



## Best Practices to Promote Work-Life Balance for Moscow City Mothers

### Background

The information presented below was published as a brochure in Moscow, Russia in 2008 by the Committee of Public Relations of Moscow City and the Organization for Employed Women within the project “Development and Modernization of Family Policies in Moscow City Organizations”. Project director Olga Bessolova is the President of the international organization Federation of Women with College Education and the Chairwoman of the Commission for Improvement of Quality of Life for Muscovites. The researchers used the framework of economic self-sufficiency developed by Wider Opportunities for Women, USA, applying the concept of economic security, as opposed to deprivation, to families in Moscow City, Russia.

### Difficulties Working Mothers Face

In Russia, working mothers have traditionally been subject to discrimination, especially due to childbirth: it is common for women to withdraw from the workforce due to childcare responsibilities, even though it is often neither affordable nor desirable for women. Nevertheless, in Moscow, there are 2.6 million working mothers employed in the service sector. It is essential that employers start taking the needs and interests of these women into account.

The Moscow City Government deemed 2008 the “Year of Family”. Part of this broad year-long initiative involved a competition, *The Best Employer for Working Mothers*. The primary goal of this competition is to evaluate and learn about employers that provide the best work environments for working women with pre-school age children. A complementary goal was to encourage these employers to broaden and sustain these practices. The Moscow City Government plans to make the competition an annual tradition.

### Moscow City Mothers as a Segment of Workforce

One of the main characteristics of mothers of pre-school age children is that they are increasingly eager to work. Modern Russian women are choosing to have children later in life in order, often times, to build a career first. According to the Moscow Statistics Bureau, in 1995, most children were born to 20-24 years old women; in 2005, however, most children were born to 25-29 year old women. Moreover, the number of children born to 30-34 year old women has been increasing from year to year.

Another important characteristic of working mothers of pre-school age children is high mobility in the labor market. Surveys show that a significant proportion of working women with pre-school age children (38%) change their employer after childbirth-related leave. Usually, the most considerable factors in choosing the new employer are:

- Proximity of the new work place to the place of residence;
- Better conditions of labor organization on a new job, such as flexible hours and possibility to have more time off.

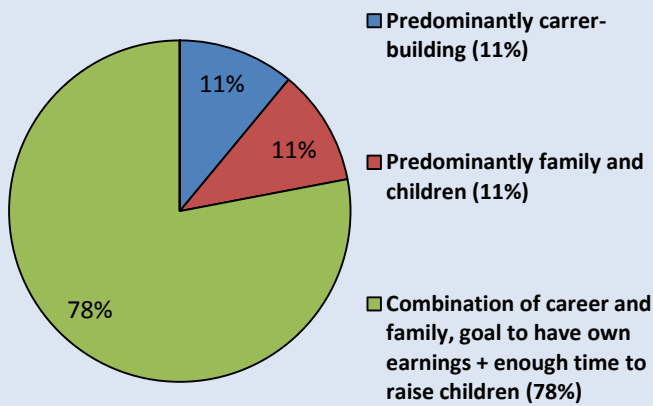
Factors such as higher salary and opportunities for career growth ranked significantly lower among the reasons for choosing a new job. Despite their eagerness to work, new mothers often face discrimination based on employers’ stereotypes about working mothers of young children. Many of these stereotypes are proven wrong by the following data.

### Moscow City Mothers: Life Strategy Choice and Education

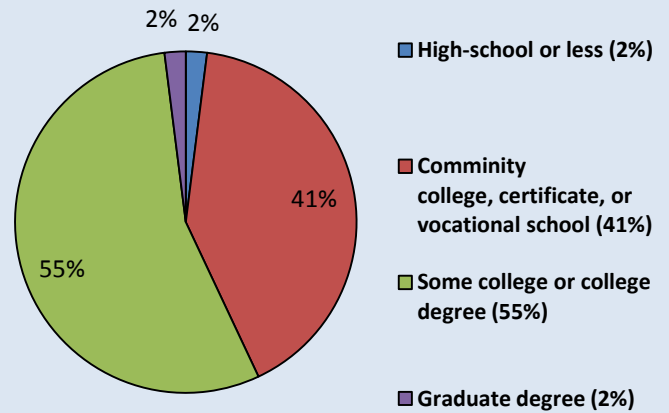
Moscow City women predominantly choose to combine work and family life, as Graph 1 illustrates. Another crucial characteristic of Moscow City women is that, as a segment of the labor force, they are highly educated: almost sixty percent have at least some college education, while only two percent have not completed high school, as shown in Graph 2.



Graph 1: Mothers of Pre-School Age Children: Life Strategy Choice



Graph 2: Women with Pre-school Age Children: Education



Based on a City mothers of pre-school age children, Initiative of the Complex of the Social Sphere of the Moscow City Government

### Promising Strategies to Help Working Mothers in Moscow

While the Labor Codex of Russian Federation protects the rights of pregnant women and mothers of young children, additional efforts are needed to encourage employers to improve labor conditions of working mothers.

The most efficient way to support working mothers through their employers is the **social package**, which includes benefits not required by the law. These social packages vary from employer to employer and across employee categories. For example, social packages for working mothers can include benefits such as medical insurance for mothers and children and summer camp for children. There already exist some promising programs: for instance, some employers provide **individual social packages**, which enable employees to choose from a list of services within a budget limit. This is a favorable strategy, because it allows working mothers to act on their needs and preferences, rather than receive a fixed range of benefits that may or may not have a value to them.

