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**RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTARY**  
**ORGANIZATIONS' ROLE IN MITIGATING THE**  
**CONSEQUENCES OF DISASTERS**

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**Abstract**

The article presents a retrospective analysis of the role of charitable, voluntary organizations in mitigating natural disasters in different historical periods (imperial, Soviet and modern). The authors attempt to take a comprehensive look at the evolution of the institutionalization of volunteerism in Russia. They analyse charitable activities involving assistance to victims in natural emergencies during the imperial, Soviet and modern periods. The research employed general scientific methods, document, secondary analysis, event analysis and case studies. In conclusion, the authors find that the significance of charitable, voluntary initiatives in mitigating natural disasters has varied in different historical periods. In the imperial period, the charity was a widespread phenomenon. Lacking a state welfare system, assistance went through the institutions and forms of social assistance and support inherent in this era, where public initiatives played a predominant role. There were large-scale public and private donations to help people affected by natural disasters and catastrophes. During the Soviet period, state institutions took the lead in emergency management and had full control over post-disaster recovery activities. In this period, charitable initiatives (public and private) assisting people affected by the disasters virtually ceased to exist. It is possible to describe the current stage in the development of the charitable, voluntary movement in Russia as a renaissance. There is a certain institutionalization of volunteerism, with the creation of public volunteer organizations involved in humanitarian work. Today, one in six Russians engages in voluntary work.

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*Keywords:* Charity, humanitarian aid, natural disaster, natural emergency, voluntary work



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## **1. Introduction**

Based on the ethical norms of Orthodoxy, charitable work in the Russian Empire was a widespread phenomenon, with Russians helping people in need without charge. The "golden age" of Russian charity falls in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Public forms of charity were closely intertwined with public and private initiatives to help people affected by natural disasters. The October Revolution led to the abandonment of many traditions, and the institution of public and private charity almost ceased to exist. State institutions took full responsibility for managing all social problems, including in times of natural emergencies. After the collapse of the USSR, there was a revival of charity and volunteerism. A certain institutionalization of voluntary work began with the development of new public and private practices in the 2000s.

## **2. Problem Statement**

There are virtually no comprehensive studies in the scientific literature related to analysing the activities of charitable, voluntary organizations in mitigating the consequences of natural disasters. The existing works are local and deal only with the experience of managing large-scale fires. However, the analysis of the evolution of the volunteer movement in Russia did not consider the specifics of its activities in mitigating the consequences of natural disasters.

## **3. Research Questions**

This article attempts to take a comprehensive look at the evolution of the institutionalization of volunteerism in Russia, related to participation in mitigating the consequences of natural disasters and catastrophes. It analyses charitable activities involving assistance to victims in natural emergencies during the different historical periods (imperial, Soviet, modern).

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the article is to trace, based on the analysed scientific sources, the evolution of the institutionalization of Russia's voluntary movement involved in the response to natural emergencies, supporting the results with empirical data from different historical periods (imperial, Soviet, modern).

## **5. Research Methods**

The research employed general scientific methods, document analysis (scientific papers, archival materials, documents of official state structures and departments, domestic and foreign non-profit organizations), secondary analysis (results of sociological surveys related to the research topic), event analysis and case studies (analysis of the social consequences of natural disasters).

## 6. Findings

The modern world historiography considers charity in the context of social policy development in general, while there are virtually no comprehensive studies on the history of charity in Russia. The exception is the work of Lindenmeyr (1996). The researchers defined the period of the second half of the 19th – early 20th century as the "golden age" of Russian charity. According to the periodization of Shchapov (1994), who first posed the problem of studying charity. At the stage from the middle of the 19th century to 1919, there is "a combination of state forms of charity with public and private ones". This thesis can be proved by the example of the activities of charitable organizations when dealing with the consequences of the devastating piled-up floods in the Azov Sea region during this period.

