

# SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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## Socio-Cultural Determinants of Marital and Reproductive Behavior of the Population in the Context of Demographic Development Challenges (Experience of Chinese-Russian Studies)



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**Abstract.** The growth of the quality of human potential is an important component of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (Chinese dream) and a key goal of Russia’s socio-economic development, and birth rate is a fundamental factor affecting the long-term demographic trends of both countries. In a report at the XX National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was proposed to “optimize the population development strategy, create a policy system to support family planning and reduce family costs for childbearing, upbringing and education of children; these areas are highlighted as the main postulates in the concept of building a “Healthy China”. In Russia, the importance of preserving people, caring for the family, and strengthening traditional values is also recognized at the highest level. Support for the family, motherhood and childhood, and an increase in birth rate are defined in the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. Presidential Decree 809, dated November 9, 2022, approved the key staples of Russian culture, including the family with children based on love and marriage. The aim of the work is to substantiate the need to strengthen the information and educational component of demographic policy regulating marital and family relations. We conducted a study using the methods of literature review, analysis of statistical data on the demographic development of provinces of Central China and federal districts of the Russian Federation, and also using the results of questionnaire surveys of Jiangxi Province and Vologda Oblast population. It was revealed that birth rate is low in almost all macro-regions of China and Russia; the number of women of reproductive age is decreasing; reproductive behavior is characterized by a focus on childlessness, marital behavior is characterized by postponement of marriage, blurring of social norms (traditions) of marriage. The decrease in birth rate occurs against the background of population aging, ensuring a further increase in the proportion of older people. The formation of a new “culture of marriage and childbearing” is a long-term project that will contribute to changing marital behavior and will require promoting family planning policy and strengthening state support in this area, forming a harmonious and friendly social environment, promoting ideas of strong marriage and childbearing.

**Key words:** birth rate, new culture of marriage and childbearing, China, Jiangxi Province, Russia, demographic policy.

### Introduction

Population is one of the most important and fundamental factors and a major element in the economic and social development of any country. China and Russia, as countries with a large area and high economic potential, pay great attention to the preservation of people and the development of human capital. At the 15th Party Congress of Jiangxi Provincial Committee of CPC, and in the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives through the Year 2035 in Jiangxi Province, the comprehensive deployment and arrangement was made for implementing the three-child policy and optimizing the population family planning services. In September 2021, the Regulations for Population and Family Planning in Jiangxi Province were revised. May 12, 2023, the provincial standing committee held a meeting at which it emphasized the precise implementation of aspects of the policy of promoting the qualitative development of the population of Jiangxi Province, creation of a reliable system of family planning support policy, vigorous promotion of social initiatives, reducing the cost of childbearing, child rearing, comprehensive improvement of scientific and cultural level, quality of health as well as the ideological and moral quality of the population, active measures to combat population

aging, improving the efficiency of human resource use and maintaining the construction of modern Jiangxi Province with high-quality population development. The current state of development of the population of Jiangxi Province is characterized by transitional changes and thus threatens the healthy and sustainable development of the Province's economy and society.

In Russia, the importance of preserving people, taking care of the family, and strengthening traditional Russian values is also recognized at the highest level. In 2020, among the amendments to the Constitution, the understanding of marriage as a union of man and woman was introduced. Support for family, motherhood and childhood, and an increase in fertility were defined in the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. Presidential Decree 809 "On approval of the foundations of state policy for the preservation and strengthening of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values", dated November 19, 2022 consolidated the key foundations of Russian culture, including family with children, based on love and marriage. The year 2024 has been declared the year of the family, and a new national project "Family" has been initiated. These steps indicate that Russia's demographic policy will involve not only measures of material support for families with children, but also a system of information and educational mechanisms designed to define and shape the image of a modern Russian family.

It is extremely important for both countries to maximize the potential of fertility and provide a solid foundation for national security and socio-economic development.

#### **Data and methods**

Despite enormous differences in the population of China and Russia, the analysis of the nature of demographic processes and development of an actual demographic policy are strategic tasks for both states. In our work, the tasks related to analyzing the discourse in the Russian and Chinese

scientific fields, assessing trends in key demographic processes and data obtained during sociological studies of demographic behavior were addressed step-by-step.

Literature review focuses on verifying the consistency of Chinese and Russian scientists' views on assessing the determining influence of behavioral factors on fertility, namely marital and reproductive behavior. In addition, the position of the government on the regulation of demographic processes and focus on family support is being determined.

In connection with the subject of the study, the analysis of demographic processes considered trends in fertility and some indicators of its structural factors. The ten-year dynamics of crude birth rate, number of women of childbearing age, average age of marriage, as well as indicators of demographic aging (number and proportion of elderly people in the population structure) were analyzed.

In order to study marital and reproductive behavior, available sociological data were used. In 2023, a questionnaire survey was conducted in Jiangxi Province covering five aspects: love, marriage, childbearing, child rearing and child education. Taking into account the actual population, as well as birth rate, natural growth rates and sex ratio, the questionnaire was sent to 11 districts and cities of Jiangxi Province. A total of 38,057 questionnaires were collected, the response was 99.8%; 66.4% of women and 33.6% of men participated in the survey. The majority (80.7%) of respondents belong to the 18–48 age group. From the point of view of marital status, the proportion of single respondents is 18.3%, married – 78.4%, divorced and widowed – 3.3%. The share of urban residents is 47.6%, rural residents – 52.4%. According to the level of education, the share of respondents with a bachelor's degree or lower was 72.2%, with a bachelor's degree or higher – 27.8%. Responses formed a detailed database so as to build a new culture of marriage and childbearing in Jiangxi Province more effectively.

In 2023, another round of the monitoring of the reproductive potential of Vologda Region population was carried out. Its tools allow us to determine the views of Vologda residents on marriage and family, attitudes toward childhood and conditions for their implementation; 1,500 people of reproductive age were interviewed. The sample is quota-based by sex, age, and territory of residence. The proportion of women among the respondents was 49.9%; respondents in the age group of 15–19 years – 10.9%, 20–24 years – 9.4%, 25–34 years – 30.8%, over 35 years – 48.9%; 56.1% of respondents are married, 9.3% cohabit; 65.5% of respondents have children. In the sample, 76% are urban residents and 24% are rural residents. According to the level of education, 64% have basic or secondary vocational education, 35.7% have higher education (bachelor's degree – 23.3%, master's degree – 12.4%), 0.3% are graduate students. The research program allows us to identify the value of family and parenthood, preferred form of relationships, reproductive motivation, preferences in the field of childbearing (number, timing of birth, child's sex), and factors contributing to implementation of reproductive intentions.

The recommendation part focuses on measures aimed at helping families with children, improving information and educational tools for the formation of social norms of marital and reproductive behavior, parenting, in order to support a prosperous family that raises children responsibly.

