

NET MIGRATION AND NATURAL CHANGE MAIN FACTORS FOR DECREASING POPULATION

MARIUS CRISTIAN MILOȘ
UNIVERSITY “EFTIMIE MURGU” OF RESITA
T.VUIA SQ. 1-4, RESITA, m.milos@uem.ro

Abstract:

Population is nowadays seriously affected by two distinct factors: natural change (the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths) and net migration (the difference between immigration and emigration). In the 1960s the overwhelming share of EU - 27 population growth could be attributed to natural change, as the number of births considerably outweighed the number of deaths. However, the relatively high fertility rates that were experienced in the post-war decades slowly came to an end, life expectancy increased – and by the end of the 1990s the number of births and deaths were almost balanced. According to the European Commission through Eurostat immigration policy has the potential to play an important role in filling labour market shortages, although the integration of immigrants may pose a challenge to social cohesion. Some countries, like Romania are severely affected by migration, as mainly young people leave Romania in order to find better jobs in the western European countries.

Key words: migration, fertility, demography

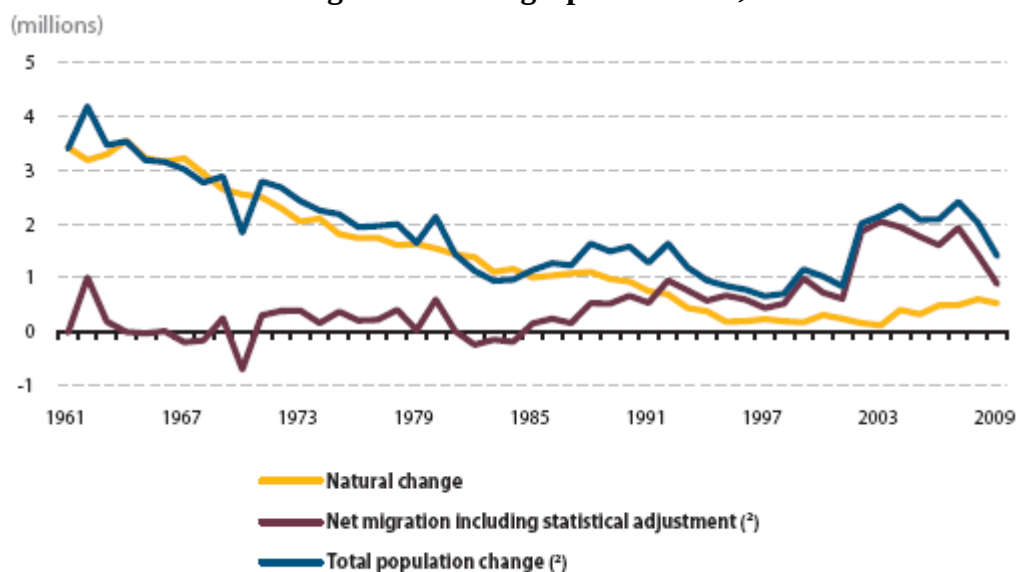
JEL classification: H00, H55

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Within the current paper we are revealing the main issues regarding net migration and natural change as the factors for decreasing population of the EU-27 by focusing on the facts offered by Eurostat (2012) through a very interesting statistical portrait, entitled „Active ageing and solidarity between generations A statistical portrait of the European Union”. Natural change (the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths) and net migration (the difference between immigration and emigration) seem to be the main factors which affect the levels of the population. In the 1960s the number of births outweighed the number of deaths and the growth of the population was considerable. It is worth mentioning also the high fertility rates that were experienced in the post-war decades but which came to an end, while life expectancy increased – such that by the end of the 1990s there was almost no net effect from natural change. The European Commission states that immigration policy has the potential to play an important role in filling labour market shortages, although the integration of immigrants may pose a challenge to social cohesion. Net migration figures generally fluctuate more from one year to the next than natural changes. During the period from 1960 to the mid-1980s, the overall effect of net migration on total population change was limited but after this period of time there was an increase in net migration, mainly from 2003 to 2007 when migration contributed an average of almost two million persons per annum to the EU-27's total population change. In the last years net migration has reduced, so that migrants contributed with only 875 500 persons to the EU-27's population in 2009 (Eurostat, 2012).

Figure 1 - Demographic balance, EU-27



(*) Break in series, 1998.
(?) Provisional, 2008 and 2009.

