

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** RUS35475  
**Country:** Russian Federation  
**Date:** 19 October 2009

Keywords: Russian Federation –Treatment and protection of disabled persons –  
Discrimination in employment – Methadone – Treatment for former heroin users

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**Questions**

- 1. How are people with disabilities treated in daily life in Russia?**
- 2. Do they face discrimination in employment?**
- 3. What protection does the government provide against discrimination or other forms of harm (for example physical violence in the streets) which people with disabilities may suffer?**
- 4. Is methadone illegal in Russia? What alternative forms of treatment are available for former heroin users?**

**RESPONSE**

**1. How are people with disabilities treated in daily life in Russia?**

Country information indicates that most people with disabilities in Russia have few job prospects and routinely face difficulties with little access to transportation, buildings and other facilities. Most disabled people are said to remain at home or in institutions. A 2006 report, authored by the American Bar Association and the Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative, also noted the difficulties faced by disabled women in accessing healthcare services. According to one NGO, however, attitudes are starting to change. In September 2008 Russia signed the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and is moving towards its ratification.

A 2009 United Nations report estimated that there are some 13 million people in Russia with some form of disability. In 1995 the *Federal Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation* was adopted. Article 1 of this law defines a disabled person as “an individual with a health condition that is associated with a stable functional disorder and caused by a disease, trauma or defect. The health condition results in limited

capability and necessitates the social protection of the individual’”. On 24 September 2008 the Russian Federation signed the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. In April 2009 *Reuters News* reported that Russia was making preparations to ratify that Convention (Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, p.5,8 [http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1; ‘Russia to boost support for disabled: Medvedev’ 2009, *Reuters News*, 7 April – Attachment 2).

According to the UN report a national targeted programme has been implemented to support disabled persons. However, disabled people require special accommodation needs and are perceived as “free riders”. Areas of concern include societal attitudes towards the disabled, education, employment and healthcare (Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, p.5 [http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

The report states:

One in 11 Russians has some form of disability. Nationwide, this amounts to 13 million people with special physical, mental or intellectual needs of varying degree, including congenital or acquired mobility, vision and hearing impairment, as well as mental and developmental disorders. These individuals are in need of special accommodations and often require assistance from other people.

Curbs, (sic) steps leading into healthcare facilities, shops or cinemas, and narrow elevator doors may present insurmountable obstacles for such people. Many disabled persons are also deprived of even simple everyday human interaction: they commonly receive uneasy glances, and it remains a prevalent belief that persons with disabilities are free riders, unable to make any significant contribution to social and economic development.

...The *Federal Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation* was adopted in 1995. Recently, a federal targeted programme to support disabled persons was implemented. The programme, however, largely relies on the concept of social protection, which is based on granting material assistance to the disabled.

...Causes for concern include the still widespread unwillingness of society to look at persons with disabilities as equals and the effective denial of equal rights with regard to education, employment, healthcare, marriage, child rearing, leisure, physical exercise and sports, and participation in public and political life. Even government officials sometimes harbour misconceptions that disabled persons are of no use for any community activity. As a result, proposals are drafted to establish specialized institutions to accommodate and educate persons with disabilities, as well as special transport routes and social venues. These arrangements encourage society at large to embrace the concept of specialized isolated environments for persons with disabilities rather than the establishment of an environment in which disabled persons can enjoy a full social life with a maximum degree of independence.

...The Russian Federation signed the Convention [*UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*] on 24 September 2008...(Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, p.5 [http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

An October 2009 *BBC News* article reports on the people with disabilities and the lack of basic facilities:

Many are like prisoners inside their own homes, unable to go outside because of the lack of basic facilities in the towns and cities, while tens of thousands of children with disabilities go without any education (Galpin, Richard 2009, 'Russia's disabled suffer neglect and abuse', *BBC News*, 12 October <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8302633.stm> – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 3).

