

# KANTAR

## Practices for overcoming demographic decline in Bulgaria

Qualitative study report

Kantar Bulgaria



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## Description of the study



# Methodology and sample

## Quantitative part

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- = Omnibus
  - = Sample n=812 respondents
  - = Terrain 1-8 August 2022
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- 1 open question with two points
  - 1 simple question
  - 1 re-coded question with two pointings
  - 1 battery with nine sub-questions
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## Quality part

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= 3 focus groups  
= Target audience – parents of children up to 6 years old. Including.  
= Location – Sofia, Veliko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora  
= Composition:  
Sofia – 4 women and 4 men,  
Stara Zagora – 8 women,  
Veliko Tarnovo – 8 men  
= Terrain: 14-16 September 2022

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- Guide for 2-hour discussion
  - Remote moderation and discussion
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# 3 Results



# Specific birth rates or social policies aimed at young people

Q. Currently, Bulgaria, like other countries in Europe, has demographic problems. In your opinion, in which of the following two areas should state measures be concentrated?

In an increase in the birth rate, or 7.4%

In the retention of young people in the country 30.3%

In both (not read) 59.8%

Don't know/cancel (not read) 2.4 %

# What will make this place attractive for young people with children (1/2)

Qa. If it were up to you, what one thing would you do in your end so that a young family or people who live together (with children or plans for children) stay here? Except for work or better work. (1st indication)

High income, good pay 18.2%

Investments in living conditions/Infrastructure/ Transport 11.2%

Housing, mortgage loans (interest-free, low interest rate) 9.5%

Child benefit (higher) 9.0%

Crèches & Kindergartens (more, free) 7.5%

Work (secure, specialty, paid insurance) 6.3%

Education (quality, free of charge)

/Schools (more), University 5.5%

## What will make this place attractive for young people with children (2/2)

Q&b. If it were up to you, what would you do in your region so that a young family or people living together (with children or plans for children) would stay here? Except for work or better work. (Total of 2 indications)

High income, good pay 25.5%

Investments in living conditions/Infrastructure/ Transport 16.9%

Child benefit (higher) 14.9%

Housing, mortgage loans (interest-free, low interest rate) 14.5%

Crèches & Kindergartens (more, free) 14.2%

Education (quality, free of charge)

/Schools (more), University 11.6%

Social benefits, benefits 10.3%

# Which of the current measures for young people with children are valued

Qa&b. The following legal provisions are currently in place to assist young couples with children. Which one do you think is most supportive and should be expanded in scope and size? And what else? (Total of 2 indications)

42.7% Maternity leave with 90% of the salary in the first year and 710 BGN compensation in the second

34.8% Personal income tax relief for 1st, 2nd and 3rd child (450 BGN, 900 BGN 1350 BGN)

31.4% Tax relief for reducing mortgage interest to BGN 100,000 for parents up to 35 years of age

21.4% Without permission from the Labour Inspectorate, a pregnant woman or a mother of a child up to 3 years cannot be dismissed

18.6% Monthly child benefit for families with low income per person (50 BGN for one, 110 BGN for two, 135 BGN for three children)

18.4% Monthly compensation of 372 BGN for a child not admitted to a state or municipal kindergarten

17.7% One-time childbirth allowance BGN 250 For the first one, 600 lv. for the second, 350 lv. for the third and 200 BGN. for each subsequent child

# What is the awareness of parental support measures?

## Mentioned in all groups, with a good knowledge of the details:

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Maternity leave allowance

Child benefit

Tax relief

One-off cash allowance for the birth of a child  
– social and municipal

Free crèches and kindergartens

Cash assistance for first and eighth graders

## Less frequently mentioned:

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- Free travel in public transport for children up to 7 years old
- 2 days of additional leave for a second child
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## Measures not mentioned at spontaneous level:

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Hospital for the care of the child, which is considered "natural" and not as a social benefit - there is no one else to do it, and only a percentage of wages is paid.

Without permission from the Labour Inspectorate, a pregnant woman or a mother of a child up to 3 years old cannot be dismissed from work.

# Attitudes to current measures: Maternity leave

## Overwhelmingly positive attitudes, especially on the increased amount for the second year maternity

### Positive attitudes:

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- The period is long: "Maybe there is no other country where motherhood is so long!"
- Good level of the amount to be paid (90% of the wage for the first year)
- Strongly positive attitudes towards the changed amount for the second year: "With BGN 710. A child can look at himself calmly."

