

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

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THE FINANCIAL SITUATION AND MORAL WELL-BEING OF RUSSIAN FAMILIES WITH DIFFERENT NUMBERS OF CHILDREN



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In modern Russia, the state recognizes families with three or more children under the age of 18 as a many-child families. In most of these families, only the fathers earn money. And in most married couples with one or two children, both spouses earn money. According to Rosstat research, the total earnings of all family members with one or two children are higher than in many-child families. But parents with many children receive more significant benefits, compensation and other social payments from the state than parents with one or two children. As a result, the total income in families with three or more children has recently been even slightly higher than in families with one or two children. But the income per one person in families with three or more children is significantly less than in families with one child and slightly less than in families with two children. However, parents with three or four children are almost as satisfied with their financial situation as parents with one or two children. VTSIOM study data does not confirm the opinion of some sociologists about the negative attitude of the majority of society towards parents with many children. The main reasons for the small number of many-child families in Russia are not their poverty or the negative attitude of other people towards them, but the fact that the vast majority of residents of our country do not need a third child. Financial assistance to families with children contributes to a more complete realization of the existing need of parents for define number of children, but does not affect the need itself. To solve this problem, it is necessary to promote the lifestyle of a family with three or more children through the media.

Number of children, total family income, per capita income, satisfaction with financial situation, attitude to having many children, desired number of children, family and demographic policy.

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Introduction

It is rather relevant the question of the relationship between the average number of children in families and the financial situation of families because the nature of this relationship determines the impact of benefits and allowances for families with a certain number of children on increasing fertility. According to the concept of direct relationship, the richer people are, the greater the average number of children in their families. According to the concept of U-shaped relationship the average number of children of both poor and rich people is higher than that of middle-income people. On the basis of these concepts, it can be assumed that increasing the level of well-being will reduce the share of the poor and increase the share of the rich in the population, so that the problem of low fertility will be solved by itself. According to the proponents of the feedback concept (according to which the richer the families, the fewer children they have), this scenario is unrealistic, and fertility can increase only as a result of the implementation of family and demographic policies. However, the policy is limited to material assistance to families and does not have a sufficient effect because fertility depends not only on economic factors. If parents have many children, even though this worsens their financial situation, does it mean that this worsening does not affect their moral well-being?

The aim of the research is to identify the nature of the relationship between having many children and the material situation and moral well-being of families to understand what measures of family and demographic policy can increase fertility at least to the level of full replacement of generations, which is possible only when more than half of married couples have three or more children by the time the wife leaves the reproductive age. We should accomplish three tasks to achieve this goal:

1) to assess differences between parents with different numbers of children in terms of financial situation, satisfaction with it and their life in general;

2) to establish why the number of large families in Russia is insufficient to simply replace generations;

3) to propose measures of family and demographic policy to increase the number of large families.

Review of scientific literature on the research topic

The relationship between income and the number of children is direct when it comes to the husband's income and inverse when it comes to the wife's income according to a number of studies (Zhuravleva, Gavrilova 2017; Kumo, 2023; Sinelnikov, 2023; Karabchuk, 2017). These two opposite dependencies in direction almost completely neutralize each other, which partially explains the weakness of the relationship between income and the average number of children (Antonov et al., 2020, p. 302). Some authors interpret such a relationship as inverse, others – as direct or U-shaped (Myrskylä et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2011, Balbo et al., 2013). But in countries and regions where fertility is below the replacement level, all large population groups distinguished by income or other social criteria, except ethnic and religious ones, also have an average number of children below that level. Under such conditions, it does not matter much in which groups this number is higher than in others, since no group reproduces itself 100% (Borisov, 2007). The exception is very rich men. Among them there are many men with a lot of children, especially when their wives do not work and/or children are born from several wives. This creates the illusion of a U-shaped relationship. But such people make up a negligible part of the population and have almost no impact on the birth rate in the country.

Some authors study the relationship between income and the actual and expected (including existing) number of children in groups of respondents with the same desired number of children (if all necessary conditions are available) (Arkhangelsky et al. 2021). Others attach importance to the connection between

having many children and living in their own houses, to which an outbuilding or a second floor can be added if children are born. Therefore, there are more large families in villages and small towns than in large cities (Dorofeeva, 2019, p. 116; Sinelnikov, 2023, p. 99).

The empirical base of the study is the data of the Federal State Statistics Service: “Sample survey of the population’s income and participation in social programs” (VNDN-2023), conducted by “sampling method in all constituent entities of the Russian Federation, covering in 2023 60 thousand households in the main sample and 10 thousand households in the target sample “Families with children”¹; “Family and fertility” (the survey was conducted in 2009 in all federal districts and covered 2,000 respondents in 30 constituent entities of the Russian Federation)²; three sample surveys of the population’s reproductive plans conducted by Rosstat (RPN-2012, RPN-2017 and RPN-2022)³, during which women 18–44 years old and men 18–59 years old were interviewed: in 2012, it was 10,000 people in 30 constituent entities of the Russian Federation, in 2017 and 2022 – 15,000 people each in almost all constituent entities of the Russian Federation. In addition, we used the database of the 31st wave of the “Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey – HSE” (RLMS–HSE), conducted by the National Research University Higher School of Economics and OOO “Demoscope” in 2022⁴.

Research results

Differences in total and average per capita incomes between families with different numbers of children

Figure 1 presents the family income structure.

The total income of families with one child amounted to 71 thousand rubles per month,

with two children – 77 thousand, with three and more children under 18 – 83 thousand. But this data does not mean that people who earn more have more children. The family budget includes not only labor remuneration and income from self-employment, which in families with one child is 61 thousand per month, with two children – 62 thousand, and with three and more – only 45 thousand. Starting from the third child, the relationship between the total income of all family members from labor activity and the number of children becomes inverse partly because in many families with three and more children there is only one breadwinner – the father.