### **Overview of research in China and other countries**

Population has long-term and strategic importance for economic and social development, it is the cornerstone of national security and the fundamental interest of the country (Zhao et al., 2016). “In the context of the formation of a new technological and, perhaps, social structure, human capital becomes the main source of national wealth” (Lokosov, 2023). In this regard, research on the institutions of family and education, and

health care as key to the reproduction of human capital and population, is of particular importance. In conditions of a low birth rate, it is also necessary to explore ways to regulate demographic behavior, in particular, the formation of intentions regarding marriage and childbirth. One of the key issues is the relationship between birth rate and economic development. Modern research has shown that the influence of economic development on intentions to marry and procreate is weakening. In regions with a higher level of economic development, the intention to marry and have children is lower (Du Xiaojing, Wang Zhenjie, 2023). The influence of the availability of educational resources on women's intentions to marry and have children has a compensatory effect, and these intentions increase with increasing access to compulsory education (Liu Na et al., 2021). Discrimination is still the main cause of the gender wage gap, so supporting women of childbearing age and eliminating gender discrimination in the marketplace is key to reducing the gender wage gap and increasing fertility (Li Hongling, Feng Juzhang, 2023). Parental pressure is also an important factor influencing the intention to marry and have a child; it is difficult for women to combine career and childcare responsibilities (Yang Juhua, 2019). However, a number of studies indicate that having a family contributes to success in work (Shabunova, Leonidova, 2023). Corporate policy, corporate social responsibility is also an important influence factor, and the positive fulfillment by employers of social responsibilities favorable for childbirth has a direct impact on women's intentions to marry and have a child (Yu Shuhong, Ge Jiabin, 2023; Rostovskaya et al., 2021). The distribution of parental responsibilities among the main family members, especially the participation of men in their performance, can significantly affect women's decision to marry and have children. Career-focused women find it difficult to avoid “reproductive punishment” (Waldfoegel, 1997), while men's participation in childcare can greatly

help mothers in their parental responsibilities (Stier, Epstein, 2007), as well as provide family support and emotional comfort for women engaged in career development (Li Baofang, 2017).

When marriage and childbearing are influenced by realistic dilemmas, the cultural concept is also an important factor (Brewster, Rindfuss, 2000), and the concept of marriage and childbearing is its important component. The marriage and childbearing concept is a subjective factor that directly affects the choices of men and women, family life and the stability of marriage. In order to ensure sustainable demographic development of the country, the most important aspect is to promote balanced demographic development in terms of optimizing the concept of marriage and childbearing. With the long-term impact of family planning policy in Chinese society, a fundamental transformation of the concept of marriage and childbearing is taking place (Yang Juhua, 2021): from “greater happiness with more children” in traditional society to “only one child” in modern society. The idea of “late marriage and late childbearing, fewer and better childbirths” is becoming a conscious choice for most people, and this modern concept of marriage and childbearing has a profound impact on the reproductive behavior of young people (Li Ting et al., 2019), which increases the risk of China falling into a “low fertility trap” and jeopardizes the realization of goals promoting fertility within the framework of the three-child policy (Xing Chaoguo, 2020). Especially the long-term strict implementation of the one-child policy leads to the fact that the social culture of “having only one child” cannot easily change in accordance with this policy (Feng Xiaotian, 2021). The concept of marriage and childbearing is also influenced by socio-economic development and globalization, which manifests itself in the weakening of the utilitarian concept of fertility “to give birth to children to prevent aging” in traditional society and in the gradual strengthening of non-

utilitarian values and changing their content in accordance with social development (Tian Hongjie et al., 2022).

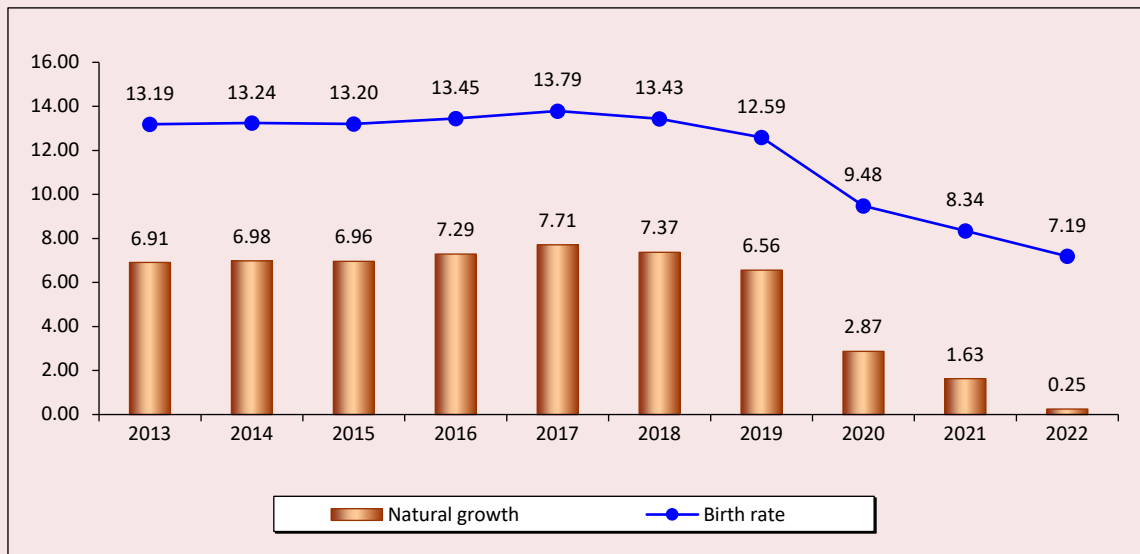
The position of Russian scientists on family development is vividly reflected in the works of T.K. Rostovskaya and colleagues, which advocate support for a full, large, multigenerational family (Rostovskaya, Egorychev, 2023). Of particular importance is the understanding of the well-being of the family, based on legitimate marriage, love, security, and material opportunities (Rostovskaya, 2022). The meanings that Russians put into the concept of “prosperous family” can be structured into four blocks: demographic parameters, material opportunities, socio-psychological parameters, and values. “A prosperous, happy family from a demographic point of view is a complete family with children, maintaining functional ties with parents and other relatives. Financially, it is provided with comfortable housing, high-quality medical care, regular health improvement, rest and leisure for all family members, capable of providing children with high-quality education and other vital needs. A prosperous and happy family builds healthy psychological relationships, implements engaged parenting. The key values of a prosperous family allow us to build relationships and a lifestyle that provides comfort, security, and conditions for self-expression for all its members” (Rostovskaya, Kalachikova, 2022).

To meet the practical needs of qualitative demographic development, an important task of creating a society favorable for childbearing is to more effectively stimulate birth rate in groups of childbearing age by forming a culture of marriage and childbearing.

