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# **Early childhood care and education in the Russian Federation**

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## Early Childhood Care and Education in the Russian Federation

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### 1. Historical legacy - political trends in the field of ECCE in Russia and the Soviet Union

The birth of public pre-school education in Russia is linked with the government reforms of the mid-nineteenth century and the abolition of serfdom in 1861. The reforms gave rise to a broad democratic movement in which leading citizens participated in the renovation of Russia and directed its development in accordance with their ideas and ideals. Education was recognized as a most important way of liberating and developing the individual. Stemming from this, a wide circle of intellectuals participated in cultural and education work, the establishment of Sunday schools, the founding of specialized publishers and the development of education journalism.

Since pre-school education was not the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Education in the Russian Empire it was left to the public and leading intellectuals. The first (private) kindergarten (S. A. Lyugebil) was opened on 27 September 1863 on St Petersburg's Vasilevsky Island. *Detsky Sad* (Kindergarten), the first Russian journal devoted to the education of pre-school age children, was published in 1866. It described the activities of Russian teachers – K.D. Ushinsky, N.Kh. Vessel and P.F. Kapterev – who had played an important part in the development of scientific pedagogics and pedagogical psychology. The 1870s saw the opening of Ye.N. Vodovozova's publishing house which produced books on pedagogics and popular science as well as children's books. The teaching journals *Uchitel* (Teacher) *Vospitanie* (Education) and *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya* (Journal of the Ministry of Public Education) published numerous articles about the system of Friedrich Fröbel.<sup>1</sup>

The birth and development of home and public pre-school education in Russia is closely linked with St Petersburg and the history of the “A.I. Herten” Russian State University. It was on the territory of the House of Education (now the “A.I. Herten” Russian State Pedagogical University) that the St Petersburg Fröbel Society was founded in 1871 to promote primary education for pre-school age children. As a result courses were initiated for the training of women teachers for kindergartens and families and lectures given on pre-school education. On the basis of the St Petersburg society similar societies developed in other towns. Fröbel societies played an important part in working out the theory and practice of educating pre-school age children and in laying the foundations of Russian child psychology.

The first kindergartens developed their teaching methods in keeping with Fröbel's concepts, but rather than simply copying them added their own Russian popular forms of organising children's education. Kindergartens which were oriented on the methods of Maria Montessori emerged somewhat later (from 1913).

Pre-school establishments were also set up at schools, gymnasiums and other education establishments with the basic purpose of preparing children for school education (the kindergarten of A.S. Simonovich and E.P. Shaffe).

An important role was played in the system of pre-school establishments by public kindergartens for national minorities. They were funded by education societies and private

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<sup>1</sup> A.P. Simonovich, from material in the journal *Vestnik Vospitaniya* (Education Bulletin), 1896.

donations. Their purpose was to guarantee the free development of national minorities and bring about cultural and national autonomy. For example, two Jewish kindergartens and several Finnish kindergartens were opened in St Petersburg in 1909-1911. The children attending them were instructed in cultural values and traditions by celebrating festivals, reading national minority literature and teaching the history and customs of their people.

Other kinds of pre-school establishments were also popularized. Children's "colonies" for children aged four to 15, irrespective of religious belief and nationality, were funded by philanthropists and parents. Set up for the purpose of promoting child health, they emphasized going for walks, physical conditioning and open-air games. Children's playgrounds were built to protect children from the harmful influences of the street and provide for their physical development (P.F. Lesgaft). They were funded by local administrations, donations and subscriptions from parents and individuals. Children's centres emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, after Russia entered the First World War, as organizations for helping war victims. In practice they combined the functions of nurseries, clubs and kindergartens and also helped parents raise "difficult children".

Analysis shows that the following types of pre-school education establishments existed before the Soviet period:

**Method of financing:**

- fee-paying private kindergartens;
- free public kindergartens;
- kindergartens with partial payment.

**Duration of stay and purpose of activity:**

- short-stay groups (three to four hours) with children's participation in collective creative games and common work activity so as to gain particular knowledge and skills during non-systematic activity;
- children's centres (eight to 12 hours) for orphans and neglected children – primarily for purposes of supervision;
- children's playgrounds at town parks for joint walks, excursions and games under the leadership of mentors who passed on to children social and collective behaviour skills and promoted their good health.

**Purpose of teaching work:**

- kindergartens at gymnasiums and other establishments whose purpose was to prepare children for entry into primary school;
- Fröbel system kindergartens;
- Montessori system kindergartens;
- kindergartens based on "freedom of upbringing" theory presupposing children's complete freedom of behaviour and activity, the absence of regulated activity and the equal rights of children, teachers and parents;
- "Ye.I. Tikheeva method" kindergartens.

Generally the facts indicate a variety of systems of pre-school education in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, the organization of pre-school establishments in a variety of forms and with a variety of social functions and also differing in the purposes of their education work and practical implementation of teaching technologies and concepts.

However, kindergartens were few in number and their services were used mostly by parents and children from large towns. A.P. Simonovich noted in 1896: "Across the whole of Russia about 1,000 children attend kindergartens". The main reasons for this were the traditions of family pre-school education of children, the inability of most families to pay for their children to attend kindergarten and the lack of state support for pre-school education.

After the October Revolution [November 1917] by decree of the Council of People's Commissars dated 5 June 1918 all pre-school education establishments were transferred to the People's Commissariat of Education and included in the public education system. The Soviet period of development of pre-school education is marked by considerable changes to the pre-revolutionary system, both positive and negative.

An important tenet of Soviet ideology was the equality of women, including their participation in production and public life on an equal basis with men. The Soviet Union took first place in the world for the number of working women. Women tried to combine the raising of their children with work, as for most of them participation in the life of society was more important than the home and child care. After the birth of a child every woman had the right to four months' paid leave (two months before the birth and two months after), but then had to return to work. Otherwise she would lose her job.

Another tenet of Soviet ideology was the idea of universal equality and social justice expressed in the collectivization of everything including children. Equal rights for all children to the same education and upbringing were considered a most important achievement of socialism. The idea of collective public education from the youngest age was a central tenet of Soviet education theory. The low social prestige of motherhood and the aim of collective education of children stimulated the development of a powerful state system of public pre-school education. This system embraced a broad network of state and departmental kindergartens. Nurseries for children aged from two months to three years were a component part of the system. From the economic point of view nurseries and kindergartens were accessible to every family since the payment per child was small. However, it was difficult to get a child into a nursery or kindergarten because the number of places available did not meet the population's actual demands.

Pre-school psychology and pedagogics developed considerably during the Soviet years. A new school of scientific psychology took shape. Its founder was the outstanding Soviet psychologist L.S. Vygotsky. At the beginning of the 1930s he formulated a number of fundamental theses of the cultural-historical theory of the ontogenetic development of the human psyche which were elaborated and developed by his pupils and followers, some in the fields of child and pedagogical psychology. A.P. Luriya made a considerable contribution to the understanding of the mechanisms of speech development and cognitive symbol functions, the development of various mental functions and involuntary actions. A.N. Leontev founded the active approach to educating people, distinguishing leading activities at various stages of a person's life. A.V. Zaporozhets spoke of the need for amplification (enrichment) of the content of child development, emphasising the significance of internal factors in a child's development. P.Ya. Galperin and V.V. Davydov investigated specific factors and conditions of teaching development.

Psychologists who had been pupils of L.S. Vygotsky's supporters began their research in the 1950s-1980s: N.N. Poddyakov (the development of thought in child experimentation); L.A. Venger (the development of capability, including modelling methods); L.I. Bozhovich (the significance of the motivational sphere in the cognitive development of children); M.I. Lisina (children's interaction with adults as a factor of development). They all shared basic theoretical positions and strove to broaden the range of problems being tackled by that school; their research was not only theoretical but also oriented on practice and of an applied nature.

Soviet pre-school pedagogics and psychology developed a new system of sensory education, a system of kindergarten didactics (A.P. Usova, the system of public education of young children aged up to three years). Fruitful research was carried out into the fuller use of the opportunities of pre-school age children's mental development (A.M. Leushina). Theoretical light was cast on problems of moral education, the formation of positive mutual relations of children in joint activities, the development of collectivism, moral perceptions and the encouragement of basic patriotism. Considerable importance was attached to the labour education of pre-school age children in the kindergarten and the family and the theory of pre-school age children's physical education was given a scientific basis. Integrated research into the formation of childhood creativity began at the end of the 1950s and the relationship between artistic creation and pre-school education was studied. Research began in the 1960s into the role of play in forms of the organisation of a child's life and its influence on the development of "child society".

The USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences was founded in 1960. Departments of pre-school pedagogics at pedagogical institutes carried out a wide range of scientific research work. The science and methodology journals *Sovetskaya Pedagogika* (Soviet Pedagogics) and *Doshkolnoe Vospitanie* (Pre-school Education) promoted the development of pre-school education.

The results of scientific research and front-ranking experience in the field of pre-school education were reflected in the Programme of Kindergarten Education (1962). All children's establishments worked on the basis of a single programme for children's education and upbringing drawn up in detail and confirmed by the State. The programme clearly distinguished age groups, prescribing a particular regime of the number and content of lessons necessary for each age group as well as norms for children's physical and psychological development (what a child should know and be able to do at each age level). This programme had a scientific basis (it was drawn up by the Institute of Pre-School Education) and was tested in many years of practical work with children. For all its shortcomings it ensured systematic pedagogical work with every child from an early age which, of course, produced positive results.<sup>2</sup>

The need to work obliged many parents to use the services of kindergartens. Although the pre-school stage was not obligatory, pre-school education embraced large numbers of children – over 70% of children attended kindergarten. The work regime of kindergartens was for a full-day stay (14 hours) and there were also 24-hour groups. The State actually usurped the function of education and upbringing, displacing the family. Parents were considered helpers of the educators rather than equal partners in children's education and upbringing.

The overcrowding of groups (as a consequence of the shortage of places in kindergartens) complicated the individualization of education influences and formalized the work of the educator and in kindergartens mostly frontal forms of organization of children's life were employed.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.psyedu/view.php>, Ye.O.Smirnova.

However, the Soviet system was quite effective in dealing with the tasks set by the State. It was:

- stable;
- without competition;
- not arbitrary;
- settled and in keeping with Russian habits and mentality;
- a prop of the existing social system;
- the same for all 15 component republics of the USSR;
- centralized;
- without right of initiative or independent decision making;
- easy to manage from above because of its uniformity.

From the mid-1980s (the beginning of perestroika) there was a gradual transfer from a unitary denationalized education system to a democratic, multiple and ethnically orientated education system. Russia saw the revival and qualitative improvement of national schools and the restoration of humanist traditions in education.<sup>3</sup>

The 1990s were a time of qualitative change in the sphere of pre-school education. Historical analysis of the development of the pre-school education system shows:

- reorientation of the pre-school education system from single plans and programmes and their unification to variety and diversity of content of pre-school education;
- replacement of value orientations determining the aims of education during pre-school childhood;
- alteration of content-rich, technological and organizational approaches;
- complication of the activities of the leaders of pre-school education establishments in connection with the need to take managerial decisions in conditions of instability, risk, the social stratification of Russians and the problems of financing pre-school education establishments;
- greater independence of pre-school education establishments in the selection of education programmes, organisational forms of activity and determination of forms of additional paid services;
- development of pre-school education standards;
- formation of improved mechanisms of expert evaluation and monitoring of the quality of education services provided by pre-school education establishments.

At the same time the economic problems and political transformations of Russia in the post-perestroika period brought about the reduction of state financing of pre-school level establishments as a result of which there was a considerable reduction in the network of pre-school education establishments, an increase in parents' payments for kindergartens and many other negative phenomena characteristic of the situation of unstable social development.

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<sup>3</sup> Pankin, A. B., *Etnokulturny paradoks sovremennogoobrazovaniya: Mongografiya*. (The Ethno-Cultural Paradox of Modern Education. A Monograph). Volgograd, *Peremena* (Change) 2001, p. 318.

## **2. The present state of the pre-school education system**

The last decade has seen a radical change in the system of public pre-school education. The pre-school education system is a multifunctional network of pre-school education establishments oriented towards the needs of society and offering a variety of education services which take into account the particular needs of age groups and individuals in child development. The initial considerable reduction in provision of pre-school education had stabilized by 1995. As of the end of 2004 pre-school establishments on average served 59% of children. At present (data from the beginning of 2005) the Russian Federation has in operation 47,800 pre-school education establishments attended by 4,321,000 children. Over the period 2000-2004 the number of kindergartens in Russia fell by 3,500 while the number of children attending rose by 58,000. In a number of regions there are queues to get children into pre-school establishments.

The main tasks of pre-school education establishments are:

- to provide for the development of children's intellect, personality and physique;
- to protect children's lives and strengthen their health;
- to make the necessary corrections to abnormalities in child development;
- to acquaint children with values common to all humanity;
- to interact with families so as to ensure the fully fledged development of children.

Pre-school education establishments have been differentiated by form and category. Superior category kindergartens make arrangements to expand their permanent staff by bringing in additional teachers specializing in one field or another. Pre-school education establishments are divided as follows according to function:

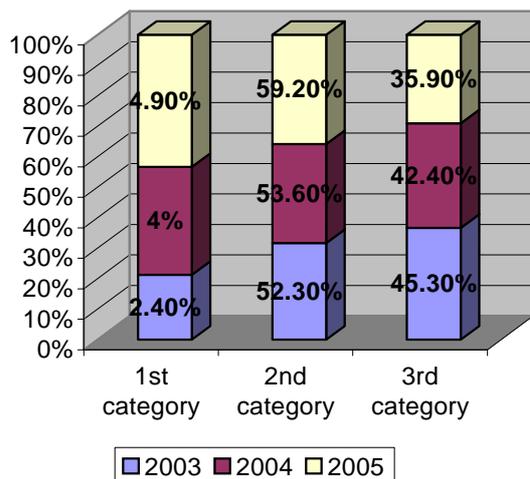
- kindergartens;
- kindergartens prioritizing one or several directions of child development (intellectual, artistic and aesthetic, physical etc.);
- kindergartens of the compensatory type prioritizing skilled correction of abnormalities in children's physical and psychological development;
- supervision and health improvement kindergartens prioritizing sanitation, hygiene, prophylaxis and health improvement measures and procedures;
- combined kindergartens which can include general development, compensatory and health improvement groups in various combinations;
- child development centres - kindergartens which stress the physical and psychological development, correction and health improvement of all children attending.

The emergence of the autonomy of education establishments has been accompanied by growth in their variety. By 2001 a broad range of forms had taken shape: kindergartens prioritizing one or several directions of children's development – 2,300; kindergartens of the compensatory type – 1,600; supervision and health improvement kindergartens – 1,300; combined kindergartens – 8,500; child development centres – 500. Pre-school education establishments offering a variety of services account for some 35% of all kindergartens.

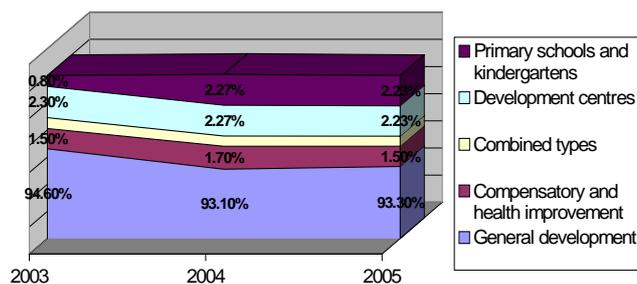
Pre-school education establishments and full-day kindergarten attendance (10.5 to 12 hours) remain the basic form of pre-school education, but new forms of non-state pre-school education are being sought: Sunday kindergartens, family kindergartens, short-stay children's groups,

development groups and family education centres which increase opportunities for families to choose the form of their children’s pre-school education. Supplementary education offers still more education services for pre-school age children.

**Number of pre-school education establishments in St Petersburg (including by categories)**



**Variety of forms in the pre-school network of the Altai Republic**



Form of ownership	Number of pre-school education establishments	Number of children in pre-school education establishments
State ownership	6,771	638,800
Municipal ownership	40,140	3,382,500
Private ownership	2,004	101,509
Other ownership	1,826	207,387

The system of pre-school education was comprehensively renewed. Kindergartens now work not to a single programme but to a whole range of new programmes and pedagogic technologies created by groups and individuals promoting initiative and creativeness in teachers. Searching for specific forms of education work and selecting them independently have become the norm of teaching activity. Modern pre-school education establishments follow 12 complex, 25 partial and two specialized programmes approved by the Russian Ministry of Education.

Much of the new education programmes is oriented towards acquainting pre-school children with national culture and the restoration of national consciousness. National kindergartens and groups are being opened, as existed in pre-revolutionary Russia. More than 10% of dissertation research (over the past five years) has been dedicated to studying the problem of including national cultural content (Adygei, Lezgin, Chuvash, Altai, Komi, Russian, etc.) in children’s education.

