

STANISŁAWA GÓRECKA

WROCLAW UNIVERSITY

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN THE CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPE ON THE TURN OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY

ABSTRACT. The political transformation that took place in the 1990s in the Central and East European countries had an impact on many fields of life, including the demographic behaviour of the population. The political and socioeconomic transformation modified or speeded up many demographic processes, especially the phenomena associated with the natural movement of population.

Already from the beginning of the political transformation there had been some noticeable changes in the level of many demographic parameters that are characteristic for the second demographic transition. The Central and East European countries, which were much less advanced in the modernization processes than the Western Europe ones, have been narrowing the distance very fast.

KEY WORDS: Central and East European countries, second demographic transition, demographic changes.

INTRODUCTION

After the end of World War II, there had been a compensation population boom that had lasted for a different time span and had different intensity in various countries. For some time the natality was at a stable level, however ever since the beginning of the 1960s in almost all of the Western and Northern European countries there had been a strong decrease in fertility rates, which in the middle of the 1970s, had dropped below the replacement level. It was a result of the changes in people's demographic behaviours, mostly in terms of forming and developing a family. In the period in question, there had been a decrease in

the marriage rate, a systematic raise of the mean age of the brides and bridegrooms (newlyweds), an increase of the divorce rate, a growing popularity of cohabitation and consensual unions, delaying of the first birth, limiting the number of children in the family, and an increase in the conscious childlessness. All these changes had been called “the second demographic transition” by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa (Kotowska, 1988).

The background of these processes were the socioeconomic, political, behavioural and technological transformations, such as the overall improvement in the standard of life, the development of democracy, widespread of pluralistic and liberal values, increase of individualism and the autonomy of individuals, increase in the level of education of people and their spatial and social mobility, increase of the participation of women in the economic and social life, widespread development of contraception methods. They had led to deep changes in the sphere of values, norms, attitudes and social behaviours of the populations of Western and Northern Europe (Kotowska, 1999).

The phenomena and processes related to the second demographic transition appeared in a period in which the Central and Eastern European countries were isolated from the influences of the Western countries, therefore the diffusion of the West European demographic trends was made considerably more difficult. On the other hand, in the Central and Eastern European countries the demographic processes were moulded by different socioeconomic and political conditions. A distinct polarization of the demographic processes had been observable in Europe until the end of the 1980s. The axis of the division was corresponding to the, then, political division between the West and the East (Kurkiewicz, 1988; Okólski, 2004; Schoenmaeckers, 2000). Only the political and socio-economic changes that took place in the Central and Eastern European countries after the fall of communism had initiated a very deep and dynamic transformations of the demographic processes in this part of Europe.

THE CHANGES IN FAMILY FORMATION AND DISSOLUTION

The first and most visible manifestation of a change in the demographic behaviours of the population was a decrease in marriage rate (Fig. 1). In all of the Central and Eastern European countries in the analyzed period between 1990 and 2002, it had been significant – more than 20%, and in Latvia and Lithuania it was over 50%. It should be mentioned that the dynamics of the decrease was much bigger in the first years of transformation. After 1995 it started to lose its intensity except for Ukraine and Moldova, where the tendency had even been deepened (Fig. 2).

Such a significant decrease caused the marriage rate to become equal to that in some of the Western countries by 2002. In some countries (Bulgaria,

Estonia, Latvia) it is even below the Western European rate. Only in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus it is still above the European mean rate.

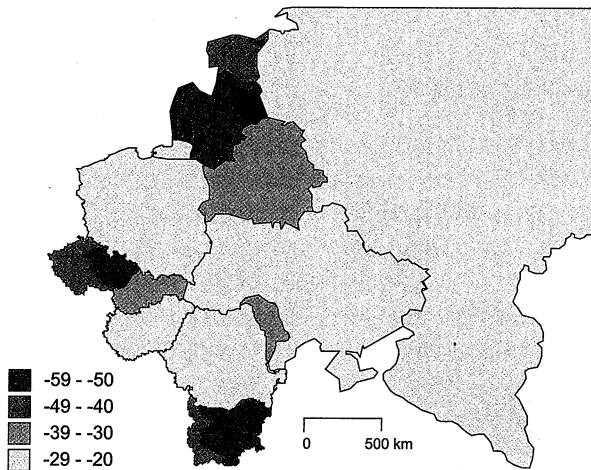


Fig. 1. Crude marriage rate (marriages per 1,000 population). Dynamic of changes in years 1990-2002 (in %)

Source: Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.

