they already been achieved, and what priority targets should be set for Russian education in the spirit of the Millennium Goals?

2.1.1. RELEVANCE OF THE MDGs TO EDUCATION FOR RUSSIA

Formal analysis of the level of achievement of the Millennium Goals for education in Russia gives a reassuring picture, both in terms of participation in education and gender equality at all levels of education.

After a decline in the first half of the 1990s enrolment of children of the appropriate age in primary education has grown steadily to reach 95% in 2004. The difference between primary education enrollment ratios for boys and girls is less than 1% and within the range of statistical error.

Gender equity in access to secondary education, referred to in Goal 3, has also been achieved: there is actually no difference in education enrolment levels for boys and girls at this level. Moreover, general educational indicators are at a high level. Russia is one of best educated nations in the world: there are only two or three

countries with lower shares of people aged 25-64, who have received only primary education, and the share of people in Russia with tertiary education is the highest in the world, the difference being even greater for women.

The share of young people in the relevant age group who completed a full course of secondary education in 2002 was not only higher than the world average but also superior to levels in most developed countries. Again, girls are in advance of boys.

Does this entail that Russia has no problems with achievement of the Millennium Goals? An answer to that question requires analysis of the situation with categories of children, who are not enrolled in education. There are two groups of causes that underlie such exclusion (Box 2.1):

- Health
- Social factors

2.1.2. DISPARITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION

As stated above, less than one in 20 children in Russia are excluded from primary education, and general indicators suggest that Russia is very successful in achieving basic educational goals. Universal primary education and elimination of disparity at all levels of education are at comparable levels in Russia and in developed countries, and trends are positive.

However, there are factors and tendencies, which prevent us concluding that Russia has fully achieved the Millennium Goals for education in spirit rather than in form.

First, there are issues concerning participation in pre-school education and inequity of access to this level of education on various

grounds. Although the pre-school education enrolment rate in Russia is comparable with that in developed countries in absolute terms, there are some unsatisfactory aspects. In particular:

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a. In an environment of ever increasing social differentiation in Russia and in view of the important role of education for social mobility, it is very important that starting conditions for all children should be equal to the greatest possible extent, regardless of the level of well-being of their families. Pre-

Box 2.1. Problems of educational exclusion of some groups of children

Access to education for children with disabilities and special health needs is an absolute indicator of the economic and moral state of a society. Available data for Russia do not allow reliable calculations because, although education statistics give data on numbers of children with special needs enrolled in education, there are no data on the overall number of such children in the country. Health statistics provide data on the total number of handicapped children but cannot answer the question of how many of them need special teaching programs or special educational institutions and how many of them are capable of integration in the education system². Furthermore, statistical data for education and health are aggregated by different age groups, making the task of their analysis quite a challenge. Rough estimates based on comparative analysis of the data provided by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education suggest that about 50% of handicapped children aged 7-15 are not enrolled in education, including those who cannot be taught.

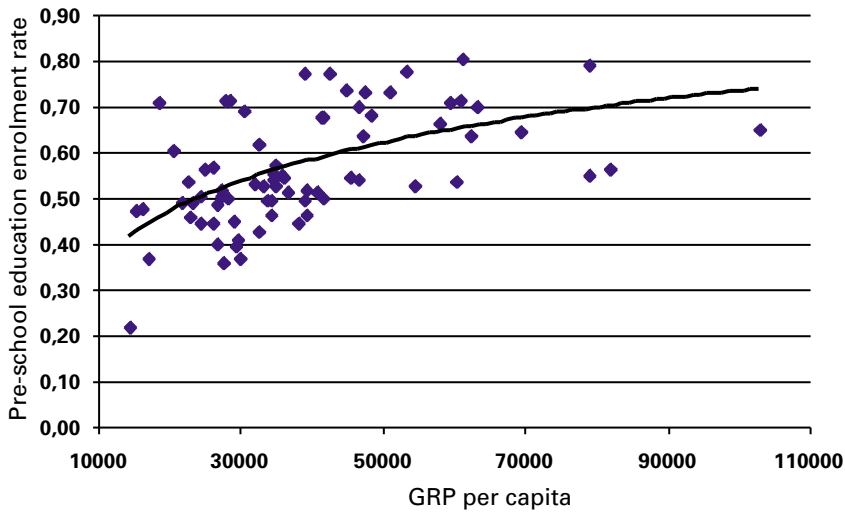
The only available data on isolation of children with special needs enrolled in education concerns the proportion of handicapped children who attend special classes within ordinary schools. In 2000-2002, this proportion increased from 43% to 45% of the total number of children with special needs having access to education. This is, undoubtedly, an encouraging tendency, although this figure is much lower than in developed countries. However, there are no data on how many children with special needs are taught together with healthy children.

