Strengthening Local Administration of Social Assistance in Russia

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHORS **IV**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **V**

Overview of the Current System of Social Benefits in Russia **2**
- Social Assistance **3**
- Federal, Subject, and Locally Mandated Assistance **5**
- Social Services **6**

Local Administration of Social Assistance **7**
- Broad Organization **8**
- Work Environment **9**
- Local Social Assistance Administration **10**

Successful Program Implementation **12**

Pilot Programs **13**

Assessment Method **16**

Findings **17**
- Overall Implementation **17**
- Quality of Administration **19**
- Outcomes and Implementation Factors **24**

Conclusions **28**

References **31**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A hallmark of the administration of social assistance under the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR was the universal nature of eligibility for benefits, either to all citizens or to categories of deserving citizens, e.g., the physically handicapped. During the transition period since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has taken limited steps to improve the targeting of benefits. The challenge to improvement is acute because the administration of the great majority of programs rests with agencies of local government. The question addressed here is how amenable local program administration is to improved targeting and more progressive program administration in general. Presented is an analysis of the results of assessments of two pilot programs implemented in two Russian cities in 2000–2001. The "school lunch pilot" introduced means testing in the school lunch program on a citywide basis; eligible families receive cash payments and all children pay the same price for their lunches in cash. The "jobs pilot" is a new, local means-tested program that provides cash support to families while unemployed workers search for work; continued receipt of funds is conditional on a minimum job search effort. We find that both programs were successfully implemented and that there was little resistance to the sharper targeting. On the other hand, a variety of problems with program administration were identified—problems that need to be addressed if program integrity and credibility are to be maintained.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL ADMINISTRATION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN RUSSIA

Analysts of social assistance in the Russian Federation have consistently documented the poor targeting of benefits delivered by these programs.[1] The housing allowance program, initiated in 1994, was the country's first explicitly means-tested program (Struyk, Lee, and Puzanov 1997). Means testing for a second national program—Child Allowances—did not occur until 1999 (Gallagher et al. 2000). But these two programs still represent a minority of benefits allocated under rules set by the national government. So targeting remains spotty at best. Moreover, other analysts have recently documented significant shortcomings with social assistance program administration at the local level. There is a low level of coordination among programs; for example, would-be participants must apply separately for each program from which they seek assistance and provide fresh documentation of eligibility each time. Quality control is low and basic office procedures rudimentary (Richman and Struyk 2000). Such findings are important because local agencies administer the great majority of social assistance in the country. In short, there is no disputing the pervasive problems in Russia's social assistance programs.

The question addressed in this paper is how amenable the local program administration is to improvement. We address this question using the results of assessments of two pilot programs implemented in two Russian cities from 2000 to 2001 and assessed in 2001. The first program, the "school lunch pilot," introduced means testing in the school lunch program on a citywide basis; eligible families received cash payments and all children paid the same price for their lunches in cash. The second, the "jobs pilot," is a new, local means-tested program that provides cash support to families while unemployed workers search for work; continued receipt of funds is conditional on a minimum job search effort.

1. See Braithwaite (1997), Connor (1997), Gallagher (2000), Klugman (1997), McAuley (1994), and World Bank (1994, 1999a, b).

One can view the pilots as experiments. The broad objective of the experiments is to determine if reforms made to increase targeting or to improve the efficiency of program administration will be well implemented when they are properly designed from a technical perspective in cooperation with the local agency. The conclusion is far from foregone because each pilot entails significant change. For example, line administrators and staff may not agree with the changes and thus undermine implementation.[2] Importantly, the experiments hold constant the quite difficult environment in which these agencies operate, as described below.

The results suggest that local social assistance administration is indeed amenable to improvement and that reforms to increase targeting and improve efficiency of program operations can be well implemented; both the jobs pilot and the school lunch pilot were implemented in accordance with program goals and produced promising initial results. Nonetheless, there remain considerable obstacles to the implementation of reforms at the local level, particularly the lack of exposure to thoroughly documented and standardized program procedures. Unless adequately addressed prior to and during program implementation, such obstacles may significantly undermine reform goals.

The paper is organized as follows. The initial three sections provide important contextual information: an overview of the structure of social assistance in Russia and the role of local government agencies in its administration, additional information on conditions at a sample of local social assistance offices, and factors related to successful program implementation. The fourth section then outlines the pilot programs. This is followed by a review of the assessment methodology, including defining the outcome indicators. The sixth section then presents the findings of the assessment. The paper finishes with some tentative conclusions.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF SOCIAL BENEFITS IN RUSSIA

Social safety nets as they are commonly understood in market economies did not exist under the Soviet regime. Social policy and welfare in Russia (and in other command economies) was instead characterized by a commitment to full employment, strict government regulation of prices and wages, subsidization of consumer goods, and state-run social insurance. Poverty did not officially exist. Noncash social benefits, such as housing, access to recreation centers and free transport, were mostly provided through enterprises. Public transfers included pensions, student stipends, birth grants, funeral grants, family allowances, subsidies to single mothers or large families, and others.[3]

As economies change, social policy reforms are sure to follow. In the late eighties and early nineties, Russia began its historic transition to political democracy and a market economy. For many sectors of the population, the transition was accompanied by increasing hardship. Unemployment swelled, incomes fell, inequality rapidly increased, and high

2. This phenomenon has certainly been observed in the West. See, for example, Meyers, Glaser, and MacDonald (1998), and Gramlich and Koshel (1975).

3. See McCauley (1994) and Braithwaite (1997).

rates of poverty became a reality (Milanovic 1998). Soviet social policies based on assumptions of full employment, relative equality, and enterprise welfare were inconsistent with the new economic environment.

Russia did not suddenly adopt a narrowly targeted, U.S.-style welfare regime or a highly redistributive social-democratic welfare system as in many European countries. Nonetheless, significant social reforms occurred throughout the nineties—an unemployment benefits system was introduced, a means-tested housing allowance program was created to offset rent increases for the poor, enterprises began the process of divesting social assets (such as housing and kindergartens), and the administration of social benefits was largely devolved to regional and local levels of government. In addition, a poverty line (known as the subsistence minimum or subsistence level) methodology was adopted in 1997 based on the cost of a minimum consumption budget in each region.[4] By the end of the decade, social policy in Russia was considerably closer to the policies of typical OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, although significant differences remain. In particular, social benefits are low by OECD standards, targeting of benefits to the poor is limited in scope, demographic and occupational characteristics assume a much greater role in determining eligibility, and benefits are more heavily skewed toward subsides and in-kind benefits than cash.

Table 1 provides an overview of the current social safety net in Russia. The system includes a vast array of benefits to a variety of beneficiaries (most of which are grouped under "Categorical Transfers"). As noted elsewhere, the system is characterized by a "fragmentation of funding sources and responsibilities" (Foley and Klugman 1997, 191). Benefits are paid through multiple funds and responsibility is divided between federal ministries, enterprises, federation subjects, and local level governments.[5]

Social Assistance

In contrast to social insurance shown in the top panel of the table, social assistance programs do not require recipients to pay into the program. Instead, cash or in-kind benefits are provided to support the income of recipients and are usually targeted at the poorest or most vulnerable groups in society.

The current system of social assistance benefits in Russia embodies two contradictory trends: the introduction of targeted assistance to those with low incomes and the proliferation of privileges to specific categories of the population. Throughout the 1990s, the federal government and State Duma indicated support for targeted means-tested

4. The monthly subsistence minimum is calculated separately for children, working age adults, and the elderly (55 for women, 60 for men) in each of Russia's 89 regions. It is based on a minimum consumption basket in each region according to methodological instructions prepared by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. In addition, many cities have adopted their own local subsistence minimum. The average monthly subsistence minimum in the four cities described in this paper in April 2001 was 1,065 rubles (about $35).

5. The Russian Federation is geographically divided into 89 conterminous "federation subjects." Fifty of these federation subjects, including all four that encompass the cities described later in this report, are called "oblasts." Each oblast is further divided into "raions," which serve as the primary administrative districts for oblast programs. "Local self-government," i.e., municipalities with a local charter—such as the cities described in this report—often extends over a number of raions.

