



POPULATION POLICY MEASURES IN SERBIA UNTIL 2020

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Abstract. *In the past five years, population policy in Serbia has dealt with declining birth rates and strategies to raise them because current trends indicate that birth rates will not increase significantly, which will further contribute to a significant decline in population. Objectives: The aim of this paper is to present an overview of measures to prevent falling birth rates in the Republic of Serbia, as well as their effects. Materials and methods: This paper belongs to the group of review papers. Various databases are reviewed, selected references are analyzed, systematized and presented in this paper. Results: The most important measures of population policy in Serbia are parental allowance and maternity allowance. Like the parental allowance, the salary compensation for mothers is defined by the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children. Families whose monthly income for the last three months does not exceed the established threshold are entitled to child allowance. In 2020, the Republic Health Insurance Fund enabled insured women up to the age of 43, who are being treated for infertility, to be entitled to an unlimited number of attempts at biomedically assisted artificial insemination. The state has also adopted a Strategy for Encouraging Birth. Statistical data show that a slight increase in the fertility rate was observed in the previous decade (1.43 in 2013; 1.46 in 2016; 1.49 in 2018, and 1.52 in 2019). Conclusion: It is still early to talk about the effects of the measures, given that some of them have only recently been introduced and that it is necessary to pass a certain period of time in order to see the results. The historical context, economic and social factors, but also the global pandemic of the SARS-COV-2 virus should be taken into account. In order for population policy measures to yield better results in the future, work needs to be done to strengthen the framework for their implementation.*

Keywords: birth rate, population policy, population

1. INTRODUCTION

Population policy is a policy pursued by a state with the aim of harmonizing the demographic picture of the population. When a country wants to direct demographic changes towards the desired goal, then we are talking about population policy. Successful European models are based on four simple principles. First, support is guaranteed to all parents regardless of marital and employment status: marital union, cohabitation, single parent, employed, unemployed and students. Second, parents and children receive benefits throughout their upbringing. Third, services such as nurseries, kindergartens and education are cheap, sometimes free, and evenly represented and available to everyone. Fourth, the measures adopted are safe and stable over a long period of time [1].

Today, when a large number of developed countries (but also developing countries) are facing the problem of low natural growth, there is a need for a different formulation and measures of population policy than those that were necessary in the 50s and 60s of the last century. On the other hand, it is necessary to take appropriate steps (primarily in the legislative field) in order to enable individuals to decide on childbirth as much as possible, ie to provide them with sufficient opportunities to satisfy their desire for offspring. State

support in this area refers to issues of population, family, children, health, education and in general the position of people and social groups [2]. States take different positions and pursue appropriate population policies accordingly [3].

Although Serbia belongs to a part of the modern developed world in demographic terms, its basic population problems are low fertility, negative natural growth rates, intensive aging process, emigration, pronounced depopulation and disappearance of the village [4].

Unlike global trends that show the enormous growth of the total population of the planet Earth, in the Republic of Serbia the situation is completely different. According to the census from 2002, the number of inhabitants was 7,893,125 inhabitants, and after that there is a continuous decline in the total population of the Republic of Serbia [5]. The demographic situation was most affected by the disintegration of the SFRY, the war in the region, sanctions by the international community, social change (transition, transformation or regression), deep economic crisis, social stratification disorders, political problems, institutional crisis, NATO military intervention.

In recent years, population policy in Serbia has dealt with declining birth rates and strategies to raise the birth rate, as current trends indicate that the birth rate

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will not increase significantly, which will further contribute to a significant decline in the population [6].

The aim of this paper is to present an overview of measures to prevent falling birth rates in the Republic of Serbia, as well as their effects.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper belongs to the group of review papers. Different databases are reviewed, selected references are analyzed, systematized and presented in this paper.

3. RESULTS

The Republic of Serbia, with an average age of 41.6 years (2011), is one of the oldest countries in the world. In addition, Serbia is constantly declining year on year [7]. The study of population policy in Serbia shows that it has gone through various stages of development and

has largely followed world trends [2] in the inter-census period 2002–2011. depopulation is present in almost all areas of the Republic of Serbia. The population has been reduced in both large functional units (Serbia - north and Serbia - south). Depopulation is somewhat more pronounced in Serbia-South, in three of the four regions of Serbia, in 23 of the 25 districts, in 152 of the 168 municipalities in Serbia [8]. Statistics show that the previous decade saw a slight increase in the fertility rate until 2019, and a decline in 2020 (shown in Table 1) [9].

