

# LABOUR UNIONS' ROLE IN IMPROVING RUSSIAN DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY: CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

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## Abstract

Many researchers justify work-parenting balance difficulties by lacking effective corporate demographic policy support measures for employees with children. In this context, the role of workers' labor unions is exciting. Our study aims to identify the position of Russian labor unions in the system of social and labor relations and evaluate the effectiveness of the existing corporate demographic policy measures. We conducted a content analysis of 30 industry-specific federal-level social partnership agreements.

The results are following: 1) the agreements specify 45 types of support measures for the parents employed; 2) mainly, the agreements provide for such measures as full or partial travel grants to children's healthcare establishments, additional short-term leave when giving birth, social and economic support when starting a family and giving birth, and health-resort treatment procedures for employees and their families; 3) the support measures specified in the agreements are often non-binding and can be provided at the employer's discretion; 4) there are very few measures that could help mitigate the barriers when balancing work and parenting. The results obtained may be used to improve corporate demographic policy and design fundamentally new measures that would stimulate employment among workers with children.

**Key words:** corporate demographic policy, labour unions, work-family balance, content analysis

**JEL Code:** J13, J18

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## Introduction

Rapid development of society led to the transformation of its goals and needs. Half a century ago, a key value was family; today, people prefer career and professional self-realisation to family and parenthood. When both parents have to participate in the economy, there arises the problem of balancing two vital areas – family and work. Despite obvious advantages of parenthood, professional and parental responsibilities in combination involve certain

difficulties, such as a lack of free time, employment problems for those with children, high level of physical and emotional stress (Joesch, 1994; Pailhe and Solaz, 2009; Matysiak et al., 2016; Remery and Schippers, 2019). When facing a lack of time and intense stress, many parents have to reduce the number of working hours or look for a new job that would allow them to devote enough time to their family and children (Becker, 1981; Nair et al., 2019). As a result, young people postpone childbearing and prefer having less children.

To solve the pressing problem, some countries implemented widely-popular family-friendly policy that combines state and corporate demographic policy measures aimed at supporting family and parenthood, including optimal conditions for balancing professional and parental responsibilities. Researchers claim that work-life balance is beneficial not only for employees, but also for employers, since the effectiveness of an organisation depends on the level of employees' subjective well-being (Turker, 2017; Suhendro, 2018). The company's policy aimed at supporting families increases labor productivity, creates a positive company image and contributes to retention of valuable and qualified personnel (Fleckenstein and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011; Wiss and Greve, 2020). Therefore, an employer should create favourable working conditions (convenient work schedule, medical support, financial incentives, positive attitude to employees, etc.).

As a rule, labour unions are responsible for ensuring social and employment guarantees and employees' rights. Researchers claim that these unions can significantly influence how a policy for supporting workers with children is developed and implemented (Wood, 2003; Ravenswood and Markey, 2011; Park et al., 2019). For example, in some Scandinavian countries without employment legislation, labour unions and collective agreements are the main tool for regulating social and labour relations.

Our study aims at identifying the position of Russian labour unions in the system of social and labour relations and at evaluating the effectiveness of the existing corporate demographic policy measures.

## **1 Data and Methods**

We conducted a content analysis of industry-specific federal-level social partnership agreements available on Ministry's of Labour and Social Protection website. These agreements are negotiated between three parties: 1) representatives of employees (labour unions), 2) representatives of employers, 3) federal authorities. They are intended to regulate social and labour—as well as related to them economic—relationships between employers

and employees within a certain industry (e.g., manufacturing, construction, transport industry) and apply to all enterprises in the industry. For the analysis, we selected agreements for the last three years (2018-2020), since each agreement is valid for 3 years. As a result, we analysed 30 industry-specific agreements. As a category of the analysis, we chose support measures for workers with children at the labour market. We calculated a total number of references to support measures for employees with children. In addition, we tried to assess the degree of imperative of each measure (i.e., whether the employee's right to receive it is guaranteed or it can be provided at employer's discretion).

## 2 Results

We obtained the following results:

1) We identified 45 types of support measures at the labour market for parents employed stipulated in industry-specific agreements. We grouped the support measures determined into 4 categories (Table 1).

**Tab. 1: Categories of support measures determined for parents employed**

<b>Categories of support measures determined for parents employed</b>	<b>Number of measures identified</b>
Measures associated with workflow management and working hours (the number of working hours, leave period, working and non-working days rotation, weekly working hours, overtime work, etc.)	22
Measures associated with financial incentives (socio-economic support to start a family, financial assistance at birth, compensation payments, additional payments for multiple-children families, financial assistance for families with disabled children, etc.)	11
Other guarantees stipulated by labour legislation (prohibition to increase pregnant women's productivity rates, prohibition to terminate employment contract with pregnant women)	3
Other measures of social support (full or partial travel grants to children's healthcare establishments, health-resort treatment procedures for employees, financial support for New Year's holidays and gifts, providing places in kindergartens, etc.).	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

Source: own elaboration

The largest group includes measures related to the work organisation and working hours (49% of all measures identified). An extract from a content-analysis map is presented in Table 2.