In an October 2009 *BBC* video Yulia Simonova, a disability rights activist, is interviewed on problems, such as isolation and access to facilities, faced by disabled people (Galpin, Richard 2009, 'Campaigning for disabled Russians', *BBC News*, 9 October <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8299325.stm>)

A July 2009 news article reporting on a demonstration to draw the attention of Muscovites to the difficulties faced by disabled people referred to problems of visibility, perception and access:

...Other participants were handicapped people who were glad to have a light shed on the problems that they face everyday. One such person, Alexei Morozov, a Western-educated lawyer now lives in Huston (sic) because Moscow proved too difficult for him to get by.

Morozov stressed the importance of the organized event to draw the attention of ordinary Muscovites to the problems that disabled people face. "The city's inhabitants do not see handicapped people on the streets, and they do not have time to think about how life in this city could be unbearably difficult for some people," he told Bolshoi Gorod.

The aim of this event was to bring disabled people into Muscovites' field of vision. The difficulty of doing simple things like going to the pharmacy or getting from one side of the road to the other in an underground passage prevent many wheelchair-bound people from leaving their homes. Hence it is unusual to see handicapped people on Moscow's streets.

Their absence means that many people associate people in wheelchairs with beggars on the streets...

...The extent of discrimination against disabled people in Russia has recently been demonstrated by two lawsuits against the airline S7. In one incident last year, a handicapped young woman in a wheelchair, Natalia Prisetko, was not allowed to board her flight on the grounds that she was required to be accompanied by someone who could assist her. Pristenko received 50,000 rubles compensation from the airline, which had to pay a further fine of 25,000 rubles. In another case, a blind passenger was not allowed to board a plane because he did not have a guide dog with him. In June this year, Pavel Obeyuh was entitled to a 25,000 ruble compensation for the discrimination by the airline, RIA Novosti reported.

Other discrimination occurs with very simple things like going to a pharmacy, where the personnel do not allow wheelchairs for fear of theft, and swimming. Moscow's most prestigious public pool, Chaika, for example does not have any disabled access. "There has never been any access for the disabled, and I am afraid that it would be impossible for them to get in. The corridors are too narrow for a wheelchair, the changing rooms are small and the shallow pool is only for children," a Chaika representative said (Kovalyova, Albina 2009, 'Bringing Them Out Of the Dark', *Russia Profile*, 16 July – Attachment 4).

In March 2009 *The Moscow Times* reported that:

...people with disabilities routinely face difficulties gaining access to transportation, buildings and other facilities (Antonova, Maria 2009, 'Blind Passenger Wants Apology', *The Moscow Times*, 3 March – Attachment 5).

In 2008, news articles also referred to the “invisibility” of people with disabilities, isolated in “homes, special schools and sheltered workshops” (Finn, Peter 2008, 'Russia Looks for Ways to End Isolation, Invisibility of Disabled', *The Washington Post*, 26 June

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/25/AR2008062502887.html?hpid=topnews#> – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 6; Arnold, Chloe 2008, 'Russia: Disabled Still Largely 'Invisible' In Society', *RFE/RL*, 26 May <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1144492.html> – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 7).

According to a *RFE/RL* article the director of Perspektiva, an organisation that campaigns for the rights of the disabled in Russia, stated that although there is still discrimination attitudes are changing:

With few job prospects, and little access to buildings and public transport, most disabled people simply stay at home – or in institutions with little contact with the outside world, says Denise Roza, the director of Perspektiva.

But she says attitudes are beginning to change. “Unfortunately there’s still discrimination, there are still violations of disabled people’s rights,” she said. “But what we’re seeing now that we didn’t see, you know, years ago, is that people in the community are...saying this is outrageous, and this has to change” (Arnold, Chloe 2009, *RFE/RL*, 12 March [http://www.rferl.org/content/Disabled\\_Activist\\_Challenges\\_Airline\\_In\\_Rights\\_Dispute/1508812.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Disabled_Activist_Challenges_Airline_In_Rights_Dispute/1508812.html) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 8).

