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Welfare Reforms in Post-Soviet States: Current Issues and Research Highlights

LINDA J. COOK & ELENA IARSKAIA-SMIRNOVA

IN RECENT YEARS, THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED major social policy reforms that incorporate contemporary state-of-the-art international principles and practices. New legislation has mandated deinstitutionalisation, that is, closing Russia's large network of residential facilities for children 'without parental supervision' ('*deti bez popecheniya roditelei*')[1] and people with disabilities. Programmes of foster care and adoption are emptying orphanages, while efforts have been made to reorient efforts of social workers and family courts towards preserving families. Children with disabilities are being moved out of institutions and integrated into public schools, while adults now have possibilities to live and work in communities that have been made more accessible. 'Active Ageing' policies are designed to enhance the agency and self-determination of older people. Schools have begun to integrate the children of migrant workers. Some social service provision has been outsourced to socially-oriented non-governmental organisations (SONPOs; see Cook *et al*. 2021) in order to allow a choice of providers and services. While the progress of these reforms has been uneven, collectively they reflect the Russian government's efforts towards integrating into mainstream society groups that have for decades been marginalised or institutionalised.

The reforms apply social policy models based on international agreements that the Russian government has adopted, mainly the United Nations Conventions on Rights of People with Disabilities (2006), On the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (2002). Together they have begun shifting Russia's inherited statist social policy practices towards more diversified, socially-inclusive, rights-based approaches. The contributors to our Special Issue explain the decisions made to adopt

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[1]Statement of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 481, 'O deyatel'nosti organizatsii dlya detei-sirot i detei, ostavshikhsya bez popecheniya roditelei, i ob ustroistve v nih detei, ostavshikhsya bez popecheniya roditelei', available at: https://base.garant.ru/70661542/, accessed 11 January 2023.

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new policies in five areas of Russia's social sector—services for people with disabilities, children without parental care, the elderly, migrant children's education and health care. The conclusion covers the effects of the COVID pandemic on groups covered in the Special Issue. Authors assess how much these reforms have changed Russia's social sector, and what obstacles they have encountered. To preview our main findings, the effects of reforms have varied markedly across the four policy areas. Changes in child welfare policy have been transformative, those in disability policy significant but more limited. Active ageing efforts remain mostly at the level of discourse which is influencing policy slowly. Integration of migrant children into education in Russia continues to be based on an assimilationist ideology rather than an active equal dialogue of cultures.

Background

Through much of the 1990s Russia's social policy continued to rely on Soviet-era norms and practices. In Soviet times, disability policy was based on a 'medical' model that led to segregation and exclusion of many persons with disabilities (Phillips 2009; Rasell & Iarskaia-Smirnova 2014). They were denied access to material resources, recognition and representation (Mladenov 2017). Adults with disabilities who had the ability to work were employed through a state-sponsored assignment system, with quotas given to employers. There was a separate educational system for children with mild disabilities, who usually lived at home. Institutionalisation and segregation from society were the norm for adults and children with severe disabilities, who often lived in state-run institutions from birth (Rasell & Iarskaia-Smirnova 2014). There was no concept of rights for those with disabilities.

The model of institutionalisation extended to children who were orphaned, as well as the broader category of 'social orphans'—those without parental or family supervision though they had a living parent. The system of orphanages had developed during the cataclysms of the revolutionary period and World War II. A third wave of children entered this care system during the decade-long recession of the 1990s. While some of these children had been abandoned, the state took many from troubled families. They were placed in residential facilities, usually isolated from the general population, and provided with education but little nurture. Soviet society for the most part lacked systems of adoption, foster care, or other programmes to integrate these children into society.

