

Trends in Demography and Migration in Slovakia

From One of the Most Progressive to One of the Most Decreasing¹

1. Introduction

After 1989, and predominantly since its independence in 1993, the Slovak Republic has experienced significant demographic changes, which do not differ from the experiences of transforming post-socialist countries. The short overview presented in this chapter devoted to the development in the Slovak Republic points to several common features with other CEE-bloc countries as well as to some specifics. The chapter presents not only the most significant and most interesting features of demographic development, but also focuses on how demographic development is reflected in official documents of the central government and institutions, or how the local demographic development is perceived by local leaders and the population.

2. General trends after 1990: Unstoppably leading towards intensive ageing

2.1. Changes in fertility

If anything can be characterised as a considerable change, then it is the transformation of the character and intensity of fertility. While some countries of the former Eastern Bloc have already experienced a decline in total fertility rate under the so-called replacement level of two children per woman in the 1980s, female fertility in Slovakia still remained at one of the highest levels in the European area. It dropped below two children per woman only in 1992, while the decline itself was characterised by great dynamics. In the course of a decade, Slovakia ranked among the countries with the lowest fertility rates in the world, when in 2000 it fell below the so-called lowest-low fertility defined by 1.3 children per woman. For the next eight years, fertility remained below this level. Slovakia reached the full bottom in 2002, when the fertility rate reached the value of 1.18 children per woman. Between 2001 and 2003, the Slovak population experienced the first and still the only natural decrease (more deaths than births) in history since the First World War. A decrease to such low level was mainly caused by the postponement of childbearing to a higher age and the coexistence of two reproductively different generations of women. While

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older women followed a socialist pattern of reproduction characterised by early onset and ending of reproductive plans, younger generations of women (born in the 1970s) started to gradually and increasingly postpone their entry into parenthood. The significant impact of this postponement is also demonstrated by the so-called adjusted tempo fertility rate that was at a substantially higher level than the values of the total fertility rate. Approximately from 2004 and 2005, we are witnessing the onset of the recuperation phase and the fertility rate is gradually increasing. In 2016, it reached almost 1.5 children per woman. However, this is still a very low value compared to the level at the end of the 1980s. On the other hand, one must point out that since 2012, the figures do not include the children born abroad to women with permanent residency in Slovakia. This is about a tenth of the total number of born children, which would increase the fertility rate over 1.6 children per woman. In the last few years, less than 60,000 children have been born in Slovakia on an annual basis, while in the periods of the highest birth rate – in the early 1950s and late 1970s of the previous century, it was more than 100,000 children. The decline in fertility and the associated fall in the number of births caused a significant ageing of the population of Slovakia. One of the important transformational changes in fertility is the abovementioned postponement of childbearing to an older age, which is also reflected, for example, in the development of the mean age at first birth. From the original level of approximately 22.5 years (early 1990s), the age has risen to 28 years. In addition, we also see changes in the character of fertility in terms of legitimacy. The close link between marital life and reproduction has relaxed, which has also reflected in a significant increase in the proportion of children born outside of marriage, from less than 8% to about 40%.

2.2. Transformation of family behaviour

In the last quarter of the century, family behaviour in Slovakia has also undergone no less dynamic and revolutionary changes. Until the early 1990s, not only early marriage was typical, when the average age at first marriage was at 22.5 years for women and under 25 years for men, but also the high intensity with which both sexes entered the marriage. According to values at the end of the 1980s, only about 10% of women and 15% of men had no marriage experience. On the other hand, however, the risk of divorce has increased, when it was about 20% before the break-up of Czechoslovakia. The beginning of the 1990s has brought a dramatic change in marital behaviour when the intensity of marriages fell sharply while the average age at the first marriage has increased. Unlike fertility, however, the phase of marriages at an older age is not significant so far, and therefore the number and share of single individuals in reproductive age is rapidly growing. This was confirmed by the results of the latest 2011 population census, when single individuals still prevailed in the category of 31-year-old men and 28-year-old women. According to the latest available data, approximately 35% of men and 30% of women would remain single if the intensity of marriages remains stable. Continuous growth in the mean age at the first marriage currently causes its values to approach 32 years in men and to exceed 29 years in women. In addition to postponing marriage start-ups, the low intensity of marriages is also affected by an increasingly frequent tendency to various forms of unmarried cohabitation of single young persons. The 1990s also brought faster growth of total divorce rate, up until 2008