A February 2006 report by the American Bar Association and the Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative examined the situation of women’s rights, including disabled women, in Russia through an analysis of Russia’s compliance with the *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). It noted that the *Federal Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation* made no distinction between disabled men and women (American Bar Association & Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative 2006, *CEDAW Assessment Tool Report for the Russian Federation*, February, p.77 [http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/cedaw/cedaw\\_russia.pdf](http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/cedaw/cedaw_russia.pdf) – Accessed 13 March 2006 – Attachment 9).

The report continued on the access to health care services by disabled women:

...Disabled women report that they are often physically unable to enter clinics and hospitals and that specialized equipment, such as gynecological examination tables, are lacking. Others explained that no accommodations are made so that women with disabilities do not have to wait in long lines to make an appointment with a physician...(American Bar Association & Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative 2006, *CEDAW Assessment Tool Report for the Russian Federation*, February, p.92 [http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/cedaw/cedaw\\_russia.pdf](http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/cedaw/cedaw_russia.pdf) – Accessed 13 March 2006 – Attachment 9).

## 2. Do they face discrimination in employment?

Sources report that people with disabilities face discrimination in employment. Country information indicates that although there is a quota system for the employment of disabled people many employers prefer to pay the low fines rather than to employ them. A 2006 report, authored by the American Bar Association and the Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative, noted that even under the quota system employers give preference to disabled men over disabled women.

Sources report that people with disabilities face discrimination in employment (Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, p.5 [http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1; US Department of State 2009, ‘Persons with Disabilities’ in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Russia*, 25 February – Attachment 10).

According to the UN report there is a quota system for the employment of disabled persons:

Initially, quotas for persons with disabilities were guaranteed by the *Federal Law on the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation* under Article 21. This system is the only and the most efficient tool that ensures employment for the disabled...In our opinion, quotas, along with other tools of securing employment, is currently a necessary mechanism for the employment of persons with disabilities, especially since the government has yet to propose alternative efficient mechanisms to replace the quota system (Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, p.10/Box 1.1 [http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

In respect of the quota system and decreasing employment of disabled people the authors of the UN report write:

For the last two decades, disabled persons have exercised their rights to work under Article 21 of the law, which approved the procedure for the allocation of quotas for disabled persons at organizations with more than 30 employees. This law was later amended to alter the quota procedure and size, authorizing subjects (regions) of the Russian Federation to establish their own disability job quotas. Instead of the flat 3% quota, enterprises were required to establish a higher quota, between 2% and 4%. The implementation of the quota process has progressed with varying degrees of difficulty in the Russian regions.

These legislative measures and the system of state support – including benefits and preferences for enterprises hiring disabled workers in both open and sheltered markets – led to an increase in the employment of disabled persons. Regrettably, a reduction in government support for employers of disabled workers after 2000 decreased the number of disabled workers, both in the open and the sheltered market. Specialized enterprises employing disabled persons, including enterprises managed by disability associations, were especially hard-hit because they were more dependent on state support than conventional market enterprises. The attitude of the state towards the efforts of disability associations resulted in a steep drop in the number of such enterprises and, by extension, in decreased employment among disabled persons (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Figure 3.2 illustrates that over five years the number of disabled workers at the enterprises managed by the All-Russian Association of Disabled Persons has fallen at an average annual rate of 15%. The fastest rate of decline was observed in 2002 and 2003 and was primarily due to the abolition of most tax deductions for disability associations and their enterprises. In particular, the abolition of tax benefits amounted to more than RUB 300 million in losses for enterprises and organizations under the All-Russian Association of Disabled Persons. More than 1,200 small and medium-sized enterprises had to be closed. A total of more than 46,000 jobs were shed between 2002 and 2005, including over 21,000 held by disabled workers.

The situation of disabled persons in the labour market degraded even further with the changes introduced into state social policy in 2005.

