

The Potential for Increasing Fertility and the Family Demographic Policy of Russia

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Abstract—In Russia, the type of family with few children has long been entrenched. Important factors in its formation are the prevalence of cohabitation and the high level of divorce and abortion among married women. Based on original research, new trends in marital and family behavior are shown, which can be viewed as a kind of challenges, for example, the formation of a subculture of conscious childlessness. Analyzing the prospects for increasing the birth rate in the country, the authors draw attention to factors such as the preservation of the importance of a legitimate marriage when deciding on the birth of children; the potential to increase the proportion of large families; and the formation of a model of active and inclusive parenting, which increases satisfaction with marriage and contributes to the prevention of divorce. This study made it possible to formulate a number of recommendations for improving family and demographic policy, taking into account the identified opinions of Russians.

Keywords: demographic policy, marital behavior, reproductive attitudes, sociodemographic differentiation of demographic behavior, conscious childlessness, inclusive parenting.

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The transformational crisis of the late 1990s in Russia led to large-scale demographic changes, the wavelike consequences of which are acutely felt even after 20 years [1]. By 2020, the number of working-age population in the country had decreased by five million people, and, more importantly, the number of women of childbearing age has significantly decreased (from 39 million to 35 million), which means that the possibilities of population reproduction are narrowing. In the late 1990s, the Russian demographer V.A. Borisov proved that it is fertility, not mortality, that plays the main role in population reproduction [2, pp. 255–257].

During the recovery in the economy and social sphere (2000–2008), demographic policy in Russia was aimed at eliminating the emerging depopulation and increasing the birth rate. At that time, the target

national programs “Demography” and “Population Health,” which were implemented from 2006 to 2014, made a great contribution to solving this problem. Already by 2008, the positive results of these social projects began to be noticeable. According to demographers V.N. Arkhangel'skii and N.V. Zvereva [3], as well as according to our calculations [4], in the period 2006–2014, the increase in the birth rate was mainly due to an increase in its intensity, rather than structural factors. An important indicator in the context of population waves was included in the management turnover—the total fertility rate (TFR, the number of children per woman of fertile age), which during the period under discussion increased from 1.2 in 2000 to 1.77 in 2015.

Efforts to improve equipment and health care efficiency also had a noticeable effect: life expectancy (LE) increased from 65 years in 2000 to 71 years in 2014. However, Russia still lags behind European countries in this indicator, where life expectancy reaches 80 years or more.

In the conditions of a small number of cohorts born in the 1990s, included in the active reproductive age, the factor of *demographic behavior* is of particular

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importance. In the short and long term, a significant impact on the birth rate will continue to be exerted by an orientation toward having few children and an increase in the age of marriage and the birth of the first child [5]. It is quite utopian to assume that the already established type of reproductive behavior with few children can be transformed into a behavior with many children, but it is necessary to create conditions for the maximum realization of the population's reproductive plans. This is the only way to increase the birth rate.

After the Address of the Russian President to the Federal Assembly in 2006, the demographic policy has been based, among other things, on the data of sociological studies of reproductive behavior (questions about reproductive intentions were included in the program of the population censuses in 2002 and 2010; since 2012, Rosstat has been conducting sample surveys of the population's reproductive plans), which made it possible to increase its efficiency. Support measures have been added, which, of course, should be called demographic and not social or socioeconomic. These measures include paid maternity leave and parental leave up to 1.5 and up to 3 years, and among the innovations is the payment of maternity capital. The right to take advantage of these measures does not depend on material wealth, the only reason for the onset of this right is the birth of children. Differentiation of the size of material payments depending on the order of the born is another sure step towards the implementation of reproductive plans. I would especially like to note the package of measures to support the first-born. In connection with the tendency to change the age model of fertility, in particular, the increase in the age of the mother at the birth of the first child [6], this decision brought young mothers out of the zone of discrimination.

However, in the context of a decrease in the number of reproductive cohorts, the positive effect of the measures taken turned out to be insufficient: in 2016, the total fertility rate began to decrease, and in 2019 its value was fixed at the level of 1.5. This level does not allow even simple reproduction of the population. The need for a new round of activating demographic policy, based on an understanding of current trends in this area, is obvious. Here it is important to assess the potential for increasing the birth rate, including through identifying the extent to which people realize their reproductive intentions and what hinders this. The formation of positive reproductive attitudes should become a strategically important component of demographic policy [7]. Sociodemographic studies of trends and determinants of the population's demographic behavior, including in the field of marriage and family relations, are the basis for updating the effective measures and tools of the demographic policy.