#### **Birth rate in provinces of Central China and in federal districts of Russia**

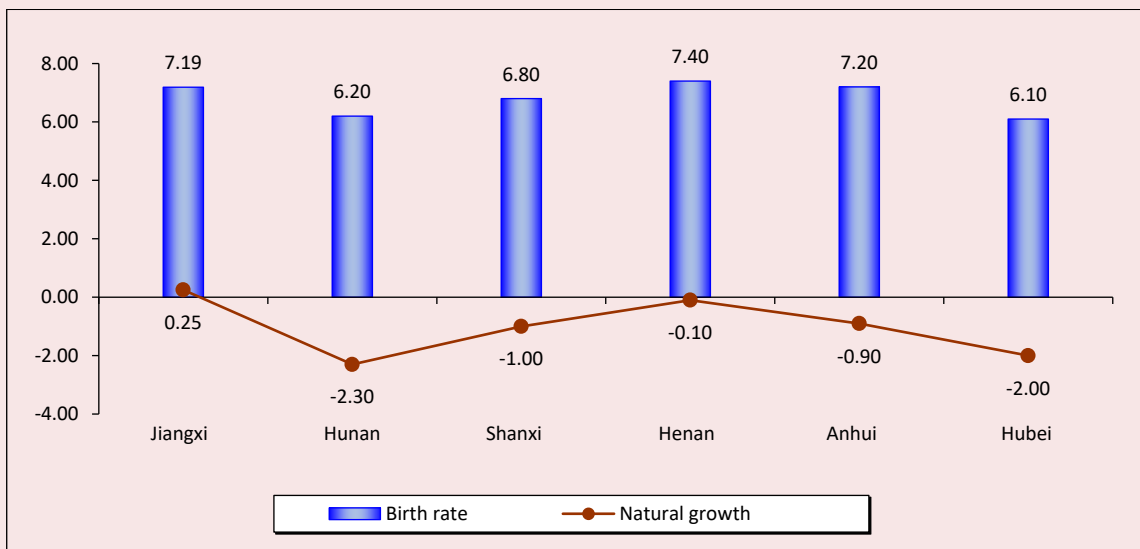
As a result of the analysis of statistical data on the demographic development of Jiangxi Province as one of the provinces of Central China, the following trends have been identified.

Figure 1. Birth rate and natural population growth rate in Jiangxi Province in 2013–2022, ‰



Source: 2022 Jiangxi Statistical Yearbook.

Figure 2. Birth rate and natural population growth rate in six provinces of Central China in 2020, ‰



Source: Arrangement and summarization of Census Yearbook of various provinces.

First, there is a decrease in birth rate in Jiangxi Province. Birth rate by the end of 2022 was 7.19‰, and natural growth rate was 0.25‰ (Fig. 1). Over the past decade, birth rate and natural population growth in Jiangxi Province have decreased by 45.5% and 96.4%. The number of live births decreased from 658,700 in 2014 to 305,300 in 2022. Among

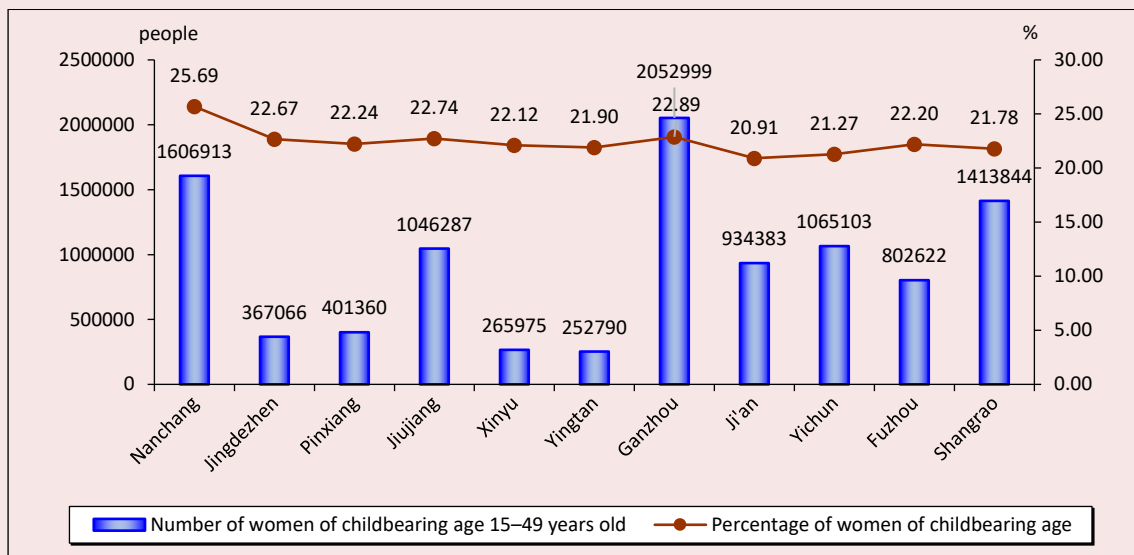
the six provinces of Central China, Jiangxi Province ranked second in terms of natural growth rate and second in terms of birth rate, being second only to Henan Province (7.42‰), but surpassing Hunan Province (6.20 ‰), Shanxi Province (6.80 ‰), Anhui Province (7.20 ‰), and Hubei Province (6.10 ‰) (Fig. 2).

Second, there is a constant decrease in the number of women of childbearing age and the overall birth rate. From a general point of view, the number of women of childbearing age aged 15–49 in Jiangxi Province in 2020 amounted to 10.293 million people, or 22.6% of the total population. In terms of trends, the number of women of childbearing age in the Province has decreased to 8.4226 million for ten consecutive years, with an average annual decrease of almost 130,000 people. The average age of first marriage for women of childbearing age has increased to 26 years. In the context of the districts and cities of the Province, in 2020, the top three districts and cities in terms of the number of women of childbearing age included Ganzhou City (2.053 million), Nanchang City (1.6069 million), and Shangrao City (1.4138 million). Top three districts and cities in the percentage of women of childbearing age in the total population were

Nanchang City (25.7%), Ganzhou City (22.9%), and Jiujiang City (22.7%; Fig. 3). In the context of the provinces of Central China, the proportion of women of childbearing age in Jiangxi Province was 22.6% of the total population, which is higher than in Hunan (21.2%), Henan (21.9%) and Anhui (22%) provinces (Fig. 4).

Third, the number of the elderly population is growing, and the aging process is constantly intensifying. In general, by the end of 2022, the number of elderly people aged ≥60 years amounted to 8.0651 million people, i.e. 17.81% of the total number of permanent residents of the Province. In terms of the trend of changes, compared with 2010, the number of elderly people in Jiangxi Province has increased by 2.9603 million people over the past decade, which is 6.37% in percentage terms. The elderly population aged ≥65 years was 5.9011 million people, i.e. 13.03%, with an increase of 2.5053 million people and 5.42% as a percentage

Figure 3. Number and proportion of women of childbearing age in various districts and cities of Jiangxi Province in 2020

