

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE IN THE PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract: The process of transformation in East Central Europe have exerted a significant influence on both demographic processes and structures. In this paper a description of some dynamic changes in the scope of population which have taken place since 1990 is presented. However, the main objective of it is an analysis of natural movement of population of East Central Europe. The author focused mainly on fluctuations of birth and death rates as well as marriage and divorce rates. The research period for this paper ends in 2011. The author analyzed statistic data derived from some national censuses which were held in chosen countries of the above-mentioned region.

Key words: East Central Europe, transformation, natural movement, population, demography

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TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES AND DELIMITATION OF EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

Analyzing population changes in the period of broadly understood transformation is an interesting subject for research. Political and economic changes have accelerated social and demographic transformation in Central Europe. The transformation itself, perceived as a multidimensional process, can in a way reflect changes in law as well as introduction of a democratic – capitalistic constitution and it is also a feature of globalization or it can indicate a complex modification of a social system (Kołodko, G., 2007, Blok, Z., 1999).

It is problematic to unequivocally determine a period when the transformation began and finished, for example, in Poland it was triggered at the turn of 1989 and 1990 by a change of a political system (Jasiewicz, K., 2009). However, it is even more difficult to determine and clearly define some virtual phases of this process (Staniszki, J., 2001) which can be associated with the process of free market evolution as well as with European Union membership or changes in behavior patterns of the society. As some intense social changes are still ongoing and they obviously do affect the processes of demographic transformation it can be assumed that this process is not finished and still evolving (Ziółkowski, M., 1999).

The issue of transformation taking place in the region concerned obligates the author to make an attempt to delimit East Central Europe (Halecki, O., 2002). Diversity of the continent has led to defining the geography of East Central Europe from the political and cultural point of view and, what is vital, an internal division of Europe has been modified several times along with the political, economic and social transformation (Rykiel, Z., 2006). When analyzing East Central Europe it is impossible not to mention the term *Mitteleuropa* (Eberhardt, P., 2005) or a dual division into Eastern and Western Europe (Otok, S., 2002), however, this polarization is now gradually disappearing as a result of the fall of Communism and dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Mucha, J., Keen, M.F., 2004). Currently observed integration processes taking place in Europe are leading to development of its geopolitical structure. In the future, most probably, it will be necessary to delimit the region again (Hudson, R., 2001, Wendt, J., 2001).

In this paper the author analyzes these countries of East Central Europe which are characterized by similar processes of democratization. However, the analysis has been limited to the countries of comparable socio-cultural characteristics. Therefore, the extend of the territory of East-Central Europe which was described by S. L. Wolchik and J. C. Curry (2011) has been slightly altered for the purposes of this study. With regard to the above the analysis has been carried out for the following countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Most of them are European Union members, however, Belarus and Ukraine are two countries of slightly different characteristics. Belarus is different because the process of socio-demographic transformation and democratization processes taking place in this country are quite specific. Ukraine, as not a long time ago it was considered a potential European Union member and now it is facing an armed conflict. Despite of this, taking the geographical location of these two countries, both Ukraine and Belarus are extremely interesting cases which should not be overlooked.

POPULATION CHANGES

In the group of analyzed countries Ukraine has got the largest population of 46,0 million inhabitants at the end of the analyzed period of time. The second and third most populated countries are Poland and Romania having respectively 38,5 and almost 22,0 million inhabitants. In the group of the least populated countries are Baltic countries, especially Estonia where in 2011 only 1,3 million people lived. The whole analyzed region had a population of 155,4 million in 2011. As a result of depopulation processes taking place in analyzed countries in 2011 there were 10,1 million people less than in 1990 what means that the population shrank by 6,1%.

When focusing on the dynamics of population change observed in East Central Europe it has to be emphasized that Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland are countries where the highest, but not spectacular, increase of registered inhabitants was noticed during the period of 1990-2011. It was the increase by 2,1-2,4%. The most stable situation was observed in Poland at that time where population was not fluctuating significantly during almost the whole analyzed period and in the result the population increased by 1,1%. According to statistical data there were not any significant changes observed in populations of Hungary, Romania and Belarus as well. The two most depopulating countries

were Latvia (-22,1%) and Bulgaria (-17,2%). A disadvantageous situation was also observed in Estonia, Lithuania and Ukraine where depopulation rates exceeded 10,0% (Figure 1).