Official statistics on children who are excluded from education due to social factors (homeless children, children from disadvantaged families, orphans and children left without care) are even less reliable. Figures provided by different studies vary in a wide range from several tens of thousands to several millions. According to a reasonably accurate estimate based on data of the last population census and age-specific coverage by all kinds of education, 709,000 children aged 7-15, or 4% of this population group, were excluded from education in 2003. In any case, the problem does exist. Apparently, the proportion of children excluded from education is declining very slowly, if at all.

The data of a one-off study by the Ministry of Education and the Federal State Statistics Service in 2002 offer a more favorable picture. But even these lower estimates³ emphasized a serious aspect of the problem, which is regional differentiation in numbers of children without access to education. The proportion of such children varies between regions from less than one per thousand to nearly one per hundred. There is quite a close correlation between this indicator and the level of social and economic development in a region and, what is even more important, the level of personal incomes in a region. The latter suggests that exclusion from education is mainly due to social factors.

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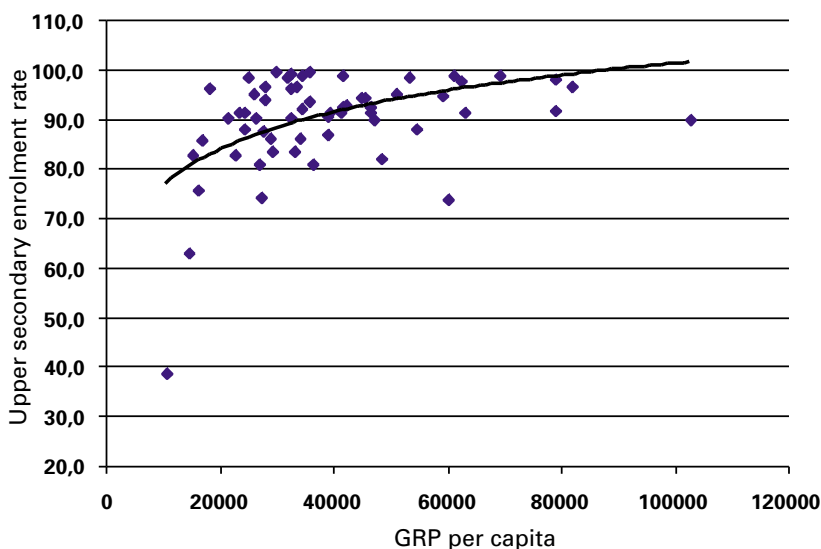
Figure 2.1. Pre-school enrolment of children aged 3-6 vs. social and economic development of regions



school education is of decisive importance in this. Therefore, increased opportunities for pre-school education is a key tool in addressing the problem of social mobility and reducing the threat of social tension in society.

b. In Russia, only primary and lower-secondary education programs are compulsory, and their duration is shorter and the typical

Figure 2.2. Participation in upper secondary education in regions of the Russian Federation vs. social and economic development in the regions



starting age is higher than in developed countries. Therefore, pre-school education should be regarded as an important factor in promoting a higher overall level of education.

Analysis by subjects (administrative regions) of the Russian Federation reveals considerable differences in participation in pre-school education resulting from inequalities in social and economic development of different regions (Figure 2.1). Pre-school education enrolment rates for children aged 3-6 vary from 21% (Dagestan) to 85% (Vologda region). The regional differences are even greater if only rural areas are taken into account.

Failure to ensure equal pre-school education opportunities will further exacerbate inequality of starting conditions for children in economically backward regions, rural areas and disadvantaged children. It will tend to leave children inadequately prepared for school, unable to digest the school program and therefore unable to obtain a good education. (Box 2.2).

The second factor, which suggests incomplete Russian compliance with the Millennium Goals for education, is regional differences in availability of good-quality secondary education. As in the pre-school case, there are considerable differences between regions as to participation in secondary education and resources allocated to it, the latter factor being decisive for the quality of education.

Regional differences in enrolment rates are observed at compulsory education levels (primary and lower secondary), and are even more apparent in upper secondary education (Figure 2.2).

Inter-regional differences in participation rates are aggravated by differences in resource allocation, leading to uneven quality of education. Comparative analysis of adjust-

ed public expenditures on education in different regions, excluding Moscow, in 2003 showed differences of nearly 3 times – from 3800 rubles per student in the Magadan region to 10,400 rubles in the Tyumen region.

In the absence of a national testing system, the only data allowing assessment of regional differentiation in education quality are results of the Uniform State Examination (USE). It should be pointed out that the USE system is still under trial. This tools and procedure of the USE have not yet matured, and a number of problems are still unresolved, so USE results can in no way be regarded as a full measure of education quality, particularly as applied to specific educational establishments. Nevertheless, the Uniform State Examination is a mass, independent and uniform knowledge assessment tool for all kinds of students, and is reliable enough to reveal general tendencies and features.

Analysis of USE results show that quality of educational services is closely related to the level of economic development and public expenditures on secondary education in a given region.⁴ A comparative analysis by Federal Districts (FD) finds considerable differences in quality of educational services (Table 2.1 and Figure 2.3).

