



The World's Largest Country could Spur the World's Largest Revival

Russia is the world's largest country by land mass and is composed of 83 administrative districts. Although Russia's top natural resources of gas, oil, and timber offer potential for economic growth, the economy and infrastructure are trending downward. Despite the many people groups and great diversity in the country, the Russian population is on a steady decline.

With a deep history of communism and oppression, Russia still struggles today to overcome many existing challenges. While the evangelical church is slowly growing, the Orthodox church that survived communism continues to dominate Christian numbers. The government is enforcing laws that stifle religious freedoms, demanding that Christian activity be regulated by the state. This makes Christian living, worship, and missions efforts very difficult for Russian evangelicals. Russia is home to many unreached peoples, offering great opportunities in missions for believers working cross-culturally within the country. Much prayer and wisdom is needed to pursue mobilization and missions efforts during the current state of Russian tension and oppression.¹



NUMBER OF EVANGELICALS

Restricted Opportunity due to a History of Oppression

Low

Under Stalin's Soviet Russia, tensions were tight and religious freedom limited. The Soviet Union desired to eliminate all religion and implement a state atheism policy, coercing people to become atheists.² Today, the Russian government views independent religious activity as a threat to social and political stability and holds tightly to the Orthodox church that has withstood communism.³ In 2016, amendments to the law were passed that highly limited religious practices for Protestants and required all activities to be sanctioned by the state. This included missionary activity, evangelism, preaching, and holding house churches.⁴ Activities such as these outside of designated state-sanctioned buildings are now subject to be criminalized. While Christianity is the largest religion in Russia, Orthodox churches dominate that number, leaving few evangelical Christians. Since the fall of communism, there has been an increase in opportunity for evangelism and Christian resources. Freedom of religion is written into the Russian constitution, however, the reality of religious freedom is vastly different and much persecution exists still today.

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CULTURAL BRIDGES

Culturally Bridged with Islam **High**

With an average Median Cultural Distance of 19.6, Russia shares cultural similarities with several of the 30 UPG nations on our list. Russia's three closest cultural neighbors are: Bhutan (8.5), Kuwait (9), and Iraq (9.5). Interestingly, two out of these three countries are primarily Muslim and in the Middle East. There are more than 17 million Muslims living in Russia, resulting in its many cultural similarities with the Middle East. Many believe that Islam will become the largest religion in Russia by the end of the 21st century.⁵

The largest cultural similarity between Russia and these three countries is their high power distance. This means that these countries accept hierarchical structures as a natural part of society and do not expect all people to have equal power in relationships.

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STRATEGIC ACCESS

Great opportunity within the Country & Regional **Low**

Russia is home to 13,565,000 unreached people domestically and 19,957,000 unreached regionally. ⁵ As a region, Russia scores relatively low in Eastern Europe/Eurasia. Russia also shares borders with many Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, which is home to almost 14 million unreached people, and Mongolia, which is 98% unreached! Praise God for placing Russia in the middle of so many unreached Central Asian

countries! Pray that Russian evangelicals would utilize the blessing of sharing borders with these unreached countries.

In-country, there is a moderate number of unreached people, totalling 78 ethnic minorities. This offers great opportunity for indigenous Russian missions to take place. Roughly 20% of the entire population are non-Russians, and over 100 different languages are spoken within that 20%! There are many opportunities to take the gospel to the 17 million Muslims living in Russia, as well as other people groups such as Jewish groups and Ruska Roma. While many Russians need to be reached, there is also significant diversity in Russia's large cities who are more open to spiritual conversations than they might be in their home countries; however, Russian nationalism and conflict with minorities groups is increasing, increasing the barriers between these people groups.⁶

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS

High Restrictions that Threaten Evangelism **Low**

According to Pew Research, Russia has the third highest level of religious restrictions and hostilities. Following Indonesia (8.2) and Egypt (8), Russia has a score of 7.6. Russia has a long history of religious oppression and still faces high persecution and intolerance levels today. The Russian Orthodox church has survived communism and is generally complicit in the laws passed against other Christian denominations. Although the fall of the Iron Curtain certainly provided believers more opportunity, religious tensions formed during communism still linger and evangelicals are still discriminated against.

As of 2016, the Russian government now requires all religious activity to be sanctioned by the state and bans evangelism altogether.⁷

These religious restrictions have greatly affected missionary work in Russia and non-Orthodox church gatherings. The climate appears to be growing less suitable for foreign missions and a greater need for indigenous Russian missionaries. Much prayer is needed for Russian evangelicals as they share the gospel though discriminatory laws which seek to squelch religious freedom.