In our study, modern trends in demographic behavior in the marital and reproductive spheres are

considered from the point of view of the importance of taking them into account when developing demographic policy measures. The empirical base of the work was the results of the first wave of the all-Russia monitoring "Demographic Well-Being of the Population of Russian Regions," during which 5616 people were interviewed in ten regions of Russia (the republics of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan; Stavropol' krai; Volgograd, Vologda, Ivanovo, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, and Sverdlovsk oblasts; and Moscow) [8].

Theoretical understanding of demographic dynamics is presented in a number of well-known concepts of demographic transition (first, second [9–12], and third [13, 14]) and epidemiological transition [15]. Within the concept of the first demographic transition, the dynamics of population movement is linked to economic development and modernization along the lines of developed countries. The second demographic transition is the transformation of the most important institution of population reproduction—the family, when individualistic values prevail. The concept of the third transition takes into account migration and controllability of demographic processes. However, all of them are relevant mainly for the realities of the developed countries of Western European culture.

As for the concepts of fertility determination, here we should mention the microeconomic models of "the price of time" (G. Becker) and "relative income" (R. Easterlin), which highlight the balance of economic utility of children and their costs as a key determinant, as well as the concept of intermediate variables within which the relationship between fertility and nuptiality, contraceptive behavior, and biological factors is assessed (J. Bongaarts, K. Davis, and J. Blake). Borisov proposed a hypothetical minimum of natural fertility, that is, the level below which it cannot fall without the influence of any circumstances (reduced fertility of a significant part of the population, a high proportion of spouses living separately for a long time, birth control), the key among which is demographic behavior. The concept of the need for children and the family crisis is being developed by Russian demographers and sociologists at Moscow State University under the guidance of Professor A.I. Antonov in the context of the theory of planned behavior. In reproductive behavior, this is the relationship between reproductive attitudes, measured by the desired number of children and actual actions that determine the total number of children in a family.

The active participation of sociologists in the study of demographic trends is due, *inter alia*, to the fact that demographic behavior has sociocultural determinants, including the value of parenting, marriage, family, and their images that appear in society. The modern rapidly changing social reality has generated not only a variety of meanings, behavioral practices, and strategies (from traditional to innovative) but also

Table 1. Intention to register one's marriage in the event of a marriage and family union, % of unmarried at the moment

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Vologograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
No, no intention under any circumstances	0.0	2.0	2.1	4.6	0.9	0.8	7.6	2.6	3.2	7.5	2.6
Yes, I intend before we start living together	2.6	22.4	21.8	13.8	18.1	18.5	22.8	24.8	3.2	10.0	16.3
Yes, I intend as soon as we start living together	0.0	11.8	10.4	10.8	12.9	16.9	19.6	20.3	12.9	17.5	12.8
Yes, I intend, but first we need to live together for a year or two and check our feelings	93.6	59.2	62.7	63.1	64.7	58.5	41.3	47.7	77.4	62.5	63.9
Yes, I intend, but only if a child is to be born	3.8	4.6	3.1	7.7	3.4	5.4	8.7	4.6	3.2	2.5	4.4

their inconsistency (this is especially important for young people [16]), which requires attention and understanding in an interdisciplinary research field.

On the issue of managing demographic development, two scientific positions have been formed, defined by V.V. Lokosov as “skeptical and pragmatic” [17]. Their essence and conceptual divergence are very clearly shown in a discussion published in the journal *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya* (Sociological Research) between famous demographers A.B. Sinel'nikov [18] and A.G. Vishnevskii [19]. Skeptics are of the opinion that demographic policy is inexpedient and ineffective, while pragmatists, on the contrary, point to the desirability of regulating demographic processes. Subscribing to the opinion of pragmatists, we note that demographic policy at the present stage of social development is focused primarily on demographic behavior. In the field of fertility, its main task is to create conditions for the implementation of reproductive intentions, and in the medium and long term, it is their formation; in the field of mortality management, it is the spread of health-preserving behavior; and in the field of migration processes, it is creating conditions for sustainable development of territories and ensuring a decent quality of life for the population.

Note that the population is susceptible to management influences. The difference between the desired and expected number of children, ascertained by many studies, which significantly decreased during the period of a stable economic situation and an active demographic policy in Russia at the beginning of the 21st century, indicates that due to the creation of conditions that are objectively and subjectively perceived as favorable for the birth of children, it is possible to

increase the degree of implementation of reproductive intentions, that is, to increase the birth rate.

Modern features of marital behavior. Marriage is one of the important processes affecting population reproduction. In recent decades, in Russia, the institution of marriage has undergone significant changes under the influence of internal transformation processes and modern global trends. Among the most notable are the legitimization of cohabitation, the postponement of marriage, the prevalence of reproductive motives for marriage, the emergence of new types of marriage—trial marriage, weekend marriage, or guest marriage, when the spouses live separately and do not keep a common household, and long-distance marriage, when the spouses live in different cities and periodically visit each other [20].

