

Public Involvement in Civil Activity: Philanthropy in Russia¹

Irina Mersiyanova, Ph.D in Sociology, Director of Centre for Studies of Civil Society and Non-for-profit Sector, tango@online.nsk.su

Olga Kononykhina, Research Assistant of Centre for Studies of Civil Society and Non-for-profit Sector, <o.kononykhina@gmail.com>

The regeneration of charitable activities is progressing in the course of the Russian society modernization, which is a sign of the civil society formation in our country, and an important parameter of the increase in the Russian people's public activities.

Subjects of Charitable Work in Russia

The notion of “charitable activities”, against the complicated background of its interpretations in Russia, is distinguished by a variety of viewpoints. First, there is a definition approved by statutory regulations at the state level. In compliance with Federal Law No.135 On Charitable Activities and Charity Organizations, dated August 11, 1995, charity activities are defined as voluntary work done by citizens and legal entities with relation to disinterested transfer of property (either gratuitous or on favorable terms) to other citizens and legal entities, including transfer of funds, as well as related to disinterested execution of work, rendering of services and other support. Second, the substance of this notion is ambiguously interpreted in the scientific community and by experts having varied opinions. Third, the subject's part in charitable activities is attributed in the mass conscience to those people who are never included among philanthropists in the countries inheriting developed traditions of such activities (Fig. 1).

Thus, according to the survey [1], every second respondent to the poll thinks that, in the first place, *the Russian state shall be engaged in charitable activities* in our country through special government organizations. In addition, almost every fourth of the respondents stated that it is government organizations that are *actually engaged* in philanthropies most of all. Whereas the conception of charitable work, as rooted in foreign countries, is entirely different from ours in excluding government agencies from the number of the subjects of charitable work, inasmuch as such agencies, bodies and institutions produce public benefits not due to voluntary contributions but owing to compulsory tax deductions and provisions from natural persons and

¹ The results of the All-Russian representative public opinion polls held in 2007-2008 by the Centre for Studies of Civil Society and Non-for-profit Sector (CSCSNS) of the State University – Higher School of Economics (HSE) provide the empirical basis for this publication. See the List of Information Sources.

legal entities. In most cases, Russian scientists also admit the non-governmental nature of such a phenomenon as philanthropy².

The respondents choosing the state as a subject of charitable work do not differ in relevant characteristics from those who choose other agents acting as philanthropists. However, it should be noted that 43 to 69 per cent of the respondents believing that the state and government institutions shall be engaged in philanthropy also point out Russian charity funds, Russian state corporations and the rich as subjects of charitable activities (or as subjects who, first of all, should practice philanthropy). Bodies of power having authority and other resource potential shall be dedicated to philanthropy, in the opinion of the most respondents.

² For instance, in the opinion of R.G. Apresyan, Doctor of Philosophy, “philanthropy is an activity by means of which private resources are distributed, on a voluntary basis, by the proprietors for the purposes of giving assistance to people living in need (in the broad sense of the word), solution of social problems, as well as improving social living conditions. Financial and material resources, as well as people’s faculties, capacities and vital power may constitute private resources” (R.G. Apresyan. Philanthropy: Charity, or Social Engineering // Social Science and the Present, 1998, No.5, p.51).

