

THE PRONATALIST POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF GLOBAL TRENDS OF DECLINING FERTILITY

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Abstract

Background and Objective: A steady decline in fertility is a problem in most developed and developing countries of the world, including the Republic of Belarus. This process has negative consequences, including a decrease in the number of employed people, demographic aging, and even the threat of extinction of nations. The purpose of the article is to identify the position of the Republic of Belarus in the global trends in the birth rate, to determine measures to stimulate the birth rate at the macro and micro levels, taking into account international practice.

Materials and methods: To achieve the goal, a spatial and temporal comparative analysis was used, which made it possible to statistically prove the presence of a downward trend in the birth rate in the world, individual regions and the Republic of Belarus for 1950–2019, as well as the formation of a whole cluster of countries where simple reproduction of the population is not ensured. In addition, an assessment was made of the degree of use of the reproductive potential of Belarusian women. The analysis is based on the statistical data of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, the World Bank.

Results: The authors made an analytical review of modern pronatalist policy measures and determined the possible effect of their use. As a result of the analysis, the need to intensify the pronatalist policy in Belarus is proved, taking into account the positive and negative experience of developed countries as part of the shift in emphasis from financial to non-financial measures, as well as activating demographic policy at the micro level.

Practical implication: The results of the analysis will be useful for the development of new directions of pronatalist policy.

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Conclusion and summary: The Republic of Belarus is among the countries with a very low birth rate. The solution to this problem is possible due to the introduction in practice of new non-traditional methods of pronatalist policy at the micro and macro levels.

Keywords: birth rate, pronatalist policy, measures to increase the birth rate at the macro and micro levels.

JEL classification: J 18.

Paper type: *review*.

1. Introduction

At different historical stages of the development of human society, the population of the country was considered as its competitive advantage in the global geopolitical arena. The natural source of population replenishment is the fertility, which is regulated by a significant part of the state demographic policy. Traditionally, birth control policy measures are divided into 3 groups: administrative, economic and socio-psychological. If there is a tendency towards a lower birth rate in the country, the Government had a pronatalist policy, and in the case of a high birth rate – a contrary policy. Thus, the first stage in the development of population policy measures is a statistical analysis of the state and development of the birth rate.

2. Literature review

Demographic problems affect all spheres of society – economic, social, political, etc. An urgent problem in the most developed countries of the world is a steady decline in the birth rate. It is possible to change the negative trends in the birth rate, thanks to a competent state demographic policy. The starting point in the development of public policy measures is the statistical assessment of the birth rate based on data from national statistical organizations (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus) and international organizations (The World Bank), as well as the results of sample surveys (Larchenko, 2014). Then one should evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the national demographic policy measures, and then analyze the experience of foreign countries with similar problems (Sbrodova & Bolgova, 2021), (Mikhalchenkova et al. 2020), (Schulz, 2021). Currently, the most interesting instruments for stimulating the birth rate are the pronatalist policy “family-work balance” (Kalabikhina, 2020) and the corporate demographic policy including the following participants “State – business-employees” chain (Rostovskaya et al. 2021), (Bagirova & Vavilova, 2020). The foreign authors’ vision of the demographic situation in Belarus is also of interest (Marples, 2016).

In most of the above articles, the authors focus on certain aspects of the fertility decline crisis. In this article, the authors will try to build a single vector “the problem – the causes of the problem – what is being done in this country – what is being done in foreign countries – what can be done taking historical and foreign experience”.

3. Methodology

The achievement of the result is based on a statistical assessment of the patterns of development of the birth rate process in time and space, followed by an analytical review of the literature and Internet resources in order to form recommendations for optimizing the demographic policy in the Republic of Belarus. The article uses the results of a dissertation research, articles, Internet sources. The practical part of the study is based on the data of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, the World Bank, as well as on the legislative acts of the Republic of Belarus in the field of birth control. For the analysis of trends a comparative analysis in time and space was used, as well as the authors used a comparison assessment of the age-specific fertility rates of Belarusian women with the standard of natural fertility. To ensure visibility, a graphical method was used.

In the course of the research, the authors put forward the hypothesis: the main reason for the decline in the birth rate in the Republic of Belarus is the low degree of use of natural childbearing potential by women, which is associated with the socio-economic development of the country.

