

THE CURRENT STATUS, PROSPECTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF POPULATION AGEING IN SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Population ageing is a social problem whose consequences will soon have a significant impact on various areas of human life. The ageing population is one of many factors that significantly affect the changes in social conditions of people's lives. It is a process that affects the emergence of new social risks and crises. This causes the need to identify the consequences of these changes and appropriate measures to respond to them. This identification is not possible without a thorough understanding of genesis and probable developments of the aging process. The following paper briefly describes the demographic aging of the population in Slovakia and important context associated with this phenomenon.

JEL Classification: I15, I39

Keywords: second demographic transition, population ageing, Slovak Republic, ageing index

Introduction

Europe today is facing major economic problems because of its aging population and a decreasing number of the working population. The demographic aging of population can be also considered a social problem, and its consequences will soon have a significant impact on various areas of life - work, education, health etc. It is believed that population ageing will place substantial additional pressure on publicly-funded health, long-term and income support programs for older people [1]. Population ageing is one of the many factors that significantly influence the changes in the social conditions of people's lives, but also the emergence of new

social risks and crises. This is caused by the need to identify consequences of these changes, as well as appropriate measures to respond to them. Identification of the impact of the changes is not possible without a thorough understanding of the process of aging. The following paper briefly describes the contribution of demographic aging of population in Slovakia and important context associated with this phenomenon.

The second demographic transition and population aging

Population ageing is an inevitable effect of so-called demographic revolution in which there has been a shift from extensive to intensive demographic reproductions, characterized by low birth and death rates respectively. to prolonging human life [2].

The term demographic revolution (demographic transition) was introduced by the French demographer Alfred Landry in 1934 [3]. The transition is characterized by a shift from low fertility and rising death rates among the elderly, leading to further population aging and eventual population decline, assuming no net migration [4]. Unlike the first demographic and low death rates to one of low transition—from high fertility and high death to low fertility and low death rates—which provides a period of “demographic dividend” [5], the second transition, is also characterized by a “demographic tax”. Negative macroeconomic impacts can be cited as one example of this phenomenon’s results.

The term population ageing describes the changes in the age structure, due to the increasing proportion of elderly in the population. Today, ageing is a global demographic process, manifested to greater extent in developed countries. This complex process is the result of previous demographic trends and is directly related to the first demographic transition and the overall modernization process after the Second World War. Technological and scientific advances enabled the mortality decline, which resulted in increasing life expectancy and better health. The twentieth century was a period of the most influential extension of human life [6]. Modernization processes also caused a decline in fertility and birth rates, thereby deepening the process of demographic aging. While it may seem that the birth rate is low only in times of momentary observation, researches show that it may remain below the level needed to replace generations, which may lead to new demographic inequalities. Effects of inequality become visible already. Low levels of fertility can now be considered a major cause of rapid demographic ageing in the developed European

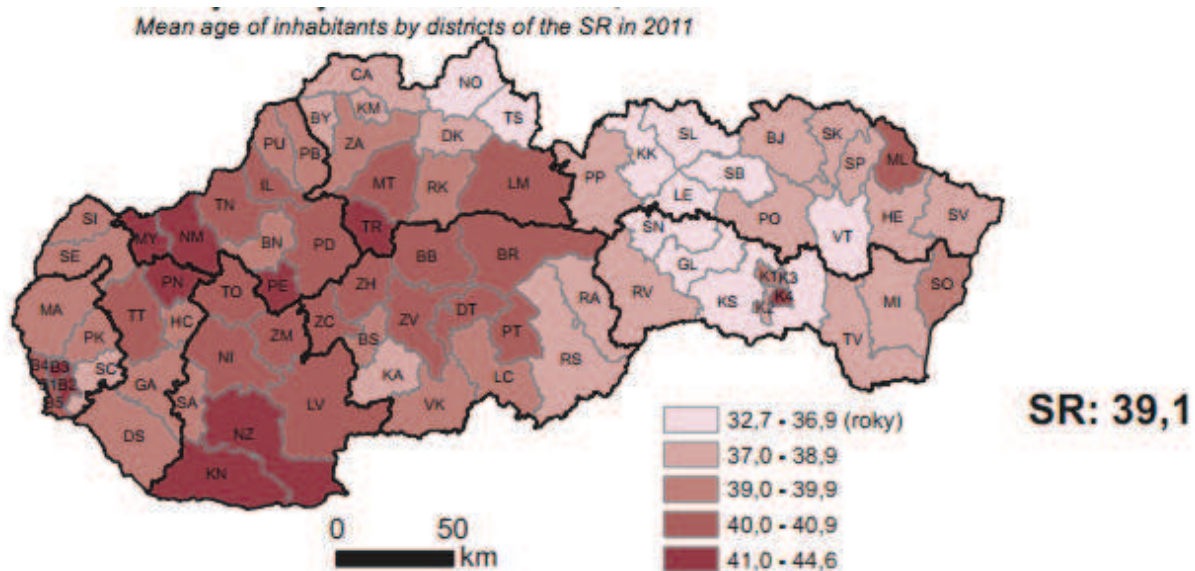
countries (as well as post-communist countries such as Slovak Republic). Eastern European countries still have considerable room to improve the level of mortality (infant mortality, seniors and over-mortality of men) and thus increasing life expectancy, which in the future will certainly affect the process of demographic ageing. Demographic ageing is reflected in the increase of older age groups.

