

Russian Babies, Russian Babes

Economic and Demographic Implications of International Adoption and International Trafficking for Russia

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Abstract: In this article, the author examines Russian attitudes and policies toward international adoption and human trafficking—two trends not regularly addressed in discussions of the demographic problems facing Russia. The author argues that differences in the way the two kinds of outflows are treated are not appropriate given their economic and demographic consequences.

Keywords: demographic crisis, human trafficking, international adoption, women in Russia

Russia faces a demographic crisis. With its high mortality rates and low birthrates, the Russian population has been shrinking for more than a decade. This trend is viewed with alarm in Russia for both economic and political reasons. A smaller population means fewer workers and soldiers, and it will likely decrease Russia's power internationally. In the words of Victor Yasmann, a senior regional analyst with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "In the future, Russia, whose land makes up 30 percent of Eurasia, may simply have too few people to control its territory."¹ The demographic trends have generated a large body of scholarly work in both Russia and the West examining the two primary factors—births and deaths—that determine the size of the population.²

In this article, I examine another two trends that influence the size of the Russian population and consider their demographic and economic significance: the adoption of Russian children by citizens of other countries and the international trafficking of Russian women. First, I briefly review Russian demographic rhetoric and policy. Next, I examine the trafficking of women from Russia. Finally, I discuss the issues of international adoption and children growing up in state institutions, such as children's homes or boarding schools. Although neither international

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trafficking nor international adoption occurs on the scale of births and deaths in Russia, they involve those age cohorts with greatest potential for productive and reproductive labor and are therefore worth examining. My findings suggest that although Russian attitudes and policies toward human trafficking and adoption are colored by demographic concerns, government policies generally fail to respond appropriately to the economic causes and consequences of these two phenomena.

Demography

To address Russia's demographic challenges, post-Soviet leaders, like their Soviet predecessors, have tended to focus on the birthrate, introducing policies intended to persuade women to bear more children, but such an approach will almost certainly not be enough to reverse the current trend, which reflects more than the decline in fertility typical of advanced industrial (or postindustrial) countries. In Russia, this decline has been exacerbated by the economic and social conditions that arose during the transition period. These have led to premature deaths, especially of young males, international trafficking of young women, and the "export" of young children through international adoption and have meant that many of the children and young adults who remain in Russia suffer from increased morbidity and decreased potential productivity.

History shows us that pronatalist policies are far more likely to affect the timing of births than the overall number of children women choose to bear. The intensive drive to increase the birthrate in the Soviet Union during the late 1970s and early 1980s was initially successful, but for only a short time. The births in the early 1980s simply occurred earlier than they would have otherwise.³ Health and Social Development Minister Tatyana Golikova's triumphant rhetoric notwithstanding, the recent uptick in the Russian birthrate is highly unlikely to indicate either a response to government policy or a long-term increase in fertility.⁴ As Leonid Rybakovsky, chief research fellow at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for Socio-Political Research, and Valery Yelizarov, head of the Center for the Study of Population at Moscow State University, both note, the increase in births is primarily due to a rise in the number of women of child-bearing age, an increase that will be reversed in just a few years.⁵

Although changes in economic structure in industrial and postindustrial societies have meant that parents have long since stopped seeing children primarily as an investment, either for the labor services they can provide while young or for the support they can offer as their parents age, it takes significant time and resources to raise a child, and parents are not alone in bearing costs or reaping benefits from their children. From the perspective of society as a whole, children should still be regarded largely as investment goods, as increasingly frequent discussions of the aging populations suggest policymakers are coming to recognize in many Western countries.⁶

Experience suggests that the best way for a society to turn infants into productive workers, soldiers, and citizens is within a family, although what constitutes a family may be interpreted quite broadly. Institutional child-rearing is expensive, as the Bolsheviks learned in the 1920s, when inadequate resources forced them to retreat from their initial dream of socializing child-rearing and other household activities. In addition, psychological studies have demonstrated that prolonged periods in orphanages, especially during the early formative years, generally produce adults who are less healthy, less intelligent, and less well-socialized for life outside such institutions than adults raised in family settings.⁷

Given the low likelihood of success from policies narrowly focused on increasing the birthrate and the high direct and indirect costs of raising children in institutions, the most efficient approach to Russia's current demographic concerns is ensuring the health, productivity, and reproductive ability of its young adults and ensuring that as many of them as possible remain in the country as they grow older. Members of this cohort are reaching the age at which they will begin delivering on their productive and reproductive potential—that is, providing a return on the resources their families and society expended raising and educating them. It is now necessary only to maintain this demographic's potential, rather than create it. Given the leading causes of attrition among young adults, it is not surprising that the Russian government has begun to talk about addressing the problems of excess mortality and disease among young males and curtailing the trafficking of young women out of the country. Significantly affecting these numbers will take far more than talk, however. It will require making serious improvements in the economic and social conditions facing young adults in Russia.

Russian leaders are obviously concerned about post-Soviet population trends. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin mentioned the demographic challenges the country faces in four of his eight annual presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly. The amount of space he devoted to the topic in these speeches increased steadily from one short paragraph in 2000 to about 6 percent of the 2003 speech, 10 percent in 2005, and over 20 percent in 2006.⁸ In 2007, reversing the trend, he simply noted the 2006 improvement in birth and death rates, but he called for designating 2008 the "Year of the Family in Russia," and several weeks before the address, he held a special session of the presidential council for Priority National Projects and Demographic Policy.⁹ In 2003, Putin introduced the topic of the shrinking population in his Address to the Federal Assembly with the statement, "The decline in Russia's population was singled out [three years ago] as one of the most acute problems."¹⁰ In 2005, he began by saying, "It is my firm conviction that success in many areas of our life depends on resolving the acute demographic problems we face."¹¹ In 2006, he went further, moving it from the category of "one of the most acute problems" to *the* most acute:

And now for the most important matter. What is most important for our country? The Defense Ministry knows what is most important. Indeed, what I want to talk about is love, women, children. I want to talk about the family, about the most acute problem facing our country today—the demographic problem.¹²