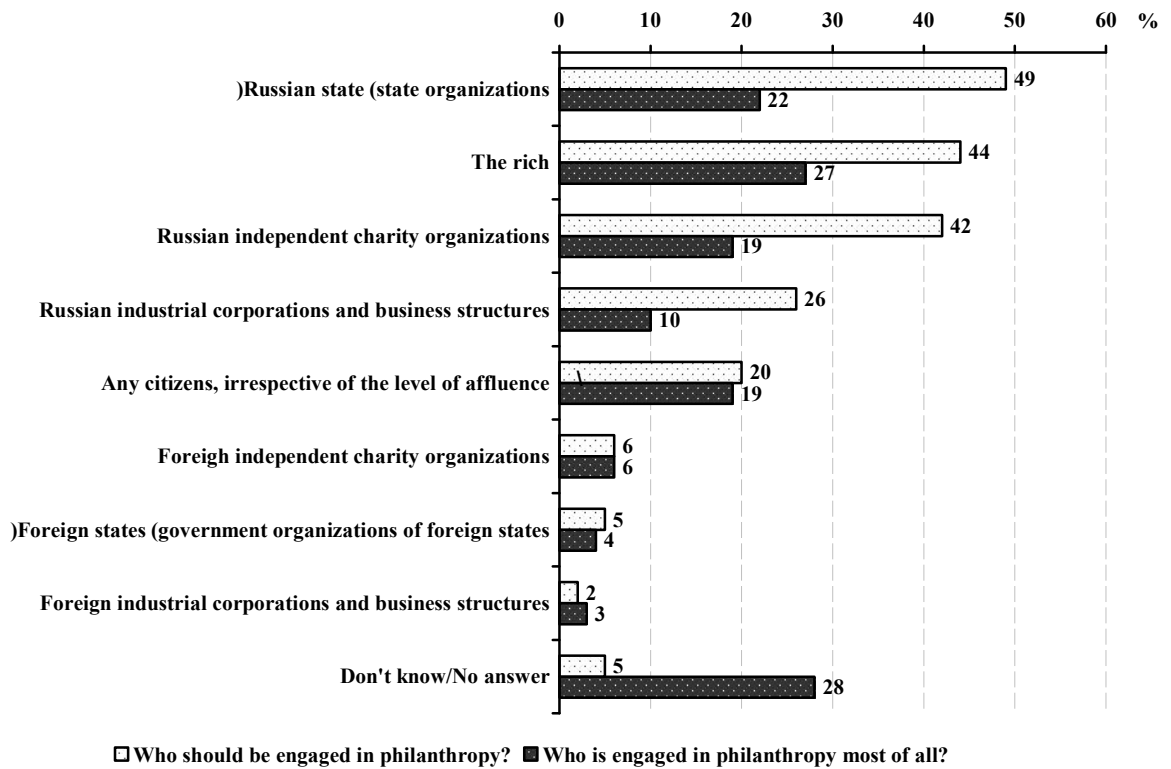


Fig.1: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "Who should be engaged in philanthropy, and who is engaged in philanthropy most of all?" (Per cent of respondents to a multiple choice question allowing no more than three response options)

28 per cent of the respondents gave no answer to the question *who is actually engaged in philanthropy in Russia*. Almost as many (27 %) advanced their opinion that the rich are mostly engaged in such activities now. Approximately equal is the amount of the respondents (22 % and 19 %, respectively) who informed that Russian state organizations and independent charity organizations practiced philanthropy. Real, as well as anticipated, assistance given by foreign organizations is estimated rather low by the population.

It is evident from Fig.1 that the statement of standard anticipations is exaggerated in comparison with the real state of things. Both various Russian organizations and the rich, in the respondents' opinion, do not practice philanthropy to their full capacity, and could do better. In the poll population opinion, only the category of "any citizens" is actually involved in philanthropy on such a scale as the society is reliant on them. However, such are the expectations of every fifth respondent. Apparently, the need for wide-scale charitable activities, immediate to such an extent that common people may have incentives to charitable work, is not characteristic of the Russian people as yet.

Charitable Work as Russian People's Daily Routine

Charitable activities can be performed by individual citizens in the form of voluntary gratuitous work and voluntary donations.

More than half of the respondents (54 %) stated that they had occasion to take the initiative in giving assistance and rendering support, performing deeds for the benefit of other people, and practicing philanthropy over the last year, while the people they aided were not their immediate relatives. More often engaged therein (about 60 % of the respondents) were middle-aged and higher-educated people who estimated their financial position as acceptable, as well as the inhabitants of residential areas with a population less than 100 thousand people. Engagement in charitable activities is related in a certain way to the type of the respondents' employment: 69 % of entrepreneurs and businessmen, 62 % of managers, and 61 % of those for whom there was no work at all declared their involvement. At the same time, the shares of such persons among unemployed pensioners and students amounted to mere 45 and 39 per cent, respectively.

41 per cent of the respondents did not have occasion to take the initiative in rendering assistance and support to anybody, performing deeds for the benefit of other people, and practicing philanthropy. In this case, it is not the question of one's family or near relations either. Such non-involvement was more often declared among individual socio-demographic groups by respondents of little education, that is, by people with average (secondary general education) or sub-average educational attainments, as well as by residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

In 2007, affirmative and negative answers to the question about the involvement in charitable activities amounted to 61 and 32 per cent, respectively (see Fig. 2, as well as [2] in the List of Information Sources).

