



Recommendations of the Expert seminar “The Rights of the Indigenous Child: the Arctic Context”

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Gratitude: Charity Foundation of Support
of Indigenous Small-numbered Peoples of the North,
Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation



Association of Ethnocultural Centers
and Heritage Organizations “ECHO”

Commissioner for the Rights of the Child
in the Republic of Karelia

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Introduction

The expert seminar was held to collect information on the best practices, support measures, legal framework and challenges related to exercise of the rights of indigenous children in the Arctic zone and nearby northern territories of the Russian Federation. The relevance of this issue is underlined by the global study “The Rights of the Indigenous Child Under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” being prepared by the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is planned that conclusions and recommendations of the seminar will be of practical importance to improve policies at the international, national and local levels with respect to indigenous children.

The experts of the seminar were the ombudsmen for human rights, children’s rights and rights of small-numbered indigenous peoples of the constituent entities of Russia, representatives of authorities and non-governmental organizations from the Republic of Karelia, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Yugra, Nenets Autonomous Area, Krasnoyarsk Region, Murmansk Region, St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The participants of the seminar stated that the planning of high-quality support measures for indigenous children is, foremost, the formulation and formation of rules for the coexistence and sustainable development of the Arctic region in respect of the civilization heritage. The core value of the Arctic is people who live there and preserve the land, biological and cultural diversity, traditional knowledge, traditional crafts, occupations and economic activities for generations. At the same time, the climatic environment in the northern latitudes is extreme, and therefore, the attitude towards indigenous peoples of the Arctic shall be careful.

The experts emphasized that indigenous children are the most vulnerable group of people in the modern hierarchy of human rights, and the exercise of their right is the integral part of creating the environment for exercise of human rights that are comprehensive and indivisible. This approach in the Russian Arctic is guaranteed by the Constitution of the country, federal and regional legislation, and the international law. The fundamental international legal instrument on children’s rights is the Convention on the Rights of the Child that was ratified by Russia (USSR) in 1990. In 2014, Russia supported the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, which refers to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a minimum standard for the rights of indigenous peoples.

The participants stated that guarantees of the rights of small-numbered indigenous peoples at the legislative level are enshrined in regulatory legal acts, federal and regional laws, including in the field of priority access to biological resources and doing the traditional economic activities. At the same time, taking into account the number of small-numbered indigenous peoples, the specifics of their activity, settlement systems, methods of self-sufficiency and other features, the unity of law enforcement practice in all regions is not ensured, which is shown, for example, in organizing of traditional fishing. Experts agreed that the priority of the authorities shall be associated with ensuring the uniform standards of law enforcement in all regions with reference to the legislatively enshrined principle of the priority of the traditional use of natural resources by small-numbered indigenous peoples over other activities, including for industrial, sports and amateur purposes.

The participants of the seminar believe that national human rights institutions play a key role

in the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous children. Ombudsmen for human rights and Ombudsmen for the rights of the child operate in all regions. The institution of Ombudsmen for the rights of small-numbered indigenous peoples is also active in four regions. The active, independent and persistent position of the Ombudsmen not only facilitates a targeted support in specific cases, but also provides a basis to reform legislation and increase the support measures. It was stated that the role of the Ombudsman borders on the functions of a parliamentarian or mediator between indigenous peoples and government bodies, and an independent status will make it possible to raise the problems and perform a wide range of functions. For example, employees of the office of the Ombudsman for the Rights of Small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of Krasnoyarsk Region monitor the information on exercise of rights, work with citizens' appeals, and are members of various commissions, including commissions on juvenile affairs. The Ombudsman also works with orphan asylums, promotes the attracting orphans to their ethnic culture.

The experts carried out a detailed analysis of examples of the best practices in education, science, interregional and international cooperation

and exercise of the ethnocultural rights of children. Instead of obsolete and damaging to the mental health of boarding schools, the Russian regions develop the innovative approaches to keep children in touch with families, communities and traditional lifestyle, while providing quality educational services. For example, in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area — Yugra, they started the implementation of the project “Camping school and kindergarten named after Yuri Vella”, and in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) they develop a practice of so-called “nomadic schools”. The experts reviewed the activity of the Northern Forum that brings together the efforts of the Arctic regions to solve common problems. A common matter of concern and interest in the Arctic is the children's health and sustainable development of Arctic communities. One of the most important conditions to achieve the sustainable development is investing in science and sharing knowledge. That is why they realize several initiatives with the same name “The Children of the Arctic. Pre-school education”. There is a joint project of the Russian Federation and the Arctic Council among them. The purpose of this project is to create an effective model to provide the affordable quality general education for the people living in the Arctic territories.

