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Larissa A. Popova

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LARISSA A. POPOVA

Changing Trends in Quantitative and Qualitative Characteristics of the Birthrate in Russia and the Komi Republic

The dynamics of the birthrate in Russia and the Komi Republic in the 2000s are revealed. Changes in the structure of natality based on the mother's age, birth order, and marital status are identified. Questions of family planning, abortion rates, neonatal health, and infant mortality are examined. Positive trends in increased birth rates are documented, even in conditions of the declining age structure of women of fertile age. This is in part due to children that were earlier postponed by senior generations, raising the number of children in families. The role of demographic policy in raising the intensity of

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Larisa Alekseevna Popova is a researcher with the Institute for Socioeconomic and Energy Problems of the North of the Komi Scientific Center, Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences [UrO RAN], city of Syktyvkar. Email: popova@iespn.komisc.ru.

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natality and the level of the reproductive intentions of the population is assessed. Directions for its improvement are suggested.

Keywords: *birth rate, age structure, intensity of natality, birth order, out-of-wedlock birth, family planning, infant mortality, reproductive intentions, demographic policy*

After twelve years of decline, starting in 2000, a rise in the birthrate has been observed in Russia, despite conditions of deteriorating demographic structure of women of fertile age that began in 2010–12 (Zakharov 2012). Signs of a decline became apparent in 2013. The number of births fell from 1,902.1 to 1,895.8, the overall quotient fell from 13.3 per thousand population to 13.2 per mil. A provisional rise in birthrates occurred in 2014. Including data for the Crimea Federal District, the number of births in Russia comprised 1,942.7; the overall quotient increased to 13.3 per mil. But in 2015, a reduction in the absolute index of births is once again being observed, to 1,940.6; the overall quotient remained at the previous mark of 13.3 per mil; the aggregate quotient, which still increases along with a reduction in the number of women of fertile age, reached 1.777 children per one woman in the course of the entire reproductive period in 2015 in comparison with 1.750 in 2014 (Rosstat). The stagnation of recent years suggests that birthrate increases in Russia may have reached its limit, and that its steady decline will begin in the near future. In these conditions, it is logical to sum up the successes of recent years and to assess the changes in the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the population's natality.

The dynamics of the birthrate

Over the whole of 1999–2015, the annual number of births increased in Russia by 59.8 percent (from 1,214.7 (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2015*, p. 37) to 1,940.6). The overall natality quotient increased by 60.2 percent (from 8.3 per mil to 13.3 per mil), the aggregate quotient by 53.6 percent (from 1.157 children (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2015*, p. 45) to 1.777). Nevertheless, the values in recent years are substantially lower than not only the 1986–87 level, when the absolute number of births in Russia had reached 2,500, the overall quotient had comprised 16.2 per thousand population, and the aggregate

one was 2.194 children (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2012*), but also that of all the years preceding this period. As a result of a decade and a half of growth, the number of births in Russia, even taking Crimea FD into account, did not make it to the 1990 level (1988.9 thousand [*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2012*]). The overall natality quotient [was at] about the 1990 level (13.4 per mil), while the aggregate one was only slightly higher (1.732 children [*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2012*]) than the indicator for 1991, the year that immediately preceded the start of the country's depopulation.

In general, natality tendencies in the Komi Republic duplicate the Russia-wide ones. A rise in the birthrate was likewise observed here since 2000. The absolute number of births increased from 9,680 persons in 1999 (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2009*, p. 30) to 12,436 in 2013 (by 28.5 percent), falling after this over the past two years to 11,789 (*Estestvennoe dvizhenie*, p. 4). Over the period 1999–2015, the number of births increased in Komi by 21.8 percent; that is, much less significantly than on average for Russia. However, the rise in natality took place in Komi in conditions of a population that was actively waning due to migrational outflow; the overall natality quotient therefore increased much more substantially over this time: by 50.5 percent (from 9.1 to 13.7 per mil) (*Figure 1*). But this too is less noticeable growth than for the country as a whole. In the past two years, the overall quotient in the Komi Republic, as is the case countrywide, continues to increase by a modest amount only in an urban locale (*Figure 1*).

The rise in natality in the relevant period was in many ways occasioned by improvement in the age structure of fertile women, a consequence of increased active childbearing ages. A range of [fertile] generations [born in] the middle through the second half of the 1980s could be observed in Russia up to the end of the past decade. An increase in the aggregate natality quotient augments the point that the intensity of the process has increased as well. In the Komi Republic, the increase in the aggregate birth rate quotient turned out to be more significant than on average for Russia: over 1999–2014, its level rose by 70.0 percent (from 1.184 children to 2.013 [*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2009*, p. 36; *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2015*, p. 44]), against 50.9 percent in the [whole] country. Unlike Russia as a whole, the rates of growth of the aggregate natality quotient in Komi surpass

