

SUPPORTING DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY IN RUSSIA: BUSINESS-LEVEL OPPORTUNITIES AND ADVANTAGES

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Abstract

Economically developed countries face negative demographic trends; therefore, developing effective demographic policy measures is of special relevance. Russia actively pursues pro-natalist policy, which currently focuses on economic support for families with children. Our paper aims to demonstrate how national demographic policy's objectives embed into Russian companies' social policies.

We surveyed 500 Russian citizens. The respondents were asked whether their employer companies provided some corporate social policy measures and how valuable they were.

As the results show, among the most popular supporting measures for Russian companies' employees are remote work opportunities and measures aimed at maintaining health and welfare; the least popular ones are those targeted at supporting families with children. At the same time, the employees highly commended social policy measures, and their evaluation depended on the gender and education level.

We elaborated a model for a corporate demographic policy which would be associated with the national demographic agenda on the one hand and the corporate social responsibility policy on the other. Aligning the demographic measures with the model would help lend consistency, comprehensiveness, and systematicity to them, as well as enhance the demographic policy in general and social and economic impacts from implementing some particular corporate programmes.

Key words: Demographic policy, Corporate social policy, Russian business

JEL Code: J15, J53, J58

Introduction

Nowadays, the Russian government actively pursues pro-natalist policy, which focuses primarily on economic support for families with children. Unfortunately, it does not produce the results desired; thus, more advanced measures to stimulate the birth rate are required. In our view, this policy should be manifold: it should be built on several levels simultaneously and include a set of mutually supporting and reinforcing measures.

According to the analysis of current studies, the issue of supporting the demographic policy on the organisation level is relevant worldwide (Fore, 2019). For instance, the OECD international database, which accumulates data on families and implements family policy in European Union countries, has a section on families' position at the labour market. The information from the database may help study the issues related to building relationships between employers and employees with children. Moreover, it allows conducting a cross-country analysis of organisation-provided opportunities to keep the work-life balance of the employees and to increase their effectiveness.

At present, scientists in countries with developing economies extensively study these and other issues. The key research foci are:

1. reducing gender inequality in career-building and remuneration rates (Hodges, 2020; Magnusson, 2019);
2. providing conditions for keeping the work-life balance (Günther-Bel et al., 2020; Piszczek & Berg, 2020, Schulz-Knappe & Hoeven, 2020)
3. designing the workspace comfortable for employees with children (child feeding zones; collective childcare in the organisation, etc.) (Magnusson, 2019; UNICEF, 2020);
4. promoting flexible working schedules (Halinski & Duxbury, 2019; UNICEF, 2020) (including banking of working hours, flexible holiday schedule, etc.) (UNICEF, 2020; OECD, 2019);
5. using modern software solutions to organise remote work for employees with children (Samman & Lombardi, 2019).

Interestingly, this issue has become increasingly important in the pandemic, which is evidenced by a number of publications, including those available on the UNICEF website (Averett, 2020; Günther-Bel et al., 2020; Samman & Lombardi, 2019; OECD, 2019).

Business in Russia also tends to support the state demographic policy; one of the recent tendencies is a corporate demographic policy. Although the demographic agenda is important for our country, there are no ready-made solutions in this area. Therefore, implementing family-

friendly policy on the corporate level in both state and commercial organisations may become a crucial aspect of corporate social responsibility and of supporting national demographic policy's focal points.

In our research, we aimed at identifying the ways Russian companies promote the country's socio-demographic policy objectives.

1 Data and Methods

A representative survey of the Russian population (initiated in May 2020 by the Catholic University of Milan) sampled 500 people. To make a comparative analysis, the sample size was equalled for all countries which took part in the survey. It was a gender- and age-based quota sample featuring a geographic principle (there were surveyed respondents from all federal districts). Methods which ensured representativeness of the results included: a) distributing the questionnaire through various informational platforms of different nature (social networks, city's websites, special survey panels); b) using relevant data obtained in 2019 for assessing the number and structure of the general population above 18 years of age in Russia; c) applying weighting calibration adjustment using frequency distribution - poststratification based on the gender, age, and federal district - at the final stage of the sample selection. The respondents answered questions on corporate social policy measures in their companies and the value of these services for them. We analysed four different groups of measures: 1) maintaining employees' health and welfare; 2) fair remuneration, including social support measures; 3) respecting employees' family obligations; 4) effective system of interaction with workers as the company's core stakeholders. The survey included questions on availability of any measures for employees in respondents' workplaces; assessment (on a scale of 1 to 6) of usefulness, sufficiency, and value of these measures for the employees. We used methods of descriptive statistics (the mean, mode, median). To reveal the relationships between answers and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, we implemented correlation analysis (chi-square test, Cramer's V and Spearman's rho). While analysing cross-tabulations, we compared column proportions (based on z-test). To compare the assessments in different respondent groups, we employed Mann-Whitney U-test and Kruskal-Wallis test. We used IBM Statistics 22.0.

