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NGOs, Civil Society, and Social Policy in Russia's Regions

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Abstract

The Working Paper reports on social sector non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with various social problems and issues in the Russian Federation. It draws on more than seventy interviews with NGO and political leaders in Tula and Samara Regions and the Chuvash Republic during 2004. The interviews are used to map social sector NGOs according to their essential functions, staffing and financial resources, and connections with other social organizations as well as with political and governmental authorities. We find that the behavior of NGOs ranges from opportunistic and clientelistic to civilly-active and politically-relevant. Many smaller organizations lack political voice but have potential to promote civil-society formation. Stronger organizations, many of which have been recipients of some foreign support, are able to engage political authorities in dialogue. The restrictive legislation currently before the Duma (12/05) would damage the potential for NGOs to organize mutual aid and to represent legitimate interests of socially-vulnerable groups in Russian politics.