**Abstract**

**RS-137**

Title: «The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and new social policy measures on the employment of parents and the income of families with children»

Head of the Project: Pishnyak A. I.

Department/Institute: Institute for Social Police

**The object of the study** is families with children.

1. **Goal of research:** analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and new social policy measures on the employment of parents and incomes of families with children.
2. **Methodology:** analysis of open data of Federal State Statistic Service;analysis of frequency distributions of responses collected in sample surveys; multidimensional statistical analysis of sample surveys; mathematical modeling; analysis of legal acts and other documents; analysis of qualitative sociological data of focus groups.
3. **Empirical base of research:** the data of The Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey - Higher School of Economics (RLMS-HSE); the data of Rosstat Household Budget Survey; data from the survey "Readiness for Change", commissioned by the HSE; the data of Statistical Survey of Income and Participation in Social Programs (VNDN); open data of Federal State Statistic Service and other organizations that provide the relevant information; empirical materials from 14 focus groups; databases of regulatory legal acts.
4. **Results of the research**:

The period of economic crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decline in the quality of life and changes in employment, income and spending levels of Russian households. Families with children, characterized by a high dependency burden and increased risks of poverty, found themselves in a difficult situation, which required increased social support from the state. The focus on reinforcement social assistance to families with children, due to the decline in their standard of living during the pandemic, employment restrictions and rising costs for children, seems justified and to be largely effective. The current changes in the system of social support for families with children were associated, firstly, with an increase in the size of existing payments, secondly, with the addition of new social support measures, and thirdly, with the addition of new categories of recipients.

Rosstat Household Budget Survey (2019) showed that households with older school-age children (14-17 years old) do not differ much from each other in terms of living standards. The expenses of households with children aged 16-17, compared with the expenses of families raising children of a younger age group, are almost at the same level, slightly increasing in part of spending on meals outside the home, which is associated with a change in the employment status of older children. At the same time, the incomes of households with older children practically remain at the same level.

In this work was studied the dynamics of employment of mothers and fathers during the coronavirus pandemic in Russia. The results of the analysis of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and related restrictive measures on the employment of parents with children indicate that the impact of the pandemic on the labor market in Russia was conservative, most expressed in the first months of the pandemic, when the regime of non-working days was in effect. The adaptation of the labor market to the pandemic occurred through the expansion of the distance employment segment, partly through changes in work schedules, working hours, unpaid vacations, much less often through layoffs.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that, on the one hand, the reduction in employment in 2020 was more expressed at women with three or more children and with children younger than 2 years. And on the other hand, according to the VCIOM survey held in May, mothers were more likely than fathers to talk about switching to distance employment, losing wages or noted other manifestations of instability of their employment. This suggests that gender inequality associated with the lack and reduction of tools for combining parenthood and employment has nevertheless intensified in the pandemic. Official employment, living in cities (but not megacities) contributed to keeping job in 2020. At the same time, the study found no significant differences between women and men with children either in the probability of keeping a job or in the factors of maintaining employment.

During the implementation of the project, we have made an assessment of the extent of participation of representatives of families with children in the social contract system, designed to activate the internal resources of poor families to get out of a difficult economic situation. The materials of surveys of the standard of living and economic potential of families with children showed a limited number of participants in the social contract program from among this category of poor families, since both the previous rules and those introduced today do not affect most of them, since poverty in this group is associated not with lack of work, but with insufficient incomes of working family members and restrictions on employment. Social policy decisions can play a decisive role here: from the establishment of a higher minimum wage, the elimination of gender wage disparities to the development of programs for the care of children and the elderly. The social contract system, for its part, can help working family members with children to improve their qualification level, in the subsequent search for higher-paying employment. As for the main contingent of participants in the social contract program – unemployed family members of working age, an individual approach is needed here in determining the directions of social adaptation and getting out of poverty. The ideas of creating mini-schools or mini-kindergartens with the involvement of non-working mothers as kindergarten teachers seem interesting and necessary, especially in small towns and localities with limited opportunities to create full-fledged preschool institutions.

The study examined the risks of chronic poverty of families with children. The chronically poor account for almost half of all the poor, while since 2016 the share of both groups in the population has changed slightly. Speaking about families with children, it can be noted that a quarter of them, according to the RLMS-HSE, are poor, more than 10% are chronically poor. The available data suggest that among the poor dominate families in which none of the adults have higher education, as well as those who live in rural areas (and the latter are especially numerous among the chronically poor).

Analysis of data from online focus group discussions shows that the pandemic and especially the period of restrictive measures have seriously affected the way of life of families, forced them to adapt to the need to work, study and solve everyday problems in conditions of limited space and choice. The presence of children, especially younger and older school age, complicated everyday adaptation.

Distance work required adaptation and at first seemed uncomfortable. Parents with children had to re-zone the home, equip the workplace, including furniture and appliances, build new boundaries and ways of interaction in the family. The combination of distance work and children's studies turned out to be especially uncomfortable during the period of severe restrictions. Supervision by superiors, the inability to separate personal and working time, as well as a decrease in the effectiveness of communication are the three main factors of dissatisfaction with distance work. However, in the end, the experience of distance work for those who were able to adapt their activities turned out to be positive and changed their views on work in the future. Many people note that the flexibility of the schedule, saving time on the road and the ability to solve everyday issues during the working day are the advantages that outweigh for them all the difficulties associated with distance work. At the same time, the combined format of work seems to be the most comfortable for most respondents. This format, on the one hand, assumes all the advantages of distance work, on the other — allows them to communicate with colleagues and solve in the office those issues that are difficult to solve online.

1. **Level of implementation, recommendations on implementation or outcomes of the implementation of the results:** particular results and recommendations formulated as a result of the project implementation can be used to advise public authorities and improve existing or developing legislation in the field of providing social support measures directly to children and families with children in order to increase their effectiveness.