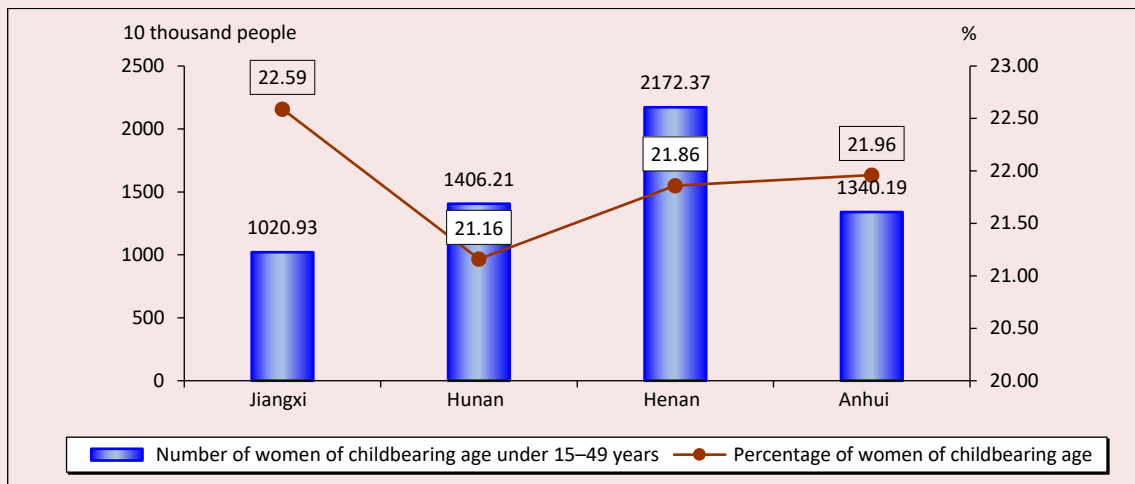


Note: The left coordinate axis shows the number of women of childbearing age under 15–49 years (persons), the right coordinate axis shows the percentage of women of childbearing age.

Source: 2020 Jiangxi Census Data.

compared to 2010. In terms of districts and cities of the Province, population aging (the proportion of the population aged  $\geq 60$  years was  $>10\%$  of the total population) was observed in all districts and cities of the Province; the top three districts and cities in terms of population aging included Pingxiang City (19.35%), Yichun City (18.04%) and Ji'an City (17.79%; Fig. 5). If we consider the six provinces of

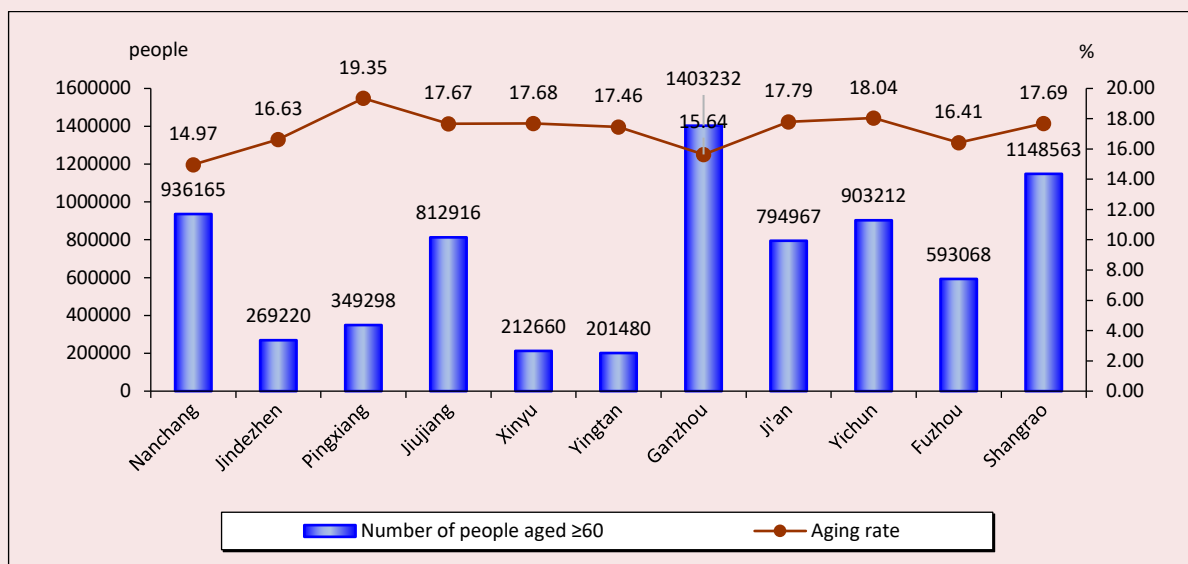
Figure 4. Number and proportion of women of childbearing age in various provinces of Central China



Note: The left coordinate axis shows the number of women of childbearing age under 15–49 years (10 thousand people), the right coordinate axis shows the percentage of women of childbearing age. No data for Shanxi Province and Hubei Province are available.

Source: Arrangement and summarization of 2020 Census Yearbook of various provinces.

Figure 5. Population aging in various districts and cities of Jiangxi Province, %

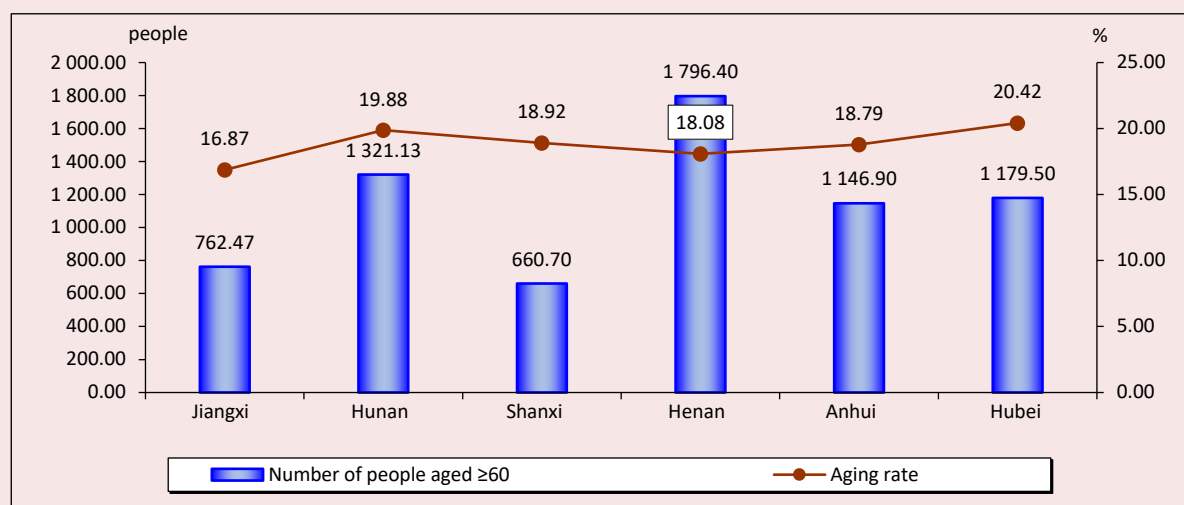


Note: The left coordinate axis shows the number of people aged  $\geq 60$ , the right coordinate axis shows population aging rate.

Source: 2020 Jiangxi Census Yearbook.



Figure 6. Population aging in six provinces of Central China



Note: The left coordinate axis shows the number of population aged  $\geq 60$ , the right coordinate axis shows population aging rate.

Source: Arrangement and summarization of 2020 Census Yearbook of various provinces.

Central China, the mildest population aging was observed in Jiangxi Province, where the population aging rate was 3.01%, 2.05%, 1.21%, 1.92% and 3.55% lower than in Hunan, Shanxi, Henan, Anhui and Hubei provinces, respectively (Fig. 6).

Similar trends are observed in the Russian Federation. Over the past ten years, the demographic situation has worsened: since 2017, there has been a natural population decline and a decrease in the birth rate (Fig. 7).

