

POPULATION OF LITHUANIA IN 1990-2000

SUMMARY

General trends of demographic development. Rapid and essential political, socio-economic changes of the recent years have discontinued the long-term demographic trends and predetermined the formation of the new ones. Some of them are short-termed fluctuations of demographic trends leading to a new phase, others signify the emergence of a new demographic behaviour, which has been taking a firmer hold every year, still others are the expression of negative trends which have persisted for years and become intensified in the conditions of economic recession. At the beginning of 1990s, all demographic processes acquired new features: fertility dropped suddenly, mortality rose, migration flows took an opposite to the previously dominant trend – the long-year net-immigration of the Soviet period was replaced by substantial net-emigration. Since the mid-1990s the trends of demographic processes have changed slightly: fertility has been declining further, albeit at a slower rate; according to the official statistics, mortality has started decreasing; the volumes of immigration and emigration have become slight and correlated with the size of the flows, net-migration – close to zero.

Size and age composition of population. The above demographic changes are responsible for the decreasing number of population which started in 1992. Over 1992-2000, the number of population went down by 54 thou. people, totalling 3693 thou. at the beginning of 2001 (according to estimation). However, the data of the census carried out on 6 April 2001 show a considerably lower number of the nation's population – 3491 thou.

The form of age-sex pyramid of the beginning of 2001 clearly shows that the composition of population by age is typical for an industrial society. The age-sex pyramid illustrates a considerably advanced process of population ageing, both from the “bottom” and the “top”. Particularly rapid ageing of the population from the “bottom” has been observed in the last decade. In 2001, the proportion of children under 14 accounted for 19.1% and population aged 60+ – 18.8%.

In Lithuania, as in other post-communist countries, a particularly broad gap between the indicators of male and female ageing was evident in the 1990s. A considerably higher proportion of women than men live to a very advanced age which upsets the sex ratio in the oldest age groups, i.e. feminisation of old age has been taking place.

Fertility and family. The trends of fertility and family institution changes have been acquiring essentially new features in the 1990s. During the last decade Lithuania has been rapidly adopting family transformation features typical for the advanced European countries. Marriages and childbearing are being postponed for a later age, consensual unions and extra-marital births are becoming more common. The traditional family pattern is dying away and the new one is gaining strength.

In Lithuania, fertility has been gradually declining since 1990. The number of births went down from 56.7 thou. in 1990 to 34.1 thou. in 2000. Total fertility rate correspondingly decreased from 2 to 1.26. This is an indication of a lost demographic balance, i.e. failure to ensure the replacement of generations. The decrease of fertility is mostly the result of the lowering number of the first and the second births.

For a long time until the early 1990s, extra-marital births accounted for 7% of all births in Lithuania, however, in the last decade the rate started growing and reached 22.6% in 2000.

Periods of economic recession are usually marked by a decline in fertility. However, the survey *Family and Fertility in Lithuania*¹ has demonstrated that the above trend is also influenced by the basic changes of the society. All these factors predetermine a rapid change in fertility attitudes and norms. In the 1990s the number of wanted children dropped significantly. According to the findings of the 1988 and 1990 surveys² the number of wanted children at that time was close to three (on average 2.8), in 1995 and in 2001 the indicator was close to two (2.1 and 2.2).

The *Family and Fertility Survey* registered the emergence of the new for Lithuania fertility attitudes, which are no news for the developed western countries: the increasing number of people who do not want to have any children at all. In Lithuania the spread of this attitude has been observed in the very youngest cohorts. As many as 10% of the Lithuanian youth aged 18-19 do not want to have any children. This might signify the start in the spread of voluntary childlessness.

Recent-year family changes in Lithuania were first manifested through the decrease of marriage. The number of marriages went down from 36.3 thou. in 1990 to 16.9 thou. in 2000. Crude marriage rate decreased from 9.8 to 4.6, respectively. The findings of the survey *Family and Fertility in Lithuania* show that this indicator is one of the indices of the basic, recently started family changes in Lithuania. According to the data of the survey the behaviour of the youth concerning family formation has been strongly affected by the recent-year conditions. Marriages which had been “rejuvenating” throughout the post-war period, at the beginning of the 1990s started “ageing”. Increasingly fewer people start families upon reaching marriageable age, marriages are postponed for a later age.

An increasingly larger number of the youngest marriageable-age men and women live in consensual unions. In Lithuania, the spread of the alternative way of family life has of late acquired the proportion of an explosion: in every successively younger cohort, more and more individuals start living together by cohabiting. This is, in fact, a new phenomenon which in the Catholic culture-dominated Lithuania was,

¹ The survey *Family and Fertility in Lithuania* is an integral part of the international project *Fertility and Family Surveys in the Region of ECE Countries* coordinated by the United Nations Population Activities Unit of the Economic Commission for Europe. The survey has been carried out by over 20 countries. In Lithuania the survey was carried out by the Demographic Research Center of the Lithuanian Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, the fieldwork was conducted by *Baltic Surveys Ltd.* in 1994-1995, during which 5000 people aged 18-49 were surveyed.

