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Not for Profit? Youth Voluntarism and the Restructuring of Social Assistance Programs in Provincial Russia

Abstract

In Russia, youth are the subjects of an emergent nationalist-oriented cultural project. Via Kremlin-sponsored political movements, as well as via local voluntarism promoting projects, they are courted by Russian political elites. Since 2004, the federal government has created an elaborate new infrastructure of grants and funding; simultaneously, it has put considerable sums into sponsoring the creation of new civil society organizations and movements. Youth have emerged as a particularly important site of these civil society interventions.

In this Working Paper, I report on the findings of a pilot research project that has two main goals: (1) to study the logic behind the promotion of youth voluntarism projects in Russia; and (2) to explore these projects ethnographically. It is based on library-based research and a pilot collaborative research project conducted with scholars and students associated with the Center for Gender Studies and Women's History at Tver' State University. In engaging youth, this research provides insight both into young peoples' understandings about voluntarism, politics and social responsibility, and into the new civil society organizations taking shape as international donors withdraw. In so doing, it provides valuable knowledge about emerging welfare regimes and the recreation of citizenship and state power in Russia.