and 2009 when it peaked at more than 41%. From that point forward, we are witnessing a slight decline and, according to the latest data, about one third of 100 marriages will end in a divorce (ŠPROCHA–VAŇO 2015).

2.3. *Changes in mortality*

In terms of the mortality process in Slovakia, the period after 1989 can be assessed positively. It was in the early 1990s that brought along the breakdown of more than two decades of stagnation and in case of men even a slight deterioration in mortality rates. This is confirmed by the development of the mean life expectancy at birth, which represents a synthetic indicator of the mortality rate. From 1990 to 2016, it increased by more than 7 years among men and by approximately 5 years among women. According to the latest available data and providing that the mortality rates remain unchanged, boys just born in Slovakia have a chance to live up to 74 years and girls more than 80 years (ŠPROCHA–MAJO 2016a). Compared to the most advanced European countries, however, Slovakia is still lagging relatively far behind in terms of mortality rate. The main cause is, above all, the worse mortality rates among men in the older productive and younger post-productive age among women, especially in post-productive age. Despite the positive developments in mortality rates, the results of the EU-SILC and EHIS surveys show, that the Slovak population has the perception of leaning to a worse qualitative degree than most of the EU28 countries.

2.4. *Demographic ageing*

Rapid changes in fertility and also in mortality resulted in intensive demographic ageing. The Slovak population is among the fastest ageing in Europe. The reason is the sharp fall in fertility to the lowest values in Europe, while by 1989 the total fertility rate in Slovakia was above average. The fertility dominated ageing is taking its course. At the same time, the average length of life – mortality dominated ageing – is increasing and intensive ageing takes place from the middle. The large cohorts of the 1950s and 1970s are gradually getting older, while these *baby-booms* were very intense in Slovakia. The mean age in Slovakia reached the level of 40 years in 2015, and the ageing index is approaching a threshold of 100 seniors per 100 children. The Slovak population, however, still belongs to the younger ones in Europe, although this situation will only remain the same for a few more years. The economic dependency ratio has decreased after 1990 due to declining birth rates and the shift of larger generations to productive age but has been rising again since 2010. The senior part of the population has and will have a substantial impact on its growth (BLEHA et al. 2013).

2.5. Changes in the educational structure

Changes in the educational structure are mainly the result of transformation of the educational paths of young generations that have a pronounced tendency towards complete secondary education and in the last decade also towards tertiary level of education. This transformation of the composition of the population according to the highest achieved education applies to a greater extent to women who, at a younger age, historically achieve higher education than men. In the last intercensal period, the need to improve the quality of human capital, however, has also affected those who had completed their education in the previous period and finished their educational paths with respect to their age. As a result, at the age of 25–29, a quarter of men and about a third to 40% of women achieved university education, while in the early 1990s it was only about one tenth of the respective age group (ŠPROCHA–MAJO 2016b).

2.6. The ethnic structure

The ethnic structure of the Slovak population is the result of a long-term historical development. The Romani population has a specific position, which is characterised by several problematic perceptions due to its allochthonous origin and a long-term not only spatial segregation. This means above all a high level of long-term unemployment, a very low level of education, disastrous living conditions often found in segregated settlements and also aspects related to mortality, health status and reproduction. From the point of view of reproductive behaviour, the persistence of early partner and maternity patterns is still confirmed, with high chances of becoming a mother repeatedly at a young age. The result is not only the significantly higher fertility rate of Roma women, especially women living in segregated settlements in the eastern parts of Slovakia, but also the different size of their families. Combined with the problematic situation on the labour market, social transfers linked to maternity and parenting are a very important income for family budgets. On the other hand, a complex of external factors (e.g. inadequate living conditions, low food quality, excessive use of tobacco and alcoholic products) along with some genetic predispositions greatly impact the quality of health and contributes to a significantly shorter life expectancy. Multiple social exclusion results in a situation where Roma people live in mostly segregated settlements in marginalised areas of eastern Slovakia, where they are unable to break out of these problems by themselves and are in many ways fully dependent on help from outside (ŠPROCHA–BLEHA 2018).