Despite consistently highlighting the issue, Putin changed his emphasis and policy prescriptions over the years, perhaps reflecting an awareness of the great complexity of Russia's demographic challenge. In 2000, despite mentioning it early in the speech, Putin presented the shrinking of the population in the context of the general difficulties facing Russians: "There are still many for whom it is hard to raise children, hard to provide the old age they deserve for their parents, hard to live."¹³ He did not elaborate with any detailed discussion or prescriptions. In 2003, Putin stressed high mortality rates, the need to address the system of medical insurance, and the "new epidemics" of drug abuse and AIDS.¹⁴ Putin's 2005 list of solutions to the demographic problem again began with lowering the death rate, but he spent roughly as much time on the importance of raising the birthrate.¹⁵ In 2006, although he again addressed the death rate first, more of his message was about the state's responsibility to encourage women to bear more children.¹⁶ Given that several recent studies compellingly argue that the primary cause of the population decline is an

excess number of deaths (largely from illness and accidents) among the adult (especially male) population rather than low birthrate, it is ironic that Putin's focus was moving in the opposite direction.¹⁷

It is not surprising, however, that Putin hoped that increasing maternity allowances and child allowances would make a difference, given the erosion of those benefits in the early transition years. A combination of inflation, which reduced the purchasing power of the sums to which mothers of young children are entitled, and a tax administration that has proved largely unequal to the task of collecting the money to fund such benefits temporarily resulted in child allowances so low that, according to the Russian newspaper *Segodnya*, "the state allowance per child (38,500 rubles [a month]) [was] enough for exactly two long pieces of cooked sausage."¹⁸

When discussing ways to encourage a higher birthrate, Putin's recommendations largely focused on maternity leave and financial compensation. Putin increased the monthly benefit per child from 500 to 700 rubles, and raised the one-time payment at birth from 6,000 rubles to 8,000 rubles on January 1, 2006. The increase was equal to 50% of the 4,000 rubles defined as the monthly subsistence wage in September of that year.¹⁹ As of January 1, 2007, the monthly allowance was more than doubled to 1,500 rubles; at that time the official subsistence minimum for children was 3,536 rubles.²⁰

However, past attempts to implement the kinds of policies Putin has advocated have been only marginally effective, and there is little reason to expect them to be any more effective today. Russian women need far more than a modest state allowance to make it easy for them to raise their children. The always-considerable challenge of combining paid work and motherhood has been made even harder by the shortage of jobs with decent wages and by a decrease in both the availability and the affordability of child care.

According to Elena Mezentseva of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, the incidence of unemployment among Russian women is highest for those between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four.²¹ Furthermore, the particularly poor wage levels in sectors such as state-funded education and health care, in which women are employed in large numbers, has meant that many women who have jobs are ill paid, earning on average only 50 percent of men's wages in 2000, down from 70 percent in the 1980s. This gap is largest for workers between the ages of 20 and 40, who are most likely to be bearing and raising children.²²

If a young mother does find a job, she must also find a way to care for her children during work hours. The Soviet-era practice of having enterprises rather than municipal governments responsible for the provision of many kinds of services has complicated the post-Soviet picture and has probably accelerated the closing of a number of child-care facilities. The number of such facilities fell by 40 percent—from almost 88,000 in 1990 to just over 53,000 in 2000—and the share of communities with state nurseries declined from over 50 percent in 1994 to just more than 33 percent in 2000.²³ According to then-prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, speaking at a session of the Presidential Council for Implementing Priority National Projects and Demographic Policy in March 2007, there were "more than 900,000" children in nurseries and kindergartens.²⁴ This compares with a newborn-to-four-year-old cohort of 7,200,000 in that year.²⁵ In recognition of the inadequacy of child-care options, in his 2006 Address to the Federal Assembly, Putin called for more paid maternity and child-care leave and for government reimbursement of part of what parents spend on preschool care. The prospects for the last provision remain cloudy,

because Medvedev's comments at the same session of the council suggest that regional governments may not be doing their part to carry out this initiative.²⁶

Three significant consequences for the demographic challenges facing Russia follow from the economic and social conditions of young women. The first, and the one the state has paid most attention to, is that these women have inadequate incentive to bear and raise children. Time constraints, financial constraints, and housing constraints all serve to limit the number of children Russian women wish to bear. For example, in the first half of the 1990s, surveys carried out by the Vserossiisky tsentr po izucheniyu obshchestvennogo mneniya (VTsIOM, or in English, the All-Russian Center on Research of Public Opinion) found that the number of children women expected to have fell short of their "desired" number, which was less than their "ideal" number—a pattern suggesting the negative impact of these constraints on the Russian birthrate.²⁷

Second, the difficulty of finding satisfying and remunerative work means that young women are vulnerable to promises of higher earnings and an easier life in other countries.²⁸ Whether they are recruited to be domestic workers in Greece, "entertainment workers" in Germany, or wives in the United States, these women anticipate that they will be able to live far more comfortably elsewhere than they could at home. Except for those in the last category—and anecdotes suggest that not even all of the women in that group are an exception—the women generally hope that going abroad will be a temporary measure that will enable them to earn enough to return home with better prospects.

Finally, the economic hardship facing young mothers has been exacerbated by family instability, drug abuse, and alcohol abuse, all of which intensified in the early years of the transition. As a result, women who do give birth may find themselves psychologically and economically unable to provide care for their children, leading to large numbers of children either on the streets or in state institutions.

