

Demographic problems of the Republic of Belarus and their solutions

Last year the realization term of the National Program of demographic security of the Republic of Belarus for 2007–2010 was over. The author of the article analyzes the implementation of the program paper from the angle of some certain indices. Some current demographic problems of the country are also considered, short-term and long-term perspectives are estimated. The author suggests some ways for further protection of demographic security of the Republic of Belarus.

Demography, demographic security, demographic situation, fertility, migration, life expectancy, prognosis, population policy.



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As of April 1, 2011 the population of the Republic of Belarus was 9474.2 thousand people [1]. The urban population was 74.5% and the rural one was 25.5% [2]. Belarus isn't distinguished by the population among other countries of Europe and takes a middle position.

Thus, it ranks fifth among the CIS countries after Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Its population is by 14 times less than the population of Russia, by 5 times less than the population of Ukraine, but by 1.3 times more than the population of all three Baltic states combined, by 2 times more than the population of Finland or Denmark.

There are more people than in Austria, Bulgaria, Sweden and Switzerland in our republic. The following European states such as Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Czech Republic, Yugoslavia and some others have approximately the same size of population as in Belarus.

Throughout the postwar years, until the early 1990s the population of the Republic of Belarus was increasing steadily. However, the intensity of that growth started to decline since the early 1970s.

Reforming of the country's economy in 1990s has touched many aspects of life. The transition to a multisectoral economy, private sector development, informal activities, the removal of restrictions in the terms of re-employment, unemployment, the forming of the housing market – all these things substantially affected the living conditions and, accordingly, the dynamics of its size, composition and processes of population reproduction.

Currently, Belarus is facing a difficult period in its demographic development, joining the stage of the demographic crisis. A number of trends and events increasingly assume the features of the demographic threats to sustainable development of society and more – to national

security. Demographic security of the state becomes the most important area of national security and, therefore, an important state task.

Even in the recent past the demographic changes were not seen as threats to national security because they do not have a broad aspect of the negative social, economic and other consequences and, therefore, they had no significant impact on individual areas of national security. Currently, such impact or better to say – interaction – appears quite clearly and, most importantly, it is growing.

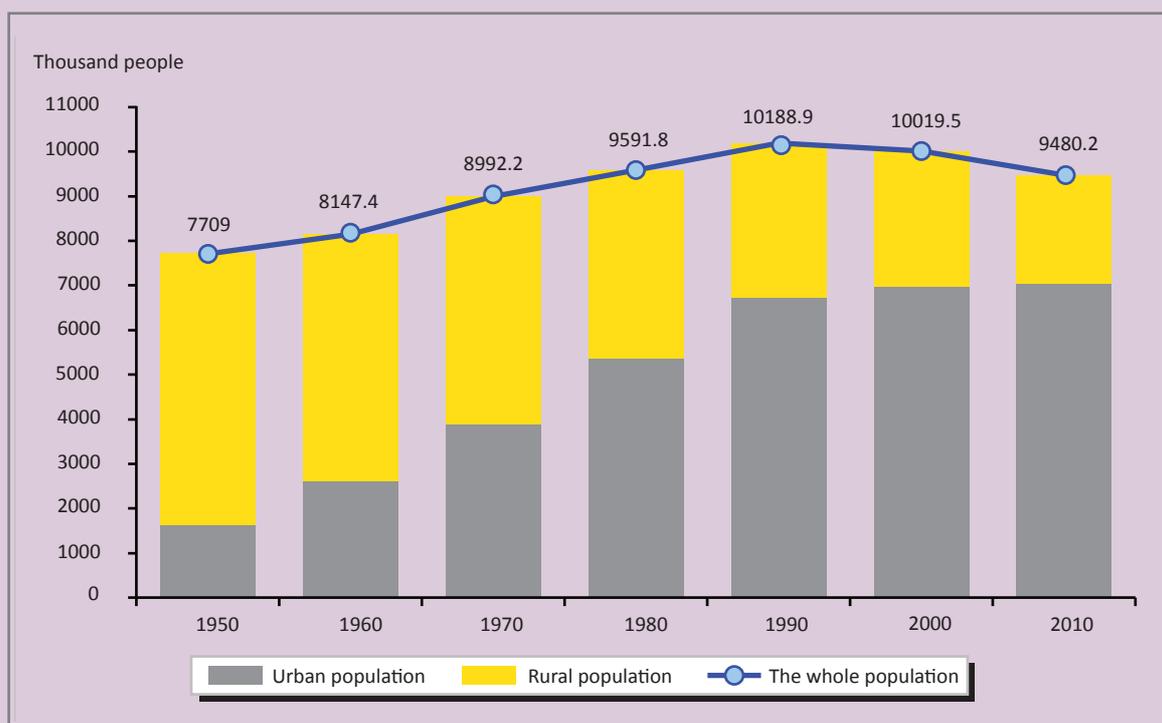
The modern model of demographic development in the Republic of Belarus was not established in recent years – it is the result of development over the century. Practically since the end of the 1970s our country (and the urban communities – since the late 1960s) doesn't reproduce its population, except for the mid-1980s, when there was short-term growth of some coefficients of population reproduction. Natural population increase for more than 20 years was provided only at the expense of the demographic potential of the

