

Child Welfare Spending 'Is Not Enough'

November 24, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

Although almost one-fifth of the Russian populace is under 18 years old, only 2 percent of the federal budget is spent on child welfare, and mostly ineffectively at that, UNICEF and the Audit Chamber said Thursday.

Further federal cutbacks are planned for 2012-14, increasing the burden on the regions, which already spend a quarter of their budgets on child welfare, the two bodies said in a joint report presented at a news conference in Moscow.

Total state expenditures on children, women and family welfare in 2010 stood at a mere 0.79 percent of gross domestic product, or some \$11 billion, the report said.

Only 26 percent of the respondents polled for the report considered state measures to support children and families effective.

The state needs to increase spending on child welfare, given that the number of children living below poverty line is increasing, said the report, the first of its kind in Russia.

The government also needs to step up control over money allotted for child welfare because

most the funding is used ineffectively and nontransparently, in part due to lack of any clear strategy on what the money should be spent for, the report said.

This research aims to "raise awareness of the importance of investment into children and the deficits in that sphere," Bertrand Bainvel of UNICEF Russia told The Moscow Times.

"Children are the future of Russia. To improve the situation of the country, you have to start with the children," he said.

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