

Modern Russian Demographic Policy in the Field of Fertility: Results and Areas for Improvement*



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Abstract. In recent years, Russia has been pursuing the demographic policy focused on the support of the birth of the second and more children. The paper discusses the development of this policy, assesses its effectiveness and suggests areas for improvement. It has been established that the expansion of demographic policy measures by introducing in 2011 the regional maternal capital for the birth of the third child in addition to the federal capital for the second child gave positive results. It helped extend the positive trend in the birth rate as the situation concerning the women of childbearing age began to worsen; it also helped older generations to decide in favor of having children rather than wait for better times; in addition, this policy helped extend the families through additional births, strengthen the family component of fertility, and promote reproductive attitudes of the population. In spite of the fears, the growth in the number of decisions to have children took place not only in older age cohorts. A sociological survey conducted in 2013 gives reason to hope that the small generations of those born in the 1990s and on which the prospects of fertility depend, will achieve slightly expanded reproduction. As the age structure of fertile contingents is deteriorating, it is necessary to carry on and improve demographic policy. It is necessary to preserve all the components of economic measures to support families, including childcare allowances to low-income families, and they should be extended up to the time when the child comes of age. It is necessary to widen the scope of implementation of the maternity capital. When developing the new measures of demographic policy, one should put more emphasis on the psychological measures aimed to form value orientations

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of the population in the area of childbearing, to improve the quality structure of fertility and strengthen the institution of family. It is necessary to reorient economic activities on second births. The general line of the demographic policy in the field of fertility is to increase self-sufficiency of families through the promotion of employment and increase in incomes from employment and development of preferential housing programs for families with children.

Key words: demographic policy, level and structure of fertility, calendar of births, reproductive attitudes, real generations.

For the last eight years, Russia has been pursuing an active demographic policy in the field of fertility, and the extent and variety of these activities is increasing. Therefore, great importance is attached to the issues related to the evolution of governmental pro-family policy and assessment of its impact on the level and structure of fertility, changes in the calendar of births, implementation of existing reproductive attitudes of the population, revision of reproductive plans by the members of older cohorts of childbearing age, childbearing attitudes of young people. The paper is devoted to the analysis of development of demographic policy carried out in Russia, and to evaluation of its results and areas of improvement.

The beginning of modern Russian demographic policy can be traced to the year 2006, when Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered his Address to the Federal Assembly and highlighted demographic issues as most acute and crucial for Russia. The legislative and executive authorities were instructed to deploy vigorous state policy in the field of fertility, as a result, in November–December 2006 several related federal laws were adopted and “The concept for demographic policy of the Russian Federation for the period

until 2025” was approved in October 2007. It should be noted that, after a long break, the differentiated approach was proclaimed to stimulate births of different order. A second child was proclaimed to be a priority (according to a VTSIOM survey, even in the crisis-stricken 1990s, the average desired number of children per family fell below two only in 1992–1994. [2]), this child is often very desirable but for its birth there are too many restrictions in the family that consciously plans its life.

In general, the Russian system of providing support to families with children includes the following benefits and payments:

1. The allowance for early registration of a pregnant woman with a women’s health clinic (543.67 rubles in 2015).
2. Pregnancy and maternity allowance paid according to a sick leave: 60% of the wage if working experience is under 5 years, if working experience is from 5 to 8 years – 80%, over 8 years – 100%. However, in 2002, a maximum for this allowance was set: its amount cannot exceed the limit value of the base for calculating insurance contributions to the Social Insurance Fund. In 2015, for 140 days of maternity leave, the maximum allowance was 228,603.2 rubles (about 49

thousand rubles per month). Women who have worked less than two years with low wages or who did not have wages in that period, receive an allowance in the minimum amount: in 2015 – 27,455.4 rubles over the entire period of maternity leave (i.e. in the amount of the minimum wage per month).

3. Lump sum payment at birth (in 2015, the amount was 14,497.8 rubles).

4. Monthly child care allowance received until the child is 18 months of age. From January 01, 2007 it is for the first time paid to non-working women, and it is differentiated by order of birth. At the time of its introduction, it was established in the amount of 1,500 rubles per month for the first child, 3,000 rubles – for subsequent children. By 2015, as a result of indexation, it has increased, respectively, to 2,718.34 rubles and 5,436.67 rubles per month. For working women the allowance is not less than 40% of their earnings and no less than its minimum amount, but no more 19,855.82 r es (in 2007, the maximum amount was 6,000 rubles). In regions with regional premium rate, the amount of the allowance takes it into account (if it is not already included in the wage).