2.7. Regional heterogeneity

The regional heterogeneity of the population development is considerable. The Slovak Republic is a country of significant regional contrasts in terms of regional disparities and socio-economic disparities. A simple view at GDP per capita by NUTS-III and NUTS-II regions reveals that regional inequalities in Slovakia are among the highest in the EU and have been increasing after 1989. Most underdeveloped regions are located in the south

of Central Slovakia and in Eastern Slovakia. The territory is thus divided diagonally, while the northwest is more developed than the southeast, thus manifesting the factor of macro-location attractiveness (KOREC 2005). Demographic processes are partly affected by regional disparities, although fertility differences are also given by the cultural and ethnic specificities of individual regions. In principle, northern and eastern Slovakia is demographically younger, with higher reproductive intensity and higher fertility rates. The spatial picture in terms of mortality is more mosaic. Residents live longer in the cities than in the countryside. The lowest average life expectancy is in some rural regions in the south of Central and Eastern Slovakia, mostly as a result of the educational and social structure as well as environmental factors.

Regional disparities mostly affect the internal and external migration. In the last two decades, the number of districts (LAU-2), which are showing a positive migration balance concerning national migration, is decreasing. In addition, these districts are concentrated in the western part of Slovakia. In Eastern Slovakia, there is no district with a positive migration balance, except for the suburban zone of Košice. On the contrary, the figures of migration increase are growing in the region of Bratislava, in Bratislava itself and in the districts of the Nitra, Trnava and Trenčín regions. Thus, internal migration has a distinct east-west gradient. Population mobility and the willingness to move have risen, especially for work reasons, but is still below the EU average. The number of long-distance migrations has also increased, which is related to the aforementioned relocation from Central and Eastern Slovakia to Western Slovakia (KAKAŠ 2017). For example, the number of migrants to Bratislava 15 years ago declined sharply with increasing distance, and now the number of migrants from the seven self-governing regions to the Bratislava Region is almost equal. Therefore, regional disparities are significantly manifested in migration patterns in Slovakia.

3. Population outlooks, forecasts and decision-makers' reactions

The Slovak Republic has a longer time series of forecasts at national and district level (LAU-II), from which NUTS-II and NUTS-III forecasts can also be deduced by using the top-down approach. A latest forecast at the national level was published in 2013 (BLEHA et al. 2013), and an update of this forecast is planned in 2018. The forecast's horizon is 2060. The results of the latest forecast can be summarised as follows. An increase in total fertility is expected in all three fertility scenarios, but even the high scenario does not expect to exceed the replacement level of two children per woman, however: the threshold of 1.9 children per woman may be reached. This would put Slovakia at the top of the ranking of the European countries according to the current values. The medium, most likely scenario expects an increase in the total fertility rate to 1.65 children per woman. The prediction in the low variant is approximately at the level of 1.5 children per woman in 2060. All three variants assume an increase in the average maternal age, another shift in the reproduction paths and the overall ageing of the fertility age profile. A substantial part of the increase in fertility will be provided by the age group of 30–34 years, and to a lesser extent also by the age group of 35 years and over. Concerning the mean life expectancy, an increase to 82 years among men and 86 years among women is projected in the medium scenario. Decline in the mortality rates in the 60–79 age group for men, and in the 60–79 and 80+