In the past, policy towards Russia's elderly focused on paternalism, socio-economic support and care and assistance for the frail elderly. The concepts of active, healthy, successful ageing that developed in postindustrial societies and now characterise their responses to increasing life expectancy and quality of life have only recently become prominent in Russian discourse. Studies show that the quality and meaning of longevity depend on lifestyle, the immediate environment and national policy for improving the quality of life of older people (Kolosnitsyna & Khorkina 2017). Russia's approach to 'active ageing' ('active longevity') is defined in the Strategy of Actions in the Interests of Citizens of the Older Generation in the Russian

Federation to 2025, the National Project 'Demography' and the Federal Project 'The Older Generation'.[2]

During the Soviet period, immigration and emigration was largely controlled throughout the Union. Immigration to Russia, mostly of Russian nationals from Former Soviet states, began during the 1990s. After 2000 it grew to a massive inflow of labour migrants, mostly from poorer, predominantly Muslim Central Asian states. This inflow has brought to Russia modest but growing numbers of school-aged migrant children who differ culturally and linguistically from the Russian majority. Though most labour migrants remain unregistered, both UN mandates and Russian federal law guarantee their children's rights to attend school. Schools in urban areas, where migrants are concentrated, for the first time have substantial groups of non-Russian speaking students. Educational authorities tasked with developing curricula and teaching materials for these children face the question of how to represent the relationship between Russian and migrants' cultures.

Major social policy reforms in the Russian Federation

Reforms in each policy area were first considered between 2005 and 2010, with legislation passed between 2012 and 2015. Implementing such reforms required substantial changes in social sector organisation, financing, skill sets and so forth, and inevitably confronted structural and institutional barriers. Civil society organisations, including NGOs, effectively shaped and promoted reforms, but the policy space that was open for their influence depended on how well each reform fitted a priority of the Presidential Administration. Chief amongst these priorities are demographic concerns, cost-efficiency in the social sector, public satisfaction with delivery of social services and social stability. It should be noted that the reforms are selective, implementing or at least legislating current international norms in some areas of social policy while ignoring or rejecting such norms in other areas. Reforms do not, for example, extend to gender equality, rights of LGBTQ people or, in our case of educating migrant children, to interpenetration of Russian with other cultures rather than assimilationist approaches (Chubarova & Grigorieva 2021).

Reforming disability policy

Attitudes towards people with disabilities began to change slowly in post-Soviet times, but the Russian government retained its established practices until 1995. The first significant reform legislation, the 1995 Federal Law 'On Social Protection of People with Disabilities in the Russian Federation' mandated measures for the integration of those with disabilities into communities with the purpose of guaranteeing them equal opportunities.[3] Its approval

[2]N 164-p, 'Strategiya deistvii v interesakh grazhdan starshego pokoleniya v Rossiiskoii Federatsii do 2025', 5 February 2016, available at: https://mintrud.gov.ru/ministry/programms/37/2, accessed 5 December 2022; 'Demografiya', 23 August 2018, available at: https://mintrud.gov.ru/ministry/programms/demography, accessed 5 December 2022; 'Starshee pokolenie', 16 December 2018, available at: https://mintrud.gov.ru/ministry/programms/demography/3, accessed 5 December 2022.

[3]FZ (Federal Law) 181, 'O sotsial'noi zashchite invalidov v Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 24 November 1995, available at: http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=132981, accessed 5 December 2022.

marked important progress, as emphasis was put on the improvement of the 'social conditions' of this group. Some urban social service centres began providing therapies and other resources on a modest scale, but for more than a decade there was no more significant change (Fröhlich 2012). The presence of both physical and social barriers at different levels and the fact that discrimination against disabled people was not yet legally forbidden hindered the Law's implementation.

Then-President Dmitrii Medvedev promoted Russia's 2012 ratification of the UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities within the context of his Modernisation Programme. The government proceeded with broad changes to bring Russian policy into compliance with the Convention. Significant improvements in accessibility of public spaces for people with physical disabilities were made through the Programme 'Accessible Environment 2011–2015'.[4] New laws on 'inclusive education' required that children with disabilities be integrated into mainstream schools. The Ministry of Labour mandated that workplaces be specially equipped for adults with mobility limitations, visual and hearing impairments, and other disabilities.[5] Discrimination against people with disabilities was legally prohibited. Their rights to live, work and receive social services in communities, form families, foster and adopt children were enshrined in legislation.