Source: Eurostat (2012)

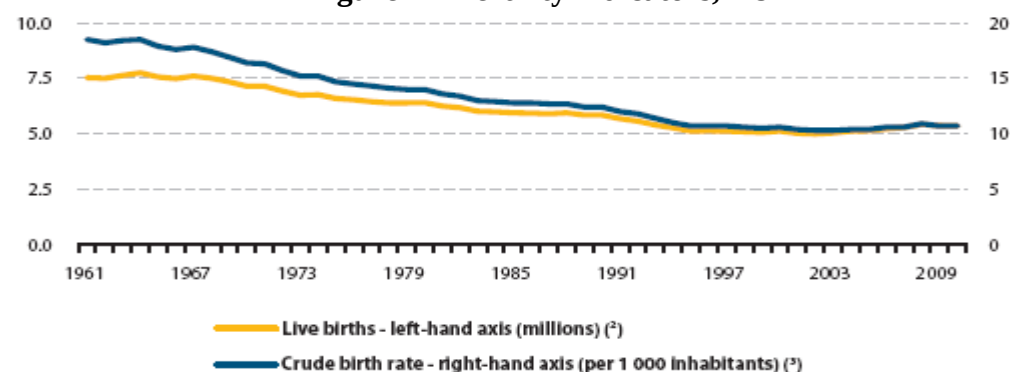
In the figure below there are fertility indicators for period 1961-2010 to be analysed. There were 7.5 million new born children in the EU- 27 in 1961, which was 2.2 million higher than the corresponding figure at the end of the period under consideration. The number of live births in the EU- 27 fell briefly below 5 million in 2002, before recovering slightly to 5.4 million by 2010 (Eurostat, 2012). Demographic changes can only be observed in time, if we consider for example the large cohorts of baby-boomers progressively moving up the EU's population pyramid towards older age, leading to a top-heavy population pyramid.

The crude birth rate is correlated to the number of live births but it also reflects other population changes through its denominator, as this indicator presents the number of live births per 1 000 inhabitants. The EU- 27 crude birth rate has decreased from its highs at the start of the 1960s, with its most significant reductions being recorded in the 1960s and 1970s. While the birth rate continued to fall during the 1980s and 1990s, the reductions were of a lower magnitude. The crude birth rate reached its lowest level in 2003 (10.3 births per 1 000 inhabitants), after which there was a slight recovery (10.7 births per 1 000 inhabitants in 2010). Ireland, followed by the United Kingdom and France reported the highest crude birth rates among the EU Member States in 2010.

Among the Member States, France and the United Kingdom recorded the highest number of live births in 2010, each accounting for slightly more than 15 % of the total number of births in the EU- 27, as both countries passed 800 000 new births in the year.

In contrast, Germany recorded some 678 000 live births in 2010, equivalent to 12.7 % of the EU- 27 total: this figure may be compared with the German share of total EU- 27 population which was 16.3 % in 2010 (Eurostat, 2012). While the overall number of live births in any given country is, at least in part, linked to the number of women of childbearing age, it is also affected by issues linked to the ability or willingness of the population to raise children.

Figure 2 – Fertility indicators, EU-27



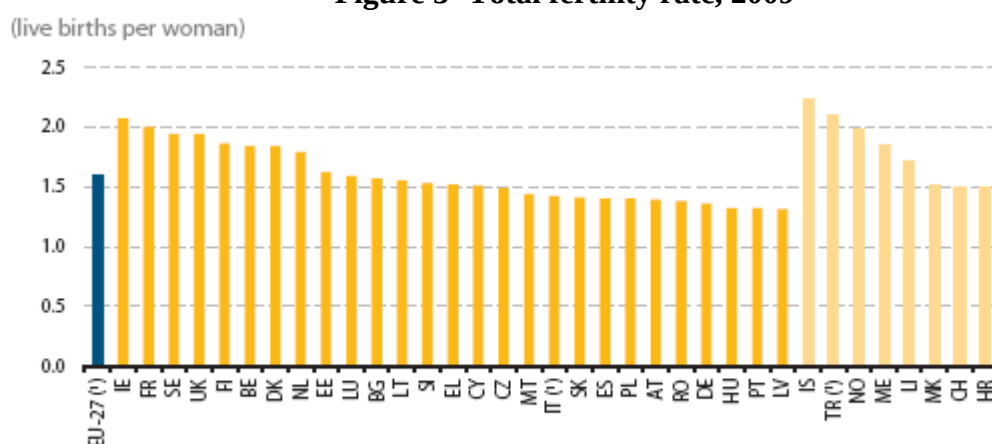
(*) Break in series, 1998.
 (†) Provisional, 2010.
 (‡) Provisional, 2008 to 2010.