age structure accumulated in previous years, and the potential run out gradually, and the reproduction rate decreased. Thus, the absolute decline in population of Belarus in the last 15 years was due to the population reproduction mode existing in the country for more than 40 years. The crisis in the socio-economic and environmental development in the late 1980s – early 1990s only hastened an onset of depopulation, accelerating the basic trends in the population changes of Belarus (*fig. 1*).

You don't have to be a demographer to foresee clearly right now some negative for the State and society consequences of current deep demographic changes.

Moreover, the demographic trends in their development have great stability and time persistence. In 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century small and not enough healthy generations were born, some of whom have already left high school, and in the foreseeable future they will have to work, serve in the Army and provide the financial basis of all state system of social protection and social maintenance.

Figure 1. The population changes of Belarus over 1950 – 2010

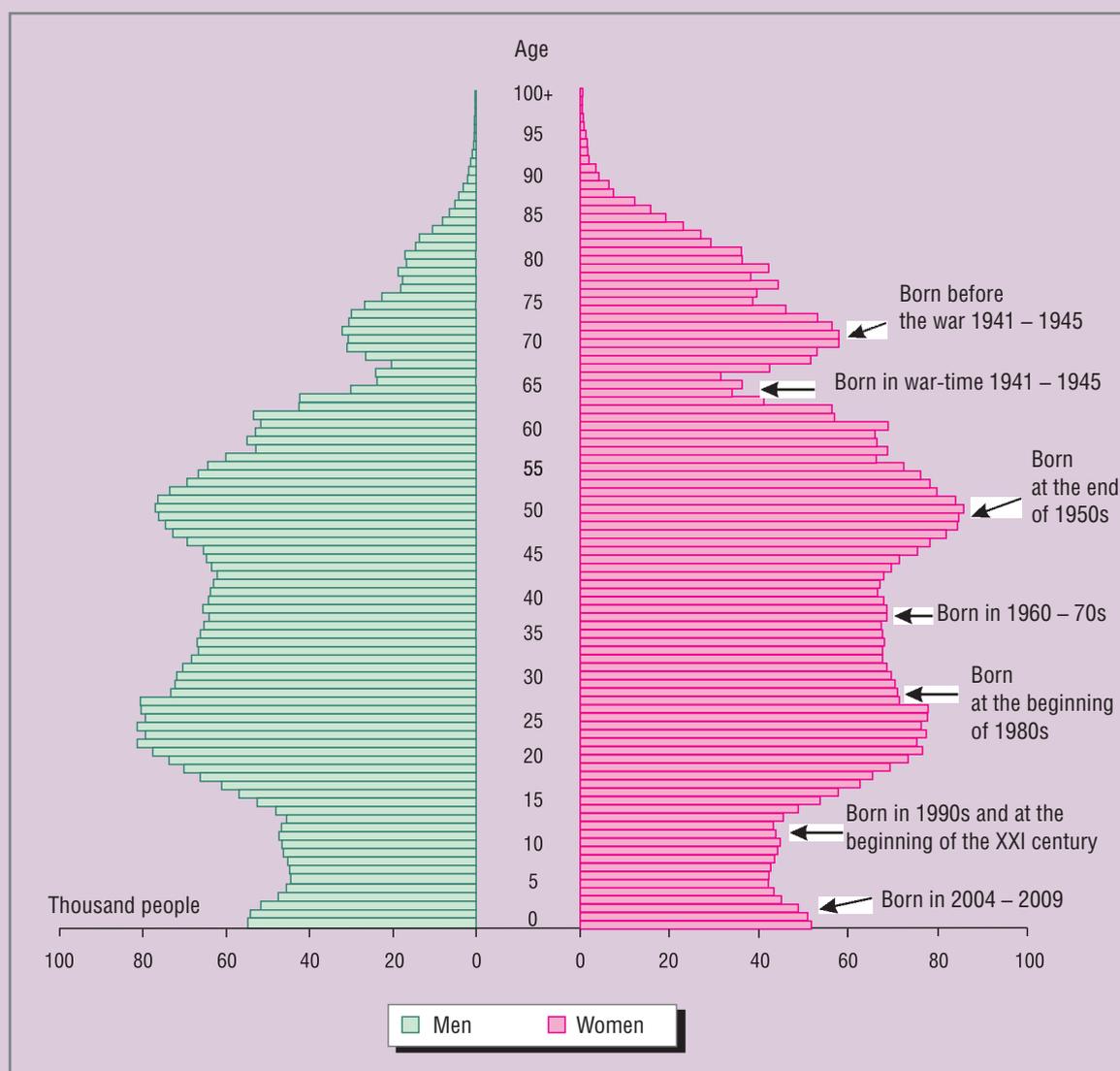


Numerous generations of people born in the postwar decades live and have already begun to go beyond working age, filling up the ranks of retirees. This is clearly seen from the age-sex population structure (fig. 2).

Operating in our country the social system supposes a considerably number of employed people of working age paying compulsory contributions to the social insurance system. Until recently in Belarus despite the rapid decrease in the total population, the population of working age has risen steadily, reaching 6 million and 66 thousand people in 2007.

Only over the years following the 1999 census the population of working age went up by 100.7 thousand people, with an increase of more than a half was due to young people aged 16 – 29 years. Naturally, the share of working-age population to the total population was growing more rapidly, reaching a peak in 2008 – 62.5%. It is the highest figure in the history of the country. The demographic burden on the working population was constantly decreasing. Thus, according to the data of the 2009 census, the share of disabled population was 624 people per 1000 people of working age,

