

EXPLORING POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPING PROACTIVE GRANDPARENTING IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

In modern Russia, demographic issues are relevant. The paper aims to study the potential for developing proactive grandparenting in Russia. We used the following statistical indicators of the older generation: its population and dynamics; health indicators, labour force activity and social inclusion, mastery of new technologies, the level of pensions, involvement in childcare. The results obtained allow us to claim that Russia has a considerable potential for developing proactive grandparenting. The following particularities found positively characterise the quantitative component of this potential: the number of the older people, life expectancy, and remaining life expectancy are increasing in the country; a share of non-working older people remains high. The qualitative component of the potential is improving, too. The human capital of potential grandparents is enhancing: a share of the older people without grave health problems is increasing, their social participation and mastery of informational technologies are improving. To fulfil the potential of the proactive grandparenting in Russia, it is necessary to provide various mechanisms to support proactive grandparents in the society, such as state support, compensation benefits for them, developing the infrastructure, digital technologies, and e-learning tools, supporting and promoting the image of a proactive grandparent in media.

Key words: older generation, grandparents, proactive grandparenting, potential, Russia

JEL Code: J11, J14

Introduction

In modern Russia, demographic issues are one of the most relevant; this is primarily due to recent negative demographic trends. Thus, since 2018, the country has experienced a population decline: 146.9 million people in 2018, 146.8 million people in 2019, 146.7 million people in 2020 (Demographic indicators, 2021). The most likely medium variant of demographic projections shows a further annual decline in population. Moreover, the natural population decline will increase every year until 2027, accelerating the overall decline in the Russian

population. To note, such reduction will occur only due to natural population decline accompanied by the migration growth projected (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Medium variant of demographic projections in Russia, thou. persons

Year	Population at the beginning of the year	Changes for the year		
		total increase	natural increase	net migration
2021	146650.1	-113.2	-374.9	261.7
2022	146536.9	-164.5	-423.4	258.9
2023	146372.4	-236.5	-493.2	256.7
2024	146135.9	-277.6	-532.5	254.9
2025	145858.3	-318.8	-572.2	253.4
2026	145539.5	-328.6	-583.2	254.6
2027	145210.9	-328.0	-583.5	255.5
...
2035	143128.2	-134.9	-398.5	263.6

Source: *Demographic projections of the Federal State Statistics Service. Changes in population size by variants of projections* (2020). Retrieved September 13, 2021, from <https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/progn1.xls>

The birth rate is falling in the country. For example, the crude birth rate has decreased by almost a third over the past 10 years – from 14.1 in 2011 to 9.6 in 2020. For many years, the total fertility rate has remained significantly below the level of simple reproduction. For instance, in 2020, TFR was 1.5 children per woman (Demographic indicators, 2021).

Population ageing is a global trend of recent decades, which is becoming more and more evident in many countries; a share of the older people in the population is increasing. In Russia, the process of demographic ageing is also obvious. Over the past twenty years, the share of those aged 65 and older has increased from 12.4% in 2001 to 15.8% in the beginning of 2021 (Demographic indicators, 2021). Therefore, the older people play an important role in the socio-economic development of society.

At the same time, ageing in Russia is often accompanied by a decrease in both the standard of living and quality of life. In 2020, the Natixis Global Retirement Index, which analyses developed and developing countries based on a range of factors that affect retirement security, ranked Russia 38th out of 44 countries. The values of the Health Index, Finances in Retirement Index, Material Wellbeing Index, Quality of Life Index, and Global Retirement Index for the older population of Russia were low or extremely low (2020 global retirement, 2020).

In our view, two major demographic problems in Russia – low fertility and poor quality of the older people’s life – today may be addressed comprehensively through stimulating proactive grandparenting in the Russian society; in particular, through fostering proactive engagement of grandparents in taking care of their grandchildren.