As long as the focus remains on increasing the number of births, with relatively little attention paid to providing the resources necessary to raise children to become healthy, educated, and productive members of society, Russia is unlikely to make significant gains in either the size or quality of new cohorts. If the only change is that more children are born, the future pool of working-age recruits and workers will be larger, but it will also be likely that a significant portion of them will be in poor health, be uneducated, or suffer the effects of prolonged institutionalization if family and social resources allocated to health, education, and child-rearing—already inadequate—are stretched even tighter. A larger population is of little benefit if its members are incapable of contributing sufficiently to society. This potential outcome is clear each year at the time of the military draft. Among the conscript-age population, there is a staggeringly low percentage of healthy males (even allowing for fraud by those desperate to avoid the dangers of both military training and service in Chechnya).²⁹

More promising than the increases in child allowances is Putin's 2006 proposal for "initial maternity capital" for those women giving birth to a second child and the "priority national projects" in housing, education, and health care he discussed in his 2007 Address to the Federal Assembly.³⁰ Maternity capital, Putin suggested, could be used to improve the family's housing or the child's education but might also be used as start-up funds for a small business.³¹ According to Medvedev, by March 2007 "almost 1,500 women already [had] government certificates for maternity capital and . . . about 8,700 women had made the necessary applications to the Pension Fund."³² Unlike the monthly child allowances,

this sum, initially set at 250,000 rubles but scheduled to rise in 2010, may be large enough to provide a real incentive. Also, unlike the monthly allowances, it is intended to be accessible only for purposes offering a significant and long-term benefit to the child.³³

The priority national projects, too, are intended “to invest in people and improve their quality of life.”³⁴ Together, these and the maternity capital suggest increasing awareness of the broader scope of the changes necessary if the demographic decline is to be halted. Still, it is far too soon to conclude that this program will be successful. Priority national projects will be only as good as their funding, and the gap between the rhetoric at the federal level and the commitment and resources at the regional level is likely to be vast.

Moreover, additional priority national projects will need to be designed to address the large numbers of institutionalized children and of women so desperate for better opportunities that they are vulnerable to the risks of trafficking. So far, the prevailing Russian attitude toward human trafficking has been to consider the women themselves guilty (of greed, of poor morals, of lack of patriotism), whereas adoption of Russian-born children by foreigners has been viewed as a threat to the “genetic fund” of the nation, rather than as a way to improve the opportunities of children who otherwise are likely to grow up in Russian orphanages.³⁵ These attitudes have, in turn, shaped policy. Government antitrafficking efforts are largely focused on organized crime, whereas those of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have largely focused on educating young women and responsible adults (such as teachers) about the techniques that traffickers use and the perils of being trafficked. International adoption has been subject to periodic moratoria and tightened regulation; serious efforts to provide financial incentives for domestic adoption of institutionalized children have only recently occurred.

Trafficking of Women

Although human trafficking for sex (and other kinds of work) occurs both within and between countries, it is the international dimension that is relevant here, because the movement of people between countries—whether legal or illegal—affects national population size. International human trafficking has received increasing attention since the mid-1990s, as the pressures in the countries of origin for the trafficked and more restrictive immigration policies in destination countries have created a climate in which those who enable illegal border crossings are thriving. Although it is impossible to determine exact figures on the profitability of human trafficking and estimates vary significantly,³⁶ almost every contemporary study of the phenomenon, particularly those focusing on women and the sex industry, stresses the low risk and high potential gains relative to other high-visibility international crimes, such as arms smuggling and drug dealing.³⁷ Not only are the women easier to transport, because they usually travel voluntarily and even assume the burden of their own travel costs, but the traffickers face little danger of being caught and even less danger of being held accountable for their actions. In the United States, for example, between 2001 and 2003 the Justice Department prosecuted only 110 trafficking cases, and won only 77 convictions.³⁸ In Russia, between 2004 and September 2005, only 23 cases were opened, resulting in a mere 7 convictions.³⁹

For the most part, only those orchestrating the trafficking reap the profits. Few if any benefits are reaped by the source country as a whole (nor, of course, by those who are trafficked). Louise Shelley contrasts the Russian approach to trafficking with that of the Chinese, arguing that long-standing cultural and economic traditions have kept Rus-

sians from emulating Chinese traffickers' practices, which tend to result in a long-term stream of income and benefits for the larger society. Shelley identifies three key ways in which the Chinese and Russian approaches to human smuggling differ—the “product,” the degree of vertical integration in the industry, and the uses to which the revenue earned by the traffickers is put. The Chinese traffic young men for manual labor as well as women for sex; they tend to handle all stages of the operation themselves, from initial recruitment through the sale of services to clients; they recruit within extended families over time; they invest their earnings in capital development within China.⁴⁰ By contrast, the Russian approach is less complex, less lucrative, and more short-sighted. Together, these differences mean that the Chinese are more likely to ensure the life and health of those smuggled and, Shelley implies, both those smuggled and the society in general may actually benefit from the trafficking operations, something which is definitely not true in the case of Russia. Shelley argues that Russian traffickers, drawing on a tradition of myopic exploitation of abundant natural resources, instead attempt to maximize short-term personal economic gains without regard to the future or to the broader economy.⁴¹ Russian trafficking seems to consist almost entirely of transporting women (or young girls)—the portion of the Russian population that is most vulnerable, most likely to have trouble finding employment at home, and most susceptible to promises of great opportunities elsewhere.⁴² Russian traffickers tend to concentrate on selling women for a one-time payment to those who then sell the women's services to clients—that is, they view the trafficked woman as the final product, rather than as an investment.⁴³ Finally, Shelley argues,

The Russians, who historically have been sellers of mineral resources rather than traders, treat their trafficking business as a commodity market. The human resource of women is plundered like the precious metals, oil, and gas of the former Soviet Union with no thought to the investment of the profit of this trade in the domestic economy.⁴⁴

Poverty and lack of economic opportunities play a critical role in replenishing the resources—young women available to traffickers. Should these conditions change, the pool of women willing to be trafficked will likely dry up. Traffickers may try to protect their livelihood by diversifying, investing their short-term profits in businesses that could thrive in a healthier economy. For the traffickers themselves, it may be irrelevant whether those businesses are domestic or foreign, but for the country it matters. Thus, China benefits because its traffickers invest their profits in legitimate domestic businesses. Russian traffickers, on the other hand, send (or keep) their profits abroad.

