22223

National Foreign Assessment Center

~~Confidential~~

The New Direction of Soviet Demographic Policy

An Intelligence Assessment

Information available as of 1 October 1981 has been used in the preparation of this report.

This assessment was prepared by Office of Global Issues, Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to , OGI, or , or SOVA, on

This paper was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for the USSR and Eastern Europe

~~Confidential~~
NI 81-10012
November 1981

National Security Information

Unauthorized Disclosure Subject to Criminal Sanctions

A microfiche copy of this document is available from OCR/DLB (351-7177); printed copies from OCO/IMD (351-5203). Regular receipt of NFAC reports in either microfiche or printed form can also be arranged through OCO/IMD.

Derivative classification b
Review six years from date
Derived from multiple sources

All material on this page is Unclassified.

BLANK PAGE

The New Direction of Soviet Demographic Policy

Key Judgments

Longstanding demographic trends present the Soviet leadership with a number of important problems:

- Declining fertility and, hence, declining national population growth since 1960 portend serious decreases in the working- and the draft-age populations; labor shortages are already squeezing the economy.
- Regional differences in population growth are compounding the manpower problem: the labor supply is growing mainly in the southern ring of Muslim republics rather than where it is most needed—in the industrial European USSR and resource-rich Siberia.
- Rapid population growth in the Muslim areas will not endanger the dominant position of the Slavs, but it is being used to justify demands for improved availability of consumer goods and for better political representation, both at the expense of the Slavic areas.

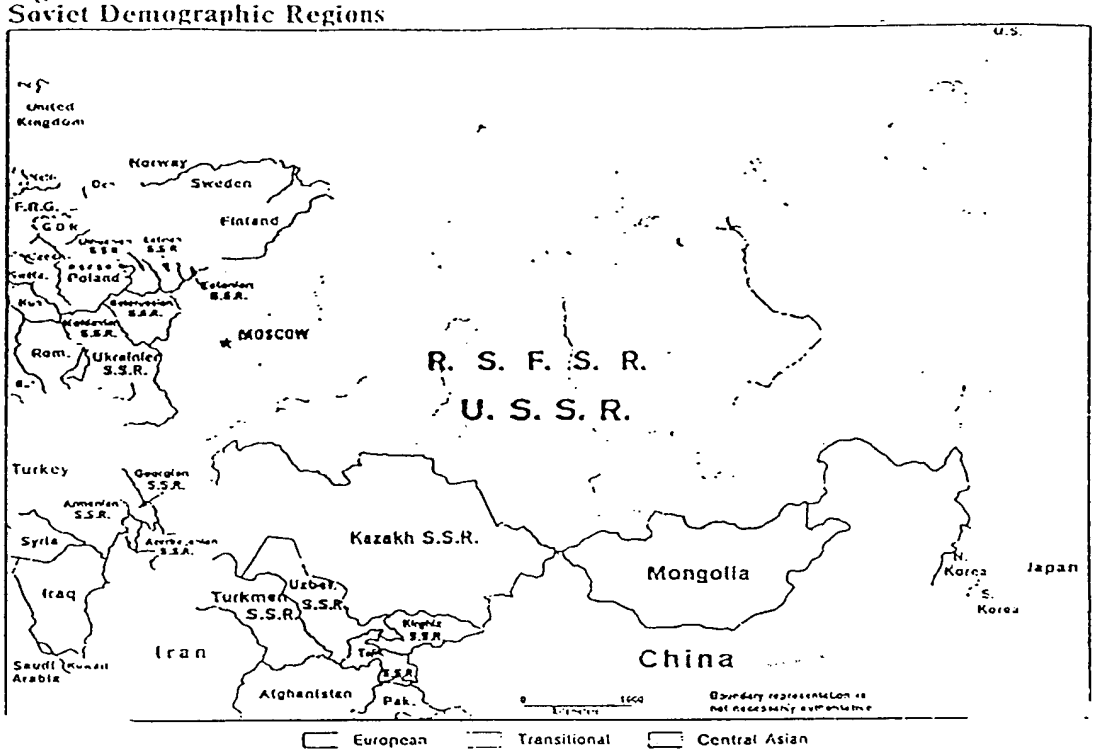
In the face of these problems, the Soviet Government apparently has decided to pursue a regionally differentiated policy to stimulate population growth. Moscow, sensitive to possible charges of racism, had long delayed endorsing such an approach. By adopting a differentiated approach now, the Soviet Government has acknowledged the serious economic, social, and political pressures caused by regional differences in population growth.