Studies on grandparenting conducted in different countries prove that intense involvement of grandparents in their grandchildren’s life has a positive effect in the demographic, social, and psychological context. Thus, the grandparents’ engagement in taking care of and developing their grandchildren may help address low fertility. For example, based on a survey of 898 Dutchmen and women, Thomas & Liefbroer (2013) claimed that involvement of grandparents increased the likelihood of additional child births. The authors concluded that grandparental childcare may be part of an emerging reproductive strategy. Similar results were obtained as part of research conducted in other countries – China (Gu et al, 2021), Germany (Hank & Kreyenfeld, 2003), and some others. Okun and Stecklov (2021) found out that grandparental death leads to a low likelihood of Israel families to have children in the next five years.

Numerous studies show that taking care of grandchildren has a positive impact on grandparents’ health and well-being. Arpino & Bordone (2014) examined whether the provision of childcare helps older adults maintain better cognitive functioning. Their findings point to the inclusion of grandparenting among other cognitively stimulating social activities and the need to consider such benefits when discussing the implications of this important type of nonmonetary intergenerational transfer. Mahne & Huxhold (2015) proved that involvement in grandchildren’s lives improves grandparents’ subjective well-being. Hilbrand et al. (2017) claimed that such activity decreases elderly people’s mortality rates. Previously, we showed that Russian grandparents taking daily care of their grandchildren feel healthier and are more socially proactive (Shubat & Bagirova, 2020, Shubat & Shubat, 2021).

1 Data and Methods

Proven by many studies, positive effects from the grandparents’ involvement in taking care of grandchildren determined the aim of our research is to study the potential for developing proactive grandparenting in Russia.

Today, Russia does not carry out any nationwide surveys of grandparenthood; therefore, official statistics do not have any grandparenting indicators. Thus, as a major source, we used data on the older people (i.e., those retired, who are most likely to become proactive

grandparents) provided by the Federal State Statistics Service (The older generation, 2021). The older generation includes retired people. Meanwhile, Russia raised the retirement age from 60 years for men and 55 for women in 2019 to 61 and 56 respectively in 2020-2021.

As additional sources, we also used survey data of public health (Population Health, 2020) and comprehensive monitoring of living conditions (Comprehensive monitoring, 2018), conducted by the Federal State Statistics Service of Russia.

It is important to mention that we did not use 2020 statistics. The COVID-19 pandemic could significantly affect the final statistical indicators characterising the older generation. At the same time, we believe that the influence of this factor, although highly important, is short-term and can change demographic dynamics only for a short period of time.

For our research, we used the following official statistical indicators characterising the older generation in Russia: population and its dynamics; health indicators (life expectancy, self-evaluation of health), labour force activity and social inclusion, mastery of new technologies, the level of pensions, involvement of grandparents in childcare.

Let us clarify the latter indicator. As noted earlier, there are no nationwide surveys of grandparenthood in Russia. We applied statistical indicators characterising the older generation in general and assumed that in case people from this age group take care of children, they are most likely their grandchildren. Proactive grandparents are those who responded positively to the survey question (Comprehensive monitoring, 2018) on whether they take daily care of children or not.

In our research, we used descriptive statistics and studied the time series of indicators that characterise the older generation in Russia.).

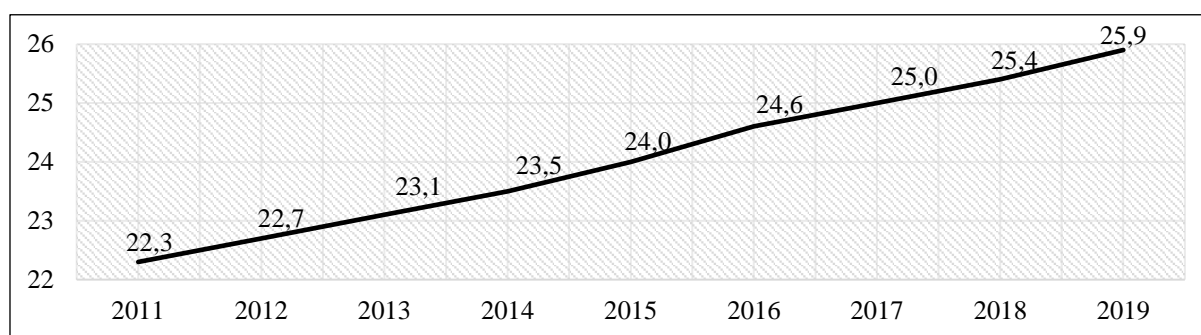
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2 Results