It is important to note that public spending on education, which, as we have seen, is a significant factor for education quality, does not depend on the level of economic development of a region. Levels of regional spending on education clearly depend on policy priorities of regional governments.

2.1.3. THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION, MODERN LIFE SKILLS AND THE LABOR MARKET

It is certainly true that education has intrinsic value. But it is equally certain that the

high priority give to education by the Millennium Development Goals is not only a tribute to its intrinsic value. Education is the most important factor enabling young people to adapt to the modern world, the basis for career success and the precondition for a healthy lifestyle, social mobility and overcoming poverty. It is therefore important to ascertain whether the content of Russian education meets the requirements of modern life. Many countries, including developed countries, are asking themselves the same question. A recent adult literacy survey in Canada has revealed that a significant proportion of adults classed as formally literate in the sense of knowing letters and being capable of put-

Box 2.2. Monitoring data obtained during an experiment on improvement of structure and curricula of general secondary education, October, 2001

Monitoring that covered 30,000 children in 61 of 89 Russian administrative regions showed that in general Russian children are prepared for school. *On average, the share of unprepared and inadequately prepared children were 2% and 7% respectively (varying from 0 to 30% depending on the region).* About 60% of children were rated as adequately prepared. The share of excellently prepared children was 35% (from 11 to 60% depending on the region).

Children were offered a number of tasks to test their ability for future acquisition of literacy and mathematics. These tasks were different from those used to check whether a child can read, write and count, i.e. whether he/she has knowledge and skills normally tested at school admittance, and which should be acquired during the first school year.

The diagnostic tests revealed the following:

1. Girls are ahead of boys in terms of preparedness for school. This difference is not large but is, unfortunately, significant (about 40% of girls and only 32% of boys were rated as excellently prepared for school).
2. The age of admittance to school (6, 7 or 8) is not a decisive factor for the level of preparedness.
3. Effectiveness of children's preparation for school is nearly equal regardless of where it is carried out – in a day-care center, family, school or "other place". No significant advantage of any mode of preparation over any other was found in the course of monitoring.
4. What skills first-grade children have. At school admittance, the overwhelming majority of children know most of the letters and the digits from 1 to 9 (5% fail these tests) and can count from 1 to 10 and down (5% cannot). Over two thirds can write letters, read words, and perform arithmetic operations with the numbers 1-10. More than half of children can read sentences and write words.

About 87% of children can communicate easily both with teachers and other children. A little more than 10% of first-grade children have significant communication difficulties.

Results of tests of the same children performed after two years of school were consistent with results of the pre-school preparedness tests, both in Moscow and Russia in general. *The group of children who were poorly prepared for school failed to catch up with their better prepared peers in the two first school years.* The number of children showing bad results in mathematical tests remained unchanged compared with the pre-school tests, and numbers who performed badly in Russian language and reading texts increased by 1.5 and 3 times, respectively.

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Table 2.1. USE mean scores by federal districts

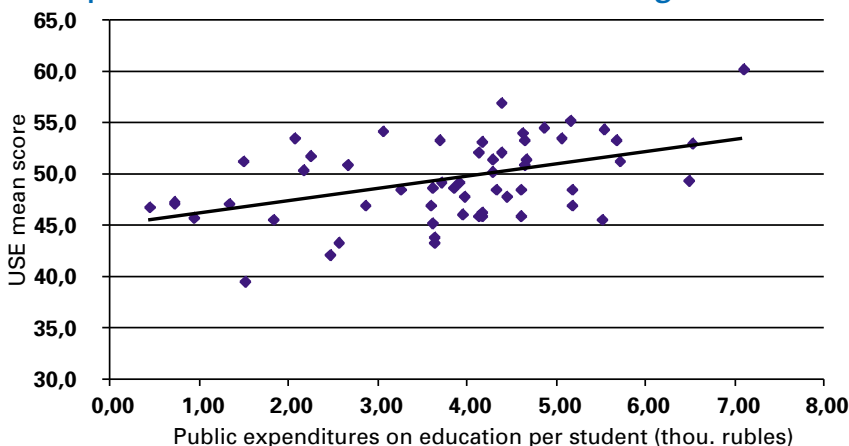
Federal District	USE mean score (Russian Language and Mathematics)	Educational expenditures per student (adjusted), thou. rub.	Rural population proportion, %	GRP per capita (adjusted) thou. rub.
Central FD	51.1	4.9	28	45.0
North-Western FD	52.0	4.7	24	43.8
Southern FD	46.0	3.7	41	33.0
Volga FD	51.4	4.6	31	40.7
Ural FD	49.1	4.7	30	64.9
Siberian FD	45.1	4.0	35	32.3
Far-Eastern FD	46.6	2.9	47	46.4

ting them together as words, cannot grasp what is written. When presented with standard two-paragraph instructions for use of aspirin, printed on an aspirin bottle, they were unable to answer the simple questions: how many pills can be taken daily, and who, and in what cases, should not take the pills.