Measures adopted at and shortly after the 26th Party Congress in February 1981—including one-year partially paid maternity leave and lump sum grants for first, second, and third births—are intended to raise the birth rate in the low-fertility, predominantly Slavic regions. Because of their limited scope, however, the new measures will probably have only a marginal effect. Moreover, to the extent that the measures succeed, they will exacerbate the critical labor shortages that are already unavoidable for the 1980s: women in the low-fertility but highly industrialized or developing regions would withdraw from the labor force to bear children.

Successfully encouraging population growth in Slavic areas will place increased demands for social services—education, health, and housing—on a government already strained to meet current needs. But there is no indication, other than an expressed intention to improve working conditions for women, that the Soviet leadership is prepared to make the significant and costly commitments to housing, consumer goods and services, and child-care facilities needed to resolve the modern Slavic woman's conflict between her roles of worker and childbearer. The first role is critical to the Soviet economy now; the second, to the country's economy of the future.

NF81-10012
November 1981

Figure 1
Soviet Demographic Regions



The New Direction of Soviet Demographic Policy

The Shift to a Differentiated Policy

The Guidelines for the 11th Five-Year Plan (1981-85), which were adopted at the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held in February 1981, ended years of speculation about the direction of the Soviet Union's demographic policy. The Guidelines revealed a plan for gradually implementing limited pronatalist economic incentives in selected regions.

In speeches at the Congress, President Brezhnev and Premier Tikhonov implied that a long-term demographic policy is being formulated on the basis of "special features [of the demographic situation] in regions and republics." This is a marked policy shift: since 1917, all pronatalist measures have been implemented simultaneously in all regions of the USSR.

The new measures are an acknowledgment that the USSR's demographic situation has continued to deteriorate. The growth of the population has been slowing during the last 20 years, primarily because of declining fertility. Preliminary results of the 1979 census show that the population grew at an average annual rate of 0.9 percent between 1970 and 1979, in contrast to the 1.3-percent annual rate during the previous census period (1959-70). Moreover, the disparity in population growth between Muslim and Slavic groups persists. Only one-third of the USSR's population growth in the 1970s occurred in Slavic areas. Although birth rates in the predominately Muslim republics have begun to decline, they are still from 1.5 to 2.5 times those in the predominantly Slavic republics (figure 2). In addition, recent countrywide mortality trends—an unprecedented rise in infant mortality and rising mortality among males 25-44 years old—add a new element to the concern over declining population growth.[1] Fertility decline and the regional disproportion in population growth are causing severe labor supply problems for the regime. During the 1980s, annual increments to the national labor pool will decline sharply, and virtually all increments will come from the high-fertility regions.