Reforms had support amongst many professionals, NGOs and, critically, the Putin administration. At the same time, some social sector professionals resisted the changes, or protested that they were introduced without adequate preparation or funding. As the essays in this Special Issue show, implementation confronted obstacles that limited reforms' effectiveness, but some progress was achieved in each policy realm. Mobilisation of support by people with disabilities and their families contributed to progress. According to Cook and Iarskaia-Smirnova:

> in contrast to the situation before the reform, the rights of people with disabilities are now better recognized by Russia's government and society. The activism and agency of parents with disabled children have played a significant role in bringing public attention to disability issues. Now public officials openly express concerns about the special needs and inadequacies of current approaches. Grassroots associations, NGOs and networks take part in discussions and contribute to overcoming stigmatization and exclusion in society. (Cook & Iarskaia-Smirnova forthcoming, p. 15)

In other post-Soviet societies as well, by comparison to the Soviet period with its famous slogan 'There Are No Disabled People in the USSR' (Fefelov 1986; Phillips 2009), nowadays people with disabilities are becoming more visible not only as addressees of assistance and heroic characters in dramatic stories, but also as professionals, actors in the field of decision-making, agents of change, and subjects taking an active part in society

[4]State programme 'Gosprogramma "Dostupnaya sreda" na 2011–15 gody. Utverzhdena Gosudarstvennaya programma Rossiiskoi Federatsii "Dopstupnaya sreda" na 2011–2015 gody.', 17 March 2011, available at: https://rg.ru/documents/2011/03/28/dostupnaya-sreda-site-dok.html, accessed 5 December 2022.

[5]Order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Russian Federation No. 63, 'O provedenii monitoringa sozdaniya oborudovannykh (osnashchennykh) rabochikh mest i trudoustroistva na nikh nezanyatykh invalidov', 30 January 2014, available at: https://base.garant.ru/70631460/, accessed 5 December 2022.

and in the public sphere. However, despite the progress made, institutional and societal barriers persist, limiting the development of inclusive culture in educational settings and workplaces as well as in the society as a whole (UNESCO 2021; Kolybashkina *et al*. 2021; Iarskaia-Smirnova & Goriainova 2022). Some commentators have claimed that legislative reform is a necessary but not sufficient condition for inclusion, and that practical implementation should instead follow a holistic approach that takes account of all factors maintaining exclusion (Mladenov 2017).

Three of the contributions to our Special Issue focus on reforms in disability policy. Nikita Bolshakov and Charlie Walker address vocational education for deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHOH) young people in Russia, particularly the changing shape of transitions from education to employment for DHOH youth. During the Soviet period, the lives and prospects of these young people were heavily restricted by the classification of their disability, which determined what and where they could study and the forms of employment they could hold. The authors find that inclusive policies and legal frameworks have now been instituted at the state level, and educational opportunities somewhat expanded. Relying on surveys and interviews with DHOH youth, their study shows, however, that choices become narrower at each stage of transition to adulthood. The majority follow the vocational pathway through the education system. Here, a combination of resource constraints and narrow preconceptions of what DHOH people can do limits their possibilities. Higher educational institutions typically have instructors for DHOH students in only a few specialised areas, towards which almost all are therefore directed. While an enabling ethos clearly underpins the attempt to foster an inclusive approach, the lack of resources to realise this ethos means that the education system remains a disabling institution.

Moving into the labour market, DHOH youth confront widespread discrimination from employers and disabling attitudes that further narrow their prospects, again with *de jure* rights *de facto* not held up. In essence, they appear stuck between two modes of governmentality which exclude them in different ways, one limiting them through outdated resources and practices while the other simultaneously promises yet denies new forms of self-realisation. Ultimately, their options remain quite limited. Marginalisation in both education and the labour market contributes to a counter process of searching for a separate cultural identity within the deaf community. That community, rather than integration into general society, remains central to interviewees' horizons for action as they progress into adult life.

Christian Fröhlich, Victoria Antonova and Anna Sinelnikova ask a related question for people with disabilities more broadly: whether new international norms and rules on workplace inclusion produce genuine diversity or a 'charade' of integrating workers with disabilities in large Russian companies. During Soviet times, enterprises in the largely autarchic economy played major roles in social welfare provision. The progressive integration of Russian business organisations into global markets and networks in recent decades requires them to respond to global norms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in order to be accepted as legitimate international actors. The authors investigate how Russian companies publicly address CSR, specifically inclusion of people with disabilities. The research relies on interpretive content analysis of non-financial reporting by Russian companies that are highly-ranked for CSR. Studying these companies'

selected corporate inclusion policies, the authors identify distinct approaches towards people with disabilities with regard to both workplace inclusion and participation in wider society. Different approaches amongst company groups are explained as consequences of Soviet welfare legacies, characteristics of industrial sectors in which enterprises work and state–business relationships.

