

PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT REFORMS WITH THE HELP OF

LEGAL DATA BANKS IN MOSCOW LIBRARIES

The state policy on providing information about reforms mostly relies on official publications (such as "Rosyiskaya gazeta"), the internet resources of the Government of Russia (www.gov.ru), the Government of Moscow (www.mos.ru) and, above all, on municipal public libraries.

Since 1998, a special programme called "Modernisation of Moscow libraries" has been in operation in Moscow. The programme stipulated the foundation of 10 Internet centres - in each administrative district (okrug) as well as in the central city libraries. These centres constitute the basis for supplying legal information to the population. On the information market the most important providers of the legal data banks are such companies as "Garant" and "Consultant plus"; the Federal agency responsible for the government communication and information provides its product as per contracts to municipal city libraries.

At the same time a large-scale national programme "Creation of a legal information centres network on the basis of public libraries" was brought into action in all regions of the Russian Federation. This programme enjoys the support of the Ministry of Culture.

Retrieval systems of the legal data banks are really powerful: you can find documents according to the date when they were passed, their number, name, key words and so on. "Garant", "Consultant plus" and the Federal agency responsible for the government communication and information incessantly update their data banks, notify their users of new editions of various laws, decrees, orders and other standard acts. They also give information about outdated documents, supplement their data bases with complete texts of laws, codes, etc.

There are different groups of population among the users of the legal data bases in libraries, like house-wives trying to solve their material problems (they clear up questions dealing with the division of property, inheritance); old-age pensioners (they try to legally confirm their right to pay less for housing, transport, medical care); students (they account for 80% of all users) who use the legal base, which undergoes constant changes in the process of economic reforms, while doing their research and practical work (essays, term and degree papers, theses).

Here are some themes of such research projects:

“Tax reform in Russia”,
“Budgeting of enterprises”,
“Methods of evaluating enterprises under restructuring capitalisation of enterprises”,
“Legal provisions of developing small business in Russia”,
“Activity of commercial banks”,
“Terms of crediting”.

This list shows quite clearly the importance for the development of economy of providing the users with the necessary information through the legal data bases of municipal libraries in Moscow. We to stress that not at groups of users are ready to use the legal data bases independently. In many cases consulting librarians make a special search for the required information for pensioners and house-wives. As a rule, Moscow students are able to use the legal data bases independently or after 1-2 consultations. These data bases enable the users to print out and copy the necessary materials electronically, which is convenient and saves working time and allows to deliver the essential information promptly and without delay, including email.

Those who correspond with the European Human Rights Court also ask for legal clarification and make Inquiries. They usually browse through archived precedent law cases on the site of the Court.

For the managerial staff and accounts departments of our libraries, legal data banks are an indispensable tool for making legally important personnel decisions, for drawing up contracts with other organisations and institutions, for preparing balancesheets for tax authorities and pension funds. Legal data banks are also used to monitor local laws concerning libraries (work pay, social guarantees, compulsory copies). For the last few years this monitoring has been carried out by the Russian Library Association (Saint-Petersburg RLA Headquarters [Mr V.P. Firsov]).

Another direction worth special mentioning is work with invalids. We share the opinion of Ms Tatyana Yelfimova (Russian State Library for the Blind in Moscow) who says that “legal education of invalids is becoming a means of their social protections. A very serious problem for invalids is the lack of knowledge about modern laws which are constantly changing. As a result of this, they can’t defend their right to work, education, rest, access to information, etc. Therefore, more often than not they can’t fulfil their intellectual and professional potential. Nowadays legal education of the population including the invalids has taken the lead in providing information service. This activity has obtained the state status thanks to documents passed at the federal level, and it has financial support from the federal and local budgets. The legal information centres are becoming effective and important places because they are able to gather around them and co-operate with different organisations, social and psychological rehabilitation centres, departments of social protection, educational institutions, scientific institutions dealing with corrective pedagogy and defectology, voluntary societies and invalid unions, specialised publishing houses, associations of social services.”

According to practical workers, readers’ legal competence is on the rise in libraries working with legal data bases. Such centres open their own legal advice offices which

render all the necessary legal assistance. They don't substitute existing law services, but contribute to a wider distribution of information about rights, guarantees and obligations. Training seminars, special information boards "How to protect your rights", "Your benefits", "Consumer rights" help to promote legal education.

In our view, it's important to say a few words about the consortium "Codex", which together with the Federal agency responsible for the government communication and information, "Grant" and "Consultant plus" distributes legal data bases in public libraries. Ms Irina Mironova, the head of the programme "Libraries and legal culture of citizens", that it is necessary to switch from the centres of legal information to electronic libraries, but even now these centres are the only really working mechanisms that allow citizens to realise their right to have access to information. Libraries themselves need legal support. In 2000 the system "Expert Library" was created to this effect.

Nowadays "Codex" considers necessary to create a corporate library legal centre with the following functions: co-ordination, information and methodological support of all legal centres; arranging teleconferences, managing inter-library electronic legal resources exchange systems, refresher courses for specialists of legal information centres, organising seminars, workshops and training courses. Apart from the head co-ordinating centre, they plan to create specialised centres of legal information for cultural institutions, children and teenagers, invalids, centres for gathering information about foreign legislation, ecology centres and so on.

Central City Public Library also uses other systems and legal data bases such as "Bank of legal documents of research centre "System", question-answering systems "Expert" (President, Government, Departments), "Court practices, international practice", "Medicine and pharmaceuticals", etc.