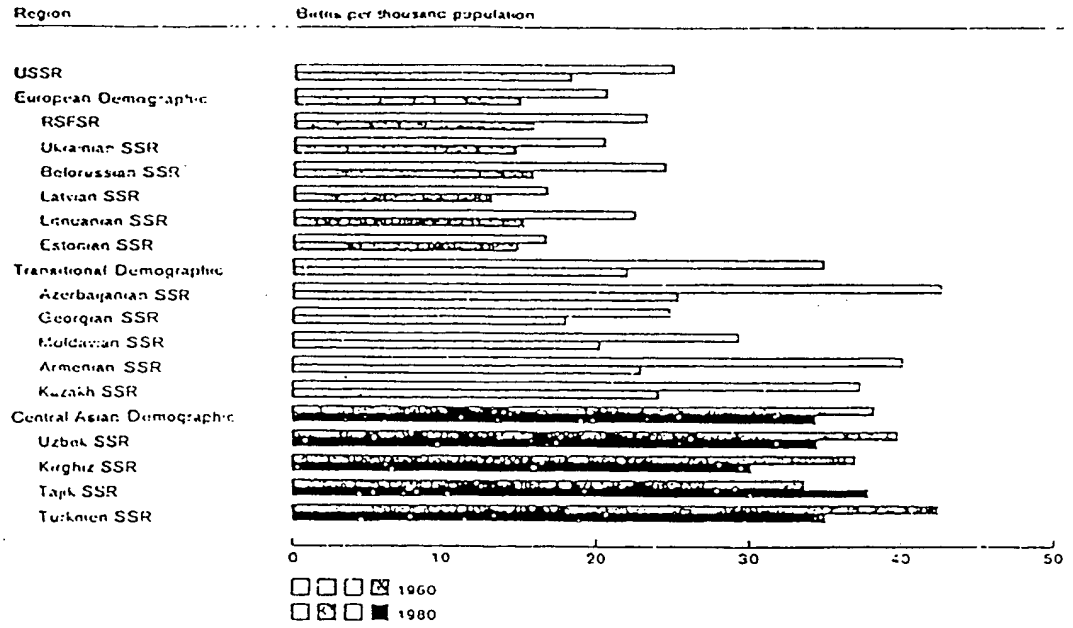
The new measures —grants of 50 rubles (US$78.50) for first births and 100 rubles (US$157) for second and third births and one year of partially paid maternity leave—are to be introduced over a two-year period "step by step in different regions of the country." They are scheduled to be introduced first (1 November 1981) in the predominantly Slavic regions of the Soviet Far East and Siberia, where the regime has had great difficulty fostering population growth; next (1 November 1982) in the remaining European regions; and finally (1 November 1983) in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The priority of these regions in the new policy is also evidenced by the regional differential in the amount to be paid during maternity leave. Shortly after the Congress, it was announced that qualifying mothers (those with at least one year of prior work experience) in the Far East, the Far North, and Siberia would receive 50 rubles a month, while mothers in the rest of the USSR would receive 35 rubles (US$55) a month. Despite the stated two-year timetable for countrywide implementation, the new measures—designed to encourage first, second, and third births among working women —may never be introduced in the Central-

[1] Between 1967 and 1974, the infant mortality rate in the Soviet Union increased by 22 percent (from 22.9 per thousand to 27.9 per thousand). The USSR has not released infant mortality statistics since 1974 although a knowledgeable Soviet official recently asserted that the infant mortality rate in the country has been 28.0 per thousand since 1978. The US Bureau of Census estimates that the USSR infant mortality rate reached 31.1 per thousand by 1976. Even if the lower figure supplied by the Soviet official obtains, the rate is high for a developed country; in the United States the infant mortality rate is 12.5 per thousand, and rates are even lower in at least 10 other countries.

Figure 2

Regional Differentiation in the Birth Rate, 1960 and 1980



Note: Birth rates for regions are average of birth rates of republics within the regions.

Asian and Transcaucasian republics, where families of four or more children are the norm and where labor force participation rates for females are the lowest in the country.

These proposals are a far cry from the "effective" and presumably comprehensive policy Brezhnev called for as early as 1976, but the delay can be largely explained by the dilemma the Soviet Government faces with any demographic policy. The regionally differentiated program could invite charges of racism; however, a single, regionally undifferentiated program intended to encourage Slavic growth would also encourage minority population growth. The dilemma does not necessarily derive from racial attitudes: stagnating population growth in industrialized and developing areas, which are predominately Slavic, is also an economic issue, as is high population growth in minority areas that are rural, traditional, and undercapitalized.

A regionally differentiated demographic policy is likely to exacerbate labor shortages in the 1980s if women withdraw from the labor force to bear children in the low-fertility but highly industrialized or developing regions where manpower shortages already

exist. Should births increase in the developing regions, the resulting demands for social services --expanded day-care facilities, increased housing, and improved social amenities and consumer services --would require heavy investment by a government already strained to meet current needs.

The Demographic Policy Debate in Academic Circles

The 15 or so years preceding the 26th Party Congress witnessed conferences, proposals, and debates centered on whether a policy to deal with the problem of declining national fertility should be countrywide in scope or differentiated by regions. By 1976, two schools of thought had crystallized: one favored a continuation of the de facto policy whereby pronatal measures were applied uniformly countrywide and one advocated a regionally differentiated approach under which measures to stimulate the birth rate would be aimed only at low-fertility regions.