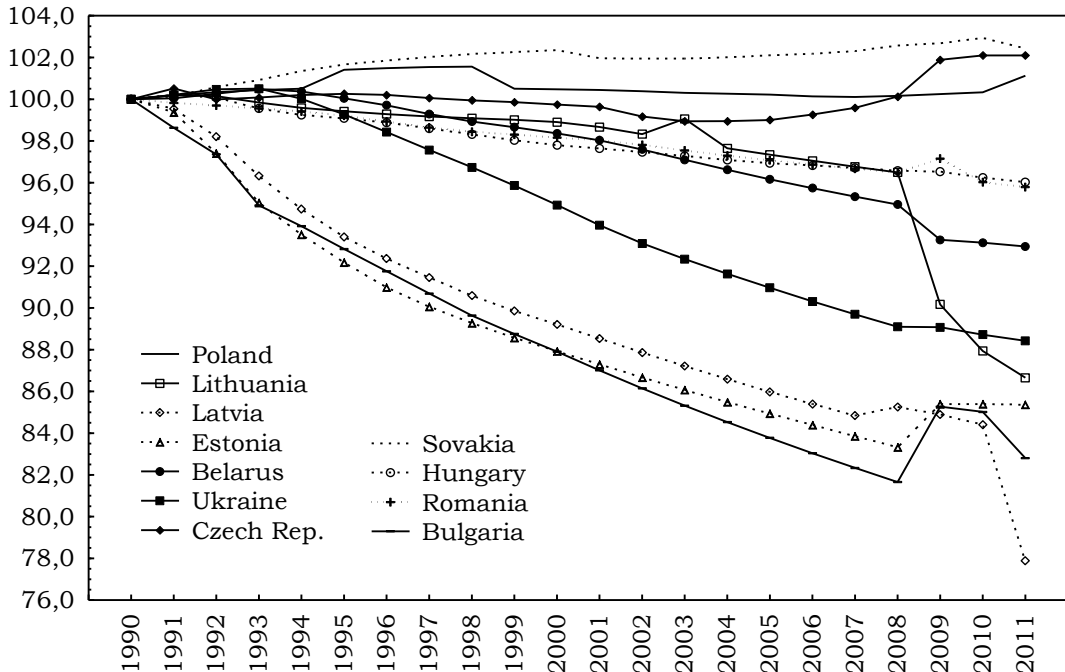


Figure 1. Dynamics of population change in East Central Europe (1990 = 100,00%)
(Source: own work on the basis of dispersed data)

It is worth mentioning that it is a common situation that just before the socio-political transformation taking place in a given region, a systematic growth of the number of inhabitants is observed. Therefore, there is a clear connection between the population dynamics and the transformation processes. It was the most visible in the countries of the former Soviet Union. The highest population decrease was noted in the Baltic countries (except Lithuania) in the period of 1989-1991 while in Ukraine and Belarus not earlier than 1993. The transformation had the most visible impact on the population of Bulgaria where after 1990 depopulation processes were extremely intense. However, in Hungary the first signs of depopulation was observed in 1985, but the most intense depopulation processes were noticed at the beginning of the transformation period. The rest of the analyzed countries did not faced the same pattern of depopulation and their demographic situation was relatively stable and the depopulation processes was not observed immediately after the fall of communism but later – during more advanced phases of the transformation.

CHANGES IN VITAL STATISTICS

A major decrease in vital rates in East Central Europe has been observed which is typical for the demographic transition. It is worth mentioning that both Poland and Slovakia were in a relatively good situation considering vital rates during the whole research period as the natural population drop was observed only during the short period of 2002-2005 in Poland and in the period of 2001-

2003 in Slovakia. An exceptionally difficult situation can be observed in Ukraine regarding this matter. The unprecedented high drop of $-7,6\%$ was noted there in the period of 2000-2002 and in the year 2005 (Figure 2). A considerable advantage of a death rate over a birth rate is also a crucial issue in Bulgaria (Mladenov, C., 2006). It can be stated that a characteristic feature of population growth in East Central Europe is its deep decrease in the Baltic countries after 1993 – especially in Latvia. However, in the next period demographic conditions in these countries was gradually improving (Cicharska A., 2009). Nevertheless, the demographic situation of Belarus and Hungary was continuously deteriorating and in 2011 the above-mentioned factor did not exceed $-4,0\%$. In the Czech Republic and Romania the analyzed demographic changes were not as severe as in the other countries as in the last decade their population growth rates did not change significantly (Stupariu, M., 2011).

