

RECENT EVOLUTIONS AND TENDENCIES CONCERNING THE ROMANIAN POPULATION: A CHALLENGE FOR CENTRAL AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Andrei STĂNOIU*

Abstract

After December 1989, Romanian population experienced a sharp decline of its birth rate (as a result of abolishing the very restrictive law about abortion and worsening economic situation) and a rising rate of external migration. The main results from the demographic point of view were a continuous diminution in the population number and a process of population ageing. There are, also, a lot of economic and social consequences (on the level and structure of the labour force, on the medical and social assistance system, on the educational and cultural system, on the professional structure of the population, on family and its status, structure and function and so on). We can not ignore, also, possible serious consequences on nation security and the relations of our country with other countries.

All of these represent real challenges for workers in local and central administration. They have to find solutions to solve the problems which appear and to diminish as much as possible the negative effects of these evolutions.

Key words: *rate birth, fertility rate, natural growth of the population, migration growth, demographic transition.*

Introduction

The transition period, which came after the 1989 December events, encountered profound changes in all the domains of social life in our country: starting with the economic, social and political life and finishing with the spiritual and moral one.

The complex connections and interactions between the population subsystem and the other subsystems of the global social system, as well as the multiple determinations and the social, political and cultural implications characteristic of the demographic phenomena and processes have generated profound and dramatic changes as to the demographic situation of our country. These changes may affect the whole future evolution of our country, and to have serious sometimes predictable consequences over all the social life sectors in Romania, as well as over the position and role of the state within the international context.

The changes that have already appeared, the ones we expect to come in the future, as well as the major risks associated to these changes should be a main concern for all the responsible factors existing at a central and local level, whose role is also to find solutions for mitigating these dangerous demographic evolutions and diminishing their destructive and disorganized effects.

Adopting new measures and initiating new actions also implies a good understanding of the topic in discussion.

Literature review

We have take into consideration the valuable contributions brought by the specialists in the field. First of all we should mention Academician Vladimir Trebici, who, immediately after 1990,

* Associate Professor, Ph.D., Dean of the Social and Administrative Sciences Faculty, "Nicolae Titulescu" University.

was the first to point out at the dangerous demographic evolutions that started to manifest and suggested that a new demographic policy should be adopted in relationship with the new social, economic and political conditions in our country. The remarkable study – “Is a new demographic policy necessary to be adopted in Romania?” – appeared in the magazine “Social Research Works”, nr. 7/1994. Academician Vladimir Trebici was the one who created the Centre for Demographic Studies within the Academy of Romania, a centre which inherits his name and whose role was to stimulate and promote demographic research and to suggest solutions for important decisions and ways of dealing with demographic problems. Professor Vasile Ghețău, the present director of the centre founded by Vladimir Trebici, has analyzed – as his mentor once did – the demographic situations in our country, bringing into evidence how serious our demographic problems are and mentioning the necessity to adopt urgent and efficient measures to at least reduce their extremely serious consequences. One should make reference to the following remarkable studies written by professor Ghețău: “Transition and its Demographic Impact”, the “Social Research Work” magazine, nr. 1/1994, “The Decrease of the Population and Demographic Ageing – One of the Great Contempt Acts in the face of Romania at the Beginning of the XXIst century”, in “Population and Society”, “Supplement”, nr. 1/2001, and “The Demographic Decline and the Future of Romanian Population. A perspective from 2007 over the Romanian population in the XXIst century”, Editura Alpha, MDN, 2007.

Besides these authors one can add others like: Tr. Rotariu, M. Țarcă, V. Sora, I. Hristache, C. Mihăescu, who managed to accomplish profound, scientifically valuable studies on the demographic problems of Romania.

Unfortunately, the results of the numerous research works and the alarming signals pointed out by these works did not generate a significant effect on decision factors. These were either ignored or revealed lack of professionalism and amateurship. The few measures that were adopted were sporadic and quite ineffective.

What do the changes recorded at demographic level in our country consist of?