The experts of the seminar paid a great attention to family values, intergenerational relationships in indigenous communities and the inextricable link between childhood, motherhood and fatherhood, the rights of children to be raised in family and the rights of parents. They emphasized a value of traditional knowledge for resilience of indigenous peoples in a globalizing world. According to the experts, the goal of the Arctic policy should be the welfare of children, their right for a happy childhood and creation of environment for their comfortable life in the Arctic.

Good practices

International scientific project “The Children of the Arctic: Local Knowledge and Sustainable Development”

The initiator of the project is the Northern Forum, an international organization that unites the Arctic zones, having the status of the observer in the Arctic Council. The aim of the project is to assess and study the successful sustainable development practices in respect of children in the Arctic with reference to adaptation of traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples to modern environment in cooperation with experts from Greenland, Yakutia (Russia) and Quebec (Canada). The project will open the way to study social and economic conditions and health of children in the Arctic, as well as the problems they face, including the climate change, industrial development, and globalization. The studies will also focus on methods of preservation and intergenerational transmission of native languages and traditional knowledge and skills, and will collect information on the best international practices in child's welfare and their implementation among children in the Arctic.

The project “Children of the Arctic. Pre-school Education”

The project is aimed at the implementation of innovative educational projects and methods that provide equal starting opportunities for pre-school indigenous children of the Arctic zone, search for new approaches and improve the situation in socialization of children having a nomadic lifestyle with their parents. Together with the countries of the Arctic zone, the implementation of the project will allow to implement projects aimed at improving of the level of preparation of children for school, obtaining high-quality school education, preserving and developing their native languages and cultures. They discuss a possible expansion of the project to school education. The project was initiated by the Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs of Russia and the Association of Small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation and supported by the Arctic Council. The Yamalo-Nenets, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Areas, Republic of Komi, Sakha Republic (Yakutia) and the Arkhangelsk region have signed a “Roadmap” for the project. The project includes the creation of an Arctic model of education and environment for normal physical, mental and cultural development of children living in the Arctic, creation of a high quality life, as well as the provision of a modern digital educational environment.

Camping school and kindergarten – the equal starting opportunities for children

The project is being implemented in Surgut region of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Yugra to create a modern model of education in places of traditional residence of indigenous peoples with reference to developmental features of children from among the small-numbered indigenous peoples of the North. The project combines the possibilities of language adaptation, socialization, career guidance, preservation of traditions and customs, education for parents who do not have a general education, preservation of a nomadic lifestyle and distance learning.

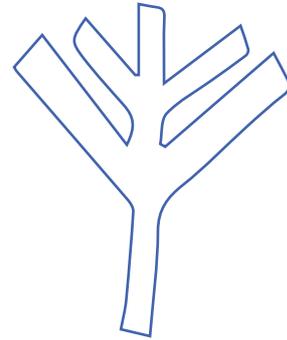
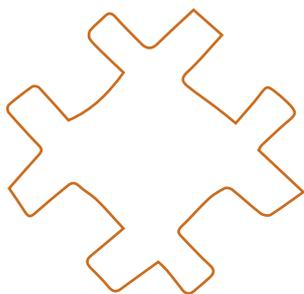


Nomadic school

The experience of creating nomadic schools is being implemented in several regions, including the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Yugra, the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Area and Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Its common goal is to create a system of affordable and high-quality education for the children amongst small-numbered indigenous of the North with differentiated education in native language, which allow to preserve the culture, national traditions, and native language. Nomadic schools make it possible to avoid boarding of children and adapt the methods of ethnopedagogy. Nomadic schools contribute to the education of citizens on example of the age-old traditions of peoples who preserve the nomadic lifestyle, are able to use modern information technologies and technical means in the North and create conditions to restore the continuity of generations, preserve and further develop the traditional lifestyle and ethnic culture of the people.

