

## **Population Ageing in Central and Eastern Europe: Societal and Policy Implications**

**Andreas Hoff, ed.**

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Population ageing is one of the most significant demographic processes, with long-term consequences which are already beginning to affect many countries around the world, most noticeably in Europe. There are several definitions of population ageing. One of them refers to an increased percentage of people older than 60 or 65 in the total population. Underlying this simple definition are a large number of negative demographic, social and economic implications. Experts, the general public and the media alike are increasingly interested in the potential societal challenges related to the process of population ageing. Even so, many experts believe that this global phenomenon has not been given enough attention.

At the beginning of this book readers are introduced to the population ageing situation in Central and Eastern Europe and the importance and complexity of the global population ageing phenomenon. There is a difference between the ageing of individuals and that of societies. While individual ageing is an

inevitable process for everyone, population ageing reflects the age structure of the entire population, which can theoretically change in any direction. All the countries covered in this volume display the same directional tendency, toward an older populace. Although there is a significant amount of partial research on the subject, this book provides a systematic analysis of population ageing at the level of individual post-socialist countries in Europe. Every chapter represents a characteristic country report on important demographic trends in the authors' respective countries. The book also covers the implications of population ageing for policy, health care provision, labour market, intergenerational family relations and quality of life in general. The editor, Andreas Hoff, emphasizes the specifics of the analyzed post-socialist countries, identifying 1989 as a pivotal period from which a series of "unintended side-effects" arose. The editor's introductory review focuses on the side effects of the specific transition process of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries from dictatorships with centrally directed market economies to democracies with market-based economies, with a special focus on demographic changes. The growing socio-economic insecurity of that period resulted in a drop in fertility and also caused a mass exodus of young people who left their countries in search of a better life. Thus, those countries have been deprived of not only that generation, but also of all the generations of children born to the émigrés.

Part I of the book, entitled "Population Ageing in Eastern Europe", covers the cases of Poland, Lithuania and Russia. In Chapter 2, Ewa Frątczak describes the basic demographic determinants of population ageing in Poland. As in many other European countries, the fertility rate in Poland declined in the second half of 20th century, entering the low fertility zone in 1988 (1.2-1.3 children per woman). Such a trend was a consequence of broad economic and socio-cultural changes. The author stresses that emigration has had an increasing role in shaping the Polish population's age structure. The shape of the age structure is marked by "high waviness", as a result of demographic booms and busts throughout the 20th century due to the First and Second World Wars. According to these

projections, the highest increase in the number of elderly (by about 2.1 million) will occur between 2011 and 2020 due to the movement of post-war baby-boomers from working to retirement age. By 2030 the share of people aged 60+ in the overall population will reach 30 percent compared to 8.3 percent in 1950. In addition, the author evaluates the impact of demographic determinants on family and intergenerational relationships by a macro-simulation model. The results indicate significant alterations in family structure and size, along with changing intergenerational relationships.

In Chapter 3, Sarmitė Mikulionienė describes the population ageing process in Lithuania. She starts by analyzing the dynamics of population ageing during the 1959-1989 period under the Soviet regime, followed by the 1990-2009 transitional period. A comparison of these specific periods reveals significant changes in the structure of Lithuania's population and the different pace of population ageing. The ageing process during the post-communist transition was twice as fast as that of the Soviet period. The past five decades were marked by a heavy loss in the children and youth group (0-19), and a sharp increase in the old age group, as well as the feminization of old age. The author argues that emigration might have accelerated population ageing. Namely, in 2008, Lithuania was one of only four EU countries (besides Latvia, Poland and Bulgaria) with a negative net migration rate. The elderly in Lithuania state that the older they get, the more difficult it is for them to sustain their social status as active members of society due to many barriers of social exclusion. Mikulionienė concludes that unfavourable portrayal of seniors in the media additionally contributed to the problems related to population ageing.