age groups for women will be most likely contributing to this increase. In the case of migration, the assumptions are optimistic: in the medium scenario, Slovakia should gain about 12,000 inhabitants a year from around 2025. However, an update of national forecast will also take into account some estimates that will make the migratory numbers more realistic. It can be assumed that after the establishment of the independent republic in 1993, Slovakia is experiencing a negative net migration.² The forecast assumptions have concluded the following results. Slovakia will be one of the fastest ageing populations among the OECD countries. The reasons were further discussed in Chapter 1. The average age will reach almost 50 years in 2060, the only growing segment of the population will be the senior group over the age of 65, and the ageing index will exceed the threshold of 200 seniors per 100 children. The economic load index will also increase significantly. The number of seniors in 2060 will be at least 2.5 times higher than in 2016. The natural increase after 2020 will gradually change into a natural decline in all three scenarios. In 2060, Slovakia will annually lose about 30,000 inhabitants a year in terms of the difference between the number of the born and the deceased.

What is the response of the government and the decision makers to these unfavourable prospects? First, it should be noted that the forecasts at the national level have been available since the 1990s, including the forecasts of the UN, the World Bank and Eurostat. The response of the government over the past 25 years cannot be described as excellent and complete, but some important measures have been taken. From the sphere of adaptation measures, the pension system reform should be mentioned first. This change was introduced in 2004, with Slovakia predating a number of surrounding countries. The entire system of contributions was changed and the second pension pillar was established. The parameters of the pension system were changed several times in the next period and the second pension pillar was opened several times. An important measure is the increase in retirement age. At present, its increase is driven by a rise in average life expectancy. In 2017 and at the beginning of 2018, efforts were made to set the ceiling for retirement age initiated by trade union leaders who took advantage of a petition. The petition should be addressed by the National Council of the Slovak Republic in the course of 2018. The draft of the trade unionists suggests the ceiling of 64 years.

In addition to the mitigation measures, some measures have been taken to address the direct or indirect impact of demographic processes, especially birth rates. The Concept of State Family Policy was adopted for the first time in 1996 and the *Proposal for Updating the Concept of State Family Policy for 2004–2006*³ was adopted by the Government of the SR in 2004. The *Proposal for Measures to Reconcile Family and Work Life with a View to 2010* was adopted in 2006. Such measures appear to be effective and necessary alongside direct financial support (McDONALD 2006). Measures are being proposed to promote teleworking, part-time work, but also to extend working hours in pre-school facilities and to choose the length of parental leave. In 2006, a material entitled *What Is and What Should Be the Strategy to Tackle the Demographic Changes in the SR* was published for public discussion (BLEHA et al. 2006). Overall, however, the progress in the field of strategic management of fertility and development of families and household cannot be evaluated

² Migration is more closely described in Section 4.

³ Rokovania (s. a.).

as satisfactory, although there are certainly some positive changes. Slovakia is one of the countries with above-average length of parental leave (a total of three years), the parental allowance is almost EUR 215 per month from January 2018, and from the 34th week of pregnancy the woman is entitled to the sickness insurance benefits for a maximum of 34 weeks. Exceptions include multiple births and single mother cases. The level of benefits is based on previous income of the mother (currently 75% of the gross wage). There is one-off contribution of nearly EUR 830 for the first to third child, which is paid at childbirth. Direct financial support is important, but equally important are measures to reconcile family and work life. In the last approximately 10 years, the Slovak Republic has been facing a lack of spaces in pre-school facilities, especially in the cities and surroundings of cities with a high degree of immigration. There are several government initiatives to build pre-school facilities, but the shortage persists. In the school year 2016–2017, the Centre of Scientific Information of the Slovak Republic stated more than 11 thousand outstanding applications, which is about one-fifth of the number of births per year, while in some regions the situation is even more critical, especially in the western part of Slovakia. Yet forecasts indicated an increase in the number of births already at the turn of the millennia.

The number of fathers who remain on parental leave is also rising in Slovakia. However, it still only concerns relatively low figures, the threshold of 1,000 fathers on parental leave was exceeded in 2017 (publicly available data of the Social Insurance Agency). Interesting measures include, for example, the annual *Family-friendly Employer* competition, which has been organised by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in the past 15 years, based on measures aimed at reconciling family and work life, as well as supporting balanced representation of women and men in decision-making positions.