Changes in the content of pre-school education are expressed in the tendency that has taken shape to reject the disciplinary model of education: the teaching community is increasingly oriented towards implementation of the principles of humanistic pedagogy and the personality oriented way of relating to children. The scale of the innovation movement in pre-school education is no smaller than that of school innovation as a whole.

The increasing variation in the availability of pre-school education as well as in the standard and quality of the education obtained has been a basic negative trend in Russia's education system over the past decade. Inter-regional differences are growing, as are differences between town and country and inequality of opportunity of children from families with diverse levels of income to obtain a good-quality education.

One of the main reasons for the growth of variation in the education system is, first, the transfer of responsibility for financing the majority of education establishments to local budget level with greatly varying sizes of revenue base. Previously the State's share in the financing of pre-school education reached 77%. The differences in regional budgets can be as much as fiftyfold, according to data from V.Ye. Shudegov, Chairman of the Science, Culture and Education Committee of the Federation Council. Second comes the growth of payment for education. On the basis of a whole series of federal laws (No. 131-FZ, No. 122-FZ, No. 95-FZ) and Article 31, paragraph 2 of the Russian Federation Law on Education the organization of provision of generally accessible free pre-school education has been relegated to the powers of local self-government bodies. In this connection normative legal acts have been adopted in many regions which regulate the activities of pre-school education establishments and rules on the collection and size of parental payments, as well as social welfare programmes which allow for direct aid to low-income families with pre-school age children. Thus the scale of parental payment is differentiated depending on the region's possibilities, the minimum standard of living, the social welfare programme and the income level of the population which have taken shape in one territory or another. Many families, especially in the regions of the Russian Federation where a difficult socio-economic situation has developed, cannot pay for their children to attend these establishments.

	<b>Name of town</b>	<b>Amount of parental payment per child (roubles)</b>	<b>Amount of food norm per child per day (roubles)</b>
1.	Ryazan	570	38
2.	Vologda	800	40
3.	Tula	400-1,000	30-40
4.	Voronezh	350-1,050	32
5.	Kaluga	350-370	30-33
6.	Tver	320	25
7.	Belgorod	315-420	27.8
8.	Kursk	300	18-20
9.	Lietsk	300	30
10.	Tambov	290-340	22
11.	Orel	250	27-29
12.	Bryansk	231	21

The ideological basis for these processes was the concept of liberalization of education including the decentralization of management, the greater diversity of organizational and legal forms of education establishments and allowing "freedom of choice" of forms and kinds of education.

The changes taking place in pre-school education gave rise to variation in the quality of education services. This affects the various states of preparation of pre-school children for primary school and greatly hampers their adaptation to new conditions of school life, complicates the organization of the teaching process and adversely affects the children's development and health. Only 58% of children can cope with the education programmes for pre-school education and therefore on the threshold of school some children can read and even write and others have not been

taught the basics of literacy. To solve this problem it is proposed to draw up a system of measures to promote greater accessibility to pre-school education, in particular its final stage prior to school entry. The Law on Education which came into force on 1 January 2005 introduced the “prior to school entry stage” equating to general education. The main aim of preparation prior to school entry was to even out the starting opportunities of the future school children so that they could avoid stress, complexes and humiliation which might dispel their wish to study for all the following years.<sup>4</sup>

This decision received a varied reception in the pedagogical community and caused stormy polemics which still continue. For the time being education prior to school entry is not obligatory but it is recommended. Models of education prior to school entry are being elaborated in various regions of Russia.

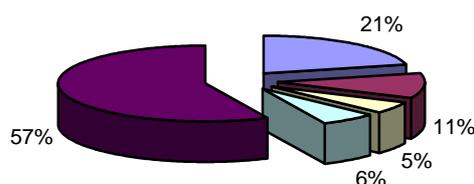
The organization of work with small children in modern conditions makes special demands of teachers’ professionalism and personal qualities. The education level of teachers is rising. As of 1 January 2002, 29.6% of teachers had a higher education; 3.5% had an incomplete higher education; 65.6% had a secondary specialized education, including 60.3% who received teacher training. In 2000 the proportions were 29%, 3.0%, 66.7% and 61.4% respectively.

The following trends are characteristic of the state of cadre provision:

- the overwhelming majority of teachers are still women;
- the teacher pool continues to age; 35% of teachers in the general education system in 2002 had been working for more than 20 years;
- a considerable proportion of teachers have a heavy workload, often working two shifts.

The main reasons for the situation which has developed are low wages and the decline in social prestige of teaching work.

Fluctuation of teaching cadres in the 2003/2004 school year  
Lipetsk region



- released in the course of transfer to another pre-school establishment
- released on the worker's initiative because of retirement
- released because of ill-health
- released because of change of residence
- released on the worker's initiative because of change of profession or transfer to work in another sphere of production or commercial structures

<sup>4</sup> A. Fursenko [Andrei Fursenko, Russian Minister of Education and Science] December 2004.

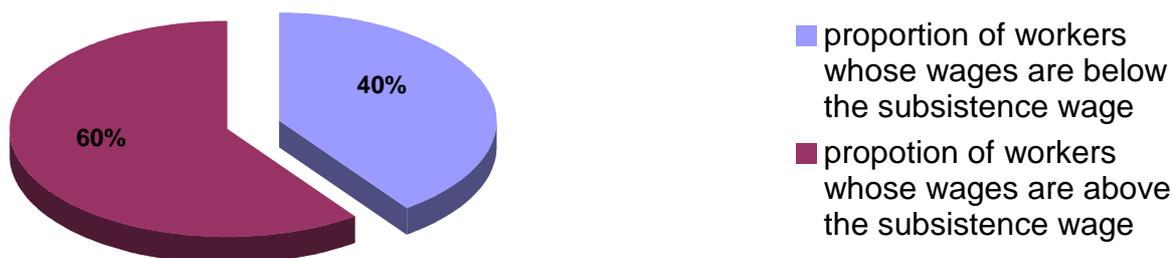
Thus the general lines of change appear at various levels of organization of the pre-school education system.

**At the social level:** transformation of the status of once unified “public pre-school education” into a quite heterogeneous institution, “pre-school education”. This was capable selectively of satisfying the education (and extra-education) demands of various strata of the population. The intensively developing network of non-state pre-school education establishments transformed pre-school education into an open system which reacted promptly to the needs of parents and general education schools.

**At the financial and economic level:** virtual curtailment of support for the pre-school education system from the federal budget. It is a case of delegation of responsibility to regional and local budgets, the appearance of multi-channel financing and an increase in the number of paid education services.

**At the organizational level:** replacement of the unified kindergarten by various forms and kinds of pre-school establishment, attempts to ensure the pre-eminence of pre-school and general secondary education by means of creating education complexes of the school-kindergarten type, development centres, pre-school groups based on schools, etc.

**At the programme and method level:** replacement of the standard programme with a variety of programmes, the wide use of innovative variants in the provision of the pre-school education establishment’s programme, organization and management and scientific method, the development of integrated programmes and education health protection technologies and the provision of psychological accompaniment to the education process.



The changes taking place in pre-school education over the last 15 years are wide-ranging and in many ways irreversible. All the same, they have not so far led to the restructuring of the pre-school education system or to sensible reorganization into a new system of pre-school education. The changes continue.

### **Specific characteristics of pre-school education in 2005:**

- the pre-school education level is not obligatory;
- the multiple variations in the education milieu;
- the recognition of the self-worth of childhood and the child as a proper subject of activity;
- the absence of a state education standard and complexity in the evaluation of results;
- parents as partners and active participants in the process of child development;
- the possibility of choosing various forms of teaching;
- the variation in quality and accessibility of pre-school education depending on region, social status of the family, place of residence (town or country) and many other factors.

### **State guarantees**

The State's guarantees of the general accessibility and free provision of pre-school education are to be found in the following documents: The Constitution of the Russian Federation (Article 43, paragraph 2); and the Law on Education (Article 5). Under Article 31, paragraph 2 of the Law on Education the organization of provision of generally accessible and free pre-school education is relegated to the powers of local self-government bodies. In this connection many regions have adopted normative legal acts regulating the activities of pre-school education establishments, rules for the levying of parental payments and their scale, as well as developing social welfare programmes envisaging direct assistance to needy families with pre-school age children. Thus the size of parental payments is differentiated in accordance with the subsistence minimum, social welfare programmes and level of the population's income in one territory or another.

