SOCIAL POLICY
AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

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TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM
AND ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION:
ASPECTS OF RELATIONSHIP AND INTERACTION

SUMMARY. This article is devoted to the discussion of problems experienced by the Russian social protection institutions in connection with economic modernization in the Russian Federation. The study is based on the analysis of the social protection system existing in many locations of the Ural Federal District in 2000-2012. The author sets a framework for a new social protection strategy, which is oriented toward the increased quality of human capital and expanded reproduction of human capital. Steps are taken to analyze whether the qualitative parameters of the existing human capital meet the goals and objectives of the economic modernization in the Russian Federation. It appears that the present-day social protection system is marked by some drawbacks and limitations. Furthermore, it becomes crucial to utilize a range of specific innovative social protection instruments and methods in order to increase a proportion of the middle class in the country. The distinct features of some contemporary approaches, which may contribute to the development of human capital in the Russian Federation, are discussed by the author.

KEY WORDS. Social safety net, poverty, economic modernization, human assets, quality of living, middle class, globalization.

The overall modernization with a focus on innovative development is officially proclaimed as a major short-term scenario for the transformation of the Russian economy. It is well-known that the emergence of this modernization trend is obviously linked with the fact that the development potential of the Russian raw materials sector is nearly exhausted. Many experts say that the strategy for a creation of a competitive national economy must be based on the technological and infrastructural modernization which can enable the Russian government both to reduce its economic dependence

from the existing environment in world raw material markets and to increase people's living standards in the Russian Federation.

However, it must be stressed that there is no direct relationship between the economic modernization and quality-of-life enhancement. On the one hand, it is evident that personal income growth and new educational and qualifications improvement opportunities result from the improved productivity and increased economic activity of population. On the other hand, new requirements to the quality of human capital come into being and this leads to stronger competition in labor markets and income inequality growth, along with the worsening of a financial position of specific social groups. Therefore, efforts to modernize the Russian economy are inseparable from the development of a well-coordinated action plan required for the implementation of social programs within a framework of the social policy pursued by the Russian government. This approach can be found in the Report on Human Potential Development in the Russian Federation for the Year 2011 [1, 12].

In general, social protection plays a very important role in the realization of the social policy of the Russian government. The system of social protection includes many institutions which undertake a range of economic, social and legal actions in order to prevent or mitigate a negative impact of social tensions and social ill-being. The system under discussion is aimed at regulating the living conditions of various social groups, seeks to protect the social and economic interests of these social groups and tries to increase their adaptation capacity to social risks and challenges. The social protection ensures the expanded reproduction of population and enhancement of human capital in the Russian Federation. Accordingly, the improved quality of human capital may be considered both as a result and a success criterion in the social protection of the population and implementation of the modernization strategy in Russia.

The purpose of this article is to study the peculiarities of a new approach to social protection in Russia and transformation problems experienced by the local social protection institutions linked with the proposed modernization of the Russian economy. The research, which covers the period 2000 through 2012, seeks to analysze the performance of social protection institutions existing in the locations of the Ural Federal District. The comparative analysis serves as the methodological tool of the present research.

There are two different approaches to the analysis of a social protection function in the modern science, which can be termed as narrow and broad approaches. In line with the first approach the social protection authorities must support the poor and economically disadvantaged people and contribute to the development of non-profit organizations and institutions involved in social and cultural activities. In this situation the State provides aid to specific social groups, including the unemployed, pensioners, IDPs, refugees, homeless, disabled and low-income families, young families, multi-child families and families which welcomed orphans into their homes.

On the contrary, under the broad approach the concept of social protection is often understood in the same way as the concept of social policy. From this perspective, social protection must be provided to all citizens of a specific country and includes a variety of actions to cover different aspects of life, including but not limited to the

creation of new jobs and favorable environmental conditions, housing and social infrastructure services.

In our opinion, the broad approach to social protection is more in tune with the goals and objectives of economic modernization in Russia. Meanwhile, it is the narrow approach to social protection of the population that prevails in modern Russian practice and, accordingly, social protection takes the shape of social security. Based on this approach, the regional authorities seek to fulfill both federal and regional social obligations to specific social groups by means of minimum wage regulation, state pension awards and delivery of social assistance and social services. The poverty reduction is officially announced to be the criterion for the efficient operation of the social protection system. In line with the Program for Long-Term Socio-Economic Development of the Russian Federation, the Russian government has a plan to reduce the number of people in poverty to 8.9 million or 6.2% of the population by 2020 [2].