Analyzing the data of the study conducted by Vologda Research Center of RAS in 2016–2017 in the Northwestern Federal District of the Russian Federation (a total of 3,101 respondents, including 353 mothers with three or more children), E.O. Smoleva found that among all respondents the share of working was 62%, and among mothers with many children – only 48% (Smoleva, 2017, p. 18). In families with 1–2 children, usually both spouses work, if the only child or the youngest of the two children is at least three years old. If mothers with many children earn something, then, as a rule, very little due to the loss of qualifications after several parental leaves and/or inability to work full-time (Dorofeeva, 2019).

Allowances, compensations and other social payments at the federal and regional level amount to 5 thousand rubles per month (7% of the family budget) in families with one child, 11 thousand (14%) – with two children and 31 thousand (37%) – with three or more. Some families have other incomes, for example, from renting out housing. But the link between total income and the average number of children in

¹ Sample observation of household income and participation in social programs in 2023. Description of the observation. Table 1.3s. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/VNDN-2023/index.html

² Summary results of the sample survey “Family and fertility”. Table 17. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/12781>

³ Sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2012. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html; Sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2017. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN17/index.html; Sample surveillance of population reproductive plans in 2022. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html

⁴ The Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey – HSE. Project description. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/rlms/description>; Data of the 31st wave of the RLMS–HSE. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/rlms/news/856261114.html>

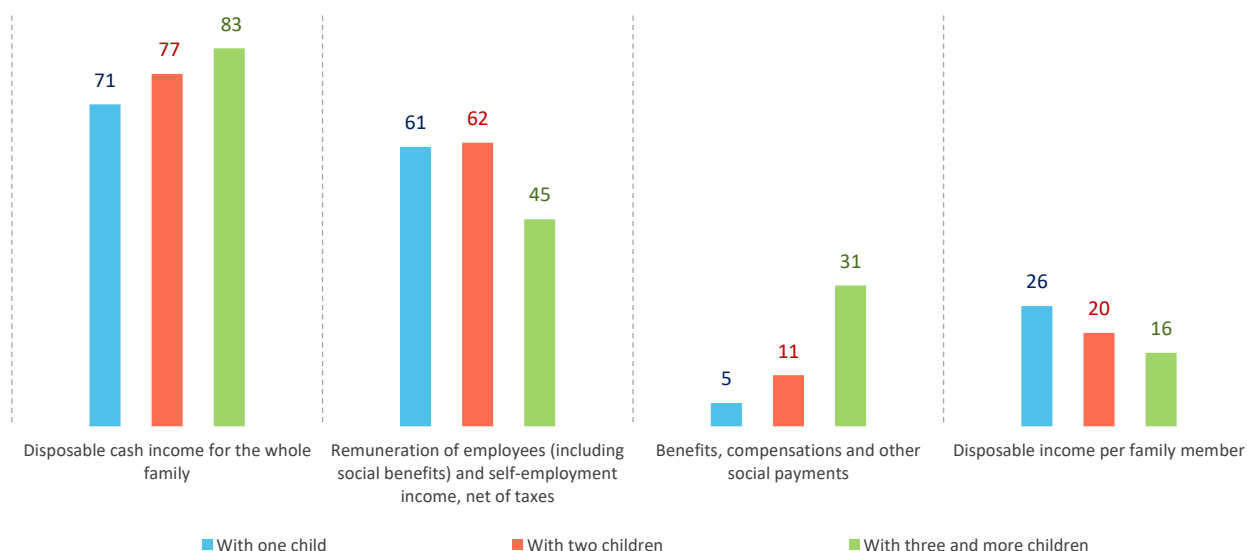


Figure 1. Disposable income for the whole family and per family member in 2022, depending on the number of children under 18 years of age per month, rubles

According to: Sample observation of population income and participation in social programs – 2023. Results of the observation. Table 1.3s. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/VNDN-2023/index.html

contemporary Russia has become direct as a result of increased social payments. However, the relationship between average per capita income and the number of children is inverse. The disposable monthly cash income per family member is 26 thousand in one-child families, 20 thousand in two-child families, and only 16 thousand in families with three or more children. Social payments have significantly reduced these differences, but have not eliminated them completely.

Self-assessment of financial situation among parents with different number of children

The questionnaire of the RLMS–HSE – 2022 has a question: “Imagine a ladder of 9 steps, where on the bottom, the first step, there are beggars, and on the top, the ninth step, there are rich people. On which of the nine steps do you personally stand today?”. This scale can be reduced to three levels – below average (1st to 3rd step), average (4th to 6th) and above average (7th to 9th). *Figure 2* presents the distribution of opinions of 4,149 respondents with children under 18 years old who answered this question.

From 28 to 33% of respondents with one, two, three and even four children under 18 years of age consider their situation to be below the average level (stages 1 to 3). Differences in these shares between respondents with 1 to 4

children are generally statistically insignificant. But among respondents with 5 or more children, this share is 50%, i.e. 20–22% higher than among those with 1–3 children. The differences are statistically reliable according to Student’s t-criterion at the significance level of $p < 0.05$. Only the difference of 17% between parents with 4 children, on the one hand, and those with 5 or more children, on the other hand, raises doubts ($p = 0.10$).

Two thirds (64–66%) of respondents with one, two and three children and 58% with 4 children classify themselves as middle (from 4th to 6th). Among those who have 5 or more children, only 42% of them do. There are very few (6–8%) who believe that they occupy the highest (from 7th to 9th) rungs on this scale, and this is practically independent of the number of children. The data in *Figure 2* are in good agreement with the data in *Figure 3*.