5. The monthly child allowance. It is granted according to the fact how needy the family is. The amount of payment varies from 50 to 100 rubles per month depending on the age of the child. Single mothers receive an allowance of 50%. Some regions make additional premiums to this allowance. For instance, in the Komi Republic, at the end of 2015, the monthly child benefit paid to low-income families was set as follows: for children

up to the age of 18 months – 1,225.39 rubles; from 18 months to 3 years – 1,188.73 rubles; from 3 to 6 years – 670.76 rubles; from 6 to 16 years – 335.37 rubles; for children aged 16–18 studying in general educational organizations – 335.37 rubles. The amount increases by 156.50 rubles for children of single parents, by 78.24 rubles – for children whose parents evade paying alimony [8].

6. The lump-sum allowance at children's foster placement. It equals the lump-sum payment at birth. Parents receive 100 thousand rubles per each child if they adopt a disabled child, a child older than 7 years, or children who are brothers and/or sisters.

The Russian legislation also provides for the lump sum benefit paid to the pregnant wife of a military man who serves in the military under contract, and a monthly allowance for a child of a military man who serves in the army. All types of child allowances in Russia are subject to annual indexation.

From January 01, 2007 in accordance with Federal Law 256-FZ “On additional measures of state support provided to families with children” [22], Russia introduced a completely new measure of demographic policy – a certificate for maternity (family) capital at the birth of a second (subsequent) child. Its basic amount was 250 thousand rubles. By 2015, as a result of annual indexing, it has reached the amount of 453,026 rubles. The maternity capital can be used to improve the family's housing conditions, to pay for the child's education and to be added to the funded part of the future pension of the mother.

The effectiveness of the federal measures in the field of demographic policy in 2006–2007 was already discussed in a considerable number of works [e.g., 1, 3, 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19]; they give different assessments of its effectiveness judging by the dynamics of statistical indicators and by the data of sociological surveys. However, one cannot deny the fact that measures such as the introduction of the parent capital for a second child, the monthly allowance differentiated by order of birth and paid (until the child reaches 18 months of age) to non-working women who are often university or college students or recent graduates of educational institutions, and the increase in the amount of child benefits helped extend the positive trends in the birth rate, which in 2005–2006 experienced stagnation and decline in the conditions of the favorable impact of changes in the age structure of fertile contingents; these measures also helped increase the number of children in families due to the fact that people could implement their reproductive plans; these measures also laid the foundations of a stable trend of reducing the level of out-of-wedlock births. At the same time, they made the calendar of births more dense and contributed to the early exhaustion of total fertility of the generations born in the 1970s–1980s [14], which on the background of the deterioration in the structure of women of childbearing age that started in 2010–2011 added an additional threat to fertility.

Besides, by 2010, the effect of new measures of demographic policy has been almost exhausted. The rates of increase in the total fertility rate in 2010 and 2011 in Russia were,

respectively, 1.6 and 1.0% vs. 8.5% in 2007 [calculated on the basis of 13]. It was necessary to boost Russia's demographic policy. Due to the fact that by this time it became obvious that the main area in which the parent capital was used was the improvement of housing conditions, Federal Law 256-FZ with an amendment dated July 28, 2010 allowed families to use the parent capital for transferring it to the account of the owner of the certificate, so that the family could afford to build or reconstruct a house.

In addition, the 2010 Presidential Address proposed that the Government together with the regions should work out the procedure for the one-time provision of land plots to families free of charge for the purpose of constructing residential houses or dachas at the birth of a third (subsequent) child. In accordance with this, the number of Russian federation subjects have developed regional laws on a free-of-charge provision of land plots to large families, which came into effect from the beginning of 2011. In that year again there emerged several new options for using the maternity capital for a second child. July 01, 2011, amendments were introduced in Law 256-FZ, which abolished the deadline for the parents' right to receive a mortgage loan with the use of the funds on the capital. There appeared an opportunity to involve the family capital in the credit relationships at any stage and use it to repay the mortgage loans received earlier.