The first and the most spectacular change was the decrease of the total number of the population. Thus, if on July 1st 1990, the Romanian population was of 23, 206, 720 inhabitants, then the census accomplished on January 7th 1992 revealed a total number of 22, 810, 035, next on March 18th the population number decreased at 21, 680, 974, and on January 1st 2006, the number of inhabitants reached the level of 21, 610, 200 inhabitants. Thus, within 16 years, the Romanian population decreased with about 1.6 million inhabitants, respectively 9.3%. This decrease was **mainly generated by the dramatic decrease of the birth rate** from 16‰ alive born inhabitants in 1989 to 11.9‰ inhabitants in 1992, and to 9.7‰ inhabitants in 2002 and 10.4‰ inhabitants in 2006. This decrease was determined by a series of factors like: legislative factors (the repealing of the laws that prohibited abortion), social and economic factors (the decrease of the living standard, the unemployment generated by the closing of factories, the profound crisis of dwellings, a feeling of uncertainty as to the personal future of the individual etc.), medical and sanitary factors (the family planning programmes, the contraceptive methods existing today at an accessible price and the propaganda used to encourage their usage), demographic factors (reaching the age of maximum fertility of the population born between 1970 and 1984), cultural and value factors (the collapse of the former system of norms and values, including the family values, one of its components being represented by the reproductive behavior, which is clearly influenced by the foreign pattern, even if this behavior is not realistic enough or clearly outlined).

It is difficult to establish with precision the extent to which the above mentioned factors is responsible for the sudden decline registered as to the birth rate. This process can be also influenced by the so-called demographic transition specific for most of the socially and economically developed countries.

Reproductive behavior has recorded other significant changes, among which one can mention: the increase of the number of primogenitures from 42% in 1990 to 50 and 54% in the following years and the decrease of the alive born of the second geniture and especially of the third or more geniture; the increase of the number of women that become mother at a middle age; the decrease of the fertility index (from 2.2 in 1989 to 1.5 in 1992 and 1.3 in 2002 up to the present); the decrease of the rate of weddings (from 7.7% in 1989 to 6.6% in 2006); the decrease if the abortion rates (from 177.6 ‰ women and 3154,4 ‰ newly born alive babies in 1990 to 29‰ women and 736‰ newly born alive babies in 2006). Although the abortion rate is still high (above 60,000 in 2006), still this is incomparably smaller than it was in 1990, when more than 992,000 abortions were made. This determined an important number of companies to adopt different contraceptive means to control fertility and avoid unwanted pregnancy.

The second factor that contributed – to a lesser extent however – to the decrease of the population is the increase of the mortality rate, whose level oscillated between 10.7‰ in 1990, 11.6 ‰ in 1992, 12.4 ‰ in 2002 and 12.1 ‰ in 2006.

As a consequence generated by the evolution of the two components of the natural movement of the population, the natural increase recorded a decrease tendency, becoming negative ever since 1992 and having values that oscillate between the mentioned level and a maximum of -2.7% in 2002 (at present it is of -1.9‰).

Finally, **a third factor responsible for the decrease of the population** is represented by external migration and, especially the sold of external migration. This sold had dimensions that varied between a maximum level of -42.558 persons in 1991 and a minimum level of + 429 persons in 2001. At present it has reached a level of about – 7300 persons. As far as this migration type is concerned, one has to make several observations:

a) the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics concerning the number of immigrants do not reflect the amplitude of this phenomenon, and this is so because of the ambiguity that characterizes the criteria used for defining external immigration. The most likely situation is that the real level of external immigration is higher than the one recorded by statistics.

b) even if we accept the data as being accurate, the level of the external immigration sold has surpassed the level of the natural increase of the population (except the hardly acceptable situation recorded in 2001), which indicates a substantial contribution to the decrease of the population number.

The second major change has been represented by the process of demographic ageing which is more and more prominent. As a consequence the older population has numerically increased, while the younger population has substantially decreased. Thus, the population aged 60 and more than 60 has increased from 15.6% in 1990 to 16.58 in 1992, 19.19% in 2002 and to 19.36 % in 2006. At the same time, the number of citizens aged less than 15 years old has decreased from 23.07% to 22.39% in 1992, 17.34 in 2002 and 15.60% in 2006.