A hurricane with wind speeds exceeding 20–25 m/s started on the last day of the winter of 1914, this natural disaster covered almost the entire south of Russia, with the most affected entire eastern coast of the Sea of Azov (Pashchenko & Chuklina, 2019). In the first days after the hurricane, many of the communities affected by the disaster – Yeisk, Temryuk, the villages of Grivenskaya and Primorsko-Akhtarskaya – set up relief committees on a public basis to help the victims. A telegram from Lieutenant-General Babych to Count Vorontsov-Dashkov said: "Committees have been appointed to help the victims, ...local authorities and residents are providing the necessary initial assistance, most of it free of charge...". They usually consisted of the most respected and wealthy residents and primarily engaged in the collection and distribution of funds. The periodicals of that time provide the most comprehensive information on their activities, along with archival sources. Thus, the local newspaper "Priazovsky Krai" reported "On 10 March in the ataman's palace under the commanding ataman, cavalry general V.I. Pokotilo, there was the first meeting of the committee on the collection of voluntary donations for the hurricane victims..... It was decided to ask the Archbishop of Don and Novocherkassk Vladimir to organize the passing hat collection on March 25 in all the churches of the region, and also to arrange a charity evening and lottery-allegro to distribute all money among the hurricane victims" (Priazovsky Kray, 67). The following notes contained information about the heads of the funds and the main activities: "The relief committee was immediately organized in the village (Yasenskaya Kosa)..., with the local popular public figure, merchant Varvarov, elected as its chairman. ...The committee fed the victims, clothed them, found them shelter" (Priazovsky Kray, 70). In Yeisk, the city council elected a relief commission for flood and hurricane victims, chaired by Kiselev, a member of the city council. It collected 5.726 roubles 77 kopecks, including 5.000 roubles from the town council and 726 roubles 77 kopecks from private individuals.

In addition to the regional relief funds, there is information about "the need to organize committees in Moscow and the provinces to collect donations for the hurricane victims. These committees must enter into relations with the committees organized locally and having a public character".

At the same time there is information about donations: from representatives of the supreme organ of church-state administration in the Russian Church "The Synod decided to help the churches of the Don Army and Stavropol Province, which suffered from the hurricane"; from representatives of the merchants, factory owners and bankers "The Exchange Committee donated... 2.000 roubles to the Rostov Committee, 2.500 roubles to the Ekaterinodar Committee and 2,000 roubles to the Astrakhan

Committee"; from nobility "Moscow nobility has donated 1000 rubles in favour of victims from a hurricane"; from students "students held intense collections in favour of victims from a hurricane".

In addition, there are reports of the day of "ears of rye", "flower", "Russian flag holiday" – these are examples of charitable street festivals, which served as an example of joint work of officials and charitable organizations, embodied in the general passing hut collection of donations to provide concrete assistance to the needy and flood-stricken (in this case) various sections of the population.

The tsar's family also contributed to the relief efforts. "On March 9 Empress Alexandra Feodorovna deigned to establish a committee under her personal chairmanship to help victims of the storm of February 28th – March 1st in the south of Russia, having ordered to allocate to the disposition of the said committee 50 thousand rubles for the first time. By imperious command, the Ministry of Finance has ordered the release of 20.000 roubles to the appointed ataman of the Kuban troops for the granting of aid to the population of the Kuban area affected by the storm of 25th February in the name of His Majesty". Major-General D.Ya. Dashkov, sent to the disaster area, reported the results of his trip: "...I arrived by sea [to] Yeisk, where I handed over 1000 rubles to the assembled committee for general needs". Then he "came on a cross-icebreaker to Temryuk... at the meeting of the local committee [he] handed 2.000 rubles to the orphans, widows and most bereaved families and 500 rubles to the Grivna committee on behalf of Your Majesties". Major-General Dashkov gave another 3.000 roubles to the committee set up on 2 March to help the victims in the village of Primorsko-Akhtarskaya, the Yasenskaya Spit and Primorsko-Akhtarsk "Sadki" from sovereign Emperor Nicholas II Alexandrovich and sovereign Empress Alexandra Fedorovna.