According to *Figure 3*, parents of five and more children differ much more from those with 1–4 children than these four groups from each other; 70% of parents with five and more children are dissatisfied with their material situation, in the other groups – from 45 to 52%. Among those with three children, despite lower average per capita income, there are 7% less dissatisfied with their material situation

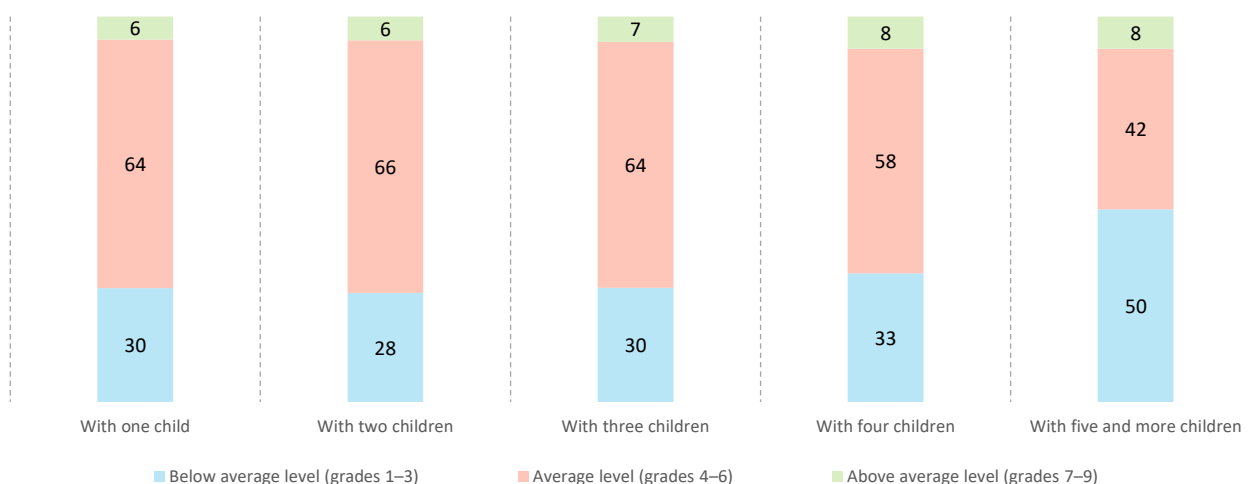


Figure 2. Assessment of the financial situation on a scale of 9 steps between the poor and the rich, % of respondents with any number of children under 18 years of age

According to: RLMS–HSE – 2022 data base. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/rlms/news/856261114.html> (in Figures 2 and 3, the sum of shares for some columns differs from 100% due to rounding).

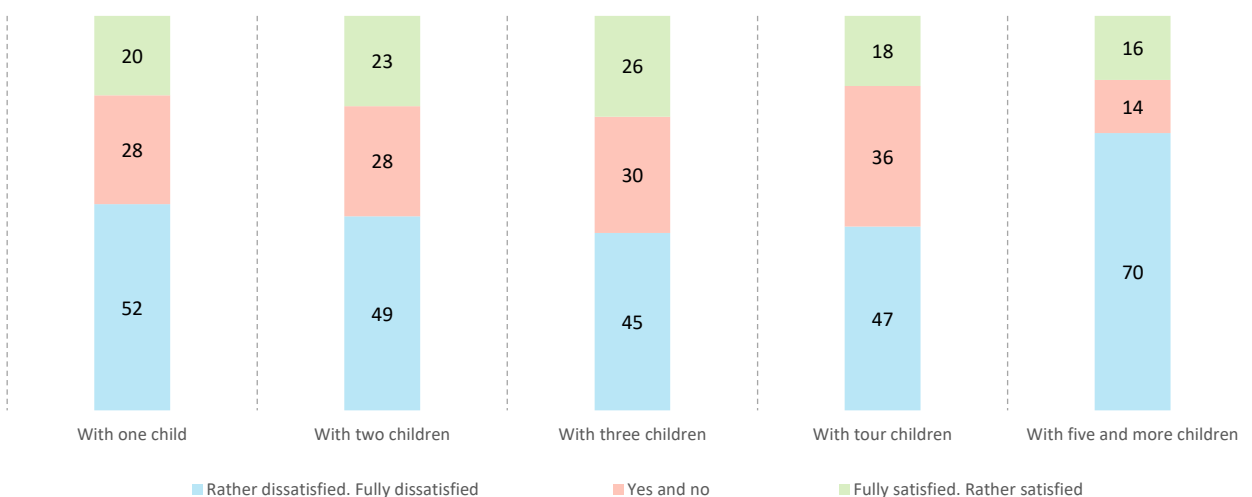


Figure 3. Distribution by degree of satisfaction with their financial situation, % of respondents with a certain number of children under 18 years of age

According to: RLMS–HSE – 2022 data base. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/rlms/news/856261114.html>

than among those with one child, and 6% more satisfied. The differences are insignificant. Differences in the share of those dissatisfied between those with five or more children and all other groups are reliable at the significance level of $p < 0.05$ and range from 18 to 25%. However, dissatisfaction with the material situation does not always lead to dissatisfaction with life in general (Fig. 4).

Among those with one child, 52% are not satisfied with their material situation, and only

16% are dissatisfied with life in general, i.e. 36% less. Among those with two children this difference is 35%, among those with three children – 29%, among those with four children – 31%, and among respondents with five or more children – 57%. According to the main indicators (see Fig. 2–4) parents with five and more children differ from respondents with 1–4 children much more than representatives of these groups from each other. In this regard, it is necessary to specify the criterion of having many children.

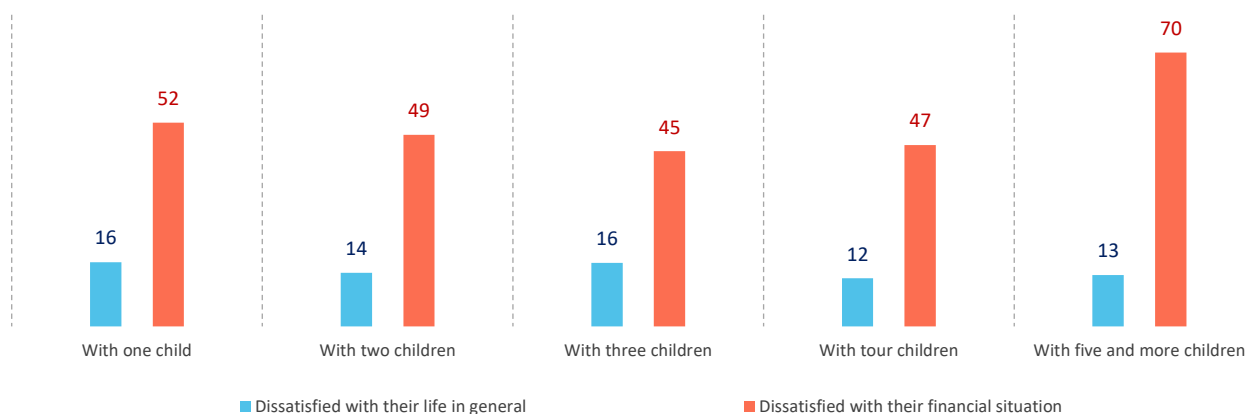


Figure 4. Share of those dissatisfied with their financial situation and life in general, % of respondents with a certain number of children under 18 years old

