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Birth rates and reproductive behaviour in the population of the Slovak Republic

Pedagogika Rodziny 2/2, 225-232

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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1. Introduction

The birth rate of the Slovak Republic is alarmingly low for more than a decade, the number of children born per annum has been even lower than one percent of the total number of the Slovak population for years. During more than the last ten years the number of children younger than 15 years by 300 thousand, has decreased to one quarter.

The total fertility rate, number of children born to a woman over her lifetime, dropped below 1.3 and it is one of the lowest rates within the European Union. If the population of Slovakia in recent years didn't decline and if this won't happen in the following years, it is the consequence of the prolonged life expectancy and growing immigration in the Slovak Republic. However, despite of increasing population, development prognosis show, that Slovakia will experience drop of population after 2025 and its extensive decline till 2050. With high probability Slovakia can't count on achieving fertility rate that would maintain the population in the current numbers.

The number of people over 65 years is expected to continue its slide from 12 percent to 19 percent in 2025 and to 30 percent in 2050. Economic dependency ratio (number of people under 15 or above 65 per 100 of those who are between 15 and 64) supposed to increase from 38,9 to 51,9 percent in 2025 and to 76,1 in 2050. This demographic development poses risks for economic and social development of Slovakia. (according to: Kde sú tie deti Slovenska. Slovak National Council's Declaration of the demographic future of Slovakia).

2. Birth rates in the Slovak Republic

The demographic development in Slovakia shows phenomena that don't have similarity in the country's history and claim attention of the political institutions

and the entire Slovak public. Birth rate in the Slovak Republic has been dramatically low for over a decade. This birth rate drop has no parallel in the past of Slovakia.

In 1960, 90 thousand live-born children were born in Slovakia. In years 1976-1969 this number dropped below 80 thousand per annum, so that it could increase again. At the turn of 1970s and 1980s the birth rate reached its highest level when the number of live-born children came up to about 100 thousand per annum. In 1980s the birth rate experienced a minor decline. In 1986 it decreased to a level of 90 thousand, in 1991 to 80 thousand and in 1994 to 70 thousand. The birth rate dropped below 60 thousand for the first time in 1997, while it was constantly decreasing. The birth rate reached an all-time low in 2002 when the number of live-born children fell to 50 841. In the following years the birth rate slightly increased. In year 2005 it achieved the number of children 54 430 and notes a stagnant tendency ever since. In years 2006 and 2007 the birth rate did not reach the level of the previous year. This low birth rate is all the more dramatic since the “baby-boom” generation of the late 1970s, so-called “Husak’s children” attained parental age. This generation has very few children.

Substantially reduced birth rate causes alterations in the age structure of the Slovak population. According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic decreased markedly the number of children under 15 over a decade. In 1996 represented the number of this age group 1 164 897, whereas in 2006 only 870 622, which is one quarter.

Total fertility rate, number of children that are expected to be born to a women of child-bearing age, in Slovakia is 1.3 and is one of the lowest among the EU countries. The European Union as a whole has also a very low total fertility rate of 1.5. It is known that the total fertility rate should not fall below 2,1, if the population intends to keep its actual numbers.

The prognosis count on a increase of the total fertility rate not greater than 1,5 by the year 2025. The most important fact from 2007 about the total fertility rate is: “With a high probability can Slovakia not count on maintenance of current numbers anymore”.

In the debates about the long-lasting low birth rate is being discussed the danger of dying out. It is to be mentioned that in spite of reduced birth rate the population of Slovakia does not fall because of two factors. One of them is the prolonged life expectancy of Slovakia’s population, the second one is the migration in the Slovak Republic. Migration nexus, i. e. the difference between the number of residents who entered a locality and those who left it, registered a large increase. At the present time it is more accurate to talk about the aging population rather than its extinction. This aging is already in the progress and it will be one of the most intensive in Europe.

In the discussions about the massive decline of the birth rate is necessary to take into consideration the significant difference between the number of children that people have and the number of children that people would like to have. There are sociological researches in Slovakia and the whole Europe showing that people consider the ideal number of children essentially higher than they practically have. This factum proves impossibility of settling the matter with a simple statement that people have as many children as they really want.