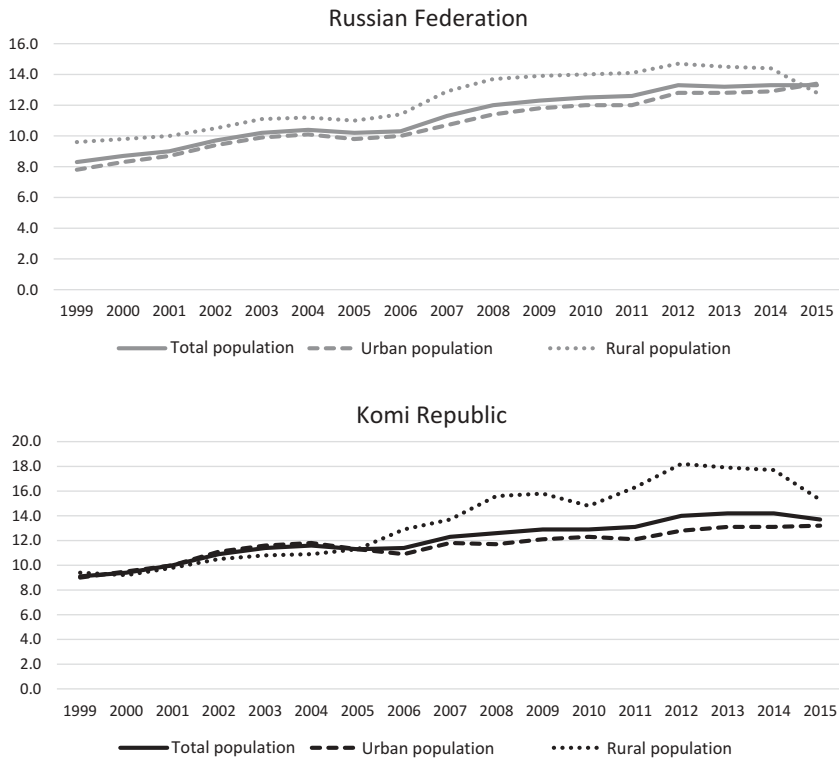


Figure 1. **Dynamics of the Overall Natality Quotient of the Population in the Russian Federation and the Komi Republic, 1999–2015** (number of births [per] 1,000 population)

Sources: Rosstat; *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2012*; *Estestvennoe dvizhenie*.

the rates of growth of the overall quotient. A widening of the gap with the Russia-wide aggregate natality indicator is therefore being observed in recent years (Figure 2). We note that over the span of 1988–2001, the aggregate quotient in Komi, which until then had noticeably exceeded the Russia-wide level, was on average somewhat lower than for the [whole] country. As of 2002, it once again becomes stably higher, but until recent years the outperformance was very insignificant (from 3 to 7 percent). In 2012–14, the republican aggregate birthrate quotient already became 11–15 percent higher than the Russia-wide index.

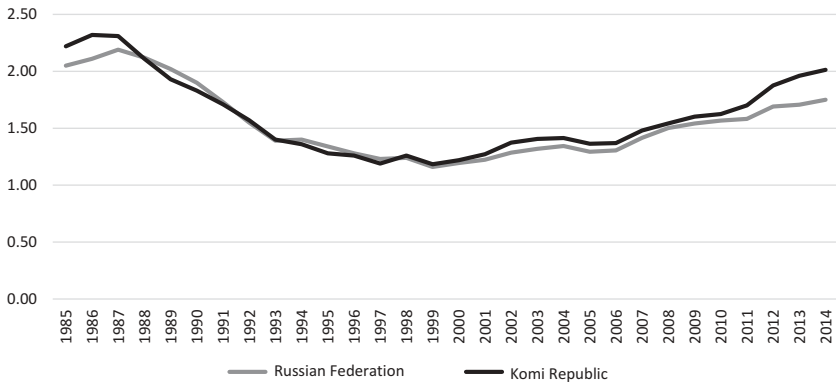


Figure 2 **Dynamics of the Aggregate Natality Quotient in the Russian Federation and the Komi Republic, 1985–2014** (children per one woman in the course of the reproductive period)

Sources: *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii* 2012, 2015; *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi* 2009, 2015.

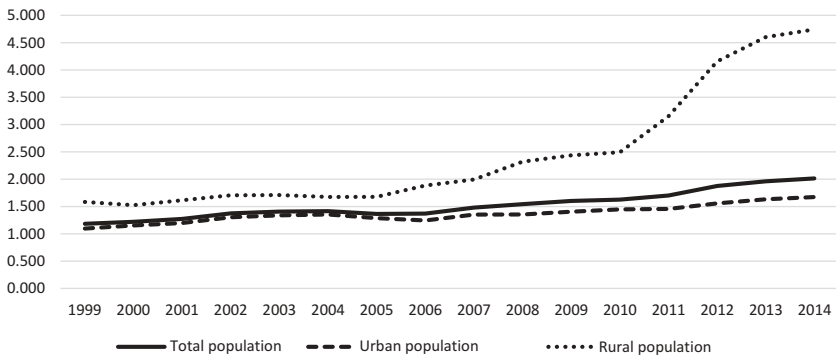


Figure 3 **Dynamics of the Aggregate Natality Quotient in an Urban and Rural Locale of the Komi Republic, 1999–2014** (children per one woman in the course of the reproductive period)

Sources: *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi* 2009, 2015.

A one-and-a-half-fold rise in the aggregate birthrate quotient occurred in an urban locale of the Komi Republic over 1999–2014; the rural indicator increased by nearly three times (Figure 3). From the mid-2000s it started to noticeably break away from the urban one. As early as 2008, the psychologically important milestone of simple

population replacement was reached and passed in villages. In a provisionally defined generation as of 2008, the aggregate birth quotient comprised 2.305 children per one rural woman over [her] entire child-bearing period. According to the data of official statistics, in 2012 its value topped the mark of 4, while in 2014 it comprised 4.741 (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2015*, p. 40). True, a recalculation by age natality quotients published in this same source does give more modest numbers. But according to it as well, in 2014 the level of the aggregate natality quotient of the rural population of the Komi Republic comprised 4.413 children per one woman. This is 2.6 times more than the urban indicator, while ten years ago the outperformance had comprised a bit more than 20 percent.

