

# Fostering the Qualitative Potential of Demographic Policy in the Russian Federation: Risks and Areas for Effective Implementation

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**Abstract:** Amid the latest economic and political challenges, as a major factor influencing the dynamics of development in countries around the world, the issue of having in place an effective demographic policy is increasingly gaining in strategic significance, especially for the Russian Federation. Relevant today as never before is the need to investigate the area of regulation of processes related to the nation's population dynamics. Most of the key trends identified by scholars and experts in the literature tend to be expressive of the fact that the serious problem is still there, with very little revealed in the way of positive outcomes from the fulfillment of central tenets of the Concept on Russia's Demographic Policy through to 2025. The latest dry statistical figures indicate that, even if we are projecting high numbers for the dynamics of natural population increase, the indicator will still have negative values, which means that the only potential factor for the increase is external migration. Of relevance in this respect are the dynamics of migration from Africa and the Middle East to the EU. In the case of Russia, prior to 2014 the bulk of migrants would come in from the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, whilst today it is now Ukraine, which is quite understandable. The paper shares the findings from the authors' analysis of key indicators for demographic policy in present-day Russia.

**Keywords:** demographic policy, Russian Federation, population, population increase, population size dynamics, Russia's social policy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The qualitative potential of Russia's demography has been affected by declines in the nation's household income, the tangible impact of economic sanctions on its economy, its increased social tensions, its increased inflation and unemployment rates, the uneven distribution of its population, its pronounced urbanization trends, the varying conditions of development among its regions, and some other factors. The demographic situation in Russia has also been negatively impacted in a serious way by the sociocultural aspects of certain pro-Western "values" that are being promoted these days, like those justifying same-sex marriage, and negative trends associated with the development of an entire subcultural movement that is urging one to remain "childfree" [1-3].

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## II. METHODS

In order to be able to resolve one of the highest priority issues facing the nation today, the refusal of many Russians to have a large family, the government will need to identify the key reasons (including subjective ones) one may be guided by in making that decision. Based on data from Stolitsa Detstva, an information center for parents, most Russians ascribe the following as the reasons [4, 5]:

1. Finances. This is the most popular reason behind women's refusal to have children in Russia at the moment. Many women are convinced that raising a child requires significant funds and fear that they will not be able to provide decent living conditions for their children.

2. A lack of love for children. A certain percentage of women (especially socialites) have an indifferent attitude toward children. They feel that children are an unnecessary "pain in the neck" or an "extra mouth to feed", so it is perfectly reasonable to forgo children and a happy family life.

3. A focus on career growth. This in part is akin to Reason No. 2. One is driven here by a pronounced focus on self-actualization at a young age and reluctance to waste one's precious time on the family, when all that time could be spent on something more productive, like making money to attain financial security.

4. Fear about labor pain during childbirth. Nearly 15% of childless women are ascribing their refusal to be a mother to fear of labor pain or of potential damage to their health.

5. Fear about having a sick baby. A significant number of women are of the view that today's poor ecology may have a serious effect on the prospects of bearing a healthy child, wary that there is a high likelihood that a sick baby will be born.

6. An unstable relationship. Many women are critical of their partner's skills from a perspective of fatherhood. Plus, there is a substantial risk that the female will be left with a child on her hands.

7. Fear about one's changing body image. Strange as this may sound, women are often worried about the changes to their body shape that can be caused by pregnancy.

An analysis of the above responses indicates that, for the most part, today's generations do not feel immediate personal responsibility for present-day global issues. Most prefer shirking obligation and responsibility, creating thereby a whole raft of new problems, which are only going to accumulate and make things increasingly worse.