The analysis of electoral programs of relevant political parties in the field of population and family policy in the first decade after 2000 points to the fact that not enough attention is paid to this issue, only a few pages of exact, concrete measures that are clearly linked to demographic problems, and that are explicitly made with pro-population intentions (BLEHA 2010). With regard to population and policy research, several research studies are regularly published by the Institute for Labour and Family Research. In addition, relevant research is also carried out by some academic institutions aimed at demographic and population studies, such as the Demographic Research Centre at Infostat and the Department of Human Geography and Demography at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the Comenius University (BLEHA–VAŇO 2007). There is little information in Slovakia about how people perceive demographic changes. The pilot survey was carried out more than 10 years ago (BLEHA 2007) and revealed some interesting results. It confirmed that people perceive demographic changes and also understand the terms such as demographic ageing and the connection between demographic processes and the changes in the pension system. However, it is necessary to update this survey, extend the number of questions and samples.

Some research has been done at the local level, as demographic development is spatially heterogeneous, and cities and municipalities are facing many problems. Bleha (2011) carried out a research focusing on the views of local government representatives on demographic developments, on issues related to the demographic development of settlements, larger cities and smaller rural settlements. Representatives of municipalities are aware of the importance of demographic development. The decreasing population is seen as a problem, but the composition of the population by age is seen as a much bigger

problem. Mayors are equally aware of the fact that even the spontaneous and unsettled growth of the population can cause problems. This development is already happening and several growing municipalities in the background of cities (especially Bratislava) face significant problems (ŠVEDA–ŠUŠKA 2014). Some studies are also taking place that focus on downsizing of larger cities in the Slovak Republic and the reactions of local representatives to this process (BUČEK–BLEHA 2012; 2013; 2015). Interesting but disturbing results have been brought to light by a recently published study (BLEHA–FARBIKOVÁ 2017). The authors examined the quality of demographic parts in the strategic and planning documents of municipalities on the example of two of the eight self-governing regions of Slovakia. The findings are not very positive. The greatest shortcoming is the absence of a demographic forecast or its poor quality. Another problem is the formality of documents and measures, often done as a template and not taking into account the specificities of the given municipality.

4. Migration trends: Perceptions and responses

Managing and influencing migration belongs to the population policy in the same way as pronatalist and family measures. In recent years, the debate on foreign migration in Slovakia is much greater than the debate on pronatalist measures. It is quite natural in view of the development of the migration situation in the last 3–4 years. Slovakia faces a serious problem in terms of foreign migration. Although official migration data depict Slovakia as a country that has been gaining population by migration for over two decades, the reality is quite different. The issue of undocumented migration is as big as in other countries of the former Eastern Bloc. This chapter briefly addresses two major issues.

The first problem is the drain of skilled and less skilled labour, which has both demographic and socio-economic consequences. Divinský (2007) estimates that Slovakia is a country with declining population rather than a country with growth due to migration tendencies.

In addition to updating data based on routine evidence, the update also uses a new approach based on an alternative prediction on real emigration estimates, that is, estimating the degree of its underestimation, and simplifying its factuality. For the first time it was applied for the prediction of the migration future for the Slovak Republic in the study by Bleha et al.(2014). It is based on the results of two studies. Jurčová and Pilinská (2014) estimate that between 2001 and 2010, the average annual loss of population due to foreign migration reached approximately 1,900 persons, and between 2011 and 2013, the average annual loss of population due to migration was between 9,700 and 10,480 persons. The Financial Policy Institute (HALUŠ et al. 2016) estimated migration surplus/loss based on data from the Central Register of Health Insurers. Both studies use methods that have their limits and shortcomings, but they undoubtedly provide refined data on expatriates and, ultimately, specify the migration balance. The Financial Policy Institute made estimation until 2015. The migration loss should be around 6,000 persons in the last estimated year (2015), decreasing to this value from around 15,000 persons in 2013.