In our research, we obtained results that, in our view, allow us to claim that Russia has a potential for developing proactive grandparenting.

1. Our study showed that in recent years the population structure has been changing, and there has been a steady increase in the number of the older population. Thus, from 2011 to 2019, the share of the older people in the total population increased by 3.6% and reached 25.9% (Figure 1).

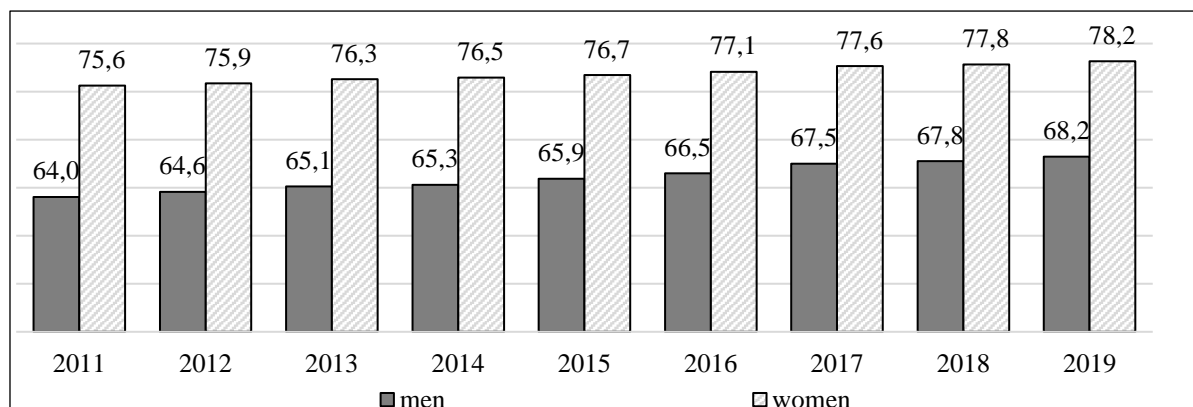
Fig.:1 Share of the older generation in the total Russian population in 2011-2019



Source: *The older generation*. Federal State Statistics Service (2021). Retrieved September 9, 2021, from <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/13877>

2. In recent years, life expectancy at birth in Russia also rose. For instance, this indicator increased by 3.5 years and amounted to 73.3 years (Figure 2). To explore the potential for developing proactive grandparenting, it is important to mention that during the time period analysed, men's life expectancy was increasing more rapidly; as a result, the gap between life expectancy for men and women significantly decreased – from 11.6 years in 2011 to 9.9 years in 2019 (Figure 2). To add, the remaining life expectancy is also increasing.

Fig. 2: Life expectancy at birth, years



Source: *The older generation*. Federal State Statistics Service (2021). Retrieved September 9, 2021, from <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/13877>

3. The older generation's self-evaluation of health is improving. In particular, the number of Russian elderly people who assess their health as very good, good, or satisfactory is increasing (Table 2). At the same time, the majority of older Russians (76.6%) believe that they are the ones most responsible for their health (Population Health, 2019). In addition, statistical data more often testify to the fact that older citizens pay more attention to their health: they adopt a healthy lifestyle (more than 12%), consult a doctor when having early symptoms of a disease (58.9%), undergo annual preventive examinations (34.2%) (Population Health, 2020).