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Reasons like these did not arise for a very long time, due to the need to follow traditions. Dissent would be harshly suppressed, with everything malign and destructive weeded out. Followers of traditions would pass along the more efficient models across generations, helping thereby to enhance the social order and adapt it to modernity. With the passage of time, people would acquire increasingly more rights and liberties – yet, today very few know how to use them properly. As a result, we now have a society of individualists. These are people who live for themselves and for the sake of themselves, their main focus being not caring for their close ones but caring for themselves only. The world has already witnessed something like that – through the Roman Empire.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

We know from history that the Romans were increasingly lapsing into moral decay, with lust and depravity raised to their highest power and regarded as an achievement that surpassed military exploits. As a result of the empire's moral decline, it would be ruled by weak, spineless individuals. These men would ascend the imperial throne not based on a set of merits that would help facilitate prosperity in the country but based on the whim of military commanders, who placed their own ambitions above the interests of the state. We perfectly know how it all ended – Rome was overrun by the Barbarians, who were driven by totally different values, and fell tragically.

For Russia, which has fallen victim to internal strife at least twice in the last 100 years, to be able to avoid the same fate, the government may need to take better care of the internal information space, which has been filled with information vacuum ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This means that there is a need to have more social advertising in city streets that would encourage people to help others, promote family values, and develop a positive attitude toward the world – instead of focusing on showbiz, beer, or energy drinks. It would help to focus on reminding people more often on TV that they ought to strive to make the world a better place every day, instead of deriding traditional values and morals of society in comedy shows. From childhood, most Russians are taught to be honest and fair and disapprobatory of lawlessness, uncontrolled consumption, depravity, and debauchery. By contrast, today's realities are quite the other way around. However, it is always possible to rectify the situation via taking purposeful action to change things. It is society itself that should drive these changes, with support from the state.

In addition to ideological outreach activities, it may help to focus on resolving the more relevant issues facing a couple that wants to create a happy family. In particular, there is the housing issue, one of the most pressing and fundamental challenges of our time. If we take a quick look at history, it may be worth recalling the really efficient Soviet practice of providing citizens with social housing. This approach could be adjusted to match today's realities, and the state could launch a large-scale program on providing young families with social housing. Unfortunately, existing federal targeted programs on support for young families (e.g., Molodaya Sem'ya ('young family') and Zhilishche ('domicile')) are not

currently resolving the issue in full measure. Understandably, providing all young couples with housing requires significant funding, so it may be worth structuring the program as follows below [6].

In 2014, Russia's GDP at purchasing power parity was a little over \$3.5 trillion, based on data from the IMF, the World Bank, and the CIA World Factbook [7, 8]. In light of the nation's tough economic situation, compounded by the sanctions, 2015 saw a drop of, by various estimates, 3 to 7% in Russian GDP. In 2017, the nation posted a slight GDP increase of 1.8 to 2.2%.

Based on data from Rosstat, Russia had 31.6 million young people aged 15–29 in 2012, 32.4 million in 2011, and 33.7 million in 2009 [9]. A modern low-rise multifamily building for 25–30 families had an average market value of 30 million rubles in 2015. A single building can potentially accommodate 50 people (2 persons per family). Thus, to provide each Russian citizen aged 15–29 with social housing, the state will need to build 620,000 houses, which is \$372 billion, or 11.19% of the nation's GDP (PPP) (1/50 at year-end 2015). Of course, the figure is large, but it is quite achievable, especially considering that the state is losing as much as a result of corruption among government officials and the diversion of funds to offshore accounts. So, the bottom-line is that, to come up with the funding needed, the government just needs to start combating corruption in an efficient manner.

It is also worth noting in this context that it would be short-sighted to provide housing indiscriminately to all citizens in the above age category, as that would deal a serious blow to the nation's real estate market. In this context, it may help to limit things to just providing housing to young citizens who would agree to move to a region that is strategically significant for the nation. This would help distribute labor resources in a purposeful manner across the country. Besides, it is not necessary to provide that much funding all at once. The program could be implemented in a gradual manner – by outlaying, say, 1% of GDP per year. Consequently, it would take a little over 15 years to cover the entire target age category under examination.

This program may provide a major stimulus for policy in the area of preserving the institutions of marriage and the family in Russia and an impetus for boosts in the birthrate.