The traffickers' lack of interest in investing in Russia's productive capacity is not noticeably different from that of other Russians with significant financial assets. Capital flight from the country has been discouragingly high and will no doubt remain so until the twin threats of renationalization and politically motivated tax investigations fall significantly.⁴⁵ As Prakash Loungani and Paolo Mauro argue:

The root causes of capital flight from Russia include an unsettled political environment, macroeconomic instability, a confiscatory tax system, an insolvent banking system, and weak protection of property rights.⁴⁶

The political environment has become increasingly predictable since 2000, and the maximum tax rate has been cut, and until the current global financial crisis, the macroeconomy

looked increasingly stable and banks appeared to have a more solid financial foundation. Few would argue, however, that property rights have become noticeably more secure. The 2005 edition of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's series on *International Investment Perspectives* notes, "Several recent or continuing operations of Russian major firms, such as initial public offerings in western stock markets and participation in foreign bidding . . . seem to be mainly motivated by concerns of these firms over what they see as the tax administration and more generally government interference threatening their activities in Russia."⁴⁷

Not only are the earnings from trafficking not invested in legal productive activity in Russia; neither does the country benefit economically from the initial transaction. The one-time payments for "exported" women go unreported and thus are not subject to taxation; this is also true for the bribes and side payments that government officials complicit in the trafficking receive. Nor can Russia expect to benefit ever again from the labor of women already sent abroad. It is rare—although not completely unheard of—for the women who are trafficked to be able to send occasional payments to family

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members at home; it is even more rare for them to return home and lead lives that contribute to the country's well-being, either in the market sector or the household sector. Most of the women never have the chance to return: they are kept under lock and key, without access to their passports and with financial responsibility for the exaggerated costs of their travel and upkeep. Should these women escape their captivity, they are likely to be treated as criminals, either for entering the destination country illegally or for engaging in illegal prostitution there. Finally, they face the psychological barriers of shame for all that has happened to them and fear of retribution against their families.

Although many of the women who are trafficked come from poverty, and are therefore unlikely to embody high levels of human capital (that is, education, training and experience that increase their productivity), this is not true of all. According to Sally Stoecker, "many of the Russian women exported and enslaved tend to be well educated. They answered advertisements for positions in the service sectors for which they are frequently over-qualified."⁴⁸ This reflects the more general pattern of female migration in the globalized economy, "whereby women migrants become 'cheap labor' abroad, taking jobs that are well below their educational level."⁴⁹ As long as productive opportunities within Russia for women are insufficient, human traffickers will find it possible to lure women, even those who have previously been trafficked, to other countries.⁵⁰ The more human capital these women embody, the more the country has invested in them, and the greater the economic loss of their leaving. In addition to the direct loss of their productive contributions, Russia loses their reproductive potential.

It is impossible to get accurate figures on the number of women trafficked, either for the world as a whole or for Russia in particular. As Donna Hughes puts it, "The

trade is secretive, the women are silenced, the traffickers are dangerous, and not many agencies are counting.”⁵¹ Those agencies that are counting tend to be NGOs working to prevent the practice or assist the women who manage to escape. Their estimates vary dramatically. The Angel Coalition, a group of roughly twenty Russian and Ukrainian NGOs fighting trafficking by trying to raise awareness among young Russian women and the people close to them (e.g., teachers, parents, orphanage directors, etc.), estimates that at least 500,000 Russian women were forced into the sex business in roughly fifty countries during the 1990s;⁵² *Literaturnaya gazeta* quoted Juliette Engel, the director of MiraMed, an NGO that is part of the Angel Coalition, as saying that at the very least 40,000 women had been victims of sexual trafficking during that period.⁵³ This huge disparity reflects different degrees of willingness to extrapolate from the cases actually known, rather than fundamental disagreement about the extent or gravity of the problem.

Further adding to the number of illegally trafficked Russian women are mail-order brides. Sometimes, of course, the agencies arranging such marriages are simply fronts for sexual trafficking; sometimes men who use legitimate agencies exploit the women. There are, however, a significant number of legitimate marriages that take place this way. The women who take this route are motivated by the same basic set of factors as those who are trafficked. Some are looking for an easier life for themselves; some are motivated by the desire to provide more opportunities for their children. One American husband in such a marriage describes it as “not much different than adopting a Russian child. You just get the mother as part of the package.”⁵⁴

Russian women’s willingness to seek work or marriage abroad, despite increasing publicity about the risks involved, reflects the lack of opportunities at home. Not only are jobs difficult to find, wages low, and child care inaccessible, but according to a survey published in 2002, the majority of those polled (both men and women) believed that refusal of sexual advances at the workplace created a “real chance” of costing a woman her job.⁵⁵

Given the difficulty of finding well-paying work in Russia—and the widespread belief that sexual advances may be a normal part of the work environment—it should not be surprising that young women are tempted to try their luck abroad. Russians may not be surprised, but they nonetheless generally disapprove. In Russia, the most common response to stories about trafficking is to blame the victim and to insist that the women are fully aware of what they are doing but are so tempted by the prospects of making easy money that they are willing to take the risks. These views are unfortunately shared by many officials who might be expected to fight trafficking. For example, a woman working for the regional administration of Primorsky Krai asserted, “Trafficking of women in [Primorsky Krai]? No, for us it is not serious. It is there, in the West it’s a problem. But here it is not—just occasional cases. And it is the women’s fault anyway. They know why they are going abroad.”⁵⁶

Even Russian scholars of trafficking may share this view. For example, Mikhail Kleimenov and Stanislav Shamkov write:

Potential victims of trafficking are women who are ready to take risks and are prepared to join a marginal group abroad provided that they will be well paid for their services. The results of our survey show that most of the recruited women are aware of or at least suspect what kind of work they are expected to do, even if the recruiters promise them that their services will not be of a sexual nature.⁵⁷

Kleimenov and Shamkov also suggest that traffickers need not resort to fraud or elaborate schemes to attract women, because there are plenty of women already working as prostitutes within Russia who are quite willing to try their luck abroad.⁵⁸