The orientation towards poverty reduction can be explained by the fact that since the second half of the 1990s poverty and income differences have been considered as obstacles to economic growth and social welfare. Moreover, poverty causes degradation of the population and worsens the overall demographic situation in the country. In this context, economic growth is assessed to be a poverty weakening factor as it helps the authorities create more jobs and leads to personal income growth.

In 2012, as many as 15.8 million people in the Russian Federation, or 11.2% of the total population, had their money income below the subsistence minimum level. This is a more than 2-fold decline compared to 2000. The total headcount of people living in poverty in the Ural Federal District stood at 1353.9 thousand people, a 2,6-fold decrease during the period 2000 through 2012. However, the poverty level in the Ural Federal District is quite different. In 2012, the poverty level in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Sverdlovsk Region was 7.5% and 10.2% of the total population, respectively. The Kurgan Region has the worst poverty level of 15.8% in the Ural Federal District, which is considerably higher compared with the average poverty level across the Russian Federation [3].

It is interesting to note that several regions in the Ural Federal District are associated with a faster pace of poverty reduction. In the period under review, the Sverdlovsk Region, the Chelyabinsk Region and the South of the Tyumen Region recorded a 2.8-fold poverty reduction, while the Kurgan Region and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug managed to achieve a 3.2-fold and a 1.5-fold progress in poverty reduction, respectively. The number of people in poverty in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug fell by 1,6 percentage points. The different poverty reduction rates make one suppose that there is no strong direct relationship between gross domestic product growth and quick reduction in the number of people in poverty, which, in its turn, casts doubt on the achievability of goals and objectives for social protection of the population in Russia outlined by the official development strategy.

To prove this statement, let us make an analysis of the dynamic development of two indicators, which are the gross regional product growth rate in the Ural Federal District during the period 2000 through 2012 and the poverty reduction rate for low-income people living below the subsistence level (see Table 1).

Table 1

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People in Poverty and the Gross Regional Product in the Ural Federal Okrug (in dynamics), in Percentage against the Previous Year

Indicators	Years												
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
The Kurgan Region													
Change in the Number of People in Poverty	95.7	95.3	92.1	98.8	76.7	88.4	74.9	81.9	91.8	101.2	90.5	105.0	83.1
Index of Physical Volume of the Gross Regional Product	107.1	101.2	102.0	107.9	103.3	107.5	111.8	104.4	109.3	92.9	97.5	108.3	101.3
The Sverdlovsk Region													
Change in the Number of People in Poverty	90.3	95.5	87.1	72.7	85.4	83.3	95.9	86.1	101.1	102.0	91.5	104.9	82.2
Index of Physical Volume of the Gross Regional Product	112.1	108.6	104.2	109.0	108.9	109.5	111.5	109.4	102.5	88.4	111.4	108.7	107.8
The Tyumen Region													
Change in the Number of People in Poverty	109.0	72.6	103.4	80.5	96.5	95.9	96.9	97.4	96.1	119.6	100.2	104.1	94.5
Index of Physical Volume of the Gross Regional Product	109.4	110.4	104.9	108.2	106.5	110.8	106.0	103.1	103.8	94.3	106.0	103.3	106.0
The Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug													
Change in the Number of People in Poverty	78.3	84.0	84.2	104.9	91.9	121.1	83.0	96.8	97.5	110.4	98.9	99.2	95.8
Index of Physical Volume of the Gross Regional Product	107.4	109.3	102.5	109.2	107.9	112.4	106.7	103.2	102.9	95.2	103.0	101.4	100.7
The Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug													
Change in the Number of People in Poverty	78.3	84.0	84.2	104.9	91.9	121.1	83.0	96.8	97.5	119.4	98.9	101.8	95.9
Index of Physical Volume of the Gross Regional Product	104.5	111.4	109.8	108.5	100.4	101.2	104.6	103.5	105.5	89.8	110.1	103.3	103.5
The Chelyabinsk Region													
Change in the Number of People in Poverty	94.7	111.2	86.1	81.9	85.5	70.6	82.3	93.8	91.5	102.0	95.6	104.9	97.4
Index of Physical Volume of the Gross Regional Product	110.7	103.1	100.9	108.5	104.9	108.3	110.6	113.4	101.5	85.9	106.0	105.2	102.1