It ought to be noted that until 2006, an overall natality quotient was increasing at more significant rates in the Komi Republic. That is, in this period, the principal role in increasing natality was played by the factor of improvement of the age structure. Over 1999–2006, the overall quotient rose in Komi by 25.3 percent in comparison with a growth in the aggregate quotient of 15.7 percent. The rise in intensity of natality in this time was determined by a spontaneous response to improved conditions of economic growth in the 2000s. These were births that had been deferred by the population in the crisis 1990s. After the introduction of federal support, maternity capital provided for a second child as of January 1, 2007 under federal law no. 256-FZ “On Supplementary Measures of State Support for Families Having Children” of December 29, 2006 (Federal’nyi zakon O dopolnitel’nykh), a higher-than-expected escalation of the aggregate quotient can be observed. A rise in the intensity of natality had taken hold. In 2007, the aggregate quotient had already increased in Komi by 8.0 percent against a growth in the overall quotient by 7.9 percent. The outperformance continued to ramp up in subsequent years. For the country as a whole, the higher-than-expected increase in the intensity of natality began somewhat later: in 2009. Over 1999–2008, the overall birth quotient grew in Russia by 44.6 percent in comparison with a growth in the aggregate quotient by 29.8 percent. Since 2009, intensity of natality began to dominate. Over the 2008–14 period, the aggregate quotient increased in Russia by 16.5 percent against a growth in the overall quotient by 10.8 percent.

The rollout of state demographic policy allowed for a continuation of positive trends in natality seen at the beginning of the 2000s. However, these were already starting to show signs of stagnation in 2005–06.

Conditions of policy inducements and continuing favorable age structure nonetheless facilitated a rise in the intensity of natality. In the Komi Republic, the rates of gain in the aggregate birth quotient increased from a negative value of -3.5 percent in 2005 and 0.4 percent in 2006 to 8.0 percent in 2007. After this, their gradual reduction was observed: to 4.3 percent in 2008, 3.8 percent in 2009, and 1.4 percent in 2010.

The introduction of regional maternity capital for a third child in 2011 (law no. 45-RZ of the Komi Republic “On Supplementary Measures of Social Support for Families Having Children on the Territory of the Republic of Komi” of 29 April 2001 (Zakon Respubliki)) noticeably increased the gain in the aggregate quotient in Komi: to 4.7 percent in 2011 and 10.3 percent in 2012. Gains in this indicator in rural areas comprised 26.4 percent in 2011, and 31.9 percent in 2012. That is, despite conditions of declining age structure of reproductive women, the positive trend in natality not only continued to persist, but ramped up.

In 2013, when reduction in the birthrate was documented in the country as a whole, growth persisted for the time being in the Komi Republic. However, the rates of the growth became noticeably smaller. The overall natality quotient rose by a mere 1.4 percent, the aggregate one by 4.5 percent. In 2014, the absolute number of births in Komi shrank somewhat, the overall quotient remained at the previous level, and the value of the aggregate quotient increased, though insignificantly. In 2015, the number of births declined significantly, while the overall quotient increased slightly only in urban areas. That is, in essence, the republic, like the country as a whole, is standing on the brink of reduced natality. The aggregate quotient, calculated by methods of provisionally defining generations, retains a positive trend—and even quite a significant one in rural areas. This is due to a continuing rise in natality in the age groups older than 25—older than 20 in rural areas—and an increase in the ratio of second and higher order births.

Changing the calendar of births of different generations

It is well known that change in the intensity of natality can be caused by long-term trends creating rises (or falls) due to numerous factors, especially shifts in the calendar of births [*kalendaria rozhdenii*] over the span of women’s childbearing potential. Increase in the aggregate natality quotient in 1999–2014 was to a significant degree due to

changes in birth calendars. Deferment of births was practiced by the Russian population over the entire span of the crisis 1990s and very noticeably manifested after the 1998 financial crisis, as reflected in all fullness 1999 indicators. An elevated level was influenced in more recent years by a reciprocal shift in the calendar of births: the realization by older generations of previously deferred births, as well as a compressing of the timetable of births among young cohorts of the population under the influence of federal and regional demographic initiatives. That is, a reciprocal shift in the calendar of births can be observed.

Proof is a noticeable shift in natality into older groups of the population, visible over the period under consideration. Throughout Russia as a whole in 2008, the modal age of natality (the age at which the greatest number of births takes place) shifted from the 20–24 age group to the 25–29 age group. The rate of the gain in the age quotients, negative on the whole over the period under consideration in the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups, continues to ramp up from age to age, reaching the maximum in the 40–44 age group. Until 2006, the maximum annual gain in the age natality quotient had been in the 35–39 age group. At this time a spontaneous realization of deferred births was occurring in families, since opportunities had appeared, given conditions improved socio-economic situations in general. From 2007 on, the maximum gain moved into the older age interval. Births were stimulated by new demographic policy measures, many of which most likely would not have happened without the stimulus. On the whole, over 1999–2014, the age quotient for the 40–44-year-old group increased in Russia by 3.7 times, and for the 35–39 age group by 3.5 times (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii* 2015, p. 64).