Thus, the situation has deteriorated for disabled persons willing to find employment. Employers with less than 100 workers – i.e. virtually all small- and medium-sized enterprises – were exempted from the required allocation of job quotas for the disabled. Additionally, managers of enterprises that employ more than 100 workers, and are therefore obliged to apply quotas for the disabled, are not accountable for non-compliance with the legislative requirements. In fact, effective quotas for persons with disabilities are now absent, which has a negative effect on disability employment.

New barriers emerged after 2005, mainly due to the cumbersome procedures involved in obtaining the status of a disabled person, a reduced list of guaranteed rehabilitation devices and most importantly, the repeal of discounts on motor vehicles for most Russians with disabilities, which also has negatively influenced employment among disabled persons. Many persons with disabilities have lost not only their motivation to work but also their willingness to pursue medical and social rehabilitation, resulting in a pattern that leads to increased dependency.

Government policies with regard to the employment of persons with disabilities remain incoherent and are still devoid of any clear scientific and practical base... (Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, pp.42-44 [http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_path\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_path_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

In 2008 news articles also reported that the quota system had faltered as most employers preferred to pay the low fines rather than employ disabled people (Finn, Peter 2008, 'Russia Looks for Ways to End Isolation, Invisibility of Disabled', *The Washington Post*, 26 June <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/25/AR2008062502887.html?hpid=topnews#> – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 6; Arnold, Chloe 2008, 'Russia: Disabled Still Largely 'Invisible' In Society', *RFE/RL*, 26 May <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1144492.html> – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 7).

In addition, the 2006 report by the American Bar Association and the Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative stated on the employment of disabled women:

Disabled women report that they face additional hurdles in finding employment as disabled people are rarely hired and, even under an existing quota system, employers give preference to disabled men. Women who become disabled while employed are usually fired. Women with vision impairments in Vladivostok reported that several young women from their group who have received higher education have not been able to find work in their fields (American Bar Association & Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative 2006, *CEDAW Assessment Tool Report for the Russian Federation*, February, p.81

[http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/cedaw/cedaw\\_russia.pdf](http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/publications/cedaw/cedaw_russia.pdf) – Accessed 13 March 2006 – Attachment 9).

Of some interest is that in April 2009 President Dmitry Medvedev was cited by a *Reuters News* article as saying that there are six million disabled people capable of working of which 15% are employed ('Russia to boost support for disabled: Medvedev' 2009, *Reuters News*, 7 April – Attachment 2).

### **3. What protection does the government provide against discrimination or other forms of harm (for example physical violence in the streets) which people with disabilities may suffer?**

Information on this question is provided below as:

[Protection against discrimination or harm](#)  
[Social protection](#)

#### **Protection against discrimination or harm**

No information was found in the sources consulted on government protection for people with disabilities against physical violence. Although violence has been reported against disabled people little information was found in the sources consulted of any subsequent action taken by the authorities. However, there have been instances where disabled people have taken legal action in discrimination cases and succeeded.

Richard Galpin, on *BBC News*, reported the case of Vadim Voevodin, who is paralysed from the waist down. Two years ago Voevodin was beaten up by a local resident. Voevodin also claims that 40 of his colleagues have died over the last 10 years, including in hospitals, through prejudice in Russian society. However, Galpin also writes that "It is extremely difficult to verify these claims, but there was a swift denial from the authorities" (Galpin, Richard 2009, 'Russia's disabled suffer neglect and abuse', *BBC News*, 12 October <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8302633.stm> – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 3).

Also on Vadim Voevodin see the BBC video: Galpin, Richard 2009, 'Campaigning for disabled Russians', *BBC News*, 9 October <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8299325.stm>.

In another matter, the US State Department reported that "police discovered and arrested a criminal ring that forced persons with disabilities to beg in the streets of Moscow. There were no further developments in this case by year's [2008] end" (US Department of State 2009, 'Persons with Disabilities' in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 – Russia*, 25 February – Attachment 10).

