

Outdated approaches fuelling TB in Russia, say NGOs

WHEN Veronika Sintsova was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 2009, she spent six months in hospital before being discharged and allowed to continue treatment as an outpatient.

Today clear of the disease, the 35-year-old former drug user from Kaliningrad says the fact that she beat tuberculosis (TB) is not because of, but rather in spite of, the way many people with tuberculosis are treated in Russia.

"I think it would be fair to say that Russian authorities don't take the problem of tuberculosis seriously," she told IPS.

Tuberculosis is a major health threat in Russia, where it is the leading infectious disease killer. The country has the highest rates of multi-drug resistant (MDR) and extremely drug resistant (XDR) tuberculosis in Europe and the third highest in the world. And those rates are climbing.

Tuberculosis exploded in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union as health care infrastructure crumbled, the country was thrown into economic crisis and crime and poverty soared, leading to overcrowded penal institutions.

It also has the 11th highest burden of all TB in the world, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), which just last week said that parts of the country were "disaster areas" for the disease.