Source: Eurostat (2012)

The fertility rate for the EU-27 stood at 1.6 in 2008 – among the lowest in the world. It is widely agreed that a replacement rate of around 2.1 is required – disregarding the potential effects of migration – to maintain the size of a population in developed world countries (Eurostat, 2012).

One of the underlying reasons for the EU's relatively low fertility rates is that childbirth is increasingly delayed until later in life; the mean age of women at childbirth in the EU-27 was 29.7 years in 2008. This may be attributed to a range of demographic, socio-economic and institutional reasons – for example, the falling number of marriages, a higher number of divorces, increasing female labour force participation, uncertainty over the economic situation and job security, or young people deciding to remain in their parent's home until it is financially viable to move out and establish their own household. The relative weight of older persons in the total population has intensified as the number of births has fallen in unison with increased longevity. Indeed, the EU's population is generally living longer than ever before, as EU-27 life expectancy (at birth) rose to 79.4 years by 2008. The highest life expectancies across the Member States were recorded in Italy with 81.9 years in 2008 and Spain with 81.8 years in 2009. At the opposite end of the range, the lowest levels were registered for Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania, between 72 and 73 in 2009 (Eurostat, 2012).

Figure 3- Total fertility rate, 2009

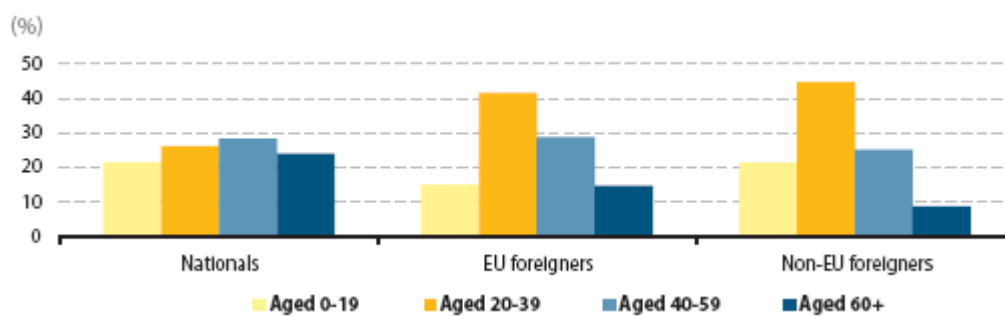


(†) 2008.

Source: Eurostat (2012)

Migration can play an important role – in the short-term – helping to alleviate demographic imbalance, for example, by easing specific labour market shortages. However, it is widely accepted that the EU's ageing demographic profile cannot be undone through the introduction of migrants alone in order to rectify the expected future imbalance between those of working age and older persons. Indeed, migrants will also eventually become old and dependent too (Eurostat, 2012). It seems unlikely that population ageing will be reversed unless fertility rates rise so that these return above the natural replacement level of 2.1. Foreign citizens made up 6.5 % of the population in the 27 EU Member States in 2010. Foreigners accounted for a relatively low share (less than 1 %) of the total population in Poland (2010), Bulgaria and Romania (both 2009), their relative weight rising to as high as 43.0 % in Luxembourg (2010). It is interesting to note that the highest proportion of foreigners is generally found within the working age population and that many foreigners appear to return to their country of origin at the end of their working lives; this pattern was particularly pronounced in Luxembourg, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Ireland and Italy. As such, the median age of foreigners tends to be lower than the median age of nationals in most of the Member States (Eurostat, 2012).

Figure 4- Age distribution of nationals, EU foreigners and non-EU foreigners, 2010



Source: Eurostat (2012)

Conclusions

Immigration is one option for softening the EU's ageing process. However, as immigrants are older than new born children, the ageing process is softened less by changes in net migration than would be the case if fertility increased. Therefore we consider that public policy within the European Union member states which encourage fertility is the only possible way to defeat ageing and to determine sustainability for the public social security expenditures.

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