In their contribution, Alfiya Battalova, Nina Bagdasarova and Rakhat Orozova look at the development and role of the disability movement in Kyrgyzstan, one of the last post-Soviet countries to ratify the UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (UN CRPD). The disability movement played a significant role in advocating for the adoption and ratification of the Convention and promoting public awareness of disability issues. Drawing on interviews with disability activists, the authors show, however, that the CPRD has been narrowly interpreted in Kyrgyzstan post-ratification. This has resulted in misrecognition of the voices of people with disabilities, who are prevented from meaningful engagement and participation in the policymaking process. The authors find that one of the challenges lies in the premise of the UN CDRP itself. By appealing to the universal values of inclusion, the framework of human rights often decontextualises the unique settings of individual countries, making recognition a formality rather than an aspirational value. Recognition of people with disabilities as participants in the political process is part of the wider approach that requires transformative rather than just legislative change. The development of the disability movement in Kyrgyzstan indicates that, in the light of Soviet legacies and contemporary trends, the human rights approach in the region needs to go beyond narrow legal formulations and take a broader approach to inclusion.

Reforms of child welfare: family services and foster care

The second major area of reform addressed in our Special Issue is child welfare, including deinstitutionalisation, creating a system of foster care and changing the orientation of family services to support and preserve families. By the end of 2020, the total number of children (0–18 years) in Russia was 31,913,558.[6] The number of children orphaned or left without parental care was 406,138, about 1.3% of all children.[7] Part of the reason for such a high rate was the lack of child protection and family reconciliation services. Most of these children remained in institutions throughout their childhoods. Volunteers from child welfare SONPOs who worked in Russia's understaffed children's homes testified to the social and emotional deprivation of child-residents.

The 2010s witnessed increasing political and public concern over child- and family-related issues in Russia, with child welfare and family policy being elevated to the top of the state's political agenda. Russia's conservative government has prioritised the protection of traditional family values and family as the mainstay of Russian society. On that basis the Putin administration introduced major policy and welfare reform

[6]Calculated manually from: 'Chislennost' naseleniya Rossiiskoi Federatsii po polu i vozrastu na yanvarya 2021 goda (statisticheskii byulleten), Federal'naya Sluzhba Gosudarstvennoi statistiki', Rosstat, available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Bul_chislen_nasel-pv_01-01-2021.pdf, accessed 5 December 2022.

[7]'Podderzhka detei-sirot i detei, ostavshikhsya bez popecheniya roditelei', Minprosvesheniya, 11 March 2019, available at: https://edu.gov.ru/activity/main_activities/orphans/, accessed 5 December 2022.

programmes including those that work towards deinstitutionalising the country's entire child welfare system (Hyppölä & Hyppölä 2018).[8] During the five years from 2018 to 2022, the number of children in institutions decreased by 34%.[9] Efforts to promote fostering and adoption of these children by existing families have included establishing support systems for new foster families, among them group 'Foster Villages' that provide the families with stipends and sometimes housing. These Villages carry considerable innovative potential and valuable ideas on family and parenting (Hyppölä & Hyppölä 2018).

Because Russia's social sector workers have had very little experience with family reconciliation, foster family placement or adoption, there has been considerable space for policy innovation in this area. Authorities have turned to child welfare SONPOs for help in designing new institutions and implementing new practices (Kulmala *et al*. 2021). For several years, before cooperation with foreign organisations was prohibited by the Putin administration in 2012, SONPOs engaged in international collaborations to help develop child welfare policies in Russia. Their experience serves to link Russian practices to international trends of child rights-based welfare systems. These reforms have been the most successful of those covered in the Special Issue. The number of foster families increased ten times between 2005 and 2015 (Biryukova & Sinyavskaya 2017). Courts have halved the share of children taken from troubled families because parental rights were terminated. Numbers of children living in state institutions declined dramatically (Kulmala *et al*. 2021; Iarskaia-Smirnova *et al*. 2021).