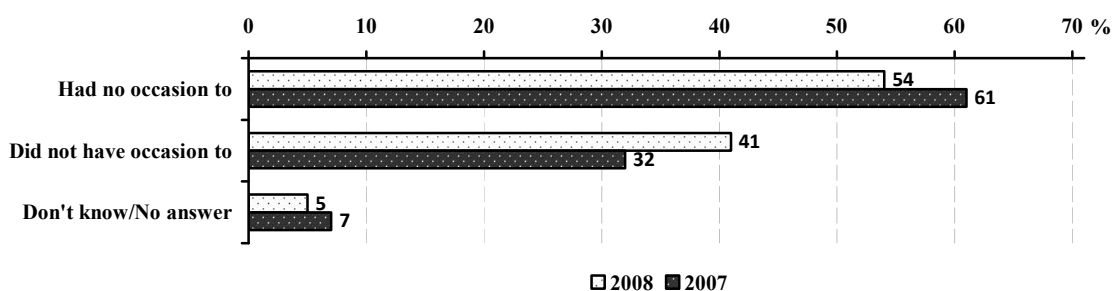


Fig. 2: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "If you leave your family and immediate relatives out, have you had occasion to take the initiative in rendering help and support to anybody, performing deeds for the benefit of other people, and doing any philanthropic work over the last year?" (Per cent of persons whose opinion was polled in 2007 and 2008)

In our opinion, the decrease in the indicator value for the Russian people's involvement in charitable activities does not signify a real decrease in their activity along the line of philanthropy as a daily routine work. It is directly confirmed by the data pertaining to the citizens' personal charitable work priorities. In this case, it is worth paying attention to the fact that the share of those involved in charitable activities as the citizens' daily social routine work is notably different by the regions of Russia, ranging between 40 and 77 per cent. The Republics of Bashkortostan and Mari El, the Kirov and Kaluga Regions, and the Jewish Autonomous Region are among the regions with the highest declared involvement. The Krasnodar Territory, and Kurgan and Chelyabinsk Regions are in the line of the regions with the citizens' lowest declared involvement in charitable activities [2]. The involvement of the Russian people in charitable work, as regionally cross-sectioned, is related to environmental characteristics, and, first of all, is dependent upon regional economic development, as well as on the quality of the human potential.

Personal Charity Activity Priorities

If we analyze answers to the question on what occasions in particular one had to perform gratuitous deeds for other people (neither one's family members nor near relations) within the last year, we can find out the priorities in personal charitable activities of the Russian population (Fig. 3). Thus, most of the respondents — 31 per cent of the population — pointed out that they had occasions to aid with goods and articles. 24 per cent of the respondents reported rendering their moral support, giving helpful wise counsel and aiding with money (by lending flat). Somewhat less — 23 per cent of the respondents — provided free beneficent aid with money. 20 per cent more of the respondents answered that they had occasions to aid with food, and provide with assistance at home, as well as just aid to do things requiring physical strength. 14 per cent of the population participated in subbotniks, activities and measures for environmental improvement at the place of residence; engaged in tree planting; repaired benches, children's playgrounds, and small architectural forms in the courtyards. 8 per cent of the Russian people and less were engaged in other kinds of charitable work. Figure 3 shows indicator values signifying the Russian people's involvement in individual kinds of daily charitable routine work, according to the 2008 polling data.