² The survey was carried out by the Department of Demography of the Institute of Economics of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. In 1988, 2880 employed people were surveyed, in 1990 – 1540 people aged 18 and over.

until recently, negligible in scope and low in prestige. However, uncertainty for one's future which became evident in the period of economic recession, strengthening of market relations, a deepening individualisation, lead towards the avoidance of marital bonds and encourage the creation of alternatives to the traditional marriage. The greatest changes in the nuptiality behaviour are observed among the youth born in the early seventies. As the data of the survey show, about 16% of men and women born in 1971-1975 had lived in consensual unions by the age of 25, whereas in the cohort twenty years older, only about 6-8% men and women had had an experience of such a union by the age of 25.

Although divorce is frequent in Lithuania, until the recent changes its prevalence was quite stable. Crude divorce rates was fluctuating in the range of 2.8-4.1 in the 1990s.

Reproductive health. The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994 (convened by the United Nations), put an emphasis on the regulation of fertility, reproductive health and sexual well-being of the population. In Lithuania, issues of reproductive health have just come up.

In soviet time, abortion used to be one of the key methods of family planning and the number of abortions was large. Although recently undoubtedly positive changes have been observed in the reproductive behaviour of the Lithuanian population, the rate of abortion is still much higher than in the west European countries. In 1988, there were 38 abortions per 1000 of Lithuanian women aged 15-49 years, and in year 2000 – 17.2 (however, in Western Germany, for example, there were 6.4 abortions per 1000 women aged 15-49 years in 1977). It should be also noted that statistics on abortions in Lithuania has never been exact and the official abortion indicators are frequently lower than actually they are.

The key factor conditioning a relatively large number of abortions until today, has been insufficient use of modern contraceptives, with customary reliance on traditional methods of preventing pregnancy. One of the reasons for an inadequate use of modern methods of fertility regulation is lack of information on effective contraceptives and unsatisfactory sexual education. Until today, Lithuania has not worked out a national programme of family planning and sexual education.

According to the statistics, prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (syphilis, gonorrhoea) has been decreasing in Lithuania; still, the available data do not show the actual picture. After the compulsory treatment was given up, part of the people do not seek medical services at all, while many approach private practitioners for treatment of sexually transmitted diseases in an anonymous way, and such cases are not subject to official registration.

As elsewhere, considerable concern for the public and the medical community of Lithuania is caused by the increasing AIDS incidence. In 1988, the first case of the infection was registered in Lithuania. At the beginning of July 2001, the total number of AIDS-infected patients reached 312. The disease has been diagnosed to 43 persons, 21 persons have died from AIDS.

In the future, the number of abortions and incidence rate of sexually transmitted diseases will greatly depend on the effectiveness of sexual education and the overall public attitude towards reproductive health. Effectiveness of sexual education and the level of effort attached to the reproductive health will predetermine the capability of the society to mitigate the risk of AIDS spread.

Mortality. The growth of mortality which had started from the 1960s and had affected, specifically, young and middle-age male population rose to an alarming rate in 1990-1994. This predetermined a decrease in life expectancy at birth of men which in those years fell by 4.1 years (from 66.9 in 1989 to 62.8 in 1994), and also of women – by 1.4 years (correspondingly from 76.3 to 74.9). However, in 1995 a turning point occurred towards decrease in the mortality trends. In 1994, 46.5 thou. people died, in 1995 – 45.3 thou., in 2000 – 38.9 thou. people. Life expectancy at birth started growing, reaching 67.6 years for men and 77.9 years for women in 2000. Still, these indicators were calculated on the basis of the estimated population size. The use of census data for the updating of indicators should make corrections in the changes of mortality indicators: they should become significantly less positive.

Mortality rates of the Lithuanian population is in direct correlation with the structural development of death causes. Since the 1950s, the specifics of the dynamics of life expectancy at birth has been predetermined by the development of mortality from cardiovascular diseases. In the soviet period and at the beginning of social transformations (1967-1968 – 1992-1993), mortality from this group of causes of death was rising, with an exception of a short period of fluctuations in the mid-1990s. In 1994-2000, male and female mortality from cardiovascular diseases was declining, nevertheless, according to the 2000 statistical data, male mortality from this cause was still higher than in 1965.

The dynamics of cause of death, which is second in importance, cancer, is characterised by greater stability: in the 1990s mortality from cancer was growing slowly (except for 1995-1998). At the beginning and middle of the social transformation period, mortality from infectious and respiratory and digestive system diseases was also rising slowly, but later death rate from these causes was stable or slightly fluctuating. The latter causes of death have a lesser impact on the rate of overall mortality.

In the last decade of the 20th century, contradictory changes in external causes of death took place in Lithuania. In 1990-1994, mortality due to external causes was increasing rapidly. This group of causes of death and mortality from cardiovascular diseases predetermined, in fact, a rapid growth in the overall mortality of the period. Significant fluctuations of the indicators are observed in mortality from suicide, homicide, traffic accidents and poisoning. During the period of social transformations, the rate of suicide in Lithuania rose nearly twice and reached a critical level – by this indicator Lithuania ranked first among the countries of Europe (however, data reliability should also be taken into consideration). Regardless of the positive changes at the end of the last decade, mortality level of Lithuanian population due to external causes is much higher than 40 years ago and in comparison with the European Union countries.

