

Retirement Reforms Will Make Life Impossible for Millions of Families (Op-Ed)

The most vulnerable members of society will foot the bill of the retirement age hike.

By [Ella Paneyakh](#)

August 12, 2018



Grandma Annie/ Anthony Doudt/ Flickr

This summer, many Russians are having to reconsider their life plans. This applies not only to women at the socially vulnerable age of 53 to 54 and men five years older, both groups of whom must now wait twice as long before retiring and whose plans for the coming years are now essentially ruined. It also concerns women just approaching 50 and who must now wait an additional 6 to 8 years before drawing a pension. It affects employers with workers of retirement age and the younger professionals who had hoped to fill the resulting vacancies. It affects parents who had planned to have children in the expectation that soon-to-be retired

grandparents could help raise them. It forces adult wage earners to make impossible choices between caring for family members with acute medical needs and a minuscule pension or no pension at all.

Everyone knows that women of the so-called “sandwich generation” wind up caring for aging parents as well their own grandchildren. It is for this reason, and not any supposed discrimination against men, that women continue to retire earlier than men do. What’s more, no one plans to deal with the root causes of this problem by eliminating the excessive bureaucratic burden placed on private kindergartens and nursing homes, providing decent conditions in state-run care facilities or toning down the official propaganda that espouses patriarchal values.

Doctors, teachers, and several other groups that currently receive pensions will continue to enjoy certain exemptions, but only after they reach the new retirement age. And here, too, no one plans to address the conditions that gave rise to the need for such benefits in the first place. Even into the 21st century, the Russian state continues to create enormous numbers of white-collar jobs with working conditions so poor, salaries so low and stress levels so high that people are physically incapable of remaining at work beyond the age of 50.

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The most vulnerable members of society foot the bill for this. They pay for the fact that, during Russia’s boom years, when the country had enough financial and intellectual resources to implement reforms relatively painlessly, the authorities vacillated, ultimately resorting to a far more primitive approach that economist Yevgeny Gontmakher rightly calls “simple arithmetic actions.” They pay for the pitiful state of a government incapable of implementing reforms that are slightly more complex, but that would be less painful for the most vulnerable members of society.

Amazingly, rulers have no plans to revise the system that allows masses of healthy men to retire from military and law enforcement service at the ripe old age of 45 and immediately begin drawing a pension from the very same federal budget. This is the result of the ultra-low quality of public administration in Russia: the less the authorities are capable of making nuanced decisions, the more they must plow ahead with policies ill-suited to the needs of the people — and the more importance the siloviki acquire.

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