The elderly population is usually defined by the age limit of 65 years. In Western Europe this threshold usually coincides with the official retirement age. In Eastern Europe it may be replaced by the age of 60 years. Such defined elderly population is not internally homogeneous in terms of lifestyle, health, and thus in terms of their attitudes towards society. For this reason, it is commonly subdivided. The age group 65-74 is called the „third age“ (young-old), persons aged 75 + „fourth age“ (old-old). The term oldest old represents the population of 85 + year olds. To reflect population ageing indexes can be used in addition to simple percentages of selected population groups by age (0-14 (%) 60 + (%) 65 + (%) 70 + (%) 80 + (%)). Among these the so-called Ageing index is probably the most used one. It expresses the number of people in the post-working age to those in pre-productive age and is usually expressed as a percentage. Another possibility to express the process of aging is the Billeter index, which expresses the difference between the number of persons in the pre-and post-reproductive age to persons of reproductive age. It is also expressed as a percentage [7].

Population ageing in European countries and in Slovak Republic

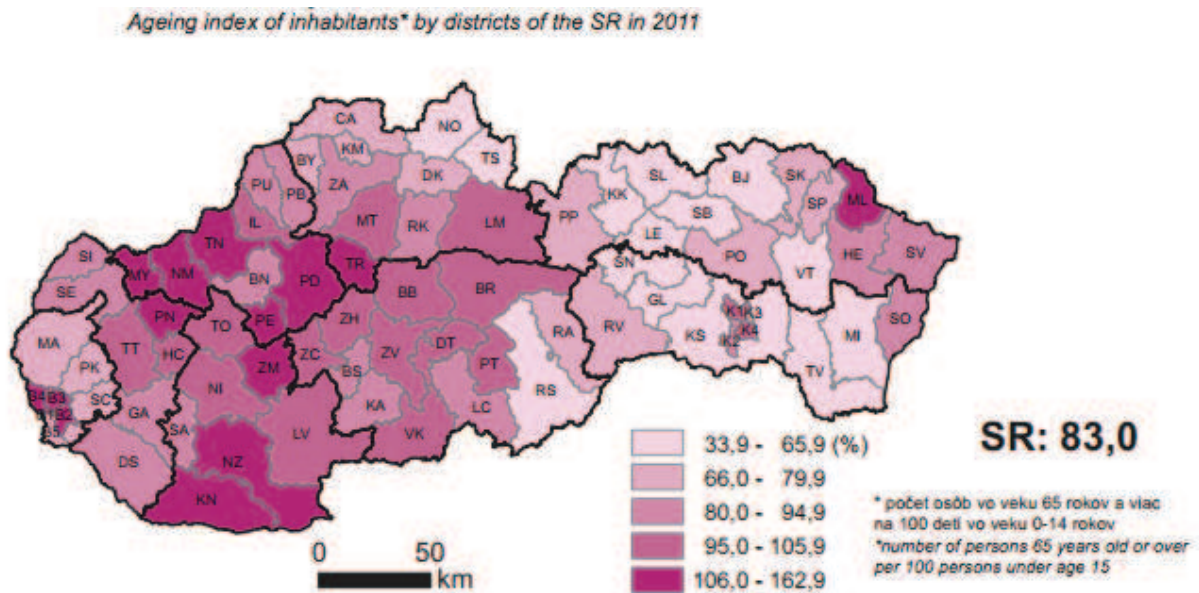
There is a high probability that in the future third of the population in various regions of the European Union will be older than 60 years. At present, the proportion of the population is about 20 percent [8]. Also the emergence of aging seniors is anticipated. Today, the proportion of people aged over 80 in the population is about 4 percent. By 2040, this percentage is likely to double. Dramatic changes can be expected after 2040, when the age group will be hit by the „baby - boom“ generation (people born in the 60s of the 20th century). Proportion of seniors aged 80 will then exceed the limit of 12 percent of the total population.

