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Russia's Oryol Region to Pay Schoolgirls for Giving Birth

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School-age girls in cooking class. **Dmitry Belitsky / Moskva News Agency**

Central Russia's Oryol region has reportedly become the country's first to offer financial incentives to schoolgirls who give birth after its governor signed a decree introducing the measure.

Oryol is among 40 Russian regions pledging to pay female university students at least 100,000 rubles ($1,200) for having children starting this year, the exiled news outlet 7x7 reported. But on Thursday, Oryol region Governor Andrei Klychkov expanded the program to include school-age girls.

On Monday, Klychkov accused media outlets of sensationalizing his order, saying that his region was not the only one to introduce financial incentives for school-age girls. According to him, the Labor Ministry instructed all regional governments in Russia to adopt the measure.

"As for my personal stance on this policy, it is important to recognize that young women in

such situations often face difficult decisions," Klychkov wrote on Telegram. "Our responsibility, given the circumstances, is to provide support — helping them preserve the life of the child and safeguard the mother's health."

The move comes amid a broader push to address Russia's deepening demographic crisis, which has worsened in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin has prioritized boosting birth rates, declaring that families with three or more children should be "the norm."

At the same time, concerns over reproductive rights are mounting. Russian authorities have outlawed "child-free" lifestyles as an "extremist ideology," criminalized "coercion" into abortion and expanded maternity payments in an effort to encourage childbirth.

Russia's birth rate has fallen to its lowest level in 25 years, while mortality rates continue to rise. The Oryol region, where the population has been shrinking for at least a quarter century, ranks as the country's 23rd least populous region, with fewer than 700,000 residents.

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