Tasks for nomadic schools:

- to introduce the modern technologies and distance learning into the educational process;
- to develop the intellectual abilities of children and create environment for specialized education;
- to teach children skills that are essential in the North;
- to develop the content of the subjects in view of ethnic culture of the peoples of the North;
- to create a new generation of textbooks.

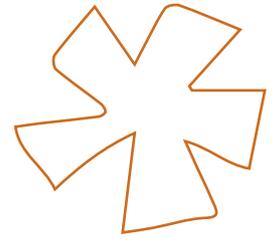


Language nest

The “language nest” method came to Karelia from New Zealand through Finland, where it has been successfully functioning for many years to increase the number of young speakers of the Inari-Saami language. The “House of the Karelian language” in the village of Vedlozero is the only place in Karelia where this method is fully applied under the name “Kielipezä”. The main principle of the “language nest” is to speak with children only in the language of the indigenous peoples. This method is well suited for languages being in a critical situation, when the native language is displaced from the surrounding reality by a dominant language and is no longer transmitted for generations as usual in the family. “Language nest” helps to create a language environment for pre-school children and help them to master the native language of the people in natural environment. The work of the nest resembles that of an ordinary kindergarten. A special feature is that the staff speaks with children in Karelian without translation into Russian. Adults help children to understand and master the language thanks to the special knowledge of working in the language nest. The group of children is small in size (nine children in this case), which allows to share enough time for individual work with each child.

Network of ethnocultural centers of Karelia

The Association of Ethnocultural Centers and Heritage Organizations “ECHO” unites public organizations, municipal cultural institutions and initiative people who are united by a common goal that is to preserve and popularize the cultural traditions of the peoples of the republic. Each ethnocultural center chooses a field and profile of work, and the Association provides methodological support, conducts training and studies, and also helps to find finance for projects of ethnocultural centers. One of the examples of effective work to preserve the ethnocultural heritage of the indigenous peoples of Karelia is the ethnocultural center “Elämä” (“Life”) in the Pryazha national municipal district.



Ethnocenter “Elämä” is implementing the project “Novelties from the provinces or the Karelian is trendy!” Its goal is to reduce the intergenerational gap in the Karelian linguistic environment and traditional Karelian culture by involving representatives of different generations, mainly young people, in ethnocultural activities to preserve and develop folk traditions and native language. In the settlements of the district, the ethnocenter conducts a family quiz game “The connection of generations – from experts to students”, master classes for Karelian cuisine, seminars for ethnic tutors on the method of language work with pre-school children, music festival “Fresh wind over Syamozero”, reading contest “Caramel” for pre-school children and school children, seminars for amateur translators.

Speaking club “Paginklub”

Speaking club or Paginklub “Vepsian Conversations” was created in Petrozavodsk in 2011 with the sole purpose to preserve the Vepsian language. The members of the club are people of different ages with different levels of the Vepsian language. The themes of the meetings are: reading poetry, watching films, listening to sound materials in the Vepsian language and about Vepsians, meetings with interesting people (Vepsian writers, poets, scientists, and teachers). Every week Paginklub holds meetings at the Center for Folk Art and Cultural Initiatives of the Republic of Karelia. Anyone can join the club via videoconference.

The International Arctic School

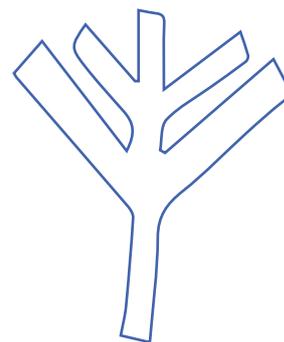
The International Arctic School was created in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) to provide children living in the Arctic zone of Russia with high-quality and competitive education of the international level. The school provides the study of foreign languages, teaching in English, learning the languages of small-numbered indigenous peoples. The educational program of the International Arctic School is focused on teaching and educating of talented children who have shown outstanding abilities and achieved the success in educational, research and creative activities. The content of the educational programs of the International Arctic School involves research and project activities aimed at studying the Arctic region, implementation of co-projects with the Arctic countries and the Arctic regions of Russia.