Since the mid-60s significant changes occur in the CoE member states in all major components of population development, lifestyle and layout of people's lives [9]. To a greater or lesser extent, this development takes place also in other European countries. It is emphasized that fundamental changes occur between European cohorts, which significantly affects the economic and social situation of European countries.

Fig. 1. Mean Age of Inhabitants in Slovak Republic

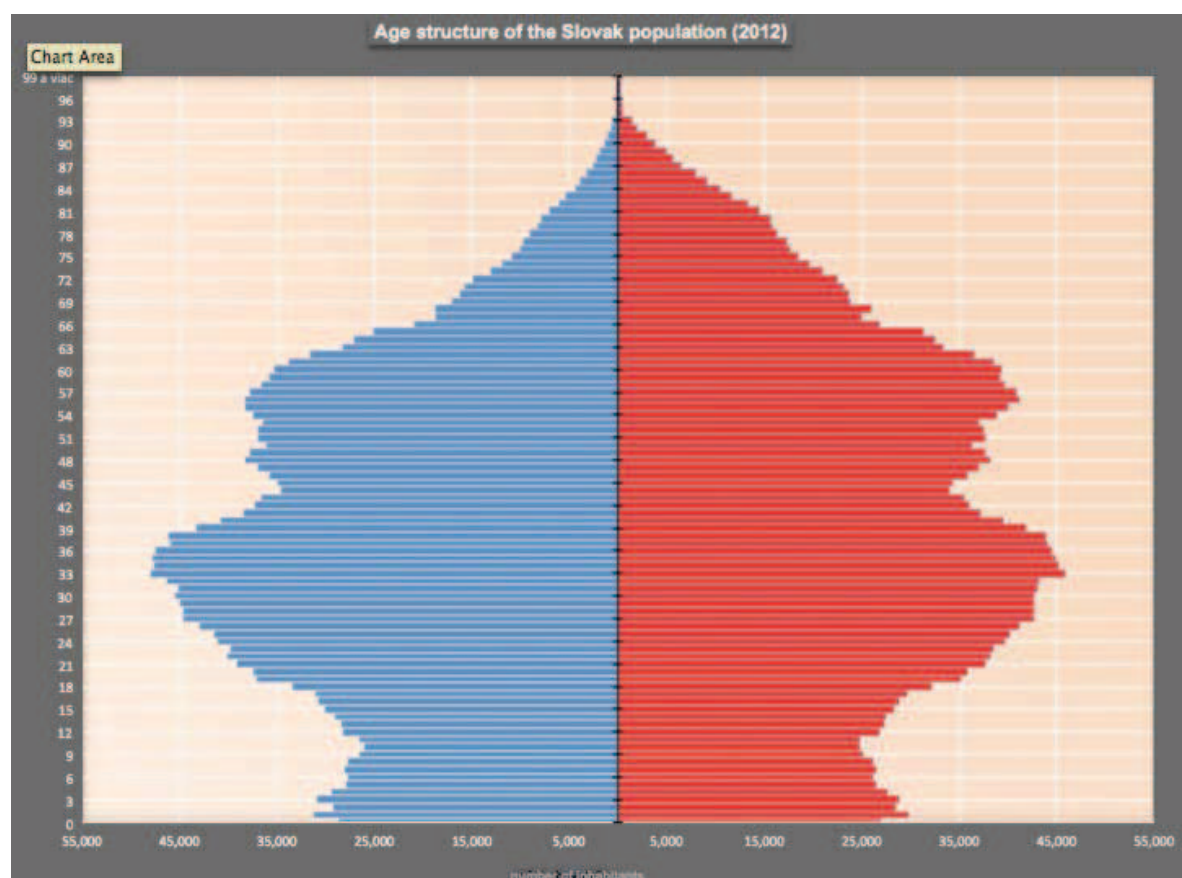
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