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PROSPERITY

Low Prosperity but Great Economic Potential **High**

With a ranking of 95, Russia scores fairly low on the Legatum Prosperity Index when compared to other Mobilization Index countries. Though Russia tends to rank higher in Education, its average score is low, due to its lower ranking in Personal Freedom, Social Capital, and Governance.

The future of Russia will likely present many challenges to mobilization efforts. Health issues are spiraling with an increase in HIV / AIDS, alcoholism, drug addiction, and abandoned children. Economic stability is also threatened while millions of people live in poverty. This economic situation causes many to feel hopeless and defeated, leading to family breakdown, high unemployment rates as well as high suicide rates. The corruption from oligarchical leaders also leaves little opportunity for Russian citizens but these hardships do not deplete the economic potential that Russia holds. As Russia is home to many natural resources such as gas, oil, and

timber, and is also the largest country by land mass, much economic potential is offered.⁸

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CURRENT SENDING

A Paradigm Shift in Giving **Low**

Currently, Russia sends 600 missionaries within the country and 35 abroad. One prayer goal of the Mobilization Index is to see 0.1%, or 1 in a 1,000, of a nation's evangelical church mobilized for missions. That means that with 635 missionaries, only 0.04% of the Russian Evangelical church has been mobilized.

Russia's generosity score is also very low, ranking at 2nd lowest of the mobilization index countries after Ukraine.⁹ This could play a major role in the challenges for mobilization and mission within the Russian Evangelical church. While some Christians may have a desire to go to the unreached, finances and views on sending may pose a large barrier. Growth towards an understanding of kingdom giving and biblical generosity would be an incredible paradigm shift for the Russian church.

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MOBILIZATION POTENTIAL

A Need to be Met by the Indigenous Peoples **Moderate**

If 0.1%, or 1 in a 1,000 evangelicals, were to be mobilized from Russia to go to the unreached, there would be 1,600 missionaries sent out from Russia. While this is no small number and a need for mobilization exists, the mobilization

potential is ranked relatively Low. The small number of evangelicals, combined with the low religious freedom and low view of sending, might mean greater difficulty in mobilizing the Russian church. Because of high religious tensions, there is a large need for the indigenous people to rise up in a missions movement rather than foreigners. There is strategic access to the many unreached peoples within Russia as well as many countries with incredible need that surround this large land mass.

Obstacles:

Low religious tolerance, a low generosity score, and a declining economic environment are some of the largest obstacles in mobilization for the Russian church that act as barriers on the mission field.

While evangelicalism is rising, there is also a significant need for increased missional vision and an ability to bridge gaping barriers after many imperialistic leaders and priests.

There is still much lingering tension and doubt in the church today as a result of many years of communist rule in Russia.

Opportunities:

One of the greatest mobilization opportunities has been the rise of the evangelical church in Russia. While growing slowly, the church is holding on to important gospel truths and desiring to see a greater vision for missions. Church planting with this vision is happening alongside a slow incline of evangelicalism.

Due to the high number of unreached people groups both within and surrounding Russian borders, the nation offers abundant opportunity for reaching the people of that region with the Gospel.

Prayer:

Pray for Russian leaders to rise up in the churches to lead in a biblical ways, rather than the typical authoritarian ways of pastors of the past.

Pray for indigenous churches and missionaries to rise up and serve cross-culturally within Russia. It is difficult for foreign missionaries to stay in Russia long term, but there could be incredible partnerships with short term trips working with indigenous Russian believers.¹⁰

Pray for the government, the economy, and the hopelessness that hovers over the country. Pray that God would open their eyes and give them new hope in Jesus Christ.

Praise:

Praise God for the fall of communism and for the doors that were opened to Evangelicals during this time!

Praise God for the Evangelicals that live in Russia and their ambition to plant more churches.

Endnotes

- 1 Operation World. DVD. 2010.
- 2 “Anti-Slavery Materials in the Library of Congress.” loc.gov/exhibits/archives/anti.html.
- 3 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Russia 2017. Accessed September 30, 2024. <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Russia.2017.pdf>
- 4 Morris, David. “Russia’s Ban on Evangelism: What’s the Effect?” Christianity Today, July 2016. christianitytoday.com/news/2016/july/russia-ban-evangelism-effect.html.
- 5 Operation World. DVD. 2010.
- 6 Idid
- 7 Morris, David. “Russia’s Ban on Evangelism: What’s the Effect?” Christianity Today, July 2016. christianitytoday.com/news/2016/july/russia-ban-evangelism-effect.html.
- 8 Operation World. DVD. 2010.
- 9 World Giving Index 2018. cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf_wgi2018_report_webnopw_2379a_261018.pdf.
- 10 Operation World. DVD. 2010.