Recommendations

In lawmaking

1. To develop a set of measures of state support at the federal level for development of nomadic education, to develop new educational technologies and methods of distance learning in the Arctic environment. To establish the uniform terminology for educational methods in nomadic environment using the existing experience of the regions where this method is already applied under different names: “education on the way”/“nomadic education”/“family education”.
2. To analyze and further adjust the regulatory framework to provide indigenous families with affordable pre-school education.
3. To amend the qualification requirements for state and municipal officials to increase their motivation in learning languages, culture and traditions of indigenous peoples, as well as ethics of behavior in camps and communities. To hold trainings on interaction with indigenous peoples.
4. In the view of experience of the regions, to complete and approve the Federal Law “On Ethnological Expertise” (socio-cultural assessment) to minimize a negative impact of industry and infrastructure projects on the life of indigenous peoples, including children, as well as to include indigenous peoples in decision-making processes on issues that affect them.
5. For educational purposes, to standardize in legislation the practice of using tutors, language mentors, including parents and guardians without professional pedagogical education.
6. To control the use of increasing coefficients and incentive payments in the implementation of state programs for specialists who use the native languages of indigenous peoples, as well as students who study the ethnic languages and culture of indigenous peoples.
7. To adjust sanitary standards to minimize their impact on the traditional nutritional systems of indigenous peoples living on their traditional lands and engaging in traditional crafts.



In education

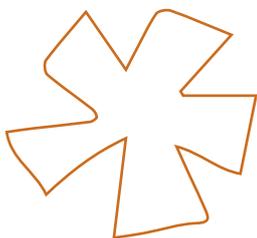
1. To develop and organize the training programs on psychophysiological and cultural properties of indigenous children for employees of the education system.
2. To take all possible measures to ensure the process of education of indigenous children without separation from the family and community. Communication between them is the most important basis for learning the native language, culture and attraction to the traditional lifestyle and economic activities of indigenous peoples. The experience of boarding schools can be replaced with alternative methods, such as “nomadic schools” (Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Area), as well as “camping school and kindergarten” (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Yugra). In cases where it is difficult to find an alternative to a boarding school, it is necessary to create favorable living environment for children on the principle of inpatient substitution, for example, guest or semi-stationary accommodation.
3. To take measures to bring all types of services closer to the places of traditional residence of indigenous peoples, including medical and educational services. The practice of optimization of healthcare and education organizations leads to the gradual dying of settlements.
4. To popularize a positive experience of applying methods of revitalizing of indigenous languages in pre-school children to increase the number of native speakers of languages among them. To conduct a consistent work on the formation of an unbreakable chain “kindergarten – school – university” with learning language or education in the native language available at all levels.
5. To regulate the legal framework for employment of parents with knowledge of their native language, but without higher pedagogical education. The use of parents as tutors, language mentors will ensure children to live in families and use a family education form. Teaching of mothers and other members of the community to teaching skills is possible in organizations of secondary vocational education.
6. To develop culturally appropriate educational approaches with reference to climatic and geographical realities of indigenous peoples, their traditional lifestyle, occupations and nutritional systems that require specific skills and competence. The adaptation of the education system will make it possible to study traditional crafts and trades that children need for a successful life in the Arctic.
7. To reform the work of commissions on juvenile affairs and protection of children’s rights in the transition from the use of sanctions measures to respond to disadvantages to identify needs and provide services to indigenous children and families with children. In areas of traditional residence of indigenous peoples, it is necessary to entrust the powers of the commissions with monitoring the observance, exercise and restoration of rights.
8. To develop ethnopedagogy of indigenous peoples, to invest in the systematic training of pedagogical personnel from among indigenous peoples. To make the system of targeted training of professional personnel available to indigenous peoples, including by developing a network of educational organizations nearby to the places of traditional residence of small-numbered indigenous peoples. To promote the return and employment of graduates in places of traditional residence of indigenous peoples.
9. To continue to improve the practice of incentive payments for students aged 10 to 17 who undergo a summer practical training in reindeer-breeding teams.
10. Together with scientific organizations, to conduct regular ethnosociological monitoring of the effectiveness of educational practices and to identify their impact on the ethnolinguistic community and environment.

In human rights

1. Develop positive work experience and support the functioning of the institution of Ombudsmen for rights of human, child and indigenous peoples by developing their interregional cooperation, as well as cooperation with indigenous peoples. Engaging the Ombudsmen in the international cooperation on issues for indigenous peoples will enable the exchange of best practices and better application of international standards in advocacy.
2. To expand the practice of implementing projects to improve legal literacy of the population, including such projects as the Arctic School of Law in the Nenets Autonomous Area.
3. To promote the development of legal literacy and civil consciousness among indigenous peoples through Russian educational and internship programs.