Figure 2. The age-sex population structure of the Republic of Belarus as of the date of the 2009 census



while in 1970 – 894 people, and in 1989 – 785.7 people. This situation was favorable for economic development, which mitigated the social and economic problems that were typical for this period. Later, however, such situation will be changed in a negative direction very quickly. The total population will continue to decrease, but the population of working age will decrease with even faster. This will increase the demographic burden on the working population and, if we are not ready for this, it can cause a number of negative socio-economic events. For example, the Ministry of Defence can have some difficulties in staffing the units and recruits, both quantitatively and qualitatively. So, in 2009 the recruiting contingent was formed from 70.1 thousand young people under the age of 18. In 10 years the number of those will be reduced to 46.1 thousand people. Approximately the same number of boys was born each year in the late 1990s and was 8 years old according to the data of the 2009 census. With this fact in mind as well as the level of health of the younger generations, the future national defense challenges arising from current demographic situation, are obvious and inevitable [1].

One can give other examples of negative consequences of current demographic trends, such as in economics (economic growth, aggregate demand, investment, labor productivity, labor force, etc.) or education, health-care system, culture, social welfare and even policy.

Demographic security is an integral part of national security, which determines the condition of protection of socio-economic development of the state and the society from demographic threats, at which the development of the Republic of Belarus is provided in accordance with its national demographic interests [2]. Thus, security in the demographic sphere is, on the one hand, to eliminate the causes of negative trends in reproduction processes, to mitigate their consequences as much as possible, and on the other - to prevent their occurrence. The demographic threats are

phenomena and trends, the results of which are negative quantitative and qualitative changes in population development, they have a negative impact on sustainable development.