UNESCO Definition: "Literacy is the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short simple sentence about one's daily life"

Such an instance emphasizes the importance of the content of education and the adequacy of education, even universal education, for making young people ready for life in a modern society, and providing a sound basis for success and well-being of both individuals and countries in the spirit of the Millennium Goals.

Figure 2.3. Education quality vs. public expenditures on education in RF regions



Participation of Russia in PISA and TIMSS⁵ international surveys has offered insight as to the quality of Russian education compared with that in other countries. Even allowing for possible misinterpretation of results due to relativity of rating assessments and difficulties in making a comparison between countries with different social and cultural traditions, and different models and standards of education, results of recent studies⁶ provoked concern among experts and education authorities. In particular, testing of 15-year old schoolchildren in 40 countries in 2003 placed Russian students 29th to 31st in Mathematics (vs. 21st to 25th out of 32 countries in 2000), 20th to 30th in Natural Sciences (vs. 26th to 29th) and 25th to 30th in a skill called "Competency in Problem Solving". Performance of 23% of Russian students in the latter skill was rated as unsatisfactory for their age, versus 5-10% in leading countries.

In 2003, Russian schoolchildren were placed 32nd to 34th out of 40 countries in literate reading (vs. 27th to 29th out of 32 countries in 2000). These results cause great concern, firstly because of their low absolute values and, secondly, because of gradual year-to-year decline. According to PISA-2003 testing results, only 36% of Russian students aged 15 appeared to have literate reading skills adequate for successful social adaptation, and most of them (about a quarter of Russian schoolchildren) could only perform tasks with a medium level of complexity. Only 2% of the Russian students had high-level literate reading skills, i.e. showed ability to understand intricate texts, make a critical review of the information provided, formulate hypotheses, reach conclusions, etc.

Tenth-grade schoolchildren attending comprehensive schools showed better results in all testing categories than their counterparts

attending rural country or primary vocational schools. Place of residence was also a factor influencing the test results (Figure 2.4).

The results here show that no concept has been developed and implemented to date, which could install new priorities in educational programs to match the needs of a post-industrial, information-based society while preserving the traditions and strengths of the Russian educational system. Russian school education is good at providing children with extensive knowledge (as confirmed by various research), but does not give them the necessary skills to perform tasks away from the classroom. Russian school-leavers are much worse prepared to live in the real world than their counterparts in developed countries.

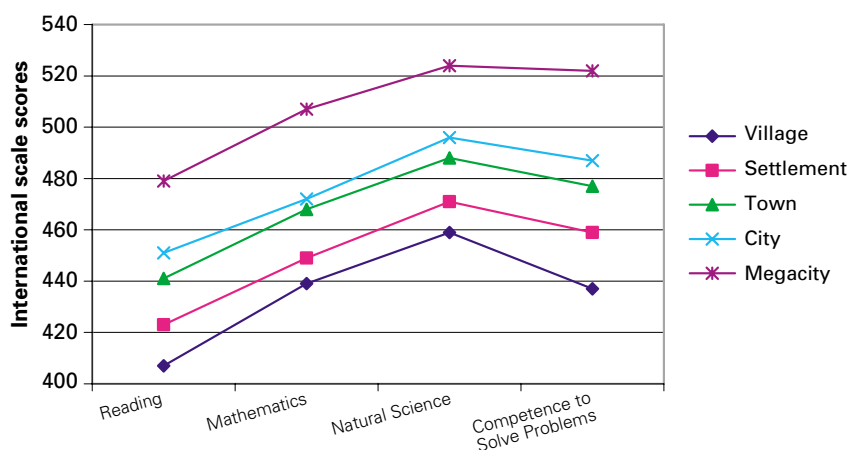
Adequacy of vocational education for the needs of modern society is a central theme in the *Education Development Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2010*. The problem, which is addressed, is that a considerable proportion of graduates do not work in the profession, for which they were trained, and/or do jobs for which they are over-qualified (at least, by formal measures). The issue of quality of higher education is described below (Box 2.3).

2.2. ASSESSMENT OF THE OUTLOOK

Two possible scenarios seem relevant for assessment of the near-term outlook for Russian education through the prism of the MDGs:

- a pessimistic scenario, with cosmetic measures (half-measures) instead of real reform, allowing official declarations that reform has been implemented without risking conflict with the conservative part of the professional community or social protest; and
- an optimistic scenario, that is implementa-

Figure 2.4. Testing results of Russian schoolchildren by place of residence



Box 2.3. Higher education and the labor market

There has been a major boom in higher education in Russia since the mid-1990s. The number of graduates increased from 401,600 in 1995 to 972,700 in 2003. In other words, the number of bachelors, specialists and masters graduating annually increased 2.4-fold over an 8-year period. The quick growth has roused concerns among education authorities and experts, which can be formulated as follows.