### Several negatives:

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- In some cases, employers do not provide their employees at their full salary
- The unemployed can't take advantage of it.
- Unpaid leave taken immediately before pregnancy is included in the calculation of the income base, and this lowers the benefit due for the first year: "After my maternity leave with the second child ended, I took the unpaid leave to watch it until the kindergarten started, which was closed by COVID. Then I found myself pregnant again. I went back to work. However, the calculation of maternity leave with my third child enters the period of the second year of maternity, unpaid leave, which significantly reduces it. This was not my salary and the calculation should be when I took a salary. Not taking into account cash compensation – this is not an insurance income. From this point of view, my motherhood is now damaged. This has not been thought of and I do not know how legally it is right, because I have to check and write a complaint. Because I have paid, I have paid for years in a row, I have been on maximum insurance income for 7 months, and now when I go out again on maternity leave, it turns out that I take terribly little money."

# Attitudes to current measures: Personal income tax relief

## Strongly positive attitudes towards increasing the amount of tax relief

### Advantages:

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One of the measures that is perceived as "real financial assistance for the family":

Increase in the amount of tax returns: "Previously there were some small 20 leva, and the current amount is felt in the family budget"

Regularity of the measure – annually

Opportunity for each parent to receive some of the relief

Relatively easy procedure – through the employer

### Single flaw mentions:

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Uncertainty whether the high value of the relief will be maintained in the future, due to its annual coordination with the adoption of the state budget

It is not due on maternity leave. The family cannot benefit if the father was also out of work

Insufficient information on how it can be obtained (single mention, to which the other participants react that this is done by the employer)

# Attitudes towards current measures: Mortgage tax relief

## Positive attitudes towards the "mortgage loan relief" mechanism, but criticism of the conditions for its use

### Advantages:

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The repayment of a mortgage loan is assessed as one of the large family responsibilities, due to the long-term repayment and the significant amount of amounts that are separated from the family budget

### Disadvantages:

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It is necessary for the couple to have a civil marriage: "I am not married and we live together. I don't really have any of the rights that are of married couples. Only the obligations!"  
g/m, Sofia

The age limit of up to 35 years of one of the spouses is assessed as unfair

Not enough amount of the received amount: "This is 100 leva per year, and for me my contribution is 500 leva per month! I don't feel that much of a relief." Zagora

# Attitudes to current measures: Protection from dismissal

**A formal, fictitious measure, employers find a way to circumvent and disrupt it**

## Advantages:

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**Distrust in compliance with the measure by employers is a barrier to the verbalization of particular benefits by respondents**

**However, there are jobs and companies that comply with the measure: "Yes, it is nice, but only the state work can be guaranteed to be respected" g/m, Sofia**

## Disadvantages:

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**Employers, especially in small and medium-sized private enterprises, find ways to circumvent the dismissal ban. Mainly by reassignment to a new position with a probationary period of 6 months, which allows dismissal of the employee, including a mother with a child up to 3 years. Respondents feel insufficiently protected and the topic causes violent negative comments. There are also examples from experience – personal or of relatives and acquaintances:**

"It is not exactly so, because if the pregnant woman is on a temporary employment contract, the employer can release her without permission from the labor inspectorate. The moment you get back to work, they can reassign you from one position to another. I've experienced this and it means you can get fired because it's like a new job. Lying to you is this measure!" Zagora

"He, the privateer, does what he wants! She twists, twists, threatens, and finally the woman gives in, because she can really make her work hell."

# Attitudes to current measures: Monthly child allowance

## Negative attitudes caused by the unattainability to receive and the small monthly amount of allowances

### Positive attitude:

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There is some financial help for low-income parents.

### Negative attitudes prevail in all groups:

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#### Inability to receive the allowances:

The amount of 510 BGN is too low and many of the families outdo it

#### The amount required for the allowance is gross

"They should not be given for the income of the parents, but the state should do it for the child, for every child raised here. That's why they're called children's, not look at our wallets. You will already decide what you will do with these allowances and how to invest in the development of the child – whether to collect for education or something else"

#### Low financial value of the allowances received:

"With this money, what can you buy a month – one shoe from a pair of boots?! Next month – the other "m/f, Sofia

"A friend of mine in Germany receives 250 euros as child benefit, provided that the child does not live with her, but here in Bulgaria" Zagora