In Chapter 4, Gaiane Safarova discusses population ageing in the Russian Federation. Demographic transition in Russia began much later than in Western Europe. A comparison between the age pyramids in 1897 and in 2008 shows dramatic changes in the structure of age groups. The proportion of young people (0-15) decreased from 37.7 percent in 1897 to 14.7 percent in 2008, while the proportion of elderly (60+) increased from 7.3 to 17.2 percent. Although the author

does not find the present demographic situation in Russia dramatic, she admits that population ageing in Russia is progressing (the ageing index has increased from 66 in 1989 to 118 in 2007). The author concludes that with the lowest life expectancy at age 60 in Europe, the main driving force of population ageing in Russia is low fertility. In addition, the author raises the question of population heterogeneity, pointing out gender inequality as one of the key characteristics of demographic developments in Russia. Due to high mortality differences, there is a significant imbalance between men and women which is most apparent in the older population (the ratio of males to females in Europe was 928/1000 in 2005, compared to 866/1000 for Russia; among elderly Europeans the ratio is 687/1000, compared to 510/1000 in Russia). The author also analyzes regional differences, stressing variations in rural/urban trends.

Part II "Population Ageing in Central-Eastern Europe" covers the cases of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. Iva Holmerová, Hana Vaňková, Božena Juraskova and Dana Hrnčiariková describe the demographic situation in the Czech Republic in Chapter 5. Compared to other European countries, the Czech age structure is relatively young. The Czech Republic witnessed increased fertility in recent years (2005-2006). Despite such positive trends, the ageing process is unavoidable. According to these projections, the older population (65+) will represent almost one third of the total population by the middle of this century. The authors describe the last 20 years as a period of transition from socialist to Western European models of social behaviour, in which Czech society experienced a significant decrease in fertility rates. Increased life expectancy is very well reflected in the fact that the number of "oldest-old" people (those who are 80 years old or over) increased from 322,000 in 2005 to 355,464 in 2008. In their research on attitudes towards ageing, the authors analyze different aspects of social life affected by ageism (discrimination based on age). The results of the survey showed that 55 percent of persons over 70 felt discriminated against because of their age. The negative perception of the elderly in the media poses an additional problem.



to describe the demographic changes, the authors stress three crucial periods in Slovenian history: 1) the end of the 19th century when fertility started to decline; 2) the beginning of the 1980s when total fertility rates dropped below 2.1, life expectancy at birth exceeded the age of 70 and the average age of women at first childbirth started to increase; 3) the beginning of the 21st century, when the number of women of reproductive age started to decline, while the number of old people exceeded the number of young people and the percentage of the working age population stopped rising. The authors conclude that decreased fertility has resulted in increased numbers of the elderly with few or no relatives, and point out the necessity of expanding care-giving facilities for the future. In the second part of the chapter, the social networks of old people are classified. Based on the results of a survey, the authors describe different types of networks among the senior citizens and try to identify those which are large enough and sufficiently heterogeneous to provide the necessary social support.

Part III “Population Ageing in South-Eastern Europe” covers the cases of Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria. In Chapter 8, Sandra Švaljek examines the economic consequences of demographic ageing in Croatia. The natural decrease caused by the falling number of live births is described as a “pronounced demographic characteristic” in Croatia. The author stresses some country-specific phenomena (political and economic) that explain the current demographic trends. The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the war at the beginning of the 1990s caused massive population movements. It is estimated that from 1900 to 2001 the total outflow of Croatian inhabitants amounted to almost 1.2 million persons. The author claims that the migration balance became positive at the beginning of the 21st century, but not strongly enough to result in positive demographic trends in the future. The share of old people will continue to rise and the share of young and working-age people will shrink. The most crucial part of the chapter deals with the economic implications of demographic ageing. More precisely, the author addresses the issue of public pension and public health expenditures, highlighting the falling number of contributors as the main problem facing the

pension system. Another fact mentioned in this study, is the low labour market participation rate of the working-age population. The participation rate of older workers is even lower (36.5 percent in 2006). Theoretically, the labour supply in Croatia could be increased by raising the activity of older people. Aware of the potential harmful economic implications of population ageing, the author emphasizes the necessity of appropriate policy measures and the structural reform of the health care system in order to minimize the negative consequences of current demographic developments.