Tab. 2: Indicators of health self-evaluation among the older generation in Russia

How do you evaluate your current health in general?	2013	2018	2019
Very good, %	20.1	20.8	21.3
Good, %	8.0	7.7	13.0
Satisfactory, %	56.4	59.9	62.8
Bad, %	28.0	27.2	20.1

Source: *Population Health Survey*. Federal statistical surveys on socio-demographic problems. (2020).

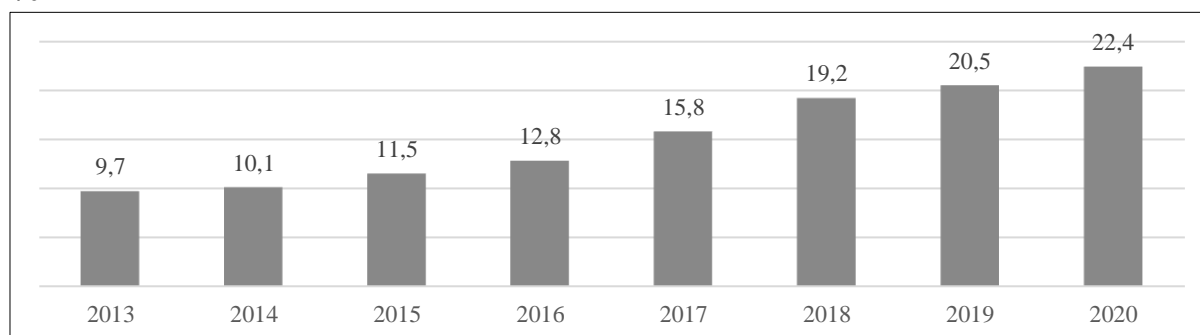
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4. An employment study in Russia did not show any significant changes in the structure of senior citizens' employment; more than 76% of the older people do not work (The older generation, 2021).

5. Russian statistics show greater involvement of the older generation in work at educational institutions. Thus, in 2020, the total number of senior employees in these establishments increased by 67.7 thousand people or 11.8% compared to 2012 (The older generation, 2021).

6. Recently, the share of the older generation who is capable of having a proactive lifestyle (active leisure, tourism, sports, and art) has slightly increased. In 2011, the share of this group in the total number of the older people was 5.3%, and in 2018 it increased to 5.8% (Comprehensive monitoring, 2018).

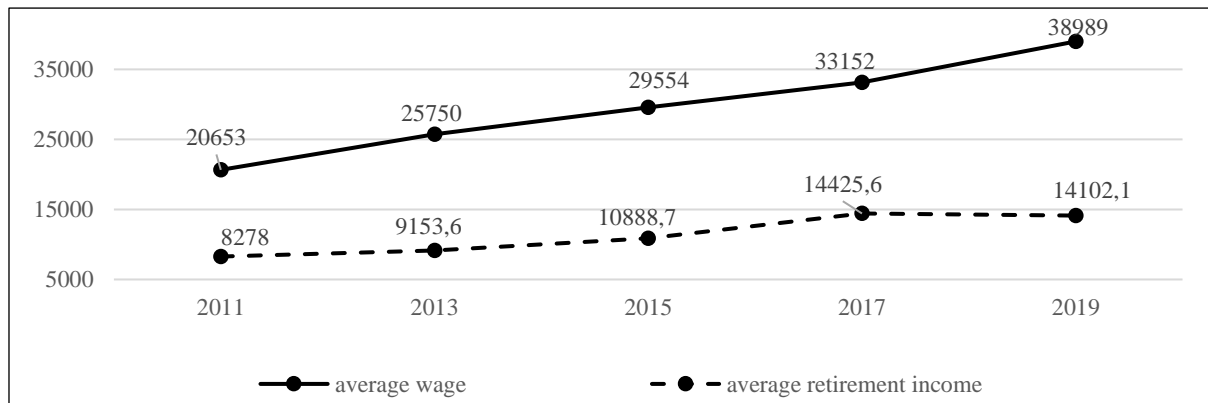
7. Senior citizens use the Internet more willingly. Over the past 8 years, the share of such people in the total older generation number more than doubled (Figure 3).