Calculated according to the data of: [3]

It can be seen from Table 1 that there is no clear relationship between the number of people in poverty and the gross regional product in the Ural Federal Okrug. The unchangeable level of poverty during the period of economic growth can be explained by the fact that the degree of participation of different social groups in the growing segments of the regional economy is not quite the same, and, therefore, income growth rates for specific private individuals may vary. Accordingly, if economic growth is accompanied by an increase in the welfare of the middle- and high-income segments of the population, the dynamics of people in poverty also remains unchanged.

It must be added that the task of poverty reduction in the Russian Federation is complicated by the methodology used for the identification of people in poverty.

The poverty level is calculated through a correlation between the level of average per capita income gained by private individuals and the poverty line, which is fixed at a minimum subsistence income level. The similar methodology is employed for the poverty level assessment in the United States, while the so-called relative methodology for measuring the poverty level is commonly applied in the EU. It must be noted that the minimum subsistence level seems to be quite subjective, because it heavily depends on the size of the regional budget and is approved by the regional authorities. The quarterly upward reestimation of a minimum subsistence indicator increases the overall level of poverty since the poverty group will inevitably include a group of economically disadvantaged people with income only slightly over the poverty line. It must be emphasized that steps to better quality of life must not be confined solely to the fight against poverty because the authorities may only enhance the living standards of the poorest segment of the population up to the minimum subsistence level by making use of the existing poverty reduction strategy.

The social sphere is considered to be a part of production relations linked with the reproduction of human capital. Since the modernization of the Russian economy can only be achieved through the use of competitive innovative technologies, Russia is in a position to introduce tough requirements to the quality of workforce. The equal access of all citizens of the Russian Federation to education and health services, coupled with the improved educational level of population, will contribute to population growth, extension of the employment longevity and mortality reduction, particularly amongst working-age people. In the aggregate, these achievements will create suitable conditions for the productive employment and social product growth. Therefore, the level of human capital and modernization of the Russian economy are closely interrelated and interdependent.

The strategy for the development of the Russian social protection system must be also modified so as to take account of the projected prospects of the proposed economic modernization. In general, the country must make a strategic shift from survival to development. The fight against poverty as a key task for the social protection system must be complimented by the task aimed at igniting middle-class growth. The position under discussion is supported by scholars from the Institute for Independent Social Policy [4] and the author of this article. The economic modernization scenario, combined with appropriate social protection mechanisms, results in the enhancement

of human capital and significant growth of educated, healthy and affluent people. In turn, health, education and financial soundness will create suitable prerequisites for the involvement of workforce in the modernization process. The final outcome of this development strategy is the growth of the middle class in the country.

The social protection system aimed at expanded reproduction of the population and improvement of human capital must support social protection institutions, which are not only keen to protect people, but also pay a primary attention to development issues, such as the creation of a favorable business environment, pension insurance, quality higher education, corporate and voluntary medical insurance and development of social services markets. The Russian social protection system must overcome its regressive development trends in order to integrate the aforesaid institutions.

The analysis of social structure in the Russian Federation over the past decade suggests that the middle class has a tendency to grow at an extremely slow pace. Experts at the Russian Ministry of Economic Development say that the middle class is currently represented by a 22% part of the population, although some alternative estimates for the size of Russia's middle class are more pessimistic. According to recent estimates by the Institute for Independent Social Policy, 19.1% of the whole population in the Russian Federation can be classified as the middle class. The boundaries of the intermediate group between the middle class and people living in poverty vary insignificantly (see Figure 1) [5]. The above-mentioned facts speak of a weak vertical mobility of the Russian population. In this situation, the plans of the Russian government to increase the share of the middle class in the country up to 37% by the end of 2020 seem to be problematic. But even if the plans of the Russian government come true, Russia will continue to lag behind the developed countries with their strong middle-class levels of 60%-65% of the total population.