The adoption of the Birth Incentive Strategy is only the first step in the state's response to extremely low fertility. The strategy identifies all important resources of population policy, which contains a number of measures and activities. A precise and harmonized multisectoral approach in its implementation has been adopted. Having in mind the complex deterministic basis of the phenomenon of insufficient births, the priorities among the directions of measures have not been determined for a reason.

Table 1. Total fertility rate. Taken from the website of the Republic Bureau of Statistics [9]

| Indicator | Territory | Period of time | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| Total fertility rate [number of children per woman] | Republic of Serbia | 1.45 | 1.43 | 1.46 | 1.46 | 1.46 | 1.48 | 1.48 | 1.52 | 1.48 |
| | Serbia-North | 1.47 | 1.44 | 1.48 | 1.48 | 1.46 | 1.50 | 1.50 | 1.53 | 1.49 |
| | Belgrade region | 1.48 | 1.45 | 1.49 | 1.48 | 1.46 | 1.48 | 1.50 | 1.53 | 1.48 |
| | Region of Vojvodina | 1.44 | 1.42 | 1.45 | 1.47 | 1.45 | 1.51 | 1.48 | 1.50 | 1.50 |
| | Serbia-South | 1.42 | 1.40 | 1.44 | 1.43 | 1.45 | 1.45 | 1.46 | 1.50 | 1.45 |
| | The region of Sumadija and Western Serbia | 1.46 | 1.42 | 1.48 | 1.48 | 1.50 | 1.48 | 1.49 | 1.53 | 1.52 |
| | Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia | 1.36 | 1.38 | 1.39 | 1.36 | 1.38 | 1.41 | 1.41 | 1.46 | 1.37 |

In addition to the Family Law and the laws that directly regulate family planning methods, a significant group of laws are those whose solutions directly or indirectly stimulate the birth rate. The Labor Law contains a decision that encourages the birth of the third and fourth child, stipulating that maternity leave and leave for child care in that case lasts two years, instead of one for the first and second child. In addition, this law stipulates that fathers, instead of mothers, can use leave of absence for child care without any conditions, which lasts from the age of three months to one year, for the first and second child, or up to two years for the third and fourth child [10]. Decisions and measures on financial support of the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children are also important, which includes various benefits, such as salary during maternity leave and childcare leave, child allowance, then parental allowance, pays progressively for each child [11]. The Law on Pension and Disability Insurance contains a provision according to which a woman who has given birth to a third child, on that basis, is included in the special length of service for a period of two years [12]-[3].

There are two measures of population policy in Serbia today. These are the parental allowance and the

full salary compensation to the employed mother during the maternity leave for a period of one year. Parental allowance is paid once for the first child, for the second it is paid in 24 equal monthly installments, and for the third and fourth child in 120 equal monthly installments [13].

The parental allowance is increased by a lump sum, for the purchase of equipment for the child and is paid together with the one-time amount of the parental allowance for the first child, ie the first installment of the parental allowance for the second, third and fourth child. The nominal amount of parental allowance and lump sum for the purchase of equipment for a child is adjusted twice a year, with the six-month consumer price index in the Republic of Serbia [11].

In accordance with the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, the salary compensation during maternity leave and childcare leave is determined on the basis of the sum of monthly the basis on which the contributions to the salary have been paid, for the last 18 months preceding the first month of the beginning of the leave [11].

Republic Health Insurance Fund from 15.06.2020 provided wider rights to insured persons (women) in connection with the treatment of infertility by

biomedically assisted fertilization (BMPO). Insured persons (women) up to the age of 43 were given the opportunity to have an unlimited number of BMPO procedures and three cryoembryo transfers at the expense of the funds of the obligatory health insurance in order to have their first child with a professional assessment. Two stimulated BMPO procedures and one cryoembryo transfer are available to women up to 43 years of age who in the existing community have one child obtained in the BMPO procedure for another child. There is currently a debate on moving the border to 45 years of age. At the expense of the Republic Health Insurance Fund (RHIF), freezing of embryos (in three straws up to 6 embryos, maximum 2 embryos in one straw) is provided, with a storage period of up to 5 years for the first child [14].