Fig. 3: Share of active Internet users in the total number of the Russian older generation, %

Source: *The older generation*. Federal State Statistics Service (2021). Retrieved September 9, 2021, from <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/13877>

8. There is a significant gap between the levels of the average wage and the average retirement income (Figure 4), which allows us to evaluate the potential for proactive grandparenting in Russia. For example, in 2019, the ratio accounted for 2.76.

Fig. 4: The average wage and retirement income, RUB



Source: *The older generation*. Federal State Statistics Service (2021). Retrieved September 9, 2021, from <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/13877>

9. Our research showed that the share of older citizens actively involved in taking care of grandchildren is not increasing in Russia. According to (Comprehensive monitoring, 2018) in 2011, the share of the older people taking daily care of children was 19.1%, and in 2018 it decreased to 15.1%. In 2011-2018, this indicator fluctuated text.

3 Discussions

We believe the results obtained allow us to claim that Russia has a considerable potential for developing proactive grandparenting. We identified tendencies and peculiarities specific to the older generation in Russia, which shape both qualitative and quantitative components of the potential.

The study showed that the number of the older people, life expectancy at birth, and remaining life expectancy have been recently increasing in Russia. In our view, these particularities positively characterise the quantitative component of the potential for developing proactive grandparenting and demonstrate that this component is likely to increase over time. Considering that men's life expectancy is increasing more rapidly, the potential for grandfathers' involvement in proactive grandparenting will be higher.

According to our results, a significant number of elderly people are not engaged in labour activity – four out of five citizens at this age do not work; thus, their labour activity is not in demand, which may be viewed as a potential for proactive grandparenting.

As our research showed, the qualitative component of the potential is improving, too. The human capital of potential grandparents is certainly enhancing: the share of the older people without grave health problems is increasing, their social participation and mastery of informational technologies are improving. The latter is particularly relevant due to various widespread forms of online interaction with information and communication technologies and e-learning. Our study also revealed that the pedagogical and educational potential of Russian pensioners working at schools, colleges, and universities is high enough, which can boost proactive grandparenting.

At the same time, today, the share of those older people actively engaged in taking care of and developing their grandchildren is low; it does not exceed 20%. With numerous studies confirming positive socio-demographic effects from the interaction of grandchildren and grandparents, engagement of the older generation in proactive grandparenting is in demand in modern Russia, as the demographic situation is worsening. It requires development and implementation of incentive mechanisms. Particularly, the difference between the levels of seniors' salaries and pensions identified allows us to determine one of the possible ways to stimulate proactive grandparenting. This difference can be crucial when choosing the potential grandparents' lifestyle and making a decision in favor of raising their own and other people's grandchildren. This potential of grandparenting – which is a type of labour – needs state support, for example, compensation benefits for grandparents. To fulfil the potential of the proactive grandparenting, it is necessary to provide other mechanisms to support proactive grandparents in the society, such as developing the infrastructure (accessible playgrounds, parks, cultural and health institutions), digital technologies, and e-learning tools, new technologies for information development and interaction, promoting proactive grandparenting at the state level in media.

Conclusion

Russia has the increasing potential for developing proactive grandparenting. The trends in the socio-demographic sphere of the Russian society indicate that this potential is formed with both quantitative and qualitative indicators in mind. On fulfilling this potential, several demographic problems, such as low fertility and poor life quality of the older people, can be addressed.

Unfortunately, today Russia does not conduct any dedicated studies that would provide reliable and comprehensive data on grandparenting, which could lay the groundwork for developing state support measures and stimulating proactive grandparents; in turn, it would contribute to a more effective solution of demographic problems in the country.

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