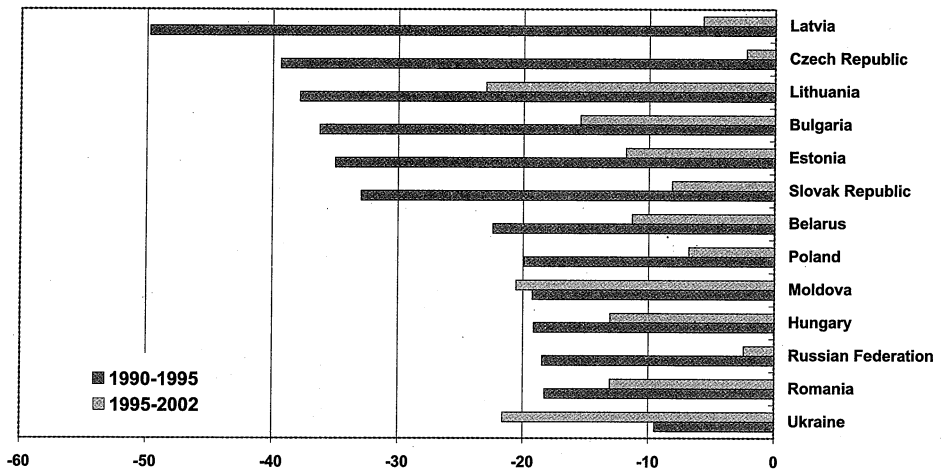


Fig. 2. Crude marriage rate (marriages per 1,000 population). Dynamic of changes in years 1990-1995 and 1995-2002 (in %)

Source: Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.

The decrease in the marriage rate had been accompanied by a systematic increase in the mean age of the brides and bridegrooms (newlyweds). In the analyzed period, in all of the Central and Eastern European countries (except

for Moldova) the mean age of women at the first marriage had risen (Fig. 3). The process had been the strongest in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria and Estonia, where the age had risen by more than three years and it's around 25.5 years now. The brides in Central and Eastern European countries are, however, still younger on average than the counterpart women in the West who get married even later, at the age of 28-29.

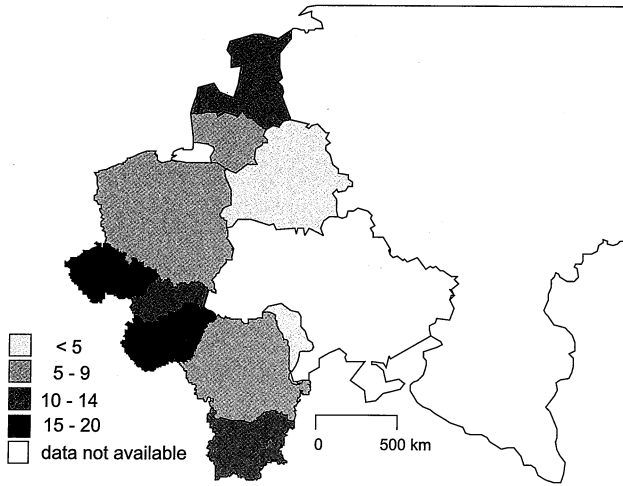


Fig. 3. Mean age of women at first marriage. Dynamic of changes in years 1990-2002 (in %) *Source:* Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.

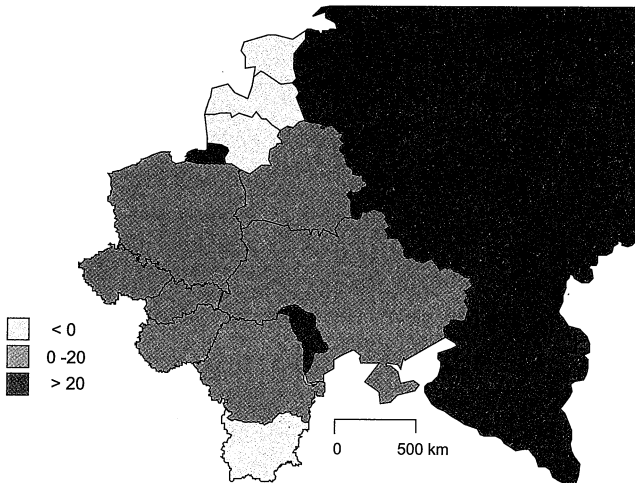


Fig. 4. Crude divorce rate (per 1,000 population). Dynamic of changes in years 1990-2002 (in %) *Source:* Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.