According to: RLMS–HSE – 2022 data base. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/rlms/news/856261114.html>

Official and scientific criteria for having many children

Until recently, families with three children had the status of large families only in those Russian regions where the share of such families among all families with minor children was rather small. According to the All-Russian Population Census 2020 (VPN-2020), families with three or more children under the age of 18 account for only 11% of the total number of families with children of this age⁵. But from the point of view of demographic science, can families with three children be considered as large families, and all families with three or more children be considered as a homogeneous population?

Simple generational replacement is possible if the average number of children born to one woman over her lifetime is at least 2.1. This applies to all women, regardless of whether they are married. According to V.A. Borisov's calculations, the average number of children born to a married woman by the end of her reproductive age required for simple generational replacement is 2.6, and this average can be summarized from the following distribution: 4% remain childless, 10% are limited to one child, 35% – to two children, 35% give birth to three, 14% – to four and 2% – to five or more children (Borisov, 2007, p. 544).

But according to the All-Russian Population Census-2020 data, among married women aged 45–49 who reported the number of children born, 6% had never had a child, 35% had one child, 43% had two children, 12% had three children, 3% had four children, and 2% had five or more children⁶. In any distribution, this implies rather large share of families with not only three but also four children to compensate for the large proportion of childless and single-child families in any low-fertility country. If the combined share of three- and four-child families is not a majority of all families, then generational replacement will be incomplete.

Families cannot be divided only into those with few children and those with many children. There should be an intermediate group occupying a middle position between them. In ordinary consciousness, “average” is associated with the norm, while “few” and “many” are associated with deviations from it, both for better and for worse. If the family and demographic policy is successful, families with three and four children will become the majority, i.e. the statistical norm, and society will cease to consider them to have many children. Until the beginning of the 20th century, no one considered families with 3–4

⁵ According to: All-Russian Population Census – 2020. Outcomes of the ARPC 2020. Volume 8. Table 9. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/vpn/2020/Tom8_Chislo_i_sostav_domochozyajstv (accessed: May 4, 2024). The census was scheduled for 2020. Due to the pandemic, it was postponed to 2021, but its name was not changed.

⁶ According to: All-Russian Population Census – 2020. Results of the ARPC-2020. Volume 9. Table 3. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/vpn/2020/Tom9_Rozhdaemost (accessed: May 23, 2024).

or even five children as large families because they were the majority.

Attitudes toward large families in society

According to a survey of mothers with many children, conducted by the Department of Sociology of Family and Demography of the Faculty of Sociology of Moscow State University in 2008, it was found that after the 1st birth the attitude of others toward the family changed for the better in 41, 9% of cases, and for the worse – only in 2.7% of cases, after the 2nd birth in 38.2 and 7.3% of cases respectively, after the 3rd – in 30.1 and 23.5%, after the 4th – in 10.6 and 12.7%, after the 5th – in 7 and 5.6% of cases respectively (Antonov, 2009, pp. 365–366). Each next birth, especially starting from the third, is approved less often than the previous one.

According to the survey conducted by Vologda Research Center of RAS in 2016–2017, 13% of mothers with many children do not have enough money for everyday expenses, and another 27% of them spend their entire salary on this. Among all respondents, 10% belong to the first group and 20% to the second group. But only 6% of mothers with many children faced rejection and/or neglect from society during the year before the survey (and not always because of having many children), and among all respondents – 4% (Smoleva, 2017, p. 19). People with many children are sometimes blamed for “breeding poverty” and irresponsible attitude toward children, but survey data show that

such an attitude is expressed by an insignificant number of people.

In the questionnaire RLMS–HSE – 2022, respondents were asked to determine their place on a ladder of 9 steps, where on the 1st step there are people who are not respected at all, and on the 9th step there are those who are highly respected. *Figure 5* presents the distribution of answers to this question.

The share of those who believe that they are highly respected or, on the contrary, not respected at all, practically does not depend on the number of children. According to the VCIOM survey (April 2024), about a third of respondents agree with the opinion “society does not have enough respect for parents raising three or more children” (*Fig. 6*).

Among parents with many children 37% agree with this statement, and among parents with few or no children – 31%. By contrast, the share of those who disagree is 53% among parents with many children and 59% among all others. In both cases the difference is only 6%, and the share of those who found it difficult to answer is 10%.

The data indicating negative attitudes toward parents with many children (Antonov, 2009; Smoleva, 2019) are based on the opinions of those who faced disapproval from individuals. People react painfully to negative attitudes toward themselves, while positive ones are taken for granted. Most people around them

