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Illegal Uses of the Maternity Capital in Russia

This paper deals with the contemporary Russian pro-natalist policy, focusing on the social benefit program “Maternity Capital”. The main goal of this program is to increase the fertility rate, especially the birth of a second child. The Pension Fund allows the money to be used only for: 1) the purchase of a dwelling, 2) the education of the children, 3) the pension of the mother, or 4) payment for services of children with disabilities. I analyze the legal and illegal uses of this program. First, I identify how recipient families intend to improve their living standards with the Maternity Capital. To this end, three types of legal uses are introduced: the acquisition of a first home, the expansion of the living space and the funding of a building project. Secondly, I show that these uses sometimes conflict with administrative, economic and personal constraints. In order to overcome these difficulties, some families chose to use the Maternity Capital in an illegal way. Thirdly, I argue that these illegal uses belong to three categories: fraudulent use, diverted use and subverted use. My claim is that: 1) Maternity Capital has some limits in its practical application; and 2) families illegally use the Maternity Capital in order to circumvent practical difficulties, but not the intent of the program. This study is based on 130 interviews collected between 2015 and 2017 in the Republic of Udmurtia, the Republic of Tatarstan and the Ulyanovsk Region.