Table 1. Overview of Social Benefits in Russia, 2000

Programs	Eligibility	Benefit	Main Funding Source/Administration
SOCIAL INSURANCE (Federal)			
Pension	Disabled, elderly (women 55+, men 60+), and survivors	Monthly cash benefit	Funding: Social Insurance Fund; Administered by federation subject or local government
Unemployment Benefits	Officially registered unemployed	Monthly cash benefit	Funding: Employment Fund; Administered by Federal Employment Administration
Sickness Benefits	Currently employed, but not working due to ill health	Cash benefit covering period of sickness	Funding: Social Insurance Fund; Administered by enterprises
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND PRIVILEGES (Federally Mandated)			
Social Pension	Disabled and elderly without work history	Monthly cash benefit	Funding: Social Insurance Fund; Administered by federation subject
Housing Allowances	Low-income households	Monthly housing subsidy	Funding: Local budget and enterprise budgets; Administered by local government
Child and Birth Allowances	Some benefits for all families with children, others only for low-income families with children	One-time and monthly cash benefits	Funding: Federation subject budget and Social Insurance Fund; Administered by federation subject or local government
Categorical Transfers	"Socially vulnerable groups" (families, elderly, disabled, etc.), honored citizens (especially veterans), victimized groups, students, and members of certain occupations	Ongoing subsidies for housing and utilities, food (school meals), transportation and fuel, health and medication, telecom-munications, and educational and cultural services	Funding: Local budget with some compensation from federal budget; Administered by federation subject or local government
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND PRIVILEGES (Federation Subject or Locally Mandated)			
Federation Subject and Municipal Social Assistance	Usually based on double criteria method: categorical requirement (e.g., disabled, large families, pensioners, students, etc) and income test	Various one-time and ongoing cash and in-kind benefits and subsidies	Funding: Federation subject or local budget; Administered by federation subject or local government

SOURCE: Urban Institute and Institute for Urban Economics.

assistance, although this support became more apparent in recent years. Notable milestones include:

- introduction of the means-tested housing allowance program in 1994 (Puzanov, 1997);
- passage of federal legislation in 1995 and 1999 suggesting principles and a framework for targeting social assistance;
- passage of federal recommendations for means testing of local programs that provide baby formula to infants in 1997;
- passage of the procedures for developing the minimum subsistence level (poverty line) for use in targeting assistance, also in 1997; and
- introduction of means testing to the child allowance program.[6]

Contrary to the principals of targeting, however, throughout the 1990s the State Duma approved a strikingly large volume of privileges—non–income-tested subsidies provided to specific population categories and occupations. As is often noted, the current system of federal mandates includes about 156 benefits to 236 categories of persons and families, including veterans, families with many children, customs officials, and others (Sharonov 1998). None of these benefits, with the exception of monthly child allowances, is means tested. Nor are many of the groups that receive privileges among the most poor. As a result, only 19 to 25 percent of total social assistance transfers were distributed to households with income below the subsistence level, according to various estimates.[7] In addition, most of these privileges place a considerable burden on the lower levels of government that must eventually provide them.

Federal, Subject, and Locally Mandated Assistance

As poverty and inequality grew throughout the decade of the 90s, local governments responded by increasingly introducing their own benefits in addition to funding and administering a substantial share of the federal mandates. Local governments provide a strikingly broad array of their own benefits (Liborakina, 1998; Gallagher et al., 2000). Although expenditures on these programs is limited relative to federal mandates, they are often more likely to be targeted to the poor.[8]

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6. *On the Fundamentals of Housing Policy* (12/92) established the housing allowance program; *On Fundamentals of the RF Social Safety Net* (No. 195-FZ, 12/10/95) sets the basic principles for providing social assistance; *On State Program of Social Assistance* (No. 178-FZ, 7/17/99) set the framework for targeted assistance; *On Free Delivery of Special Infant's Food to One- and Two-Year-Old Children* (No. 1005, 8/13/97) recommended means testing of local baby food programs; *On the Subsistence Level in the Russian Federation* (10/24/97) established the procedures for calculating the subsistence level; and *On Implementing Amendments and Addenda to the Federal Law on Governmental Allowances to Citizens Having Children* (7/17/99) introduced means testing to the child allowance program.

7. See, for example, Misikina (1999).

8. Gallagher and Liborakina (2001). Worth noting is that in 2001 the federal government provided a larger share of the funding necessary for the federal mandates and tightened the intergovernmental grant process to help insure that more funds sent to Subjects of the Federation for this purpose reached local governments.

The federal government has little role in the delivery or regulation of local social assistance. It does have an influence on local programs, however. For instance, the established federal subsistence level methodology is typically used for income eligibility purposes for local programs. In addition, recommendations by the federal government to means test local milk programs for infants have encouraged some localities to improve the targeting of these programs.

Municipal governments dominate the delivery of social assistance at the local level: administration for such assistance is usually through municipal departments of social protection. Funding is generally from the municipal budget, but some cities also receive in-kind aid from charitable institutions, such as the Red Cross, which the city distributes through its social assistance system.

Local social assistance is characterized by a mix of cash and in-kind benefits and subsidies. Eligibility rarely extends across the entire poor population. Benefits typically do not attempt to raise incomes to the subsistence level and most are not scaled according to income.

Broadly, there are two structures for determining eligibility for social assistance and social services. In most programs eligibility is independent of income but requires a person to be in a specified category. The categories themselves are of two types: (a) needy individuals, e.g., disabled persons, unmarried mothers, and (b) individuals who have rendered or are rendering special service to the country, e.g., veterans of World War II, but also police and judicial officials and members of the active duty military. (The subsidies to the militia, judiciary, military, and similar groups are used as a disguised wage supplement.) Those in certain categories qualify for different programs. This is essentially the system in place at the end of the Soviet Union.[9] In recent years, as municipal budgets have been strained by un- and under-funded federal mandates, many municipalities have adopted a "double screen." Persons who qualify for a program based on the categories are subject to an income test screen to determine eligibility (Gallagher et al. 2000). A few programs employ only an income test.

Locally mandated subsidies often follow the federal lead, building on or complementing existing federal mandates. For instance, the federal government requires that families with many children receive a 50 percent reduction in kindergarten fees. Many local governments have expanded this discount to include other groups, such as children of single parents, or low-income children. As with federal benefits, expenditures on subsidized services typically outweigh cash and in-kind benefits.

Social Services

Social services are almost entirely provided by federation subject and municipal governments. Subject governments' activities are concentrated on institution-based care.

The federal government has a much smaller role in the provision of social assistance. It sets few specific rules regarding the administration of local social services and funds most services indirectly through the general transfers to the budgets of federation sub-

9. See, for example, Braithwaite (1997), Connor (1997), and World Bank (1994).

jects. Most social services, except in-home care to the elderly and disabled, are not mandated by the federal government. Federal legislation does, however, set an overall framework for the provision of social services at the local level, specifying the major services that should be provided as follows:[10]

- *Home visitation.* In-home care (housekeeping, medical services, etc.) for elderly and disabled persons in constant or episodic need of assistance with some activities of living.
- *Institutional care.* Physical, medical, and social care in an institutional setting for elderly and disabled persons unable to take care of themselves.
- *Shelter.* Temporary shelter to orphans, abandoned or neglected children, troubled children, homeless persons, victims of domestic violence, victims of natural disasters, and others in need.
- *Day care.* Day care services for elderly and disabled persons, and troubled children.
- *Counseling.* Consultations by social agency workers on the variety of social assistance services available to citizens, including household assistance; medical, psychiatric, and educational assistance; and legal protection.
- *Social rehabilitation.* Vocational, social, and psychological rehabilitation to disabled persons, troubled children, and other persons in need.

Additional services are left to the discretion of the federation subject and local governments. In major cities, and in all of the cities in this study, most social services are funded by municipal funds and administered by municipal social protection departments. The major exception is the limited amount of vocational services provided in federal employment offices to persons applying for unemployment benefits. For the most part, decisions regarding how social services are delivered are left to the municipal government. Local governments may, if they wish, provide grants or competitively contract with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or private businesses for the provision of social services; few, however, do any such contracting.

LOCAL ADMINISTRATION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Local governments have a significant role in nearly all aspects of social assistance and social service delivery. Of the major types of benefits described above, local governments dominate the administration of federally mandated privileges, housing allowances, and local social benefits. The main exception is the child allowance program, which is administered by municipal institutions in some cities and by federation subject institutions in others.