The Law on Education generally determines the mechanism for examining education establishments and pre-school education establishments in particular in three stages: licensing (giving the right to engage in education activity); attestation (complex examination of the pre-school education establishment's activity to meet the demands of the state education standard); and accreditation (procedure of state recognition of the pre-school education establishment's status - its type, form and category in accordance with the level of education programmes being implemented). The basic aims of attestation and accreditation are:

- to guarantee the mechanism of state control over the efficiency of the education process at pre-school education establishments;
- to stimulate the activity of pre-school education establishments in the direction of raising the quality of pre-school education;
- to offer opportunities for choosing services on the basis of the diversity of content, forms and methods of work with children;
- to ensure that children are protected from all manifestations of incompetent pedagogical influences.

The Concept for the Modernization of Russian Education declares that ensuring the state guarantee of accessibility and equal opportunity for receiving an education of full value and the

achievement of a new modern quality of pre-school education constitute a most important direction.<sup>5</sup>

The Concept for the Modernization of Russian Education and the Action Plan of the Russian Ministry of Education to implement it envisage improving the general accessibility of pre-school education, transition to the allotment system of financing expenditure to pay for education services at pre-school education establishments at state expense, support and development of their provision with equipment at the founder's expense and the financing of child attendance at the parents' expense with simultaneous direct social support for needy families.

To guarantee citizens' rights to receive pre-school education the Russian Ministry of Education and the education authorities of the Russian Federation's subjects [e.g. national republics] take measures intended to preserve and develop the network of pre-school education establishments:

- the process of transferring departmental kindergartens to ownership by the municipalities continues; the proportion of municipal pre-school education establishments is 80.3%;
- new pre-school education establishments are under construction; 11,900 places were opened in 2000-2001;
- new variant forms of pre-school education are being developed: children's short-term stay groups, home education and upbringing of pre-school children with development difficulties, etc. The experiment in organizing new forms of pre-school education has been completed. A form of pre-school education like short-term (incomplete) attendance at pre-school education establishments reduces the cost (budgetary and parental) of child attendance at pre-school education establishments and brings more children into public pre-school education.
- the mechanism for financing pre-school education establishments is being improved.

The task of the State is to ensure a variety of forms of pre-school education that meets family needs. Some families are oriented towards children's full attendance at kindergarten; some parents prefer short-stay groups of various types where qualified specialists work with the children; others educate their pre-school children themselves. Families of the latter category, experience shows, need the help of qualified specialists. This is why it is particularly important to ensure that pre-school education establishments and specialists cooperate with families.

### **3. Current important factors affecting pre-school education**

Analysis of the present situation distinguishes a series of factors affecting the system of pre-school education in Russia today:

- demographic;
- socio-economic (material provision of families, predominant types of family, place of residence);
- special features of pre-school age children's health;
- state policy in the field of education.

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<sup>5</sup> *Kontseptsiya modernizatsii rossiiskogo obrazovaniya do 2010 goda* (Concept for the Modernization of Russian Education in the Period up to 2010), dated 29 December 2001, No 1756-r.

The demographic factor determines demand for pre-school education establishments for children of various ages. According to data from the state statistical service, the birth rate in Russia is low, not exceeding the average European rate. According to United Nations statistics, Russia's birth rate stands in 125th place in the world (188 countries). However the birth rate in Russia is rising today, although data from some regions show that the growth does not exceed a few percent.

Thus by 2004 the number of pre-school education establishments had fallen in comparison with 1990 by 47.4%. In some regions and federal districts the decline in numbers of pre-school education establishments over the past decade has become massive and uncontrolled and, taken together with other factors, is reducing the accessibility of pre-school education. There are signs that the decline of the network of pre-school education establishments is slowing and that the number of kindergartens being built is increasing.

The social factors determining the nature of the pre-school education system in Russia include the particular types of family of modern Russians.

Research material shows a recorded growth in number of nuclear families in Russia where the parents bring up their children without the help of grandparents, and of single-parent families (predominantly single mothers) resulting from the increasing number of divorces in Russia. These factors can be traced in both large and small towns, if less clearly in rural areas, and are typical of families with differing levels of income.

These factors determine parents' high demand for the services of the pre-school education system. The majority of parents in Russia today (67%) choose one or another form of public pre-school education.

Parents whose children do not attend pre-school establishments for the most part do not want their children to be brought up by family members alone. Only 7.8% of families whose children of pre-school age do not attend pre-school education establishments would prefer to educate their children exclusively in the home whatever the changes in external conditions. The choice of the remaining parents depends on how far their needs are met by the services offered by the pre-school education establishments. Thus 41.9% of parents whose children do not attend a pre-school education establishment want to "leave their child at the kindergarten at a convenient time", and another 37.3% would prefer to have their child attend the pre-school education establishment only for education and developmental studies. A third of parents (33%) expressed the wish to "take their children to kindergarten for outings to socialise with their peers". A slightly smaller number of parents (28.1%) wanted their children to attend kindergarten for the whole day.

The basic problems of raising pre-school age children in the countryside are connected with the following circumstances of rural families:

1. The emotional state of rural parents is affected by nervous tension, anxiety and guilt resulting from their difficult socio-economic situation.
2. Rural parents suffer from high levels of pedagogical and psychological incompetence which lead to difficulties and mistakes in family upbringing; while 93% of them consider the results of the upbringing of their children to be good the families admit to their parental incompetence.

3. Rural parents link the aims of upbringing predominantly with teaching, leaving the tasks of upbringing to last. They give priority to the development of the cognitive sphere and intellectual abilities and do not consider as aims of upbringing the development of personal qualities and the children's successful social adjustment.
4. Rural parents don't think about the upbringing of very young children, considering that at that age only infant health is necessary.
5. Upbringing by rural families is in many ways determined by the openness of the rural social environment, which makes for the strong influence of the opinion of relatives and close friends on the upbringing process.
6. Rural parents' concept of pre-school children as diminished copies of adults; the monotony and shallowness of child activity in the family; the lack of contact between adults and children; the inability to describe things to children objectively and to analyse their own methods of upbringing; efforts to evaluate not the behaviour and activity of the children but their personality, etc. In the countryside the family is the only instrument for bringing up pre-school children.
7. Parents' chief methods of influencing rural children are strictness and excessive demands and prohibitions, although they are less irritable and impatient in handling children and understand parenthood as child care [**Note: word/sentence drop at this point**] but the rest as satisfactory, only 10%.

In 2003 the Education Monitoring and Statistics Centre studied accessibility of pre-school education and the prospects for its development. It determined that the following factors influence accessibility of pre-school education:

- territorial – place of residence;
- socio-economic inequality of families;
- child health.

Each of these three factors can give rise to direct or relative inequality of access to pre-school education. Direct inequality of access to education is understood to mean the complete lack of opportunity to receive such education. Relative inequality means inability to access education of the desired quality or the inability of the available forms, types and level of quality of the services to match those required by the consumer.

The territorial factor has the greatest influence on accessibility of pre-school education predominantly for children from *rural areas*. This is a consequence of limited transport accessibility in various regions as well as the problem of the efficiency of the existing network of pre-school establishments.

Altogether 38,711,700 people live in rural areas of whom only 34.4% inhabit settlements with a permanent population greater than 100. The predominance of low-populated villages with small numbers of pre-school children determines the formation of the network of the pre-school education establishments in rural areas. On average 93.3% of children attending rural kindergartens live in the settlement where it is located; the remainder live in the neighbourhood (within 5 km). Not every settlement has a kindergarten. Bad roads and the lack of suitable transport make it difficult to take children to kindergartens from nearby villages and organize kindergartens in homes, and there is

practically no cooperation with other education and culture establishments. All these factors raise the profile of problems of equality of access to pre-school education for rural children.

Very few rural parents have the opportunity to engage in the development and education of children outside the family. Children's basic education is received in contact with family members and acquaintances (92% of replies). In several regions parents reported the possibility of attending lessons in kindergartens, schools, clubs or other existing establishments in their settlements (on average 22.7% of replies). Only in one of the investigated regions – Yakutia – do parents get together and teach their children in family groups. Similarly, in one region (Novosibirsk) parents get a school teacher to teach their pre-school children.

The situation in pre-school education is somewhat different in urban areas. About 73% of the population of the Russian Federation lives in *urban areas*. The great majority of townspeople (almost two-thirds) live in towns with a population of 100,000 or more. Moreover 40% of the population of large towns (a quarter of the whole urban population) is concentrated in 13 towns whose population exceeds one million. Processes taking place in the pre-school education system of small towns (population under 100,000) in many ways duplicate the processes in large towns but with a certain amount of delay and on a smaller scale.