In healthcare and other public services

1. To initiate and develop the work of mobile medical teams to make medical services available for indigenous peoples in remote villages and reindeer herder's camps.
2. To provide free medical kits to persons having a traditional lifestyle in respect of children's needs.
3. To take measures to further reduce child and infant mortality in places of traditional residence of indigenous peoples.
4. To provide consulting for pregnant women and young indigenous mothers living in remote communities or in camps.



In ethnocultural rights

1. To consider the key role of traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples in development and implementation of different projects and programs related to the territories of indigenous peoples.
2. To continue work in formation of depositories of objects of intangible cultural heritage, its documentation and popularization among children. Examples of such projects are the Ethnocultural Bank of the Finno-Ugric Peoples in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area – Yugra and the international Arctic project “Digitization of the Arctic cultural heritage”.
3. To direct the non-governmental organizations to work with children to involve them in learning language through high-quality creativity, crafts and the use of information technologies.

Recommendations to the international community

1. To announce the International Year of Children and Youth.
2. To work actively in the Arctic regions within the framework of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.
3. To offer the Russian Federation to make the theme of the welfare of indigenous children one of the priorities of Russia's forthcoming chairmanship in the Arctic Council.
4. To continue to use the term “traditional knowledge” in the context of international activities in the Arctic, including the work of the Arctic Council.

Conclusion

The participants of the seminar consider it urgent to create conditions for simultaneous exercise of the rights of indigenous children in getting the education and rights to preserve the traditional lifestyle, language and culture through the promotion of adaptive forms of education without separating children from their traditional living environment.

The experts are also convinced that priority shall always be given to the welfare of the child to meet its best interests. If there is an opportunity for a child to stay in family or provide an opportunity for family residence, this must be ensured. At the same time, the state shall strive to bring all types of services closer to indigenous peoples by refusing the optimization policy. Today, the remoteness of services is critical for indigenous peoples, some services are not available or there are barriers to access them.

All related parties shall consider the individual and collective aspects of the rights of indigenous peoples: both the rights of a certain child and the rights of children as part of indigenous community. Everyone shall be guided by principle of non-discrimination, including non-discrimination in terms of income or quality of life in all areas: housing, education, medicine. Indigenous children must receive their rights and must be proud of their ancestry and belonging to indigenous peoples, while being able to use the achievements of humanity, be educated, spiritually and physically healthy. All this will be possible only thanks to the consolidation of the efforts of the state, indigenous peoples and business.

When talking about the standards of child's welfare and its best interests, it is necessary to think about the system of objective criteria as so-called indicators of children's happiness. Compliance with these criteria will allow residents of the Arctic regions

not to strive for their children to leave the territory of the North. In order that children of indigenous peoples continue to associate themselves with the Arctic, it is necessary to resolve a set of issues, including issues of concern to all mankind – the impact of globalization, industrial development, migration, change of climate. Successful solution of these issues requires the effective interregional and international cooperation in the Arctic, as well as further scientific studies.

The state must guarantee the equal rights to children from all regions of the country, including the Arctic zone. Children of the Arctic must be competitive not only in the Russian context, but also in the international context. This requires a whole range of efforts at the federal level to improve the education system. The education system shall be flexible and consider the innovations in ethnopedagogy and educational experience and practices of indigenous peoples themselves, as well as pedagogical practices based on modern digital technologies. Legislation shall not provoke the appearance of obstacles to the implementation of successful methods, including methods of reviving of the native languages. It is necessary to understand that the exclusion of indigenous children from their native language and culture, as well as the decline in the prestige of their native language, is a difficult life situation.

Experts are convinced that it is necessary to hear and listen to indigenous peoples, and respond immediately to their speech, and conscientiously inform them about all changes, programs and projects that may affect their interests.

Experts call for popularization of knowledge about indigenous peoples, including through the education system in classes of geography, history, culture, biology, fine arts, music, physical training, native language, literature and other subjects.

Experts emphasize that indigenous children have the right to develop and the right to preserve their traditional lifestyle and their identity, and these rights cannot and shall not be in conflict with each other. At the same time, any conflicts of rights and collisions shall be resolved in the best interests of the child.





Project “Indigenous Children: the Map of Opportunities”

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