The value of the aging index for the Slovak Republic in comparison with other European countries is still relatively low. Slovakia is now one of the youngest countries in Europe. But the changing demographic behavior over the last ten to fifteen years has caused an acceleration of demographic aging. According to the latest forecasts, Slovakia, maintaining the current level of fertility, respectively, with its slight increase happens to be in the mid 21 century, one of the oldest populations in the world. The continued aging is terminated by the above-mentioned characteristics of the average age and the aging index. Both of these characteristics record a long-term growth, which is gradually accelerating. The current values of the average age and the aging index in Slovakia are historically high [10].

Fig. 2. Ageing Index of Inhabitants in Slovak Republic

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Over the past fifty years, numerous changes associated with the proportional representation of seniors occurred in the Slovak population. Their pace has quickened markedly during the nineties of the 20th century. The average age of the population increased from 1950 to 2000, about six to eight years, from 29 to 35 years for men and from 31 to 39 years for women. The share of seniors has doubled and mortality and improving health conditions add to changes of the internal structure of this category of the population. Among seniors, women will continue to dominate the age structure deformation due to war losses and over-mortality of men. Noticeable is the doubling of the proportion of 85 + year olds. This proportion is continually on the rise. As in other EU countries, in Slovakia we can record a gradual aging population of seniors.

Fig. 3. Age Structure of the Slovak Population

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Per 100 inhabitants below 15 years accounted for Slovakia in 2005 68 people aged 65 and over (in 1995 it was “only” around 50 people). That is, the aging index, in over ten years has increased by 38.6%.

The aging process takes place in all age groups of the population. The working population is aging due to sliding of more boomers to the elderly and their replacement by weaker boomers. Strong post-war boomers from the 70s are slowly beginning to abandon the age of highest fertility. Conversely, to the productive age still come weaker boomers born in the 80s and 90s. This increases the process of population aging.

Slovakia is not a homogenous country. Individual demographic processes take place at different speeds and with varying intensity in different regions of Slovakia, which also causes a marked differentiation in terms of demographic aging. Slovakia still outnumbers young over older districts, as evidenced by the position of Slovakia in the European countries. In the future it can be expected that aging is the result

of lower fertility and transition baby boomers in particular, to deepen mostly in so-called „average” districts. However, the entire population of Slovakia will age.

In addition, it is still necessary to mention the specifics of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe - the proportion of the Roma population in the total population. Demographic, socio-economic and often also the personal status of many Roma in Slovakia today is markedly different from the rest of the population [11]. The Roma population has different characteristics of fertility and mortality rates than the rest of the Slovak population. Specific numerical estimates can finally be recorded only indirectly, as the movement data of the population of Roma nationality do not provide real results on the reproductive behavior of Roma. According to the latest available data were for the period 1970 to 1980 Roma men life expectancy is about 54 years and Roma women about 58 years old [12]. In retrospect, the demographics surveyed prior to 1989 in violation of human rights (for Roma individuals were called by others). The structure and spatial distribution of the Roma are changing relatively slowly, and therefore the data can be considered relevant even today. The Roma population is from a demographic point of view a developing population, which is characterized by a progressive type of age structure. Taking into account demographic patterns, the demographic situation of the Roma is not uncommon, such a development is common in developing populations. A change of reproductive behavior in developing populations is associated with the change of living conditions, increased standard of living and increased education levels. Due to the isolation of the Roma population these changes are realised more slowly than in the rest of the population of Slovakia. It is believed that improving the health status of the Roma population will decrease mortality and improve longevity. Demographic theories and laws based on estimates of the current situation of the Roma population assume the aging of this population too.

Conclusion

It is very clear that the process of population aging is an inevitable process also for a relatively young („young“ from a demographic point of view) country like Slovakia. This process needs to be seen as a factor that may help the emergence of new social risks and crises. Their consequences hit the hardest socially vulnerable people, socially dependent, elderly and ill, long-term unemployed, minority communities and the like. The situation today is more than ever the need for stabilization of desirable social security, reduction and eventual elimination of those secu-

rity threats. Emphasis should be placed clearly on an interdisciplinary approach to the investigation of those risks and threats. This is a complex process in which a cooperation of responsible actors in the relevant area is necessary.

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