4. The position of the Republic of Belarus in the global trends of the birth rate process

Traditionally, phenomena and processes are studied in time and space. Let's apply this approach to estimate of fertility in the world and in Belarus. The most valuable indicator in the analysis of the fertility is the total fertility rate (TFR), which describes the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime if: the age-specific rates observed in a given year she was to pass her child-bearing year (15–49 years) experiencing the present day age-specific fertility rate. If the TFR level is 2.15, then observed simple reproduction of the population. If the TFR value is lower, then the generation of parents does not reproduce the generation of children. The dynamics of the TRF value around the world, by region and in Belarus for 1950–2019 is shown in Figure 1.

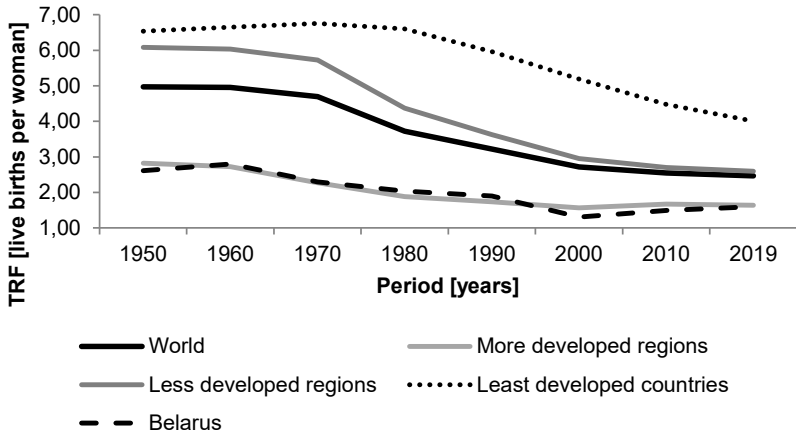


Figure 1. Total fertility by region and world, 1950–2019

Source: The World Bank; Demoscope weekly.

The Figure 1 shows negative dynamics of the TFR around the world, by region and in Belarus. Thus, for 1950–2019, the TFR around the world decreased by more than 2 times and in Belarus – by 38.7%. The specifics of the dynamics of the TRF value in Belarus largely coincide with the trends in more developed countries. The spatial aspect of the development of fertility in the world is shown in Figure 2.

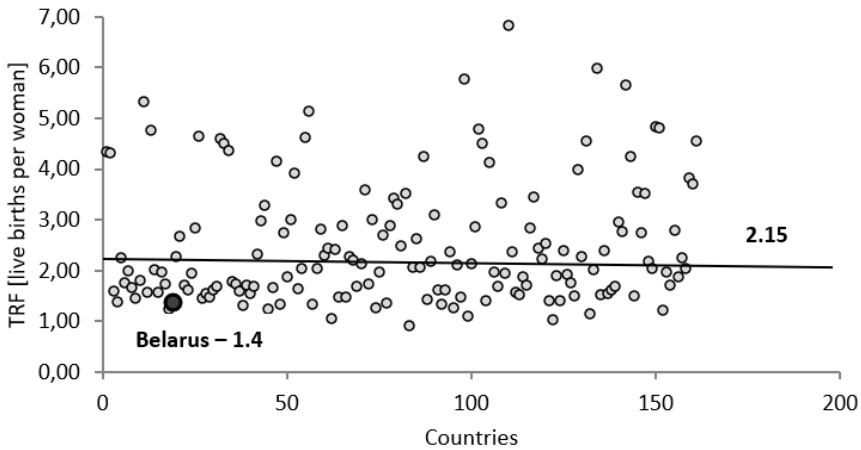


Figure 2. Total fertility by country in 2019

Source: The World Bank.

The Figure 2 shows that the countries of the world have a fairly high degree of differentiation in the level of the TFR. In addition, 52.8% of countries, including the Republic of Belarus, have a birth rate below 2.15. It should be noted that the

most developed countries of the world (Germany, Belgium, Finland, Poland, Canada, Australia, etc.) were under the line. Consequently, the low birth rate is an indicator of socio-economic progress.

The statistical evidence of the global trend of falling fertility and predisposition to its low level is determined by many factors – economic, social, demographic, and ecological, etc., but the main reason is the change in the reproductive habits of the population. This fact is confirmed by the results of a comparative analysis of the age-specific fertility rates of the Belarusian women and the women of the Hutterites³, who show a modern standard of natural fertility in the world (see Figure 3).