News articles have also reported two successful lawsuits concerning discrimination against disabled, particularly the case of Pavel Obiukh (Kovalyova, Albina 2009, 'Bringing Them Out Of the Dark', *Russia Profile*, 16 July – Attachment 4; Antonova, Maria 2009, 'Blind Passenger Wants Apology', *The Moscow Times*, 3 March – Attachment 5; Arnold, Chloe 2009, *RFE/RL*, 12 March [http://www.rferl.org/content/Disabled\\_Activist\\_Challenges\\_Airline\\_In\\_Rights\\_Dispute/1508812.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Disabled_Activist_Challenges_Airline_In_Rights_Dispute/1508812.html) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 8).

Kovalyova writes on the cases:

The extent of discrimination against disabled people in Russia has recently been demonstrated by two lawsuits against the airline S7. In one incident last year, a handicapped young woman in a wheelchair, Natalia Prisetsko, was not allowed to board her flight on the grounds that she was required to be accompanied by someone who could assist her. Pristenko received 50,000 rubles compensation from the airline, which had to pay a further fine of 25,000 rubles. In another case, a blind passenger was not allowed to board a plane because he did not have a guide dog with him. In June this year, Pavel Obeyuh was entitled to a 25,000 ruble compensation for the discrimination by the airline, RIA Novosti reported (Kovalyova, Albina 2009, 'Bringing Them Out Of the Dark', *Russia Profile*, 16 July – Attachment 4).

Following the Obiukh case the disabled people's rights group Perspektiva stressed the importance of advocating "for one's own rights to reach a just solution":

A well-known case of discrimination against Pavel Obiukh once again drew public attention to the vulnerability and lack of rights for Russian citizens with disabilities and the importance of resolving these issues at the state level. Obiukh's case also demonstrated how important it is to advocate for one's own rights to reach a just solution. Obiukh's victory in court shows that one can and should fight at the highest levels. Obiukh's is a small victory and a major step for civil society (Perspektiva (undated), 'Digest, January through March 2009' <http://eng.perspektiva-inva.ru/> – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 11).

## **Social protection**

A UN report notes that "social protection" of disabled persons is required under Article 1 of the *Federal Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation*. It also stated that receiving disability pensions and monthly cash payments from the government are the key characteristics of the status of a non-working disabled person:

According to the *Federal Law on the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation* (Article 1), a disabled person is "an individual with a health condition that is associated with a stable functional disorder and caused by a disease, trauma or defect. The health condition results in limited capability and necessitates the social protection of the individual".

The act of receiving disability pensions and monthly cash payments from the state is the key characteristics defining the status of a non-working disabled person.

...In spite of regular inflation adjustments and increases, the level of pensions remains inadequate...(Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, p.8 [http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

According to the report the degree that a disabled person is able to work is the main criterion for the person's need for social protection:

An important feature of the existing social protection system for persons with disabilities is the fact that the main criterion for determining a disabled individual's need for social protection measures is the degree to which his or her ability to engage in productive employment is limited. This criterion influences the size of pensions and monthly cash



payments...(Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, p.9  
[http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

The report continued on a disabled person's motivation for an active lifestyle and employment and accessing state-guaranteed payments:

The past few years have convincingly demonstrated that social innovations have lowered a disabled person's motivation to pursue active lifestyles and, in particular, to work. This phenomenon is primarily explained by the fact that the more active attitude a disabled person has, the greater the probability that he or she will be deprived of some part of state-guaranteed pensions and other payments. Given the high unemployment rate among persons with disabilities and difficulties in obtaining education and well-paid employment, it is obvious that disabled persons seek to preserve state-guaranteed payments.