An important step was the adoption in 2011 of regional laws on the maternity (family) capital at the birth of a third

(subsequent) child. For example, in the Komi Republic, on July 01, 2011 the law “About additional measures of social support for families with children on the territory of the Komi Republic” [9] entered into force, it approved the parent capital on the third child in the amount of 150 thousand rubles. The funds of the capital can be directed on the improvement of housing conditions, education for children and paid medical services. In addition, the law provides for an annual lump-sum payment in the amount of 25 thousand rubles, which can be used by the family to pay for the housing and utilities services, for the maintenance of children in preschool institutions, to pay taxes, to pay for property, family and children insurance. It should be noted that in other regions, the value of the regional parent capital is much lower than in the Komi Republic – from 25 to 100 thousand rubles. In the Komi Republic there are more opportunities for disposing of the funds of the regional capital, which makes this measure of demographic policy and social support to families more effective. Therefore, the evaluation of the influence of demographic policy measures on the birth rate is largely built on the positive example in this region, especially since it is characterized by the presence of statistics on the order of birth, which makes analysis more complete and accurate.

The analysis of the situation based on Russian data and the in-depth analysis on the example of Komi Republic reveal that the increase in the number of state demographic initiatives gave quite noticeable positive results.

First, it helped extend the positive trend in fertility in the conditions of deteriorating age structure of women of childbearing age that started in 2010–2011. The increase in the birth rate, which declined significantly in 2009–2011 compared to 2007–2008, once again increased in 2012: the overall rate in Russia rose from 12.6 per 1,000 people to 13.3‰. In 2013, there was a decrease in its level – to 13.2‰. But in 2014, the growth was resumed – up to 13.3‰ (including and excluding the Crimean Federal District). The total ratio increased from 1.58 children in 2011 to 1.69 in 2012 and 1.75 in 2014 [13]. In 2012, in rural areas of the country, a psychologically important threshold of simple reproduction of the population was overcome: the total fertility for the conditional generation of 2012 amounted to 2.215 children. In 2014, it was 2.338 children vs. 1.585 children of urban population.

Second, the extension of demographic policy measures has provided an opportunity to fully implement the births that had been previously postponed by the older generations, as evidenced by the dynamics of the growth rates of age-specific fertility rates. In 1999–2014, there was a marked shift in the birth rate in older population groups. In 2008, the age of fertility in Russia moved from the group aged 20–24 to the group aged 25–29. The rate of growth of age coefficients, which was negative in general in 1999–2014 in the groups aged 15–19 and 20–24, grows from age to age, peaking in the group aged 40–44 [calculated on the basis of 13]. Before 2006, the maximum annual increase in age-related fertility rates

was registered in the group aged 35–39. At that period, there was mostly a spontaneous realization of postponed births in families, which found an opportunity to do so due to the improvements in the country's socio-economic situation. Since 2007, the maximum increase shifted to the older age interval – the births stimulated by the federal parent capital began to be implemented; probably, those births would not be implemented if it were not for the maternity capital.

In parallel, there is an increase in the percentage of births of the second, third and higher order. This is clearly evidenced by the statistics in the regions with the full account of births by order of birth, for example, in the Komi Republic. In general, in 2006–2014, the share of first-born children decreased in the Komi Republic by 30.5%, and the percentage of births of all other orders increased. In the first two years after the introduction of the federal maternity capital for the second child, the proportion of second children in Komi Republic increased by 11.3%, third – by 25.0%, fourth and more children – by 19.0%. In the context of the regional capital for the third child, the proportion of second births increased by 9.5% in 2014 compared to 2010 (reaching 41.6%), third births – by 54.0% (to 13.4%), fourth and further births – by 72.7% (to 3.8%) [calculated on the basis of 5, p. 48]. In 2014, the proportion of second children (41.6%) exceeded the proportion of first children (41.2%). Thus, expanding the measures of demographic policy aimed at promoting the second, third (and subsequent) births increases the intensity of the birth rate as

a result of the changes in the calendar of births, and a more full realization of reproductive plans of the population.