A subgroup of the school favoring a differentiated approach advocated stimulating the birth rate in low-fertility regions, depressing the birth rate in high-fertility regions, and "improving the quality of life" of the USSR population. A number of leading Soviet demographers put increasing emphasis on the economic problems caused by the regional imbalance in population growth. They supported their case by pointing to the experience of Yugoslavia, a multinational country where a regionally differentiated demographic policy is in force.

The advocates of a uniform demographic policy increasingly referred to the ethnic discrimination they believed was implicit in a regionally differentiated policy. They also argued that continued rapid population growth in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus must not be discouraged because these regions were the only guaranteed sources of new manpower.

Advocates of every sort of policy engaged in unrestrained, sometimes heated, debate in major scholarly journals. Brezhnev's call in 1976 for an effective demographic policy without further elaboration opened the door for an intensification of the debate after the 25th Party Congress. As the 26th Party Congress approached, the tone of the academic debate indicated that the economic arguments for a regionally differentiated policy had won official favor.

The Policy Shift at the 26th Congress

By the time the 26th Party Congress convened, the demographic situation in the Soviet Union had clearly reached the point where the leadership could no longer avoid taking concrete steps to regulate population processes. The decision to implement the new pronatalist measures by region marks a major shift from the de facto uniform approach to demographic policy the USSR had followed since the October Revolution.

Certainly, the current labor situation was a major, perhaps the dominant, consideration in the shift. The prospect of a sharp decline in the growth of the working-age population is a primary factor in the USSR's gloomy economic forecast. Although the reductions in the annual increments to the able-bodied population [1] were clearly predicted decades ago, the government only recently began to take compensatory steps. Limited measures have been passed to restrict labor mobility, and growth of labor productivity has been emphasized in the current five-year plan; there is little real hope, however, that these measures will do much to prevent the deceleration of economic growth.

Although a policy that discourages population growth in regions of high fertility and guaranteed labor supplies might appear self-defeating, the regime has become increasingly aware that rapid population growth in the high-fertility republics is causing more economic problems than it is solving. The large, young dependent population requires increasing investments in the social sector, such as in education and health. While the growing working-age population provides a large reserve of manpower, these workers are difficult to integrate into the industrial economy. Mobility among the major Central Asian nationalities is low,

[1] The increment to the working-age population (males, 16-59; females, 16-54) during the period 1981-85 will be one-fourth the size of the additio[illegible] d[illegible]ring the mid-1970s and will shrink further during 1986-90.

and prospects for spontaneous outmigration to labor-deficit areas are poor. The unwillingness of native Central Asians to migrate out of the region, or even to cities within the region, has created labor surpluses in rural areas, while local urban centers are experiencing shortages of skilled labor

The value of workers recruited from among the Central Asian nationalities is further limited by their generally lower level of technical skill and Russian-language ability and their historically low labor productivity. Central Asia's per-worker industrial output is only about half the national average, reflecting, in part, historically low capital investment in industry. These factors confront the government with difficult investment decisions as capital investment funds are becoming scarce. Increasing investment in labor-intensive industries in Central Asia might raise productivity, stimulate urbanization, and lower fertility in the long run; however, it is doubtful that much funding will be available for such investment after other, more pressing claimants are satisfied

Aside from purely economic questions, political considerations concerning the disparity between Slavic and Muslim population growth rates probably figured in the decision of the Congress. There is little doubt that the Slavs will continue to be the dominant group in the Soviet Union. The regime may have decided, however, that the time had come to begin to correct the imbalance in population growth, lest Central Asian leaders use their increasing numbers to justify greater political demands. Indeed, Central Asian representatives, in speeches at the Supreme Soviet session in October 1980, showed a willingness to use rapid population growth as political leverage. An Uzbek deputy, K. G. Sadykov, for example, referred to Uzbekistan's "leading role" in USSR population growth when requesting additional allocations for housing, while Tadjikistan's trade union chief A. Khaydarov also cited his republic's rapid population growth in calling for additional investment in light industry to help achieve full employment.

The regime might also have been concerned that the Soviet military will have to rely increasingly on minorities to staff the armed services: by the year 2000, for example, native Central Asians are expected to account for one-third of the individuals eligible for the draft. Some Soviet military planners might question the reliability and performance of non-Slavic troops.