In addition to the above scheme for provision of young citizens with housing, the government could also reintroduce the successful Soviet system of distribution of professional human resources based on need. This method would help resolve the issue of personnel gaps across the country and have a positive effect on the development of its remote regions. In this context, it may be worth considering that back in the Soviet period the need to move to a different area, specifically designated by the authorities, in order to work there was associated with the fact that those young people were entitled to free education in return. Today, when one can either get an education for free or pay to get one, it may be not very fair to send a person who has paid for their education to a new place of residence against their will. In this respect,

a more rational way would be to provide prospective students with the opportunity to enter into a contract with the state to let them assume the obligation to work for the state for a strictly specified period of time in exchange for free education and social housing

in the area where they would work. This approach could help resolve a whole set of issues. Firstly, it is the issue of personnel gaps in the periphery. Secondly, it would make it possible to influence, in a purposeful manner, the size of the population in the country's strategically important regions. Thirdly, young specialists would have the opportunity to get a job related to their field of study right upon graduation. And fourthly, it would help young citizens resolve the housing issue.

Another possible way to stimulate natality is providing a monthly allowance for a minor. Strictly theoretically, the state could pay a family with a child aged between 0 and 14 years up to 10,000 rubles monthly (the average cost of raising a child in Russia), in which case the government's monthly expenditure would total \$4,240 billion, or \$50,880 billion annually, which makes it 0.7 to 1.5% of GDP (PPP) per year. Thus, the state would take on some of the costs associated with raising the nation's minors, which would help reduce significantly the burden on people's family budget. But then again, payments of this kind could be offered not to all citizens but, say, those who would agree to move to a region that is of strategic significance for the nation.

In addition to the above, it is likely that a substantial overhaul of the nation's existing pension system will be necessary. Without getting into particular nuances and details, Russia's present-day pension system is built on the principle that each person is supposed to earn their pension benefits. The pension reform proposed in June of 2018 was met with widespread public condemnation, which has undermined public trust in the government substantially. A possible measure that could help convince people that having many children can be profitable is this: citizens will not just earn their pension benefits based on their own reckonable service but could also get pension benefits based on the service of their children. In the event they are physically unable to have children, they could adopt a child from an orphanage. This could help establish a direct link between a secure old age and the number of children raised. In addition, this could also help resolve the issue of numerous neglected children in the country. Also, it may be worth noting in this context that much would depend on not just the number of children but how good they are as well. Indeed, paying pensions based on a focus on children only is not very correct, as there are many nuances involved here that should not be overlooked, but still it would be quite acceptable to somehow integrate this idea into the nation's future pension reform. Children, in this context, may be seen as an investment in one's future: one will be able to get dividends from the government based on the quality of upbringing given to these children. With that said, this is a win-win situation for both sides. The state will obtain new workers, while the parents will be assured of assistance from the government – and, ultimately, a secure old age.

One more potential way to improve Russia's demographic situation is through entering into specific contracts with young individuals [10, 11]. Under a contract of this kind, a

young couple would be obligated to give birth to 3-4 children over a certain period of time. In exchange for this, the state would provide the family in advance with a set of benefits, like a suburban house designed for a multichild family, assistance with employment, financial assistance toward childcare costs, etc. This scheme could help resolve one of the key issues discouraging young families from having many children.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Note that right now the government is already employing a scheme of financial support for multichild families – it provides them with a land plot for the construction of a suburban house. However, there seems to be inconsistency here. The overwhelming majority of citizens would not choose to have a large family due to having no housing of their own, so providing housing to a family that is large already seems illogical, as the very fact that a third child (and so on) is born is indication that to these families housing is not a major concern. In the end, it turns out that the government is providing housing assistance to families which have already resolved the issue on their own.

As has been proven via the calculations provided above, even in a tough climate of sanctions the Russian government should still be quite able to afford implementing those kinds of programs – it could break the implementation process into several timeframes and may need to reconsider its socio-economic planning policy. Unfortunately, it is hard to tell how high the birthrate would be, but just increasing it 1.5 times (to 2.6) would in 18 years' time give Russia over 10 million young able-bodied citizens. In the future, investing in implementing this policy could pay off in spades through boosts in manpower and in the potential of Russia's young population, the creation of new subjects of tax law, the nation's improved geopolitical position in the global arena, boosts in its defense capability, etc. Most importantly, Russia could be able to finally overcome its painful demographic trend, known as the Russian Cross, in less than a quarter of a century's time.

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