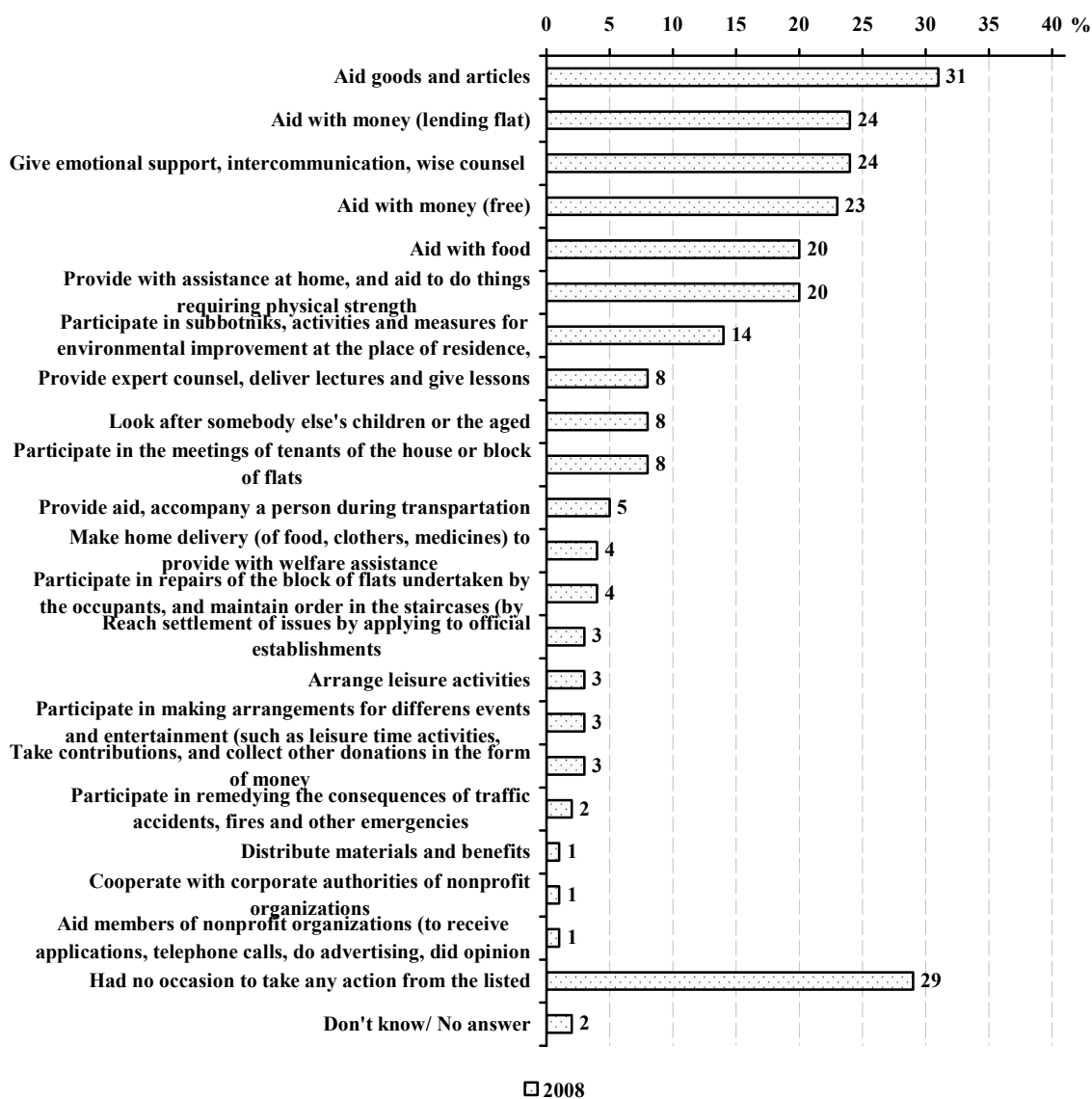


Fig. 3: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "Which of the following actions did you have occasion to take as free aid to other people (neither family members nor near relations) last year?" (Per cent of respondents to a multiple choice question allowing any number of response options, according to the 2007 and 2008 polling data)

At the same time, one third of the respondents (29 %) admitted that they had no occasion to take any action of the just listed within the last year. However, this quantity is much smaller than the number of those (41 %) who said they did not perform any charitable deeds on their own initiative (Fig. 4). In actual fact, as shown by the responses evaluation made for this population group, its members did participate in such a type of charitable activities as rendering free aid. Every eighth of those persons pointed out that they provided others with emotional support, while every ninth aided with money by lending flat, and every tenth came to other

persons' aid with goods. Moreover, falling within the same group were persons who participated in subbotniks, aided with money (free) and with necessary food, and helped to do other persons' chores. But, as realized by the respondents, such involvement did not constitute philanthropy. There can be several reasons accounting for it. It is possible that they did not attribute these activities to philanthropies, because charitable work, in their stable estimation, was something more substantial than just aiding people to perform ordinary everyday tasks in their home, or participating in the cleaning of their own courtyard areas. It is also quite possible that "everyday altruism", in their own evaluation of their own work, does not fall into the category of "one's own initiative".