The third important change was the modification of the internal migration flows. On the one hand, the size of the migration growth is changing on the two existing residential levels. For the urban area this growth evolves from + 521.772 persons in 1990 to +74.700 in 1992, -24.696 in 2002 and -21.537 in 2006. For the rural area, the evolution is uncertain: there is an evolution from -521.422 persons in 1990 to -74.707 in 1992, +24.696 in 2002 and +20.527 persons in 2006.

This evolution was mainly determined by unemployment which affected an important number of persons coming from the rural areas and settled in the urban zone. This evolution is also revealed by the dynamics of the migration flows: rural – urban and urban – rural. If in 1990 the percentage of the persons migrating from the rural area into the urban one was of 69.82% of the total number of migrants and the percentage of the people migrating from the urban to the rural zone was of only 3.52%, then in 1992 the percentages recorded were: 39.21% and 13.73%, in 2002 they were: 22.42% and 30.12% and in 2006 they were 22.08, respectively 29.62%. The situation recorded in 1990 is atypical, the considerably large number of migrants recorded at the time being in fact a transformation of a de facto situation in a de jure situation (most of the ones recorded as migrants were actually living in the urban areas but because of the previous strict legislation these people were not able to settle in the big cities which were considered closed).

However, a significant conclusion is the essential change produced in the migration flows.

The demographic evolution perspectives in our country are not encouraging at all since the demographic situation tends to worsen and multiply the negative effects it has generated.

Birth rate is still low and it will probably decrease more after 2010 when the generations born after 1990 – numerically very reduced – will reach the period of maximum fertility. Birth rate is unlikely to increase since the women of a fertile age are ageing. Consequently the general rate of fertility is unlikely to increase or at least to remain constant.

The death rate will slowly increase and this will lead to an increase of the negative sold in the natural growth of the population.

As to migration significant changes will not be recorded and these will not be able to influence the demographic evolution of the Romanian population.

From a strictly demographical point of view, the forecast evolution of the three components of the population movement will generate the following results:

a) The decrease in the population number. According to the estimations of the United Nations Organization (Population Division of the Department of Economic on Social Affairs of the United Nations, Secretariat, World Population Prospects: the 2004 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects), the population of Romania might reach a maximum number of 20.941 million citizens or 19.858 million citizens – the medium level, or 18.759 million citizens – the lowest level in the year 2025. For 2050 the number of citizens would be of 19.964 millions, 16.757 millions or 14.033 millions in the three possible variants (the highest, the medium and the lowest level).

Figures vary to a smaller or bigger extent from an estimator to another, according to the hypotheses concerning the forecast evolution of the birth rate and death rate. For example, Professor Vasile Ghețău considers that the Romanian population will decrease up to 16 million citizens in 2050. The World Bank appreciates that the population of our country will reach a level of 18.678 millions citizens for the same year.

One can easily conclude that despite the existing differences all estimations indicate a decrease of the population.

b) The demographic ageing process is revealed by the increase of the number of old people living in our country.

c) The possible change of the ethnical composition of the population at a national and territorial level, as a result of the differences existing between the birth rate of the ethnical groups living in Romania, might generate results that are sometimes undesirable. This may happen if the birth rate level differences will increase to the detriment of the Romanian population, especially in some areas of the country, where sometimes unconstitutional methods are adopted in promoting territorial autonomy on ethnical criteria.

The recorded demographic evolutions and the ones that are expected to happen in the future **are a serious reason of concern**, since they affect not only the present but also the future of Romania as a national state, and they might affect the position of our country in the international context and in relationship with the other states in Europe.

The most serious changes are **the extra-demographic implications** (the social, economic, political and cultural ones). The already outlined effects of these changes represent a real challenge for all the responsibility factors in our country for the employees in public administration, at a central and a local level. On the other hand, these changes are difficult to be anticipated and sometimes they occur on the spot.

a) **Economic effects** are mainly due to the decrease of the population number, the ageing of the population and external migration.

