

Trends in Fertility in Romania. -Case-study in Bihor County-

After the 1989 events, in the Central and Eastern European countries new tendencies have appeared in the field of political and economics and also in the demographic phenomenon. These countries are characterized as “transition countries” considering their transition to democracy and market economy. The demographic changes on the ground of the marriages and births are fundamentally changing the demographic map of Europe. In Romania, the economic transition has been closely followed by the demographic transition manifesting at national level and also at local Bihor County’s level.

The socio-economic and political mutations within the Romanian society affected all the segments of the post December ‘89 population. The mass urbanization enforced in the 80’s was a complex process that had positive consequences but also negative ones. The forced industrialization policy and urbanization from socialist years led to a rapid increase in population in the cities whereas the migration towards the cities produced a veritable whirlwind in the rural environment. After 1989, the countryside had suffered important mutations, depopulation of the villages, restricting of the agricultural population, environment degradation, misuse of human and natural resources, increase in migration. Internal and external migratory waves have reached a peak in 1990 after which the motility decreased at national and county based level. The external migration almost completely immigration has a high degree of uncertainty, also having a tendency of settling down to legal immigration during the last few years. Besides the differences between village and city, we have to take into account the environmental territorial profile under the historical, geographical, economical and social conditions.

Poverty affected all segments of population and as opposed to other counties in the neighborhood, the urban population seemed to be more affected than the rural population. To the economical crises we can add some destructive reactions such as alcoholism, harmful substances consumption, suicide, an increase in crime which together with desperation and demobilization could be considered as a result of the crises or they can enhance the effect of the crises. These effects manifest themselves on the quality and length of life, health and nutrition but also on some of the individual and collective wealth and wellbeing – education, culture, crime levels and population self-confidence. The changes that happened have touched even the more subtle aspects of society, like the formation and stability of the family, reproductive behavior, mortality and immigration. The result was a natural decrease in net population, a process amplified by immigration. The future population level in Romania for the next decades depends on the parallel evolution of birth rate and death rate and the level of net immigration.

Between the censuses of 1992 and 2002 the population decreased by 1.1 million. This was due to the evolution of birth rate, death rate and immigration after 1990: the gross rate of birth continuously decreased after 1989, reaching -9.7 newborns per 1000 inhabitants, whereas the general death rate was and is high, recording 12.4 deaths per 1000 and child death rate continues to be the highest in Europe. The intense external migration, made up of mainly young population recorded 800000 people, compared to the natural decrease in population of only 300000. For a continuous development of the country, a stop on demographic decline should be part of the political strategy, the recovery of the birth rate being a condition that imposes itself or else the disequilibrium would manifest at all levels in society .

Matrimony is an important factor of demographic behavior. The sudden drop in marriages rate after 1989, apparent in all countries in the region, is due partially to a decrease in the population of the age group where marriages are more often present. Along with the strictly demographic factors, the socio-economic factors are also deciding, especially the economical insecurity, the unemployment explosion, the deepening of the housing crisis and due to the drop in the housing construction, private rent and housing costs are skyrocketing. The economic crises has a negative influence on family stability and cohesion, leading besides economical dysfunctions to emotional problems, manifesting in alcoholism, violence, and a drop in self-confidence. Besides the matrimony drop, divorce rate increase however lower in Romania compared to other counties in the region, has a negative influence on the birth rate.

The low fertility and the change in reproductive behavior has led to the reversal of population balance in 1992. In Romania, as is the case in other countries in the region, the gross birth rate has rapidly dropped, even below the long term demographic expectations. Along with abortion legalization after 1989 and then the introduction of family planning, fertility rate decreases also due to economic insecurity, lowering of life standards, of the decrease in matrimony and the increase in divorce rate.

The sharp increase in the number of abortions, which have risen 8 times in 1990 compared to 1989, shows the effect of deprivation of the need for family planning during the previous regime. A severe phenomenon in Romania, above the level in neighboring countries, the increase in the number of abortions is due to a pro-birth policy without any precedent before 1989. Even if the tendency for a decrease in the abortion rate is apparent, these are still at a high rate, having a negative effect on the physical and mental health of women and on the fertility rate. The decrease in birth rate is the most important cause of natural population drop. The decrease in the number of births tips the balance towards single child families or families with no children therefore below the level necessary for generation replenishment.

The decline in population number, mainly due to the drastic reduction in birth rate leads to a demographic ageing process and an increase in the rate of dependency of the aged on active people. A phenomenon noticed by sociologists is the increase of childbirths for adolescent mothers under 20 in the countries in the region and in a lesser extent in our country, of child births outside marriage. These children are in a situation of risk of being abandoned, institutionalized or living in poverty.

In the last more then 30 years and mostly after the Population World Conference in 1974, the majority of the developed countries and countries in transition have formulated Politics in the field of Family and Demographics or developed legal, economical and social measures. In the majority of the western countries the families with children get economical support true specialized institutions. The Social Politics in the Population and Family domain define the goals, arguments, measures and interventions. We will refer to the economical and social measures concerning the Social Assistance of persons and families, the development of the social measures, improvement of the economical and social status of women.

The western researchers considers that the Eastern and Central European Politics before 1990 succeeded to reach superior fertility levels then in the rest of the western contemporary Europe, but the measures did not reached the ultimate goal in time: to sustain a high rate of fertility. These countries, including Romania suffered a lot of economical and social transformations in the 1990, the previous family support measures vanished or have being transformed. So, today these countries have some of the lowest fertility rates in the world. In

fact, nowadays young and adult generations have completely different fertility strategies than their parents had.

The economical and social measures had eventually the role to assist families or individuals. In Romania, the measures follow indirectly the increase of the fertility and directly the improvement of social conditions and assistance of the families : child-support, helps for young families, improvement of the woman's status, development of social services for families. But the final goal is the support of the institution of the family and its values, to harmonize the conflict between the job and the motherhood and to release some of the pressures in child's care.

The case-study in Bihor county includes: social quantitative methods (1048 cases of fertile women) and qualitative methods (adolescent mothers under 20 and families with many children). The characteristics and the factors involved in the decrease of the fertility represents part of the social development which have to be taken in consideration in order to improve social politics.