Figure 1. Changes in Social Structure of the Society in 2004-2011 (in dynamics)

The creation of a favorable business environment is a basic condition for the growth of the middle class in the Russian Federation as it allows private individuals to expand the sources of their personal income through obtaining income from business activity. In the long run, the favorable business conditions may contribute to the

enhancement of the overall well-being of citizens. However, experts at the Institute for Independent Social Policy say that at present only 5% of Russian families has an opportunity to join the middle class through access to entrepreneurial income.

The changes in the income structure of different Russian regions during the period 2000 through 2012 can be exemplified by the Ural Federal District. In the period under review, entrepreneurial income as a proportion of the total income was down in the Chelyabinsk Region, the Kurgan Region and the South of the Tyumen Region, while the northern districts of the Tyumen Region showed strong track record in entrepreneurial income (see Figure 2). However, this factor has also resulted in the differentiation of individual incomes since business undertakings may differ greatly in terms of scale, efficiency and social significance.

In 2012, Russia experienced steady personal income growth, whereas the trend for a high differentiation of income levels and their purchasing power remained unchanged. At present, the ratio of cash income to the cost of a fixed basket of goods and services is characterized by regional fluctuations in the range of 0.98 to 3.94. The same trend can be observed in the Ural Federal District where the ratio under consideration has less pronounced variations of 2.5 to 4.6. [3]. The existing income differences do not contribute to the poverty reduction, enhancement of the overall well-being of citizens in regions and middle-class growth.

To improve the quality of human capital, it is critical both to increase overall expenditures on health and education and to improve the efficiency of these expenditures. From the year 2011, the budget expenses on health care in the Russian Federation total over RUB 2 trillion and make up nearly 4% of the Russian gross domestic product. As a proportion of all spending on health care, the federal budget funds are estimated at 20% [6; 407]. Although expenses on health care gradually grow, they are still lower in Russia than in industrialized countries which have the average health care spending at the level of 7% of the gross domestic product. Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled strength in this field with a result of 23%.
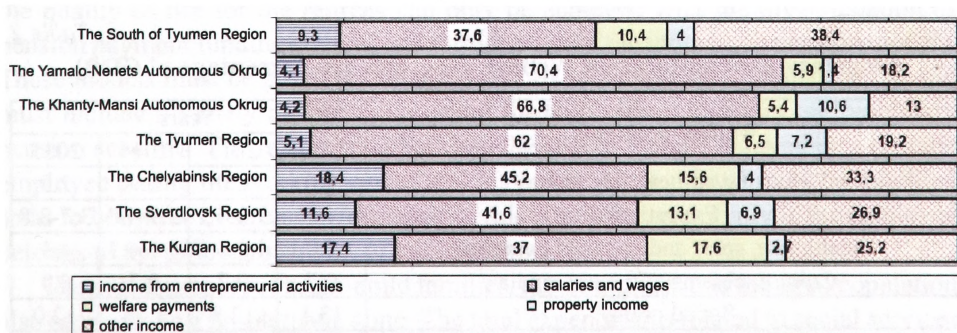
The year of 2000

Figure 2a. Changes in the Income Structure in the Ural Federal District during the Period 2000 through 2012, in percentage
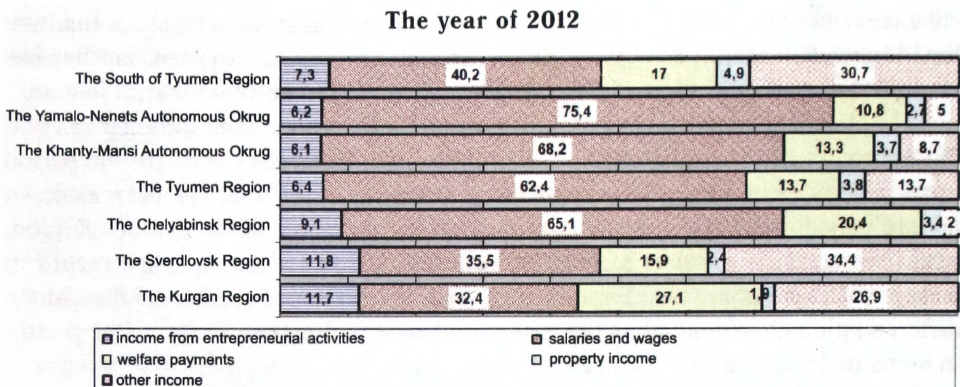
The year of 2012