Fourth, expanding demographic policy measures strengthened the family component of fertility, making more sustainable the trend of decline in the share of non-marital births that began in 2006. After two decades of growth during which the percentage of out-of-wedlock births has increased in Russia in almost three times, the number of illegitimate births decreased from 30.0% in 2005 to 22.6% in 2014 [4]. It is still more than two times higher than in the early 1980s, but it is already a sustainable trend.

But the most important thing is that the expansion of demographic policy measures contributed to the growth of determination to have children. Under the guidance of the author of this paper, two sociological surveys were conducted every five years, some of their questions concerned reproductive behavior of the population. The first survey was conducted after the introduction of the federal maternity capital in late 2008 – early 2009 (the bulk of respondents was surveyed in the 2008, the sample and the results are described in detail in [14]). The second survey was carried out in 2013 when the regional family capital was implemented (the sample is described in [15], the main results on reproductive behavior – in [16]). First of all, it should be noted that by 2013 there was a growth in all major types of reproductive attitudes. The mean ideal number of children increased over the period of five years from 2.35 to 2.50, the desired number of children in the presence of all the

necessary conditions – from 2.48 to 2.67, the average expected number of children almost reached the level of simple reproduction of generations (increased from 1.98 children to 2.13 children) [16].

Contrary to expectations, the growth has occurred not only in the older cohorts of the population who previously were able to use the maternity capital for the second child, and who after the introduction of the regional capital for the third child got the opportunity to review and enhance their reproductive expectations. The survey conducted in 2008–2009 showed that the federal demographic measures focused on the second child were addressed mainly to the numerous generations born in the 1980s, and the small generations born in the early 1990s did not feel the stimulating effect of the federal measures [14]. Logic suggests that the regional maternity capital for the third child introduced in 2011 also concerned the older generations, including the cohorts born in the 1980s, who have previously responded to the activities that promoted second births. However, the effect of regional measures of demographic policy turned out to be more universal. The maternity capital for the third child influenced the reproductive plans of all the real cohorts of the population without any exceptions. The increase in the level of reproductive expectations, as expected, is mostly typical of the generations born in the mid-1970s – early 1980s. By 2013, there was a considerable increase in the expected number of children in the generations born in 1989–1993 that, according to the results of previous surveys, did not receive the

stimulating influence of the federal measures of demographic policy. At the same time, the reproductive plans of this cohort in 2013 were lower than in other generations. It will definitely have its negative impact on the birth rate in the next years. But the most interesting and at first sight unexpected result is that the youngest generation that participated in the survey is characterized by the most significant level of reproductive plans in terms of implementation of the regional parent capital. It is a numerically small generation born in the middle and second half of the 1990s [16]. Apparently this cohort, the demographic standards of behavior of which were formed in favorable conditions of the sustainable intensification of the government's attention to the problems in the field of fertility, received a very strong positive impetus for the realization of their reproductive plans. There is reason to hope that this generation, which largely determines the prospects of fertility, will achieve the slightly extended reproduction. In other words, a step-by-step build-up of the pro-family demographic policy can influence not only the current situation in the field of fertility, but also its prospects.

There is another event, which, in fact, cannot be considered a demographic policy measure, as it applies only to low-income families, but which, in the opinion of some researchers, has played a very significant role in the growth of the percentage of births of the third and subsequent child in 2013–2014. Here we speak about the monthly cash payment in the amount of the regional subsistence minimum for children in case of the birth of

the third (subsequent) child until they reach three years of age. This measure was introduced in accordance with the decree of the President of the Russian Federation “About the measures on the implementation of demographic policy in the Russian Federation” dated May 7, 2012 No. 606 [21]. The provision of this type of social support depends on per capita family income and is paid only to families that have the status of the poor. The payment was introduced in regions where fertility rates are below the national average and this payment is co-financed from the regional and federal budgets.

Although the total fertility rate in the Republic of Komi at the level of the second decimal place since 2002 consistently exceeds the average for Russia, the region was able to qualify for federal funding and to implement the mentioned social allowance. According to the Decree of the Head of the Komi Republic No. 73 of June 15, 2012 “On the realization of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 07, 2012 No. 606” [20], beginning from January 1, 2013, if the third (subsequent) child is born into needy families after December 31, 2012, these families receive monthly payments in the amount of the subsistence minimum set in the Republic for the children, these payments are appointed until the child reaches the age of three.