On average across Russia the number of pre-school education establishments in urban areas is declining steadily, although accessibility over the past few years has improved somewhat. This indicates that on the whole there are some positive trends. In towns the state of pre-school education establishments is influenced considerably by the policies of the education authorities. Research data show that on average around 80% of urban parents have the opportunity to choose kindergartens and the proportions in big and small towns differ very little. At the same time the opportunities for choosing pre-school education establishments in certain regions vary considerably. In roughly half the large towns there are more than 100 children per 100 places in pre-school education establishments.

The features of pre-school education are certainly influenced by the ever-increasing phenomenon of socio-economic inequality of urban families.

Over the past 10 years private kindergartens have appeared in the Russian Federation. So far there are a little over 1,500 of them, that is fewer than 4%. This proves that Russian citizens' prosperity is growing, since child attendance at private kindergartens is not cheap. In a situation where there is a shortage of pre-school education establishments these private kindergartens have their niche, meeting the education requirements of particular consumers.

Additional opportunities for the education of pre-school age children (outside the pre-school education establishments) are also more accessible to high-income families. The majority of services provided outside kindergartens are paid for, and this prevents access to them by low-income families. Children not attending kindergartens but mostly in various pre-school education structures are from families with above-average incomes. The explanation for this is not only that the parents can pay for education services but also that they have more opportunities to take their children to lessons in private or official transport.

**Income levels of families whose children do not attend pre-school education establishments but attend other pre-school education structures (percentage of those questioned)**

Forms of pre-school upbringing and education	Parents' evaluation of their family's material situation			
	prosperous	above average	average	below average
Child has lessons with a private teacher	-	48.3	5.7	2.6
Attends circles and sections	20.0	32.2	29.2	26.9
Attends preparatory lessons in school	-	17.2	14.6	11.5
Has lessons at a Sunday school, a development centre, etc.	20.0	29.9	18.8	23.1

An important factor still determining the development of Russia's pre-school education system is the state of health of pre-school age children. A range of ecological and socio-economic problems are factors in the weakening of the health of the newborn, infants and pre-school age children. During pregnancy 40% of mothers have a poorly balanced diet and 17% do not give up smoking. On average 12% of children in Russia are of abnormal weight at birth.

The need for child health care encourages education management bodies to increase the number of establishments of the compensatory and health improvement types. Special opportunities for children's health improvement and the correction of development abnormalities are available at specialized pre-school education establishments, kindergartens of the combined and health improvement type which have speech therapy groups, groups for posture correction and for weak and sickly children. These establishments have the appropriate material and technical base and bring together psychological, pedagogical and medical specialists.

These types of health improvement and correction groups and establishments promote the improvement of opportunities for weak children and children who are ill but without complications so they can make a successful start at primary school.

**4. The status of pre-school education services (focusing on access across the country and children with development difficulties)**

**Range and quality**

The 1990s saw a reduction in the network of pre-school education establishments (by 40% compared with 1990) and the swift rise of parental payments for children's attendance at pre-school education establishments; an outflow of children from kindergartens and reduction in child

accessibility to pre-school education (in 1995 about 50% of children were not using the services of pre-school education establishments).

Today on the whole a little more than 55% of pre-school age children in Russia attend kindergartens or specially created pre-school groups while for various reasons about 45% of children receive no pre-school education. The reasons for this include the shortage of free places in kindergartens, high parental payments for children's attendance and parents' wish to bring up their children at home.

The table below indicates the trend towards the reduction of child access to pre-school education. These trends have infringed the guarantee of citizens' right of ensured access to education services for all levels of society and led to unequal conditions for kindergarten children starting school.

**Child access to public pre-school education (%)**  
(data from Russian State Committee for Statistics)

	<b>1990</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Russia</b>	66.4	55.5	54.9	57.2	57.6
<b>Town</b>	70.5	62.4	63.6	65.7	-
<b>Country</b>	56.1	39.3	35.5	37.9	-

Note: In 1990 child access to general pre-school education was calculated on the basis of the age range 0-7; since 1994 it has been based on the age range 1-6, in connection with the adoption of a decree of the Russian Federation government on leave from work for the care of children aged up to 18 months.

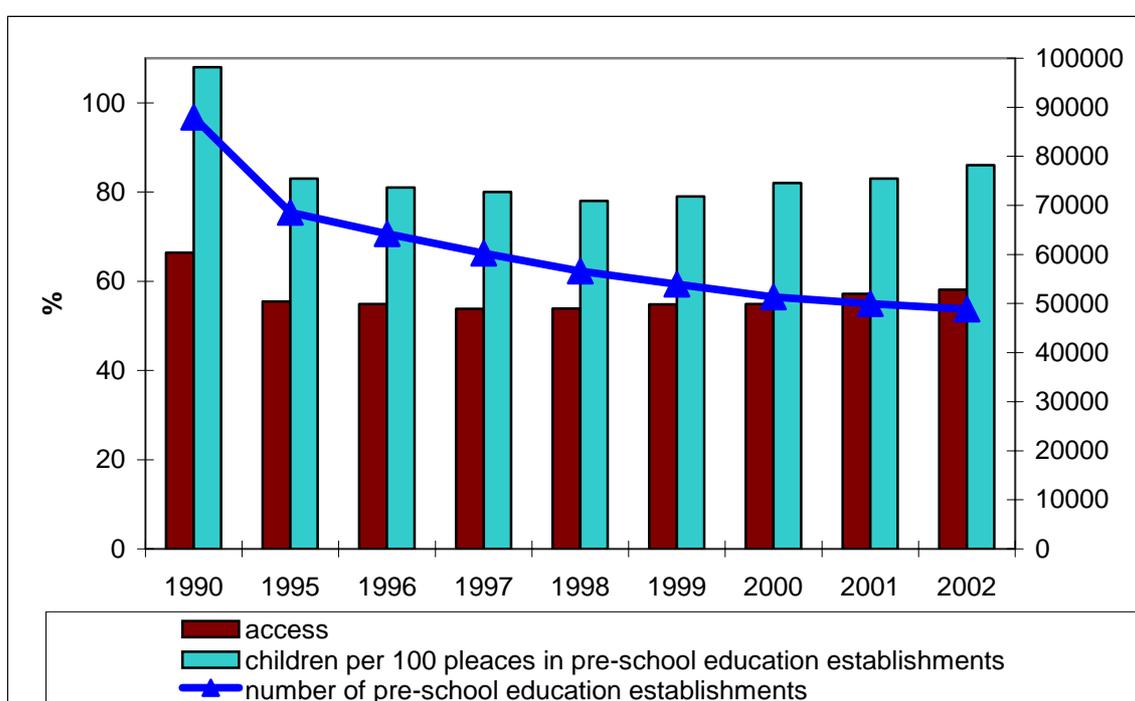
Over the past few years the population's access to pre-school education has grown and is approaching the level of 1990-1991. In recent years a clear trend has emerged towards the growth of child access to pre-school education. Statistical analysis indicates the inequality of child access to pre-school education in both regions and territories.

In Moscow, Leningrad and Chelyabinsk regions, according to data for 2003-2004, access reached 69-70%; in Stavropol and Krasnodar territories 59% and 61.1% respectively. According to data from the education portal of the Khanty-Mansi autonomous district, child access to pre-school establishments is 65.5%. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tatarstan, as of July 2004 access to pre-school education by children aged 1-7 republic-wide was 67%, including 73% in towns and 58% in the countryside. In Novgorod region access to the system of pre-school education establishments by children aged 3-7 has increased to 93.6%. In parts of Chelyabinsk region only 35-45% of children have access to pre-school education. The rate of access to pre-school establishments per 100 places is 91 in towns and 63 in the countryside. At the same time in other settlements of that region 29% of establishments are oversubscribed and there are queues for kindergarten entry.

It should also be noted that there is a trend in all regions towards pre-school education being accessed more by older pre-school age children than younger ones; this is particularly so in Russia's big towns. According to data from Moscow's education department, at present 90% of older pre-school age children are attending preparatory groups. In St Petersburg 85% of pre-school children attend senior and preparatory groups.