In the Komi Republic, a negative rate of gain in age quotients over the 1999–2014 period is characteristic only of the youngest fertile age group, 15–19 years old. It then accelerates, achieving a maximum in the 40–44 age group, in which the index over the period under consideration increased by 4.4 times, while in the 35–39 age group it increased by 3.9 times (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi* 2015, p. 4). Natality in the republic's urban population by 2010 in Komi likewise shifted into the 25–29 age group. This occurred somewhat later than in the country as a whole since in Komi, the 20–24 age group also trended upward. In the rural areas, natality by age continued to remain sufficiently young, both in Russia and in the Komi Republic.

Switching from age quotients based on provisional generations to the real cohorts of women analyzed by year of birth, for whom these quotients are measured by year of observation, shows which real generations received the maximum “reproductive gain” from the state’s demographic initiatives. Federal demographic policy measures, in the country as a whole and in the Komi Republic, facilitated the realization of overall fecundity for the generations born in 1963–73 most of all. Regional maternity capital for a third child contributed in the greatest degree to an increase in the intensity of natality of the cohorts born in 1967–78.

Over the whole period of state demographic policy activism, the most significant impetus for changing reproductive behavior was manifest by the generations born in the 1960s and 1970s. They incarnated it in a real way in births in the older age groups: births that might not have taken place without the demographic policy measures. A rise in the indicators is also characteristic of the generations born in the 1980s and even of the generations of the beginning of the 1990s, especially after the introduction of regional capital for a third child. That is, the thesis about the compressing of the birth timetable among young cohorts of the population under the influence of state demographic initiatives is corroborated. However, it is characteristic above all of the age model of natality of the rural population.

Increasing the number of children in families

Higher-than-expected increase in the percentage of high order births demonstrates vividly changes in natality patterns in the years of demographic policy activism. It ought to be noted that in the country as a whole there is no full accounting of births by birth order. Due to Federal Law no. 143-FZ of November 15, 1997 “On Acts of Civil Status” (Federal’nyi zakon Ob aktakh), information on birth order was excluded from the Records of Acts of Birth from 1999 onward. In the first half of the 2000s, even in those subjects of the Russian Federation where such statistics continued to be processed on the basis of medical birth certificates of birth (about sixty regions), the percentage of births for which the order was not indicated was very high. The Komi Republic is one of these regions. However, interruption in continuous processing of information about birth order was not very lengthy, only from 1999–2003.

From 2004 onward, information about birth order in Komi is available for practically all births. This enables analysis of which children best indicate trends in the rise in natality.

The ratio of firstborns fell in the republic over 2006–14 by 35.9 percent, and in comparison with 2004 by 37.8 percent, having comprised 39 percent in the structure of births in 2015 (*Estestvennoe dvizhenie*, p. 17) against 61.1 percent in 2004. The percentage of births of all other [birth] orders increased. In the first two years after the introduction of federal maternity capital, the ratio of second children rose in Komi by 11.3 percent and of third ones by 25.0 percent, and the percentage of fourth and higher children by 19.0 percent. Over the four years 2006–10, the corresponding numbers comprise 19.5 percent, 27.9 percent, and 4.8 percent (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2015*, p. 48). That is, while second and third births within a family in 2008–10 continued to rise, the ratio of fourth and higher order births went down. By 2010 it had returned to the 2006 level among the urban population. Thus the stimulating effect of pro-family demographic policy measures did not die out by the third and fourth year of [the policy's] realization. It was gradually concentrating only on those births at which it had been aimed.

The introduction of regional maternity capital for a third child gave a new impetus for increasing the number of children in a family. The relative weight of second births grew in Komi by 2015 in comparison with 2010 by 13.2 percent, of third ones by 72.4 percent, and of more by 81.8 percent. All in all, over the period of intensification of the state's attention to problems in the area of natality (on the whole over 2006–15), the ratio of second births rose by 35.2 percent, the percentage of third births increased by 2.2 times, and the ratio of children of an even higher order increased by 90.5 percent.

As recently as 2010, firstborns comprised more than half of all children born in the republic. But in the following years, they ceded first place in the structure of births to second births: 41.2 percent against 41.6 percent in 2014 and 38 percent against 43 percent in 2015. Such a correlation had been documented only once before: in 1986 in conditions of a maximum of births under the influence of the 1981 Decree “On Measures to Intensify State Assistance to Families Having Children”. Unquestionably in both cases, these are phenomena of a temporary order, occasioned by the peculiarities of birth calendars for the relevant years of observation.

In 2015, third and higher order births comprised 19 percent of all births in the Komi Republic, while in 2006 there were less than half as many: 8.9 percent. According to birth percentages for families with many children, the republic had returned to the 1988 level. In such a manner, demographic policy oriented at stimulating high order births contributed to a rise in the intensity of natality not only due to changing birth calendars, but also to a fuller implementation of the population's reproductive expectations. An improved realization of intentions for the ideal number of children above and beyond initial plans seems to be the result of families' reconsiderations, given conditions of palpable state assistance.