The amount of the monthly payment is very significant, especially for rural residents. For example, in the second quarter of 2015, the subsistence minimum per child in the southern regions of the Komi Republic amounted to 10,524 rubles in northern regions

– to 11,488 rubles. As a result, after the introduction of the monthly social benefit for the third child among the large families of the Republic there was a marked increase in the share of the needy. For two and a half years (since the beginning of 2013 until the end of the first half of 2015) in some rural districts of the Komi Republic, the proportion of children receiving these payments has exceeded 80% of the total number of the third and subsequent children (in Ust-Kulomsky and Izhemsky districts – 83–84%, in Kortkerossky District – 86.5%) and in the whole country is 43.5% [6]. On the one hand, it is certainly the result of the fact that more and more people are applying for the allowance that is quite a significant sum of money. On the other hand, it is a consequence of a low level of per capita family income at birth of the next child. But this is largely the result of increased fertility in low-income population groups that are stimulated by the possibility of obtaining a new source of income. And in this case, the question arises: how these families and these children will live, when they are three years old or after December 31, 2015, if the timing of payment of the allowance will not be extended: according to the current legislation, these payments are provided to low-income families only until the end of 2015.

It is necessary to mention that the period of validity of the federal and regional maternity capitals is also limited by December 31, 2016. At the same time, to low reproductive expectations of the small generations of the late 1980s–early 1990s can be satisfied to the maximum extent, so that the reproductive

plans of still smaller generations of the middle and the second half of the 1990s, formed at quite a high level, could be fulfilled completely and so that the small generations born in the 2000s, who are just entering their reproductive years, could plan to have not fewer children, it is necessary not only to continue the current demographic policy in the field of fertility but also to intensify its activities.

This means that, at least, it is necessary to prolong the existence of the federal and regional maternity capitals. The effectiveness of both influences not only the change in the calendar of births. They really contributed to the increase in the number of children in families and promoted the reproductive attitudes of young generations, which will play its role in the future. The abolition of maternity capitals will lead to the disappointment of the population in the demographic policy pursued by the government. In the conditions of the upcoming long-lasting structural reduction in the level of fertility, it can trigger a new round of demographic crisis, more profound than in the 1990s. Even more dangerous is the transition after 2016 to the selective appointment of the maternity capital according to the principle of neediness. In our view, the demographic policy must not be targeted on the principle of poverty. When the socio-demographic policy gives priority to the social component, one should not expect it to produce a sustainable demographic effect. If after 2016 there is a transition to the principle of targeted provision of the maternity capital only to low-income families, then there will be fewer births, as will be the case when these demographic measures

are abolished, and there will also be fewer births in those segments of the population that have the highest socialization potential. In addition, the principle of providing target support to low-income families, the focus on “economic inexpediency” of having children in the families can have a negative impact on the level of reproductive attitudes of the generations born in the 2000s, which in turn will negatively affect the future prospects of fertility. The level of fertility defined by numerically small generations can be increased only by the adjustment of reproductive behavior in the direction of increase in the number of children in families [12, p. 152].

At the same time, the monthly cash payment in the amount of the regional subsistence minimum for the child in case of birth of the third (subsequent) child, initially approved in the regions only for low-income families, in our view, should be continued not as a measure of demographic policy, but as a measure of social support to families with low incomes. In such circumstances, first, there will be a real opportunity to extend the period of validity of this allowance after December 31, 2015: as of today, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Komi Republic initiates its extension for 2016–2018. [6]. And second, if this allowance is paid only for one third or half of the children from low-income families, it is perfectly legitimate to raise the question about the possibility of its spreading to older ages – until the child reaches the age of 16 (students in secondary schools – up to 18 years). It is possible to use it along with correction factors for different age

categories similarly to the monthly allowance for children. From the point of view of the economy, the main result of the birth rate is not the birth of children, but their reaching the age of economic activity with the highest quality characteristics. The government must help poor families that decided on the birth of third or more children socialize them until they reach active working age, since this is its most important economic interest.