Finally, because a broad-based negative reaction to a regionally differentiated demographic policy did not seem likely, the regime may have felt compelled to take the pragmatic path indicated by economic, political, and social considerations. The general public apparently is not aware of the ramifications of the new policy. Debate over demographic policy has generally been restricted to scattered social science journals, so that public exposure has been limited; articles in the popular press have tended to focus on raising public consciousness about such population problems as high divorce and abortion rates, alcoholism, and lack of child-care facilities. Moreover, the regime, aware of the political sensitivity of a regionally differentiated demographic policy, will undoubtedly stress the economic rationale for the policy shift in order to avoid charges of racism

Prospects for Success and Future Steps

Although the new measures are clearly pronatalist in intent, they are unlikely to have more than a marginal effect on the reproductive behavior of women in the low-fertility Slavic regions. Neither the lump sum grant for first, second, and third births nor partially paid maternity leave will bring a significant improvement in the living conditions of young couples at an important stage in the life cycle. The grant alone is probably not large enough to influence childbearing decisions. Partially paid maternity leave may be more influential, depending on the percent of wages it represents, but at best it will only enable couples to maintain their standard of living.[1] Because maternity

[1] At least one leading Soviet demographer has privately expressed dismay over the small amount paid during maternity leave. According to 1978 data, the 50 rubles a month that mothers in Siberia, the Far North, and the Far East are to receive during maternity leave amounts to about 31 percent of the average monthly wage (160 rubles) of all workers in the RSFSR. The 35 rubles mothers in the rest of the country are to receive amounts to about 23 percent of the average monthly wage (R151) in Central Asia, 21 percent of the average monthly wage (R166) in the Baltic republics, and 25 percent of the average monthly wage (R142) in the Transcaucasus region

leave has been extended to 18 months after birth, the problem of dealing with job and family will be postponed for women during the period of greatest child-care demands

The regime will probably continue to tinker with economic incentives to encourage fertility, but the leadership will be constrained by limited funds.[4] A number of important Soviet demographers recognize that pronatalist economic measures will compete with other equally important demands in the national economy. Some have advocated a program of non-economic incentives—such as expanded part-time employment opportunities for women and improved day-care facilities—to make employment and childbearing and rearing more compatible. But other than oft-repeated recommendations to improve working conditions for mothers, there is little indication that the regime has made the commitment to upgrade the infrastructure that would accomplish this

Evidence of increased interest in the success of economic incentives, particularly housing credits, in East European countries suggests that the government may be contemplating limited moves in that direction. Soviet surveys indicate that poor housing conditions are a major motivation to limit family size. Thus far, however, there have been no moves to institute the kind of low-interest housing loans (partially canceled with increased numbers of children) that are available in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Even though these housing programs seem to have had a positive effect on fertility in these countries, the Soviet Government may be hesitant to endorse housing loans in view of resource constraints and the chronic shortage of housing in major urban centers. In fact, the 11th Five-Year Plan shows almost no planned increase in the amount of housing construction. However, the new incentive programs try to improve housing conditions by guaranteeing a room for newlyweds under age 30, a one-room apartment for parents with one child, and a two-room apartment for those with two children.

[4] Despite the leadership's expressed concern over population issues, only some 9 billion rubles, or about 1.7 percent of the expected national income (531-540 billion rubles) at the end of the 11th Five-Year Plan, was allocated for aid to families with children

Legislative options that would have a regionally differentiated effect on demographic development are also open to the government. In particular, restricting abortion could have a major impact in the low-fertility regions. Abortion, currently available on demand at nominal cost, is the most common means of family limitation in the USSR. According to one estimate, the average Soviet woman has six or seven abortions during her lifetime. The high abortion rate has been cited as a cause of rising infant mortality, and official support for restricting abortion appears to be growing. For example, Boris Urlanis, the late dean of Soviet demographers, suggested in a *Nedelya* article a more restrained use of abortion and pointedly referred to the restrictive measures several Soviet Bloc countries have "found it necessary" to take.[5] Although Urlanis maintained that women have the right to abortion and stopped short of suggesting its restriction, he did strongly promote unwed motherhood and cited pregnancy out of wedlock as a poor reason to resort to abortion.[6] Because abortion rates are probably much higher in the European areas of the USSR than in the Muslim-dominated republics, any legislation affecting abortion should have a markedly regional effect