The Russian Red Cross Society had a strong outreach to victims: established in May 1867 in St Petersburg as the "Society for the Care of the Sick and Wounded Soldiers", it was soon renamed the "Red Cross Society under the patronage of the Empress Maria Alexandrovna". In its early years, the society assisted to war victims, but as the number of donations grew steadily, it also included assistance to people affected by various disasters: fires, floods, epidemics, etc. The assistance of this organization was different: medical – "the committee [for assistance] organized several independent and joint trips with the Red Cross to Achuevskaya Spit and the neighbouring estuaries and flooded areas to help the survivors and find the bodies and property of the dead"; as well as financial: "The main administration of the Red Cross sent to help the hurricane victims: 2 thousand to Taganrog, and 1 thousand to Berdyansk". (Priazovskiy Kray, 64), " Khvostov said he had received 2.000 roubles from the Red Cross Headquarters. This money has a special purpose and can be used for the organization of feeding stations, for medical care and the distribution of clothing".

Thus, the negative consequences of the storm and floods of 1914 in the southern regions of the country were overcome without a state welfare system through the institutions and forms of social assistance and support characteristic of that era, where public initiatives played a predominant role.

After the October Revolution, the institution of public and private charity in Russia virtually ceased to exist. First, the Ministry and then the People's Commissariat for Public Charity (PCSC) pursued a policy of abolishing existing aid agencies, with funds and property reallocated to the needs determined by new state needs. The Bolsheviks began a campaign of a ruthless criticism of "bourgeois philanthropy". A characteristic feature of this period was the declaration of full responsibility by the state for resolving

all social problems. However, the most acute problems were addressed through public organizations: the Lenin Children's Fund (fighting mass child neglect) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (training nurses to provide first aid to victims), which existed on the basis of membership fees from the population and subsidies from the state. Voluntary donations were revived during the Great Patriotic War, but then this was reduced to compulsory deductions of membership fees from the wages of every working citizen.

An example of the activities of the disaster relief system in the USSR is the information on measures to mitigate the consequences of the 1969 piled-up flood on the eastern coast of the Azov Sea – from Peresyp to Primorsko-Akhtarsk – which was on a scale comparable to the tragedy of 1914.

To eliminate the consequences of the catastrophe, the forces of the district, regional administration and many other regions responded to the call for help: "The immediately created district commission headed by the chairman of the district executive committee.... together with representatives of district party soviet and economic organizations took urgent and immediate measures to mitigate the consequences of the disaster as soon as possible.....The regional organizations provided our district with transport means, building materials, machinery, specialists arrived to carry out restoration works" (Tamanetz, 1969a).

The mitigation of the consequences was handled by military personnel. This fact is supported by archive documents: in the Protocol of the Executive Committee of Temryuksky District Soviet No. 23 of December 17, 1969, it is noted that "the catering enterprises and the shop No. 1 by the department 'Meat and Fish' of Gorryubkoop, by order of the Chairman of the Extraordinary District Commission to control the disaster was providing free meals to the flood victims and the military personnel of military units, drawn to provide assistance."

The disaster was of an all-union character, as can be seen from Council of Ministers Decree No 904 of 27 November 1969 and Order No 2668-r of 4 December 1969 of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR "On measures to help the Krasnodar and Stavropol Territory and the Rostov Region to eliminate the consequences of the natural disaster". A look at these orders gives us information about the kinds of assistance to the population: "...citizens who suffered from a natural disaster received the opportunity to get a loan "for the construction of individual houses in the amount of up to 1.5 thousand rubles per family for a period of up to 12 years with repayment from the second year after receiving the loan; for major repairs of damaged houses in the amount of up to 500 rubles ...for a period of up to 5 years, with repayment from the second year after completion of repairs of the house". Also under Decree No 904 of the USSR Council of Ministers dated 27 November 1969 the deadline for repayment of loans received and not repaid by citizens who had suffered a natural disaster was extended by 5 years".

