

CAN ROMANIAN POPULATION DECLINE BE STOPPED?

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Between 1992 and 2002, the population of Romania decreased by 1.1 million. The downward trend is not surprising, since all the available data on natural and migratory movements after 1989 define a well-installed population decline. The unexpected element is the magnitude of the decline and, more importantly, the contribution of a new and statistically little known component of external migration: Romanians who are abroad and have not been recorded by the 2002 census. Romania's population decline therefore acquires new dimensions and makes the country's demographic status even worse. What is however little known and evaluated at its true value is the extent to which the population's age structure has deteriorated in the context of population decline, and the implications of that deterioration from the perspective of the country's potential demographic recovery. This study attempts to approach Romania's demographic situation in the early 21st century from that lesser known perspective, while also looking at the country's population prospects.

The first section of the study is an overview of the trends registered so far in fertility, mortality and external migration, almost exclusively from the perspective of the manner and extent to which changes in the level and structure of these phenomena may contribute to reducing the degradation of the demographic situation and, in the long run, to curbing demographic decline. Based on the current demographic trends, as well as on the characteristics of the variables that have been generating these trends, we obtain a rather gloomy picture of Romania's population prospects for the following decades, unless we see a substantial recovery in the birth rate—the main component in the deterioration of the population's age structure.

The second section of the study deals with a description and analysis of the assumptions and results of three prospective scenarios for Romania's population for the first half of the 21st century. In fact, these scenarios indicate, from a normative perspective, the changes that should occur in birth rates (fertility) in the context of a population policy firmly oriented towards curbing Romania's demographic decline.

Introduction

Transition and Demographic Impact

Romania will soon be entering the 15th year since it has seen a deterioration of its demographic situation, with no signs of recovery. It would be unfair to deny or overlook the relative stability registered in **birth rates and crude death rates** during these last years. However if we look at the present level registered by the two variables, we realize that the process of degradation actually continues, due to the accumulation and consolidation of the negative potential contained in the imbalances affecting the age structure of the population. Moreover, the results