Relatively the smallest changes had occurred in the divorce rate (Fig. 4). Although after 1990 in most of the Central and Eastern European countries the intensity of divorce rate had increased, it did not exceed 10% (except for Russia and Moldova, where it was almost 50%). In Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia the divorce rate had even decreased, nevertheless, it is still high (one of the highest in Europe). A similar situation exists in other post-USSR countries.

THE CHANGES IN NATALITY

After 1990 in the Central and Eastern Europe there had been some really dynamic changes in the natality. They can be seen in the decrease of birth rate (Fig. 5) which in the years 1990 to 2002 had exceeded 30% in most of the analyzed countries. The decrease in natality was particularly deep in the initial stage of transformation, between 1990 and 1995, and was most evident in countries such as Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, and Bulgaria. It is unusual that in these countries the decrease tendency has leveled off and it reversed in Russia and Estonia.

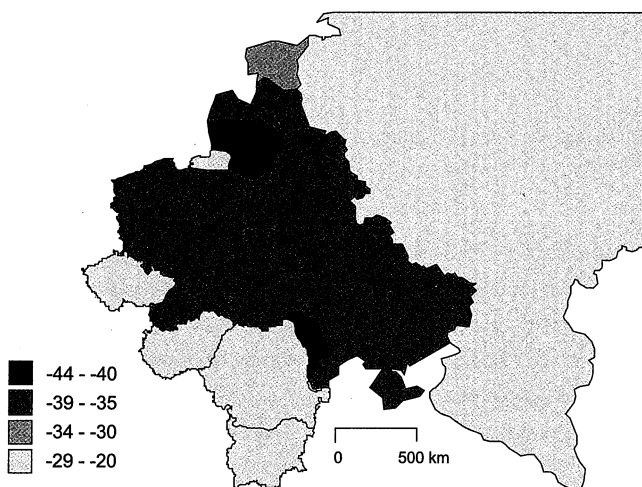


Fig. 5. Crude birth rate (live births per 1,000 population). Dynamic of changes in years 1990-2002 (in %)

Source: Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.

The decrease in natality had caused a decrease of total fertility rate of more than 30% in all of the Central and Eastern European countries (Fig. 6). In spite of the fact that already in 1990 the fertility rate was on such a low level that it did not ensure the replacement of the cohort, by 2002 it had reached an unprecedentedly low level (it was no higher than 1.37; in Ukraine only 1.1, in the

Czech Republic – 1.17). Such low values of fertility rate were unprecedented in Europe (the previous minimum had been reached in Spain in 1995 – 1.18). The dynamics of fertility rate level was similar to the birth rate. After a very rapid fall in the 1990 to 1995 period, in most of the countries the fertility rate was falling much slower except for Poland, Moldova and Hungary where the decrease had been slightly bigger (Fig. 7).

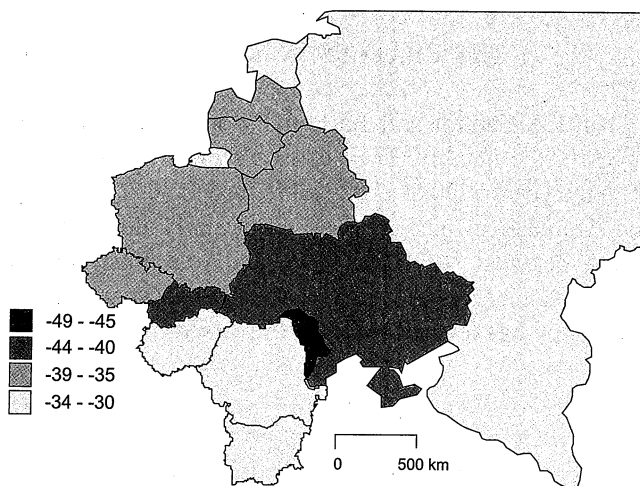


Fig. 6. Total period fertility rate. Dynamic of changes in years 1990-2002 (in %) *Source: Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.*