In their contribution to the Special Issue, Meri Kulmala, Anna Tarasenko, Maija Jäppinen and Anna Pivovarova focus on reforms of Russia's child welfare system. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Russia, they analyse the process of deinstitutionalising children and moving them into foster families. These policies have received strong support from the Presidential Administration, and the shift at the ideational and programme level is real. However, the authors find that the process of implementing deinstitutionalisation across the Federation has been fragmented. Relying on a neo-institutional framework, they ask: what kind of institutional change has followed the new ideals of care, with what consequences, and what factors could explain the obvious flaws? The authors illustrate the policy shift with several examples that show implementation through new institutional design and practices, as well as fragmentation and constraints of institutional legacies. The reform's key goal is supposed to be to keep children in families and prevent them from entering the state care system. However, much effort has instead focused on 'reorganisation' (or faking reorganisations) of an alternative care system. The essay identifies four factors that contribute to this outcome: Russia's authoritarian political regime; a kinship-like understanding of foster care; the inferior position of child's rights to other rights and interests; and a low level of societal trust.

[8]See, for example, Ukaz Prezidenta RF N761 'O Natsional'noi strategii deistvii v interesakh detei na 2012–2017', 1 June 2012, available at: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_130516/, accessed 2 February 2023; 'Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoi semeinoi politiki v Rossii na period do 2025 goda', Rossiiskaya gazeta, 28 August 2014, available at: https://rg.ru/documents/2014/08/29/semya-site-dok.html, accessed 2 February 2023.

[9]'V Rossii na tret' sokratilos' chislo detei-sirot', *RIA Novosti*, 13 April 2022, available at: https://ria.ru/20220413/siroty-1783263372.html, accessed 5 December 2022.

Continuing the focus on children's welfare, Maria Kozlova and Tatiana Ryabichenko study approaches to integrating migrant students in Russian schools. Kozlova and Ryabichenko focus their research on the model of social integration represented in Russian schoolbooks intended for children of migrants. Analysing the content of the *Alphabet Book* and the *Literary Reading* textbooks, used in grades 1–4 for language and reading development of non-native speakers, they find cultural stereotypes that effectively 'other' especially adult migrants, that is, the students' parents. The content analysis of the textbooks shows tendencies towards the elimination of cultural specificity from grade to grade, the exclusion of adult migrants in the representations of intercultural contact, and the implicit reinforcement of the dominant role of the Russian majority. In the *Alphabet Book* and the *Literary Reading* textbooks diversity is admitted as a demographic fact and a set of practices (costume, cuisine, organisation of private space and so forth). However, the texts indicate an assimilationist ideology. They exclude the possibility of interpenetration of values and mutual consideration of the inter-temporal interests of interacting actors. Cross-cultural education should but does not imply an active equal dialogue of cultures. The authors conclude that there is a need to rethink the legal framework for regulating education and the content of schoolbooks.

'Active ageing'—reform of policy towards the elderly

In Soviet and post-Soviet policies towards elderly people, the emphasis has been on social protection, pensions, benefits and other socio-economic support instruments. Aspects of social development, in particular, the socio-psychological problems of ageing, were not articulated. Recent social policies, largely initiated and supported by non-governmental organisations, are aimed at filling that gap. The turn towards the policy of active ageing and the revision of the social contract between the elderly and the state are new, just-emerging phenomena in the Russian normative field. At the discursive level, they are embodied in the transition from standardisation to individualisation of social services. For example, Federal Law 122 'On Social Services for Elderly and Disabled Citizens', which entered into force in 1995, classified the elderly and people with disabilities into one homogeneous group of unemployed citizens, thereby reproducing the Soviet tradition of classifying individuals by their labour status (Harris 2011). The Federal Law 442 (2013, enacted 2015), on the contrary, articulates the principle of individualisation, which is at the heart of social services.[10] The paradigm shifts in the understanding of ageing and old age in gerontology and the social sciences have coincided with tremendous changes affecting attitudes and practices towards ageing in postindustrial societies (Del Barrio *et al*. 2018). In recent decades, the issue of ageing has become the subject of debate in Russia, and longevity is emphasised as a strategic landmark of welfare policy.