10. See *On Fundamentals of the RF Social Safety Net* (No. 195-FZ, 12/10/95).

This section gives an overview of the administration of social assistance by local governments, using as examples the four cities participating in a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)–supported pilot project designed to strengthen operations in this area. Three topics are covered: the broad organization of social assistance, the general work environment for social assistance offices, and the operations of social assistance offices.

The four municipalities—Tomsk (population, 480,000), Perm (1 million), Novgorod (230,000), and Arzamas (110,000)—represent a range of city sizes and regions of the country: Novgorod and Arzamas are in European Russia, Tomsk in Siberia, and Perm in the Urals. The sample covers a broad range of cities and regions—45 percent of Russians live in cities with populations of 100,000 or larger, and only 13 percent live further east and north of Tomsk. Nevertheless, we make no claim that our sample is representative, and consequently any generalizations should be made cautiously.

Broad Organization

Diversity is the catchword to describe arrangements on the ground. Each city is organized differently in the way it administers social assistance programs. In part, this results from the agreement reached between the oblast and the municipality as to which programs the municipality administers on behalf of the oblast.

In Arzamas and Novgorod, the Housing Allowance Program is administered outside of the Social Protection network, while in Tomsk and Perm, the program is administered by the agency that administers several of the other benefit programs in the city.

In Novgorod and Arzamas, social assistance agencies were created based on the household category to be assisted, e.g., pensioners, disabled adults and children, and families and children; each center provides both benefits and services for that particular population. In Arzamas, for example, the Municipal Center for Household Social Assistance provides assistance or services to pregnant women, disabled diabetics, members of Chernobyl liquidating teams, pensioners, low-income families, handicapped adults who are not pensioners, and handicapped children. This center also processes applications for in-kind food assistance and monetary assistance to households in crisis. The Municipal Center is complemented by the Arzamas Family Committee, which administers the Birth and Child Allowance programs.

In Perm and Tomsk, assistance is organized by function, and benefits are located in one office while services are located in a separate office. Because they are large cities, encompassing several districts (raions), both also organize by district. In Perm, as an example, the city is divided into seven districts and each district has a comprehensive benefit office that takes applications and provides benefits for most programs for all populations. Each district also has a comprehensive service center that provides most services to all populations in the district. The benefit office administers assistance programs for pregnant women, families with many children, disabled children, children with disabled parents, and families with only one parent. The Perm district benefit office also handles all benefit programs for pensioners and disabled adults. Despite the co-location of assis-

tance programs, applying for each program is still a fully separate transaction: the applicant visits a different section for each major benefit sought.

Coordination of referrals between agencies and collection of data is also different in each city. In Novgorod, each agency maintains its own database, and information is not routinely shared between agencies in a formal manner. In Arzamas and Perm, at least limited data sharing is routine. In Arzamas, each office has its own database, which it regularly updates with information from databases of other agencies. In Perm the benefit office and service office in each district have a common database and routinely share information, and they have a good process for referral of households between offices. There is, however, little or no sharing of information across district boundaries.

Work Environment

Analyses of well-performing government agencies argue that several factors concerning incentives, motivation, and professionalism can influence performance levels (Hilderbrand and Grindle 1997). Such factors include recruitment procedures, level of compensation, presence of performance standards, basis for promotions, and the quality and quantity of office space and equipment available to staff. The record across the studied offices is discouraging on these points.

Salaries are modest at best. Table 2 shows the monthly wage of an intake worker as a percentage of the per capita subsistence level in each city. The subsistence level is defined for each location using a standard methodology. As the name implies, this is the income necessary for a minimally adequate diet and other living expenses. In spring 2000, the highest per capita subsistence level among the four cities was the equivalent of $1 per day.

The figures in the table show that in no city would one call these workers well paid. Indeed, in Novgorod and Perm, it is likely that the family incomes of some of the workers are less than those of some of the people receiving the subsidies administered by these workers. Such low salaries could well undermine worker morale.

Recruitment is generally an *ad hoc* affair. Possibilities for favoritism are wide. Only an agency in Arzamas reported advertising when a position was open and administering a test as part of the review process. Formal staff evaluation is essentially absent, with the exception of one office where workers have short-term contracts and performance must be at least implicitly reviewed before the contract is renewed. A similar situation exists for promotions, but since the organizations are usually completely flat in structure—all workers report to the office head—there is little scope for promotion in any case. Only

Table 2. Intake Staff Salaries As a Percentage of Local Per Capita Subsistence Income Level, Spring 2000

City	Salary As a Percentage of Monthly Subsistence Income
Arzamas	111
Novgorod	49
Perm	46
Tomsk	176

SOURCE: Richman and Struyk (2000), Table 1.

the Perm office, the Arzamas Municipal Center, and the Novgorod housing allowance office have scope for internal promotion.

Finally, offices are cramped and equipment, even of the most rudimentary type (staplers, scotch tape, file folders, even paper), is generally scarce. In short, by western standards the work environment would be judged as extremely difficult and not one that would help motivate workers to high performance. Despite this, the staff interviewed and observed appeared reasonably motivated in their jobs.

Local Social Assistance Administration

To summarize local practices, we rely on an earlier assessment undertaken for this purpose (Richman and Struyk 2000). The assessment could be described as a diagnostic study—a comparatively quick examination of program administration to determine if there are problems present or incipient (Valadez and Bamberger 1994, 163).[11] The following points were examined:

- in-take procedures
  - program access
  - client flow
  - verification procedures
  - interviews
- staff assignments, supervision and monitoring
- instructions/manuals and training
- client appeal procedures
- computerization
- management reporting

Information was collected at nine offices in the four cities discussed above. In each city, agencies were selected to provide a broad overview of how social assistance and social service programs were administered in that city. The review *excluded* the actual delivery of services, e.g., home visits to disabled elderly or counseling to troubled teenagers. Although the sample of offices is small, the consistency of the findings suggests that it is sufficient for a diagnostic study.

Local offices in each city administer three types of programs. First is a set of locally designed and funded programs. Then there are two groups of nationally funded programs. Following the taxonomy of Subbaro et al. (1997), these are (a) those where the local government has significant administrative discretion (e.g., housing allowances) and (b) those

11. The procedure also has features in common with what Newcomer (1996, 565–66) terms "economy and efficiency reviews" and "evaluability assessments" and with field office inspections (Glover 1989). However, in our case, there are few national program standards available to use in assessing performance.

where the local government is the agent of the national government (e.g., child allowances). Most national programs fall into the second category. In reality, however, there is little national ministry or Subject of the Federation oversight of local program administration.

The results of the assessment are summarized in table 3. Several limitations are documented. The salient points include:

- Most offices have a very flat structure with up to 20 staff reporting directly to the office head. Related to this, there is no formal monitoring of eligibility and benefit determinations at the majority of offices.

Table 3. Summary of Administrative Practices

Intake Procedures—Program Access and Client Flow	
Number of offices where clients make appointments to file applications.	3/9
Intake Procedures—Verification	
1. Number of offices that have standardized procedures regarding what must be verified.	9/9
2. Number of offices that give workers latitude in how information is verified, i.e. what are acceptable documents to verify client statements on the application.	1/9
Intake Procedures—Interviews	
1. Number of offices that require interviews with applicants before providing benefits.	9/9
2. Number of offices that have special interview rooms or areas where client confidentiality can be kept.	0/9
Supervision and Monitoring	
1. Number of offices that have positions at the supervisory level for benefit workers.	3/9
2. Number of offices that have any form of formal monitoring or worker case actions to determine if the determination of eligibility and calculation of benefit amount are correct.	4/9
Procedural Manuals and Instructions	
Number of offices that have formal instructional or procedural manuals for workers.	0/9
Training	
1. Number of offices that have formal training for new workers.	3/9
2. Number of offices that provide formal training to veteran workers on new or changed laws and regulations.	5/9
Client Appeals	
Number of cities that have formal appeal procedures to use when clients are not satisfied with the decision made by the agency worker.	3/4
Computerization	
1. Number of offices that have some degree of computerization.	9/9
2. Number of offices that have a personal computer for each worker.	1/9
3. Number of offices with computer systems that determine eligibility and calculate benefits.	5/9
4. Number of offices that have any connectivity with other agencies.	5/9
Management Reporting	
Number of offices that produce management reports designed to assist workers and administrators to do their jobs more efficiently or effectively.	0/9

SOURCE: Richman and Struyk (2000), Table 2.