Strengthening the family component of natality

The rise in family natality, that is the relative weight of births in officially institutionalized families, can be gauged as an indisputable positive result of the pro-family demographic policy of the 2000s. A high level of out-of-wedlock natality is to blame for the pervasiveness of de-facto marriages that are characterized by a smaller number of children as well as elevated instability compared with registered ones. It also leads to the wide prevalence of incomplete families and, correspondingly, a deterioration in family structures that nurture socializing potential. After more than two decades of growth, during which the percentage of out-of-wedlock births in the overall number of births in Russia nearly tripled, reaching 30.3 percent in 2005, it dropped by a quarter: to 22.6 percent in 2014 (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2015*, p. 68). This is already a sufficiently stable process. The relative weight of out-of-wedlock births declined more significantly in urban areas; that is, the difference between the city and the village for this indicator became greater.

In the Komi Republic, the percentage of out-of-wedlock births has traditionally been higher than in the country as a whole; and this outperformance intensified noticeably over the span of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. But over 2005–14, the ratio of out-of-wedlock births shrank in Komi significantly: by 29.1 percent (from 42.3 percent in 2005 to 30.0 percent in 2014 and to 29.3 percent in 2015) (*Estestvennoe dvizhenie*, p. 18; *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2015*, p. 47). Correspondingly, a kind of convergence occurred between the republic with Russia (Figure 4). While the outperformance [concerning out-of-wedlock births] had comprised 41

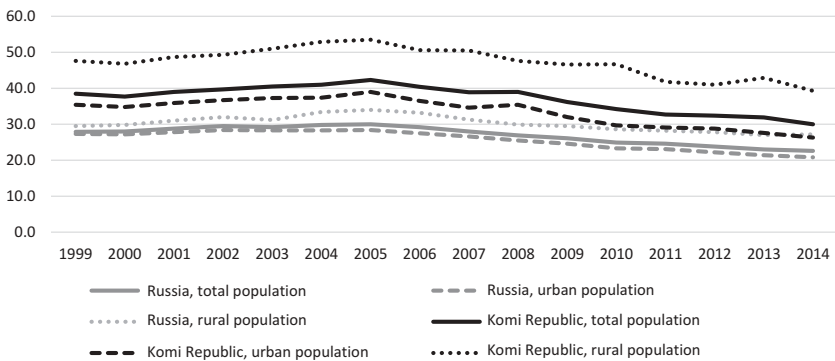


Figure 4. Dynamics in the Russian Federation and the Komi Republic of the Relative Weight of Out-of-Wedlock Births in the Overall Structure of Births, 1999–2014 (%)

Sources: *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2012*; *Estestvennoe dvizhenie; Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2015*.

percent in 2005, in recent years the level in Komi compared to Russia became higher by less than a third. The urban trajectories converged particularly strongly, while in rural areas, the percentage of out-of-wedlock births, despite converging, still exceeds the rural level for Russia as a whole very significantly (by 45 percent).

In another positive aspect, it is worth mentioning that a decline in the relative weight of out-of-wedlock births has correlated with a steady increase in the percentage of births among them that are being registered through joint application by both parents. This confirms the existence of [cooperative] relations between the child's parents, perhaps indicating a factual or provisional marriage that subsequently may be officially registered. In 2014, the ratio of jointly registered out-of-wedlock births comprised 49.8 percent in Russia (in 2013 the level was as high as 50.2 percent), having increased in comparison with 44.0 percent in 2006 (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2012*, p. 68). In Komi, the percentage of jointly registered out-of-wedlock births is noticeably higher, and its growth is more consistent and significant. In 2014, it comprised 60.7 percent, having increased from 50.5 percent in 2006 (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi*, p. 47). Thus, state demographic initiatives calculated to stimulate natality have yielded impressive positive results in intensifying the family component of natality.

Improving the health of mother and child

Improvement in other qualitative characteristics of natality also contributed to a rise in positive natality indicators. The active choice of family planning instead of abortion can be observed over the past two decades in Russia. It ought to be underscored that choosing harmless and effective modern means of contraception over abortions may significantly reduce secondary infertility, and therefore may contribute to an improvement in natality in the long term. **In other words, contraception is an alternative not to the birth of a child, as opponents of family planning programs assert, but to abortion.**

A consistent reduction in the level of abortions has occurred in Russia since the mid-1960s, but at the beginning of the 1990s, in conditions of the demographic crisis that had unfolded in the country, deterioration occurred in this indicator as well. The maximum level, 235 abortions per 100 births, was documented in 1993; since then a steady reduction in this indicator has been observed. In 2007, for the first time since they were legalized, the number of abortions executed in the country became lower than the number of births, at 92 abortions for every 100 births, while in 2014 the indicator fell to 48 (Demoskop). In the Komi Republic, the level of abortions has similarly declined, but as before it is higher than for Russia as a whole. The number of abortions became lower than the number of births of children in 2008, while in 2014 the indicator comprised 58 abortions per 100 births (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2015*, p. 51).