Table 1. Avarage – **general** – ideal number of children for the men and for the women in SK by age

	Men	Women
15-24 years	2,01	2,01
25-39 years	2,11	2,10
40-54 years	2,12	2,24
55+ years	2,39	2,42

Source: Gerbery D.: *Sociálny štát a podpora rodín: skúsenosti a perspektívy*. www Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny.

Table 2. Avarage – **personal** – ideal number of children for the men and for the women in SK by age

	Men	Women
15-24 years	1,92	1,95
25-39 years	2,13	2,08
40-54 years	2,14	2,29
55+ years	2,34	2,60

Source: D. Gerbery: *Sociálny štát a podpora rodín: skúsenosti a perspektívy*. www Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny.

According to the results of the research is obvious that besides presented „general“ and „personal“ ideal number of children, the higher age group in both categories considers to be ideal a higher number of children. It concerns people:

- who have smaller chances of having children,
- who consider the number of they own children,
- who inclinate to traditional way of thinking about the Slovak multiple children family.

With the demographic prognosis of Slovakia's population deals the Demographic Research Centre of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic that in 2002 issued "Prognosis of Population Development of the Slovak Republic by the year 2050" (in original: "Prognóza vývoja obyvateľstva Slovenskej republiky do roku 2050") and in December 2007 published its updated version "Prognosis of Population Development of the Slovak Republic by the year 2025" (in original: "Prognóza vývoja obyvateľstva Slovenskej republiky do roku 2025").

According to this prognosis, the impact of prolonged life expectancy together with the migration factor, it will be above the low birth rate factor and therefore the Slovakia's population will grow until 2025 by about 100 thousand, to approximately 5,5 million. However, in year 2020 the number of live-born children is supposed to drop below the number of deaths. In 2025, despite of migration, will the population of Slovakia fall rapidly. By the year 2050 is it predicted to go down below 5 million. This decline is considerable because of its occurrence in spite of the hundred thousands of migrants expected to arrive in Slovakia during the next decades.

Demographic structure of Slovakia's population could be described as follows: The population has few children already but still small number of pensioners, which reflects a short-term economic advantage.

Risks of the mentioned demographic development of Slovakia's population:

In light of medium- and long-term prognosis it is assumed that the long-lasting and low birth rate could be the cause of serious problems. On the number of economic active population depends **the sustainability of pension and medical security**.

Low birth rate of today leads to labour scarce economy in twenty years, namely lower income from the Social Insurance Agency and consequently lower rental income guaranteed by the government.

In the field of health security occurs the same situation. Higher number of pensioners will lead to an increased number of the medical service users, at the same time the low birth rate will cause a drop in the number of payers for the medical services. This could eventuate in sliding the medical security level of Slovakia's population.

Further risks of population, besides deteriorating **macroeconomic indicators of the Slovak economy**, is: **rising demand for social services** of elderly people as consequence of ageing process, **increased pressure on intensive migration from abroad** to the Slovak Republic and other factors that reflect in economic, political, social, cultural and other dimensions of life of Slovakia's population.

2. The European Union and Slovakia

The demographic factors of the Slovak Republic are **similar to those of the EU**, however, the demographic crisis afflicted the EU a few years earlier than Slovakia, that achieved the EU rates very fast. Other countries of the European Union vary only in a different state of the this trend. On 21. February 2008 passed the European Parliament a Resolution on the demographic future of Europe. According to it is **migration one of the demographic crisis solution**.

(modified according to: Explanatory report to the Declaration of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the demographic future of Slovakia)

3. Research results – Reproductive behaviour, attitude towards the children, birth of children, marriage planning

This part of article deals with the research results obtained within the research project pursued in years 1997–1999 in the Czech Republic. Considering the similar development conditions in both countries (used to be Czechoslovakia till 1993) is it possible to apply the results of this research also in Slovakia.

The majority of the examined population considers a family with two children to be ideal (73% of respondents), one child desires 11% of the respondents and three children is an ideal number to approximately 23% of respondents.

The children as a value were varied as follows: 2/3 (72%) of women out of the total number of the respondents perceive the children as a joy of life (only 57% men). For the demographic development of society is important that only 56% of the young people consider children as the only joy of life. Every third woman and 47% men responded that the children are a great restriction for the parents.

Higher age of married couples²⁴ and higher age of women giving birth for the first time are another factors creating the so called “generation gap” for the coming 20 years.