The data of the first wave of the all-Russia monitoring “Demographic Well-Being of the Regions of Russia” confirm the prevalence of cohabitation as a kind of rehearsal for starting a family: 64% of those surveyed intending to legalize their relationship in the future believe that “first you need to live together for a year or two and check your feelings” (Table 1). In the Republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, the share of those focused on marriage registration before the start of life together or immediately after it begins is higher than in other regions, which fits into the hypothesis of the influence of religiosity and tradition on all spheres of life.

Marriage is viewed primarily as a partnership with a similarly minded, dear, beloved person and an opportunity to avoid loneliness: this motive for starting a life together scored 4.7 points on a 5-point scale (Table 2). The second place in importance is the desire

Table 2. Motives to begin married life (average score for assessing the significance of each factor on a 5-point scale)

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Volograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
Desire to have a spiritually close, dear, loved one, not to feel lonely	5.0	4.7	4.7	4.5	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.7	4.8	4.4	4.7
Need for a permanent sexual partner	3.2	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.5
Desire to rationalize common household management	3.8	3.7	3.3	3.1	3.4	3.3	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.4
Striving to become a truly adult, independent person	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.2
Need to give birth to a child in the near future	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.7	2.8	3.1	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.8	2.8

to have a permanent sexual partner (3.5 points), and the third place is the need to rationalize housekeeping (3.4 points), but the desire to have a child in the near future is only 2.8 points. At the same time, the desire to have children in a registered marriage is the first among the motives for legitimizing relations (3.9 points on the 5-point scale, Table 3). As before, a significant role is played by legal and moral norms, which many respondents want to comply with (three points).

This study assessed the attitude towards interethnic marriages, which serves as indirect evidence of tension in interethnic relations. Among the participants in our survey, the majority (58%) approve of such unions (Table 4), and 15% believe that the success of relations in them depends on the specific nationality of the spouses. The maximum share of those who approve of interethnic marriages (66%) is in the Republic of Tatarstan, but opponents are greater in Moscow (28%) and Stavropol' krai (27%).

The assessment of cohabitation turned out to be very loyal: 43% approve and support it (Table 5). At the same time, opponents of unregistered relations are most of all in Stavropol' krai (51.4%), Tatarstan (54.3%), and Bashkortostan (56.5%). On the contrary, residents of Moscow oblast (47.2%), Moscow (43.8%), and Vologda oblast (53.9%) approve of cohabitation.

Less tolerant, which is expected, are the respondents to same-sex marriages: 59% are categorically against, and another 18% do not approve of them (Table 6). However, many do not see the legalization of same-sex unions as a serious problem. There are

more such respondent among Muscovites (31%) and the residents of Volgograd (28%) and Moscow (27%) oblasts.

It can be concluded that, despite the range of opinions and general tolerance, Russians still prefer a legitimate marriage as the basis of relations with a loved one, considering it as an institution enshrined in law and morality, preferable in the event of the birth of children. Cohabitation is clearly institutionalized, but most of the population see it as a rehearsal for marriage and a test of the strength of relationships.

An important aspect of marital behavior is the *divorce rate*. Russia is the leader among the industrialized countries of the world in terms of the general divorce rate (in 2019 it was 4.2 per 1000 population). A similar level is typical of other post-Soviet countries: Belarus, 3.4; Latvia, 3.1; Ukraine, 3.0; and the United States, 3.2. The crude divorce rate in Russia has increased since 1990 (3.8‰), peaked in 2002 (6.0), and decreased to 4.2 ‰ by 2019. According to the experts of the Higher School of Economics S.V. Zakharova and E.V. Churilova [21], the total divorce rate (it shows the total share of broken marriages) in Russia was 0.58 per marriage in 2011–2014 and 0.52 in 2015–2017.

On average, the duration of broken marriages (for all reasons, including the death of one of the spouses) is 9.5–10.5 years. At the same time, women are two times more likely than men to think about divorce and 3.5 times more likely to implement such an intention. Unregistered marriages (cohabitation) break up twice as often: 60% of women and 63% of men said that the

Table 3. Reasons for marriage registration, average score on a 5-point scale

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Volgograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
Desire to have a child in a registered marriage	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.8	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.3	3.9
Need to ensure the material rights of a parent who remains with children in the event of a possible divorce	3.2	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.5
Living together in an unregistered marriage has been tested for strength	2.9	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.5	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.2
Desire to comply with the norms of public morality, the opinion of others	2.6	2.8	2.6	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.7	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.1
Belief that a registered marriage will guarantee a long life together	3.1	2.5	2.5	2.8	2.7	2.8	3.2	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.7