The effective role of government in the demographic aspect, in particular, to provide demographic security can be realized only if the supreme bodies of state administration recognize the existence of the problem and those profound social and economic consequences that they entails. It is necessary to realize that the solution of demographic problems is a very complex task. We need targeted measures, time and available financial funds, we need the concept of long-term public policy directed to demographic security.

In Belarus the complexity of the demographic situation has been realized, and some certain measures are taken at the state level. Thus, October 22, 2010 at the meeting with the participants of All-Belarus action “Question to the President” the President of the Republic of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, said that the ensuring of demographic security is becoming one of the main activities of the state [3].

The crisis in the economic, political and environmental development of the Republic of Belarus in 1990s were accompanied by worsening of demographic situation. Population growth has changed into its diminution and until the middle of the first decade of XXI century the depopulation intensity increased. The age-sex population structure has significantly deformed (see fig. 2). The birth rate did not ensure a simple reproduction and tended to further decrease as well as the indicators of life expectancy at birth, which were already at a low level. Death rate grew. The Belarusian Institute of the family was in a critical situation. Significant changes took place in the migration mobility of the population: there were streams of refugees and immigrants resettling from other former Soviet republics and areas of environmental contamination associated with the disaster at Chernobyl. In addition, the flow of immigrants from Belarus to the “far abroad”

increased and was accompanied by “brain drain”, the problem of illegal migrants became an acute one. All this caused some complex social and economic problems and put the state under a real threat to the security of the country, which had not previously encountered with these problems before.

The complexity of the demographic situation had caused the urgent need to develop a law on demographic security of Belarus, which was passed by the House of Representatives, was approved by the Council of the Republic, and January 4, 2002 was approved by the President of the Republic of Belarus. In accordance with this law the “National Program of demographic security of Belarus for 2007 – 2010” was developed and approved by Presidential Decree of March 26, 2007 [4].

The aim of the Program was to stabilize the demographic situation and the formation of a prerequisite for population growth in the Republic of Belarus, to achieve the aim it is necessary to accomplish the following tasks:

- implementation of an integrated system of socio-economic, legal and organizational measures aimed at improving the quality of life for families with children;

- implementation of a package of measures to improve the reproductive health of the population and to protect maternal and child health;

- reducing morbidity and mortality through the measures on forming healthy lifestyles and eliminating the influence of unfavorable environmental factors;

- an annual phased reduction in mortality from all causes with the level of 8 percent a year by 2011;

- optimization of internal and external migration flows.

The result of the program was to be:

- an increase in the total fertility rate up to 10 – 11 per 1000 people;

- an increase in the aggregated fertility rate - the number of children that would be born by a woman during the whole reproductive period (15 – 49 years) – up to 1.4 – 1.5 children;

- reduction in the infant mortality rate to 6 per 1000 babies born alive;

- reduction in total mortality of the population to 10 – 11 per 1000 people;

- achieving the life expectancy at birth 70 – 72 years by 2011;

- providing an annual increase in population up to 5 thousand people due to external migration, mainly the people of working age.

To achieve this goal and to get the expected results a series of specific measures was carried out, such as preferential credits for housing construction and financial aid in paying off debt on preferential credits to large families (with 3 or more children); differentiated benefits for child birth depending on the order of birth: the birth of the third and subsequent children – 3 living wages, the birth of the first and the second child – 2 living wages; monetary compensation at the birth of twins – 2 living wages for each child; raising the one-time cash payment to mothers of large families awarded with the Order of the Mother; raising the benefits for the first child up to 5 living wages, and the birth of the second and subsequent children – to 7 living wages.

The measures to improve reproductive health, maternal and child health have been implemented, they included screening of congenital malformations and genetic diseases; diagnosis and treatment of genetic diseases of newborns and children; equipping the medical genetic centers with ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus of expert class; improvement of family planning services on premarital counseling, preparation for childbirth and advocacy of family births, abortions after rehabilitation; opening in vitro fertilization (IVF) units using the center “Mother and Child”, the purchase of equipment, reagents, etc.

The measures for promoting healthy lifestyles and creating a favorable environment: for this purpose there have been developed and implemented some state and industry programs: tobacco control; rational, balanced and safe food of the population; prevention and

overcoming of hard drinking and alcoholism. The measures to train staff and to develop some educational programs aimed at creating a healthy lifestyle and to provide an information and advertising support have been taken.