In seven out of eight federal districts over the past ten years, there has been an increase in natural decline and a decrease in birth rate (Table). Only in the North Caucasus Federal District, natural population growth has been maintained due to a higher birth rate. However, the dynamics of both indicators is negative. In 2022, the Northwestern Federal District recorded the lowest birth rate compared to other districts of the country – 8.1‰.

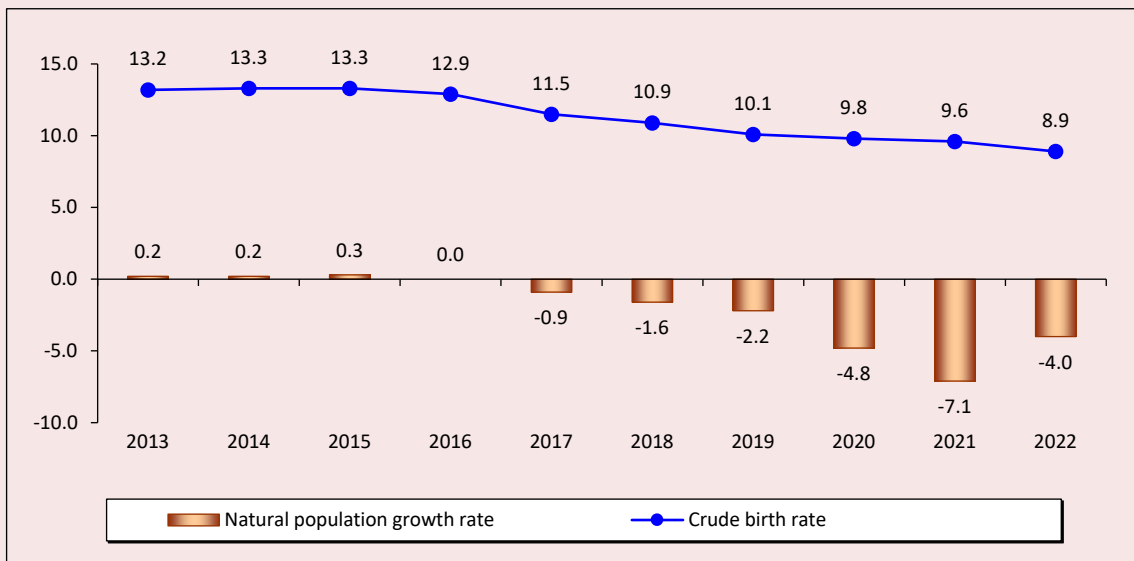
As in the People's Republic of China, there is a decrease in reproductive potential in Russia. According to the population censuses, the number

of women of childbearing age in 2020 amounted to 35654889 people, which is 24% of the population. The decrease over the past 10 years was 4% or 1573001 people (37227890 and 26% of the population in 2010); the decrease over twenty years was 11% – from 39966700 in 2002, which was 27.5% of the country's population. The largest number of women of childbearing age live in the Central and Volga federal districts, and the share of this demographic group is higher in the North Caucasus Federal District (Fig. 8), where there is a higher birth rate and natural population growth.

Demographic aging is also a major challenge to Russia's socio-economic development. Over the past ten years, the number of elderly Russians has increased by a quarter – from 26043897 in 2010 to 34490721 in 2020 and amounted to 23.4% of the country's population.

The highest proportion of elderly people is observed in the Central Federal District: 24.9%, in the Volga Federal District: 24.7%, and in the Northwestern Federal District: 24.5% (Fig. 9).

Figure 7. Crude birth rate and natural population growth rate in the Russian Federation (‰)



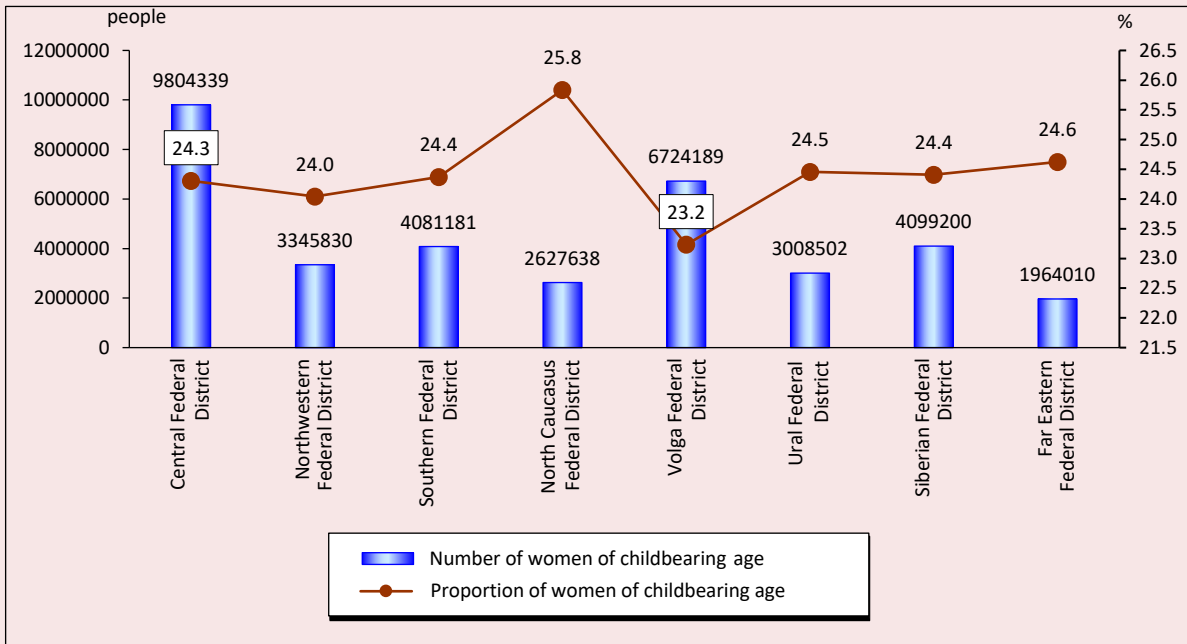
Source: Federal State Statistics Service. EMISS. Available at: <https://www.fedstat.ru/>

Total natural growth rate, crude birth rate in federal districts of the Russian Federation (‰)