1) Relative excess of people with higher education

According to results of the recent population census, the proportion of people with higher and postgraduate education in the total population aged 25 to 64 (this age range is traditionally used in international comparative studies) is 20.6%. A similar picture is observed in a number of developed countries such as Australia (20.0%), Japan (20.1%), Canada (21.0%), and the Netherlands (21.9%). However, there are at least three countries with a higher proportion of people, who have completed higher and postgraduate education. These are Israel (25.9%), Norway (28.4%) and the USA (29.0%).⁵ So it would be unreasonable to claim that Russia is producing too many people with higher education.

2) Quality of higher education

In recent years, the quality of Russian higher education has been of paramount concern to both educational authorities and experts.⁷ However, quality control in higher education by the Federal Service for Education and Science Surveillance (Rosobrnadzor) and the Federal Education Agency (Rosobrazovanie) is mostly limited to reviewing the content of curricula, results of state exams and assessing material and technical resources of higher education establishments, i.e. checking compliance with license requirements.⁸ In-house control by higher education institutions is quite common, but is limited to checking compliance with formal criteria of Rosobrazovanie and carrying out surveys of educators and students in a given establishment. Finally, questioning of employers has been applied recently as a method for assessing higher education quality. But only selected establishments at regional and municipal levels have been subject to this type of assessment.⁹

In general, Russia currently lacks a reliable system for assessing the quality of higher education. This is partly due to a shortage of members of the professional community who can be assigned to assessment work, and partly to lack of a system of indicators for international comparison (unlike quality of Russian school education, which has been assessed over several years as part of the European PISA project). Only a few indirect indicators can be applied at the aggregated level.

One applicable indicator is the proportion of part-time students (signed up to evening courses, distance and non-residency studies departments) in the total number of graduates. This proportion has been steadily rising, from 34.7% in 1993 to 50.1% in 2003. Another indirect indicator of higher education quality is the number of foreign students from outside the CIS. This indicator has been in steady decline, from 34,100 in 1993 to 17,300 in 2004. These figures are presumably indicative of a deterioration of Russian education quality (although reduction in the number of foreign students may be partly explained by apparent growth of xenophobia, racism and chauvinism in Russian society).

3) Professional structure of education

Another subject of debate is the professional structure of higher education and, in particular, rapid increase in the proportion of Russian graduates with diplomas in social and humanitarian sciences.¹⁰ In 2002, this proportion was 63.9%. But this is still comparable or even lower than figures for a number of developed countries such as France (71.8%), Israel (66.7%), the USA (65.2%), the UK (63.9%), Ireland (63.7%), Australia (62.8%), New Zealand (62.3%), Iceland (61.7%) and Belgium (60.8%).¹¹

The proportion of graduates with diplomas in social and humanitarian sciences grew further in 2003 to 66.4%. The figure does not yet seem excessive, particularly in view of "underproduction" of specialists in social and humanitarian sciences over many years (the proportion of such graduates in 1993 was just 36.8%). Nevertheless, there are real problems and imbalance in graduate profiles, as reflected in industry distribution of graduates.

4) Structure of employment of graduates

In total, 4,804,000 people graduated from Russian higher educational establishments from 1999 to 2004. In this 5-year period, the total number of graduates in the population group aged 15-72 increased by 4,255,000 (from 16,282,000 in October 1998, to 20,537,000 in November 2004) while the number of employed graduates increased by 4,631,000. Most of this increment entered trade, public catering, logistics and procurement (17.1%), education (15.4%), industrial production (14.2%), public administration (11.7%), public health, social welfare, physical education and sport, and recreation and tourism (9.2%). These industries took up 67.5% of the increment.

The proportion of graduates in the employed population group aged 15-72 increased by 4.6 percentage points (p.p.) (from 20.4 to 24.9%) over the 5-year period. The growth was more pronounced in such sectors as finance, credit, insurance and social protection (17.4 p.p. of the increment), culture and art (7.4 p.p.), public administration (6.5 p.p.), and education (6.4 p.p.). In late-1998, science and related branches were the only sectors of the economy where more than 50% of employees had higher education diplomas. In late-2004, however, this level was passed in three sectors: science and related branches (63.9%), finance, credit, insurance and pension coverage (58.3%), and education (50.1%). As before, the proportions of graduates are lowest among those employed in agriculture and forestry (6.9%), housing and communal services and non-producing consumer services (12.1%).

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tion of a real educational reform as envisaged in the Medium-term Strategy of Socio-economic Development and the Education Development Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2010.

The pessimistic scenario seems quite probable, due not so much to lack of funding as to the opposition of the professional community (from school teachers and administrators to heads of higher institutions supported by a certain part of the State Duma). Some measures would be rejected and others would be implemented in truncated form, the point of the exercise being to justify official reports that reform has been completed without actually changing anything. This scenario could have critical consequences for renewal of the content of education, both general and professional, and, to a lesser extent, for greater participation in education by vulnerable groups.