The measures for increasing the life expectancy have been taken to improve the delivery of primary health care population: the differentiated clinical examination has been carried out (by the screening in the age groups with risk factors); the Interior Ministry, the Emergency Ministry, the Transport Ministry, teachers and workers of dangerous production skills were trained to give first medical aid, a set of measures for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hypertension was carried out, there were open social rehabilitation centers for the persons released from prison and find themselves in situations of extreme, there was continued a development of effective methods of diagnosis, treatment and prevention of all forms of dependency and etc.

In order to solve immigration problems in the country there were taken some measures to attract able-bodied population and experienced personnel in the rural economy, to encourage employers in creating jobs in the areas with high population outflow and with critical condition of the labor market, to extend rural structures of small businesses, farmers and private farms, including farmstead farms, focused on the development of rural tourism.

To solve the problems of external migration there were taken some steps to reduce the emigration of individuals that make up the scientific, technical, intellectual and creative potential. The monitoring of the migration processes, including intellectual migration and forecasting of migration situations was organized.

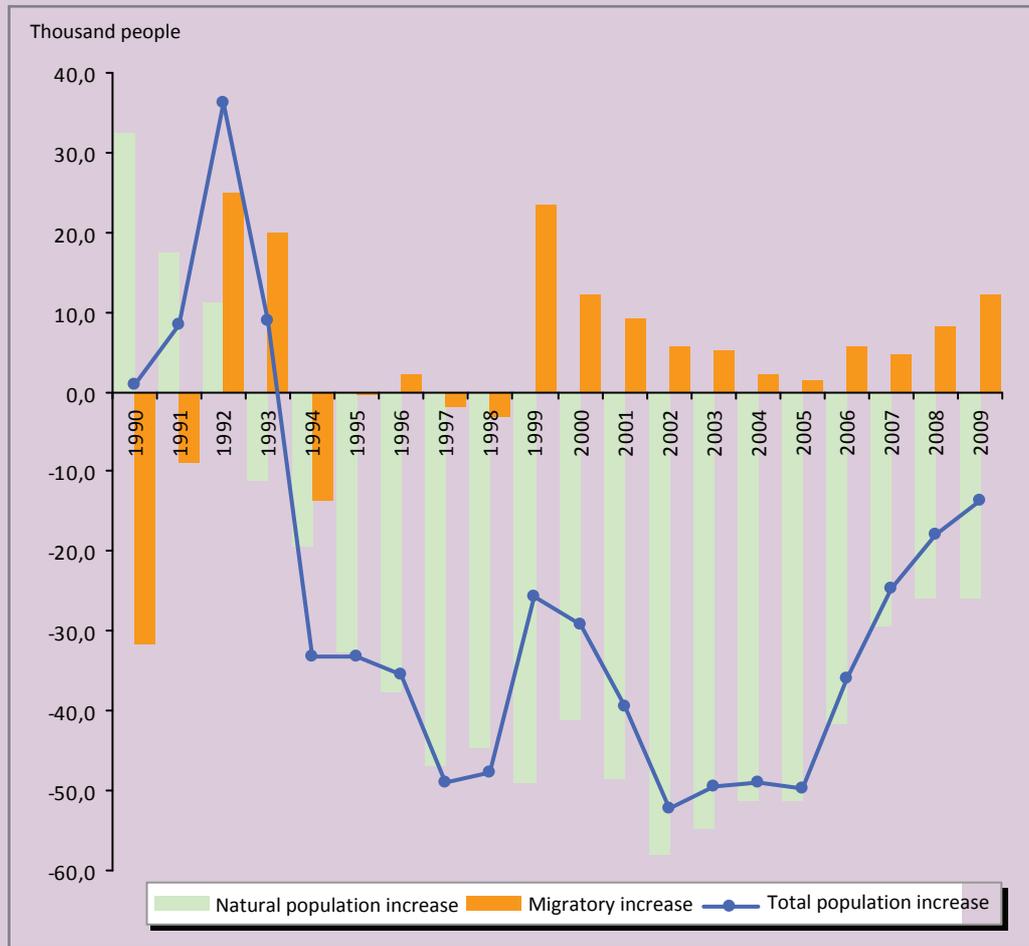
There was adopted a simplified procedure for obtaining documents for entry with the inhabitancy in the Republic of Belarus for foreign citizens and the persons without citizenship who have reasons to acquire the nationality of the Republic of Belarus as well as for Belarusians and those who identify themselves as Belarusians.