The krai party committee and the krai executive committee petitioned the governments of the republic and the country to allocate funds to provide material aid to the victims of the natural disaster.... as early as October 30, a government commission arrived in the district, which took effective measures to mitigate the consequences of the disaster... (Tamanets, 1969b, p. 62).

The reserve fund of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR was used to finance the rescue work, to provide one-off assistance to the population and to rebuild houses. All victims of the disaster had a right

to compensation. The decision of the Executive Committee of the Temryuk District Council of Workers' Deputies of 20 November 1969 is proof of this.

It is also noteworthy that ordinary citizens have also provided material assistance: "Having learned about the natural disaster that occurred in the Temryuksky district, we send 100 rubles to help the victims" – from a telegram from the spouses and Arabadzhievs from Vakhrushev city of Luhansk region" (The Arabadjievs to the victims ..., 1969), "... the surgical department of the central district hospital received two parcels from Kerch from pensioner Shokoreva ... Taisia Pavlovna sent cutoffs for a dress, clothes and other items" (Tsyrukunova, 1969, p. 25), from a telegram by Fedorova and Vishnya: "We pensioners ...decided to help people in trouble. Each of us has savings and allocates 50 roubles from them. Please pass these sums on to particularly needy children" (Fedorov & Vishnya, 1969, p. 42).

Although the tragedy was an all-union event, it did not have wide public resonance, due both to the sensitive nature of a large amount of data and to the comprehensive reconstruction work, which began in the first days after the tragedy and was entirely under the control of the state.

The decision of the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers of 30 July 1987 was to serve the purpose of protecting and rescuing the population in emergencies caused by natural disasters, major accidents and catastrophes. "On measures to fundamentally restructure the civil defence system", but it was not in force. Already in the middle of 1989, the USSR Supreme Council decided to establish the State Commission for Emergencies of the USSR Council of Ministers within the USSR Government, and on 15 December 1990 the State System for Prevention and Actions in Emergencies was established by Decree No. 1282 of the USSR Council of Ministers. As early as 17 July 1990, the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution "On the Establishment of the Russian Rescue Corps". Implementing this decree, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR established the Russian Rescue Corps by Decree No 606 of 27 December 1990 on the rights of the State Committee of the RSFSR. The new organization proved its worth in dealing with the aftermath of the 1995 piled-up flood in Dagestan, which flooded a large part of the Tersko-Kumskaya and Tersko-Sulakskaya lowlands (Sultanbekov, 2019). With the first signals of an emergency (12 March 1995), the Committee for Emergencies of the Republic of Dagestan notified the republic's leadership, EMERCOM, the ministries and departments of the republic about the unfolding situation. They put the search and rescue units of Dagestan's Emergencies Commission (EC) on alert. The State Council of the Republic of Dagestan established the Republican Disaster Response Headquarters, headed by the Chairman of the Government of the Republic of Dagestan, to coordinate the implementation of emergency measures. The district Civil Defense Headquarters, housed in the administration of the Kizlyar district under the leadership of Stepanov, Head of the Kizlyar district administration, worked around the clock. The local authorities developed an action plan to deal with the disaster. For example, the Kizlyar district administration organized the evacuation of residents from flooded villages, mainly from the villages of SRTS and Stary Terek. The air defence unit stationed near Krajnovka was a great help. It provided all the equipment with fuel and allocated three-axle Ural vehicles. In Krajnovka, the school and kindergarten were set up to receive evacuees from flooded and destroyed houses. There was a timely delivery of bread, food, medicines and medical care. Because of the economic blockade resulting from military operations in the neighbouring Chechen Republic and a large number of refugees (about 150,000), the leaders of the

Republic of Dagestan were forced to appeal to the Government of the Russian Federation for financial assistance to mitigate the consequences of the natural disaster. The Government of the Russian Federation (1995) headed by Chernomyrdin immediately decided:

... in 1995 to allocate 25 billion rubles from the reserve fund of the Government of the Russian Federation to the Government of the Republic of Dagestan to finance priority measures for mitigating the consequences of the flood of March 1995 (para. 4).