**Tab. 2: Extract from content-analysis map**

Categories of Analysis	Units of Analysis	Observation units (frequency)		Total
		Binding	Non-binding	
<b>Measures associated with workflow management and working hours</b>	Additional unpaid short-term leave due to child's birth	8	9	17
	Additional unpaid short-term leave for employees with children in elementary school due to the beginning of the school year	6	6	12
	Annual additional unpaid 14-day leave for employees with two or more children under 14 years of age	5	6	11
	Additional day off per month for one parent working in the Far North and having a child under 16 years of age	8	2	10
	Additional paid leave for mothers with many children	2	4	6
	36-hour work week for women working in rural areas and in the Far North	4	1	5
	And so forth			
<b>Measures associated with financial incentives</b>	Socio-economic support to start a family and give birth to a child (including housing support)	3	12	15
	Financial assistance at birth / additional one-time payment	5	9	14
	Compensation payments to families with children whose parents were injured at work	6	4	10
	Additional compensation payments to employees on maternity leave taking care of children under 3 years of age	4	6	10
	And so forth			
<b>Other guarantees stipulated by labour legislation</b>	Preferential right to stay when reducing the number of staff for women with a child under 3 years of age and single parents with children under 16 years of age	8	1	9
	Prohibition to terminate employment contract with pregnant women and single parents	3	0	3
	And so forth			
<b>Other measures of social support</b>	Full or partial travel grants to healthcare establishments, children's health-resort, and pre-school institutions	5	19	24
	Health-resort treatment procedures for employees and their families	2	13	15
	Places in school and kindergarten	1	9	10

	Training courses after parental leave to regain professional skills	3	3	6
	And so forth			
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>272</b>

Source: own elaboration

2) Mostly, the agreements provide for such measures as full or partial travel grants to children's healthcare establishments (80% of agreements), additional short-term leave when giving birth (57% agreements), social and economic support when starting a family and giving birth (50% of agreements), and health-resort treatment procedures for employees and their families (50% of agreements).

3) In more than half of the cases (53%), support measures are non-binding and can be provided at employer's discretion (Table 3). In most cases, binding measures are associated with workflow management and working hours, as well as other guarantees for parents employed (prohibition to terminate employment contract with pregnant women, prohibition to increase pregnant women's productivity rates, preferential right to stay when reducing the number of staff). The reason is that labour legislation predominantly includes such types of support; those not stipulated in law are often considered as recommendatory.

**Tab. 3: The level of imperative for support measures**

Categories of Analysis	Observation units (frequency)		Total	
	Binding	Non-binding	Units	%
Measures associated with workflow management and working hours	74	35	109	40
Measures associated with financial incentives	25	47	72	26
Other guarantees stipulated by labour legislation	13	1	14	5
Other measures of social support	17	60	77	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>100</b>
	<b>47%</b>	<b>53%</b>		

Source: own elaboration

4) Although measures related to workflow management and working hours predominate in the agreements, actual mechanisms that could help mitigate barriers to work-parenting balance (the possibility to change start and end of a workday, flexible working hours, employment forms, including distance work) are extremely rare. Moreover, about half of the measures identified apply only to certain categories of people with family

responsibilities. These categories usually include pregnant women, parents raising disabled children, single women, multiple-children families, and people raising children without a mother.

### **3 Discussion**

In Russia, social and labour relations are regulated by federal normative acts. Our analysis showed that industry-specific agreements predominantly include measures already stipulated in the country's labour legislation, which, in turn, accounts for why most measures identified are associated with workflow management and working hours. This very aspect is frequently referred to in labour legislation. Those rare support measures not stipulated in law are usually recommendatory, non-binding, and can be provided at employer's discretion (full or partial travel grants to children's healthcare establishments, training courses after parental leave to regain professional skills, etc.). Interestingly, most of these measures represent mechanisms of financial incentives for parents employed. Hence, not all employers will follow these recommendations and implement them due to possible financial and administrative costs.

Our results suggest that modern Russian labour unions play an insignificant role in regulating social and work processes. Social partnership agreements mostly include labour legislation norms and lack effective mechanisms to support employees with children, which may testify to a low engagement of labour unions in developing effective corporate demographic policy measures. (These unions are known to advocate for improving employees' working conditions).

Poor labour unions' development in Russia may be caused by objective law restrictions which do not allow labour unions to fulfill their original purpose. Actually, their authority is limited. According to Russian legislation, if an employer submits a local bylaw but a labor union does not agree with it, the employer still has a right to accept this bylaw. Most likely, it is labour unions' limited rights and authority that cause low engagement in employees' rights protection.

### **Conclusion**

Our research allowed us to obtain the following results: firstly, in almost half of the cases, support measures of parents employed provided in industry-specific social partnership agreements are stipulated in Russian labour legislation; secondly, in more than half of the agreements, these measures are only recommendatory and can be applied to certain

employees' categories (pregnant women, those raising children under 3 years of age, single parents, those raising disabled children). At the same time, there are not any measures that could help mitigate the barriers when balancing work and parenting. One of the parties involved in negotiating social partnership agreements is a labour union that is supposed to protect employees' rights and ensure favourable working conditions. Therefore, a lack of effective measures aimed at securing work-family balance in agreements may testify to a low labour unions' engagement in corporate demographic policy. The results obtained may be used for improving corporate demographic policy and for designing fundamentally new measures which would stimulate employment among workers with children.

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