The measures were taken to create conditions for social and domestic resettlement of immigrants and their integration into society, for realization of their constitutional rights and freedoms, including employment and housing. A set of measures to return highly qualified and promising scientists holding a contract abroad for a long time to the Republic of Belarus was developed. Foreign citizens and stateless persons were given information about a legal status of foreign citizens and stateless persons on the territory of the Republic of Belarus and about the procedure for acquiring citizenship of the Republic of Belarus. The control over the activities of legal entities and individual entrepreneurs who use foreign labor was strengthened.

In 2010 the life of the policy document was over – it is possible to sum up. By now, the most targets provided for in the National Program of demographic security for 2007-2010 have been achieved. Thus, according to the data for 2009, the total fertility rate in Belarus amounted to 11.5%, the aggregated fertility rate – 1.442 children per a woman. By the way, taking into account the most recent census data, which clarified somewhat the number of population by different age groups, and showed that the number of women of active reproductive age of 20 – 34 years were somewhat exaggerated in the current statistics, we can say that the aggregated fertility rate in 2009 was even slightly higher.

The increased intensity of fertility in these years was observed in almost all age groups of women. During 2004 – 2009, a cohort of women younger than 20 years the birth rate increased by 7%, in a cohort of 20 – 24 years – 7% too, in the cohort of 25 – 29 years – by 22%, in a cohort of 30 – 34 years – 40% and in a cohort of 35 – 39 years – 56%. The number of births of various birth-taking has increased, while there has been a positive trend of more intensive birth of the second and following orders: the number of the firstborn has increased by 12%, the number of the second children has increased by 35%, the number of the third and subsequent children – by 28%.

Figure 3. The changes of total, natural and migratory population increases over 1990 – 2009



Other targets have been performed: the infant mortality rate declined to 4.7%, life expectancy at birth increased to 70.5 years, migration increase amounted to 12.2 thousand people. As a result of it the population decline was much slower (*fig. 3*).

Among all target indices only the index of the total mortality rate is below the planned standard – in 2009 it was 14.2%. However, it is rather an error in the Program itself: the peculiarities of the established age structure of population in the country have not been fully taken into account. This remark was made by demographers at the stage of formation of a program document, but it has not reflected in the final document.

The peculiarities of the established age structure of population in the country should

be considered when developing a regular program for 2011 – 2015, the concept of which has already been developed. Because of the objective reasons in Belarus the population development and the growth of proportion of elderly population accelerate, with a decrease in the total population, as a result of this the overall mortality rate will rise, even with a reduction of age mortality rates and increase in life expectancy.

As a whole, the National Program of demographic security for 2007 – 2010 can be considered to be running successfully. Almost all assigned tasks have been solved, and the most problems of demographic development has gained positive trends, but there is a danger to a public opinion about an easy solution of these problems in future. But it's not so.

First, the absolute success of the National Program of demographic security of the Republic of Belarus for 2007 – 2010 and its high efficiency are not so large as regards the necessary population to establish a simple type of reproduction, and especially for the “slightly expanded one”. It is this type of reproduction at this stage of development of the country that is considered to be optimal most often.

The Republic, as before, doesn't reproduce its population, and its number is going down. Despite some certain growth recently the birth rate of the country is still low. They cover only 65% of the reproduction of population. The lifetime raty has increased by almost two years recently, but at the same time they are 10 – 15 years behind the rate of the developed countries of the world. They are even lower than those in the Republic in 1950 – 1980. Although the migration increase in population remains permanent positive in the last 20 years, its size isn't enough to compensate the natural population loss completely.

Secondly, the beginning of the XXI century was characterized by very favorable conditions for positive trends in the demographic development of Belarus. The country had improvement in the socio-economic environment, growth of the population, which had a positive impact on demographic processes. In addition, special measures improved the welfare of families with children, in particular, reduction of the gap in incomes of families with children or without them, creating a favorable environment for education, increasing an accessibility of health and education services for the population. Under these conditions the most population was able to exercise their reproductive attitudes. During these years the so-called «delayed children» actively came into the world, i.e. those children whose parents postponed their birth to better times because of the difficult socio-economic situation. As the surveys show, it is the second and third children most often, as the parents postpone relatively rare the birth of the first child for a long time without reference to the socio-economic environment.