This lack of sympathy may be heightened by the fact that many of the young women who are particularly vulnerable to the promises of traffickers are those who have recently aged out of orphanages, a population that Russians do not generally regard with much favor.⁵⁹ Given the lack of education and relatively poor health of these women, the loss of the contribution they would have made to the economy through their labor and that of their children may not be high, but the government incurs high costs while they are in the orphanage.⁶⁰ From the government's perspective, these young women are extremely expensive, but the government receives nothing in return for its investment.⁶¹

Despite the tendency to see trafficked women as largely responsible for or deserving of whatever ills befall them, Russian leaders are beginning to adopt legislation and practices designed to address the problem of trafficking. In 2002, the Legislative Committee of the State Duma set up an interagency working group headed by Elena Mizulina, the deputy chair of the Duma's Committee on Legislation (and a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe). The working group consisted of legislators, government representatives, and representatives of various NGOs and was responsible for drafting the legislation. In 2003, the federal law, titled *On Introducing Changes and Additions to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation*, was passed by both houses of the Russian Duma and signed by Putin. The bill added two new articles, one dealing with trafficking in persons and the other with the use of slave labor, and amended a number of other articles, including two dealing with prostitution.⁶² Perhaps the most significant element of this law was that it identified trafficking as a crime for the first time in Russia.

The decision to address the issue was prompted by a number of factors. NGOs have worked hard to bring public attention to the issue of trafficking in Russia, both to bring about institutional changes and in the hope that greater awareness will enable women to make safer choices. NGOs' efforts to increase government attention to trafficking and to encourage cooperation among the various parties working in this area have continued since the law was adopted. In January 2004, the first All-Russian Antitrafficking Assembly was held in Moscow, and the second assembly took place in March 2006. NGO representatives and government agencies participated in both conferences, focusing on increasing cooperation between the two types of organizations. There have also been several regional conferences: in November 2005, under the auspices of the Duma of Primorsky Krai, the Vladivostok Center for the Study of Organized Crime, and the U.S. Department of Justice, in Vladivostok; in August 2006, also in Vladivostok, under the auspices of the Primorsky Krai Administration and several NGOs; and in October 2006, a Russian-Swedish conference in Petrozavodsk.

It is possible that the increased attention from the Russian government has also been a response to the decision of the U.S. Department of State to carry out an annual assessment of various countries' antitrafficking efforts and to tie foreign assistance to performance in this area. The department's assessment uses the following system:

Tier 1: Countries that fully comply with the act's minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.

Tier 2: Countries that do not fully comply with the minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance.

Tier 2 Watch List: Countries on Tier 2 requiring special scrutiny because of a high or significantly increasing number of victims; failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons; or an assessment as Tier 2 based on commitments to take action over the next year.

Tier 3: Countries that neither satisfy the minimum standards nor demonstrate a significant effort to come into compliance. Countries in this tier are subject to potential non-humanitarian and non-trade sanctions.⁶³

For the first two years of implementation of the Victims of Trafficking Act, Russia was ranked in the bottom tier. The explanation provided in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report of the U.S. Department of State for 2001 was that Russia “has done little to combat the problem of trafficking, primarily due to lack of resources, training and adequate legislation,” but this was followed by the optimistic assessment that the government “has made a dramatic about face in the last year and has recently acknowledged trafficking as a problem.”⁶⁴ This optimism proved unwarranted, since in the 2002 report, not only was Russia still in Tier 3, but the government was seen as “not making significant efforts to [comply with the minimum standards].”⁶⁵ Starting in 2003, Russia moved up to Tier 2, with other countries “whose governments do not fully comply with the Act’s minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards;”⁶⁶ however, in 2004, a Tier 2 Special Watch List was introduced, and Russia has remained in this not-quite-Tier-2 group since then.⁶⁷

Putin has identified his own reasons for pushing the new legislation. In an October 2003 speech on the introduction of the draft law to the State Duma, he focused on trafficking as a violation of human rights and as a source of financing for international terrorism.⁶⁸ Whether the latter is true, trafficking certainly contributes to—and is also exacerbated by—the social and family stresses of the post-transition Russia. These stresses, which the government’s antitrafficking efforts have so far largely ignored, also play a significant role in the practice of international adoption.

International Adoption

Although social and familial breakdown in Russia started before the Soviet Union’s dissolution, they accelerated sharply in the wake of the economic difficulties of the early 1990s. By 1998, one of every seven children under the age of eighteen lived in an “incomplete family”—the result of the high divorce rate (59.1 divorces per 100 marriages) and the relatively high rate of births outside of registered marriages (27 percent).⁶⁹ According to government statistics, the divorce rate peaked in 2002, with almost 84 divorces per 100 marriages; by 2007, after several years of improved economic conditions, it had fallen to 54 per 100.⁷⁰

Being a child in Russia in the first decade and a half after the Soviet Union fell meant a high likelihood of experiencing at least some period of poverty. Using data from the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey, Michael Lokshin and Barry M. Popkin note that during the first years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, single-parent families were twice as likely (and families with three or more children three times as likely) to be persistently poor as nuclear families, and “more than 70% of Russian children lived in households where needs exceeded income.”⁷¹ In 2003, families with children were more

than twice as likely to fall into poverty and were likely to experience a much greater degree of poverty than families without children.⁷²

Russian children's experience with poverty and the various social problems that were so marked during the transition is reflected in the decline over the 1990s in their average weight, height, chest size, and muscle strength.⁷³ It is also reflected in the fact that roughly 25 percent of young Russian women have reproductive problems, 33 percent of young Russian men are unfit for military service, and about 50 percent of the Russians graduating from school have health problems that limit their career opportunities.⁷⁴ It also means that many Russian children are born into families that face formidable difficulties raising them.