Table 4. Attitude towards interethnic marriages, % of the respondents

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Volgograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
Categorically against	0.0	7.0	13.1	9.7	8.6	12.3	9.8	8.1	8.6	6.7	8.8
In general, I do not approve	19.5	13.0	15.1	14.2	12.9	14.7	12.1	8.5	10.9	13.3	13.2
In total	19.5	20.0	28.2	23.9	21.5	27.0	21.9	16.6	19.5	20.0	22.0
In general, I approve	57.8	43.6	36.9	48.6	49.4	46.2	47.0	48.5	46.1	47.8	46.6
I fully support	6.5	13.9	12.1	7.6	9.6	11.4	14.6	17.9	9.4	10.2	11.5
In total	64.3	57.5	49.0	56.2	59.0	57.6	61.6	66.4	55.5	58.0	58.1
Depends on what nationality the future spouses are	13.6	16.4	20.2	15.1	15.7	12.4	14.0	13.2	18.8	13.8	15.4
Another answer	2.6	6.0	2.6	4.7	3.8	3.1	2.5	3.8	6.3	8.1	4.4

decision to divorce was made jointly. Among the reasons for divorce, the main ones are betrayal, poverty, quarrels and mutual misunderstanding, alcoholism and drug addiction, and mismatch of characters and outlook on life. High divorce rates are an important reproductive risk factor. After all, 70–75% of children are born in marriage, and the instability of unions contributes to the spread of few children.

Women are more likely to express dissatisfaction with marriage and relationships in it than men. Perhaps this is due to the erosion of gender roles and functions of spouses. It is advisable to consider this aspect in terms of age, as young people rethink the transmitted norms and patterns of behavior. Three key projections characterize the main authorities in the family: making responsible decisions, managing the family's

Table 5. Attitude towards unregistered marriages, creating a family without registration, % of the respondents

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Volgograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
Categorically against	6.5	10.4	14.5	7.2	8.9	19.0	15.7	17.3	10.6	9.6	12.2
In general, I do not approve	57.8	34.8	36.3	33.5	35.5	32.4	40.8	37.0	44.7	37.7	38.1
In total	64.3	45.2	50.8	40.7	44.4	51.4	56.5	54.3	55.3	47.3	50.3
In general, I approve	27.9	35.8	33.6	44.9	39.5	35.8	35.5	34.1	29.3	38.6	36.0
I fully support	0.0	11.4	10.2	9.0	8.1	5.8	5.7	4.7	7.3	5.3	7.1
In total	27.9	47.2	43.8	53.9	47.6	41.6	41.2	38.8	36.6	43.9	43.1
Another answer	7.8	7.6	5.4	5.4	8.1	6.9	2.3	6.8	8.1	8.8	6.7

Table 6. Attitude towards same-sex marriages, % of the respondents

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Volgograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
Dead set against	42.2	49.2	46.9	68.3	50.0	66.7	67.4	54.9	71.3	65.2	58.7
In general, I do not approve	35.1	18.8	18.8	19.7	17.8	13.0	17.5	16.6	13.9	13.4	17.7
In total	77.3	68	65.7	88	67.8	79.7	84.9	71.5	85.2	78.6	76.4
In general, I approve of the experience of legalizing same-sex marriages	0.0	6.0	7.9	1.4	10.1	3.5	4.2	6.7	0.8	3.6	4.7
I do not see anything special about it	20.1	20.5	23.1	9.0	17.6	14.2	9.8	17.7	12.3	15.7	15.9
In total	20.1	26.5	31.0	10.4	27.7	17.7	14	24.4	13.1	19.3	20.6
Another answer	2.6	5.5	3.3	1.6	4.6	2.8	1.2	4.2	1.6	2.0	3.0

material resources, and distributing functions (household, parenting, etc.). Almost 40% of Russians see the husband as the head of the family; 11%, the wife; and almost 20% believe that there is no head in the modern family. At the same time, both women and men more often consider themselves the head of the family than their spouse. A quarter of young people consider parents in this role. Young women are less likely than young men to define their husband as the head of the family (Table 7) and less often believe that “a good wife is always submissive to her husband” (Table 8), which indicates a possible conflict of claims to power.

Similar patterns are observed in assessments of the contribution of spouses to the family budget. Accord-

ing to Russian women, more than half (55%) of the family budget is provided by the income of the man (husband), and 39%, by the income of the woman (wife). Men rate their contribution more highly (61%) and that of their spouses lower (34%). According to the respondents, the assistance of the wife's parents provides for 13% of the family budget, and that of the husband's, only 2%. Here, 24% of women and 22% of men stated that they control the income and expenses of the family, and 10% of women and 7% of men reported a separate budget with their spouses. Among young Russians, the absence of practice of pooling the financial resources of spouses is practiced somewhat more often than among the older generation.