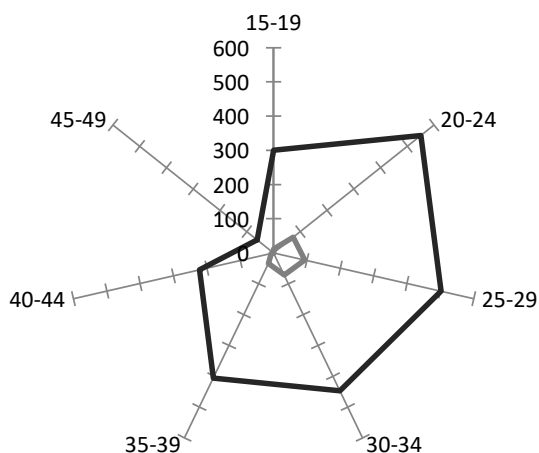


Figure 3. Age-specific fertility rates of the Hutterite women and the Belarusian women (births per 1,000 women in that age group)

Source: National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus; Nihal, 1998.

The Figure 3 shows a huge difference in the age-specific fertility rates of the compared groups. In 2018 the childbearing potential of Belarusian women was used only 12.6% at the possible natural level.

A conscientious objection to have children or a focus on the birth of one child is associated with the active socio-economic development of countries. The correlation coefficient between the TFR and the Human Development Index in 2019 was -0.762 (calculated for 160 countries of the world), which indicates a strong feedback between the values of these indicators. Indeed, the progress of society provides great opportunities for human development – getting an education, career growth, playing sports, traveling, etc. Therefore, children are seen as a kind of “obstacle” to self-development and enjoyment of life, especially at young ages. As proof, we present the results of a sample survey of women of reproductive age in Minsk. The modal value

³ The Hutterites are a communal ethno-religious branch of Anabaptists, in which all birth control methods are prohibited.

of the desired number of children in real conditions is 1 child, and in ideal conditions – 2 children. Thus, the majority of women are focused on a one-child family, more than 20% of the surveyed women do not want to have children (Larchenko, 2014).

The analysis serves as a statistical confirmation that Belarus is the representative of the group of countries for which the pronatalist policy is relevant.

5. What is being done and what can be done in the Republic of Belarus to stimulate the birth rate

What are they doing and what can be done to increase of the birth rate in Belarus, taking into account the world and historical experience?

The legislative basis of the modern pronatalist policy in Belarus includes the following legal acts: the Law “On Demographic Security of the Republic of Belarus”; National Demographic Security Programs of the Republic of Belarus; the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus “On Family Capital”, etc. The most powerful measures are maternity leave, family capital, concessional housing credits.

The other measures are used at the macro level: the right to a weekly paid day off for one of the parents in large families, tax benefits for large families, provision of free meals for children of the first two years of life, babysitting services, a respite service for families raising disabled children, the Order of the Mother for mothers who have raised five or more children and other kind of targeted state social assistance.

Thus, a wide range of measures to stimulate the birth rate is applied in Belarus, most of which are of a material kind.

As part of the answer to the question “What else can be done in Belarus?” the authors propose a dualistic approach to the proposed measures, that is their division into non-financial and financial.

Given the increasing importance and effectiveness of non-financial instruments around the world, it is worth starting with the measures in this area. These include:

1. Shifting the emphasis from the material paradigm of fertility support to the paradigm of time release. The introduction of family capital and allowances are an effective instruments of demographic policy, they had their effect soon after their application. Thus, the family capital introduced in Belarus in 2015 allowed already in 2016 to increase the number of births of the third children by 11%, the fourth – by 13%, the fifth – by 7%, the sixth and more – by 15% (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus). In 2017 the effect remained, but from 2018 and beyond the effectiveness of this measure began to decline. That is why, a new direction of the pronatalist policy “family-work balance” is being formed (Kalabikhina, 2020). It is cheaper for the State, funding is stretched

over time and has a cumulative effect. Also, this type of demographic policy corresponds to the attitudes of young people. It should be noted worth noting that in Germany, back in 2012, the VIII Family Report focused on the criterion of “time” as a special priority in a number of family policy measures (Schulz, 2021). The main directions of “family-work balance” policy are: 1) creation of a developed infrastructure aimed at taking care of children of different age and the elderly; 2) friendly attitude to employees with children; 3) egalitarian distribution of responsibilities within the family.

Effect: stimulating the birth rate in the part of the population that postpones parenthood due to fear of lack of time for family, children, on the one hand, and professional and career growth, on the other hand.

2. Development of remote employment, the possibility of support and professional development during maternity leave. Currently, career growth is becoming more of a priority for young women, it forces them to postpone the terms of motherhood indefinitely. As a result, the late birth of the firstborn reduces the likelihood of the birth of subsequent children. Therefore, the introduction of the possibility of remote work, the creation of flexible forms of employment for women in the labor market without loss of skill level is an urgent measure of modern demographic policy. The effectiveness of this measure is confirmed by the results of a study of the work-life balance conducted in the EU countries (Mikhailchenkova et al. 2020).