In addition, the mechanism for obtaining state-guaranteed social services is extremely complicated. The employment process is hindered not only by the existence of productive employment limitation degrees but also by the effective dismantlement of the quota system at small- and medium-sized enterprises (notwithstanding the low efficiency of this tool)...(Gontmakher, Evgeny et al. 2009, *Russia: On the Path to Equal Opportunities*, UN Office in the Russian Federation, Moscow, pp.9-10  
[http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia\\_on\\_the\\_pat\\_en.pdf](http://www.unrussia.ru/publications/russia_on_the_pat_en.pdf) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

A May 2008 *St. Petersburg Times* article also described the changes introduced in 2006 in relation to the process for disabled persons applying for federal benefits:

Under new rules introduced in 2006, all disabled people applying for federal benefits must have their disabilities verified by the state. Even amputees, paraplegics and those with genetic disorders must go through a lengthy process to confirm their disability and define the extent of it. They must obtain documentation from a variety of doctors as well as from their local department of social services, department of residential services, bureau of medical and social analysis and social security office. And naturally, visiting all these agencies requires standing in long lines.

The process takes two to four months, and while the application is in process, the applicant has no right to any allowances or other privileges. Receiving the document that certifies the disability is only a temporary victory, however. The certification is only valid for a year, and then the process starts all over again (Osadchuk, Svetlana 2008, 'Russia's Disabled People Find Life a Struggle', *The St. Petersburg Times*, 12 May  
[http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action\\_id=2&story\\_id=25979](http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=25979) – Accessed 13 October 2009 – Attachment 12).

#### **4. Is methadone illegal in Russia? What alternative forms of treatment are available for former heroin users?**

##### **Is methadone illegal in Russia?**

Sources agree that the use of methadone for the treatment of drug addiction in Russia is prohibited by law.

In a detailed 2007 report on drug dependence treatment in Russia, Human Rights Watch stated on the legality of methadone use:

Maintenance treatment for drug users is not available at all in Russia, as the use of methadone and buprenorphine for treating drug users is expressly prohibited by law...(Human Rights Watch 2007, *Rehabilitation Required: Russia's Human Rights Obligation to Provide Evidence-based Drug Dependence Treatment*, November, Vol. 19, No. 7(D), p.47 – Attachment 13).

According to Dr Evgeny Krupitsky, Psychiatrist at the Leningrad Regional Dispensary of Narcology, cited in a World Health Organisation bulletin:

In many countries, methadone and/or buprenorphine maintenance treatment is unavailable or illegal. For example, though the Russian Federation has one of the highest rates of opiate use in the world, “substitution therapy by methadone and buprenorphine is forbidden by law. All treatment for drug abuse in the Russian Federation is abstinence oriented,” says Dr Evgeny Krupitsky, Psychiatrist, Leningrad Regional Dispensary of Narcology (Chatterjee, Patralekha 2008, ‘The methadone fix’, *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, March, Vol. 86, No. 3 <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/3/08-010308/en/index.html> – Accessed 15 October 2009 – Attachment 14).

Also, a news article in *The Independent* reported:

Substitution therapy using methadone is banned in Russia, and needle and syringe exchange points are regarded as highly controversial...(Walker, Shaun 2009, ‘Russia finally admits to its hidden heroin epidemic’, *The Independent*, 11 March <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-finally-admits-to-its-hidden-heroin-epidemic-1642103.html> – Accessed 30 September 2009 – Attachment 15).

Of interest is an article in the *Harm Reduction Journal* which states on substitution treatment for drug dependence in Russia:

...Narcology officials in the Russian Federation have consistently opposed substitution treatment for opiate dependence – the replacement of a short-acting illegal substance with a longer acting prescribed drug with similar pharmacological action but lower degree of risk. Thus, despite the addition of methadone and buprenorphine to WHO’s list of essential medicines in 2005 and multiple position papers by international experts calling for substitution treatment as a critical element in the response to HIV (IOM, 2006; UNODC, UNAIDS, and WHO, 2005), methadone or buprenorphine remain prohibited by law in Russia (Elovich, Richard & Drucker, Ernest 2008, ‘On drug treatment and social control: Russian narcology’s great leap backwards’, *Harm Reduction Journal*, Vol. 5 <http://www.harmreductionjournal.com/content/5/1/23> – Accessed 15 October 2009 – Attachment 16).