Table 7. Distribution of answers to the question “Who do you think is the head of your family?,” %

Possible answer	Survey average	Women	Women of ... years			Men	Men of ... years		
			17–30	30–40	40–50		17–30	30–40	40–50
Wife	11.1	15.3	5.1	19.2	22.3	6.4	2.6	6.3	10.0
Husband	38.6	32.7	25.8	40.3	34.7	45.0	34.8	52.7	51.8
Someone of your parents (spouse’s parents)	10.5	10.5	24.1	4.1	2.3	10.5	22.7	4.2	2.7
No family head	19.4	20.5	22.6	18.8	19.0	18.3	18.9	16.1	20.7
At a loss to answer	16.3	16.7	18.0	12.6	18.5	15.7	16.1	15.8	12.6
Someone else	4.1	4.2	4.4	5.0	3.3	4.0	4.8	4.9	2.2

Table 8. Some ideas about the modern family, % (share of respondents who fully agree with this statement)

Statement	Survey average	Women	Women of ... years			Men	Men of ... years		
			17–30	30–40	40–50		17–30	30–40	40–50
A good wife is always submissive to her husband	17.0	13.2	12.7	14.4	14.1	20.4	21.1	24.1	15.6
A man should deal with household issues and raising children on an equal basis with a woman	40.7	47.8	45.0	49.6	50.9	33.5	34.5	30.9	35.5
Taking care of children is exclusively the responsibility of women	9.7	7.8	7.6	7.6	7.6	11.1	12.0	14.0	6.5
Divorce is normal these days	25.0	27.7	33.4	25.0	24.2	22.2	28.8	21.8	12.5
Marriage must be registered, otherwise it is not a real family	27.8	31.9	22.0	36.0	35.8	23.6	16.5	25.1	28.6
You do not have to start a family to be happy	22.1	24.4	28.7	21.6	22.7	19.4	27.4	17.6	11.3
A family without children is not a family	27.2	29.6	17.7	35.7	37.4	24.3	14.5	28.3	31.8

A significant contribution to the material security of the family gives reason for women to strive for parity in the distribution of household functions and parental responsibilities. According to the monitoring of the reproductive potential of the population of Vologda oblast, young people are more inclined to an egalitarian model of relations, which presupposes equal participation of spouses in ensuring the life of the family [22]. This implies the active participation of men in organizing everyday life and raising children.

The problem of the erosion of gender roles, noted by many researchers, in particular the male role, lies in the contradiction of the meanings of hegemonic masculinity and paternity [23]. Simply put, in the modern understanding of responsible (inclusive) parenting, the concepts of “good father” and “good mother” are functionally similar, which gives rise to contradictory definitions of “a real man” and “a good father.” At the

same time, fatherhood included, the participation of men in the performance of household duties is one of the key conditions for the prevention of divorce. Women’s satisfaction with marriage is higher in families where husbands are involved in raising children and in everyday economic activity [24]. The opinion that a man should deal with domestic issues and raising children on an equal basis with a woman is shared by 48% of women and 33% of men (Table 8).

The resulting picture reflects the previously identified problem of combining family and marital roles (functions) with professional labor activity [25–28]. In part, the priority of the labor sphere in the life of Russians is due to the transfer of a number of family functions to social institutions during the period of industrialization. The importance of the professional side of life is also related to the fact that it is a source of income needed to support a family. Pushing women

Table 9. Total fertility rate, hypothetical minimum of natural fertility and the degree of HMNF implementation in Russia

Year	Total fertility rate	Hypothetical minimum of natural fertility	HMNF implementation, %
	in ppm		
1897	49.9	47.7	104.7
1927	46.0	50.2	91.6
1939	37.0	51.4	72.0
1959	23.9	49.2	48.6
1970	14.4	47.2	30.6
1979	15.9	47.6	33.4
1989	15.3	48.7	31.5
2002	9.7	39.3	24.7
2010	12.5	38.6	32.4
2015*	12.9	38.5	33.5

Sources: A. I. Antonov and V. A. Borisov, *Lectures in Demography* (Akademicheskii Proekt; Alma Mater, Moscow, 2011), p. 204; Rosstat operational data on the natural movement of the population, Vologdastat data, authors' calculations.

* Calculated according to the 2015 Microcensus data. http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/micro-perepis/finish/micro-perepis.html.

who would like to engage in family and child-rearing into the labor market has become a factor limiting their reproductive intentions.