Thus, although there was an organization set up to deal with emergencies, it remained the prerogative of the state to help people affected by emergencies. Although it is during this period that volunteerism begins to revive, taking on new forms (Kozlov et al., 2019).

Further institutionalization of volunteerism in Russia dates from the mid-1990s. . The regulation of charitable activities, including those related to the mitigation of the consequences of natural disasters, in Russian legislation, began in 1995–1996. Volunteerism is governed by federal laws: Federal Law No. 7-FZ of 12 January 1996 "On Non-Profit Organizations" (Consultant, 1996), Federal Law No. 135-FZ of 11 August 1995 "On Charitable Activities and Volunteerism" (On Charitable Activities and Volunteerism, 1995). According to article 31.1 of Federal Act No. 7 of 12 January 1996 "On non-profit organizations", socially-oriented non-profit organizations should provide social services, support and protection for citizens; prepare people to overcome the consequences of natural, environmental, man-made or other disasters, prevent accidents; help victims of natural disasters, environmental, man-made or other disasters, social, ethnic or religious conflicts, refugees and forced (Consultant, 1996). Charity and voluntary activity is primarily "voluntary activity in the form of work and (or) services free of charge", including "preparation of the population to overcome the consequences of natural disasters, environmental, industrial or other disasters, to prevent accidents; assistance to victims of natural disasters, environmental, industrial or other disasters, social, national, religious conflicts, victims of repression, refugees and forced migrants".

"Volunteerism is unpaid work for the benefit of people with whom the volunteer is not bound by contract, kinship or friendship" (Tilly, 1994, p. 291). Volunteerism is a voluntary type of work for the benefit of someone in particular and/or to solve a short-term problem (Nevsky, 2018).

In today's Russia, state policy in the field of protecting the population and territories from emergencies, including those of a natural nature, is implemented by EMERCOM of Russia. State structures, including law enforcement agencies, and the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations as the focal point, have full control in an emergency, making the activities of voluntary organisations involved in the emergency response. It is subordinated, coordinated by the state authorities. Volunteerism is an important support resource for state structures in emergencies (Nevsky, 2018). Volunteering in emergencies forces volunteer organizations to bring their activities in line with the strict framework of the state (Nevsky, 2018).

According to research (Nevsky, 2018), overseas volunteerism in emergencies takes three main forms: humanitarian intervention in areas of natural and man-made disasters, work in voluntary fire brigades, and the search for missing persons. The beginning of the volunteer movement in Russia is

associated with the initiative of the Russian Ministry of Emergencies to form student rescue teams (the early 2000s). The impetus for the further development of the volunteer movement was the period (2010–2013) of mass mobilization of citizens to eliminate the consequences of emergencies in different regions of Russia (wildfires in Central Russia in 2010–2011, flooding in Krasnodar Krai in 2012 and Khabarovsk Krai in 2013).

We will look in more detail at the emergency that occurred in Krasnodar Krai in 2012, showing the rapid mobilization, self-organization of the Russian population into public voluntary organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected people. A catastrophic flooding event occurred in Krymsk (Krasnodar Region) on 6–7 July 2012. There was no warning to the city's residents of the impending disaster, which resulted in the deaths of 153 to 171 people, according to various sources. According to estimates by the regional authorities, the total economic damage amounted to about 20 billion roubles. A total of 872 people were rescued in the flooded area and 2.912 people were evacuated. More than 1.000 people sought medical assistance, about 29,000 lost their property completely, and more than 5500 partially lost their property.