Another strategy is to increase the role of **labor unions**. The rights of unions are protected by the Labor Codex of Russian Federation; they have both rights and authority to transmit the needs and preferences of working mothers to their employers.

### Moscow City Mothers' Preferences

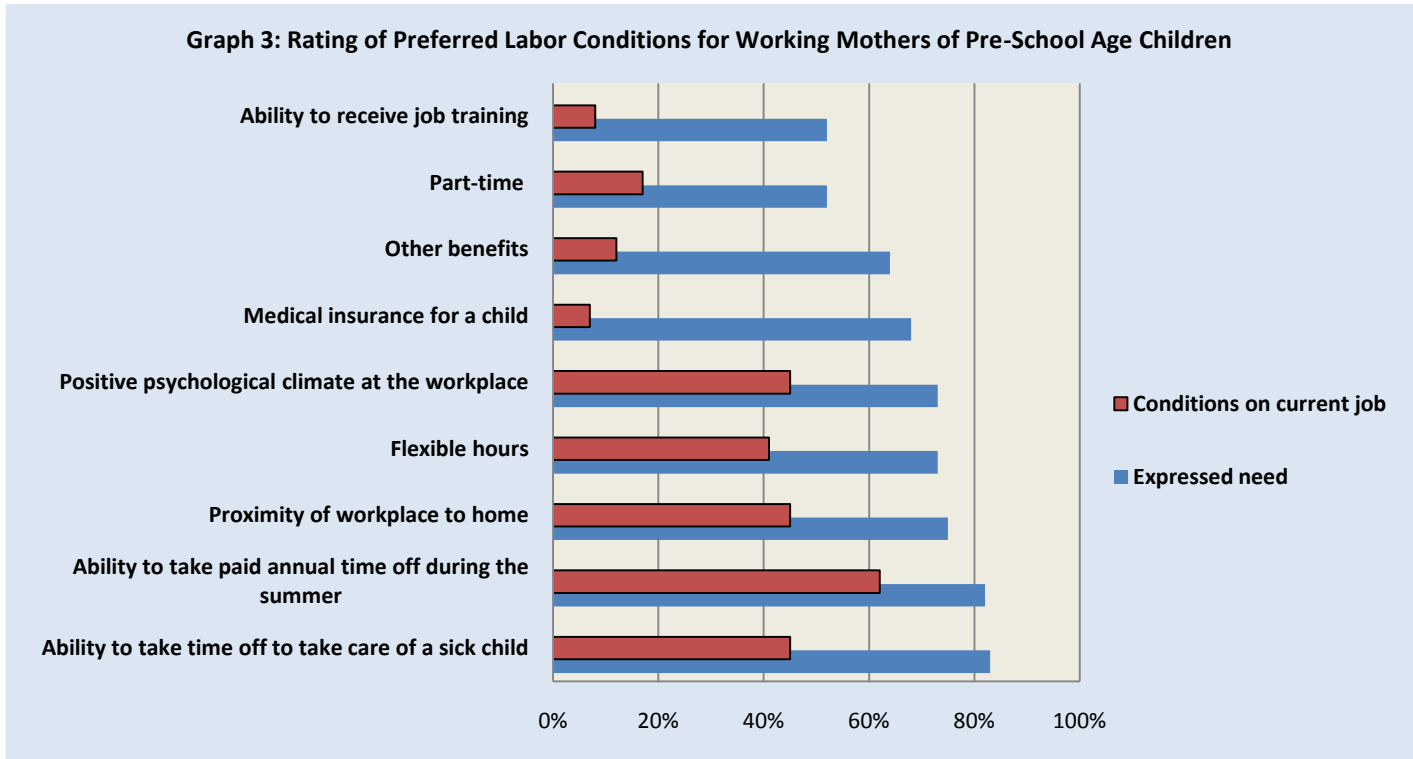
As Graph 3 illustrates, the characteristics that working mothers of young children value the most include:

- 1) Being able to take time off in case of a child's illness in order to take care of a child;
- 2) Being able to take annual time off during the summer, when children are out of school;
- 3) Proximity of workplace to home;
- 4) Flexible hours as opposed to fixed work schedule;
- 5) Favorable psychological atmosphere at the workplace.

More than 70 percent of surveyed working mothers indicated these characteristics as "very important". However, on their current jobs, slightly more than 60 percent of women can take their annual time off during their preferred season; only 45% can take time off to take care of a sick child (even though this is a constitutionally protected right).



Graph 3: Rating of Preferred Labor Conditions for Working Mothers of Pre-School Age Children



(In percent of surveyed mothers who indicated each particular category as “important” or “very important”, and either present or absent on their current job)  
Based on a survey of 1,225 Moscow City mothers of pre-school age children, Initiative of the Complex of the Social Sphere of the Moscow City Government

### City Wide Competition Fosters Implementation of Promising Practices

The 2008 competition, *The Best Employer for Working Mothers*, helped identify and encourage employers that are most attentive to the needs of working mothers. The winners include two construction companies, a plant, a social center, a shoe factory, and a Moscow City office of Microsoft Corporation - Microsoft Rus. The rivalry helped initiate the public discourse about the problems of working women with pre-school age children, drew attention to their needs, and promoted market competition to the benefit of working mothers.