# Attitudes to current measures: One off birth grant of 1st, 2nd and subsequent children

**Positively perceived, as spontaneously mentioned is the help from the municipality, and then that from the state**

## Positive attitude:

**Positive attitudes. The fact that two benefits of this type are granted – social/state and municipal – is also approved by the participants. Thanks to it, larger purchases can be made to meet the needs of the newborn.**

## Negative attitudes:

**Some participants consider that applying for these benefits is bureaucratically complicated. Lack of easily accessible information, going around institutions at a time when the newborn needs to be cared for.**

## Attitudes to other current measures (1/2)

| <i>Description of the measure</i>  | <i>Positive attitudes</i>   | <i>Negative attitudes</i>   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>15 days paternity leave due to a parent of a newborn</b>                              | A positive attitude – even if this leave cannot be taken, it can be financially compensated.  | Not mentioned.  |
| <b>372 compensation of expenses of parents of children not admitted to kindergartens</b> | It is perceived as a real financial aid for families with unqualified kindergarten children, especially in Sofia, where the lack of places is one of the main problems of parents.                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In cities like St. Zagora and Veliko Tarnovo have no problems with unqualified children: "They can redirect you to another neighborhood, but very few children remain outside the system." .</li> <li>• The child's period of up to 3 years remains "financially uncovered" if the mother has to return to work.</li> <li>•</li> </ul> |
| <b>Paternal paid leave of 2 months for a child up to 8 years</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure unknown to participants</li> <li>• A positive attitude due to the ability to take care of the child when necessary, e.g. in summer</li> <li>•</li> </ul> | Skepticism about employers' inclination to take additional leave.   |

## Attitudes to other current measures (2/2)

| <i>Description of the measure</i>  | <i>Positive attitudes</i>  | <i>Negative attitudes</i>   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>From the age of 2 of the child, each of the parents can take up to 8 months of unpaid parental leave, which counts as work experience</b> | A measure of "extreme necessity", but still positively evaluated.  | Again, reluctance on the part of employers to pay social security contributions in the event of unpaid leave.   |
| <b>Free nursery and kindergarten</b>   | Positive attitudes, although the fees of the state institutions were not large.  | Not mentioned.  |
| <b>Discount from children's kitchen for large families</b>   | A measure known by the parents of more than two children. Positive attitude: "after all, someone has thought about us"                             | Not mentioned.  |
| <b>Financial assistance for first and eighth graders</b>   | Overall, the idea is good – any financial assistance is welcome. Especially in the upper courses, when textbooks and aids are bought from parents. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative attitudes that it is associated with a certain number of unexcused absences – achievable for children in the first grade, but difficult for parents to control in eighth graders.</li> <li>• There is a feeling that the Roma community is favored: "They do not write unexcused absences, because schools are on delegated budgets and if there is insufficient attendance, they will be closed. So it turns out that the Roma family will receive this help, although the child has not set foot in school and is illiterate, and my family – not, because absences are written in our school. "</li> </ul> |

## Attitudes to current measures: Sick leave for a sick child

A measure that is seen as "natural", but some employers find it difficult to embrace such leave

### Advantages:

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There is a good trend - more and more large companies (in Sofia) are "mom's friendly" and provide mothers with more opportunities to care for children, including the use of sick leave

### Disadvantages:

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Some employers are intolerant of taking sick leave: "Regardless of the size of the company, employers want to rely on workers. So far I have not heard of a place where the hospital is not a problem!" g/m, Sofia, "The private person wants to work because he has no one to replace you with" m, Veliko Tarnovo

Insufficient number of days granted to one person in work within a year (single mention): up to 40 days of sick leave is eligible per year

Insufficient financial compensation of days if the company does not provide workers at their full salary: *"It is not for nothing that sick people are called hungry"*

# Major problem areas facing parents

## Insufficiently high income levels, insecurity in terms of job retention and the ability to take good care of the child