Since the 1990s significant progress has been made in increasing the level of social activity of the older generation, including their engagement in volunteering (Pevnaya

[10]FZ-442 2013 'Ob osnovakh sotsial'nogo obsluzhivaniya grazhdan v Rossiiskoi Federatsii', 28 December 2013, available at: http://www.rg.ru/2013/12/30/socialka-dok.html, accessed 5 December 2022.

et al. 2020; Grigoryeva & Bogdanova 2020). However, these experiences are confined mainly to the middle and upper classes. Overall, studies show a high risk of deprivation amongst older people in Russia, including non-monetary deprivations (Manning *et al*. 2017; Tikhonova 2017; Ovcharova *et al*. 2020). Their involvement in various spheres of life is limited by persisting myths and stereotypes about ageing, and their access to socially significant resources and programmes of culture, health care, social services and labour markets varies in time and space, from region to region (Nizamova 2020; Ovcharova *et al*. 2020). Active ageing as a regulatory framework becomes exclusively top-down, despite the declared commitment to the values of participation. Policies are adopted taking little account of diversity of needs and inequalities among older people. In the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, new risks of social exclusion, deprivation, vulnerability and ageism have arisen (Grigoryeva & Bogdanova 2020).

The Special Issue includes two essays on Active (Dignified) Ageing. In the first, Aliia Nizamova and Elena Zdravomyslova rely on interviews to analyse the roles of policy entrepreneurs, public discourse, barriers and opportunities for improving the active engagement of Russia's elderly Federation-wide. Their master frame is 'dignified ageing', which conveys multiple meanings and is aimed at mobilising support of authorities and publics. The authors present the discourse of 'dignified ageing' as mobilised by policy entrepreneurs in Russia in the fight for long-term care reform, which has been underway since 2017. Dignity rhetoric, in different meanings, is mobilised by authorities, by critics of the regime, and by reformers trying to implement social changes. The authors ask how various policy entrepreneurs promote reforms in the elderly care regime. They find that different categories of entrepreneurs work on different issues of dignified ageing according to their interests. Three types of policy entrepreneurs acting in the realm of Long-Term Care (LTC) reform are taken into account in the research: private charities and non-profit organisations; commercial providers; and medical experts.

By using dignity discourse as a powerful tool for establishing a conditional consensus amongst various actors, these social policy entrepreneurs describe the ageism expressed towards older citizens in Russian society; deprivation of choice and control over their own lives; and the degrading treatment that manifests itself in indecent living conditions and inhumane practices of care. The negative accounts are emotionally charged, powerful and eloquent: they condemn ageism, malfunctioning institutions and scarcity of care. However, social policy entrepreneurs do not only critique the existing patterns; they initiate changes in ageing social policy, and elderly care in particular. In their cultural work, they promote a change in attitudes towards frail senior citizens. The system is changing, albeit slowly. Pilot projects seem to be successful, but dissemination of best practices is still a problem. The system remains blind to the diversity of the needs and demands of frail and dependent elderly.

Daria Prisiazhniuk and Arturs Holavins's essay draws on interviews with elderly Russian citizens to study active ageing policy in the Moscow and Saratov regions. The authors reveal the ideology behind the concept of positive ageing as a set of welfare tools and value system connected to neoliberal trends in social policy. The essay shows confusion and uncertainty in the mismatch of the 'paternalistic' and 'optimistic' discourses on old age and ageing. The first views ageing as a time of troubles and is now largely viewed as obsolete, yet the new 'optimistic' discourse of old age as a time of freedom and opportunities often does

not reflect the experiences of many senior citizens. Key results of the research demonstrate that class apparently matters. 'Active' elderly people distinguish themselves from the 'non-active', explicitly mentioning their own social background as educated intellectuals. This analysis reflects a gradual recommodification of elderly care provision and a trend towards non-state social care and support for the older population. The neoliberal project of self-sustenance, proactivity and a healthy, independent lifestyle for the elderly has become a point of reference in social policymaking. The authors argue that active ageing is one of the few viable paths for retrenchment of the Russian welfare regime. Programmes manoeuvre between the paternalistic and the neoliberal approaches to ageing, remaining ambiguous. Those that emphasise independence, self-sustenance and proactivity of the elderly serve as a justification for more modest state social services and provision.