2 Results

We obtained the following results:

1. Russian companies provide employees with an opportunity to work remotely using telecommunication technologies—it is the most widespread measure among all those directly or indirectly related to corporate demographic policy; the least popular one is providing services for children (summer holidays, access to a kindergarten, babysitter services, etc.) (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Distribution of responses from the respondents employed on how widespread corporate support measures for employees are and when they were introduced (as % of the number of answers in each line).

Aspect	Measures	Is present		Is absent	Total
		Introduced before the pandemic	Introduced in the pandemic		
Effective system of interaction with workers as the company's core stakeholders	Remote work using modern software solutions	68.9	16.9	14.2	100
Maintaining employees' health and welfare	Services aimed at maintaining health and welfare	44.6	5.0	50.4	100
Respecting employees' family obligations	Care services for aged family members and/or family members in need of special care	32.7	4.2	63.1	100
	Suggestions aimed at keeping the work-life balance	31.0	3.8	65.1	100
Fair remuneration, including social support measures	Financial support	23.0	2.7	74.3	100
Respecting employees' family obligations	Services for children (summer holidays, access to a kindergarten, babysitter services, etc.)	12.4	0.4	87.3	100

Source: data of the survey

It is interesting to note that two thirds of the respondents claimed their companies often used remote work even before the pandemic. Furthermore, women shared this opinion more often than men (Table 2, Cramer's V 0,233, $\alpha=0,001$).

Tab. 2: Opportunity to work remotely as an employer service for employees (% of the respondents employed)

Answers	Men	Women	All respondents
It has been introduced before and is present now	58.4	74.3	68.9
It was introduced in the pandemic	16.9	17.1	16.9
It is absent	24.7	8.6	14.2
Total	100	100	100

Source: data of the survey

Corporate measures aimed at supporting families with children are, regrettably, limited in Russia. The majority of the respondents claimed their employer does not offer any services for children. Interestingly, those who reported their availability were predominantly men (Table 3, Cramer's $V = 0,158$, $\alpha = 0,041$).

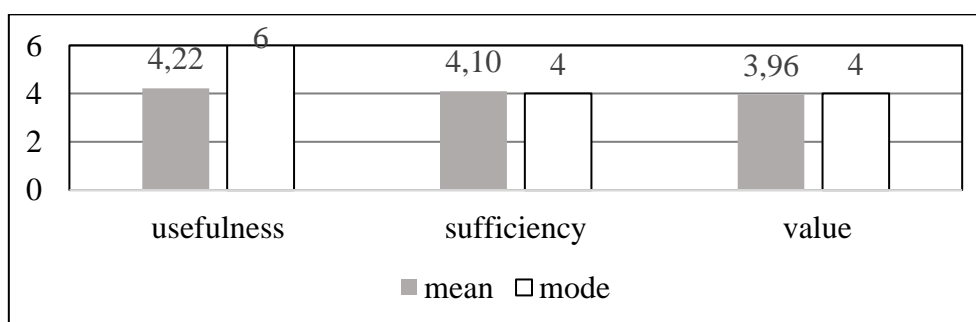
Tab. 3: Assessing availability of services for employees' children (% of the respondents employed)

Answers	Men	Women	All respondents
They have been introduced before and are present now	19.5	8.9	12.4
They were introduced in the pandemic	0.0	0.6	0.4
They are absent	80.5	90.5	87.3
Total	100	100	100

Source: data of the survey

2. The usefulness of the services received the highest assessment (4,22 with the maximum one being 6; most often, the respondents rate these services the highest). Sufficiency and value of the services aimed at maintaining employees' health and welfare were rated approximately two thirds of the highest level; the medians for all parameters were the same and equaled 4 (Figure 1).

Fig.1: Mean and modal respondents' assessments of the usefulness, sufficiency, and value of services provided by organisations to their employees



Source: data of the survey

It is noteworthy that assessments of services for these three parameters proved to be strongly connected with one another (Table 4); thus, the higher the respondents rate one parameter of the services, the higher they rate the other two of them.

Tab. 4: Correlation matrix for assessments of usefulness, sufficiency, and value of organisations' services for employees (Spearman's rho)

Parameters	Usefulness	Sufficiency	Value
Usefulness	1.000	0.793**	0.833**
Sufficiency	0.793**	1.000	0.831**
Value	0.833**	0.831**	1.000

Source: data of the survey

** . Correlation is meaningful on 0,01 level (two-tailed).

3. Attitude towards services offered by organisations does not depend on respondents' marital and parental status, occupation, position, or employment type. The statistical tests conducted did not confirm the significance of differences in assessments between the groups of respondents highlighted by these parameters.

At the same time, we found significant differences in assessments between respondents of various genders with women's assessments being higher (Table 5).