According to calculations, the increase in the number of births in 2006 – 2009 by 88 – 90% is due to the increased intensity of fertility in the country [5, p. 219]. However, there is no reason to talk about increasing of the population's reproductive attitudes. It should be noted that in Belarus two and all the more three or more children in the family is still a serious risk of falling into the category of low-income families. At the same time it is undeniable that a certain percentage of families among those who have not clearly been formed their attitudes to the number of children could be pushed for a decision in favor of another birth by the possibility to obtain benefits for housing.

Increase in the people's well-being and improvement of their quality of life, of course, had a positive impact on health improvement, it was promoted by special measures taken to improve the work of the health-care system of the country. This may explain the change in this period in the trend of life expectancy.

Thirdly, the demographic processes in the country in the first decade of the XXI century were also positively impacted by structural factors: the composition of the population by sex, age, marital status, etc. During these years a significant part of the population was in the active reproductive age and its relation to sex and marital status was also favorable. The age-sex structure of population contributed to the growth in the number of births due to rapid growth in the number of women of active reproductive age: numerous cohorts born in 1983 – 1986 were at this age. According to the latest census, the active child-bearing age (20 – 34 years old) were 1088.8 thousand women and it is by 39.1 thousand more than it was in the 1999 census (1049.7 thousand) [1]. The growth trend in the number of women of active childbearing age is almost exhausted. In the short run the opposite situation will occur. As the numerous cohorts born in 1990's come into active childbearing age, their number will decrease rapidly. This has a negative impact on the dynamics of the number of children born in the country during the second and third decades of the XXI century.

At the beginning of the XXI century the features of the age structure of population of Belarus had a positive impact on the dynamics of the number of deaths in the country. In these years small cohorts of people born during the Great Patriotic War became to go beyond the age of 60. This reduced the population of older ages and, correspondingly, reduced the number of deaths, because the older the person is, the higher chance to die during the current year he has. Thus, according to the 1999 census, there were 2160.1 thousand people of retirement age, and according to the census of 2009 – 2139.3 thousand, i.e. it is by 20.8 thousand less. Naturally, this has reduced the number of deaths. As the numerous cohorts of population born in 1950s go into retirement age, respectively, it will increase the number of deaths, even with positive trends in the age-specific mortality rates.

To evaluate the role of each of the three main components ensuring the population growth (fertility, mortality, migration), we have developed variants of demographic projections after six hypothetical scenarios [5].

The projections have showed that if the state level does not take any special measures to improve the demographic situation, the population will continuously decrease, and the pace of reduction will increase. It is possible to achieve positive trends in the reproduction of population and to repay its losses by changing the trends of development of all three components in the complex.

The problem cannot be solved by reducing only the indicators of mortality, even to the lowest level existing in the world now. This will lead to a shift of deaths to a later period, which will increase the population at older ages and will have no impact on the number of population of younger and middle ages. Dramatic increase in immigration will have a positive effect on population size and structure. However, in order to solve the problem of preventing the population loss, the indices of the size of positive balance of migration should be very large.

The admittance of even 50 thousand people a year will not solve the problem of depopulation, but by mid-century on the territory of Belarus the one third of the population will be migrants and their descendants, and by the end of the century they will make up two-thirds.

Theoretically the problem of depopulation in the country can be solved the most radically by quickly rising the fertility rate up to the level of simple reproduction, but in this case the effect is only possible by mid-century. To solve the problem faster it is necessary to have at least three or four children for almost every fertile family. But it is practically impossible to realize this in the near time. Increase in the birth rate, as well as the reduction in mortality or an increase in migratory flows cannot happen overnight, as provided for in the hypothetical scenarios. Consequently, it is necessary to influence all components of population growth at the same time in a comprehensive way.