This measure will also allow to maintain the labour force. Since going on maternity leave, a woman/ a man actually remains a specialist at his workplace. It should be noted noting that the introduction of the possibility of remote work or a flexible schedule will allow parents to save their skill level and to grow professionally with the innovations of scientific and technological progress. As a result, at the end of maternity leave there will be no significant gap in knowledge, experience, skills. Therefore, the employees with a small child will remain a competitive specialist in the labor market.

Effect: stimulating the birth rate in the part of the population that postpones parenthood in favor of professional development and becoming a specialist.

3. Providing the necessary number of places in kindergartens. According to statistics, the number of children in kindergartens has been decreasing in recent years, while the coverage of children in kindergartens has been steadily increasing and reached 86.1% in 2020. Given the significant annual decline in the number of births in Belarus in conjunction with the construction of new kindergartens, it can be assumed that in the coming years the implementation of this measure will become available. Confidence in providing a child with a place in kindergarten gives parents a guarantee for a timely return to work. This state lever has already proven itself in Sweden, which has a fairly high total fertility rate for developed countries.

Effect: stimulating the birth rate in the part of the population that postpones parenthood due to problems with places in kindergartens.

4. Substitution migration. Substitution migration increases the population, including women of reproductive age. At the same time, migrants are often representatives of those cultures and societies in which a high birth rate and a large number of children in the family is the norm. For this reason, the birth rate in the recipient country should increase over time. However, this measure is ambiguous and requires a balanced decision, since it carries negative consequences: the growth of social tension in society, additional burden on the budget, the creation of threats to security and stability in the country, etc. A good example is the countries of Europe, where the birth rate has increased after several waves of migration, but an unpleasant additions were the discontent of the indigenous population and mass riots, etc. The way out of this situation may be to attract highly qualified, educated workers (USA).

Effect: stimulating the birth rate in the recipient country due to the influx of people with higher reproductive attitudes.

As for the financial instruments that the state can use to improve and achieve positive effects of demographic policy, the following directions are proposed:

1. A significant reduction in the allowance for the birth of the 1st child with a simultaneous increase in the allowance for the 2nd and subsequent children. This measure is applied in France (Sbrodova & Bolgova, 2021) and allows it to achieve a fairly high birth rate for developed countries – 1.9 births per woman. This instrument is designed to increase the indicator “the desired number of children in the family” and stimulates having at least two children. The application of this measure is also effective from an economic point of view, because due to savings on payments for the first child, there will be a reserve for an increased payment for the second and subsequent children.

Effect: stimulating fertility by changing the reproductive habits of families planning to have one child.

2. A significant increase allowance for single parents. This measure (implemented in Germany (Sbrodova & Bolgova, 2021)) is designed to support mothers and fathers raising children alone, to reduce the number of abortions.

Effect: stimulating the birth rate by creating guarantees for persons who raise children alone and for women who decide whether to leave a child if they have to raise him without a father.

In addition to the positive experience of foreign countries, the study also identified measures undesirable for implementation in state demographic programs. These measures include:

- (1) Increased propaganda of fertility, turning into moral pressure on society. Healthy promotion of family values has an indirect positive effect on people’s decision to

have children. But when propaganda measures turn into moral pressure on society, their effect is significantly reduced and questions arise in the field of human rights and freedoms, which is proven by the experience of Japan.

(2) The introduction of taxes on the childless and the provision of interest-free loans to families with children at their expense. This mechanism was used in Germany, but it caused condemnation in society and did not bring the desired result in increasing the birth rate. In addition, this measure violates the rights and freedom of choice of a person.

(3) Material support of fertility only for families in which the mother was employed before the birth of the child. This measure has a negative impact on the intensity of the birth rate among the young population (for example, students), despite the fact that the birth rate of this age group is already rapidly decreasing. On the other hand, when implementing such a measure, the state saves budget funds, which proves the successful experience of Spain (Sbrodova & Bolgova, 2021).

Most of the measures discussed above are implemented at the macro level. It should be noted that measures of corporate demographic policy, that is, demographic policy conducted at the micro level, are gaining particular popularity in the most developed countries of the world (Bagirova & Vavilova, 2020), (Rostovskaya et al. 2021). Corporate demographic policy is a system of measures aimed at ensuring that an employee performs professional, labor and family functions within the national demographic interests of the country.