### **What alternative forms of treatment are available for former heroin users?**

Naltrexone is reportedly the only pharmacotherapy available for treating heroin dependence in Russia. Sources also state that the usual treatment of heroin users in Russia involves detoxification and rehabilitation with outpatient follow-up. Although the majority of patients complete inpatient treatment, few keep follow-up appointments and most relapse. Country information also indicates that the state is the main provider for drug dependence treatment with some private treatment facilities.

Evgeny Krupitsky et al. wrote in a 2004 journal article and in a 2009 symposium abstract that “Naltrexone is the only specific pharmacotherapy for heroin dependence available in Russia”. It is also noted in the 2004 journal article the “naltrexone has not been widely used because it is too expensive” (Krupitsky, Evgeny et al. 2009, ‘Long Acting Sustained Release Formulation of Naltrexone for Heroin Dependence: Results of Interim Analysis’, Abstract, 12th Congress of ESBRA [European Society for Biomedical Research on Alcoholism] website, 7-10 June 2009 [http://research.med.helsinki.fi/esbra2009/ESBRA2009\\_Abst\\_%20Smposium13.pdf](http://research.med.helsinki.fi/esbra2009/ESBRA2009_Abst_%20Smposium13.pdf) – Accessed 15 October 2009 – Attachment 17; Krupitsky, Evgeny M. et al. 2004, ‘Naltrexone for heroin dependence treatment in St. Petersburg, Russia’, *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, Vol. 26, Iss. 4, p.285 – Attachment 18).

ClinicalTrials.gov, a US government registry of federally and privately supported clinical trials conducted in the US and around the world, reports on the treatment of heroin addiction in Russia in the context of a study comparing oral naltrexone with a naltrexone implant:

The usual treatment of heroin addiction in Russia involves detoxification and 2-4 weeks of rehabilitation with referral to outpatient follow-up. Though most patients complete inpatient treatment, few keep follow-up appointments and relapse rates are high...(US ClinicalTrials.gov 2009, ‘Addiction Treatment in Russia: Oral vs. Naltrexone Implant’, 2 September <http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT00218426> – Accessed 15 October 2009 – Attachment 19).

Evgeny Krupitsky et al. in an earlier 2004 journal article expand on this description:

...Russian law prohibits use of methadone or other agonists for detoxification or maintenance. Standard treatment involves inpatient detoxification using clonidine and/or medications with sedative effects followed by 2-6 weeks of inpatient rehabilitation with referral to a local health center for followup. Few patients keep appointments and one study found relapse rates of approximately 75% at 6 months (Krupitsky et al., 2002) (Krupitsky, Evgeny M. et al. 2004, ‘Naltrexone for heroin dependence treatment in St. Petersburg, Russia’, *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, Vol. 26, Iss. 4, p.285 – Attachment 18).

Elovich and Drucker also write on the treatment of drug users:

Vladimir Mendelevich, a Russian psychiatrist who has actively critiqued the dominant narcological model, reported at a 2006 satellite meeting of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (UN CND) findings from his recent research [2] that: (1) the majority of narcologists in Russia offer nothing but heavily medicalized detoxification; (2) the majority of patients relapse within six months, and (3) the majority of narcologists are satisfied with the field and do not think major changes are required...(Elovich, Richard & Drucker, Ernest 2008, ‘On drug treatment and social control: Russian narcology’s great leap backwards’, *Harm Reduction Journal*, Vol. 5 <http://www.harmreductionjournal.com/content/5/1/23> – Accessed 15 October 2009 – Attachment 16).

On the treatment at detoxification centres a July 2008 *New York Times* article states:

Many researchers on both sides of the methadone debate agree that only a small fraction of the heroin users in Russia seek treatment at detoxification centers and that most who do – some say more than 90 percent – relapse into drug use shortly after leaving.