Tab. 5: Assessments of usefulness, sufficiency, and value of organisations' services for male and female employees

Criteria for evaluating employer's services	Women		Men		Mann-Whitney's U-test	Asymptotic significance
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median		
Usefulness	4.38	5	3.99	4	5469.000	0.050
Sufficiency	4.24	4	3.90	4	4902.000	0.050
Value	4.15	4	3.67	4	4983.500	0.016

Source: data of the survey

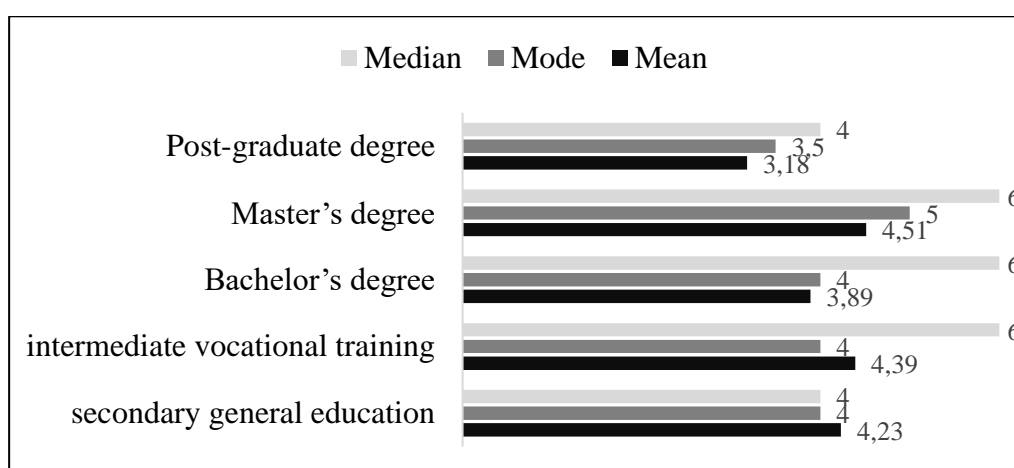
We have also found that respondents with various levels of education rate only one parameter of employer's services differently—their value (Table 6). Figure 2 clearly shows that respondents with intermediate vocational training and a Master's degree gave the highest assessment to the value of the services provided by the employer to maintain employees' welfare.

Tab. 6: Statistical significance of differences in service evaluations between respondents with different levels of education (Kruskall-Wallis test)

	Usefulness	Sufficiency	Value
Chi-square	5.567	5.813	12.452
df	5	4	5
Asymptotic significance	0.351	0.214	0.029

Source: data of the survey

Fig. 2: Mean assessment for the value of organisations' services to employees with different levels of education



Source: data of the survey

Discussion

The results obtained testify to the fact that, at present, the system to support the pro-natalist policy on the corporate level is not developed yet in Russia. However, we suppose that demographic policy measures employed on the government and corporate levels simultaneously will certainly produce a synergetic effect if they complement each other. Therefore, we attempted introducing a corporate demographic policy model related, on the one hand, to the national demographic agenda, and on the other hand, to the corporate social responsibility policy. The key points of constructing this model are as follows:

1. Developing, organising, and codifying rules, principles, aims, and norms to form corporate demographic policy.

We suggest that workers who already have, or are planning to have, children should be included into the development of the policy's principles.

2. Expanding a basic set of tools for the demographic policy, which has potential to be used on the corporate level.

The development of the basic set of tools may be based on the same categories of pro-natalist policy mechanisms existing on the government level (ideological, financial, medical, administrative ones).

3. Building a system of information and communicative support, monitoring and controlling the social effectiveness of corporate demographic policy.

It is important to include business values promoting a positive attitude to parenting into corporate culture and to integrate results of implementing services aimed at supporting families with children into corporate social reporting.

We should mention that as part of expanding the existing material and non-material incentives for parenting, Russian organisations are implementing a number of practices; for example, opening a corporate kindergarten or children's rooms; expanding financial assistance programmes for young employees' families and working parents; expanding the range of voluntary health insurance programmes; holding corporate holidays with employees' families. However, these measures are, generally, not systematic; they do not have sufficient support from the government; rather, they are one-off initiatives, often dependent on the personality of the company's manager/owner.

Building the corporate demographic policy model according to the principles proposed and extending this model to a large number of Russian enterprises will make the demographic measures in the country consistent, integrated, and systematic. This, in turn, will improve both the overall state demographic policy and social and economic effects from individual corporate programmes.

Conclusions

Our results provide insights into how Russian companies promote the targets of the socio-demographic policy of the country. They demonstrate that remote work is the most common corporate policy measure, whereas those measures aimed at employees' children are initiated by employers in Russia quite rarely. We also learned how employees assess the relevance, value, and significance of these measures. The results lead us to believe that it is necessary to develop a model of the corporate demographic policy and to integrate a social institute of business into state decision-making in demography; it will allow creating a more solid foundation for developing children's human capital in Russia.

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