Maternity and infant mortality is steadily decreasing in the country. The number of deaths from complications of pregnancy, childbirth, and post-natal trauma per hundred thousand live births decreased in Russia from 39.7 in 2000 to 10.8 in 2014 (*Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii*, p. 181). The infant mortality indicator—the number of children who died before reaching their first birthday—for every one thousand births, along with the indicator for life expectancy of the population, is recognized as an important characteristic not only of the development of the population, but of the progress of society as a whole.^a Its level is considered an objective sign of the socioeconomic and cultural well-being of a country, reflecting also the state of the health care services (Kharchenko et al. 2002, p. 91). After initial growth in the early 1990s, due primarily to Russia's transition to new [international] criteria of health parity, infant mortality has been consistently falling in the country since 1994. In the Komi Republic, the growth was longer in duration and more significant,

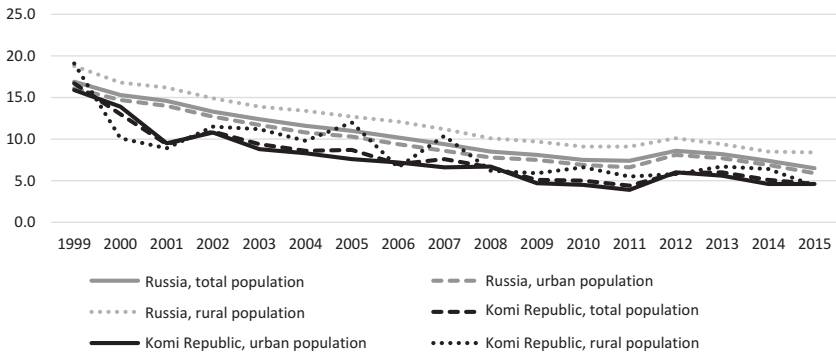


Figure 5 **Dynamics in the Russian Federation and the Komi Republic of the Infant Mortality Level, 1999–2015** (per 1,000 births)

Sources: *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii 2012*; *Estestvennoe dvizhenie; Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Komi 2015*.

but already as early as 1996, the level of mortality in the first year of life has been stably lower than the average for the country. Over the years under consideration, 1999–2015, infant mortality shrank in the country from 16.9 per thousand births to 6.5 per mil (Rosstat); a reduction from 16.7 per mil to 4.6 per mil occurred in the Komi Republic over this time (*Estestvennoe dvizhenie*, p. 5) (Figure 5). Such a dynamic, decreasing levels of infant mortality, can be considered an important achievement, attesting to an improvement in the health of mother and child.

In sum, in conditions of improved natality indicators, improvement in the qualitative structure of natality can be confirmed. The family component of natality is strengthening—the number of births in registered families and factual marriages is increasing. And family planning has been improving as well. Abortions are gradually ceding ground to effective contraception, which contributes to an improvement in the health of a mother and her future children. This means the birthrate can improve in the long term, accompanied by further reduction in maternity and infant mortality.

Raising the reproductive intentions of the population

The most important result of accelerating demographic policy measures, in our view, consists of the point that they have contributed to an increase in intentions concerning the ideal number of children. Two

sociological studies under the author's guidance included a series of questions exploring reproductive behavior of the population at an interval of five years. The first study was conducted after the introduction of federal maternity capital at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 (the main mass was surveyed in 2008; the sample population and the results are described in detail in Popova and Butrim 2011). The second study was done in 2013 after introduction of family capital benefits at the regional level (the sample is described in Popova and Zorina 2014; the main findings concerning reproductive behavior in Popova, Shishkina, and Butrim 2015).

It is imperative to begin by noting an increase by 2013 in all the main kinds of reproductive intentions.^b The average ideal number of children increased over five years from 2.35 to 2.50, the [number] desired under all the necessary conditions from 2.48 to 2.67, and the average expected number of children practically reached the level of simple replacement of generations (it grew from 1.98 to 2.13 children) (Popova, Shishkina, and Butrim 2015). Contrary to fears, the increase occurred not only among older cohorts, but also among those who earlier had been able to make use of maternity capital for a second child and [later] got a chance to reconsider and raise their reproductive expectations after the introduction of regional capital for a third child. The 2008–09 study showed that federal demographic policy measures oriented at a second child had turned out to be targeted in the main at the numerically large generations born in the 1980s. The stimulating effect of the federal measures did not reach the numerically smaller generations of the beginning of the 1990s (Popova and Butrim 2011). Logically speaking, the regional maternity capital for a third child that was introduced in 2011 was likewise targeted at the older generations, including the cohorts born in the 1980s that had previously responded to the measures for stimulating second births. However, the effect of the regional demographic policy measures turned out to be more universal. Maternity capital for a third child affected the reproductive plans of all real cohorts of the population without exception. As expected, a rise in the level of reproductive expectations was characteristic in the greatest degree for the generation of the mid- 1970s through the beginning of the 1980s. Also increasing significantly by 2013 was the value for the expected number of children among the generation born in 1989–93. According to the results of the previous survey, they had not experienced the stimulating effect of the federal demographic policy measures. Nonetheless, the reproductive

plans of this cohort by 2013 were lower than among other generations. This will unconditionally exert its negative influence on the birthrate in the next few years.

The most interesting and at first glance unexpected result is that the generation characterized by the most significant level of [positive] reproductive plans, enabled in conditions regional maternity capital benefits, is the youngest one taking part in the survey: the numerically smaller generation born in the mid- through the second half of the 1990s (Popova, Shishkina, and Butrim 2015). Obviously this cohort, having formed standards for improved demographic behavior in the favorable conditions of steady active state attention to problems natality, has received a sufficiently powerful positive impetus for its own reproductive plans. There are grounds to hope that this generation, on which natality's prospects in large measure depend, will end up having a slightly expanded reproduction regime.

Directions for improving demographic policy

As research has shown, even though regional maternity capital for a third child was targeted above all at the generations born in the 1980s and even older cohorts, the effect of the regional demographic policy measures turned out to be more universal. It contributed to an increase in the birthrate even in conditions of a deterioration in the age structure of fertile women. It outstripped the increase in the ratio of high order births, attesting to a rise in the level of realization of intentions for the ideal number of children and an improvement in the qualitative characteristics of natality. Most significant, it contributed to an increase in the reproductive plans of the population, including those of the youngest age cohorts. In other words, a consistent acceleration of demographic policy measures is capable of having an impact not only on the current situation concerning natality, but on its prospects as well.