The problem of financial support for development of education deserves special attention. Changes in education financing due to enactment of the law on assignment of authorities between different levels of government¹² are of great importance. Responsibility for financing primary and secondary vocational education has been transferred to regional and municipal governments in addition to their responsibilities for financing pre-school and secondary education. If additional fiscal sources are not provided for regional and local budgets, and if the scope and mechanism of financial support to depressive regions is not reviewed, Russia will risk widening gaps between regions in terms of both economic development and people's well-being. Regions, whose budgets depend on subsidies organized at the federal level (such regions are in the majority), will spend resources earmarked for education on current expenses (maintenance of buildings and wage payment) and will concentrate their financial resources on compulsory education, i.e. primary and lower secondary education.

It looks certain that implementation of the resource provision standards set out in the **Education Development Strategy** will lead to reduction of regional budget allocations for pre-school, primary and secondary vocational education (non-compulsory programs). Funding of education development will also be cut. Modernizing the content of education also requires major spending, and although development of new standards and their methodological support will be financed by the federal budget, funding of teacher retraining, replacement of textbooks, acquisition of educational equipment and materials, etc., will remain the responsibility of regional authorities. Such a burden will be unbearable for regional budgets, let alone local budgets, without significant federal support. In these conditions, it is natural to expect reduction of allocations for vocational education (primary and

secondary) and of wages in the general education sector. This, in turn, will inevitably result in worsening of teacher staff quality and, consequently, deterioration in the quality of education. Many young people will be unable to obtain vocational education close to home and will have to leave for other, wealthier regions. The answer to the question whether the latter regions will agree to fund the education of people from elsewhere, or whether the newcomers will have to pay for their own education, seems quite clear, particularly in view of the situation with medical insurance, which de facto guarantees free medical care only in the region of a person's origin.

Major differences between regions in quality and scope of educational opportunities are therefore probable. This will lead to further reduction of human resources in depressive regions, a decline in the investment attractiveness of these regions, further polarization of Russian regions in terms of social and economic development, outflow of young people wishing (and able) to move to other regions for vocational education, further social differentiation of the population and marginalization of those young people who remain in depressive regions, criminalization of young people due to unemployment and inadequate education levels, and increased social tension.

The optimistic scenario envisages reform of the Russian educational system along the lines now being followed by developed countries. This means, first of all, significant financing to update the content of education (development of new standards and a quality assessment system, retraining of teachers and significant wage increases to attract people capable of implementing the updated system, renewal of educational and methodical support, etc.). This scenario will require a review of the education funding system, including, possibly, amendments to the Budget Code. Implementation of

Major differences between regions in quality and scope of educational opportunities are therefore probable. This will lead to further reduction of human resources in depressive regions, a decline in the investment attractiveness of these regions, further polarization of Russian regions in terms of social and economic development.

this scenario is sure to cause protests in the most conservative part of the professional community, especially those who benefit from the current situation and, probably, will displease a part of the general public. Some public opposition is likely because education is a particularly sensitive issue in Russia, and mistakes committed in implementation of previous reforms (intentionally exaggerated by their opponents through mass media) have nurtured a deep-set opposition in many people to any sort of reform. Any innovations reduce efficiency of a system when they are first launched: introduction of new technologies initially upsets cost-effectiveness of manufacturing, and quality of education is bound to be temporarily upset by renewal of its content. This will be used as another ground for criticizing reforms.

It is also important to acknowledge that even the optimistic scenario is unlikely to cause a major reduction of the gap between regions in scope, resource support and quality of education at all levels.

2.3. GOALS AND TARGETS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN EDUCATION IN THE SPIRIT OF THE MDGS

The above analysis enables us to formulate the problems and tasks, which face Russian education, in the light of the MDGs. The problems are as follows:

- inadequate involvement in education of

socially vulnerable groups (disabled, orphans, children from socially disadvantaged families) and their socialization via and within the framework of the educational system;

- inequality of starting conditions for children from different social strata and different regions, leading to further inequality in society;
- regional differences in the scope, resource support and quality of education, causing polarization of regions by levels of social and economic development with all the ensuing consequences;
- a widening gap between the contents of

The Russian Government views education as a high-priority issue for the country's social and economic development.

secondary education and the requirements of modern life, dominance of an academic approach instead of teaching skills for full participation in public, social and economic life; and

- unsatisfactory linkage between the structure and content of vocational education and labor market requirements.

The tasks for development of Russian education in the spirit of the MDGs are:

- to involve vulnerable groups in education and socialization;
- to ensure participation in pre-school education for children from low-income families and families in rural areas;
- to reduce the gap in funding and access to general secondary and primary vocational education between and within regions;
- to update the content of general secondary education towards development of practical and knowledge application skills; and
- to improve the compliance of primary vocational and tertiary education with the modern economic environment and labor market requirements.

Targets and proposed indicators for monitoring achievement of these targets are given in the table in Appendix 2.1.

2.4. GOVERNMENT EDUCATION POLICY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

As stated above, the Russian Government views education as a high-priority issue for the country's social and economic development. This is evident from official documents and statements by political leaders, but it is also evident from rapid growth in resource provision for the sector. Growth in education funding has outpaced economic growth in recent years, and public expenditure on education rose from 2.8% of GDP in 2000 to 3.5% in 2003. However, public expenditure on education in Russia is still lower, both as a share of GDP and in absolute terms, than in OECD countries and countries with comparable levels of economic development.