Divorce law reform could also have a differentiated effect on fertility. Divorce rates doubled when laws were liberalized in 1965, and contrary to the expectations of Soviet demographers, they have not declined. Divorce rates vary widely among regions; in the RSFSR and Estonia, for example, rates are twice as high as in Uzbekistan. Soviet sociologists and demographers have postulated that the easy availability of divorce increases family instability and has a negative influence on family-formation and family-building

[5] For example, in Bulgaria, abortion is denied to married women under age 40 who are childless or have only one child; in Hungary, only women under age 40 or who have three children may have abortion.

[6] Both the loss of males during World War II and the increase in mortality among young men have created an unfavorable sex ratio in the USSR. In the same article Urlanis addressed the resultant problem of too many single women: "They can't all get married! There aren't enough eligible men," he stated. Further, "a woman ought to be aware that her chances are limited, and she also ought to be aware that motherhood sometimes brings more joy (or in any case, no less) than matrimony, especially if matrimony is not accompanied by mutual love and respect. I think that reducing the number of abortions among this group of women is quite important. The women would find personal happiness and the country's demographic situation would improve.

decisions. Family counseling clinics have been established in a number of areas, and the current intensification in the campaign against alcoholism (reportedly a major cause of divorce) seems at least partially aimed at lowering divorce rates. In view of increased expressions of concern over divorce rates, the government will probably institute some restrictions on divorce, though there is no guarantee (given the difficult economic situation of young Soviet couples) that lower divorce rates in the European USSR will result in a rise in fertility.

Appendix

Soviet Legislation Affecting Fertility

The following summarizes major Soviet legislation on the family, social welfare, and labor that has some effect on fertility. For each category, current provisions in the law are given, as well as recent significant changes in the case of maternity leave, maternity grants, and child allowances.

Maternity Leave

Provisions. Women had been permitted 112 days (56 days prior to birth, 56 days after birth), regardless of length of employment. Postnatal unpaid leave was increased from three months to one year in 1968. The government detailed new provisions for maternity leave on 6 September 1981. Partially paid leave will be granted for one year to working women employed for at least a year: 50 rubles per month for women in Siberia, the Far East, and the country's northern regions (Karel'skaya and Komi ASSRs and Arkhangel'skaya and Murmanskaya Oblasts), and also in Vologodskaya, Novgorodskaya, and Pskovskaya Oblasts; 35 rubles per month for women in the rest of the country; plus additional unpaid leave to care for a child up to the age of 18 months. These benefits are to be implemented according to the following schedule: on 1 November 1981 in the northern regions, Siberia, and the Far East; on 1 November 1982 in the remaining regions of the RSFSR, the Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia, and the Baltic republics; and on 1 November 1983 in the regions of Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the Transcaucasus. Beginning in 1981, an extra three days of paid leave is granted to working women with two or more children 12 years old or younger.

Intent. This pronatalist measure is clearly designed to appeal to women in low-fertility regions, where female labor force participation rates are extremely high. (According to 1970 census data, 90 to 98 percent of all women in the able-bodied ages in the Baltic and Slavic republics were in the labor force.)

Maternity Grants

Provisions. The size of the grant is based on average monthly income. If the average monthly income of either parent is less than 60 rubles (US$94.20), the family is granted 12 rubles (US$18.84) at the time of the child's birth and 18 rubles (US$28.26) when the child is 5 months old.

Intent. Designed to defray the costs of purchasing a layette and weaning the child, these small payments cannot have a serious pronatal effect.

Family Income Supplements

Provisions. Until 1974, the benefits did not begin until the fourth birth; payments were made only until the child was 4 years old and the sum was very small. After the 24th Party Congress (1971) a program of supplements for low-income families was announced; it was implemented in 1974. The landmark program provided for an allowance of 12 rubles (US$18.84) a month for each child under age 8 in families whose per capita income did not exceed 50 rubles (US$78.50) a month.

Intent. The plan, while national in scope and application, maximizes benefits to large rural families who are more likely to fall below the poverty line.