- No procedures manual exists for any program.
- Formal training is extremely limited; the great majority of training is on-the-job; at most offices this is the only training.

While all offices are computerized to some degree, no office uses its computers to produce reports that provide information to improve office planning and efficiency.

On the other hand, all offices do have standardized procedures for verification of an applicant's income and other conditions of program eligibility.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The literature on program implementation identifies several factors that are associated with successful program operations. But there are typically multiple viewpoints on how each factor actually may effect implementation (O'Toole 1986; Pindus et al. 2000). Below we provide a quick overview of the more prominent factors.

- *Characteristics of the policy being implemented.* The greater the clarity and specificity of goals and procedures, the greater the likelihood of the program achieving its objectives. Still, some flexibility is necessary to deal with unforeseen obstacles and to adapt to changing environments.
- *Availability of resources.* Did program implementers have sufficient resources with which to work? While the literature often refers to financial resources, other inputs can be important as well, e.g., adequate office space, copying services, and qualified staff.
- *Number of implementing actors.* It is often held that the more actors involved in implementing a program there are, the greater the chance that implementation will be retarded or be less successful if full implementation proceeds.[12] Multiple agents were involved in both pilot projects. Importantly, neither project had notable involvement with any regional (oblast) agencies.
- *Attitude of implementing personnel.* Another factor is the support for the innovation among the staff (i.e., are the changes being viewed as reasonable?).[13] Acceptance of new procedures depends implicitly on the establishment of new acceptable norms in the relevant policy community. Povan and Milward (1991) emphasize peer pressure and professionalism as powerful agents in establishing revised norms.[14]

12. This proposition was made famous by Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), but Bowen (1981) has demonstrated that this does not necessarily need to be the case.

13. Drawing on the new institutionalism in sociology, Nee (1998) argues that the efficiency of program administration depends critically on the extent to which staff agrees with the objectives and structure of a new or revised program, as well as on its formal rules and the operating rules of the administration organization. Nee (1992) has also demonstrated that remarkable flexibility and creativity in institutional structure and operations can emerge when the incentives are right. Also see Brinton and Nee (1998).

14. See Knight and Ensminger (1998) on the process by which new norms are formed.

- *Alignment of clients.* Responding to client concerns is essential, particularly among those favoring the "bottom-up" lessons from project implementation, where success is seen as depending on involvement of all stakeholders. Support can result from consultation with clients in the design stage or the willingness of agency staff to negotiate changes in procedures or even standards during implementation, if this is needed (e.g., Berman 1978, 1980).
- *Opportunity for learning among implementers.* Each of the pilots proceeded independently and there were no other agencies implementing similar initiatives. On the other hand, the local agencies had access to consultants experienced with these programs, and this probably was an efficient substitute for interaction with other implementers.
- *Past experience.* Previous experience with implementing similar programs may have a significant impact on implementing new programs, particularly if the earlier programs were successful and if the knowledge gained from previous experience has been institutionalized.
- *Local environment.* Factors external to the program, such as the local economy and characteristics of the target population, will likely influence client responses to the program, depending on the services being offered. Characteristics of the local economy may also affect implementing agencies' access to necessary resources. For example, in a jobs program, a client population with very limited skills combined with a depressed local economy make realization of job placements more difficult.

PILOT PROGRAMS

The two pilot initiatives were implemented in Arzamas and Perm. The initiatives emerged from discussions between program administrators in each city and consultants from the Urban Institute (Washington) and the Institute of Urban Economics (Russia) under the USAID-supported program. While the project team helped the city administrators formulate strategies for addressing local social policy goals, the specific pilot initiatives were chosen and implemented by the cities themselves. The project team provided continuing guidance on many issues, but all decisions were ultimately those of the city administration.

The introduction of a new means-tested benefit was at the core of both initiatives, although specific goals of the pilots differed. In Arzamas, the school lunch pilot replaced a citywide subsidy for school lunches with a means-tested benefit targeted at the poorest families with children. Prior to launch of the pilot, all children received free lunches, although the quality and variety of school lunches were considered poor by parents and administrators alike. Following the introduction of the pilot initiative, a price of four rubles was introduced citywide for school lunches.[15] Low-income families were eligible for a cash benefit covering all or part of the cost of the school lunches on the condition that the money be used for the purchase of school lunches. (See table 4.)

15. In summer 2001, the exchange rate was about $1(U.S.) = 30 rubles.

Table 4. Characteristics of Targeting Initiatives

	Perm: Jobs Pilot[a]	Arzamas: School Lunch Pilot
Objective	Provide support to those not traditionally receiving assistance and stimulate unemployed members of poor households to find work.	Improve quality of food provided to children and improve the targeting of expenditures on school lunches.
Target Population	Families with at least one child under 16, at least one able-bodied unemployed adult member, and family per capita income less than 65% of the subsistence level.	Families with at least one child in municipal schools and per capita income below the subsistence level.
Benefits	Quarterly cash benefit determined as follows: Per capita benefit equals 60% of subsistence minus the sum of monthly per capita unearned income plus 75% of monthly per capita earned income. The per capita benefit is multiplied by an equivalence scale to determine monthly benefit and then by three for quarterly benefit.	Monthly cash benefit determined as follows: (1) Families with monthly per capita incomes below 25% of subsistence: benefit equal to the total monthly cost of school meals per child. (2) Families with monthly per capita incomes from 25–50% of subsistence: benefit equal to half the total monthly cost of school meals per child.
Maximum Benefit	1,746 rubles per capita per quarter.	84 rubles per child per month.
Benefit Maintenance Requirements	The unemployed member of the family must participate in employment service requirements as determined by the caseworker.	Children receiving the benefit must purchase a lunch from the school each day.
Penalties for Noncompliance	Termination of the benefit and possible loss of other municipal social assistance for up to six months.	Recipient children continue to receive school lunches, but the benefit is paid directly to the municipal school.
Coverage	Maximum of 100 families at any given time in three contiguous micro-districts.	Citywide.[b] 14,000 in 17 municipal schools; in steady state there were about 4,700 children in 3,700 families receiving a benefit.
Implementing Agencies (level of government)	Municipal and District Departments of Social Protection (local); District Employment Center (federal).	Municipal Department of Education, including 17 schools (local); Municipal Social Protection Department including subsidiary agencies (local); neighborhood centers (local).
Dates of Implementation	November 2000–November 2001.	February 2001–indefinite.

a. Eligibility and benefit rules were altered during the evaluation period. The information in the table represents the later rules. The earlier rules had a higher eligibility limit, but provided a smaller benefit; the maximum benefit was 600 rubles per capita per quarter.
b. However, the new application was only implemented in offices of two districts of the city.

This move from a general subsidy to a targeted means-tested benefit was coupled with reforms to the process of procuring food for school lunches. Prior to the introduction of the initiative, food for school lunches was purchased from two municipal suppliers. Under the initiative, schools were granted authority to competitively procure food from a broader range of licensed providers. Since the introduction of prices for school meals raised revenues available for the purchase of food, such contracts have become attractive to private food companies. In order to ensure that the quality of the school meals is maintained or improved, local parents' committees are among those charged with monitoring food quality.

In Perm, the jobs pilot introduced in three micro-districts a new means-tested benefit available to low-income families with an able-bodied unemployed adult member. Participation, though, was limited to 100 families at any given time during the pilot. For eligible families that chose to participate, the benefit replaced a poorly targeted, semi-annual poverty benefit available to all low-income families citywide.[16] Unemployed members of participating families were required to meet employment-focused service requisites, such as job search or job training, in order to continue benefit receipt.

In addition to the introduction of a new means-tested benefit, both pilots involved considerable administrative reforms, many of which were similar across the two cities. Most notably, each city developed a new application for use with the new benefits, although in Arzamas, which implemented the school lunch benefit citywide, the new application was only introduced in 2 of the cities' 15 micro-districts.[17] These forms are considerably more detailed than applications for other municipal social assistance programs.