As a result, the post-Soviet period has seen an increase in children living on the streets or in institutions. For children on the streets, life offers little more than grinding poverty, violence, and crime. Prostitution, or trading sex for food or shelter, is almost inevitable for females. For children in institutions, life may be somewhat easier, but the future it promises is hardly bright. According to the CoMission for Children at Risk, of the roughly 15,000 adoles-

“The post-Soviet period has seen an increase in children living on the streets or in institutions. For children on the streets, life offers little more than grinding poverty, violence, and crime.”

cents aging out of Russian orphanages every year, about 10 percent commit suicide, about 20 percent support themselves through crime, about 33 percent are unemployed, more than 33 percent become homeless, and about 50 percent of the girls turn to prostitution.⁷⁵ The Ministry of Education's data show the same percentage committing suicide, but add that 40 percent commit crimes and an equal percentage use drugs.⁷⁶

Although it is difficult to be precise (there is considerable ambiguity in the way the terms are used), official figures indicate that at the beginning of 1998, about 600,000 children were not under parental supervision, and, in 2007, there were over 730,000 in this category. In 1993, around 75,000 of these children were living in children's homes or boarding schools; by 1998, this number had roughly doubled; by 2007, it had climbed to 200,000.⁷⁸

The overwhelming majority—some estimates say over 90 percent—of children in Russian orphanages are so-called *social orphans*, meaning that they still have at least one living parent. In some cases, these children have run away from home to escape abuse or neglect; in others, the authorities have terminated parental rights. Of the children entering orphanages each year, however, about 30 percent are brought to the homes by single mothers.⁷⁷ With the collapse of the Russian economy in the 1990s, more and more women found themselves unable to raise their children. The Soviet legacy of allowing women to place children in state institutions for indefinite periods probably made it easier for women to relinquish their children to orphanages.⁷⁹

Clearly, then, only the narrowest interpretation of the demographic problem facing Russia would suggest that the solution is simply to increase the birthrate. The idea that children represent the country's future and the continuation of Russian nationality resonates so

powerfully, however, that neither the economic nor the demographic realities of child-rearing seem to have much power to shape legislation or, more important, actual policy.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia almost immediately became the country of choice for international adoptions in the industrialized West. By 1995, Russia was in third place for countries sending children to the ten Western countries that carry out 75–80 percent of all international adoption; by 1998, it was in first place.⁸⁰ More recently, it has consistently ranked second only to China for international adoptions in Canada and the United States.⁸¹

Although it is impossible to find reliable statistics on the average age of those trafficked from Russia, certainly it is higher than the average age of children adopted into families living outside of Russia, especially given the strong demand for babies in the adoption market. This means that Russia has devoted more resources to raising each woman lost to international trafficking than to raising each child lost to international adoption.

Like human trafficking, international adoption is a business and tends to generate sizable incomes for those providing the services involved. Furthermore, international adoption is heavily regulated and restricted, creating potential economic gain for those who find ways to bypass these regulations, including trafficking children for adoption.⁸² Nonetheless, the earnings from international adoption almost certainly fall far short of those from sex trafficking, while the number of news stories about adoption scandals suggests that the risks of prosecution are much higher.⁸³

Side payments are common in international adoption; they are primarily directed to the orphanages raising the children, rather than to government bureaucrats. Even when caregivers at the orphanages appropriate for themselves gifts of money, toys, medicines, or school supplies intended for the children, these donations do indirectly increase the resources used to raise these children, because they supplement the very low wages the orphanage staff receive. Given the exhaustion and sense of defeat that characterize many of the women working at orphanages, the benefit they receive from these gifts may significantly affect the way they treat their charges.⁸⁴

Although it is too early to tell, Russia may reap future benefits from the adoption of children. In the United States, adults adopting children from other countries are strongly encouraged to be open with their children about their adoption and to give their children a positive sense of their country of origin. Heritage travel programs, culture camps, and crafts aimed at families formed through international adoption have all proliferated.

Although many parents ignore this advice—after all, one of the reasons Russia has attracted attention as a source of adoptable children in the industrialized West is that the children are more likely to resemble their adoptive parents than Asian and Latin American children—there are certainly a large number of adoptive families that will develop strong bonds with Russia. As the children grow, they are likely to hear and read about Russia, perhaps even visit it with their families. In their late adolescence or early adulthood, some will no doubt choose to return for an extended visit, perhaps on a study-abroad program or to live and work there for several years, just as the children of émigrés have.

Nor must Russia wait that long to benefit from international adoption. Most adoption agencies handling international adoption have links on their Web pages to descriptions of ways in which potential adopters can provide humanitarian assistance to their adopted children's native countries. One of the standard ways that families maintain connections with their children's country of origin after adoption is through programs that provide

assistance to children who remain in the institutions in which their children lived. For example, part of the stated mission of Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption (FRUA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit support network for adoptive families with children from the former Soviet Union, is “to support the whole life experience of Eastern European orphan children.”⁸⁵ Since 1994, FRUA members have developed seven major projects to help orphans and orphanages in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.⁸⁶ Most of these projects are ongoing, and together they represent a significant investment in the lives of the children remaining in institutions in these countries.

According to a study carried out in the 1980s, American women involved in non-related adoptions tended to have significantly higher education levels and significantly higher incomes than the average American.⁸⁷ Given the high financial and emotional costs involved in completing an international adoption, this is likely especially pronounced for parents who adopt internationally. Many of the adoptive parents share the view of Cheri Register:

I believe very firmly that being entrusted with the love and care of children born to someone else in another part of the world carries an obligation of stewardship. . . . [W]e can work to improve the welfare of children worldwide, with special attention to family security, . . . seek and promote greater awareness of the global socioeconomic causes for family dissolution and abandonment of children, and help find just and equitable solutions.⁸⁸

Of course, were it possible to find good homes for these abandoned or institutionalized children in Russia, few would argue that the country would benefit from having the children raised abroad, even if that would shift the costs of raising them to other countries. Table 1 indicates that Putin’s statement in his 2006 Address to the Federal Assembly, “It seems to me that foreigners are adopting more of our children than we ourselves are,” accurately described the situation in 2003–5.⁸⁹ More worrisome than the absolute numbers is the trend of a decline in domestic adoption from 1996 to 2005.