Federal district	Indicator	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	<b>2022-2013</b>
Central	NGR	-2.3	-2.2	-1.8	-1.9	-2.5	-3.0	-3.3	-6.0	-8.6	-4.9	<b>-2.6</b>
	CBR	11.3	11.4	11.7	11.6	10.4	9.9	9.3	9.0	8.9	8.2	<b>-3.1</b>
Northwestern	NGR	-1.2	-1	-0.9	-0.8	-1.7	-2.2	-2.8	-5.4	-8.2	-5.3	<b>-4.1</b>
	CBR	12.2	12.3	12.5	12.4	11.1	10.4	9.6	9.1	8.8	8.1	<b>-4.1</b>
Southern	NGR	-0.6	-0.8	-0.8	-1.2	-1.8	-2.3	-3	-5.3	-8.3	-5.3	<b>-4.7</b>
	CBR	12.5	12.8	12.7	12.3	11.1	10.5	9.8	9.5	9.4	8.4	<b>-4.1</b>
North Caucasus	NGR	9.2	9.3	8.7	8.1	7.5	6.9	6.3	4.8	3.3	4.9	<b>-4.3</b>
	CBR	17.2	17.3	16.6	15.9	15	14.4	13.7	13.7	13.1	12.7	<b>-4.5</b>
Volga	NGR	-0.6	-0.6	-0.6	-0.8	-2	-2.7	-3.3	-6.5	-8.8	-5.4	<b>-4.8</b>
	CBR	13.3	13.3	13.3	12.8	11.1	10.6	9.6	9.2	9.1	8.2	<b>-5.1</b>
Ural	NGR	2.7	2.7	2.3	1.8	0.9	0.0	-0.8	-3.3	-5.2	-2.3	<b>-5.0</b>
	CBR	15	15.1	14.8	14.1	12.6	11.9	10.9	10.6	10.5	9.8	<b>-5.2</b>
Siberian	NGR	1.5	1.5	1.2	0.8	-0.4	-1.6	-2.5	-5	-7.5	-4.8	<b>-6.3</b>
	CBR	14.8	14.7	14.4	13.8	12.3	11.4	10.4	10	9.7	9.2	<b>-5.6</b>
Far Eastern	NGR	1.3	1.4	1.3	0.8	0	-0.1	-1.1	-2.7	-4.9	-3.2	<b>-4.5</b>
	CBR	13.9	14	13.9	13.3	12.1	11.9	11.1	11.1	10.6	10.1	<b>-3.8</b>

Note: NGR – natural population growth rate, CBR – crude birth rate.  
 Source: Federal State Statistics Service. EMISS. Available at: <https://www.fedstat.ru/>

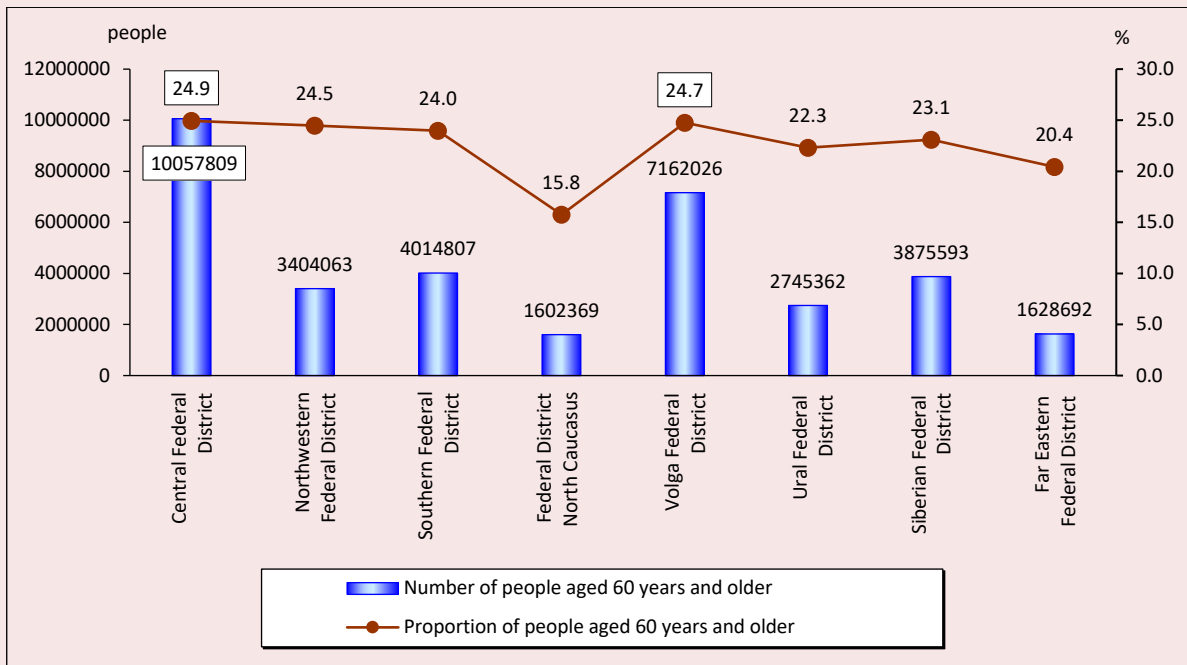
Figure 8. Number and proportion of women of childbearing age in the total population of the Russian Federation



Note: The left coordinate axis shows the number of women of childbearing age under 15–49 years old (persons), the right coordinate axis shows the percentage of women of childbearing age in total population.

Source: calculated according to the 2020 census data. Volume 2. Age-sex composition and marital status.

Figure 9. Population aging in federal districts of the Russian Federation



Note: The left coordinate axis shows the number of people aged 60 years and older (persons), the right coordinate axis shows the proportion of the population aged 60 years and older in the total population of the district (percentage).

Source: calculated according to the 2020 census data. Volume 2. Age-sex composition and marital status.

Thus, in the 21st century, Russia and China faced identical trends in reducing the reproductive potential and fertility of the population against the background of increasing demographic aging. Understanding the possible risks of these trends and the strategic importance of human potential formation at the highest level has led to the development of sociological studies of demographic behavior, which allow us to assess its parameters, identify reserves of demographic growth and effective demographic policy tools, including those aimed at the formation of norms, values, and culture of marital and reproductive behavior.

**Analysis of questionnaire data on the culture of marriage and childbearing (surveys of the population of Jiangxi Province and the Vologda Region)**

Here are a number of identified features of marital and reproductive behavior of the population of Jiangxi Province and the Vologda Region. The first aspect is the attitude toward premarital relations and toward marriage. Childbearing after marriage is still the main practice in Jiangxi Province, and only one in ten is tolerant toward pregnancy before marriage. According to the survey, 57.2% of respondents believe that pregnancy before marriage is bad, and 9.9% believe that it is normal. It was revealed that there is an “open sexual position”, people’s tolerance toward premarital sexual behavior. According to the survey data, 35.7% of respondents consider premarital sex unacceptable, and 19.1% consider it acceptable. “Trial” or premarital cohabitation is practiced, which is gradually recognized by the highly educated population. The survey data showed that 38.7% of respondents consider premarital cohabitation to be wrong, and 19.8% approve of it. It has been revealed that there is no unity of position in relation to homosexuality. According to the survey, 67.9% of respondents believe that homosexuality is bad, 11.3% hold the opposite view.

In general, respondents point out that “long-term stable relationship” is needed, and most people are unequivocally opposed to a one-night stand. According to the survey data, 75.3% of respondents believe that one-night stands is wrong, while 4.5% believe that it is normal. However, marriage is still an important event in the lives of the vast majority of people. According to the survey data, 81.4% of respondents believe that “marriage is important for life”, and 14.2% believe that “marriage is not important for life”. When asked about the age favorable for marriage, most people noted that 21–30 years old is the best time to get married. According to the survey, the proportion of respondents who believe that the best age for marriage is “≤20 years”, “21–25 years”, “26–30 years”, “31–35 years” and “≤36 years” was 1.16%, 42.20%, 50.04%, 4.10% and 2.50%, respectively. Legitimate marriage is the preferred form of relationship. Most of the respondents prefer an officially registered marriage: 73.1% of respondents want to get married, and 27.0% do not want to.