Along with a new application, the new benefits were offered through neighborhood offices in each city closer to the target population than other benefit offices. In Perm, the jobs pilot benefit was offered through a new single benefit office located within the three micro-districts where the program was introduced, instead of through the more distant districtwide office. In Arzamas, one office in each of two micro-districts was staffed to accept the new applications for the school lunch benefit, instead of requiring residents in these districts to visit the central offices of the agency administering the benefit.

Both pilot initiatives also involved new forms of cooperation among social protection agencies. In Arzamas, the municipal Department of Social Protection and the agency under its authority that administers the school lunch benefit were required to develop new methods of coordination with the Department of Education and the 17 municipal schools providing the school lunches. It was also necessary for the agency administering the school lunch benefit to work with a separate agency administering child allowances, so that the former could use the database of child allowance recipients in targeting dissemination efforts and verifying applicant information. In Perm, the employment service

16. Although the citywide benefit was limited to families with incomes below the subsistence minimum, each family was provided with the same cash benefit, regardless of the depth of poverty or the size of the family.

17. In Arzamas, this application was designed so that it could eventually be used throughout the city for determining eligibility and benefits for all other social assistance programs available in the city.

requirements of the jobs benefit required development of links between the jobs pilot benefit office and the federally administered local employment center (table 4).

ASSESSMENT METHOD

The assessments were designed to measure if the innovations or new programs were successfully implemented. The assessments had the same general structure. Program activities common to both initiatives were examined as they developed during the implementation stage to determine if the program was operating in accordance with the attainment of program goals and to discover where implementation challenges occurred.[18] Main program activities examined included the development of program documentation, implementation preparations, benefit office operations, application data collection and verification procedures, benefit delivery, and monitoring procedures. Broader issues were examined as well, including the attitude of implementing personnel and clients, the attainment of program outcomes, inter-agency coordination efforts, and program sustainability.

We also defined a series of indicators based on good administrative practices in the West to determine if each "program" was successfully implemented. The most informative indictors are listed in table 6. To the extent possible, we tried to relate success to the underlying factors discussed in the preceding section.

The plan of assessment in each city was developed in cooperation with local administrators. Since the assessment plans were developed prior to implementation, program clients were not consulted. Information was collected from multiple sources. Prior to implementation, the project team was frequently present in each city and in close contact with city officials so there was a good deal of on-site observation during the implementation process. In addition, team members regularly reviewed program regulations. Once the implementation process began, team members collected data during the first four months of program implementation.[19] Data collection efforts included:

- *Review of program statistics* developed by project teams and local administrators and provided regularly by implementing program personnel;
- *Review of key policy documents*, including policy regulations, personnel instructions, and other relevant documents;
- *Interviews with key personnel* in all implementing agencies, including front-line benefit caseworkers;
- *Review of client case records* (54 in Perm, 51 in Arzamas), including application forms and verification documents; and

18. The methods used follow those outlines in Hatry, Winnie, and Fisk (1981), Hummel (1994), Kumar (1989), Newcomer (1996), and Miles and Huberman (1984).

19. The first four months of the jobs pilot covered mid-November 2000 to mid-March 2001. The first four months of the school lunch pilot covered the period of February to May 2001.

- *Several group interviews with beneficiaries* (10 clients in Perm, 28 in Arzamas) and, in the case of school lunch pilot, parents not eligible for benefits (19).

FINDINGS

The results of our analysis are presented in three parts.[20] We begin with an overview of the degree to which the programs succeeded in accomplishing their goals and the likelihood that they are sustainable. Second, we summarize how well a variety of essential administrative tasks were executed. Third, to help understand the reasons for the outcomes, we examine the outcomes with respect to the "implementation factors" discussed above.

Overall Implementation

Overall, both pilot initiatives appear to be working toward the intended goals, particularly the school lunch pilot, slightly less so with the jobs pilot. A summary of achievements and limitations is provided in table 5. In Arzamas, parents are now paying for school lunches, food quality has improved, school and program administrators note lower food prices due to the introduction of competition among food providers, and the lowest-income households are receiving the targeted school lunch benefit. In Perm, unemployed-parent households are receiving the targeted benefits, but the link between benefits and employment requirements is somewhat fragile—a majority of clients who have sought the employment services have been rewarded with jobs; but the enforcement mechanism for the employment search requirement is vague. Both initiatives are characterized by the participation of many enthusiastic personnel; reliance is on flexible, informal arrangements and previous experience rather than detailed standardized procedures; and there is considerable involvement by many implementing agencies.

Outcomes and Client Satisfaction. Within the short time frame of this evaluation, initial results of both targeting initiatives are remarkably positive. In Arzamas, the introduction of prices to school meals, competition among providers of food, and the means-tested benefit have dramatically limited the portion of school meals subsidized by municipal administration and targeted that subsidy to the poorest families. In the first four months of program implementation in Perm, 23 of the 38 unemployed program beneficiaries who sought employment services were successfully placed in jobs after receiving job search assistance or training coupled with job search assistance. However, 28 unemployed program beneficiaries did not seek the required unemployment services at all, but as of the end of the evaluation period, only 1 participant was in the process of being sanctioned.

Satisfaction with the pilot project among program beneficiaries was also positive. In Perm, clients of the jobs pilot particularly emphasized the importance of the cash benefit, not surprisingly, in supporting their income. In addition, though, these clients also

20. Greater detail on the findings is presented in Gallagher, Nikonova, and Sivaeva (2001a, b).

Table 5. Achievements and Limitations of Targeting Initiatives[a]

	Objectives	Initial Results
Jobs pilot (Perm)	1. Provide support to those not traditionally receiving assistance	1. Sixty-four households with working-age adults paid a quarterly benefit averaging about 690 rubles per quarter.[b]
	2. Stimulate unemployed members of poor households to find work	2. Sixty-six unemployed beneficiaries were referred to employment services. Of the 38 that participated in the employment services, three-fifths (23 clients) obtained employment during the evaluation period. Twenty-eight unemployed clients did not participate in employment services; they either had a "good excuse," were in the process of being sanctioned, or left the program (possibly due to obtaining employment on their own).
	3. Client satisfaction with pilot	3. High, among clients interviewed, particularly with treatment by front-line staff. Less satisfaction with employment services.
	4. Sustainability	4. Limited, due to high benefit and administrative costs.
School lunch pilot (Arzamas)	1. Improve quality of food provided to children	1. Beneficiary and non-beneficiary parents interviewed unanimously noted improvements in both quality and variety of school meals.
	2. Improve the targeting of expenditures on school lunches	2. New prices for school lunch cover the total food costs (but not administrative and preparation costs) of school lunches. By the end of the school year, 3,695 low-income households (including about one-third of all municipal school children) were receiving the targeted full or partial school lunch benefit.
	3. Client satisfaction with pilot	3. High, among clients interviewed, particularly with improvements in school lunches, convenience of the location and operating hours of the benefit offices, and efficiency of benefit office operations.
	4. Sustainability	4. Strong, since program-cost savings pay for the provision of the benefit.

a. Based on the first four months of operation of each program.
b. Not all benefits were paid during the evaluation period due to a delay caused by the municipal budget process.

stressed the importance of the psychological support and professional approach of the front-line caseworkers in helping them access other services and obtain employment. These clients favorably compared the treatment they received in the benefit office with experiences with workers in the employment center and other benefit programs. These clients were less satisfied with delays in the benefit payment that occurred during the

second half of the evaluation period; the size of the benefit payment, which many considered too small; and the complex and repetitious administrative procedures for determining eligibility.

In Arzamas, the vast majority of parents of children in municipal schools who were interviewed responded neutrally or favorably to the pilot initiative overall. Very few thought that the changes were negative overall, despite the fact that those with per capita incomes above 50 percent of the subsistence minimum had to start paying for their children's school meals. This may be due to the fact that the parents who were interviewed unanimously agreed that lunch quality had improved following the introduction of the pilot and that the price was not too high. However, it was clear from those interviewed that the quality of food varied from school to school.

