**Abstract**

**RS-185**

Title: «Evaluation of the impact of demographic policy measures on reproductive intentions and fertility and development of proposals to improve their effectiveness»

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1. **Goal of the project:** to evaluate the impact of demographic policy measures on reproductive intentions and fertility and to develop proposals to improve their effectiveness.
2. **Methodology:** (1) desk research of Russian and foreign scientific and expert publications, (2) descriptive and multivariate statistical analysis, (3) analysis of qualitative sociological data.
3. **Empirical base of the project:** data from the Rosstat survey of population reproductive plans (2012, 2017, 2022), microdata from the population survey on family and reproductive behavior (HSE University, 2023), qualitative data of the focus-group discussions (HSE University, 2023)
4. **Results of the project**

National and foreign empirical research mainly shows short-term effects from the introduction of new or strengthening of existing family and demographic policy measures. These effects mostly provoke a temporary increase in tempo fertility rates. This growth is ensured by shifts in the birth calendar and, according to existing estimates, generally does not lead to an increase in the total cohort fertility.

Socio-demographic measures in most developed and developing countries in modern conditions, above all, should be aimed at supporting fertility and creating conditions for the realisation of existing population reproductive plans. In this sense, the maximum results may ensure diversity and consistency of the system of measures and harmonious combination of investment-orienting and supporting measures addressed to parents and families with children. At the same time, in a labour-deficit economy interested in the maximum involvement of human capital in production and its efficient use, the emphasis should be shifted to investment-orienred measures aimed at creating conditions for combining family responsibilities with employment, reducing the opportunity costs of having children through proportional compensation of income losses during parental leave, and creating incentives to return to the labour market and infrastructure opportunities for this.

Estimates based on the Rosstat surveys show a decrease in the average desired and expected number of children, but the difference between indicators is decreasing, especially in younger generations. This may be evidence of improvement in the perception of living conditions in terms of satisfying the need for children. Younger respondents have lower reproductive intentions, while those who grew up in families with a relatively large number of children tend to have more children.

Over time (in 2012, 2017, and 2022), the proportion of people who noted some influence of government support measures for families with children on the decision to have a child is increasing: almost a quarter of respondents in 2022 noted that the measures contributed to the birth of a child, that was postponed. Among measures to support families, the importance of the influence of maternal (family) capital on reproductive behavior is most highly rated.

The results of special population survey on family and reproductive behavior conducted by the HSE University in 2023 also demonstrate positive attitude towards current demographic policy measures. Despite the lack of significant differentiation in assessments, measures with a wide coverage receive more support (1,5-years-long paid parental leave for working women, maternal (family) capital), while measures aimed at families with three and more children get less support across population. Women and childless respondents are more optimistic in their assessments.

Support for the possible new measures is generally lower than for existing ones. Respondents are most optimistic about increased one-time childbirth benefit and government subsidies for extended day at school. More restrained people evaluate the financing from maternity capital of public nanny services for children under 1 year old and parent training. The respondent residing in the largest cities, having with one or two children or children born after the special military operation show significantly higher expectations when estimating the desired value of the maternal capital certificate sufficient for increasing their fertility intentions.

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data showed that existing measures of family and demographic support are perceived mostly as: a) government obligations to ensure the well-being of people and especially families raising children; b) tools to support families with deficit incomes or resources, also during periods of childbirth and temporary difficulties. In addition to these positions, a third one is gradually formed: government support can and, in the opinion of relatively resource groups of population, should – be aimed at developing child-friendly infrastructure and creating conditions for the development of their human potential.

The youngest and childless people demonstrate the least awareness of existing measures and the rules for its obtaining; men are less informed compared to women. In this situation, there is demand for systematization of existing government support measures at the federal and regional levels, development of portal for parents/ families with children, combining information and operational functions. This service may provide the opportunity to apply for payments and participate in programs, automatically provide information, verify and confirm the compliance of applicants with the criteria for measures or programs. Even more preferable is to automate the assignment of support measures, at least monetary.

The current system of measures is generally perceived positively, especially in retrospect, when compared with the volume of government support addressed to families in the 2000s, the 1990s and earlier. At the same time, almost all existing measures are perceived, firstly, as supportive (rather than stimulating), and secondly, as temporary. Despite the relatively high demand and positive assessment of these measures, discussions with Russian women and men of reproductive age show, that only measures allowing families to solve housing problems (preferential mortgage lending, maternal (family) capital, additional payments to pay off mortgages) may have a «provoking» or stimulating effect on fertility.

Most of negative emotions regarding government measures to support families with children are associated with feelings of injustice and unreasonableness of various restrictive criteria in payment and benefit programs, especially in groups closing to the poverty. In addition, the research revealed a demand for support for families with children of preschool, school and older ages, when additional children's education, as well as vocational education, becomes paid.

The provision of universal one-time payments with childbirth, as well as additional one-time benefits related to circumstances are receiving a strong positive evaluation from the population. Although the participants of the focus-groups do not perceive these payments as systematic support, it become a kind of «marker» of the government attention and care and perceived as «additional», «extra» funds for family budget, thus remembered and are widely approved. Initiatives related to increasing the flexibility of parental leave (voluntary reduction of period with increasing monthly payments), opportunity to pay for the services of public nannies using maternal (family) capital, or financing the parents’ education receive significantly lower support. The key factors in the resistance are distrust of government specialists and the personnel selection system; attitudes towards the need for child to stay with his mother at an early age to ensure his physical and intellectual development; the potential high cost of these services, reluctance to spend maternal (family) capital funds not on the child needs. At the same time, high-resource groups are more likely to support the variants expansion: it will work to increase the efficiency of the current system, and greater variability will allow new groups (whose needs and resources allow organizing lives in the proposed way) to respond to these initiatives.

1. **Level of implementation, recommendations on implementation or outcomes of the implementation of the results**

The project of scientific and methodological support was carried out in the interests of the Government of the Russian Federation and the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation. The results and recommendations based on the results of the project can be used to advise government authorities and to improve existing or developing legislation in the field of demographic and family policy measures.