Figure 2b. Changes in the Income Structure in the Ural Federal Okrug during the Period 2000 through 2012, in percentage

The total expenses on education, which correspond to 4.1% of GDP, are also lower compared to those of the OECD countries at 6% of the GDP level [7; 301]. Today, however, it appears more relevant to enhance the efficiency of educational expenses than to merely increase spending on education. In this context, the major drawback in the allocation of educational expenses seems to be a weak link of the Russian education with the production sector of the Russian economy. The funds must be allocated so as to train domestic specialists who are demanded by the Russian production sector. The strategic task of the national education system is to grow professionals with appropriate educational background and adequate professional proficiency to ensure further innovative development of the country.

In accordance with a draft budget for the years 2013-2015, the federal authorities are planning to reduce their allocations to the public health sector in absolute terms to RUB 506.6 billion, RUB 466.4 billion and RUB 383.3 billion for each year in succession, respectively. Expenses on education will also be significantly cut against the 2012 level and are expected to reach RUB 597.4 billion in 2013, RUB 544.3 billion in 2014 and RUB 573.0 billion in 2015 (see Table 2).

Table 2

Budgetary Expenditures on Welfare Programs (in percentage of GDP)

Welfare programs	Years			
	2012	2013	2014	2015
Housing and utilities sector	2.0	2.0	1.9	2.0
Education	4.1	3.9-4.1	3.9-4.0	3.7-3.8
Healthcare, sport and physical exercise	4.0	4.0-4.3	4.1-4.3	4.1
Culture, cinema and mass media	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Social policy	13.1	12.9	12.4	12.0
Pension security	8.3	8.5	8.4	8.3

Source: [8].

Therefore, the realization of the budget plan for the years 2013-2015 will strengthen the existing gap between the Russian Federation and leading countries of the world in relation to the federal expenditures on education and public health. As L. Rzhanitsyna points out, the planned social spending cuts contradict to the idea of modernization in Russia [8].

The pension security programs, along with the pension insurance and pension accumulation schemes system are an important part of social support. Over the past years the total expenses on pensions in Russia showed 2.4-fold growth. Due to the valorization and introduction of supplementary federal payouts to retirees in 2010 the level of pension expenses in Russia rose to 10% of the gross national product. In 2012-2014, the total pension expenses are expected to double. However, the Russian pension system is characterized by low efficiency due to a weak average replacement rate against the OECD countries (36.6% vs. 53%). The ratio of the average pension to the average wage for the segment of Russian population categorized as the middle class is at the range of 3%-7% [6; 33]. The big pension expenses, along with a high rate of pension contributions, are combined with a low replacement rate, which is the result of an extremely unfavorable correlation between the number of existing retirees and people in employment who have to make the insurance contributions from their salaries to cover pension costs. According to S. Misikhina and V. Nazarov, there are about 40 million pension recipients in the Russian Federation, including survivors and those eligible for the disability retirement benefits. At the same time, only 47 million people in employment regularly make pension contributions from their salaries, which at least correspond to a minimum pay size in line with Russian law. As a result, the ratio between the payers of pension contributions and the recipients of pensions is 1.2:1, whereas the sustainability of replacement rates within the framework of the so-called distributive pension system can only be supported by the actual ratio of over 2:1 [9; 158].

Today, the aim of the Russian pension system is to ensure basic security against poverty for each retiree. At the same time, the Russian pension system makes no steps to support sustainable development in the country. Under the present circumstances, the quality of life for the retirees can only be achieved with the diversification of pension payment funding sources and introduction of the innovative pension models. These models must be based on the principles of accumulation and distribution and must include a variety of features relevant for both state mandatory and voluntary pension schemes. The relationship between the size of income enjoyed by a specific employee during the working career and his or her pension level must be modified so as to boost the creative performance of this employee, especially if the employee belongs to the affluent segment of population.

The social support of multi-child families, minor orphans and the aged population also seems to be a problematic zone. The total expenditures related to social services for the population are expected to triple by 2014 compared with the year 2005 [10; 55]. However, services provided by preschool institutions do not fully meet the needs of the households because even high-income families have problems in this sphere

due to the shortage in kindergarten places. Apart from the deficit of social services, backward technical facilities used by the social service institutions and insufficient quality of social services are another area of concern. The overall efficiency of the Russian social protection system is significantly reduced due to the complete lack of social rehabilitation services and weak development of social services for the aged and disabled people.