Child Allowances

Provisions. On 6 September 1981, the government announced lump sum grants in the following amounts (paid according to the regionally differentiated schedule outlined in the maternity leave provisions): 50 rubles upon the birth of the first child and 100 rubles upon the birth of the second and third children. In addition, beginning on 1 December 1981, single mothers receive 20 rubles per month for each child until the child is 16 years old (18 years old for students not in receipt of a grant).

Intent. These new measures seem designed to bolster the regionally differentiated policy goals. However, while the provisions apply initially to the low-fertility regions (where they are most needed), within two years the same monetary incentives will be extended to the high birth-rate regions of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.

Labor

Provisions. A 1978 Decree of the USSR Council of Ministers and the All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) "On Additional Measures To Improve Working Conditions of Women Employed in the National Economy" provides that women (1) retain their seniority if less than six months elapse from the time they cease employment in heavy or hazardous work until they begin a new job or schooling, (2) receive their average monthly salary for six months from the former job while they are in retraining programs, and (3) retain housing and child-care privileges acquired at former place of employment.

In a move effective January 1981, and apparently associated with the 1978 decree, women were barred from 460 occupations involving heavy or hazardous work—the best paying jobs for women with few skills. So that women who were in the occupations now barred will not suffer a cut in pay, the state will have to provide retraining in skilled occupations and increase the female enrollment in vocational-technical schools.

Intent. These provisions may have some pronatalist intent. Some demographers believe that chronic physical exhaustion because of heavy labor on the job has contributed to the decline in the birth rate and believe the employment shift will ease the burden somewhat. The success of the program is questionable in light of the current labor shortage, especially in industrial areas of Siberia, where factory managers will be reluctant to comply with the regulations.

Provisions. In April 1980, the State Committee for Labor and Social Questions (Goskomtrud) and the AUCCTU formally announced the regulations on improving working conditions for women with children and for those employed part-time. The 26th Party Congress called for further improvements in part-time employment opportunities for women, particularly those with young children, and better arrangements for nursing mothers. Part-time workers are now guaranteed the same benefits as full-time employees; part-time status for women with young children does not affect seniority.

Intent. Apparently aimed largely at the service sector, these provisions could draw women into the labor force who would otherwise be unable to work because of age, family responsibilities, or school. Partial employment is expected to ease the double burden of work and motherhood, and, to the extent that it is successful, partial employment may have a positive effect on the birth rate. Actual opportunities for part-time employment, however, are still quite limited (accounting for only 2.5 percent of employment in 1974). While the Guidelines for the current five-year plan call for an expansion of part-time opportunities for women with young children, managers will have trouble accommodating part-time work schedules to standardized production schedules, especially in heavily female branches of industry (such as textiles and food processing).

Divorce

Provisions. In 1965, divorce law reforms made divorce obtainable in a single court and eliminated the requirement of public notification. Registration fees of 50-200 rubles are determined by the court. These reforms provide for voluntary alimony payments and mandatory child support payments, although a woman may not be sued for divorce without her consent during pregnancy or up to one year after the birth of a child. In 1968, these reforms were incorporated into the new Principles of Family Law. The new law added the possibility of divorce without court suit by registration with the civil marriage registry under the following conditions: if the divorce is by mutual consent, in the absence of minor children, and after payment of a 50-ruble fee followed by a three-month "cooling-off" period.

Comment. Divorce rates soared after the liberalizing measures were introduced. Many demographers point to the ease with which divorce can be obtained as a factor in family instability and as a negative influence

on fertility. During the 1970s many counseling clinics were established in an effort to combat high divorce rates, and support for restrictive reform of divorce laws appears to be growing.

Abortion

Provisions. Since 1956, abortion has been available on demand through the first trimester of pregnancy at a cost of 5 rubles. Patients qualify for 10 days' unpaid leave without loss of seniority; fees and loss of pay are waived for women with incomes of less than 60 rubles per month or for abortion performed under doctor's orders.

Comment. High rates of abortion among Soviet women are a source of increasing concern among demographers, especially since the number of past abortions appears to affect the viability of future infants a woman may bear. Although the right to abortion is staunchly defended, some restrictive measures, such as required counseling for women under age 40 or limiting the number of abortions legally permissible within a year, may be forthcoming.