At such clinics, doctors encourage immediate abstinence from drug use, rather than the gradual process that methadone substitution therapy entails. Patients are often given sedatives and painkillers to cope with withdrawal symptoms. Many are then released after a month or two with the expectation that they will remain clean. They rarely do (Schwartz, Michael 2008, 'Russia Scorns Methadone for Heroin Addiction', *The New York Times*, 22 July – Attachment 20).

Human Rights Watch noted on drug treatment services in its *World Report 2009*:

Methadone maintenance therapy helps reduce HIV infections as it enables many patients to stop using illicit drugs or helps them adopt less risky injection behavior; it also helps drug users obtain and adhere to antiretroviral treatment. Yet Russia refuses to make maintenance therapy available to drug-dependent people and has banned the use of methadone for treatment purposes. Available drug treatment services are insufficiently accessible, incomplete, and often not based on scientific evidence (Human Rights Watch 2009, *World Report 2009*, January – Attachment 21).

According to the 2007 Human Rights Watch report the state is the primary provider of drug dependence treatment. There are, however, some private treatment facilities (Human Rights Watch 2007, *Rehabilitation Required: Russia's Human Rights Obligation to Provide Evidence-based Drug Dependence Treatment*, November, Vol. 19, No. 7(D), pp.21-32 – Attachment 13).

Human Rights Watch reported that, for state clinics, official treatment protocols identify three phases of treatment: detoxification, “post-abstinent” and remission. Private clinics are reportedly banned from providing medicated detoxification services but are allowed to offer rehabilitation services. The private facilities are mostly commercially operated or faith-based (Human Rights Watch 2007, *Rehabilitation Required: Russia's Human Rights Obligation to Provide Evidence-based Drug Dependence Treatment*, November, Vol. 19, No. 7(D), pp.22,28 – Attachment 13).

The 2007 Human Rights Watch report also commented on the availability of treatment for drug users:

Availability of drug dependence treatment is mixed in Russia. While there are narcological clinics in all major towns of Russia, most of these clinics offer only detoxification, which, on its own, does little to help a drug user achieve a lasting remission. State-run rehabilitation or relapse prevention centers, which provide the crucial second phase of drug dependence treatment by helping drug users manage psychological craving for drugs, exist in only 26 of Russia's 85 regions. In some regions commercial or faith-based rehabilitation centers exist, but treatment at the former is often too expensive for drug users while many drug users do not feel comfortable using the latter (Human Rights Watch 2007, *Rehabilitation Required: Russia's Human Rights Obligation to Provide Evidence-based Drug Dependence Treatment*, November, Vol. 19, No. 7(D), pp.3-4 – Attachment 13).

On treatment in private clinics a September 2009 *Los Angeles Times* news article states:

Meanwhile, at private clinics, all manner of experimental treatments – including shock therapy and the removal of parts of the brain – are in vogue. In Bryun's [Moscow's chief drug addiction specialist] government-run clinic, addicts take turns sleeping hooked up to machines that send gentle electrical impulses through their brains, or lying encased in a full-body relaxation therapy machine (Stack, Megan K. 2009, 'Heroin addiction spreads like wildfire in Russia', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 September

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-russia-heroin25-2009sep25,0,2481325,full.story> – Accessed 16 October 2009 – Attachment 22).

Also published in another September 2009 edition of the *Los Angeles Times* is the attached photograph gallery on ‘Treating heroin addiction in Russia’. Captions to the photographs mention forms of treating heroin addiction such as “an electroencephalogram exam”, “an Alpha OxySpa capsule” and an “electric sleep” (‘PHOTOS: Treating heroin addiction in Russia’ 2009, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-russia-heroin19-2009sep19-pictures,0,433592.photogallery> – Accessed 16 October 2009 – Attachment 23).

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