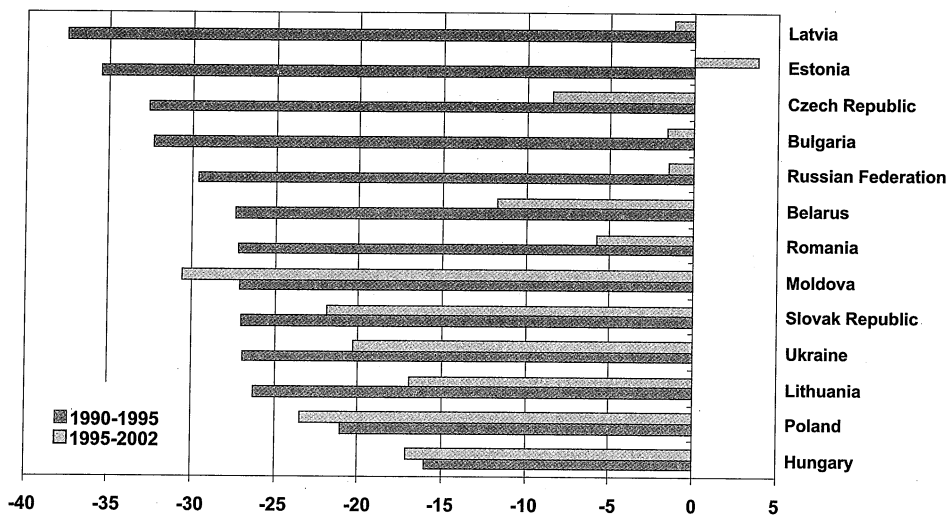


Fig. 7. Total period fertility rate. Dynamic of changes in years 1990-1995 and 1995-2002 (in %) *Source: Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.*

The women in Central and Eastern Europe give birth to fewer and fewer children, and what is more, the mean age of women at birth of the first child rises. In all of the analysed countries, the mean age of women at birth of the first child in 2002 was higher than in 1990 (Fig. 8). In most of the countries examined here it raised from 1.7 to 1.9 years, and in the Czech Republic it was as much as 3.1 years. In spite of these changes, the women in Central and Eastern Europe still become mothers much earlier (usually some 2-3 years earlier) than women in the West.

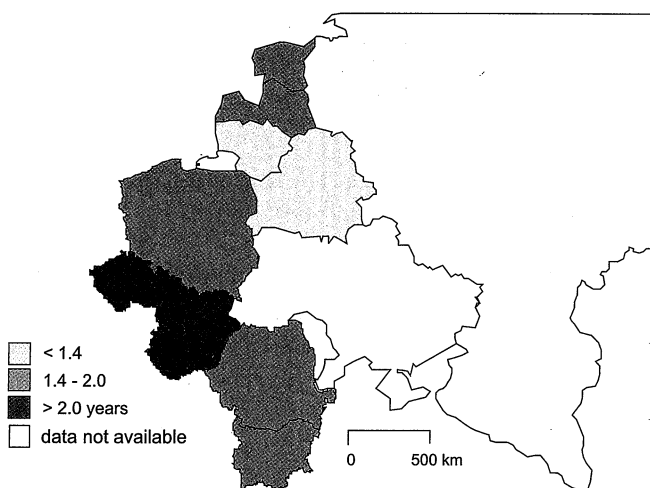


Fig. 8. Increase of mean age of women at birth of first child in years 1990-2002
 Source: Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.

The socioeconomic transformation had also caused distinct changes in one more important aspect of natality – extra marital births. Even though the percentage of extra marital births had a steady tendency to increase before the transformation, in most of the countries (except for Estonia, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine and Hungary) it did not exceed 10% before 1990. After 1990 in all of the countries there had been a noticeable increase of this parameter (Fig. 9), in some of the countries it had been quite rapid (in Romania it increased 5.5 times, in Lithuania – 3 times). As the result of these changes, in Central and Eastern European countries more and more children are born out of wedlock. In Estonia it is already over 56%; much more than in many Western European countries. A high percentage of extra marital births (30%) is noticeable also in Bulgaria, Latvia and Hungary.