Health-care reform

The contribution by Daria Salnikova compares contemporary public attitudes towards health-care quality in Russia and Latvia. When communism collapsed, both countries inherited broadly similar Soviet-style health-care systems—extensive but bureaucratised, inefficient and greatly in need of modernisation. The two systems followed similar paths of reform, but public evaluations of their performance differ markedly. Salnikova gives an overview of problems people face when they receive medical treatment, and tests differences in public perceptions between the two country cases as well as variation across different social groups within each. Surveys in both Latvia and Russia give evidence of dissatisfaction with access to care, waiting times and disrespectful treatment by medical personnel, but dissatisfaction is deeper in Russia. The study compares evaluations in terms of efficiency and quality of services, unofficial payments and gratitude gifts, and social exclusion The Latvian data show more favourable evaluations for all three categories of performance, despite roughly similar levels of expenditure in the two cases.

Salnikova's essay addresses the question of why, despite their substantial similarities, Russia and Latvia have very different health-care system outcomes. She explains these differences as results of regime characteristics that affect governments' capacity to effectively implement health-care policies, specifically rule of law and public sector corruption. Citing multiple studies and data sets, Salnikova shows that higher quality of governance strengthens positive effects of public health expenditure. Specifically, stronger adherence to rule of law and less public sector corruption in Latvia ensure better enforcement of health rights. Weaker rule of law in Russia, by contrast, increases exclusion from health care, especially of the elderly and those on low incomes. It also increases public sector corruption and facilitates a higher prevalence of informal practices, such as unofficial payments for treatment, that are detrimental to delivery of public services and access for poorer social strata.

In his conclusion to the collection, Charlie Walker focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for the social groups discussed in the Special Issue: children and young people in state institutions, people with physical and mental disabilities, the elderly, and economic migrants and their families, placing Russia in the context of

international comparison. Walker reports that during the pandemic, people with disabilities faced 'triple jeopardy' because they tend to be older, poor and have comorbidities. Many lost access to medical care, rehabilitative services and critical information that they could not access through electronic technologies. While both post-Soviet states and civil societies made efforts to continue, and in some cases increased services for these groups, all faced increased hardships and new levels of social isolation and exclusion. Elderly people also faced new risks. Overall, they were more vulnerable to infection and severe illness. Social isolation to avoid infection worsened physical and psychological health. Bio-political debates often reverted to viewing the elderly as a costly burden to societies rather than active contributors. Labour and other migrants risked a loss of income and declines in remittances to families. Many were stranded in places where they could neither work nor leave to return home. Because most are employed informally, they and their families face exclusion from social and welfare benefits, including health care. Because many live in crowded conditions, public health officials were concerned about their risk from contagious illnesses well before COVID. Here also many states extended some supports and social protections in response to the pandemic, but such efforts failed to reach most.

Children generally were impacted by closures of schools and social isolation, but effects were greater for those with disabilities or without parental care. Numbers of children taken into state care increased globally during the pandemic as families' capacity to provide for their children declined and extreme child poverty increased. Those in state care were isolated from their families, some lost access to education and social services were disrupted. Those transitioning out of care were left with few if any supports. The Eastern European and Central Asian regions experienced the second highest level of disruption of child protection services globally. Even Russia, which has made many recent improvements in its child welfare system, struggled to meet children's needs in conditions of lockdown. In sum, Walker shows vividly that COVID exacerbated inequalities everywhere, with disproportionally greater impacts on the vulnerable groups covered in this Special Issue.

Summary of findings

The essays in this collection have shown that the post-Soviet transition brought significant progress for previously excluded groups. Reform agendas have been adopted that incorporate contemporary international principles and practices aimed at engendering social inclusion in its broadest sense, promoting both the material wellbeing of marginalised groups and the recognition of their identities. The third sector has been actively enlisted into designing and implementing these agendas (Bogdanova *et al*. 2018). Nevertheless, the success of new policies aimed at facilitating the agency, self-determination and overall inclusion of marginalised social groups has been limited on multiple levels. Forms of institutional inertia and ongoing societal prejudice are amongst the many obstacles that have hindered the reform agendas addressed in this collection. In this context, despite significant progress at the levels of social policy and civil society, the

lives of the elderly, care-experienced children and young people, children of economic migrants, and people with disabilities continue to be marked by forms of social exclusion.

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