Demographic trends in Romania described in Chapter 9 are similar to those in many other European countries. The population age structure reflects a continuous process of ageing influenced by a decrease in fertility (total fertility rate 1.2-1.5 in 2008), a decrease in mortality and negative net migration. The author, Ágnes Neményi, points to international labour emigration as an ageing accelerator and focuses on social policy, social assistance and health care for the elderly. The author identifies a number of problems faced by the Romanian health care system: medical care for elderly is deficient, the supply of health care between urban and rural is unequal, hospitalization is expensive and public institutions that provide home care services lack adequate funding and personnel. In addition, the author explains the impact of massive migration from rural to urban areas between 1960 and 1985 (the so called “socialist industrialization”), which caused significant distortions in the age structure of the population. The migrant population has consistently grown since the fall of the communist regime, with Italy and Spain being the most receptive countries to Romanian citizens. The author concludes that these international migration flows also had some positive effects, e.g. contributed to the financial improvement of the older rural populace. The most vital changes are yet to come from improved social policy and economic development.

In Chapter 10, Emil Hristov describes the process of population ageing in Bulgaria. He introduces the factor analysis of ageing, to be used later in this study. The author emphasizes the last decade of the 20th century as an era that

witnessed the intensification of ageing in Bulgaria. As in other ex-communist countries, the shift from being a totalitarian state with a centralized economy to a democracy with a market-based economy resulted in negative changes such as production decreases, increased unemployment and high inflation rates. The ensuing political and social instability resulted in negative demographic trends, postponement of pregnancies and high emigration. By analyzing the impact of separate demographic processes on the ageing population, the author finds that the highest ageing rate was caused by the decrease in live births in the period 1991-2000. As expected, mortality and net migration had less of a net impact on ageing. Bulgaria witnessed a certain rejuvenation of the population due to an increase of birth rates between 2001-2010. Despite such positive trends, the author concludes that the continuous and strong ageing process driven by mortality and net migration cannot be neutralized.

Part IV “Societal and Policy Implications” consists of four chapters. The aim of Chapter 11 is to analyze physical and cognitive functions of older persons in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The authors Martin Bobak, Hynek Pikhart and Michael Marmot give a brief review of the health status of the population in CEE and the former Soviet Union (FSU), as well as in some EU member states. While the global population is inevitably ageing, the data on physical and cognitive impairment is very poor. Although the authors note the shortage of data useful for comparing the differences in physical and cognitive function between Western Europe and CEE/FSU, the available data suggests considerable variations in the measures of physical functioning among older persons in the region. The authors conclude that in some countries of the CEE/FSU, the age-related decline in both physical and cognitive functions seems steeper than in Western countries, possibly reflecting the accumulation of unfavourable risk factors over the life course.

In Chapter 12, Piotr Czekanowski examines the implications of population ageing on family relations and family care. The author takes Poland as a case study to present living conditions of the older people in CEE countries. He stresses



on society, as well as recommendations on future lines of research. Hoff stresses the necessity of raising public awareness of the specific needs of older people in response to prevailing negative stereotypes about them. *“It is crucial to accept that demographic ageing is a phenomenon affecting the entire society, and not just one age group or generation”* (p. 256).

The last sentence of the previous chapter gives the best conclusion and reference point from which to view this book. This volume represents an excellent basis for further research on demographic changes across the CEE region. It gives a systematic review of the implications of demographic ageing on the societies of the countries examined, although not with equal consistency in respect to in-depth analysis. It should be most useful to demographers, gerontologists and other scholars involved in ageing phenomena, and perhaps especially to economists and policy-makers and all those dealing with public service problems. The joint effort of the authors in reviewing population ageing in post-socialist countries compiled in one volume is invaluable. Demographic issues need to be addressed thoroughly and more frequently. Due to current population ageing trends, the ongoing changes cannot be stopped. This book proves that population ageing will remain a challenging topic. Hopefully the problem will attract more political awareness in the future. As Auguste Comte once said, “demography is destiny”. It is time to read and learn more about demography if we want to ensure that the children and adults of today do not end their days in poverty.

*Marin Strmota*