Not surprisingly, among those parents interviewed who received the school lunch benefit, responses were even more positive. In addition, the vast majority of these parents considered applying for the school lunch benefit a generally positive experience. They expressed positive and even very positive attitudes to both the new rules of the application process and the creation of neighborhood benefit offices. Respondents favorably noted the treatment they received from the benefit workers, the convenience of the benefit offices, the speed of the application process, and the convenience of the operating hours of the benefit offices. Most compared the operations of the neighborhood benefit offices very favorably with other benefit offices.

Sustainability. Program sustainability is questionable in Perm, but much less so in Arzamas. In Perm, the jobs pilot was designed much more as a pilot, i.e., a program for testing new ideas in social assistance rather than an ongoing reform. As such, it is not well integrated with the rest of the social benefit system. This has had some positive results; for example, the pilot program office is easier for recipients to access than the more centrally located offices, and clients appear to have better interactions with pilot caseworkers. But the program stands apart from the rest of the system, somewhat undermining support for its operations. In addition, program administrators consider the benefit payments to be high, given current budget constraints, and its client-to-caseworker ratio to be too costly. In fact, few administrators initially thought about sustainability or envisioned the program expanding beyond the initial pilot.

In contrast, sustainability in Arzamas was considered from the beginning, and there are already plans to expand school lunch pilot–type reforms to include other food subsidies. The cost savings noted by program administrators of the targeting pilot have been the major impetus for expansion of the targeting pilot, although the positive reactions of client and nonclient parents alike have also encouraged expansion.

Quality of Administration

This section reviews the way the principal tasks, common to both pilots, involved in launching and operating the targeted benefits were handled. The implicit standard employed in making these judgments is that of good administrative practices in the West.

The left-hand column of table 6 lists a key set of administrative tasks considered and the cells record a summary judgment for each. Given space limitations, we can only highlight a few points.

Start-up Phase. Implementing agencies of both pilots made numerous preparations for the launch of their programs in a short amount of time. Program launch in both cities occurred within a month of the passage of program regulations, although in both cities, preparations for the program preceded the passage of program regulations by several months.

Program outreach activities are particularly noteworthy. Both cities used a variety of methods to inform potential beneficiaries about the program, including public meetings; TV, radio, and newspaper advertisements; and volunteers to spread information about the program. In Arzamas, invitations for the targeting pilot were sent to families that were receiving child allowance benefits. In both cities, clients who were interviewed thought they had a good understanding of the program from the outreach materials and multiple sources were cited as the source of information. The effectiveness of outreach efforts in Arzamas is suggested by the fact that less than 5 percent of program applicants in the districts with the new district benefit centers went to the central benefit office to apply for the new program, despite the fact that this was the first time such benefits were offered through the district benefit offices.

In addition to disseminating information about the new benefit programs, implementing agencies in both cities took a number of other steps to prepare staff and benefit offices and to set procedures for dealing with clients. Both cities developed new applications for the pilot program that were considerably more detailed than applications for other municipal benefit programs. Both cities also provided training to staff on the new pilot programs, although training in Arzamas was considerably more extensive than in Perm. Offices were also prepared for both pilot initiatives. Nevertheless, in Perm, equipment necessary for the completion of benefit workers' tasks was conspicuously lacking, particularly computers and a photocopier.

The most severe weakness of the start-up phase was program documentation. The program regulations for both pilots lacked specific, concrete policies for dealing with the wide range of programs activities, such as benefit caseworker procedures and client monitoring. Despite this, few additional documents were created to set specific rules or to standardize procedures. Although applications were created for both pilots, program manuals never were. In Arzamas, instructional guidelines for the application were created for the social workers, but these did not address the wide range of issues that social workers would confront. In both Perm and Arzamas, the social workers pointed to the program regulations as the main source of policy guidance, along with verbal communication with their supervisors.

Ongoing Operations. The execution of the ongoing operations of the pilot initiatives demonstrates some significant strengths. In both cities, procedures adopted for interacting with and moving clients through all stages of applying for, receiving, and

Table 6. Assessment of Execution of Administrative Tasks

Administrative Task	Perm: Jobs Pilot	Arzamas: School Lunch Pilot
START-UP PHASE		
Program Outreach		
Multiple sources used?	Yes	Yes
Did clients hear about the program from multiple sources?	Yes	Yes
Did clients have opportunity to learn in person? E.g. at town meetings?	Yes	Yes
Is staff assessment of outreach positive?	Yes	Yes
Development of Program Documentation: Were the following developed?		
Application form	Yes	Yes
Application procedures manual	No	Yes
Benefit program manual	No	No
Formal documents for cooperation between agencies	No	No
Program Preparations		
Program procedures fully developed?	Moderate	Moderate
Offices fully equipped?	Weak	Strong
Staff trained?	Moderate	Strong
Program Launch		
Were there significant delays compared with targeted launch date?	No	No
ONGOING OPERATIONS		
Operating Procedures		
Operating procedures consistent with program goals?	Strong	Strong
Full and consistent set of client flow procedures (intake, eligibility, requirements, etc.)?	Moderate	Strong
Number of times clients had to visit office to qualify for benefits	3–4	1–2
Reliance on specific, standardized, written procedures?	Weak	Weak
Adapting to Challenges		
New problems addressed efficiently?	Strong	Strong
Program adaptation formalized in documents?	No	No
Staffing Issues		
Active supervision of program staff?	Strong	Strong
Staff assessment is positive?	Strong	Moderate
Did staff have sufficient time to deal with clients?	Strong	Moderate
Staff roles clearly defined?	Weak	Weak
Benefit Delivery		
Benefits were delivered?	Yes	Yes
Number of times an application was reviewed	3–4	3
Timely determination and delivery of benefits?	Weak	Moderate
Monitoring of Program Operations		
Overall assessment of oversight for compliance with rules, implementation of all aspects of benefit schemes, and program outcomes	Weak	Weak

(continued)

Table 6. Assessment of Execution of Administrative Tasks (continued)

Administrative Task	Perm: Jobs Pilot	Arzamas: School Lunch Pilot
ELIGIBILITY AND BENEFIT DETERMINATION (Case record review)		
Average number of data entry errors per application	15.4	9.0
Number of applications with calculation errors	3/54	0/51
Number of applications where data entry or calculation errors affected eligibility or benefit	0/54	0/51
Number of applications with complete set of accurate income verification documents	26/54	Unknown[a]

a. All records reviewed were of parents who were also receiving child allowances, and each case record included a printout of applicant income data from the child allowance database. However, program administrators note that much of the data in the child allowance database was out of date and did not accurately reflect current applicant income.

maintaining benefits were adequate. In addition, despite the lack of written procedures for directing client flow, front-line staff members were generally consistent in describing such procedures.

Implementing agencies of both initiatives also exhibited flexibility in adapting to implementation challenges. In Arzamas, for instance, benefit office hours were extended due to the high volume of initial applicants. In both cities, supervision of front-line staff was strong. Open communication between supervisors and front-line workers contributed to rapid feedback when front-line staff encountered problems, such as determining eligibility for a family with an unusual family composition not addressed in program regulations.

Finally, and most importantly, benefits were actually delivered. Considering the difficulties many municipalities have in providing social assistance payments, this is not an insignificant point. In Perm moreover, regulations allowed benefits to be paid in kind, but implementing agencies maintained cash payments.

Weaknesses were also apparent in ongoing operations. Although client-flow procedures were adequate and consistent among front-line staff in both cities, some aspects of these procedures appeared quite arbitrary and a drain on program administration, particularly in the jobs pilot. For instance, benefit caseworkers for the jobs pilot conducted home visits with all clients, although such visits were not required in any program documentation and the goal of the visits was vague.

The lack of program documentation extended into the other areas as well. Despite the flexible and efficient response to implementation challenges, when a new problem arose for social workers, the solution to the problem (often dictated by a higher level administrator) was not formalized into a policy document in either pilot. Nor did program documentation clearly define staff roles in either city. In Perm, where clients per caseworker ratios are low, the caseworker's role is almost without limit and includes rather considerable advocacy on behalf of clients for other municipal benefits.

Although benefits were delivered, as noted above, delays in providing them were common for the jobs pilot. The most significant delay in the delivery of the cash benefits lasted a few months. The delay was due to the failure of the local Duma to pass the budget

legislation in a timely way and did not reflect lack of support for funding or the absence of support from program administrators.