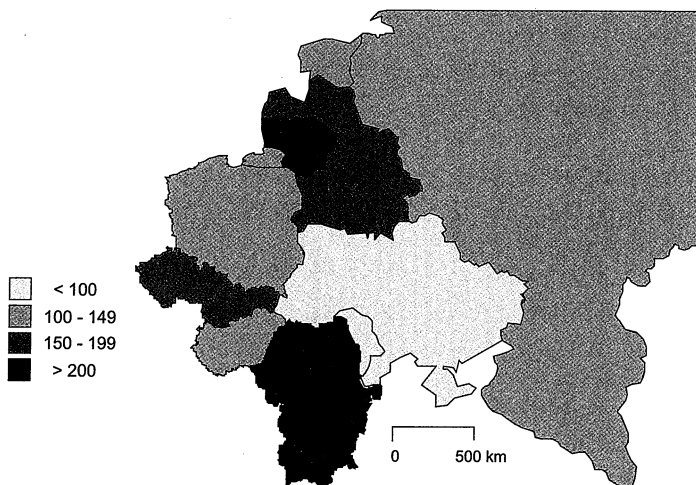


Fig. 9. Extra-marital births (per 100 live births). Dynamic of changes in years 1990-2002 (in %)
Source: Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2003.

A significant decrease in extra marital births between 1990 and 2002 resulted mainly from the steady decrease in the marriage rate and the popularization of cohabitates. It was related to a much smaller degree with the increase of the divorce rate, which in this part of Europe (except for Poland) had already been high before 1990.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the basic natural movement parameters shows that at the turn of the 20th and 21st century in the Central and Eastern European countries there had been some profound and very dynamic changes of the demographic processes.

The political and, most of all, socioeconomic transformations had caused people adjust their demographic behaviours to the new conditions. Already at the beginning of the transformation there had been noticeable changes in those areas which are most sensitive to economic changes and life condition adjustments that is in nuptiality and natality (Monnier, 1998; Seys, 1998). They were a reaction to the introduction of the free market rules and the withdrawal of the state from its welfare function. The necessity to take over the individual responsibility over the economic situation of a household caused the increase of competition between being economically active and forming and developing a family. It applied especially to women, for whom the alternative costs of a marriage and maternity are exceptionally high (Kotowska, 1998).

The answer to the new socioeconomic conditions was an almost instant decrease in marriage rate and an increase in the mean age of the newlyweds. A difficult situation on the labour market (that is preferring highly educated people and people prepared to work flexible hours) causes young adults, especially women, delay the decision about marriage until they reach a job stabilization.

The socioeconomic transformation had also been observable in a sudden decrease in fertility and birth rate, which reached unprecedented low levels. It was a reaction to the decline of social security and a decrease in the standards of living. Such behaviour was also influenced by the popularization of particularized and consumption approaches towards life, and weakening of the importance of marriage, family, and traditional values in general.

The analyzed demographic changes had been extremely fast and their dynamics was so great in the initial phase of the transformation that they had been described as a "demographic crisis" or the "demographic impact" (Seys, 1998). In the second half of the 1990s the societies of the Central and Eastern European countries slowly began to get accustomed to the new socioeconomic reality and in most of the countries, the unfavourable tendencies were leveled out.

The present demographic changes in Central and Eastern Europe successively level out the differences between themselves and the West. In some areas, it is happening surprisingly fast, while in the others the discrepancies are still visible. Does the nature of the population changes in the Central and Eastern European countries allow us to say that they characterise the second demographic transition? Yes, if we take into consideration such indexes as nuptiality and natality. However, if we take a closer look at other elements characteristic of the second demographic transition, we may have some doubts. It concerns mainly such phenomena as mortality, which is not directly dependent on the will of the individual, but on a series of social and economic conditions. In Central and Eastern Europe life expectancy is still shorter than in the Western countries. The discrepancies in this aspect are especially noticeable in the male life expectancy in such countries as Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus, in which it is a dozen or so years shorter. We can therefore conclude, that the observed processes are not simply an imitation of the Western patterns, but are apparently specific and result from different, mainly economic, social and cultural conditions.

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CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Stanisława Górecka
Department of Social and Economic Geography
Institute of Geography and Regional Development
Wrocław University
Plac Uniwersytecki 1, 50-137 Wrocław, Poland
[e-mail: gorecka@geogr.uni.wroc.pl]