Among socio-economic factors the quality of life, especially the economic conditions and living conditions have a great impact on demographic processes. The economic well-being of the family is one of the most important values in life. To improve it and increase the level of satisfaction of citizens with their life standards it is necessary to increase minimal state standards (the living wage, the minimum wage, etc.) forming the family economic well-being, which should be the primacy of the direction of family policy.

The implementation of this direction is possible only through the establishment of the economic prerequisites for the growth of wage; its targeted increase in low-paid categories of workers, raising the minimum state guarantees on salaries up to the level of the living wage, strengthening the legal protection of the rights of employees to work and fair pay.

The priority principle of government programs that provide financial assistance to the people in need should be a stimulation of their activities for the independent solution of economic problems.

In other words, the relevant principle is when every able-bodied person has got opportunity to provide his family well-being by using his work and enterprising. People engaged in public production should not fall into the category of the poor.

In order to strengthen the social protection of the families with small children it is necessary to compensate to the family both for the income not received in connection with the employment of one of the able-bodied members caring for young children and supplementary expenses in connection with the birth and upbringing of the child. In this regard, we must continue gradually to improve the system of state benefits to the families raising children, as well as to reform it, to stimulate the birth of the second child in the family by giving additional support to the family. The forms of such support can include: additional payments to the family with the birth of the second child, by analogy with the “parent capital” provided by in the Russian Federation. Is a timely statement of the President that “a good incentive to increase the birth rate will be an increase in benefits for child care. Now it has the level of living wage. But this is not enough anymore. It should be a binding to the mother’s average wage before her maternity leave” [6]. In principle, the financial support for the families with children is designed primarily to compensate for the financial disparities between people with and without children.

Alignment of the families with children and without them is assisted by improving tax policy, in particular, increase in the standard tax deduction for working parents in dependence on the number of children under age in the family. When increasing the opportunities for a more complete implementation of reproductive intentions, a significant role is played by increasing the accessibility of housing for families with children by providing grants to the low-income families and preferential credits for housing construction (purchase) with financial assistance in the repayment of credit indebtedness, by giving housing of social

use exclusive of gross income to the families raising a disabled child. One can also examine the question of state assistance for families with children in renting the housing.

In raising the prestige of the family, parenting and other family values, in forming higher population’s attitudes to the number of children per family, healthy living and optimization of migration policy, important tasks are assigned to the media, literature and cinematography. In addition, one can also use other facilities, including advertising. For example, it is reasonable to encourage advertising of goods and services related to the promotion of healthy lifestyles and a strong complete family with several children, in which relationships are built on an equitable basis.

Since the solution of the problem of higher-number-born children in the family is important for the society and the country as a whole, we should go into the issue to rank one of the parents upbringing four and more children under the age to the category of the employed in the economy. At the same time appropriate salary should be drawn, and these years should be included in the working pensionable life.

To obtain reliable and regular information about the changes related to forming the public attitudes about certain demographic processes, it is reasonable, for example, once every 2 – 3 years to include an expanded set of questions on marriage and family life, lifestyles, health and other issues touching the population policy into the questionnaire of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus on conducting the sample surveys of households.

To stimulate research in the field of demographic problems it is necessary to promote basic and applied research projects of economic, sociological, legal, educational, social and psychological issues as well as interdisciplinary issues of demographic development, to provide for coordination and funding of such research in research institutes and higher education establishments of the country.

This will make it possible to create a scientific data base for the development of evidence-based effective population policy in the country in the future. To improve the demographic literacy of the population, especially the workers who take management decisions, it is necessary to introduce lecture courses on demography in all humanities departments of universities.

Under depopulation, when the population reproduces only by half, migration is to compensate for loss of population. Therefore, the state holds an interest in the flow of population to the republic and tries to pursue an effective migration policy directed to active attraction of immigrants, especially from the CIS countries, their successful integration in the Belarusian society and neutralization

of the possible negative effects. However, as the data of recent years show, there are not any opportunities in the country to repay the depopulation due to the inflow of young people from CIS and Baltic countries.

Despite the fact that in recent years a positive migration balance of the population to Belarus from the CIS and Baltic states has increased significantly, and according to the reported data, for the first time in recent years the migration balance to other countries became positive, this increase is not large and cannot exceed the decrease in the population due to natural movement.

Thus, the demographic security will be the one of the most problematic aspects of social security in the long run.

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