Within the framework of this policy, a kind of triangular pyramid of interests of the state, the company and its employees is formed. For the state, business representatives will act as guides and catalysts for the realization of the national demographic interests of the country, a means of increasing the targeting of events. Business interest may be associated, for example, with tax benefits, obtaining government orders, the possibility of attracting young personnel in an aging workforce, etc. For employees, especially women, the opportunity to legally combine the performance of family and professional functions. The main measures of the corporate demographic policy in the field of stimulating fertility are: flexible work and vacation schedules, the possibility of remote work, the provision of educational and entertainment services to the children of employees, etc.

6. Conclusions

Demographic processes, including fertility, are characterized by inertia. Thus, it takes time to change negative trends. The analysis shows that sufficient attention is paid in the Republic of Belarus to improving the situation in the field of fertility thanks for financial incentive measures at the macro level. The policy had a short-term effect (the crude birth rate increased from 9.0 to 12.5 births per 1,000 population

between 2002 and 2015), and then its effectiveness began to decline. This research provides to accept the hypothesis put forward: the main reason for the low birth rate in the Republic of Belarus is the underutilization of the natural childbearing potential, which is associated with socio-economic progress in the country. Traditionally used measures of financial incentives did not allow to get the desired result. According to the authors, attention should be paid to measures of moral and psychological stimulation (increasing the value of the family and assessing the importance of parenthood work in society), shift the focus to assistance in the implementation of parental and professional functions (the possibility of remote work and flexible hours, reduced working hours, the provision of “babysitter for an hour, a day”, provision of places in of places in kindergartens, etc.) and to ensure the continuity of demographic policy within the framework of the relationship “State-business-family”, through the implementation of measures at the macro and micro levels. The demographic policy at the micro level is recommended to implement in 2 stages: 1) to test the main measures on the basis of individual enterprises of Belarus (for example, Minsk Automobile Plant (MAZ), Confectionery factory Kommunarka, Mark Formelle etc.); 2) if successful, to spread the positive experience to other enterprises of the country. In our opinion, the basis of success: the use of positive historical and international experience and, on the contrary, the non-applicability of aggressive measures that contradict human rights and freedoms (prohibition of abortion and distribution of contraceptives, tax on childless, etc.). Positive changes in the field of fertility are the joint effort of the whole society!

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POLITYKA PRONATALISTYCZNA W REPUBLICE BIAŁORUSI NA TLE GLOBALNYCH TENDENCJI SPADKU PŁODNOŚCI

Streszczenie:

Cel: Stały spadek dzietności jest problemem większości rozwiniętych i rozwijających się krajów świata, w tym Republiki Białorusi. Proces ten ma negatywne konsekwencje, w tym spadek liczby zatrudnionych, starzenie się społeczeństwa, a nawet groźbę wyginięcia narodów. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja pozycji Republiki Białoruś w światowych trendach przyrostu naturalnego, określenie działań stymulujących przyrost naturalny na poziomie makro i mikro, z uwzględnieniem praktyki międzynarodowej.

Materiały i metody badawcze: Do realizacji celu wykorzystano przestrzenną i czasową analizę porównawczą, która pozwoliła statystycznie wykazać występowanie tendencji spadkowej liczby urodzeń na świecie, w poszczególnych regionach i Republice Białorusi w latach 1950–2019, a także utworzenie całego skupiska krajów, w których nie jest zapewniona prosta reprodukcja ludności. Ponadto dokonano oceny stopnia wykorzystania potencjału rozrodczego kobiet białoruskich. Analiza opiera się na danych statystycznych Narodowego Komitetu Statystycznego Republiki Białorusi oraz Banku Światowego.

Wyniki: Autorki dokonały analitycznego przeglądu współczesnych środków polityki pronatalistycznej i określili możliwy efekt jej użycia. W wyniku analizy udowodniono potrzebę intensyfikacji polityki pronatalistycznej na Białorusi, uwzględniającej pozytywne i negatywne doświadczenia krajów rozwiniętych w ramach przesunięcia akcentu z działań finansowych na niefinansowe, a także aktywizacji demograficznej w kontekście prowadzonej polityki kraju.

Wnioski praktyczne: Wyniki analizy będą przydatne dla rozwoju nowych kierunków polityki pronatalistycznej.

Wnioski i podsumowanie: Republika Białorusi należy do krajów o bardzo niskim wskaźniku urodzeń. Rozwiązanie tego problemu jest możliwe dzięki wprowadzeniu w praktyce nowych, nietradycyjnych metod polityki pronatalistycznej na poziomie mikro i makro.

Słowa kluczowe: przyrost naturalny, polityka pronatalistyczna, działania na rzecz wzrostu przyrostu naturalnego na poziomie makro i mikro.