Migration. The evolutionary nature of demographic development which had been typical for Lithuania before the last decade was discontinued, notably, by political changes. Upon the re-establishment of independence, departures to the CIS countries increased significantly, while the arrivals subsided. Re-emigration, mostly to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, reached its peak in 1992 and went down rapidly in subsequent years. At present, a practically stable situation of immigration and emigration flows between Lithuania and the CIS countries has been achieved which, in fact, has no influence on the population changes of the country. In 2000 net-immigration with the CIS countries totalled, all in all, 395 people.

At the outset of the recent changes when the "open-door" migration policy was introduced, emigration to the western countries was slightly higher, since the majority of the Jewish population departed from Lithuania. However of late, legal emigration to the west is not profuse. In 2000, 812 people departed. Thus, the emigration flows, which at the start of the recent changes were responsible for the decrease of the population, presently have an insignificant effect on the population dynamics.

The immigration flow is dominated by the ethnic Lithuanians and the so-called Russian speaking population – Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians. The Russian-speakers also comprise an absolute majority of the emigrants from Lithuania. Therefore it is not surprising that most of the emigrants from Lithuania depart for Russia. Emigration (legal) to the west is not profuse, most people depart for the USA, Germany, Israel.

From 1992, a new phenomenon emerged in Lithuania – transit of illegal migrants through Lithuania. The number of illegal migrants which was growing fast until 1996, has of late decreased significantly. The composition of the migrants has also changed: at the beginning of the 1990s the flows were dominated by the representatives of Asia and the Middle East, while at the end of the decade more and more illegal migrants from the CIS countries were detained. Besides, as the surveys show, Lithuania has been turning from a transit country into the country of destination for illegal migrants.

Since 1997, another category of migrants, i.e. refugees and asylum seekers have appeared. They are the persons who in the face of threat for their freedom or life are forced to fly their home country and apply for help elsewhere. In this category, the majority of migrants are from the Asian countries. However, as the course of actions has shown, very few asylum seekers fall within the category of refugees; asylum seeking is frequently motivated by economic reasons.

Most of the emigration of the population from Lithuania, notably, short-time departures to foreign countries is also motivated by economic reasons. Exact data on labour migration from Lithuania is not available, however indirect evaluations show that the amount of this type of emigration is considerable. The emigration is stimulated by a large network of migrant recruiting agencies and positive public attitudes towards illegal employment abroad. Thus it is quite natural that the migration potential is sizable – nearly a third of the population would like to emigrate or find a temporary job abroad. The youth hold extremely positive attitudes towards migration. A number of factors

determine whether these attitudes become materialised – activities of intermediaries, development of the informal migration network, etc. Still, the decisive role in the process is played by the socio-economic development of Lithuania.

Employment. During the last decade, employment aspects of the Lithuanian population were progressing in highly complicated circumstances. On the one hand these were political and economic changes, on the other – transition to market economy. Not only economic priorities were changing, in fact, the status of an individual in the labour market changed as well. Since the transformation of the economy was overwhelming and very intensive, the employment structure was changed radically, too.

In Lithuania, the ongoing economic and social transformation made an impact on the development of labour market. The labour market was developing through the restructuring of economics, deepening processes of privatisation, formation of the mechanisms of market economy and new labour relations. An intensive social and economic transformation conditioned the emergence of unemployment, a new phenomenon in our society.

Until the middle of 1999, the level of registered unemployment was not high. As recently as mid-1997, average level of unemployment was only 6.4 per cent, which was slightly above the natural level of unemployment. However in 2001, as a result of economic crisis, unemployment exceeded 12 per cent (in February 2001 – 13.2 per cent, in November 2001 – 12 per cent). Upon the increase of unemployment, differentiation of its level by area was increasing as well. According to the statistics of the Labour Exchange of Lithuania, in early 2001 the lowest percentage of unemployment was in the district of Prienai (6.2 per cent), the highest – in Druskininkai (27 per cent) and the district of Akmenė (24 per cent).

Likewise in the western Europe, the problem of youth unemployment is topical in Lithuania as well. In demographic terms, the youth is a particularly important group of the population, since the development prospects of employment and the reproductive processes of the population are highly dependent on the possibility of the youth to consolidate in the labour market. A high level of youth unemployment involves considerable economic and social costs. Unemployed youth provokes illegal and unofficial activities, deforms the reproductive function of the population and increases social tension.

Apart from the highly topical problem of youth unemployment, there is another social group important from the standpoint of labour market, i.e. the elderly people. From 1995, the proportion of the unemployed of older age started rapidly growing in Lithuania, particularly after the retirement age was extended (economically active period was prolonged). This shows that labour market policy should put an extra emphasis on this particular age group. Their possibilities to participate in the labour market are related to the extension of the retirement age. Spanning the bottom line of the retirement age and the extension of the economically active period of the population will, undoubtedly, become important in economic terms.