In 1996 the ideal age of the marriage was considered to be 26,1 years for men and 22,6 years for women.

According to the research in 1996, the first child should be ideally born to a women at the age of 24 and to a man at the age of 27,6.

The study in years 1997–1999 shows that young people in the order to have children need: self-contained home (93,5% of respondents), financial security (83,3%), family and partnership background (32,1%), employment (30,0%),

²⁴ According to Pavlík Z. till the end of 1980s was in the Czechoslovakia a full marriage rate (contracting of marriage with a marriage certificate) and people entered the marriage mostly (90% of young man and 96% of young women) in young age.

about 10% maturity and responsibility as well as family support and help. Other conditions such as government benefits and help, health, household equipment and perspective in the future were important to 3,0% to 9,0% of respondents.

It is assumed that contemporary results of a similar research nowadays would move the numbers further from the “traditional” founded in the research in 1996 and in years 1997–1999.

Lower number of children, higher parental age at the first child's birth, creating of conditions to start a family a. o. is to be seen as a responsibility growth of young people, on the other hand as a reflection of the life conditions and family living in their own country in comparison to other more economic developed countries. A significant role play good living and unwillingness to sacrifice themselves for children in the terms of not having barriers in building a career ladder and in sense of meeting their own life ideas and expectations a.o. In the research (1997-1999) was the relevance of life planning on a 5-point scale (1 = the least, 5 = the most) evaluated with following results: to have an interesting and useful job (4,1 men, 4,0 women), to live for their own family and children (3,7 men, 4,0 women), to have sufficiency and good living (3,8 men, 3,6 women), to have a peaceful life without risks and tension (3,5 men, 3,8 women), to have success and recognition (3,6 men, 3,5 women), to have time for interests and hobbies (3,6 men, 3,6 women) and others with lower ranking (research results from year 1996 and 1997–1997 – likely until 1999 modified according to: Fialová, L. – Hamplová, D. – Kučera, M. – Vymětalová, S.: *Představy mladých lidí o manželství a rodičovství*. Prague: 1997).

Challenges to avoid the developing problems in connection with ageing population and to eliminate already existing problems in the field of social work and in other socioscientific fields of human care:

a) In relation to an individual (client):

- to help individuals, families to recognize their own social potential
- to support development of this potencial
- to predict the barriers of development and the realisation of self- potencial
- to support the improvement of self-responsibility and responsibility for others (for own and their social status)
- to support the improvement of social responsibility of an individual, group, community (towards the community in which the individual is living in), including improvement of the responsibility for reproductive behaviour supporting birth rate with respect for the eminent private and free determination of parents in certain areas.

b) In relation to the helping professions and the academic environment:

- to bring up knowledgeable professionals in the field of social work, eventually in other helping professions

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- to predict the social development, possible critical situations and intuitive focus the fields of study on educating professionals at least 5 years in advance (time of completing a university education)
 - to reflect the developing multiculturalism of social environment of Slovakia' citizens in time of study preparation, student practice and profession implementation
 - to support the increase of respect and reverence to parenthood and family
 - to support the keeping and maintaining of traditional values and customs of the Slovak population in field of individual and social life
 - to take the initiative in adequate social and other helping and supporting services for people dependent on such help, but above all for the seniors and so avoid the decline in level of taking care of this population group.

Wskaźniki urodzeń i zachowania rozrodcze w populacji Republiki Słowackiej

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia wyniki badań i analiz statystycznych dotyczących wskaźnika urodzin i zachowań reprodukcyjnych wśród populacji Republiki Słowacji. Skupiono w nim uwagę na różnych „nowych” typach zachowań młodego pokolenia, które stara się zapewnić ekonomiczną stabilizację w dziedzinie wynagrodzeń, opieki medycznej i wzrostu naturalnego na Słowacji.

Słowa kluczowe: przyrost naturalny, zachowania rozrodcze, ludność Republiki Słowackiej.

Streszczenie

The contribution deals with research outputs and statistic observations of the birth rate and reproductive behaviour of the Slovak Republic population. Attention is focused on a different “new” behaviours of the young generation, which is providing economic strenght for sustainability of its pension and medical security and natural popoulation reproduction in Slovakia.

Keywords: birth rate, reproductive behaviour, population of the Slovak Republic

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