The potential for increasing fertility in Russia. One of the demographic methods for assessing this potential is the calculation of the hypothetical minimum of natural fertility (HMNF). In the 21st century, the HMNF has become lower and is estimated at 38–39‰. Its implementation is limited by family planning methods (contraceptive and abortive behavior). However, the HMNF implementation level, which has significantly increased in recent years, indicates that the population is responding to the introduction of new measures of demographic policy. In 2002, HMNF implementation in Russia was 24%, and in 2010 and 2015, 32 and 33%, respectively (Table 9).

Obviously, it is impossible to achieve the full realization of biological fertility adjusted for nuptiality primarily due to peculiarities of the *reproductive behavior of the few-child type* that prevails in modern Russian society. Therefore, assessments of the potential for increasing the birth rate within the framework of the *theory of planned behavior*, linking the intentions and real actions of people, seem to be more balanced and realistic. Sociological research data on the preferred

number of children in a family are used as an empirical indicator for making such assessments.

The simplest calculation of the potential for increasing the share of large families is to calculate the difference between the actual share of families with three or more children (according to statistics, there are only 6–8%) and the share of Russians planning to give birth to three or more children. According to the data of the first wave of the monitoring “Demographic Well-Being of Russian Regions,” the difference is 18% (Table 10); that is, there is a possibility of increasing the share of such families by 10–12 percentage points. By the assessment of the well-known sociodemographer A.I. Antonov, to ensure simple reproduction of the country's population, large families should be about 50%. However, 32% of the respondents want to have three or more children; this is a potential determined at the stage of awareness of intentions. The assessment of the favorable conditions for the implementation of intentions is reflected in the difference between the desired and expected number of children. In our study, it averaged 83%. However, those who focus on having many children rate the existing conditions for the implementation of their intentions worse: among the survey participants, the share of those who would like to have three or more children was 33%, and only 18% actually plan to fulfill the need for several children, while the share of those oriented towards having two children coincided in their wishes and plans in 41%.

An ordinary Russian family cannot afford to have several children without external support. This is evidenced by the high interest in social assistance among actually large families and even among those who are only planning to have three or more children. Thus, the answer to the question “What measures of social assistance and support does your family need?” showed that the degree of significance of such support for those oriented towards large families in almost all of its types is noticeably higher than for those who are going to give birth to no more than two children.

In our opinion, special attention should be paid to the category of people planning to remain childless. On average, they make up about 5% of the respondents, but 8% among young men, and 7% among young women (for comparison, in older groups, it is less than 4%). Conscious childlessness and its radical variant “child-haters” have become a noticeable countercultural trend, represented mainly in the youth environment [29–31]. There are two key reasons for voluntary childlessness. First, this is the competition of the need for children with other needs, meeting which the presence of children makes difficult (high requirements for comfort and personal freedom, the self-sufficient value of self-expression, and career building); such representations are often accompanied by a negative image of parents, especially a mother who does not take care of herself, is limited in her

Table 10. Reproductive attitudes of the population

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Volograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
How many children (including existing ones) would you like to have if you had all the necessary conditions?											
0	0.0	2.1	5.5	3.6	5.0	2.9	7.7	3.0	5.9	3.4	4.1
1	6.5	9.2	13.1	10.0	12.6	9.4	7.8	7.5	10.2	6.1	9.4
2	48.7	41.0	39.5	44.7	39.7	45.9	30.4	37.2	49.2	41.4	41.3
3 or more	29.2	36.5	31.0	27.6	28.3	29.8	34.6	42.7	24.5	39.3	32.5
Hard to say	15.6	11.1	10.9	14.2	14.5	12.0	19.5	9.7	10.2	9.9	12.7
Average number of children desired	2.3	2.5	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.5	2.3
How many children (including existing ones) are you going to have?											
0	6.5	4.8	8.7	2.7	4.9	4.3	6.9	4.2	5.7	4.2	5.2
1	28.6	17.7	21.7	17.1	18.0	16.3	10.8	14.6	24.5	17.7	18.1
2	42.2	40.3	35.7	47.5	40.5	46.6	31.3	44.5	45.3	46.5	41.9
3 or more	7.8	21.0	19.6	13.3	17.9	16.5	26.8	23.0	7.5	18.0	17.8
Hard to say	14.9	16.1	14.4	19.4	18.7	16.3	24.2	13.7	17.0	13.7	17.0
Average number of children planned	1.6	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.1	1.7	2.0	1.9
Implementation of the desired in the expected, %	69.6	84.0	86.4	86.4	90.5	87.0	87.5	84.0	81.0	80.0	82.6

interests, and is overly focused on children. Second, it is a dislike for children, for the manifestations of growing up, based, among other things, on personal memories of oneself in childhood; this is the fear of becoming a bad parent, of not being able to raise a child adequately, and unwillingness to bear responsibility for a child.