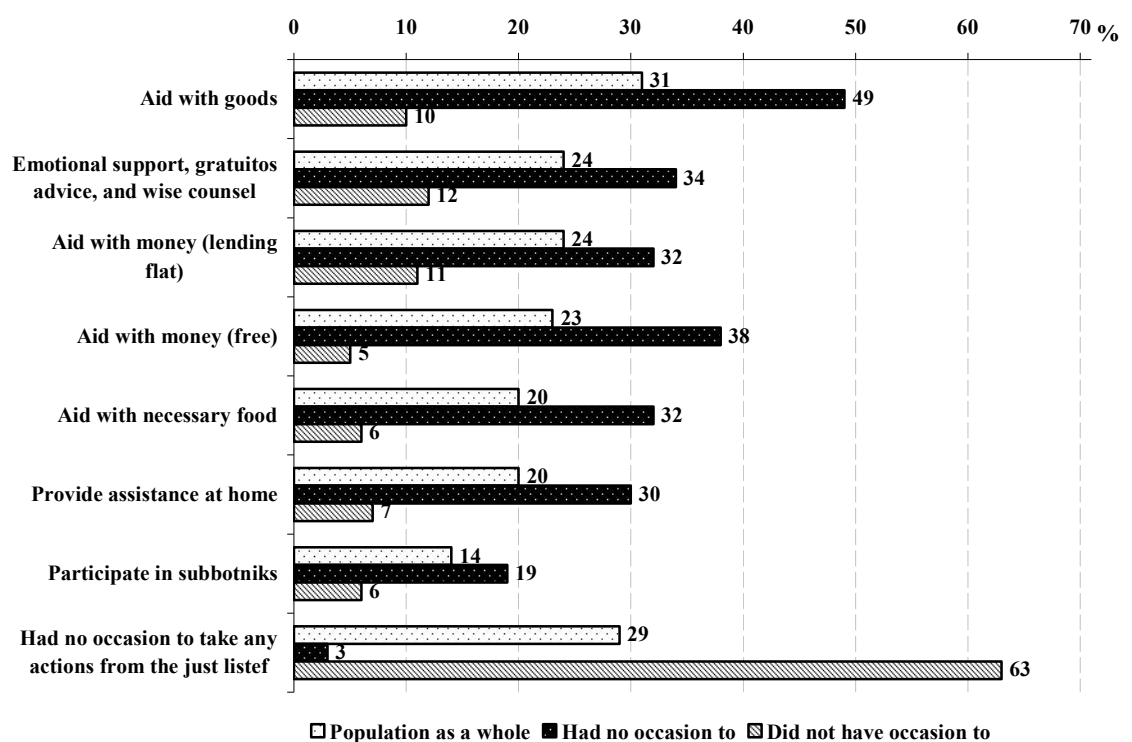


Fig. 4: Comparative analysis of charitable work done by the population as a whole and by population groups distinguished by charitable involvement versus noninvolvement (in per cent of the respondents for the population as a whole, and in per cent of those forming a respective population group for the involved ("had occasion to") and noninvolved ("did not have occasion to"))

Thus, it is evident that the number of the Russian people involved in everyday charitable practices is greater than the charitable involvement level declared by the persons whose opinion was polled.

Russian People's Involvement in Voluntary Work and Donations

Voluntary work is a way of self-expression and self-actualization of citizens taking individual and joint actions for the benefit of other people and the society as a whole, and is one of social work practices for charitable activities. According to the data from the survey, almost one third of the population (32 per cent of the respondents) iteratively worked, on a voluntary and non-repayable basis, for other persons' benefit (apart from members of their family and immediate relations) over the last two or three years, while 9 per cent of the Russian people were doing it on a regular basis, and 7 per cent only once.

The Russian people act alone most of all in the actualization of their voluntary activities. It is evident in the responses of 37 per cent of the persons whose opinion was polled. 7 per cent of the Russian people do it at their place of work. By 4 per cent of the respondents are involved in voluntary work through state and municipal institutions (except for social security agencies), as well as through organizations at their place of residence. It is significant that only 4 per cent of the Russian people are involved in voluntary work through residential organizations in the home area, while 21 per cent of the Russian people could report their monthly time expenditures on voluntary work at their place of residence, which is another proof that voluntary work is uncoordinated in our country. Regarding the rates of monthly time expenditure among them, 40 per cent indicated the mere 1 to 3 hours, and 25 per cent estimated it as 4 to 10 hours.