Population policy of local self-government must be an ongoing process that is managed, monitored and evaluated, a process that is public and that involves the engagement of competent people and the participation of citizen volunteers [2]. The Government passed the Decree on determining the Program of allocation and use of funds to support the implementation of population policy measures in the Republic of Serbia for 2017. The funds are intended for local self-government units (LGUs) as co-financing up to 85% of the proposed population policy measures. If several LGUs from the same area participate to a certain extent, the funds can be used by all LGUs, in proportion to their participation. The measures envisaged in this document can be grouped into several categories: possible solutions to the problem of insufficient births; preserving and improving the reproductive health of adolescents; fight against sterility; lowering the psychological cost of parenthood; reconciling work and parenthood; population education; activating local self-government [15].

One example is the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, which adopted in 2004 the Demographic Development Program, whose first results were a fully regressed stay of the third and each subsequent child in preschool institutions, parental allowance for the first child, initiatives for changing the population policy of relevant legislation, education and media campaigns. The basic approach in defining the population policy of local self-government should be oriented towards measures of intangible and material nature [6].

Within the special goal of the Strategy marked as mitigating the economic price of raising a child, two individual goals have been set - reduction of direct costs of raising children and financial measures to encourage births or incentives in the field of housing. two individual goals - harmonization of parental and professional domains and harmonization of work and parenthood through the care of children of employed parents. In the Strategy for Encouraging Birth, adopted in 2018, which treats the most delicate population issue of today, the stationary population, that is the population in which the next generations will be the same size as the existing ones, is presented as a general goal of sustainable demographic development of Serbia in the long run [16]. The Birth Incentive Strategy does not explicitly state the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a conceptual framework for defining its goals, but based on the analysis of that strategic document it is concluded that the 2030 Agenda goals related to challenges in the field of economic fertility

determinants are contained. based on the stated specific and individual goals of the Strategy [16].

The action plan is aimed at implementing measures in the field of social protection of young parents, in order to include as many vulnerable as possible, then at implementing measures that increase the coverage of children with preschool education, increase youth employment, and create equal opportunities for all worthy jobs. wages for work of equal value.

The results of a survey conducted in three municipalities in Serbia indicate that citizens are aware of the problems related to the birth rate in Serbia. In all three municipalities (Zvezdara, Stara Pazova and Jagodina) in which the research was conducted, the respondents agree that the state should be active in this field, but also that the local government must take the initiative in solving the problem. The main problem of birth rates according to the attitude of citizens is the poor financial situation and most of them agreed that it is material measures that can contribute to better results. Most citizens are informed that the competent ministry has developed a strategy to encourage births and believe that the best material measure that could be taken to compensate wages, parental and child allowance, and on the other hand the best intangible measures are incentives for youth employment and various flexible types of working time [7].

4. CONCLUSION

No matter how developed and fragmented, the population policy of the state cannot meet all the requirements, needs, specifics and expectations at the level of lower territorial communities – local communities, certain social groups and individuals.

The directions of possible action in order to increase the rate of natural increase may be different, so on the one hand one can observe a set of regulations related to the issue of family planning, but at the same time it is necessary to anticipate and adopt laws and provide concrete measures to facilitate creation of offspring, and this primarily refers to a series of financial, social, tax and other similar measures.

In addition to population policy, which is a policy of direct influence of the state to achieve certain demographic goals, the policy of family planning was promoted, whose main feature is the understanding of the inviolable right of individuals to freely decide on childbirth. There is no single solution when it comes to population policy. It is a set of measures and activities that states themselves must implement within a broader policy and depending on the specifics of society.

It is still early to talk about the effects of the measures, given that some of them have only recently been introduced and that it is necessary to pass a certain period of time in order to see the results. The historical context, economic and social factors, but also the global pandemic of the SARS-COV-2 virus should be taken into account. In order for population policy measures to yield better results in the future, work needs to be done to strengthen the framework for their implementation.

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