In the Chinese tradition, it is customary to give a dowry for the bride. In a survey of residents of Jiangxi Province, the “importance of dowry in marriage custom” was studied. It was revealed that more than 90% of people believe that there should be a dowry, 48.4%, 27.7% and 14.8% believe that “a dowry expresses the man’s respect for the woman and should be given in accordance with his capabilities”, “a dowry is the support of parents for a newly created family and is determined depending on the real situation” and “dowry should be given in accordance with traditional custom”, respectively. A very important question about the grounds for choosing a spouse has shown that it is “based on family values”, and the importance of family values and upbringing is widely recognized. Overall, the survey data showed that 95.3% of respondents agreed with the statement that “family values and education are important criteria when choosing a spouse”.

The data from the regional monitoring of the reproductive potential of Vologda Region population make it possible to assess people's attitude toward marriage (despite the discrepancy in the tools, the aspects under consideration are similar). Family and parenthood are consistently among the three most important life values of Vologda residents: 81.5% noted family and 58.7% parenthood; 62.3% noted that they prefer legitimate marriage, 11.3% – cohabitation. The basis of marriage is love (75.7%), respect for each other (68.6%), good health (35.1%) and material prosperity (35%); 24.3% (21.2% of men and 27.4% of women) fully agree with the statement that marriage must be registered, and 10.9% disagree; 30.1% fully agree that marriage registration is necessary for the birth and upbringing of children. The attitude toward divorce is tolerant – 23.5% of Vologda residents unequivocally believe that divorce is normal nowadays, 9.7% disagree, and 22.3% agree with the statement that divorce means destruction of the family and one should try to save the marriage, and 10.4% of respondents disagree.

Almost 34% of Vologda residents expressed the maximum degree of agreement with the statement that the main responsibilities of a woman in the family are taking care of children and running a household, and 32.7% fully agree that a woman, like a man, should take part in the financial support of the family. At the same time, 36% fully agree that a man should deal with household issues and raising children on an equal basis with a woman, and 45.3% agree that the main tasks of a husband are to protect and provide for the family. Tolerance for premarital affairs and infidelity is indicated by the permissibility of having several sexual partners at the same time (54% of men and 30% of women think so) and the age of sexual debut, which in the population aged 15–24 is 16 years on average. With an average age of the bride and groom of 27.6 and 25 years, respectively, the period of sexual premarital activity is about 10 years. The data

obtained suggest that there is no prevailing type of family. While maintaining patriarchal features in the field of sexual relations, material security, child care and marriage registration, we observe certain variability.

The second aspect is attitudes toward children and reproductive behavior. According to the survey, 71.4% of respondents from Jiangxi Province would like to have children, while 28.6% would not. It was revealed that there is a “law of diminishing marginal utility”, and almost 70% of respondents have no intention of having new children. According to the survey, 69.1% of respondents do not want to have more children, 12.1% are ready to have a second child, 3.5% – a third or more, and 15.3% take a wait-and-see attitude toward childbirth. As for the number of children, “children grow up with a brother or sister”, the desired number for the majority of respondents is two children (54.7%), 31.2% do not want children at all. An important aspect of family planning and reproductive attitudes is orientation towards the child's sex. “It doesn't matter if it's a boy or a girl”: most do not have explicit sex preferences when having children. According to the survey data, 58.1% of respondents expressed indifference to their child's sex, and 19.2% and 22.7% expressed a desire to have a boy and a girl, respectively. It was revealed that there is a problem of accessibility of personal child care support: 30% of respondents feel the need for child care services. The survey data showed that 29.4% of respondents are ready to apply for child care services in a nursery for toddlers under the age of 3, while 70.6% do not want to do so. As for the life of a family with school-age children, there is an “educational anxiety”, and more than 60% of respondents intend to purchase housing in an area where there is a school. According to the survey data, 64.4% of respondents are ready to purchase housing in school districts, and only 12.1% clearly stated that they would not purchase housing in school districts.

Among the respondents, 48.6% said that they no longer want children; 15.0% plan to have a baby in the next 1–3 years; 16.6% see the birth of a child in an even longer term (19.9% have not decided on their reproductive plans). Vologda residents also feel the need to improve the “childhood infrastructure”: 13.3% explain the decision to postpone childbirth for a long time by the lack of favorable conditions that facilitate child care in their place of residence, and another 13.3% noted that they are hampered by the difficulty of obtaining a place for a child in daycare. However, this study revealed that the problems of marriage stability, material and housing opportunities of the family are of higher importance when deciding against having a child in the near future: the lack of their own housing greatly affects the postponement of childbearing for 36.8% of respondents among those planning to have children in the future, 22.0% noted material opportunities, for 14.8% the decision to postpone the birth of a child was strongly influenced by the need to pay off loans, in connection with which the wife cannot leave work, 15.6% are not sure of the strength of the marriage. In general, for the most part, the orientation toward having fewer children is explained by the “sufficiency” of such a number of children, that is, 1–2 children is enough and allows parents to combine parenthood with professional activities and other interests more successfully. Childlessness is rare – 4.3% of respondents do not plan to have children, almost a third of such a choice is explained by health problems, that is, it has objective grounds and is not a conscious choice. The cultural grounds of childlessness include financial reasons, which in one form or another were noted by 15.6–28.1%, which indicate the predominance of materialistic needs over the need for children. In addition, 28.1% said they do not plan to have children because they do not like them, 25% do not want to change their usual lifestyle. Having many children has deep cultural foundations: love for children (76.4%), family traditions of having many

children (36.1%), social motives of responsibility for the preservation of the family (15.7%).

The questionnaire survey data show that there are similarities between the trends of marital and reproductive behavior of Russians and Chinese residents. There is still high support for the value of family and children, most recognize the importance of marriage, children, family values and upbringing, traditions; the ideal age for marriage, according to Chinese colleagues, is from 21 to 30, in Russian studies it is 25–30; most of the respondents intend to marry. As for reproductive orientations, most respondents are ready to have children, preferably two; there are no obvious differences in preferences concerning the child’s sex. There is an objective demand for family care assistance in both countries. Many families with both spouses employed do not have an opportunity to personally care for children aged 0 to 3. The issue of providing children with education worries parents in both countries, since good education is one of the welfare factors in modern society.

Research also shows that there are contradictions in people’s ideas and actions, there is no formed desirable family model that would meet modern demands for lifestyle and standard of living, clarity of norms regarding sexual behavior, divorce, voluntary childlessness. Culture and traditions play an important role in the formation of norms of marital and family behavior, as well as the position of the state, which, with its socio-demographic policy, forms a request for a particular family model, expresses support or restricts behavioral strategies. In this regard, it is necessary not only to improve the system of child care services, reduce the economic costs of childbearing, make the environment for childbearing more favorable, but also strengthen social norms of marriage and childbearing.

