

Poverty Rates Down, Life Expectancy Up

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The number of impoverished Russians has decreased in recent years and life expectancy has grown, but 14 percent of the populace is still living below the poverty line and gender discrimination remains rampant, a new UN study says.

The report, titled "The National Human Development Report in Russia 2010" and released by the United Nations Development Program on Friday, examines the country's progress toward Millennium Development Goals — a set of social goals that all UN members have pledged to achieve by 2015.

"There is considerable progress in poverty reduction and an increase in average life expectancy," UNDP representative Frode Muring said at the report's presentation.

The poverty rate has decreased by 3.7 percent from 2005 to 2009, and the monthly minimum wage reached 5,000 rubles (\$164) last year compared with only 1,200 rubles in 2000.

Male life expectancy grew from 58.8 years in 2005 to 61.8 in 2008, the report said. Corresponding figures for women grew from 72.3 to 74.1 years over the same period.

But male mortality still exceeds that for women, with rates of 1,071 and 281 deaths per 100,000, respectively, with alcohol being the main cause for the discrepancy, the report's authors said.

Women's empowerment remains an issue as well, with most decision making in the country remaining in the hands of men even though there are 11 million more women than men in the country, said Natalya Zubarevich, one of the report's authors.

Only three of the 19 ministers of the federal government are women, Zubarevich said.

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