Child-haters are viewed as an extreme manifestation of voluntary childlessness. Aggressive verbal and physical rejection of children and childcentrism manifestations is typical of them. According to some experts, such an attitude to children is temporary due to age specifics and does not necessarily entail childlessness, which means that the presence of this group in the youth environment "cannot significantly affect the demographic situation in the country" [32]. In our opinion, this phenomenon requires a more serious attitude, since a certain cultural phenomenon is being formed, the causes and consequences of which should be considered in the context of the transformation of the institution of the family.

It is about recognizing children as an attribute of the family. Among young people under the age of 30, a third absolutely disagree with the statement "A family without children is not a family," this is two times more than in older age groups (15–16% in the group of Russians over 30). In addition, among young people, especially among young men, there are significantly more people who fully agree that "In order to be happy, it is not necessary to start a family" (see Table 8). Young people are also less inclined to register marriage and share more often the opinion about the normality of divorce. All this may indicate a change in the value system, the formation of a new approach to organizing life in principle, when the family is identified not with its own but with the parental affiliation and/or the affiliation is replaced by belonging to a community. Of course, growing up is accompanied by a reassessment of attitudes and values, which often leads to the creation of a family at a later age. This is a new life strategy associated with demographic risks: late childbirth and few children, when the likelihood of even having a second child decreases. This situation will require a revi-

Table 11. Distribution of answers to the question “Have you had abortions?,” % of women surveyed

Possible answer	Ivanovo oblast	Moscow oblast	Moscow city	Vologda oblast	Volgograd oblast	Stavropol' krai	Republic of Bashkortostan	Republic of Tatarstan	Nizhny Novgorod oblast	Sverdlovsk oblast	Survey average
Prior to current marriage (for all women)											
Yes	33.3	9.4	12.4	18.1	24.7	12.6	10.9	7.9	20.3	19.1	16.3
No	66.7	90.6	87.6	81.9	75.3	87.4	89.1	92.1	79.7	80.9	83.7
After entering into the current marriage before the birth of the first child (for all women)											
Yes	0.0	3.6	7.6	7.6	24.0	8.0	5.4	4.2	3.9	11.7	8.7
No	100.0	96.4	92.4	92.4	76.0	92.0	94.6	95.8	96.1	88.3	91.3
Between births of the first and second child (for women with two or more children in the current marriage)											
Yes	100.0	21.5	35.9	20.2	50.0	27.3	26.4	20.3	23.8	29.1	27.0
No	0.0	78.5	64.1	79.8	50.0	72.7	73.6	79.7	76.2	70.9	73.0
Between the births of the second and third child (for women with three or more children in the current marriage)											
Yes	0.0	20.0	50.0	15.0	0.0	36.8	27.0	42.9	0.0	8.3	25.4
No	0.0	80.0	50.0	85.0	0.0	63.2	73.0	57.1	100.0	91.7	74.6
After the birth of the youngest child (for all women with children in the current marriage)											
Yes	0.0	7.1	14.3	20.9	15.0	13.4	15.7	11.6	24.3	20.3	16.1
No	100.0	92.9	85.7	79.1	85.0	86.6	84.3	88.4	75.7	79.7	83.9

sion of the mechanisms of demographic policy, since it will be necessary to stimulate a reduction in the intervals between births and to provide effective social support for families with children of the same age, which implies the continuous long-term exclusion of parents (primarily mothers) from work.

From the point of view of the regulatory impact of society, it requires understanding and maintaining a fairly high level of abortions. It remains unexplained that artificial termination of pregnancy is still widely used by spouses to regulate the birth rate: in established families, abortions are used more often than by unmarried women. The share of women with a history of abortion before marriage averaged 16%, but the situation varies across regions (Table 11). The share of women who terminated pregnancy before the birth of their first child is less, 9%. However, between the first and second child, already a quarter of women terminated pregnancy, and 27%, between the second and third. This is a serious problem, probably, due to the aging of motherhood and the low contraceptive culture of the population at a fairly early onset of sexual activity.

An analysis of the effectiveness of the family-demographic policy is impossible without assessing its

measures by the object of this policy, that is, by the population, especially bearing in mind their influence on the family's decision to have children. It is extremely important from the point of view of improving the federal and regional family-demographic policy to study the needs of the population for certain measures of state assistance, to identify the level of awareness of them, as well as the attitude of the population to family support from the state and other structures (business, NPOs, churches, and family associations). The overwhelming majority of respondents believe that it is the state that should support the family (79%). The idea of the participation of business and civil society in supporting families is fragmentary in the public consciousness (16 and 13%, respectively).

According to the survey data, the strengthening of state support measures did not affect the decision to have a youngest (only) child in 57% of cases, while for 24% of those surveyed, these measures became an incentive. Women more often than men stated that support measures for families with children had no effect on childbirth (62% versus 52%). The most susceptible to measures of family and demographic policy were Russians aged 30 to 40 (30% of them admitted

that they influenced their decision to one degree or another).