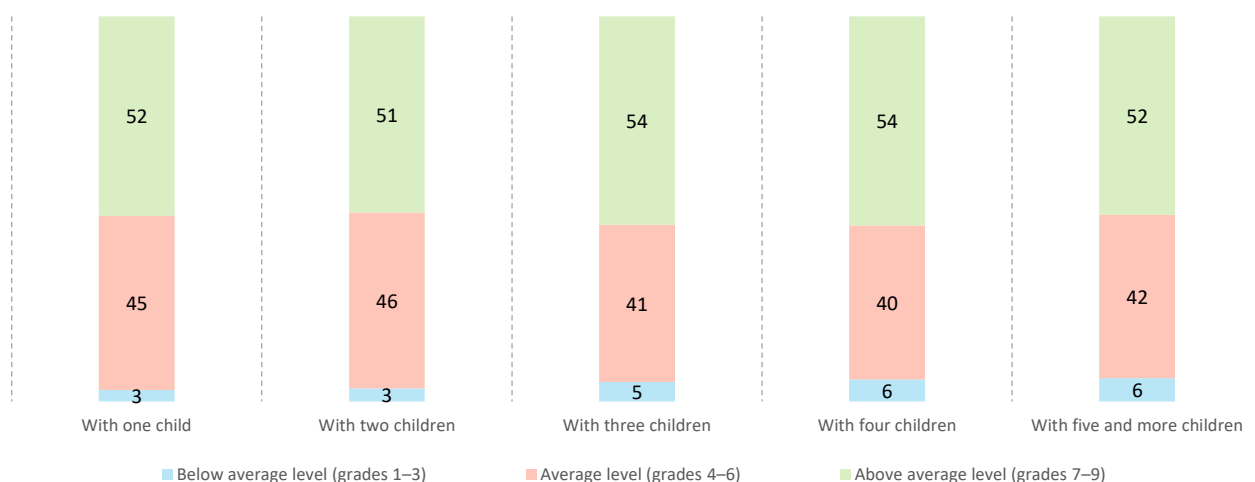


Figure 5. Assessment of the prestige of one’s position in society on a scale of 9 steps between the poor and the rich, % of respondents with a certain number of children under 18 years of age

According to: RLMS–HSE – 2022 data base. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/rlms/news/856261114.html>

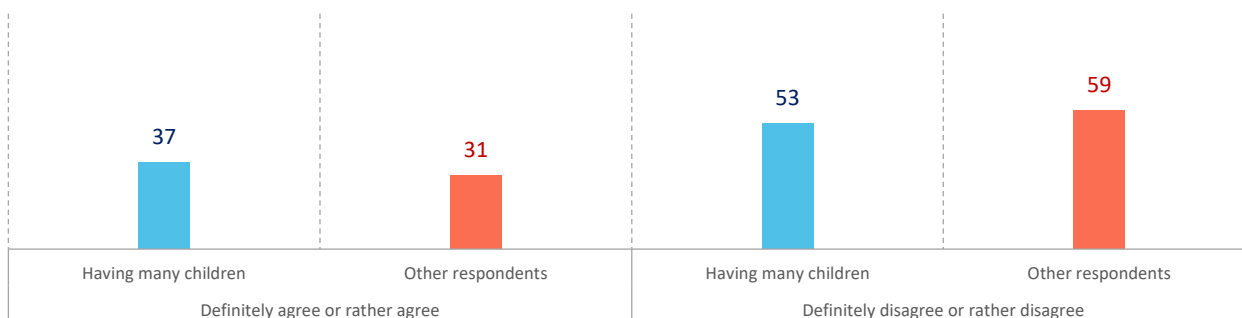


Figure 6. Share of respondents who agree or disagree that “there is not enough respect in society for parents raising three or more children”, % of parents with many children and other respondents

According to: VCIOM survey database “Large Family: Assessment and Attitudes”.

The survey of 1,600 adult respondents was conducted on April 13, 2024 by telephone interview by stratified random sampling. Tables and array (database) are published on the VCIOM website. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/mnogodetnaja-semja-ocenka-i-otnoshenie> (accessed: May 19, 2024).

do not condemn those with many children, but they are not going to take an example from them either.

Judging by the data in Figure 4, at present there are no significant differences in satisfaction with the financial situation between parents with one, two, three and even four children. The degree of this satisfaction is much lower only among parents with five or more children, i.e. among those who can be considered as having many children according to the criteria of demographic science rather than family and demographic policy. However, they are satisfied with their life in general approximately the same as all other parents, who, in turn, do not differ much from each other in all parameters (see Fig. 2–5). In particular, there are no big differences between those who have two and three children, although the latter have somewhat lower average per capita incomes, neither in the assessment of their financial situation, nor in the degree of satisfaction with this situation and with life in general, nor in the perception of positive or negative attitude to themselves on the part of others. Does this mean that family and demographic policy can significantly increase the number of third births? And if it can, what measures would be required to achieve this?

Impact of family and demographic policy on the realization of families’ need for children

According to Rosstat data, the average expected number of children that respondents intend to have is close to the average desired

number of children that they would like to have if they have all the necessary conditions for this, in their opinion. Both the expected and the desired number include the children they already have (Fig. 7).

The average expected number of children increased from 1.72 to 1.92, i.e. by 0.20 p. in the period from 2009 to 2012. The total birth rate increased from 1.54 to 1.69, i.e. by 0.15 p. This was influenced by the law on maternity capital adopted in 2006, when the total fertility rate was only 1.31. Subsequently, other benefits and allowances for families with children were also introduced, both at the federal and regional levels, which also contributed to the increase in the birth rate. Unfortunately, in 2006, Rosstat did not conduct nationally representative surveys to determine the desired and expected number of children before the introduction of this law.

In many families that previously postponed having children because of low income, poor housing conditions and other material and domestic reasons, family and demographic policies have removed these obstacles and the children desired by the parents have been born. The impact of these obstacles on fertility can be assessed by the difference between the desired and expected number of children. In 2009, it was 0.56 and in 2012 – 0.36. But the average desired number of children itself, which characterizes the need of individuals and/or families for children, has not changed. Both in 2009 and 2012, it was 2.28, and between 2012