There is no doubt that Slovakia is losing young people, a skilled labour force. However, measures to prevent this undesirable situation are scarce and inefficient. There is no

comprehensive strategy that would offer more efficient solutions. There is a government support scheme approved in 2015⁴ that aims at promoting the return of researchers and academic capacities back to Slovakia. However, this scheme does not attract much interest of the Slovaks working at foreign universities and research institutions. In the first year, the scheme only attracted four people (HORÁKOVÁ 2016). The brain drain into the Czech Republic is probably the biggest problem. This is largely reflected in the fact that Slovakia is third in the OECD in terms of the number of young people leaving to study abroad. The number of Slovak students at the Czech universities has risen sharply in the last two decades, and despite a certain halt and a slight decline in recent years, there are still more than 20,000 of them, representing more than half of all foreign students in the Czech Republic.⁵ The same conditions apply to both Slovak and Czech students. According to the findings of the Scio Agency, Slovak students are of the same quality and in some respects even better than Czech students, for example in mathematics (Scio Agency 2018). In summary, it can be stated that the development in terms of the emigration component of migration is unfavourable. Slovakia loses young people, loses its reproduction base and the important labour force. Although the migration crisis a decade ago has reduced the number of workers abroad, after its end, the number of Slovaks working abroad rose again within one year, but from 2014 began to decline again, reaching more than 140,000 persons in the third quarter of 2017. The breakthrough in terms of emigration development was the accession of Slovakia to the European Union. At the beginning of 2004, the number of workers was still three times less than three years later in 2007. Summarising by country was provided by the study of Šprocha (2014). Apart from others, it states the following facts. Since 2008, after the onset of the economic crisis, the number of Slovak citizens working in the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, Hungary and Ireland has declined. On the contrary, there has been a significant increase in the number of Slovak citizens working in Austria, mainly due to the employment of old-age carers for whom the labour market restrictions were relaxed before 1 May 2011. The share of Slovak citizens working in Austria has gradually increased, and in 2014 the results of the Labour Force Survey indicated Austria to be the most attractive destination, with a slight head start over the Czech Republic. In 2014, approximately 39,000 people (29%) worked in Austria, and 38,000 (28%) in the Czech Republic. Germany was on the third place with more than 17,000 Slovak workers (13%), followed by the United Kingdom on the fourth place with about 15,000 Slovak workers (7%). Nearly half of the men working abroad are employed in construction and almost a quarter in industry. Women are mainly employed in health and social care. About half of the women with Slovak citizenship work in this area. In terms of occupation, a third of the Slovak citizens work as skilled workers and craftsmen (almost half of them are men), and 30% of them work in trade and services (almost 2/3 are women).

Very interesting is also the development of the second main component, legal immigration into the Slovak Republic. In terms of official demographic data, the number of immigrants is increasing, but since 1993 it has never exceeded the threshold of 10,000 inhabitants per year. The number of immigrants approached the value of 9,000 in the pre-crisis period, but the crisis triggered a fall to around 5,000 inhabitants per

⁴ Managed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic.

⁵ According to the data of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

year. The following increase in 2017 reached the number of more than 7,000 inhabitants. The number of immigrants also includes citizens of the Slovak Republic who have immigrated from abroad since 2012, including children born to Slovak citizens abroad. Regarding foreigners, the individual types of residence of foreigners in the SR are defined by Act No. 404/2011 Coll., as amended. Under this law, the EU/EEA citizens have a right of permanent residence in the Slovak Republic. Third-country nationals may have permanent or temporary residence in the Slovak Republic. The number of foreigners legally resident in Slovakia is steadily increasing from 2004 to 2017 (data of the Ministry of Interior of the SR), approaching the threshold of 100,000 people, which represents approximately a 4-fold increase. Citizens of the neighbouring Czech Republic have the largest share, and EU citizens account for more than half of all foreigners.