Intensification of demographic policy and expansion of the spectrum of measures regarding natality is key here. The population becomes accustomed to existing measures rather quickly, and in two or three years after their introduction they cease to play a stimulating role. The experience of the 1980s shows this. The active phase of the positive effect of the 1981 Decree "On Measures to Intensify State Assistance to Families Having Children" on the birthrate in practice came to an end in 1983. In 1986 a kind of "aftershock" occurred, connected with higher

order births in families that had given birth to first and second children in 1982–83. Dynamics in the rates of growth of natality indicators in conditions of contemporary demographic policy confirm this. In 2007, the rate of gain in the overall natality quotient reached as high as 9.7 percent in the country, while already in 2008 it had decreased to 6.2 percent, after which in three years it had shrunk to 0.8 percent. The rate of gain in the aggregate natality quotient comprised 8.4 percent in the first year that federal maternity capital was in effect and 5.6 percent in the second, and by 2011 had decreased to 0.6 percent. The introduction of regional maternity capital for a third child noticeably activated the processes of natality for only one year: in 2012 the overall quotient increased by 5.6 percent, the aggregate one by 7.0 percent (calculated per Rosstat). Afterwards, the overall quotient entered a stagnation phase; the aggregate quotient is for now characterized by insignificant growth due to shifts of natality into the older age groups and the increase in the ratio of high order births.

Sociological data confirm that demographic policy measures in effect have practically exhausted their positive influence on natality processes. In 2015 into early 2016, under the author's guidance, the sociological survey "Youth Attitudes to Family and Children" explored how standards of youth demographic behavior are formed. The study, in the form of questionnaires distributed to a random sample with quotas set by type of population centers, was quite large-scale: 1,350 persons from 15 to 26 years of age. [Salient] new state demographic initiatives were only represented by an extension in December 2015 of maternity capital for a second child until the end of 2018, as well as continuation of a monthly payout to underprivileged families for a third child in regions with low natality until the end of 2016.

Given lack of [significant] new demographic policy measures, what results were found in analysis of reproductive intentions? By the beginning of 2016, the expected number of children among the cohorts born in 1989–98 on the whole decreased from 2.20 to 2.13 children. This was due to a diminution of the reproductive plans of the 1994–98 generation from 2.22 to 2.13 children. The expected number of children among representatives of those born in 1989–93, conversely, increased from 2.07 to 2.15 children. The ideal number of children among those born in 1989–98 diminished from 2.44 to 2.33 children. Similar data pertained for the younger cohort born in 1994–98. By early 2016, representatives of this generation consider on average that it is best of all to have 2.32

children in a family (2.53 children in 2013). Among representatives of the cohort born in 1989–98, both studies documented an average ideal number of children at a level of 2.41. In general, the number of children desired, given the prevailing conditions among the cohorts born in 1989–98, diminished in two years from 2.57 to 2.47. For those born in 1994–98, representatives of this cohort, given their conditions, would prefer 2.43 children on average in a family, against 2.53 in 2013. For those born in [the wider cohort of] 1989–98, the desired number of children, on the contrary, increased from 2.59 to 2.67 children.

It is obvious that entering adulthood in the absence of new demographic policy measures contributed to depleted demographic standards for the cohort born in 1994–98. But representatives of those born in 1989–93, becoming targets of large-scale federal-level demographic policy measures recently extended by two years, had every reason to reconsider reproductive plans in an upward direction. For both generational cohorts, key determiners of the near-term prospects of natality, reproductive expectations are for now at the level of simple replacement. In general, negative dynamics of the reproductive intentions of young cohorts, taken together with stagnation in the overall natality quotient and a low rate of gain in aggregate, are sending an unambiguous signal: the time has come for a serious acceleration of demographic policy measures.

For a start, all economic measures of support for families with children must be retained in their entirety. This means unconditional continuation of federal and regional maternity capitals, annual indexation, as well as maintaining all the other kinds of child benefits. Extension for two years is a palliative. It is imperative that the indicated demographic policy measures be made perpetual, to later avoid premature exhaustion of overall fecundity of real cohorts as they try to benefit from some kind of economic incentive while it is still available. Further, we should consider that targeting low income families alone is categorically contraindicated for demographic policy. If priority in demographic-social policy is given to the social component, there is no point expecting a demographic effect from it. We refer to the discussion about switching to offering maternity capitals only to low-income families. If this happens, we will not only lose births, as would be the case in the event of the repeal of these demographic policy measures, we are going to lose them in those strata of the population that possess the highest socializing potential.

At the same time, a monthly monetary payout upon the birth in a family of a third child until it has reached three years of age, initially approved in the regions only for low-income families, should in our view continue to be realized going forward as well as a measure of social support for families with many children and low incomes. In such conditions, first, there will be a real opportunity to extend the period of validity of this benefit after 2016. And second, it will be completely justifiable to advocate extending it to older ages as well—up to when a child reaches the age of 16 (18 for those studying at general-education institutions). According to population economics, optimal natality is not only about the birth of children, but their coming of age into productive economic activity with maximally high qualitative characteristics. The state must help unwealthy families who have decided on the birth of third and more children to socialize them until the period of employability, since herein lies its most important national-economic interest.