The share of the Russian people who personally aided necessitous strangers, including persons begging alms, with money over the last two or three years amounted to 11 per cent. Almost every third respondent (32%) rendered such pecuniary aid occasionally. Five more per cent of the respondents pointed out that they only once provided beneficent aid by charitable donations. At the same time, half of the Russian people (49 %) never rendered financial aid to necessitous strangers within the same period.

International comparisons can reveal the position of Russia among other countries, according to the ratio of the population involved in charitable donations. (See, [3]). Such comparisons were made with application of the methodology of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project, which permits to obtain comparable indices of the civil society development for the group totaling 39 countries at present. Included in this group are such countries as the Netherlands, Germany, Nepal, Mongolia, Honduras, and other countries differing both in their level of socio-economic development and in their cultural traditions. Russia comes 27th among these countries, as per the ratio of the population involved in charitable donations (see Fig. 5).

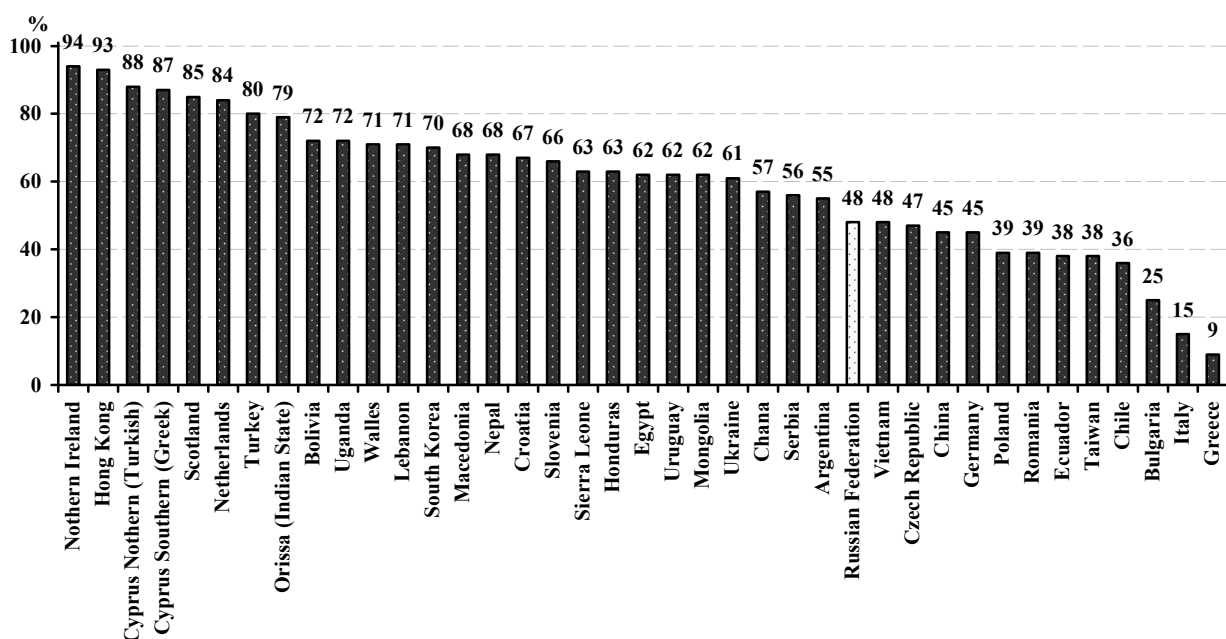


Fig. 5: Ratio of the population involved in donations (in per cent, according to the countries)

However, the volume of private donations is relatively small in our country yet. While every second respondent to the survey declared his/her involvement in donations, half of them could not even approximately estimate the amount of money they spent on their charitable donations and alms. Figure 6 shows the way donations are arranged according to their size, with reference to the respondents who pointed out their subject part in charitable donations and could estimate the amount of their expenses. It is characteristic that, in most cases, private donors contributed 500 rubles at the most. On the whole, 18 per cent of the Russian people spent no more than 500 rubles per year, with 6 per cent making expenses in the amount of more than 500 rubles, while others contributed nothing or could not estimate the donated sums. In our estimates, the money in circulation over the recent financial year in the sphere of private donations amounted to 7 billion rubles, but the most part of the money went through the channels of almsgiving.