The social reforms implemented in many countries of the world are aimed at gradual redistribution of social obligations from the state to citizens of the state in harmony with the improvement of people's well-being. The development of consumer, social, legal, psychological and other services, coupled with growing numbers of economically and financially independent people, enables the authorities to cut the number of social obligations which are not secured by sufficient resources.

The elimination of service deficit for the people in need and improvement of the service quality can only be achieved with the emergence and step-by-step development of the private sector inside the state-run social protection system. The mechanism of a public-private partnership gives an opportunity to solve social problems by means of uniting monetary resources of the state and charity funds provided by private benefactors. Additionally, the private organizations may be invited to finance social grants as well as to develop and implement social welfare programs in line with the social order of the state.

The growing globalization of the world economy may also be considered as a challenge for the Russian social protection system. The global financial, commodity and labor markets get interconnected on a fast basis, which may result in the reinforcement of social risks and lower social security of people. When an economic or a financial crisis occurs in one country, it may quickly cause a domino effect in other parts of the world and lead to deterioration in the labor market conditions and the level of social welfare. The threat of unemployment and lower tax receipts create problems for the social insurance system. With the rise in unemployment, the correlation between the payers of insurance contributions and the recipients of insurance payouts, such as retirees and those insured under the compulsory medical insurance system, automatically deteriorates. Under these conditions, reasonable steps to address complex problem situations in the field of employment, labor market and social security are critical. In particular, steps must be taken both to create additional productive jobs and prevent losses linked with the incomplete or inefficient use of productive resources.

The formation of financially sound social security funds is also hindered by a low wage level, which is typical of a major part of the working population in the Russian Federation. The wage share of Russian gross domestic product is almost twice as low as compared to the result of developed countries. The average wage level of people employed in the most-common occupations is at best only twice as high as the minimum subsistence level. In fact, many people within the popular professions in the Russian Federation live below the subsistence level because they have to spend

a considerable part of their budgets in order to pay a variety of bills for the delivery of housing, utilities, transportation, medical and educational services [11; 52]. The wage rates in the total cost of products and services must be significantly increased, which can enable the authorities to support economic growth and personal income growth in Russia as well as to replenish non-budgetary social funds.

The drawbacks and limitations of the existing social protection system revealed by the present research must be corrected in the course of the transformation of the system in question for the purpose of modernization of the Russian economy. At first, the government must develop efficient mechanisms to offer decent sized income opportunities to people and to ensure income redistribution on a socially equitable basis. The wage rates in the total cost of products and services must be increased up to 40%-60% in line with the advanced market economies.

Secondly, it is crucial that the government must create conditions to allow businesses "to operate in the open" to bring both salaries and wages out of the shadows. Along with a wage increase and the abolishment of a flat tax rate, this step will help the authorities to raise additional financial resources in order to address the existing social problems.

Thirdly, Russian citizens' income growth and equalization of income levels must be accompanied by reinforcement of the social protection system primarily funded by insurance contributions. However, given the complicated demographic situation in the Russian Federation, it is also of vital importance to increase budget financing of the social protection system in order to support financial sustainability of the state-owned insurers.

Fourthly, the authorities must design a new model for the delivery of high-quality social services. The task under consideration may be performed through a reduction in the number of government-controlled social protection institutions and a gradual transfer of some social protection functions from the state-run institutions to the non-for-profit and self-regulatory organizations. The government-controlled social protection institutions, non-for-profit and self-regulatory organizations must be selected on a competitive basis.

Finally, efforts must be made to create a healthy competition between governmental and non-governmental social institutions and strengthen a public-private partnership in the field of social protection.

It must be stressed in conclusion that a new social protection strategy must be developed in the Russian Federation, which is not exclusively confined to the fight against poverty, but seeks to improve the lives of the whole population. This innovative social protection system must be regarded as an instrument, which may be utilized in the Russian Federation for achieving the high-level consumption standards relevant for the economically developed countries. The implementation of the strategy in question will enable the Russian government to attain a range of social and economic goals laid down in the Program for Economic Modernization and provide strong social protection to all citizens of the Russian Federation.

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