Consideration of the Education Development Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2010, adopted by the Government in December 2004, shows the extent, to which the Government's action plan can solve the problems of education, which this Report has revealed in the context of the MDGs.

The Strategy describes the **problems of involvement in education of socially vulnerable groups** (disabled, orphans, and children from socially disadvantaged families) and their socialization within the framework of the educational system. However, the Strategy offers no real measures to solve these problems or even to develop a system, which could keep count of children who are excluded from education.

Proper attention is given in the Strategy to **inequality of starting conditions for children** from different social backgrounds and children in different regions. It is suggested that the problem should be solved by introducing pre-school education for children aged from 5 to 6. This, however, involves considerable spending on development of appropriate curricula, teacher training, and development and publication of methodical and educational materials. If regions are expected to pay for this themselves, there is a serious risk of further differentiation in educational levels across Russia because economically backward regions with a high proportion of rural population (the regions most in need of such pre-school programs) will not be able to ensure introduction of pre-school education curricula to a satisfactory standard.

Little attention is given in the Strategy to **regional differentiation in the scope, resources and quality of education**, and there is reason to believe that transfer of responsibilities for funding primary and secondary vocational education, as proposed in the Strategy, will only aggravate the situation. Analysis of performance by primary vocational establishments¹³ showed that only a few indicators improved as a result of transfer of funding responsibilities to the regional level in some subjects of the Russian Federation. In most cases, the change in funding source, responsibility and powers had no effect on resource sufficiency and other aspects of the primary vocational education system compared with average values for Russia, and led to changes for the worse in many cases.

The Strategy stipulates introduction of resource sufficiency standards. This would certainly promote improvement of education funding in the most economically backward

regions. However, effectiveness of this measure will depend on the level of these standards, how well they are complied with, and availability of targeted financial assistance.

The Strategy discusses the **widening gap between the content of secondary education and the needs of modern life** and dominance of an academic approach instead of teaching necessary skills for full participation in public, social and economic life. The proposed solution is to develop and introduce a new generation of standards for general secondary education. The Strategy gives considerable attention to the content of vocational education, proving that the Government is aware of the problem of **lack of match between structure and content of vocational education and the labor market**.

2.5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Achievement of the MDGs in Russia seems to be at quite a high level. Analysis of indicators, measuring achievement of the Goals, offers a favorable picture of education coverage and gender equality in access to education.

However, closer examination reveals a number of problems and tendencies, which prevent us from concluding that Russia has fully achieved the Millennium Goals in education. These problems and tendencies include:

- increasing regional differentiation in level and quality of education, including compulsory education;
- increasing gap between the content and quality of education at all levels and the requirements of modern life and the economic environment; and
- exclusion from education of some, albeit small, groups of children due to special needs and social reasons.

Chapter 2

The Government is fully aware that education, its quality and adequacy for modern requirements, are priority issues for improving competitiveness of Russia's economy and well-being and quality of life of its people. The second and third of the problems and tendencies, which we just mentioned, are given proper consideration in the *Education Development Strategy of the Russian*

The MDGs, modified for Russian conditions, could be used as a start point for consensus in order to achieve deeper public dialogue

Federation up to 2010. However, little attention is given to the problem of widening regional differences in provision and quality of education. Furthermore, negative public attitude and opposition of a considerable part of the pro-

fessional community to any type of social reform creates a risk that reforms will be called off or implemented in a truncated form. This could mean that the priorities stated in the documents will not in fact be achieved.

Documents expounding Government education policy need some amendments, and the documents need to be explained and discussed with representatives of the professional community and consumers of educational services. The MDGs, modified for Russian conditions, could be used as a start point for consensus in order to achieve deeper public dialogue. Specific measures should be designed for achieving the adapted MDGs in Russia and these measures should be included in federal education programs, particularly the Education Development and *Children of Russia* programs.

¹ Draft medium-term program for socio-economic development of the Russian Federation (2005-2008).

² According to estimates of the RF Ministry of Education, "as many as 1.6 million children (or 4.5% of the total number of children) currently need special (adaptive) education, but only 45% of them have been integrated in the educational environment". Source: web-site of the RF Ministry of Education and Science.

³ In this case, the understated estimate is not a result of malicious intent. It is explained by difficulties (common to all countries) of keeping a record of children not attending school. This is due to many reasons. For example, the fact that a child is excluded from education can only emerge if he/she is registered by agencies responsible for education, internal affairs, or social welfare.

⁴ A direct comparison of public expenditures per student does not offer a true picture, because required funding depends to a large extent on where an educational establishment is located. To illustrate, educational costs per student in rural areas are on the average 3-4 times higher than in urban areas. For this reason, initial public expenditures data were adjusted using the "index of appreciation of budgetary service standard unit cost" (this index takes into account climate, population settlement pattern, transport network and other factors influencing social expenditure needs in different regions; it is calculated annually by the RF Ministry of Finance for purposes of allocating financial support to regions). Similarly, Gross Regional Product (GRP) per capita, which is the indicator of economic development of a region, was adjusted based on the consumer goods basket.