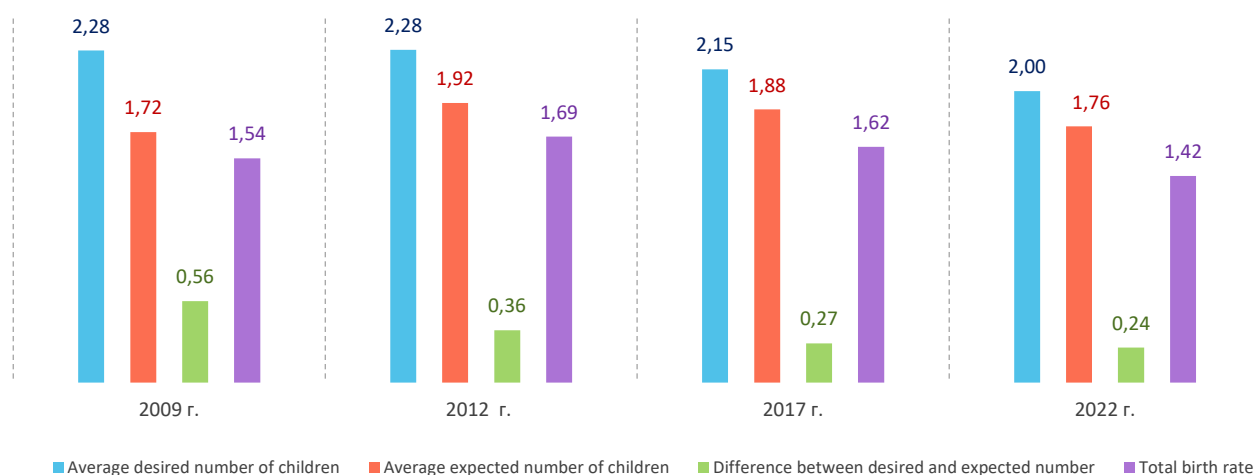


Figure 7. Total birth rate, average desired and expected number of children (including existing children) for women 18–44 years old, Russian Federation, 2009–2022

According to: Demographic Yearbook of Russia – 2022 (2023). Moscow: Rosstat. Table 2.6.

Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/demogr_ejegod_2023.pdf; Summary results of the sample survey “Family and fertility”. Table 17. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/12781>; Results of sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2012. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html; Results of sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2017. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN17/index.html; Results of sample surveillance of reproductive plans of the population in 2022. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html

and 2017, it decreased to 2.15, i.e. by 0.13 p., which indicates a decrease in women’s need for children (and families in general, since for men this indicator also decreased from 2.30 to 2.16).

This was accompanied by a decrease in the average expected number of children from 1.92 to 1.88, i.e. by 0.04 p. The total fertility rate decreased from 1.69 to 1.62, i.e. by 0.07 p. But the difference between the desired and expected number of children also decreased from 0.36 to 0.27, i.e. by 0.09 p.

The average expected number of children decreased from 1.88 to 1.76 in the period from 2017 to 2022, it means that a decrease was 0.12 pp; the average desired number – from 2.15 to 2.00 (by 0.15 p.), the total fertility rate – from 1.62 to 1.42 (by 0.20 p.), and the difference between the average desired and average expected number – from 0.27 to 0.24, i.e. by 0.03 p. The decline in fertility between 2012 and 2022 is explained not so much by a reduction in the degree of realization of the need of families for children due to worsening living conditions of the population, as by a decrease in this need itself.

Almost all measures to increase fertility are limited to removing material and domestic

obstacles to having children in families where potential parents want children but do not have them or have fewer than they want. This may at best increase the fertility rate until the existing need of families for children is fully satisfied, but it has no effect on the need itself.

For the entire period from 2009 to 2022, both the total fertility rate and the average number of children of women by the end of the reproductive age were less than not only the desired but also the expected number of children. Rosstat publishes these indicators for all respondents, regardless of their marital status, i.e. their critical value, corresponding to the level of simple replacement of generations, is not 2.6, but 2.1. But in 2022, even the desired number of children for women was 2.00, and for men – 1.97. For the unmarried, the realization of their desires and intentions regarding the number of children depends on the prospects of marriage, and for the married – on the marital relationship, which in most cases ends in separation and divorce.

The main measures of family and demographic policy in Russia are aimed at improving material and living conditions for children’s

birth in existing families, but practically do not contribute either to the creation of new families, i.e. to improving conditions for legal marriage, or to the preservation of existing families, i.e. to the prevention of divorce. Without solving these problems, the effectiveness of family and demographic policy will be insufficient.

Figure 8 presents the distribution of women by desired number of children.

Only 0.2% of women did not want to have children at all in 2009; in 2022 – 2%. This is a very small number, but there is still an upward trend in the number of those who are voluntarily childless. The share of those wishing to have only one child, which was rather small in 2009 (8%), has almost tripled to 23% in 2022.

Every fourth woman, even if she has all the necessary conditions from her own point of view, has a need for only one child or no need for children at all. In such a situation, complete replacement of generations is possible only when the overwhelming majority of the remaining women are oriented towards having medium-sized children or even many children. However, in reality, the orientation towards two-childhood prevails. In 2009, 58% of women wished to have two children (including existing children). By 2022, this share decreased to 49%, mainly due to the reorientation of some women to one-childhood. At the same time, the orientation toward three-childhood decreased. The share of those wishing to have