The decrease of the population number – according to Professor V. Ghețău – has not generated significant economic effects so far (and it has mainly affected the young generation, which is under the minimum age accepted for legally employed people). According to the same professor, the decrease of the population number has had positive results (the cut of the family and state expenses for holidays, post and pre-natal holidays, for children allotments, their medical assistance and education fees etc.).

The same thing can be said about the ageing of the population. In 1990 a pensioner was supported by 2.7 employees and in 2006 a pensioner was supported by 1.30 employees. This situation was not generated by demographic factors since the percentage representing the relationship between the labour force and the pensioners did not change almost at all. This evolution was generated by a reduction in the number of workplaces and of the number of people who contributed to the pension funds.

In the far and near future things are changing step by step and according to the same professor, V. Ghițău, everything that has been good so far will take revenge in the future and it will be demographically determined on a long term.

The economic effects of the population decrease and of the population ageing will be more and more evident as the generations born after 1990 will get employed. The labor force will become insufficient and it will generate a dramatic effect as to the percentage represented by the employed population and the one that is unemployed because of being too young or too old to work. Thus, in 2050, an employed adult will have to support the pensions of 9 persons.

The decrease of the work force will lead to the ageing of the employed population and this will have negative consequences on the physical and intellectual potential of the employees, on its capacity to innovate and be open towards the new etc.

High external migration might have dramatic effects on the economy, too, especially migration on labor reasons. Young and adult populations will be mainly affected by external migration for labor reasons. Important sectors of our national economy will also be affected. Besides, social life, the building industry, light industry, the medical sector and education will also be affected. There are sector in which the lack of labor force is significant and in order to cover this deficit we accept work force from abroad (especially from Asia). Romania might become, under these conditions, a country for emigrants and for immigrants.

b) **The social effects** like **a crisis in the educational system** might occur. The decrease of the population of a school, high school age or college age is a serious problem. Many schools will be closed, many teachers will remain without a workplace.

- A crisis of the medical system is also a potential danger since many medical assistants; nurses leave the country for a better salary in Western countries;

- The crisis of the service sector is a reality which cannot be denied since many companies that offer services have not managed to meet all the necessary requirements so far;

- There will be an over-usage of the insurance sector and of the medical assistance offered for the old population;
- There may be a potentially stronger generation gap determined by different expectations, different values etc.;
- A possible change in the cultural identity and the national spirituality of our country;
- It is likely to have inter-ethnic tensions, xenophobic attitudes etc.

c) **Effects that endanger national security.** The decrease of the population number and the deterioration of its age structure will lead to a decrease of the number of the population that is able to work in the military field. Even if during peace time this does not matter, since the Romanian army has become an army of professionals, based on volunteers, however in case of war things change. On the one hand, it is necessary for the population number to be enough to get involved in the military defense of the country and, on the other hand, there must be enough people involved in the production activities necessary to economically support war actions.

A potential risk for national security, which is insufficiently tackled or even ignored, is represented by the substantial and forced change of the ethnical composition of the Romanian population in certain areas of the country.

Such effects, as others that are easily identifiable, require well conceived and scientifically grounded measures to be taken at cultural, national and local level.

c) Adopting social and economic measures to limit the exodus of the work force towards more developed societies and “to repatriate” those that have left abroad.

d) Including the systematic degradation of the country on the mentioned dimensions among the major dangers for the national security and redundancy, and, consequently, of all the factors implied in it.

Conclusions

On an administrative level, the necessary methods will be applied with a view to ensure territorial economic development that will generate stability of the work force, to create a building system that may offer enough dwellings for the young people especially, to develop the medical system, especially for children and mothers, to diversify the family planning programmes, by laying stress on pro-pregnancy education, to ensure efficient educational services for children etc.

All these require initiative spirit and, above all, a deeper sense of responsibility. They are defining characteristics for any employee that works in the public administration field and whose formation and development are main tasks for the whole training system applied to all future specialists in the field.

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