Thus, as the structure of fertile contingents is deteriorating, it is extremely important to continue to pursue the chosen course of demographic policy, to make it long and successive. It is necessary to continue to implement it both at the federal and regional level, as well as consolidate the efforts of various social institutions in addressing the demographic issues related to improving fertility and its qualitative aspects. First of all, it is necessary to preserve all the components of economic measures to support families with children. This means that the federal and regional maternity capitals must be prolonged after December 31, 2016, with their annual indexation like all other types of allowances for children. In this regard, it is encouraging to note that on December 3, 2015, during the annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, it was stated that it was necessary to renew the maternity capital for the second child for at least another two years, and on December 18, 2015, this bill was passed by the State Duma in three readings. We believe that the next step will be the extension of the regional maternity capital. But the two-year extension is at most a make-shift. It is

necessary to make these demographic policy measures indefinite, in order to avoid the phenomenon of early exhaustion of total fertility of real cohorts in the desire to take advantage of some economic preferences.

In this case, it is necessary to expand the areas of implementation of the maternity capital. It is economically inexpensive, and the psychological effect can be quite significant. In 2015, the government considered the issue concerning the removal of restrictions on disposal of funds of the federal family capital to pay the initial payment on the mortgage until the child reaches three years. Besides, the possibility of purchasing a new car produced in Russia at the expense of the certificate was discussed. The availability of the vehicle significantly increases economic opportunities of the family. At the same time, it will be a real support for the domestic automotive industry, the slogan of which may be "A car for a young family". Researchers propose to grant the certificate holders the right to treat children and educate parents at the expense of the maternity capital.

When developing new measures of demographic policy, a greater focus should be made not on quantitative indicators, but on improving the quality structure of fertility, strengthening the family institution, revival and strengthening of spiritual and moral traditions of family relations. The most effective pro-family demographic policy measure can be considered a priority given to second births, as they are the most family-oriented ones. In our opinion, today we need a reorientation of economic demographic

policy toward second births. With the obligatory preservation of the federal and regional maternity capitals, it is necessary to strengthen measures to encourage second births. For example, in addition to the federal maternity capital it is advisable to introduce the regional maternity capital for the second child. New initiatives of the government should cover not only large families, but first of all families with two children, so that the most common type of family in Russia was a family with not one child but with two children. It is especially important due to the fact that these measures will be focused on the small cohorts of those born in the 1990s, and the activation of their reproductive behavior should correspond to the long-term goals of the demographic development of the country. In addition, it will positively influence the formation of childbearing attitudes in generations born in the 2000s that are also small in number.

The main emphasis in the economic measures of the demographic policy should be made to increase the independence of families with children, which may be achieved both by growth of employment, growth of income from employment, opportunity of members of young families to engage in business, and extension of preferential housing programs for families with children. For Russia that experienced rapid urbanization in the 1930–1970s and that is characterized by a high cost of housing construction due to severe climatic conditions, the unresolved housing problems of the population have a long history. According to the results of almost

all sociological surveys, dissatisfaction with housing conditions is the most important factor after financial problems that does not allow families to have so many children as they want. It is no coincidence that the main direction of the use of the maternity capital is improvement of living conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the range of activities that help young families in dealing with this issue. They include preferential mortgage lending with a lower interest rate at the birth of the second and third child, and the exemption from the initial payment and the state co-financing of construction of social housing for families with two or more children with the price per square meter below the average in the settlement, and so on. But in any case, the increase in economic independence and improvement of the housing situation of families with children is primarily the prerogative of the state. That is, along with allowances for children, these directions are part of the economic measures of the state demographic policy.

At the same time, one should not underestimate the psychological effectiveness of demographic policy measures in the formation of value-based orientations of the population in the area of childbearing. There is reason to believe that the increase in fertility in 2006–2014, and the increase in the level of reproductive attitudes of the population when expanding demographic policy measures are consequences of the favorable psychological atmosphere that prevails in the Russian society as the government increases its attention to the issues of fertility, which should not be declarative, but should be backed by large-

scale economic measures. Therefore, it is necessary to promote guidance work among young people so that they would want to have two or more children. The foundations of the demographic policy aimed directly at the formation of the desire to have children should be laid in adolescence, when an individual

forms his/her value orientations, that is why the critical agents of such a policy should be family and school. But the government still remains the central subject of development and implementation of social-psychological and demographic policy to increase the desire to have children.

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