Although the 2006 increase is encouraging, it is too soon to know whether it represents a real change and whether the measures Putin called for in his 2006 Address to the Federal Assembly can make a difference:

I propose that we double the benefit paid to guardians or foster parents of children and make it at least 4,000 roubles a month. I also propose considerably increasing the wage paid to foster parents from 1,000–1,500 roubles a month to 2,500 roubles a month. And we should also increase the one-off payment made to families taking in children, regardless of the form chosen for placing the child with a family, to 8,000 roubles, that is, equal to the one-off payment made for giving birth to a child.⁹⁰

Given that these children are already alive, the high cost of providing them with institutional care, and the negative consequences of institutionalization for their future as productive citizens, this focus on placing them in families seems very much a step in the right direction. According to Medvedev, the 6 billion rubles allocated from the federal budget for supporting these measures should result in new homes for at least 80,000 orphans in 2008, presumably primarily via foster care.⁹¹ This optimistic forecast is called into question, however, by Medvedev’s subsequent remarks stressing the role of regions in providing these funds and noting that “a number of regions have not yet adopted legislation on these issues.”⁹² Even without the slow pace at which regions are adopting legislation, it is doubtful that the improvement will be as dramatic as predicted.

TABLE 1. Number of Russian Children Adopted, 1994–2006

Year	Adopted by foreigners for life outside of Russia	Adopted by Russians
1994	2,196	NA
1995	1,497	NA
1996	3,251	27,377
1997	5,739	20,677
1998	5,647	19,800
1999	6,000	18,830
2003	8,800	8,300
2004	9,460	5,798
2005	7,482	4,586
2006	6,689	7,742

Sources: Data for 1994–99 found in Mikhail Kleimenov and Stanislav Shamkov, “Criminal Transportation of Persons: Trends and Recommendations,” in *Human Traffic and Transnational Crime: Eurasian and American Perspectives*, ed. Sally Stoecker and Louise Shelley, 41 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). Data for 2003 entry from Nesterova, “Sirota do vostrebvaniya,” *Trud*, September 23, 2005, <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/1730.html> (accessed July 23, 2007). For 2004 and 2005 data, see “Russia Adoption Statistics,” *Foreign Adoption*, November 19, 2006, <http://www.adoptionknowhow.com/russia/statistics> (accessed October 11, 2007). Data for 2004 and 2005 entries were calculated from the number of adoptions of Russian orphans by U.S. citizens (5,865 and 4,639, respectively), the U.S. share of foreign national adoptions of Russian orphans (62 percent), and the percentage of total adoptions of Russian orphans by foreign nationals (62 percent). For 2006 data, see Robin Hilborn, “Adoption News Central, Country News: Russia,” *Family Helper*, <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/russia.html> (accessed November 13, 2008).

Russians generally remain far less accepting of nonfamily adoption than many in Western industrial countries, and it will take time to change these attitudes, although the increasing incidence of fertility problems in Russia may provide considerable impetus. Although one poll found that the overwhelming majority of those surveyed believe that financial issues are the key constraint on Russians adopting, suggesting that the government’s financial initiatives could make a significant difference,⁹³ another poll, conducted in July 2005, found that 72 percent of the respondents would “under no circumstances agree to adopt an orphan,” which casts some doubt on Medvedev’s rosy prediction.⁹⁴

Despite their own reluctance to adopt these children, Russians are not inclined to look favorably on adoption of Russian children by foreigners. Articles in the Russian media about the international theft of the country’s natural wealth (its children) are less prominent today than they were in the early 1990s, when international adoption from Russia was new, but there is still plenty of concern—and if tensions between Russia and the West continue to rise, Russian unhappiness with the loss of their children is almost certain to increase. In the meantime, there is plenty of media coverage of the cases featuring an adoptive parent (usually American) being found guilty of abusing, in some cases even killing, his or her Russian-born child. According to news reports, thirteen Russian children have been killed by adoptive parents in the United States since 1991. Such cases led to a call for a Duma inquiry into international adoption in May 2004, only a few years after the Duma had significantly revised adoption law and set in motion a process for Russian accreditation of foreign adoption agencies.⁹⁵ According to an April 27, 2007, news release from the U.S.

State Department, there were no Russian-accredited U.S.-based adoption agencies at that time, although by January 2008, there were twenty-three.⁹⁶

Conclusion

The best approach to stemming the Russian Federation's qualitative and quantitative demographic decline would be to devote resources to improving the lives of those young Russians who already exist, encouraging women of child-bearing age to remain in Russia, and ensuring that children can be raised to be productive, contributing members of society. When the state lacks the social and financial resources to ensure such an upbringing, it should seriously consider whether it actually benefits from encouraging a higher birthrate and discouraging foreign adoption.

So far, Russian officials seem to be devoting far more attention to the task of increasing the birthrate than to either caring for the large number of institutionalized children or combating human trafficking. Those young people they do seem concerned about keeping in the country are the ones who are being adopted into families in other countries—generally the youngest and therefore the furthest away from productive and reproductive ages.

Although it is certainly important that adoption practices be transparent and that those involved in the business be carefully regulated, it seems counterproductive to focus on keeping the number of children adopted internationally to a minimum. Except for the rare cases in which things go terribly wrong, these children will almost certainly grow up to be healthier, more productive, and more engaged citizens of the world than they would if they remained in underfunded and understaffed Russian institutions. Furthermore, Russia itself will probably benefit to a modest degree from adoptive families' active involvement in assistance efforts.

The recent creation of "initial maternity capital" and the introduction of financial incentives for adoption as well as for child bearing are promising first steps toward a shift from a concern with births to a concern with really investing in children.⁹⁷ Whether there will be more steps in this direction in light of the sharp drop in the export revenues Russia can expect to earn from petroleum and in light of widespread economic turmoil in the world remains to be seen.⁹⁸

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Policy Implications and Consequences (Washington, DC: Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 2003); Timothy Heleniak, "Russia's Demographic Challenges," in *Russia's Policy Challenges: Security, Stability and Development*, ed. Stephen K. Wegren, 200–221 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003); and Nicholas Eberstadt, *The Russian Federation at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Trapped in a Demographic Straitjacket* (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2004).