More common delays in benefit provision were due, in part, to the time required for cases to be reviewed three or four times by different individuals, including a commission of upper-level administrators, before benefits were authorized. In general, both pilots are characterized by excessive involvement of upper-level administrators in decisions on benefit provision. In Perm, a commission that met only every other week had to approve of each case before a benefit was provided. In Arzamas, the head of the municipal benefit agency had to sign off on each application before benefits were provided. The problem here is more than lost time and poor use of senior administrators' time—it is the *potential* for administrators to make benefit determinations *outside* of the standard rules being followed by intake workers. While no such actions were reported, the possibility is troubling.

Finally, program monitoring in both cities was generally poor. Nevertheless, in Perm, program statistics for the pilot were better than for most other municipal social assistance programs. Arzamas did not initially produce regular statistical monitoring reports on the program. Perm did produce weekly reports, but the data were limited.

Overall, ongoing operations were generally in line with the program goals of each program, even if the poor execution of specific tasks limited the effectiveness of the program administration.

Eligibility and Benefit Determination. For both the jobs pilot and the school lunch pilot, new applications were used to access the benefits. These applications were both more extensive than previous applications for assistance and more specific in the questions that were asked. Reception to the application by program staff was mixed but positive overall. Benefit caseworkers in both cities thought the applications were somewhat long and confusing, but both sets thought they were an improvement over older forms used for other benefit programs.

Reviews of benefit case records revealed generally high-quality work by the benefit caseworkers and supervisors in adopting the new applications. Most notably, none of the data entry errors or calculation errors by caseworkers affected the eligibility or benefit amount of any of the applicants sampled. In Arzamas, there were no calculation errors in the 51 cases reviewed, while in Perm, only three calculation mistakes were found in the 54 cases. Many of the data entry errors were also generally trivial or random, such as when some cells were incorrectly left blank to imply a "no" or when information was accidentally entered into the wrong cell.

Still, some of the data entry errors appeared systematic in both cities, but particularly in Perm. In both cities, for instance, income data were routinely entered or calculated in a manner different from that intended in the application form instructions.[21] Although

21. For instance, in Arzamas each income type for each individual should be entered for the entire three-month period prior to application. The total family income for this period is then divided by three to determine monthly income. However, caseworkers routinely entered the monthly average for each income type for each individual rather than determining the monthly average only for total family income.

this did not lead to calculation mistakes, it suggests that not all application procedures were adequately explained or understood, or that caseworkers have adapted the procedures for their convenience.

The most significant weakness of the case records was the lack of accurate and complete verification documentation. In Perm, less than half of the case records reviewed included a complete and accurate set of verification documents. There is no reason to believe that caseworkers did not review verification documents in determining eligibility. But because they did not have access to a photocopier, caseworkers were unable to include copies of verification documents for their files unless they were provided by the client. Consequently, further review of case record files was seriously hindered.

In Arzamas, verification documents were not collected at all in the cases reviewed, since each applicant was already receiving child allowances. In these cases, caseworkers referred to the child allowance database to verify income data submitted by the applicant, and according to some clients interviewed, for providing income data for the applicants to enter in the applications. However, according to program administrators much of the data was out-of-date, with many files not having been updated since 1999. Considering the short timeline between the launch of the school lunch benefit and the introduction of price increases for school lunches, a lenient initial verification process is understandable although not ideal. Later verification checks resulted in a substantial number of households being removed from the program.

Outcomes and Implementation Factors

Having reviewed the programs' outcomes and the manner in which many administrative tasks were executed, we now examine how program performance relates to the factors associated with successful program implementation listed earlier.

Characteristics of the Policy Being Implemented. The goals of the two initiatives were clearly defined. On the other hand, both initiatives were somewhat complex, requiring new regulations to provide the details in such areas as eligibility rules, benefit computation formulas, and methods for monitoring clients across multiple agencies. The school lunch pilot was particularly complex considering that the introduction of the means-tested benefit was coupled with reforms to food procurement and food quality monitoring.

Despite clear goals, specific strategies as embodied in the program regulations did not meet the challenge of the complexity of these initiatives. Thus the policies being implemented may be characterized as vague, although there is some variation in this respect. Where the municipalities had previous experience or could draw on relevant and high-quality federal government regulations, the policies drafted into regulations were often clear and well defined. For instance, since both cities, and Russian municipalities in general, had previous experience with means testing, rules defining the necessary verification documents that applicants were required to produce were sufficiently detailed. Similarly, both cities drew upon federal regulations for child allowances in stipulating household composition and income definition rules. Where the municipalities lacked

past experience, such as requiring beneficiaries to participate in employment services in Perm or introducing competition and participatory monitoring of school lunches in Arzamas, regulations were conspicuously lacking in details. In short, program performance was limited by their complexities, but only in the areas where the agencies were inexperienced.

Availability of Resources. Generally, social assistance program administration in Russian municipalities is underresourced. The pilots generally operated under similar straitened circumstances. However, not all was bleak. Physical infrastructure, i.e., municipal office space, was readily available in both cities for establishing neighborhood level benefit offices close to the target population. Although the office in Perm was too small to provide private interview spaces, the offices in Arzamas did permit private interviews in addition to being spacious and generally inviting.

In Perm, the jobs pilot enjoyed a much higher ratio of staff to clients than other programs. Four dedicated benefit workers were hired for the single benefit office and the program was limited to a total of 100 clients, practically ensuring the caseworkers would have time to monitor the employment progress of program recipients. In contrast, in the neighborhood benefit offices in Arzamas, staff-to-client ratios for the school lunch pilot were about 1 to 300, or about one-tenth those of the jobs pilot program. However, office equipment, particularly a computer and copy machine, were conspicuously lacking for the office in Perm. In Arzamas, each of the two neighborhood benefit offices included a networked computer provided by an international donor organization. Overall, although the lack of certain administrative resources decreased administrative efficiency, resources seem not to have materially affected outcomes.

Number of Implementing Actors. Multiple agencies were involved in both pilot projects, and some of those involved were not under the jurisdiction of the social protection committee, potentially making coordination difficult.

In Perm, implementing actors for the jobs pilot included the municipal and district social protection departments and the federally administered employment center, which is not under the jurisdiction of the municipal administration. The primary link among the various actors was between the neighborhood benefit office and the employment center, since unemployed beneficiaries were required to participate in services offered by the employment center. To a far lesser extent, the neighborhood benefit center also cooperated with other municipal agencies and NGOs to which program beneficiaries were often referred.

Cooperation among the various agencies involved in Perm relied heavily on a single administrator's prestige among the agencies, rather than on any kind of formal regulations. Overall, working relations were effective in most areas of program administration, although the reliance on personal relations rather than specific responsibilities between agencies hindered program implementation somewhat. In particular, deteriorating relations between the municipal and district social protection departments in Perm hindered program-monitoring efforts.

The number of implementing actors for the school lunch pilot was even greater, although there was no involvement with any higher level (oblast or federal) agencies. Since the pilot was implemented citywide, all 17 municipal schools were involved. In addition, the municipal Department of Education was a full participant because it oversees the provision of school lunches in the schools. Further, three separate agencies under the Department of Social Protection were involved: one administering the benefit, one supervising some benefit case workers in the neighborhood benefit offices, and one providing database support for verification of applicant data. In addition, the neighborhood benefit offices were under the authority of both the Social Protection Department and separate neighborhood commissions. Here, as in Perm, personal relations played a much greater role than formal agreements. Still, despite the multiplicity of agencies and the lack of formal agreements, working relations were positive and effective.

Attitude of Implementing Personnel. An important factor for the pilots is that the local agencies worked with staff from the Institute of Urban Economics (IUE) (Moscow) and the Urban Institute (Washington) on preparing and implementing the changes. IUE is a highly respected Russian think tank that is viewed as a consistent source of ideas for program reform and administrative improvements for local governments during the transition period; it can be thought of as a key player in defining cutting-edge professional practice.[22]

Still, the potential for negative attitudes among implementing personnel was present in both initiatives. This is particularly the case, as in these pilots, where multiple agencies are involved regardless of the policies being implemented. Different agencies typically have different goals and policy priorities; personnel of one agency may distrust staff from another working in similar policy areas. Required cooperation between such competing agencies may easily turn the attitudes of otherwise supportive personnel.