Three days after the beginning of the tragedy, there were seven humanitarian aid points in the city, which received about 4.000 tonnes of humanitarian cargo. The coordination of activities and provision of information required the establishment of a public oversight committee, which, according to the organisers, should be "a link between the people and the authorities". The committee was initiated by the chairman of the Crimean District Council of Veterans. The community organization consisted of war veterans, representatives of TSGs, neighbourhood representatives and teachers. The committee was established to monitor the distribution of humanitarian aid, the cleaning of houses and farmsteads, the removal of rubbish, the reconstruction of roads and infrastructure and the payment of compensation to the victims. Information provision for citizens (legal support for document renewal and compensation, provision of up-to-date information about what is happening in the city) (Committee will take under control ...). Many regions in southern Russia (Dagestan, North Ossetia, Chechnya, the Rostov region, the Volgograd region, etc.) collected and sent humanitarian aid. Volunteers were in charge of distributing the humanitarian cargo to the temporary accommodation centres and providing hot meals. In Krymsk, there were seven humanitarian aid points deployed. The reconstruction work involved 1.158 volunteers, with a total of 2.584 in Krasnodar Krai (EMERCOM, 1969).

Thus, the 2010–2013 period saw further institutionalization of volunteer activities in the field of emergencies: there was a professional community of volunteer rescuers, consisting of support regional public organizations, their cooperation on a contractual basis with the structures of EMERCOM of Russia and the regional authorities, the creation of public organizations of volunteers who provide humanitarian assistance to the victims.

Since 2018, the legal framework defines permissible areas of activity for volunteers (volunteer rescuers) in emergencies (Nevsky, 2018). In addition, there are other important steps taken to support volunteerism at the national level: the establishment of the Association of Volunteer Centres in 2014 and the unified information portal "Volunteers of Russia" in December 2017." Russia has declared 2018 the Year of the Volunteer. In December 2018, the International Volunteer Forum was held in Moscow, attended by volunteers from 120 countries. In March 2019, Russia participated in the UN Regional Forum

on Sustainable Development in the ECE region, where participants discussed further ways to develop and support volunteering (Kozlov et al., 2019).

The revival of public and private volunteering initiatives is evidenced by the results of recent sociological surveys, which record an increase in Russians who participate in volunteering activities. Whereas in 2013 only 3 % of the Russian population participated in voluntary work, in 2019 this proportion had already risen to 16 %. According to the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, the total number of citizens involved in volunteering in 2019 was around 7.5 million. According to Rosstat, the average number of volunteers involved in non-profit (socially-oriented) organizations was over 4 million in 2019.

According to opinion polls, only 17 % of Russians regularly participate in charity. Most of the help is ad hoc. In most cases, the charity is run by people aged 25–34 with higher education – middle-level managers who earn more than 40.000 roubles a month. According to the 2019 survey, the proportion of people involved in charitable activities who donate between 100 roubles and 1,000 roubles is 36 %. Every fourth Russian spends between 1.000 and 5.000 roubles on charity (in 2018 – 18 %, in 2019 – 25 %). Charity donors willingly provide monetary aid to the population affected by natural disasters, environmental, man-made and other catastrophes, donate financial means for activities related to animal protection and environmental protection, and assist orphans and children with various illnesses (Gorsky, 2020).

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, the significance of charitable, voluntary initiatives in the field of natural emergencies varied from period to period in history. In the imperial period, the charity was a widespread phenomenon. Lacking a state welfare system, assistance went through the institutions and forms of social assistance and support inherent in this era, where public initiatives played a predominant role. There were large-scale public and private donations to help people affected by natural disasters and catastrophes. During the Soviet period, state institutions took the lead in emergency management and had full control over post-disaster recovery activities. In this period, charitable initiatives (public and private) assisting people affected by the disasters virtually ceased to exist. It is possible to describe the current stage in the development of the charitable, voluntary movement in Russia as a renaissance. There are certain institutionalization of volunteerism, formation of a professional community of volunteer rescuers cooperating with the Russian Ministry of Emergencies and regional authorities, creation of public volunteer organizations involved in humanitarian activities. However, state institutions retain the prerogative to coordinate and control assistance activities to victims of emergencies of natural genesis. The revival of public and private volunteering initiatives is evidenced by the results of sociological surveys, according to which one in six Russians today participates in volunteering activities.

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