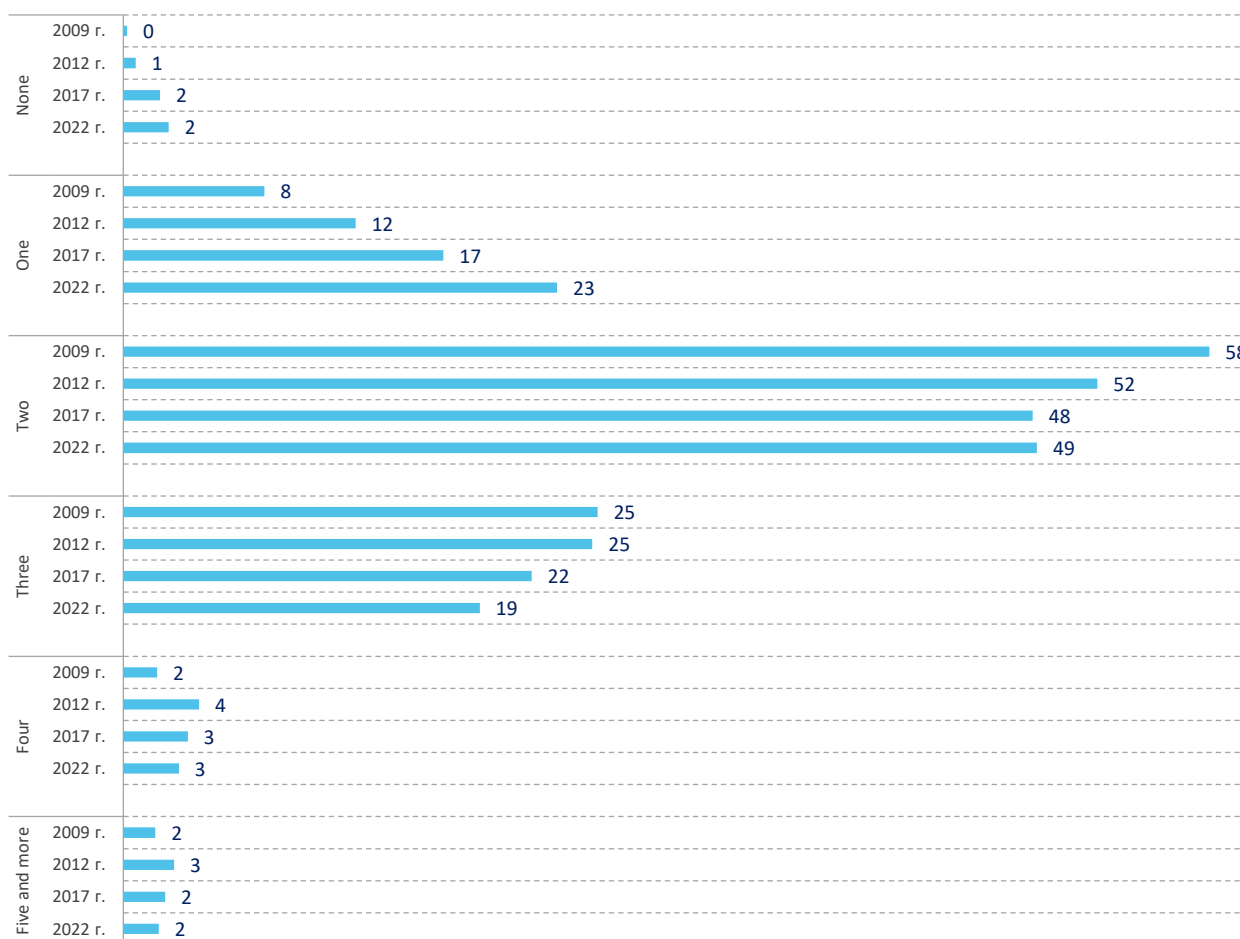


Figure 8. Distribution of women 18–44 years old by desired number of children

According to: Summary results of the sample survey “Family and fertility”. Table 17. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/12781>; Results of sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2012. Results of the observation.

Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html; Results of sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2017. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN17/index.html; Results of sample surveillance of reproductive plans of the population in 2022. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html. The sum of shares is less than 100% because between 2 and 6% of respondents did not answer the question about the desired number of children.

three children decreased from 23% in 2009 to 19% in 2022.

The share of those wishing to have four children has remained insignificant all this time (from 2 to 4%). Only 2–3% of women have a need to create families with five or more children. The distribution by the expected number of children was somewhat different (Fig. 9).

The share of women who intended to remain permanently childless increased from 1 to 4%. In 2009, 33% of women intended to limit themselves to one child. By 2012, this indicator decreased to 24%, which may be due to the intensification of family and demographic

policy. But then the indicator increased again and reached 30% in 2022. This may be due to the deterioration of living conditions of some families due to the situation in the country, as well as to the growing share of women who want to have only one child even if they believe they have all the necessary conditions.

Between 2009 and 2022, the share intending to have two children increased slightly (from 47% to 50%), but then decreased again to 45% in 2022. The cumulative share of those intending to have two or more children increased from 56% in 2009 to 64% in 2012 and then almost stabilized to 62% in 2022. This may have been