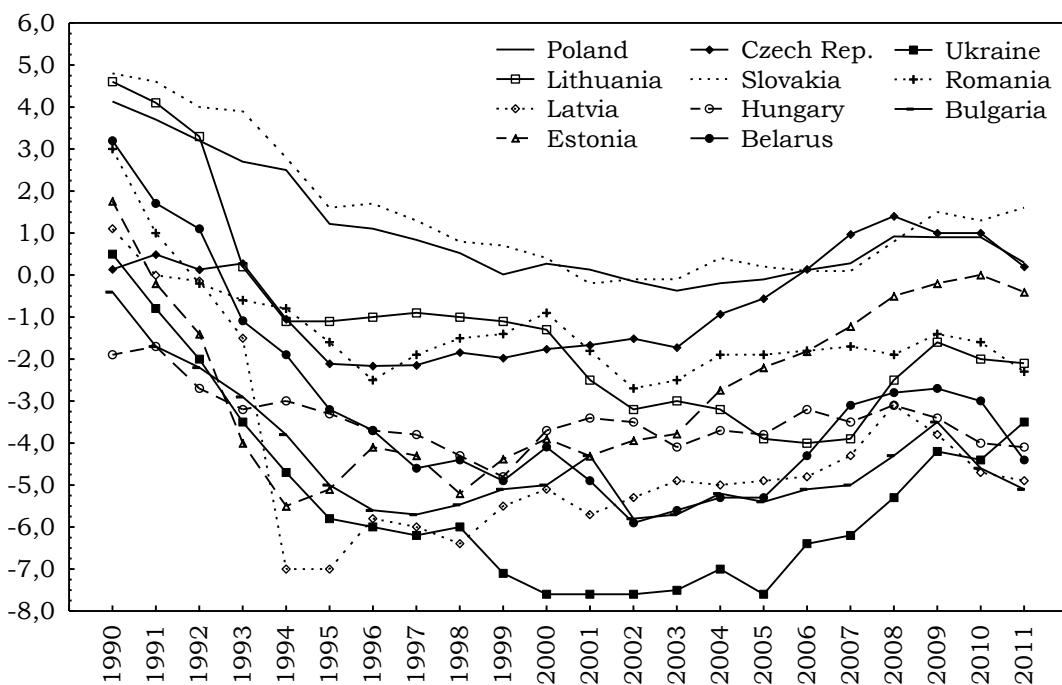


Figure 2. Changes in the population growth rate in the countries of East Central Europe in the period of 1990-2011 (in %) (Source: own work on the basis of dispersed data)

The most important role in shaping the population growth rate in East Central Europe played a crude birth rate. In all analyzed countries the birth rate declined and it is highly possible that this trend will continue (Długosz, Z., Raźniak, P., 2008). An exceptional drop of the crude birth rate was noted in Latvia as in 2011 it was only $9,0\%$ whereas at the beginning of the analyzed period it was $14,00\%$. A visible birth-rate drop occurred also in Lithuania ($4,3\%$) and less significant ones in Estonia, Slovakia and Belarus. The same problem concerns also Poland and Hungary where the birth rate was also gradually declining in the analyzed period.

A decade preceding the transformation not only the natural factors has an effect on the birth rate (e.g. echo of the post-war baby boom) but social policies

also. In many countries of East Central Europe these policies were promoting the traditional family values (Matysiak, A., 2005). After 1990, along with numerous changes in the scope of these policies a fertility rate declined and an average age of having first child increased. It has to be emphasized that the “fertility trend” which started in the 90. did not change although the baby-boom cohorts entered an optimal reproductive age. Once accepted behavior patterns are still being followed and they seem to be more and more similar to the trends observed in Western Europe.

The death rates in the analyzed period were not fluctuating as significantly as the above-mentioned rates. For instance, in Poland the death rate was rather stable (a bit more than 10,0‰) until 1996. In the next years it was fluctuating insignificantly and oscillating between 9,4‰ and 9,9‰. Thus, in this case as well as in the Czech Republic and Hungary it can be stated that the mortality rate is stable. However, this trend is not observed for other countries. An intriguing example is Ukraine where the mortality rate significantly increased during the first years of the transformation. The death rate ranged from 15,0‰ to 16,0‰ in the period of 1994-2008. The same increasing trend was also observed in Belarus, Latvia and Bulgaria. However, it shall be emphasized that data concerning the Baltic countries showed that the death rate rapidly increased in the first period of the transformation and slowed down in the next years thus it can be stated that the political situation of countries is a contributing factor and it influences a mortality rate (Stasas, M., Michalski, T., Palmowski, T., 2002). The social reforms which were implemented or discontinued after the fall of the communist system had a significant impact on the death rate in East Central Europe.

In the years preceding the socio-political transformation in East Central Europe the most important factor determining the fertility rate was a marriage rate (Iglicka, K., 1993). However, ten years later in the same region some changes typical for the second demographic transition were intensified as the behavior patterns of Western Europe (Matysiak, A., 2005), globalization processes and the political transformation were in progress (Górecka, S., 2006). It means that more people chose informal relationships and they did not want to get married. Obviously, this so called “social modernization” was not progressing at the same pace and under the same conditions in all analyzed countries. The situation in catholic Poland is not the same as in the Czech Republic where liberalism and individualism in social interactions are widespread (Fialova, L., 2006). Some important elements of the family life transformation are also changes in the labor market and birth control policies.