In structural conditions of deteriorating fertility, it is extremely important to ensure long-term and sustainable demographic policy at federal and regional levels, as well as to introduce new measures capable of giving a positive impetus to intentions for augmented ideal numbers of children, especially for young cohorts. As a minimum, the directions in which maternity capitals can be realized need to be broadened. This does not carry a high economic cost, but the psychological effect may turn out to be very significant indeed. In 2015, restrictions were lifted on the disposition of federal family capital funds for making a down payment on a mortgage before a child has reached three years of age. Also discussed is the possibility of being able to acquire a new automobile produced in Russia using these funds. On the one hand, having a car substantially expands a family's economic opportunities. And on the other, this would be a real support for the domestic automotive industry, whose brand may well become the slogan "Cars for young families." Researchers are proposing certificates for the right to medical treatment for children, using maternity capital funds, as well as the right of parents to an education.^c

In developing new demographic policy measures, emphasis should extend beyond quantitative indicators to improving the qualitative structure of natality and to strengthening the family as an institution. The most pro-family demographic policy measure can be considered prioritizing second births, since they consolidate the survival of the family. In our view, it is crucial to redirect economic demographic policy to measures aimed at

stimulating second births, while retaining both federal and regional maternity capitals. This includes introducing regional maternity capitals for a second child on top of the federal one. New state initiatives have to pull into their orbit not only families with many children, but especially those with two. Thus the most prevalent type of family in Russia would become not a one-child family, but a two-child one. This is all the more urgent given that the target of intensified measures oriented at second births will be the numerically small cohorts born in the 1990s. Activating their reproductive behavior meets the long-term objectives of the country's demographic development. In addition, this will positively impact intentions concerning the ideal number of children for the generations born in the 2000s, which are also numerically small.

The main emphasis of economic demographic policy measures should be toward boosting the independence of families with children. This would enable increased employment, income stimulus from labor activity, and opportunities for members of young families to engage in entrepreneurship. It should include preferential housing programs for families with children. For Russia, which experienced fast rates of urbanization from the 1930s–70s coupled with high costs of building in severe climatic-and-natural conditions, the unresolved nature of the population's housing problems has a long history. Based on the results of practically all sociological surveys, dissatisfaction with housing conditions is the most important factor after material problems that prevent families from realizing the desired number of children. Not by chance, the main use of maternity capital funds goes toward improving housing conditions. The spectrum of measures to help young families resolve this question should therefore be broadened. This includes methods like preferential mortgage lending with a reduction in the interest rate upon the birth of a second and third child, exemption from [having to make] a down payment, state co-financing for construction of preferential housing for families with two and more children with a price per square meter below the average for the given population center, and more. In any case, boosting the economic independence and improving the housing situation of families with children—this, above all, is the prerogative of the state. That is, along with child benefits, these directions are also a part of the economic measures of state demographic policy.

Further, one must not underestimate the effectiveness of psychological measures of demographic policy for forming values orientations concerning the desired number of children. We conclude that a

sufficiently large aspect of improved natality in 2006–15, as well as increased reproductive intentions with the acceleration of demographic policy measures, resulted from the favorable psychological atmosphere that emerged in Russia's society in conditions of increased state attention to problems in the area of natality. This is why orientation work among youth must be substantially intensified with the aim of forming reproductive standards at the level of two children, toward making this the average. Demographic policy measures stimulating values, aimed directly at forming a desire for children, must be established as early as in adolescence, when priorities in a person's life orientations are established. The most important conduits of such a policy must therefore be family and school. But the state itself must be the main fulcrum for developing and realizing social and psychological demographic policy, to stimulate the need for increasing children in the population. The state must consolidate efforts of various social institutions to resolve demographic problems, thus increasing natality and improving its qualitative aspects.

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Editor’s Notes

a. One of the first advocates of this view regarding the Soviet Union was U. S. demographer Murray Feshbach, who became famous for alerting the world to the Soviet Union’s cessation of publication of infant mortality statistics in the 1980s, covering up the increase of infant mortality in a purportedly developed, model socialist society. See Murray Feshbach with Alfred Friendly, Jr. *Ecocide in the USSR: Health and Nature Under Siege* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

b. Translator Stephan Lang points out that the Russian original here, *reproduktivnykh ustanovok*, was translated into English by the author Larisa Popova in her English abstract as “reproductive intensions,” and we are honoring her version. However, the term *ustanovki*, used in Russian social sciences and by President Vladimir Putin, is not easily translatable. Stephan Lang explains: “It refers to a set of pre-established attitudes and/or behaviors that determine the vector [or set] of current and future attitudes and/or behaviors.”

c. Here the author is sounding nostalgic for Soviet era federal-level social entitlements. See other published work by Larisa Popova: *Ekonomicheskie i sotsial’nye aspekty starenii naseleniia v severnykh regionakh* (Syktyvkar: Komi respublikanskaia tipografiia”, 2014); *Vnebrachnaia rozhdaiemost’: tendentsii, prichiny, modeli razvitiia vnebrachnoi sem’i* (Syktyvkar: Komi nauchnyi tsentr UrO RAN, 2007); *Sushchnost’, prichiny i posledstviia sovremennogo demograficheskogo krizisa (na primere Respubliki Komi)* (Ekaterinburg: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, Ural’skoe otd-nie, 2004).