In terms of program policies, the potentially most controversial was the school lunch pilot, because it resulted in taking free lunches away from non-poor households. Indeed, some implementing personnel, especially those from the Education Department, were skeptical about program goals. Still, support among key staff in Arzamas was overwhelmingly positive. The clear trend in Russia is toward income testing in social assistance programs, as witnessed by the national housing allowance and child allowance programs. This may suggest why this initiative was less resented by the staff, particularly social protection staff, than one might have thought initially.

Support among staff may erode, though, if implementation is too demanding. Benefit caseworkers in Arzamas, although extremely positive toward the goals of the project, felt

22. The Urban Institute has worked with Russian municipalities since 1992 and has a strong reputation at the local level as well. Joshi and Moore (2000) have argued that one of the most important factors in NGOs implementing successful antipoverty programs is their credibility with other agencies involved in implementation as well as the local population. Credibility in this sense encompasses a clear record of reliability and predictability (pp. 29–30). One might argue that IUE's established record was similarly important in the context of implementation of these pilot projects.

somewhat overburdened during the initial weeks of the program due to a combination of the unanticipated overwhelming response—several thousand families applied in the initial weeks—and an unwieldy set of responsibilities placed on program caseworkers.

In Perm, the program goals of the jobs pilot were universally supported, particularly the emphasis on encouraging increased labor market participation among poor households. Benefit caseworkers, hired explicitly for the program, were particularly enthusiastic. However, some disagreements regarding program strategies and distrust among administrators of implementing agencies somewhat dampened program support.

Overall, the programs enjoyed solid support, despite reservations and lack of enthusiasm by some staff involved and significant challenges in program start-up.

Alignment of Clients. Between the two initiatives, the school lunch pilot had the greater potential for support among clients, as it required less from clients to maintain benefits. However, it also had the potential to alienate those parents not eligible for the benefit. Interestingly, the school lunch pilot received considerable support from both benefit clients and nonclient parents, primarily because, as revealed in the interviews, many nonclient parents did not consider the price increase to be excessive. Both sets of parents stated the desire for improved quality and variety in school lunches.

Although the Perm jobs pilot set job search or training requirements on unemployed beneficiaries, support for the goals of the project were high among those clients interviewed. Most stated the financial assistance provided by the program as the main reason they applied. In addition, many interviewed respondents expressed interest in the employment services, viewing them more as an opportunity than a requirement. But since a significant portion of the program recipients did not participate in the employment services, this view may not be representative of all participants.

Opportunity for Learning among Implementers. Since the programs under consideration are pilots limited to a single site each, the scope for implementers to exchange experiences is indeed limited. However, there was the opportunity for exchange between the implementers and the technical assistance team. Some team members had substantial experience with similar programs in other contexts and this experience was drawn upon as new problems were encountered. So in this sense, some opportunity was present for confronting challenges with help. For instance, team members worked with city administration of Perm to improve benefit calculation methodologies and the application form in Arzamas. The team had worked on similar tasks in implementing the housing allowance program with local administrations over the past few years.

Past Experience. Past experience with similar initiatives or similar program operations may be either positive or negative. Long-term experience with unchanging program operations may result in "bureaucratic inertia." Poor program operations, habitually practiced among implementing personnel, may be difficult to alter even when program support for change is high. Many of the practices of program administrators in the pilot cities are

inconsistent with strong management, as noted in the earlier section on local program administration. For instance, neither Perm nor Arzamas had a tradition of producing program manuals for local social assistance benefits.

On the other hand, both sites had previous experience in administering means-tested social assistance programs from the housing allowance program, local social benefits, and the recent switch to means testing for the child allowance program. Despite poor procedures in some areas of the programs, this past experience was a considerable asset to implementing the jobs pilot and school lunch pilot.

Program administrators were particularly challenged where they had little to no experience with a task. As noted in the discussion of the first factor, the lack of previous experience in some areas often resulted in poor specification of program strategies and procedures that hindered program implementation. In such program policy areas, the opportunity for learning from technical advisors played a considerably more important role. In short, past experience with programs with a similar philosophy and tasks positively affected implementation.

Local Environment. The success of the jobs pilot in Perm relied on the possibility that unemployed beneficiaries could find jobs. As with most municipalities in Russia, the economy of Perm has suffered considerable difficulties in recent years, but overall the local economy was slightly better than average in Russia. Local administrators also report that the district in which the program was implemented did not lack available jobs and that opportunities were available to the unemployed.

Other factors beyond the control of the implementing agencies in Perm, however, did hinder program administration. The delays in providing benefits to new and recertifying clients in the latter half of the evaluation period were due to the slow municipal budget process. Although the availability of funds for the program was never in question, funds could not be released until the entire budget process was completed. Despite this single problem, the overall environment for implementation was conducive for program success.

The local economy of Arzamas is more depressed than that of Perm, but implementation of the school lunch pilot was less reliant on the local economy than the jobs pilot was. Still, implementation of the introduction of prices for school lunches was calibrated to the ability of parents to pay, with the price set at four rubles per day. Additionally, the competitive procurement provisions of the pilot relied on the presence of qualified food providers. Overall, despite a poor economy, the local environment in Arzamas did not limit program success, due in part to consideration of the local environment by program policymakers and implementing personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the two pilot projects provide a (limited) basis for addressing the two questions that are the focus of this article. Our conclusions follow. The first question was, "How amenable is local social assistance program administration in Russia to improve-

ment?" Our response is quite positive, but the lack of exposure of municipalities to progressive policies and administration makes progress slow. The second question was, "Will reforms made to increase targeting or to improve the efficiency of program administration be well implemented when they are properly designed from a technical perspective in cooperation with the local agency?" Here, too, the answer is positive. Local staff for both programs, and clients in the case of school lunches, did not oppose a sharper targeting of assistance to lower-income households. This suggests considerable scope for further improving targeting in a large number of federal and local social assistance programs, both cash benefit and in-kind subsidies.

There were, nevertheless, considerable difficulties encountered in program implementation. Below we use the "implementation factors" discussion to identify where greater problems emerged.

A common thread running through the program implementation problems is the lack of specific detailed documentation setting clear standards for program operations. As noted, where the pilot municipalities had little prior experience, official regulations tended to be vague. This, in turn, led to the development of vague procedures, at a minimum, and, at worst, no procedures at all or ones that undermined program goals.

However, even where official regulations were thorough, further elaboration in operational instructions was missing. Clearly, timing was a factor. Had official regulations been issued sooner, implementers of the pilot initiatives, particularly in Perm, would have had a greater opportunity to develop further documentation. An even more important factor was the lack of previous experience in developing comprehensive program documentation and the general reliance on upper-level administrators to intervene in matters of policy and procedures.

One result of this is that the attitude of implementing personnel took on an even greater role as a factor in determining program success. The lack of clear and detailed regulations meant that the potential for successful program implementation would have been extremely limited without the positive attitude and *effort* of key personnel toward making the program work. The importance of implementing administrators exploiting the opportunities for learning new administrative techniques is also elevated by the lack of program documentation.

As in programs everywhere, outcomes were sensitive to the local environments—even the political and bureaucratic environments external to the implementing agencies—as the delay in benefit delivery in Perm shows. Conflict among implementing agencies, particularly when numerous agencies are involved in implementation, is also a common problem of implementation everywhere. The jobs and school lunch pilots were able to rely on generally positive coordination efforts. But some of the difficulties experienced in monitoring, a process that often relies heavily on the cooperation of multiple implementing agencies, hint at the possible problems that conflicts among implementing agencies could mean for municipalities.

In conclusion, the pilot programs succeeded in spite of some clear problems that are likely to emerge in the implementation of similar targeting reforms in Russian municipalities. Overcoming many of these obstacles can likely be accomplished in large part

through more thorough program documentation of operating rules and working relations—and a greater reliance on them in actual administration. To a considerable extent, this may be accomplished simply by thoughtfully building on the recent program experiences of municipalities in implementing means-tested housing and child allowances. However, it will also require opportunities for reform-oriented municipal social program administrators to learn from the administrative practices of countries with greater experience in efficiently administering these types of programs.

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