Access to pre-school education is closed not only to rural children from settlements lacking a kindergarten (30.7% of those questioned said that the reason for their children's non-attendance at a pre-school education establishment was their distance away), but also to children from villages where there is a kindergarten. About 44% of all parents questioned whose children do not attend kindergarten indicated as the reason for non-attendance the lack of places in the kindergarten at the time, or the closure of the kindergarten. About 22.7% of them said that there had never been a kindergarten in their settlement. Another 48% of respondents said that the kindergarten in their settlement had been closed. In the parents' responses one's attention is drawn to the statement that it was "closed by the enterprise management". In 78.6% of cases all the inhabitants were opposed to this, in 16.2% of cases only the parents of pre-school children were opposed and only in 2.2% of cases did the parents think that "nobody noticed, nobody cared".

### Dynamics of pre-school age children's access 1990-2002



At the present stage the situation with pre-school establishments in the rural areas is gradually changing. In accordance with the Model Regulations on Educational Establishments for Children of Pre-School Age and Young School Age, Article 14, paragraph 1, rural establishments may be abolished only with the agreement of a gathering of inhabitants of the settlements being served by the given establishment.

The rise in payments for kindergarten attendance has brought about a reduction in access to pre-school education in certain regions, primarily in rural areas. For example, in rural districts of Leningrad region this was 7.6%.

### Access data by regions

<b>Number of children in pre-school establishments by regions of the Russian Federation, thousands for the indicated year</b>							
	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Russian Federation	9,009.5	5,583.6	4,263	4,246.3	4,267.3	4,321.3	4,422.6
Central Federal Region	1,980.8	1,271.3	984.1	975.4	977.7	988.9	1,011.6
North-Western Federal Region	992.9	614.8	471.4	468.7	467.8	472.6	483.2
Southern Federal Region	1,084.9	678	550.5	556.4	556.5	561.6	571.9
Volga Valley Federal Region	2,082.9	1,346.2	1,040.1	1,031.1	1,037.5	1,045.3	1,060.5
Urals Federal Region	924.5	565	432.4	429.6	431.6	440.8	457.1
Siberian Federal Region	1,332	782.3	555.5	559	570.2	582	603
Far Eastern Federal Region	601.4	326	229	226.1	226	230.1	235.3

Analysis of material from the Ministry of Education shows that Russian education policy is directed not only at improving accessibility of pre-school education but also increasing protection for children with physical and psychological development difficulties.

In many regions direct support is being given for access to education services in pre-school establishments by children from families which are poor or have many children. In keeping with the programme for modernization of Russian education, children with severe health problems must be provided with medical and psychological back-up and special conditions for education primarily in general education establishments near where they live, but in the case of particular medical symptoms in special establishments.

For example, in Tatarstan 15% of children attending pre-school education establishments receive rehabilitation and correction services. Over the past year Gorno-Altai (population 53,100) has opened a kindergarten-sanatorium and four groups for children with severe health problems (48 children). Over the past three years the number of pre-school age children in St Petersburg receiving assistance with rehabilitation and correction in kindergartens has increased by 5,000 (altogether there are now 214 such establishments). In Lipetsk groups for children with weak health account for 7%.

The number of pre-school establishments with logopedic groups and groups for children with sight and hearing difficulties and problems with the development of the muscular-motor apparatus has grown over the past decade. For example, in St Petersburg there are 898 groups for children with speech defects, 127 groups for children with retarded mental development and 1,376 groups for sickly children. In Leningrad region the network of correctional groups has increased by 21 groups and at present numbers 522 groups (22% of the pre-school education establishments). In the town of Lipetsk specialized groups account for 30% of all groups at pre-school education establishments. In the town of Elektrostal, Moscow region, one child in three is attending a health improvement or correctional group.

Child health care concerns encourage the constant growth of establishments of the compensatory and health improvement types. Much experience has been gained in child health improvement and correction of development difficulties in children by specialized pre-school

education establishments, kindergartens of the combined and health improvement types having logopedic groups, groups for posture improvement and for weak and sickly children. These establishments have the appropriate material and technical basis and psychological, pedagogical and medical specialists.

The Ministry of Health and Science of the Altai Republic and municipal education bodies pay great attention to ensuring health protection for pre-school education. According to data from the annual dispensary examination of pre-school age children, various health problems have been found in 62% of children, retarded physical development in 2.1% of children and retarded mental development in 1.2%. The pre-school education establishments of Gorno-Altai, the capital of the republic, and rural districts have opened kindergarten sanatoriums and groups for children with severe health problems: four groups at pre-school education establishment No. 3 (48 children), three groups at pre-school education establishment No 5 (48 children with general speech impediments); two groups at pre-school education establishment No 6 (20 children with mental or muscular-motor disorders); four sanatorium groups at pre-school education establishment No. 9 (91 children with tuberculosis); the republican children's tuberculosis sanatorium at Elikmanar has a pre-school group (the number of children depends on demand).

In Tatarstan 15% of children attending pre-school education establishments receive rehabilitation and correction services. Prophylaxis and diagnosis for the early identification and correction of children's difficulties are carried out under the patronage of the Psychological, Medical and Social Support Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Altai Republic.

The correction of abnormalities (over 45% of children suffer from retarded speech development, motor insufficiency, etc.) ensures the necessary level of development for successfully coping with primary school programmes.

Statistics show that the State's main task in the pre-school education sphere – ensuring that it is generally accessible – has not yet been fully completed. This is connected with the shortage of free places in kindergartens, high parental payments for children's attendance and parents' wish to bring up their children at home.

One can conclude from the material cited that the pre-school education system in the majority of Russian regions is a flexible multi-functional network of pre-school education establishments oriented towards the use of a variety of new generation education programmes, health improvement and correctional functions and offering a wide range of additional (paid) education services. Pre-school establishments which ensure high-quality education services and children's preparation for school education predominate in the structure of the pre-school education system. These establishments have an education environment of subject development which closely matches the specific requirements of pre-school children at specific ages and they are also on the whole fully staffed with teachers. They are capable of ensuring psychological and pedagogical support for children in weak health and with special education needs to improve their starting opportunities as future school children.

## **Finance**

Expenditure on education began to grow in 1999. The proportion rose from 3.34% of GDP in 1998 to 3.58% of GDP in 2001, returning to the 1992 level. The proportion of means allocated to education in federal budgetary expenditure began to increase.

### **Distribution of education allocations between budgets of various levels**

<b>Budget level</b>	<b>Proportion of allocations as % of general expenditure of budgets at all levels</b>
Total	100.0
Federal	17.8
Federation subjects	19.2
Municipal formations	63.0

At the moment the State guarantees education alone and not child care in kindergartens. Educational services in kindergartens are paid in full from budgetary means and that is how they become available. The State allocates annually 21,000 roubles per child. Out of this money the child should receive 40 roubles' worth of food daily. Education specialists consider that parents' additional payments for food must be introduced.

The financing of social services is the joint task of municipal authorities implementing social programmes on their territory and the parents of the children that receive the services.

In accordance with the Model Regulations on Pre-school Educational Establishments, Article 49, paragraph 4, the financial norm for small rural pre-school education establishments should calculate expenditure irrespective of the number of children attending.

Maintenance and the provision of equipment are the task of the owner of the establishment. If the establishment is owned by the municipality the financing of maintenance and the provision of equipment are duties of the municipality.

There are pre-school establishments which offer education services for the children attending only within the limits of the state education standard and with a minimal range of social services (food, medical services, care). These kindergartens have no additional premises for child development, specialized groups or additional specialists on the staff. Some pre-school establishments offer education services beyond the requirements of the state education standard and also offer a broader range of social services for child development (including swimming pools, physiotherapy consulting rooms, art studios, etc.). To maintain children in establishments like these more money is spent from the town budget or obtained through larger payments by parents. Differentiated two-level parental payments were introduced from 1 January 2005. They are based on the following criteria: the category of the establishment according to the results of its attestation and state accreditation, and the range of social and daily services.

Thus the basic principle of financing pre-school education establishments is shared funding. The State, the founder and the parents of the pre-school children contribute their share. The basic principles of shared funding of pre-school education establishments are:

- observance of citizens' constitutional rights in introducing state norms of budgetary financing on the basis of federal components of the state education standard for pre-school education;
- safeguarding the general accessibility of education services provided by pre-school education establishments on the scale of the state education standard for pre-school education.

The experimental approval and introduction of schemes for the shared funding of pre-school education establishments has now been completed. During the experiment parameters were determined and established for education services offered to citizens by pre-school education establishments free and without compensation. Methods were worked out for: calculating the norms and scale of the budgetary financing of education services offered by pre-school education establishments; drawing up rules for generating parental payments for the services offered on a differential declaration basis; and the rules for implementing budgetary financing of pre-school education establishments from budgets of various levels on the basis of share norms.