⁵ PISA = Program of International Scholar Assessment, TIMS = Trends in International Mathematics and Science.

⁶ Agranovich, M.L., Poletaev, A.V., and Fateeva, A.V. Rossiyskoye obrazovanie v kontekste mezhdunarodnykh pokazateley, 2004. Sravnitelnyy analiz, Moscow, Aspekt Press, 2005, Table 2.

⁷ See, for example, Livni, E. and Polishchuk, L. Problema kachestvennogo obrazovaniya: rol' gosudarstva, konjurenstii i rynka truda, http://www.eerc.ru/details/download.aspx?file_id=3900.

⁸ See the list of data collected by Rosobrazovanie to perform a rating assessment of higher educational establishments and chairs, http://www.edu.ru/db-mo/mo/Data/d_05/pr11-5.doc

⁹ See, for example, studies that were undertaken in Krasnoyarsk (Markova, O.Yu., Petrushina, I.S., and Krasnikova, E.A. Marketingovye issledovaniya rynka obrazovatel'nykh uslug; <http://www.marketing.spb.ru/conf/2002-01-edu/sbornik-4.htm>) and in the Primorski Krai (Popova G.G., and Gembatskaya, G.V., Analiz rezultatov sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniya mneniy rabotodateley ob otsenke kachestva podgotovki spetsialistov vuzami Primor'ia; and Dotsenko, V.A., Otsenka kachestva vypusnikov VGUES po itogam anketirovaniya rabotodateley, in Perspektivnye tekhnologii otsenki i monitoringa kachestva obrazovaniya [Perspective technologies of education quality assessment and monitoring], Collection of papers, Vladivostok, Dalnevost. Un-t, 2003).

¹⁰ This group includes three aggregated branches of knowledge according to the International Standard Classification of Education of 1997: (1) Education, (2) Art and Human Sciences, and (3) Social Sciences, Business, and Law. These ISCED-97 domains correspond, in turn, to five aggregated groups of specialties and training types as defined in the All-Russia Classifier of Educational Specialties: (50) Education and Pedagogy, (70) Culture and Art, (30) Human Sciences, (40) Social Sciences, and (80) Economics and Management.

¹¹ Agranovich, M.L., Poletaev, A.V., and Fateeva, A.V., Rossiyskoye obrazovaniye v kontekste mezhdunarodnykh pokazateley, 2004. Comparative presentation, Moscow, Aspekt Press, 2005, Table 15. Data for Russia have been rectified.

¹² Federal Law No.122-F3 of Aug. 22, 2004.

¹³ Problemy i tendentsii razvitiya obrazovaniya v Rossiyskoy Federatsii: regional'nyi aspekt. Statisticheskiy informatsionnyy sbornik, Moscow, 2004.

Appendix 2.1

Table. Goal 2. Ensuring accessibility to education

Target	Indicator	Current value	Targeted value	Comments
<i>To involve vulnerable groups of the population in education and socialization</i>	Education coverage of children with special health-related needs The proportion of children with special health-related needs attending secondary schools in the total number of children with special health-related needs who are in education The proportion of children from vulnerable groups with a certificate of full secondary education or primary vocational education and employed or continuing education	45% (2002) - -	- -	The system for recording numbers of children excluded from education needs to be improved.
<i>To ensure participation in pre-school education of children from low-income families and residing in rural areas</i>	Pre-school education coverage Including: in rural areas children from low-income families	58.1% (2002) 39.0% (2002) -	90% 70% -	A special survey is required with subsequent organization of monitoring.
<i>To reduce the gap in funding and access to general secondary and primary vocational education between and within regions</i>	A reduction of the gap in spending per student between regions and between local communities within regions (the ratio of mean values for upper and lower deciles) A reduction of the gap in upper secondary education coverage between regions (the ratio of mean values for upper and lower deciles)	2.1-fold (regions) (2002)	1.5 1.1	The ratio between values in the “top” and “bottom” 10% of regions.
<i>To update the content of general secondary education towards developing practical skills and knowledge application</i>	Improvement of Russia’s rating in PISA and TIMS assessments	2003 – 30 th position	Pessimistic scenario – 35 th position Optimistic scenario – 20 th position (average among OECD countries)	
<i>To improve compliance of vocational education with the modern economic environment and labor market requirements</i>	Employment of vocational school leavers and graduates (the proportion of unemployed in the total number of vocational school leavers and graduates) Primary vocational education Secondary vocational education Higher vocational education The average duration of job search for people aged 16-24 System of additional education (additional education coverage of people aged 24-60)	2003 6.1% 6.9% 2.2% 8.0 months - 2002	3.0% 3.0% 1.5% 6 months	A reliable audit system needs to be developed for additional education.