- There is a lack of sense of predictability of the future and achievement of long-term stability – in terms of employment and insufficiency of family income in order to take good care of the generation
- Legal frameworks and "protection" are perceived as fictitious, especially for some of the employers in the private sector. Mainly in terms of going to the hospital, but also a "loophole" for the dismissal of a mother with a child up to 3 years
- The feeling of "inequality" of access to some of the measures – mainly when commenting on child benefits, but also calculating the amount for maternity leave, a one-off allowance for eighth graders. The point of view "the state works for the benefit of the Roma, but not for us" is still multiplying
- Insufficient places in nurseries and kindergartens in Sofia – some of the children need to be enrolled in private institutions with a high monthly fee
- Insufficient public access to information with the measures and what needs to be done to benefit parents from them (single mentions): *"I have to rely on the community of moms in our neighborhood to know what I can benefit from and how to do it. On the website of the municipality absurd to orient myself and wanting to receive the lump sum, going to the municipality Roma women described to me much better what to do from the employee" g, St. Kliment Ohridski. Zagora*

# Current measures perceived as stimulating the birth rate

Long-term and significant value

## Effective measures:

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**Paid maternity leave – the duration of the leave and the amount of the benefit give certainty that for a certain period of time the family has the means to raise the child**

**Tax relief on personal income is stimulating, due to its increased size.**

## Measures that could have a better result if changes were envisaged:

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**Opportunity for more families to receive monthly child benefits – changing the required income threshold. And a higher amount of child benefit**

**"Loosening" the requirements for assistance in paying off a mortgage loan – inclusion of those living in cohabitation, higher age of parents, if possible and a larger amount of aid**

**Effective rather than fictitious commitments and compliance with the rights of parents of young children by employers – protection from dismissal, the right to hospital**

# What other incentive regulations would work (1/2)

Positively stimulating

Q. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is "I categorically DO NOT approve" and 7 is "I strongly approve", would you or would not approve the following measures to raise the birth rate in the country? Keep in mind that for their implementation it may be necessary to withdraw funds from other important items in the budget.

|  | Average |
|--|---------|
| Flexible working hours for parents with young children   | 6.32    |
| Twice as much paid leave for a parent with a child up to 12 years old.   | 6.28    |
| Increase in monthly allowances for school-going children   | 6.23    |
| The state to repay one third of the mortgage loan at the first child, as the repaid amount increases 6.09 with each subsequent child | 6.09    |
| Advantage in accepting a job and in career development for women up to 40 years. with children                                       | 5.88    |
| Family /instead of current individual/ taxation with preferences for families with more children                                     | 5.63    |

# What other incentive regulations would work (2/2)

## Penal incentives

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Q. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is "I categorically DO NOT approve" and 7 is "I strongly approve", would you or would not approve the following measures to raise the birth rate in the country? Keep in mind that for their implementation it may be necessary to withdraw funds from other important items in the budget.

|   | Average |
|---|---------|
| Introduction of a stag tax of 10% for people over 21 years of age no children | 3.10    |
| Prohibition of abortion   | 2.96    |
| Restricting access, production and imports of contraceptives                  | 2.88    |

# Attitudes to possible measures: Flexible working time arrangements

Highly positive attitudes, especially outside Sofia, where this practice is present

## Positive attitudes:

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It would provide a little more peace of mind in everyday life – the logistical efforts with leading and returning from kindergarten are great, which creates inconvenience and worries parents: *"It's great! It would make it very easy for me, because I will be able to lead and take my child calmly, not as now, when I have to take it away from me a friend or a neighbor."* Zagora

The practice is already adopted in some companies and the state administration and has proven to work in favor of parents (mainly in Sofia)

## Skepticism:

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Uncertainty about how it will be perceived and whether it will really be applied by employers

Not applicable to some areas of business/industries

# Attitudes towards possible measures: Twice as much paid leave for parents with children up to 12 years old.

Awesome! But too idealistic

## Positive attitudes:

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**A very good opportunity for parents to take good care of their children on vacation:** *"We have seen children who hang in the offices and company cars in the summer, because their parents are wondering who to leave them to, and up to 12 years you have no right to leave it alone!" but it's so nice to spend more time with your child" m/f, Sofia*

## Disbelief that it is possible:

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**Employers would reluctantly accept such a long vacation:** *"Absurd! Get paid that many more days and you don't work. Everything will remain only on paper and there will be a circumvention of the law" m, Veliko Tarnovo*

# Attitudes towards possible measures: Increase in monthly allowances for school-going children

Accepted with enthusiasm

## Strongly positive attitudes:

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Fair practice that encourages responsible parents

Expectations not to be tied to parents' income and number of absences not excused

## Negative attitudes:

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Missing

# Attitudes to possible measures: Repayment of 1/3 of a mortgage loan

Very positive reactions to the measure

## Positive attitudes:

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Paying off a mortgage loan is seen as one of the biggest family expenses.