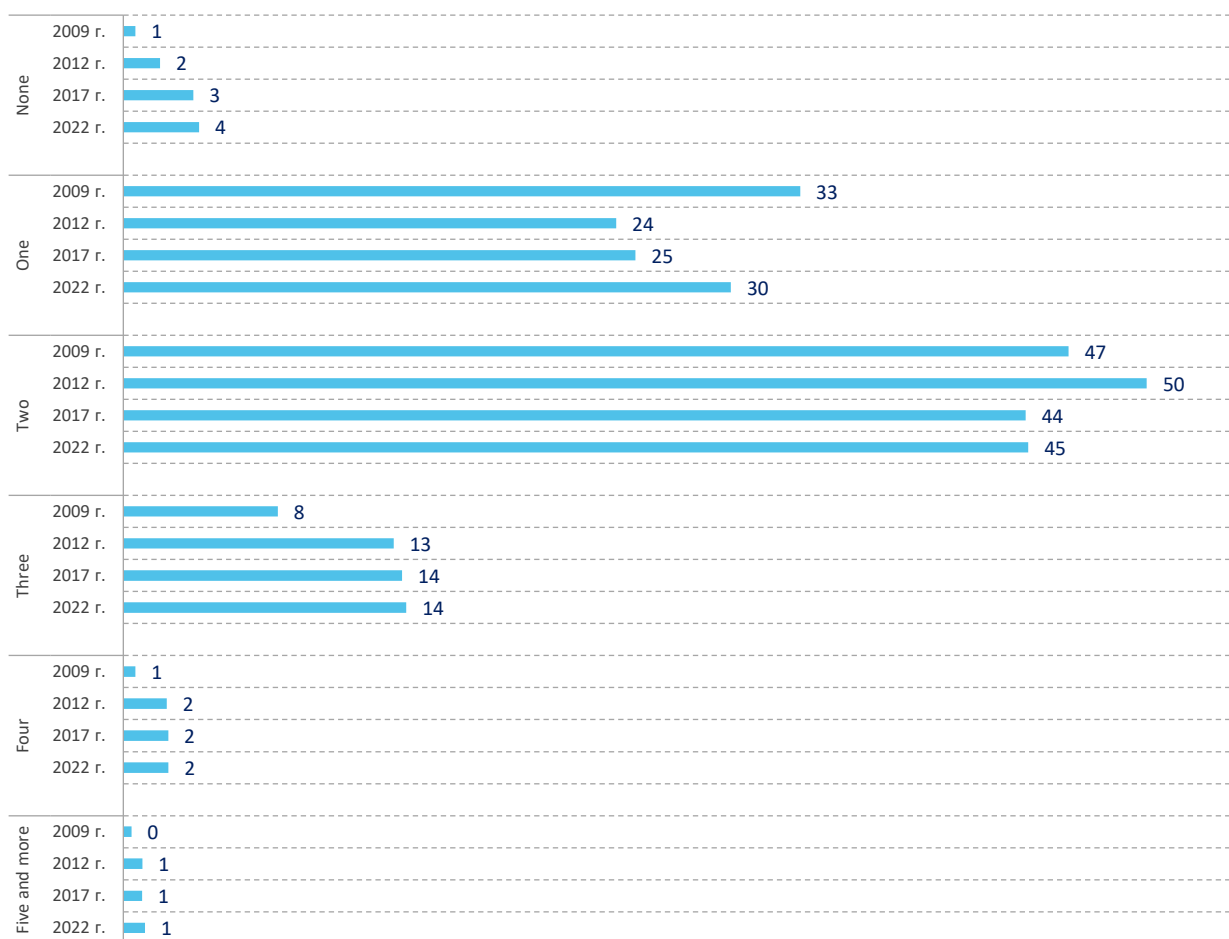


Figure 9. Distribution of women 18–44 years old by expected number of children

According to: Demographic Yearbook of Russia – 2022 (2023). Moscow: Rosstat. Table 2.6. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/demogr_ejagod_2023.pdf; Summary results of the sample survey “Family and fertility”. Table 17. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/12781>; Results of sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2012. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html; Results of sample observation of reproductive plans of the population in 2017. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN17/index.html; Results of sample surveillance of reproductive plans of the population in 2022. Results of the observation. Table 33. Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/RPN22/index.html. The sum of the shares is less than 100% because between 5 and 11% of respondents did not answer the question about the expected number of children.

influenced by the granting of the right to maternity capital after the birth of the second child. If the second child was born before January 1, 2007, i.e. before the law on maternity capital came into force, the mother received this right after the birth of the third child. If the third child was born before January 1, 2007, the right to the capital could be obtained after the birth of the fourth child, etc. Until 2020, this right was granted only once, which was due to the limited economic opportunities of the state, but, in any case, limited the effectiveness of family and demographic policy.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, many women whose second child was born before 2007 gave birth to a third child and became eligible for capital. Therefore, the share of women intending to have three children increased from 8% in 2009 to 13% in 2012, and later stabilized at 14%. Over time, there were fewer and fewer families who did not receive capital for a second child born before 2007, and the federal maternity capital stopped affecting the fertility rate of third children. However, many constituent entities of the Russian Federation introduced regional maternity capitals for women who gave birth to a third child, but their value is less than the federal capital. Since 2020, families have become eligible for the capital after the birth of the firstborn, and when the second child appears, the amount of capital increases. This should have been done much earlier.

Despite the decrease in total fertility rates, which are calculated for conditional generations, in real generations the share of women who have given birth to three or more children is increasing. Unfortunately, the share of childless women is also growing (Kalabikhina, Kuznetsova, 2023). It is much higher than it can be judged by Rosstat data on the desired and expected number of children.

The number of parents with three or more children is growing in Russia, but the overwhelming majority of families remain small. The main reason for the small number of large families is not in the deterioration of their financial situation after the birth of third and

subsequent children or in the allegedly negative attitude towards them in society, but in the fact that most parents have a need for only 1–2 children. The increase in the fertility rate after the introduction of the law on maternity capital and a number of other benefits and allowances for families with children improved the conditions for having children in many families. This helped to increase the realization of the existing need of these families for children, but did not affect the need itself.

It is necessary to grow assistance to families with children, especially those with three or more. However, under the influence of these measures, fertility in real generations may increase at best to the desired number of children, which at present, even if it is extremely unlikely to be fully realized, is insufficient for simple replacement of generations.

Increasing the need for children is impossible without reorienting the majority of the population towards family values. The data of almost all sociological surveys indicate that in the system of values of Russians the family is either in the first place or in the second place – after health. But only a few surveys specify which type of family we are talking about (Antonov et al., 2020).

Many scientists adhere to the theory of the “second demographic transition” (Van de Kaa, 1987), according to which modern society recognizes not only single-children but also childless couples as full families, including those who can but do not want to have children, as well as single parents with children⁷ (Vishnevsky, 2014; Churilova, 2015; Gurko, 2022). The social acceptability of choosing any life path also concerns the creation of large families, but their incomes are lower and their housing conditions are worse than everyone else’s. This is not compensated by any socio-prestigious advantages over families of other types and single people, so families with three and more children are too few to compensate for the non-participation of the childless and insufficient participation of single-children in population reproduction.

⁷ Isupova O. (2010). “Childfree,” or voluntary childlessness. *Demoscope Weekly*, 427–428. Available at: <https://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0427/gender01.php> (accessed: May 20, 2024).

Conclusion

A nuclear family cannot become large at once. To ease the difficult path to middle and large children, some benefits, allowances and credits should be provided to families from the moment of marriage registration, but for no more than 2 years. After the birth of each child, this period can be extended for another 3 years. The conditions for granting preferential family mortgages could provide for a reduction not only in the interest on the loan, but also in the monthly payments during the period of the mother's leave to care for a child under the age of three, when the family income decreases.

The introduction of additional benefits and allowances is necessary to improve the

conditions for the realization of the existing need of families for children, but does not affect the need itself, which is now insufficient even for simple replacement of generations. It is necessary to properly promote in the mass media the lifestyle of a family with three or more children based on a strong legal marriage as an essential component of a healthy lifestyle to increase the number of children desired by parents themselves. Family studies courses should present this lifestyle in such a way as to make it attractive to students. Family and demographic policy will achieve its goals if material assistance to large families is combined with an increase in the prestige of their position in society.

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