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7. For example, see Kim Maclean, "The Impact of Institutionalization on Child Development," *Development and Psychopathology* 15, no. 4 (2003): 853–84.

8. Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, *Ezhegodnye poslaniya prezidenta RF: 1994–2005* [Annual Messages of the President of the Russian Federation: 1994–2005] (Novosibirsk, Russia: Sibirskoe universitetskoe izdatelstvo, 2006); Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," President of Russia's Web site, April 25, 2005, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml (accessed November 12, 2008); and "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly," President of Russia's Web site, May 10, 2006, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823_type70029type82912_105566.shtml (accessed November 12, 2008).

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27. Sergei Zakharov, "Fertility, Nuptiality, and Family Planning in Russia: Problems and Prospects," in Demko, Ioffe, and Zayonchkovskay, *Population under Duress*, 49.

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60. Judith McKinney, "Lone Mothers in Russia: Soviet and Post-Soviet Policy," *Feminist Economics* 10, no. 2 (2004): 43. The government spends significantly more per child raised in an orphanage than per child raised at home.
61. Individual officials may receive side payments as bribes, and the government might therefore be able to pay marginally lower salaries than would otherwise be necessary, but the resulting savings to the government are too small to justify the argument that the state benefits from trafficking.
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67. The explanation for the watch list is that although the countries are making significant efforts, “a) The absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; or b) There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or c) The determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.” U.S. Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report: Introduction (revised),” U.S. Department of State Web site, June 14, 2004, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/34021.htm> (accessed December 23, 2008).

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76. iOrphan, “Russian Orphan Facts and Statistics,” Ascent Russian Orphan Aid Foundation, http://www.iOrphan.org/russian_orphans/index.asp (accessed November 13, 2008). These numbers are estimates. For example, the 10 percent suicide rate has been cited by almost everyone writing or speaking about Russian orphans for over a decade. Perhaps it is indeed that consistent, but it seems more likely that the research behind this number was conducted many years ago. The number is therefore likely to be inexact—even if the problem it recognizes is very real.

77. Otto Latsis, “Generation of Hope Asks for Help,” *Novye Izvestiya*, January 21, 1999, trans. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 51, no. 9 (1999): 6–7; Alla Malakhova, “‘Flowers of Life’ Are Fading before Our Eyes,” *Novye Izvestiya*, January 21, 1999, trans. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 51, no. 9 (1999): 7–8; and iOrphan, “Russian Orphan Facts and Statistics.” A

boarding school in Russia is essentially an orphanage for children of school age, not a place for an expensive private education.

78. Itar-Tass, "Matrimony Rate on Decline in Russia," Johnson's Russia List, December 7, 1999, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/3668.html##1> (accessed November 30, 2002).

79. Judith Harwin, *Children of the Russian State: 1917–1995* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1996): 19–20.

80. Peter Selman, "Intercountry Adoption in the New Millennium: The 'Quiet Migration' Revisited," *Population Research and Policy Review* 21, no. 3 (2002): 214.

81. Itar-Tass, "Trafficking in Children under Way in Russia," Child Trafficking Research HUB, November 15, 2004, http://www.childtrafficking.org/cgi-bin/ct/main.sql?file=view_document.sql&TITLE=-1&AUTHOR=-1&THESAURO=-1&ORGANIZATION=-1&TOPIC=-1&GEOG=-1&YEAR=-1&LISTA=No&COUNTRY=-1&FULL_DETAIL=Yes&ID=1191 (accessed February 5, 2009).

82. Sadly, there are also cases of children trafficked for sex and cases in which adoption serves as a cover for the sex trade. However, in this article, I consider the adoption process only as a means of genuine family formation.

83. In trafficking for adoption, the criminal activity takes place within Russia, so jurisdiction over the crime is clearer. Furthermore, the children were unequivocally viewed as victims rather than as willing participants.

84. During visits to a handful of orphanages and shelters in Yaroslavl and Irkutsk in 2005 and 2006, I noticed that many of the women working in these institutions are pensioners desperate to supplement their meager monthly allocations from the state. They are therefore over fifty-five years old, tired, and not in very good health.

85. Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption, Home page, Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption: Including Neighboring Countries, <http://www.frua.org/> (accessed November 1, 2006).

86. Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption, "Orphanage Support," Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption: Including Neighboring Countries, http://www.frua.org/members/orph_support.shtml (accessed January 6, 2009). These projects include a goods-donation program, an emergency response fund (providing food, formula, vitamins, and medicine), a book distribution project, an emergency repairs fund to improve facilities, a playground project, a project to help emancipated orphans learn life skills, and a matching grant program, which has funded such things as a vaccination campaign.

87. Kathy S. Stolley, "Statistics on Adoption in the United States," *The Future of Children* 3, no. 1 (1993): 38.

88. Cheri Register, *"Are Those Kids Yours?" American Families with Children Adopted from Other Countries* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 210–11.

89. Putin, "Annual Address," 2006.

90. Ibid.

91. Putin and Medvedev, "Excerpts from the Transcript of the Session of the Presidential Council."

91. Ibid.

93. Nesterova, "Sirota do vostrebovaniya" (see n35).

94. Romir, "Figures and Facts" (see n59).

95. Robin Hilborn, "Adoption News Central, Country News: Russia," Family Helper, <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/russia.html> (accessed November 13, 2008).

96. "Russia: JCICS Members," Joint Council on International Children's Services, <http://www.jcics.org/Russia.htm#List%20Accredited%20Agencies> (accessed November 13, 2008).

97. Putin, "Annual Address," 2006.

98. Medvedev, in his first—and, given the constitutional amendments being proposed, possibly only—annual Address to the Federal Assembly, was surprisingly silent on the issue of demography, making only a passing reference to increasing the birth rate in his discussion of health insurance. Dmitry Medvedev, "Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, November 5, 2008, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/11/05/2144_type70029type82917type127286_208836.shtml (accessed January 27, 2009).

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