### **Staff provision**

It is traditional in the Russian system of pre-school education for children always to be cared for by competent teaching staff of an adequate education level. Staff provision is subject to the following trends:

- a cut in the number of persons working in the education system in recent years;
- the lack of any real inflow of young specialists;
- the continuing ageing of teaching staff.

Low wages in relation to the high demands of teaching standards and heavy teaching loads are the basic reason for the situation.

### **Average monthly nominal calculated wages of workers of organizations by economic sector (roubles; after January 1998 1 new rouble = 1,000 old roubles)**

	<i>1995</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004</i>
Industry	528,800	2,735.7	8,060.8
Agriculture	236,700	891.0	2,778.3
Construction	595,100	2,795.6	7,947.2
Transport	736,500	3,344.8	9,684.2
Health and social welfare	348,400	1,370.9	4,744.8
Education	309,200	1,234.6	4,254.3
Culture and Art	286,300	1,229.0	4,289.1
Finance, credit and insurance	768,700	5,433.2	17,042.4
Administration	504,400	2,668.6	8,330.9

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To raise the quality of pre-school education particular attention is being paid to the level of professional training of staff. In 2001 the number of teaching staff in pre-school education establishments increased by 19,000 (persons).

### Rise in teachers' education levels

Education level	2000	2002
Higher education	29	29.6
Incomplete higher	3.0	3.5
Secondary specialized	66.7	65.6
including secondary specialized teacher training	61.4	60.3

### Education levels of directors and teachers of pre-school establishments in Novgorod and Novgorod region (%)

Urban areas: Education level:	Teachers					Directors				
	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004
Higher	21.9	26.2	28.4	28.5	29.6	48.4	63.9	67.5	72.8	76.4
Incomplete higher	2.5	3.2	4.6	5.9	6.1	3.6	2.6	1.9	3.3	2.7
Secondary teaching	69.9	66.4	62.8	61.7	59.0	44.8	31.6	29.2	23.2	18.9
Secondary specialized (non-teaching)	4.2	3.2	3.4	2.8	3.7	2.6	1.9	1.3	0.7	2.0
Rural areas: Education level:	Teachers					Directors				
	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004
Higher	10.6	12.0	15.7	16.5	18.0	19.8	27.6	27.7	31.8	36.6
Incomplete higher	1.5	1.5	1.1	0.6	1.5	1.2	1.6	3.6	5.6	4.0
Secondary teaching	75.3	76.4	75.5	74.1	71.6	58.1	58.3	57.1	56.1	55.4
Secondary specialized (non-teaching)	7.0	7.6	5.0	5.8	5.4	15.0	10.2	8.0	4.7	3.0

In pre-school establishments of St Petersburg, according to the results of 2003-2004, 70% of directors and 50% of teaching staff in pre-school education establishments have a higher education. Experienced specialists work with the children – they have not less than five years' work experience (5-10 years 20%; 10-15 years 72%). As a result the set tasks of bringing up children, educating them and encouraging their development can be carried out successfully.

In Lipetsk in the 2003-2004 school year 21% of teaching staff changed their jobs, the majority of them completely changing their profession and taking up work in the commercial sphere. The basic way of boosting wages is to work for more than one wage in one's official post or in another one. In pre-school education there are 4,195 staff for 5,410 waged posts for all workers in pre-school education – the wages for 1,215 posts are spent on additional payments, not counting standing in for persons temporarily absent because of ill health.

## **Pedagogical approaches**

New values in education are being developed on the basis of a new education strategy for education as a whole and continuous socio-cultural process combining socialization and individualization of the developing personality.

The personality-oriented education paradigm focuses on children's specific personality with their individual originality, age-specific requirements and rate of development.

The idea of the self-worth of pre-school childhood and the creation of conditions for every child to live to the full this period of its life brought about the rejection of attempts to accelerate child development artificially, enabling children to achieve their age potential and individuality.

The advantages of the pre-school education system are:

- the completeness of the pedagogical process and its developmental and educational nature and the "pre-lesson" content of education. Pre-school education conditions guarantee the wholeness of the medical, psychological and pedagogical care of children, a necessity considering the age differences of pre-school children and the flexibility, mobility and sensitivity of their somatic, physiological and psychological development;
- the presence in pre-school education establishments of an education environment which provides for children's emotional comfort and development. Variety in the education space ensures children an opportunity for choice and independence in keeping with their interests and inclinations. The organization of semi-functional types of child activity initiates the formation of children's social groups in which each child carries out the activity it prefers while simultaneously cooperating with other children. In such an education space the leading pre-school processes of socialization and individualization supplement each other harmoniously;
- the historically formed unique Russian system of pre-school education oriented towards protecting the health and the whole, harmonious and thorough development of children and their preparation for school;
- flexibility and mobility as the most modern system of pre-school education and training for pre-school teaching staff.

The pedagogical approaches to the organization of child education are based on the following principles:

- childhood as an unique and worthwhile period in a person's life in which the foundations of the culture of the personality are laid and the person's way in life is predetermined;
- education as a most important factor in the continuous development of the person. society and the State;
- the child as the subject of specific forms of activity and behaviour actively entering the culture and social environment, and the wholeness of its development;
- the age-related psychological and psycho-physiological features of child development and its periods of crisis;
- the continuity of uninterrupted pre-school and primary general education;

- the wholeness of the child education process (unity of upbringing, teaching and development) as a totality of pedagogical conditions directed to the development of the children's personality, the opening up of their individual world, capabilities and inclinations, the gaining of experience of contact and interaction with the world, culture and people;
- the variety of modern pre-school education, its diversification and the flexible system of additional education services;
- the family as a most important institution of education and factor in child development and education.

Pre-school age is a period of active social development, the gaining of personal experience of the world and the acquisition of cultural values. At this stage of life pre-school age children experience an intensive orientation in inter-personal social relations and social motivation for their activity, gain initial experience of independent, morally guided activity and develop the ability to act in accordance with the ethical norms and rules that they are capable of understanding.

The essence of the developing process of pre-school education includes the following:

- child experience must be organized so that children naturally, in accessible forms of activity, acquire the means and methods of cognition, relationships and activity which enable them to demonstrate independence, achieve the position of subject and enter the world of culture;
- the educator must engage in creating education situations and jointly resolving them with children. Educational situations encourage children to understand the content of the education programme and achieve self-realization in various types of activity, and this requires the individualization of the interaction process - the alignment of education trajectories and the pedagogical care of children.

The pre-school education process is intended to enrich the individual resources of child personality development by means of culture. The indicators of the quality of the education process are the integrated indices of children's socio-cultural development which determine its development as a subject of cognition, activity and social contact and reveal the value-related personal sense of the cultural experience being acquired.

## **5. The new national policy and strategies for improving/expanding pre-school education services**

The following are the basic directions of development under the Federal Programme for the Development of Education 2006-2010:

- guarantee of citizens' constitutional right to receive any level of education in accordance with Russian legislation;
- consideration of the socio-economic, ethno-cultural and other interests and priorities of subjects of the Russian Federation [e.g. national republics] and national communities in implementing a single state policy in the field of education;
- protection and support for the development of national cultures, cultural traditions and features in the conditions of a multinational state;

- realization, improvement and development of the normative legal base and the adjustment and preparation of normative documents;
- preservation of the unity of the education space of the Russian Federation and the development of a system of education establishments or various forms, types and kinds;
- development of a system of continuity of state education standards including specially stipulated standards and programmes for the education of persons with health difficulties;
- creation of special conditions for education of persons suffering from health and development difficulties;
- improvement of the organization of the education process with the aim of protecting and improving the health of those in education;
- improvement of the economic mechanisms of the functioning and development of the education system, taking into consideration its functioning in rural areas and places inhabited by compact small communities of national minority peoples;
- regulation of the range of children's games and toys based on their psychological, pedagogical, moral, ethical, hygienic and ecological suitability;
- functioning of state and public systems for evaluating the quality of education establishments' activity including their licensing, attestation, state and public accreditation, the creation of a state attestation service for controlling the quality of education and the creation of mechanisms for protecting those in education from low-quality education;
- introduction and realization of norms for state financing, material and technical supply and equipment of education establishments in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation;
- monitoring of the state of education and the creation of a system of education statistics;
- the functioning of marketing services (structures) and information and advertising provision for education activities.