Recently we have seen a significant increase in the number of foreigners working in the Slovak Republic, both EU/EEA citizens and third-country nationals (data from the Centre of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR). In January 2018, their number was close to 50,000, with almost 28,000 from the EU/EEA. The clear cause of this growth is the economic boom in the Slovak Republic and a significant drop in unemployment to historically low values below 6%. The number of vacancies is rising and employers are talking about increasing job problems, especially but not exclusively in Western Slovakia. In the Bratislava and Trnava regions, unemployment is below 3%. At the same time, other big investors (Amazon and Jaguar – Land Rover) came to invest in Western Slovakia. In light of the above-mentioned facts, a rather intense public debate is developing. Representatives of employers are alerted and call for easier employment of foreigners. On the other hand, the government has prepared legislation limiting the number of employees from abroad. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family said: *“Our intention is to make foreigners dearer. All the measures are aimed at making the foreigners working in Slovakia more expensive, so that it is not more cost-effective to hire them instead of domestic labour force”* (Trend.sk 2018). The number of inspections on the illegal employment of foreigners is also rising. The employment of foreigners also raised a relatively large wave of local dislike. There is a stormy debate in many cities and smaller settlements, where the representatives of local governments and local representatives are not unanimous. A petition against the construction of hostels was initiated in 2017, for example, in Nitra, with regard to the arrival of Jaguar – Land Rover.

With regard to illegal migration, after the accession of Slovakia to the European Union, the number of foreigners who illegally crossed the border or illegally stayed on the territory of the Slovak Republic declined by about 5 times. The number of asylum seekers in the SR has increased sharply in connection with the expected enlargement of the EU. In 2001, the number of applicants exceeded 8,000 persons and reached the maximum in 2004 when 11,400 people applied for asylum in the Slovak Republic. After the accession of the Slovak Republic to the EU, the number of applicants declined significantly, reaching only about 30% of the number in 2004 (ŠPROCHA–VAŇO 2015). In recent years, only a few hundred applications were made, regardless of the outbreak of migration crises in 2015. While the number of applicants is low, the rate of asylum admissions is very low. It is a maximum of dozens of people a year. The exception was 2016, when the asylum was received by 149 Assyrian Christians from Iraq. Slovakia has long been one of the countries in which the least people apply for asylum in terms of population size. Like the other V4 countries,

the Slovak Government has rejected the migration quotas introduced in 2015. However, Slovakia is the only one that does not face a complaint of the European Commission as it has accepted some refugees (although this is only a fraction of the quota set for Slovakia). As far as the attitudes of the population are concerned, according to a survey in 2016, the Slovaks were among the least open to migration and migrants (ESIPOVA et al. 2017).

5. Conclusion

Demographic development in Slovakia does not go beyond the trajectory of other Central European countries. In some respects, changes have been more severe than in other countries, such as in the case of fertility breakdown. Demographic ageing in Slovakia seems to be one of the fastest in Europe and the world. In recent decades, Slovakia has responded to this development, for example, by a comprehensive reorganisation of the pension system. However, measures in the field of pronatalist policy have not undergone significant changes. New elements have occurred, such as paternity leave, and there are efforts to reconcile family and work life. But, on the other hand, the response to the temporary increase in childbirth was not adequate, and there is a lack of spaces in pre-school facilities. Pronatalist policies and strategies in the electoral programs of political parties, except for some, are either absent or too general.

The situation in migration is not good. The brain drain continues and the initiatives to stop it are not efficient enough. There is a high outflow of students leaving to the Czech Republic, where according to surveys, half of them is not expected to return. On the other hand, the economic boom in recent years is attracting more and more workers not only from the EU but also from third countries. At the beginning of 2018, their number reached 50,000. The employment of foreigners is subject to a heated public and political debate. As far as asylum policy is concerned, the number of applicants is low and the rate of asylum admission is very low. From the point of view of immigration and taking refugees, Slovakia remains a relatively closed country. This is also demonstrated by surveys on migration acceptance, where Slovakia ranked in the last places.

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