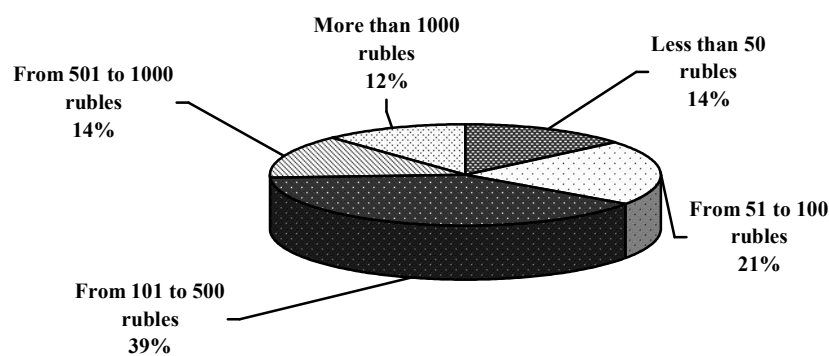


Fig. 6: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question,

” If you ever contributed to charity, and personally aided necessitous strangers, including persons begging alms, with money over the last year, please estimate the total amount of your donations, even if approximately” (per cent of the respondents who stated the amount of their donations)

By analyzing the respondents' answers to the question about the way they contributed to charity, either through some organizations or on their own, one may come to the conclusion that the population is still less relied on public or government organizations in this matter, as compared to the matter of voluntary work on a non-repayable basis. Most of the Russian people (37 %) preferred to pay moneyed assistance to the necessitous public by themselves. Three more per cent of the respondents rendered financial support at their place of work. Only a few (one per cent of the population) stated that some organization acted as an intermediary in their charitable activity.

It should be noted that only 6 per cent of the Russian people are engaged in voluntary work and contribute to charity through non-governmental structures, that is, through non-governmental non-profit organizations, including church institutions, as well as through charity funds, through organizations at their place of residence and work, and not by acting alone.

It is obvious that mass charitable institutions should be developed in Russia, alongside with institutions designed to support mass philanthropy. Providing favorable conditions for extending charitable activities on a national scale should have priority among other state authorities' efforts to promote the development of civil society institutions on the whole, and charitable activities and voluntary work in particular. Assistance is needed in the establishment of regional and municipal voluntary work centers, in promoting the organizations that provide for large-scale collection of donations, and in propagating their experience. Establishment of support institutions, including specialized auditors checking the organizations in need of beneficent help, for the purpose of promoting mass philanthropy is necessitated by the peculiarities of the institutional infrastructure in Russia. Therefore, the involvement of local communities'

foundations is expected to be increased in the promotion of mass philanthropy, as well as a greater effect of the territorial public self-administration tools in Russian municipal establishments is to be expected.

List of Empirical Information Sources

[1] Results of the All-Russian representative public opinion poll held by the CSCSNS in October 2008. The information was compiled by the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center. The sampled population amounted to 1,600 persons who were selected on the basis of a multi-stage stratified territorial random sampling. The survey frame was designed by I.V. Mersiyanova and L.I. Yakobson.

[2] Results of the mass surveys of general public opinion made by the Public Opinion Fund in 2007, using the GeoRating technique. The survey frame was designed by I.V. Mersiyanova and L.I. Yakobson, with the assistance of E.S. Petrenko. Polls were held in 68 subjects of the Russian Federation (RF), with a sampled population aged from eighteen and over. Sampling in each RF subject amounted to 500 respondents, with 34 thousand respondents on a broad scale of the whole of Russia. General sampling rules were applied in all 68 subjects of the Russian Federation. Three-stage stratified territorial sampling of households was used. The households were selected in three stages. Administrative regions were selected in the first stage, with steps to select residential areas and households as the second and third stages, respectively. Statistical uncertainty for each subject of the Russian Federation does not exceed 5.5 per cent. Statistical accuracy of the overall results for all 68 RF subjects does not go beyond 1 per cent.

[3] Results of the survey made by the CSCSNS (in 2008), using the secondary data review method for analyzing the data provided by 39 countries in the reports prepared by national research teams by the procedure of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index of the World Alliance for Citizen Participation.