#### ***Recommendations***

When forming state policy in relation to the family, a number of aspects are important, such as love, marriage, childbearing, child rearing, child

education, etc. The information and educational component of demographic policy is a long-term project that requires attention to the role of family values and education, assistance in changing customs and habits in the field of marriage and formation of a culture of marriage and childbearing; coordinating and promoting a comprehensive policy covering marriage, childbearing, child care, education and housing, conducting an effective combined policy and reducing family costs for childbearing, parenting and education of children; promoting the distribution of parenting responsibilities and increasing the enthusiasm of the population of childbearing age in relation to fertility; forming a positive public opinion about marriage, family, childbearing, a child-friendly social atmosphere, including through the development of memorable and easy-to-understand slogans. Among the relevant directions, we can define common and specific ones for the two countries.

### **1. Development of marriage services**

Creating a high-quality marriage services platform. It is necessary to actively use the resource of mass public organizations (the Federation of Trade Unions, the Communist League of Youth and the Federation of Women of the People's Republic of China, the Civic Chamber, the Union of Fathers, the Union of Women of Russia, Yunarmiya, Rosmolodezh), create an integrated online and offline communication platform for friendship of boys and girls of the appropriate age, fully use the potential of youth friendship unions and regularly conduct youth friendship events in various forms and with rich content and themes for the "matchmaking" of young people of marriageable age. It is necessary to standardize the development of safe and competent marriage services, direct licensed institutions to carry out offline matchmaking and online dating services, promote the creation of certified marriage services platforms, make full use of marriage registration agencies, and include marriage and family

counseling in their functionality. It is necessary to include funds for marriage and family counseling in the financial budget of the territories, introduce professional non-governmental organizations engaged in marriage counseling through public procurement of services, and provide consulting services on premarital counseling, marital relations, family relations and divorce settlement.

### **2. Main principles of family life, translated into demographic policy**

It is proposed to promote the following conceptual foundations of the family. With regard to marriage: "to overcome storms and stresses together, to help each other in difficult times, to share responsibilities, to respect and love each other"; "emotions come first, personal qualities come second, material benefit comes last"; with regard to weddings: "simplicity, moderation, civility and health"; with regard to childbearing: "marriage and childbearing at the appropriate age, responsible childbearing and parenting, sharing parental responsibilities by spouses and respect for childbearing"; with regard to families in general: "equality, harmony, unity and warmth (care)". Special attention should be paid to the socio-psychological support of the population entering into marriage, young parents, to develop work with young people on the formation of values, especially family and childbirth, to widely promote the social value of childbirth, the attitude toward children as the main value of life. It is important to overcome utilitarianism in relation to children, move away from the point of view of "costs—benefits", it is necessary to guide and educate young people in the spirit of recognizing that "childbearing" is not only an important basis for procreation and development of the country, but also a way to realize personal social values and contribute to society, thereby fostering patriotism and awareness of responsibility among young people, helping to form a positive, healthy and correct view of marriage, childbirth and family.

### **3. Strengthening state economic support for the family**

For both countries, it seems promising to continue implementing a differentiated approach to family support depending on the number of children. This applies to direct cash transfers to the family and tax deductions. In Chinese practice, a more effective policy of ensuring the security of public rental housing should be implemented and preference should be given to families with two or three children when choosing, renting and subsidizing rental units of public rental housing. Preferential conditions will be provided for large families purchasing commercial housing, such as housing subsidies, tax cuts, a reduction in the initial payment, a reduction in the interest rate on the loan and an increase in the quota for a loan to the housing reserve fund. In Russia, the active use of the municipal housing stock for social hiring for families with children, the development of mortgage lending tools and housing programs, including those with special conditions for young and large families, are seen as promising.

In China, a full-scale project of collective school management should be implemented, the joint use of resources should be developed within the framework of the projects “famous schools helping new schools”, “strong schools helping weak schools” and “joint school management”, promote educational equity and a balanced supply of high-quality educational resources, as well as inform parents about the provision of educational services to children. It is necessary to complete the creation of a system of child care services, to encourage and direct public forces toward the creation of public daycare institutions, taking measures such as financial subsidies and the purchase of services in various forms, for example, privately run public institutions and private institutions subsidized by the government.

For both countries, the issue of developing corporate demographic policy, including the experience of departmental daycare institutions, is relevant.

### **4. Encouraging an egalitarian family model, involved fatherhood, and the participation of grandparents in the upbringing of grandchildren**

The practice of equal distribution of responsibility between members of a family with children is promising. Efforts should be directed at transforming the family model, supporting family relations that encourage childbirth and upbringing of children, forming a model of harmonious marriage, according to which the responsibilities of raising children are shared between spouses, helping men understand the value of childbirth, child rearing and housework for family development, paying more attention to women’s psychological health before, during and after childbirth and eliminate the anxiety associated with childbirth. One of the promising measures seems to be the creation of a more flexible maternity leave system, encouraging employers to allow male employees with children under 3 years old to work part-time at home, as well as the formation of institutional conditions for men to do more housework and participate in the upbringing of children. Similar proposals are available in Russian research discourse (Bagirova et al., 2024).

State support for child care by representatives of different generations seems appropriate. These are tools for including the participation of older people in the upbringing of children with the help of incentives such as, for example, food stamps, pension subsidies, travel discounts. In Russian studies, A.P. Bagirova and colleagues developed the concept of ancestral labor and assessed its prospects (Bagirova, Shubat, 2023; Bagirova, Yan, 2023).



### 5. Strengthening the promotion of legitimate marriage and childbearing and creating a positive attitude toward them in society

It is necessary to expand the use of popular and effective forms and channels of public opinion formation. Research shows that the mass media are not used effectively enough to cover family and demographic policy, and the broadcast information does not always correspond to the state course and goals of demographic policy (Rostovskaya, Vasilyeva, 2022). Using mass media, digital and information technologies, social networks and other new media platforms more effectively, it is necessary to present the model of marriage and childbearing in the form of a youth-oriented discourse, attract the attention of the younger generation and achieve wide dissemination of correct information on the Internet. The promotion of the culture of marriage and childbirth should be integrated into family health services, groups for mothers, marriage agencies, child care services and social insurance services so that people can get acquainted with the new family culture through social security services.

Propaganda methods should be improved, including through the construction of facilities such as, for example, the Wedding Culture Exhibition Hall and the Family Culture Park, make

full use of various platforms of cultural institutions, organize and conduct innovative, diverse, interesting and vibrant events such as free seminars, knowledge contests about family health, create appropriate literary and artistic works. Within the framework of thematic days (for example, “May 15 – International Family Day”, “July 11 – World Population Day”), release videos and films representing the image of a strong and happy family with children. Literary and artistic workers and artists should also be encouraged to create and prepare programs on the culture of marriage and childbirth.

### 6. Creating a friendly social environment for families with children

It is necessary to continue the practice of taking into account the needs of families with children in urban planning and development, designing public spaces such as transport systems, commercial premises and workplaces, creating an environment for pregnant women and new mothers, so that they would feel comfortable in public places, as well as creating favorable conditions for childcare and breastfeeding.

Demographic policy based on a harmonious combination of financial, educational and administrative tools will allow achieving desirable indicators of population reproduction in both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

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