The programme lays down as basic directions for the development of pre-school education:

- state guarantee of the general accessibility of services of pre-school education establishments for all groups of the population;
- creation of conditions for the fullest development of pre-school age children's abilities and interests, including those with health difficulties, on the basis of the individual approach;
- preservation and development of a system of pre-school education establishments of various types and maintenance of their functioning in accordance with the population's needs;
- support and development of various forms of prophylactic work in education establishments of various types and kinds;

- development of programmes and training methods to ensure state education standards and model education programmes for pre-school education;
- assistance for families in the education and upbringing of pre-school age children not attending pre-school education establishments;
- ensuring continuity of pre-school and primary general education, further integration of pre-school education establishments with education establishments providing general and supplementary education, the introduction of new education technology into the pre-school education system; and the improvement of education programmes for children with health difficulties.

In accordance with the Concept of Continuous Pre-School and Primary Education, the following priorities are to be observed at the *pre-school stage* :

- introducing children to the values of a healthy life style;
- ensuring the emotional welfare of every child and the development of positive self-awareness;
- development of initiative, inquisitiveness, strength of will and capability of creative self-expression;
- formation of children's knowledge of their environment and the stimulation of their communicative, cognitive, play and other forms of activeness in various kinds of activity;
- development of competence in the area of attitude towards the world, people and self;
- inclusion of children in various forms of cooperation (with adults and other children of different ages).

*At the primary school stage:*

- realization of the acceptance of the values of a healthy life style and regulation of their own behaviour in accordance with those values;
- readiness for active interaction with their environment (emotional, intellectual, communicative, practical, etc.);
- wish and ability to study, readiness for education at the school's basic level and for self-education;
- initiative, independence and cooperation skills in various forms of activity;
- improvement of the achievements of pre-school development (throughout primary education);
- special assistance in promoting qualities not developed in pre-school childhood;
- individualization of the learning process, particularly in cases of advanced or retarded development.

The Concepts determine the psychological and pedagogical conditions for the achievement of continuous education:

- personality-oriented interaction of adults and children;
- provision to each child of conditions for the possible choice of activity, partner, means, etc.;
- orientation of pedagogical evaluation towards the relative indicators of children's progress (comparison of a child's achievements today with those of yesterday);
- creation of an education environment promoting children's emotional, value-based, socio-individual, cognitive and aesthetic development and the preservation of their individuality;
- formation of leading activity as a most important factor of child development;
- reliance on play in the formation of learning activity;
- balance of reproductive (reproduction of a ready model), investigative and creative activity in joint and individual, mobile and static forms of activity.

On 18 January 2006 Andrei Fursenko, the Russian Federation Minister of Education and Science, had a conference with the heads of regional education management bodies. The main theme of the conference was discussion of implementation of the "Priority Directions of Development of the Russian Education System". The search for ways of developing pre-school and primary education in accordance with the priority tasks set became the central theme: *equalizing the starting opportunities of all children at primary school entry stage and increasing the accessibility of education.*

To work out the technological solutions for achieving the set priorities a concrete action programme is needed in the sphere of pre-school education, properly trained staff, model staffing timetables, special education courses and standards for "prior to school entry stage" development as well as competent evaluation of aids.

## **6. Innovative projects in the field of pre-school and primary education**

Analysis of the organization and results of innovative processes in pre-school education institutions shows that they promote the renewal and development of the pre-school education system, improve the professional competence of teachers and leaders and ensure the making of child-oriented cooperative teaching.

As an existing element of education development, innovation finds expression in tendencies to gather and introduce innovations into the education process which in totality lead to changes in the quality of both content and technology.

Russia has a network of experimental playgrounds of various levels (federal, regional, town, rural district) at which innovative processes are being developed. Considerable numbers of these playgrounds have been organized at pre-school education establishments. The experimental playgrounds are provided with financial, scientific, organizational and procedural assistance (as available) by the State, local education bodies and the scientific community. The scale of financing scientific research and experimental design work from the federal budget planned for in the Education Development Programme increased from 6 million roubles in 1999 to 150 million in 2005.

The projects being developed can be divided into two basic groups. The first group comprises projects which are adaptations of existing innovation programmes to the conditions of specific education establishments (for example, various kinds of projects for setting up education establishments of the “kindergarten-school” type). For developing education in this case considerable importance may be attached to the technology of adaptation used in various socio-cultural environments (rural area, small town, megalopolis, etc.).

The second group comprises projects based on the modernization of existing ideas and programmes and their improvement and development (for example, ideas behind the Montessori method in modern kindergartens; the building of a developing environment in various kinds of pre-school education establishment). These education system projects are interesting because of their new methods of resolving problems which may be used on quite a large scale. Of great interest are projects oriented towards the use of the education system’s existing potential whose implementation does not require considerable additional budgetary allocations.

Detailed analysis of education projects makes it possible to single out some of the most significant problems of pre-school education establishments.

- Creation of new types of education establishment. A relatively small number of projects are investigating this problem and their number is falling. In the majority of cases they involve the creation of complexes, associations and other types of pedagogical combine which would make possible the fuller use of intrasystemic links and on that basis increase the potential of education establishments. For example, the experiment in setting up children’s short-term stay groups.
- Development of new social and pedagogical opportunities in pre-school education establishments and the implementation of their functions as centres of local community development and centres of social initiative. (For example, implementation of the cultural function of pre-school education establishments in urban estates.)
- Orientation of many projects towards the development of social partnership between education establishments and other organizations interested in the development of education. Many projects are oriented towards the development of broad social cooperation in the education sphere. The number of such projects is constantly growing. (For example, interaction between pre-school education establishments and museums as a factor in child development.) The pedagogical community is aware of the need to develop public-state management of the education system and is actively promoting it.
- Renewal of the content of education and the intensification of culturological, ecological and developmental trends in education. Many projects are oriented towards this problem and in recent years their number has grown considerably. (For example, the development of patriotism and citizenship in pre-school age children; cultural upbringing.)
- Rebirth of national culture and the creation of national schools. Projects oriented towards the preparation of education programmes intended to develop national awareness and national self-determination.

A wide search is under way in Russian education for new approaches to the development of the pre-school education system and different ways are being proposed for organizing the activities of pre-school education establishments, education content and ways of carrying out educational tasks. The activeness of teachers and the rather high potential of staff ensure the development of the pre-school education system and its ability to react to change.

## 7. Conclusion

By the beginning of the twentieth century a variety of systems of Russian pre-school education had actually been set up. However, there were few kindergartens, their services were used predominantly by parents and children from large towns and the quality of education services varied greatly. The basic reasons for this were the tradition of family upbringing of children before school, the inability of most families to pay for their children's attendance at kindergarten and the lack of state support for pre-school education.

After 1917, the State (the USSR) took over complete responsibility for the upbringing and teaching of small children. The Soviet system was quite stable, centralized, uniform, easily manageable and produced results. Education was accessible and complex and continuity with primary school was ensured. Pre-school pedagogy and psychology were actively developed, a complex programme for the upbringing and teaching of children in kindergartens (1962) was drawn up and scientifically grounded and an unique didactic system was created for teaching pre-school age children. The negative sides of Soviet kindergartens were that pre-school groups were oversubscribed, teaching methods were authoritarian, teaching work was formalized and there was considerable divergence between theory and practice.

The beginning of perestroika was marked by the unfolding of the process of gradual transition from the unitary, denationalized education system to a democratic, varied and ethically oriented system of education.

Changes in the content of pre-school education were reflected in a particular tendency to reject the teaching discipline model of education: the emphasis on the application of principles of humanistic pedagogics and personality-oriented style of treating children. Pre-school education establishments were divided into types and categories. Kindergartens are working across a whole range of new programmes and teaching technology created by staff groups and individuals and this promotes development of initiative and creativeness amongst teachers.

Russia sees as negative trends in the pre-school education system the decline in child health, insufficient enrolment of staff in pre-school education as a stage in continuous education, the fact that it is not obligatory, lack of continuity in pre-school and primary school education, increased variation in the accessibility of different stages of education and in the level and quality of the education received, which are falling as a result of the socio-economic situation that has come about and the widening of the range of additional education services.

Interregional differences and differences between town and country are growing and inequality of opportunity to receive quality education is emerging for children from families of various income levels. The basic reasons for this include, first, the transfer of responsibility for financing to the local budget level, and second, the growth of paid education. Essentially what is happening is the disintegration of the unified system into two parts which are barely linked: an elite system and a mass system.

The general lines of change are to be observed at various levels of organization of the pre-school education system: at the social level, at the financial and economic level, at the organizational level and the programme and method level. The changes which have taken place in the pre-school education sphere in Russia over the past 15 years have become widespread and in many ways irreversible. So far this has not led to the restructuring of the pre-school education system or its reorganization into a new system of pre-school education. The changes continue.