When analyzing fluctuations of the marriage rate in the selected countries of East Central Europe it becomes obvious that it was a relatively high percentage of formal relationships at the beginning of the transformation (Fig. 3). It is especially visible in Latvia and Romania where more than 8,0‰ of relationships were formal ones. However, in the next years this percentage was declining gradually (Precupetu, I., Precupetu, M.). When considering sustainability of marriages in the analyzed period, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria are the countries where marriages lasted longer – mostly because of the existing cultural conditions. This situation has been changing over the years as the processes of social modernization are still in progress but when compared to the situation in Latvia, being a representative of the post-soviet countries, this trend is not alarming (Figure 3). In Latvia a large number of registered

partnerships has become a typical feature of the social transformation. Among many different reasons for a high divorce rate the most important ones are unhealthy lifestyles of men and poor living conditions. An additional factor is a noticeable growth in the number of women who are economically independent. What is more, educational negligence in the scope of family issues and its importance for societies as well as in the scope of interpersonal communication are not factors in favor of formal relationships (Eglite, P., 2012).

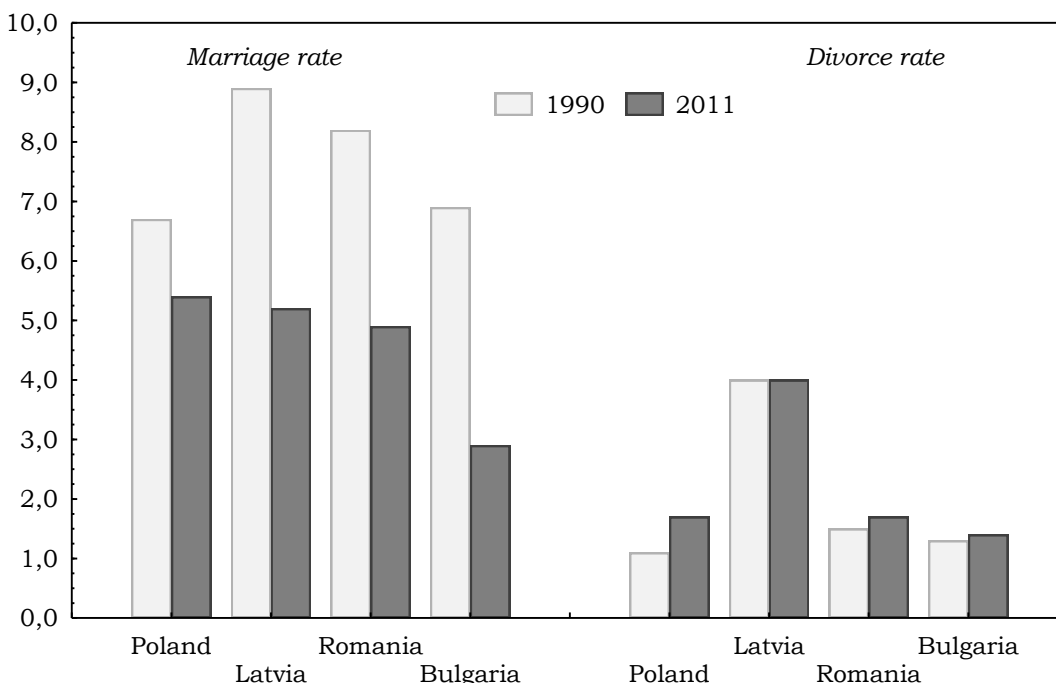


Figure 3. Changes in the marriage and divorce rates in the chosen countries of East Central Europe (in ‰)
(Source: own work on the basis of dispersed data)

SUMMARY

All historically and culturally conditioned events which took place in the transformation period in East Central Europe have led to numerous demographic changes. The process of state economy transformation has also played an extremely important role in those processes as changes in labour market and unemployment have an impact of fertility and families. It is worth mentioning that although the process of social modernization is still ongoing the demographic condition of many countries of the region is relatively good. Negative population changes were observed mainly in the post-soviet countries, especially in Ukraine where the rate of depopulation was the highest in the analyzed region.

In all countries of East Central Europe a major social changes took place in the research period as it was a time when a brand new dimension of interpersonal relations emerged. What is more, it was intensified by a growing wealth gap, decrease of trust and relationship permanence (Giordano, C., Kostova, D., 2002). The causes for this situation are, among others, the state economy transformation along with some common economic problems including

deindustrialization, globalization and neoliberalism (Czepczyński, M., 2008). It must be emphasized that the advancement of the democratization process of a given country has also a great impact on demographic processes (Bjørnskov, C., Dreher, A., Fischer J., 2008).

At the time of social modernization and global economic crisis it is very difficult to predict further demographic changes unambiguously. Since 2008 in East Central Europe, especially in the Baltic countries, the economic and social crisis has been the most visible. Integration processes taking place in Europe as a part of the European Union development and an inevitable demand for young workforce expressed by aging populations of many European countries which can be met only by an increased inflow of immigrants will lead to noteworthy changes in demographic potential of Europe.

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