The most popular measures to support families with children, according to our data, are consultative and medical services, additional education for children, and assistance in finding employment for parents with the possibility of working on a flexible schedule. Least of all, the population needs help in the form of providing household services, organizing a family business, and caring for disabled family members.

Age and sex differences are revealed in the assessment of the demand for individual family assistance measures. For example, the need for counseling and medical services was highest among women aged 30 and over, and the need for additional education for children and assistance in caring for a preschool child, among women and men aged 30–40. Young women aged 17–30 are especially interested in employment with flexible working hours.

In general, 46% of the respondents have a level of awareness of regional measures of state family policy below the average (2.6 points on the 5-point scale). Only 9% of the respondents are fully aware of the information on support measures for families with children, while 24% know practically nothing about them. Women aged 30–40 years (3.0 points) are best informed about regional family policy measures, while young women aged 17–30 years (2.5 points) and men of all ages (2.6 points) have the lowest awareness. According to our data, the main source of information on family policy measures is the Internet (78%). An important information resource turned out to be information received from neighbors and friends (32%); to a lesser extent, television and radio broadcasts (22%), publications in newspapers and magazines, as well as specialized sources (18%). The share of those who do not need any information on this issue turned out to be small and amounted to only 5%.

Conclusions and recommendations. This study made it possible to formulate a number of proposals for improving family and demographic policy in Russia. The development of its measures should be carried out in accordance with the characteristics (sociodemographic, regional) and the needs of the population groups most susceptible to them. Particular attention should be paid to risk groups (deliberately childless) and trends in demographic behavior that are negative from the point of view of population reproduction (prevalence of cohabitation, abortive behavior of married women, high divorce rates initiated by women).

In order to prevent divorce and increase the degree of implementation of reproductive plans, it is necessary to support the *formation of a model of an egalitarian family* with an equal distribution of family responsibilities, as well as positive-active inclusive fatherhood. There is a potential for increasing the share of large families: 32% of Russians said that they would like to have three or more children if all the necessary

conditions were present. Solving the problem of maximum implementation of reproductive plans involves compensation for the dependent load.

According to the respondents, the most important areas of family strengthening in Russia should be ensuring decent parental wages; housing for families in need; an increase in the allowance for the birth of a child, as well as the introduction of an allowance for a child under three years of age in the amount of the subsistence level for those families whose income is below the average; partial repayment of a loan or subsidy for the purchase of housing (at the birth of the first and second child) or its full repayment at the birth of a third child; and providing guarantees for children to receive high-quality vocational education. Least often, the respondents noted as desirable measures such as the formation of a negative attitude in society towards abortion and the introduction of legislative norms that complicate the divorce procedure.

Since young women highly appreciated the importance of employment with the possibility of flexible work, and women aged 30–40, assistance in looking after children, especially of preschool age, it seems relevant to develop a system of measures to help women combine educational and work functions, namely, helping mothers being on parental leave and participating in professional activities. Two forms are possible here: helping women to adapt to professional activities after parental leave and expanding the use of so-called flexible forms of employment (part-time work, work from home, telecommuting, etc.) [33]. This trend is consistent with the goals of the gender approach in social policy [34]. Another opportunity to combine parenting and professional responsibilities is the development of the institution of certified nannies, which is still in its infancy. Moreover, the demand here significantly exceeds the supply.

It is advisable to *expand the list of tools for informing the population* about measures to support families with children, for example, by developing special websites and applications for mobile devices containing all the necessary information on current measures, criteria, and procedures for obtaining them and the list of documents required for this. Vologda oblast has a positive experience in this regard. Here, the official portal of the regional government has a section dedicated to the current measures to support families with children in the region, and the youth parliament of the oblast in 2017 issued an information booklet *Measures of State Support for Families in Vologda Oblast*, containing a list of assistance measures and conditions for obtaining it in different categories of families (families awaiting the birth of a child; families in which the first child was born; families in which the second child was born; families in which the third and subsequent children were born; families raising a disabled child; etc.). The information on the government website is regularly

updated, and the information booklet is periodically reissued.

In our opinion, one of the top-priority measures should be the creation of a *unified system for monitoring* the effectiveness of the sociodemographic policy pursued in all the subjects of the Russian Federation. It is fundamentally important to introduce sociological research data on the reproductive attitudes and plans of the population (the desired and expected number of children) into the range of indicators monitored, on the reasons for limiting childbirth and postponing births, on the conditions necessary to realize the need for children, on assessing the effectiveness of existing measures of the family demographic policy, and on the need for additional measures of state support.

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