Independent housing is a way to achieve better upbringing of children and independence of the family

Often planning for another child is a motive to buy a home and financial relief is welcome for a family with children

## Negative attitudes:

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Not mentioned, but more accessibility of assistance is expected – no limit on age and marriage of parents

# Attitudes towards possible measures: Career development of women up to 40 years with children

The measure is perceived as rather "unfair"

## Positive attitudes:

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**Chances for professional development of mothers with children**

**The measure sounds "logical" like an investment in valuable human resources:** *"It is not profitable for the employer to hire a mother with a child, because his logic is that the mother with a child goes to the hospital, but if the employer has a different mindset, he knows that the mother with a child is a sure cadre because he will want to work in order to have income. He will want to keep the mother, because she gives a lot of herself to develop a career." Zagora*

## Negative attitudes:

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**Participants share a principled attitude that career development should be based on ability, education and experience, and not on other conditions**

**Unfair to women over this age**

**Uncertainty as to whether it will be respected by employers**

# Attitudes towards possible measures: Family taxation with preferences in large families

Positive attitudes in general, but without arousing enthusiasm

## Positive attitudes:

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Fair measure if both parents are working

Expectation of flexibility of relief – the family only to decide whether both parents (to be married) or only one of them will benefit from the relief (or individually)

## There are also some negatives:

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Parents with one child may feel excluded.

There are no advantages over the current tax relief.

With a non-working parent, the family will not be able to benefit from a good level of relief.

## **Attitudes to possible measures: Bachelor tax**

A measure that is astonishing. Negative attitudes towards its potential to stimulate population growth

### **Positive attitudes:**

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There is a lack of such in general. Only in Veliko Tarnovo it is single-mentioned that it could stimulate people to "think" about parenting, forced by payment

### **Inappropriate and unfair:**

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Familiarity with the bachelor tax from the time of socialism by some participants – its presence did not stimulate those paying it to have children

Parenting needs to be aware and desired, not forced, so that good follow-up care can be taken for children.

Unfair to people who want but can't have children

The age to start paying the tax is too low: at 21 still studying at university

High value of the tax

# Attitudes to possible measures: Abortion ban

## Strongly negative attitude

### Neutral attitudes in terms of population growth:

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Only in the group of men from Veliko Tarnovo is it believed that such a measure would lead to more newborns in the country

### Rejection:

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Violation of the human right to make a decision about your life

It could lead to an increase in the birth rate, but it would lead to an increase in the number of abandoned children, or not every parent would take good care of their child.

It's not relevant to the era we live in.

Risk of illegal abortions that put women's health at risk

# Attitudes towards possible measures: Restricting access to contraceptives

Impossible!

## Positive attitudes:

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**Not observed in any of the group discussions**

**Mockery of the measure:** *"Aha, so we will smuggle condoms and contraceptions from abroad □" g, St. Kliment Ohridski. Zagora*

## Negative attitudes:

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**Retrograde measure, unsuitable for application in modern times:** *"On the contrary! There should be campaigns to use them, not a ban!"*

**It would lead to an increase in sexually transmitted diseases.**

## Attitudes to other possible measures

| <i>Description of the measure</i>                                     | <i>Positive attitudes</i>   | <i>Negative attitudes</i>   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Generous one-off assistance in the birth of a child</b>            | It is perceived positively as a help when the family needs to prepare for welcoming the newborn.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not seen as an incentive to increase the birth rate.</li> <li>• It can lead to an increase in births among the Roma community, which is perceived as incapable of taking good care of children, e.g. In terms of education.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Part-time, e.g. 4 day work week</b>                                | Positive attitude, especially on the part of women. A 6-hour working day is even preferred to a free day of the working week option – it would allow peace of mind when picking up and returning from kindergarten, school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doubts that it is applicable.</li> <li>• Expectations for a lower level of wages.</li> <li>• A good social advantage, but it is not recognized as a measure to stimulate the birth rate.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>14 days of additional paid leave</b>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A positive attitude due to more time spent with the child.</li> <li>• It would make it easier if this leave could be distributed among the parents.</li> </ul>                     | Skepticism about whether it is achievable.  |
| <b>Interest-free loan for starting a business with a second child</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive attitude in general to stimulate business initiative of parents</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sounds too good to be achievable</li> <li>• Restrictive on the number of children in the family</li> </ul>   |



Thank you!