Roman Tesliuk, Vitaliy Krupin

The Ageing of Ukraine's Population: Demographic Trends, Social and Economic Implications*

Abstract: The article aims to understand key demographic trends in the past 30 years in Ukraine in terms of ageing. The particular focus is on differences between urban and rural population in order to understand the possible social and economic implications of ageing. The research considers national trends and regional disparities, presenting the key demographic indicators for both. These indicators include the dynamics of population with regard to age groups, demographic dependency, average age, potential support ratio, life expectancy at birth and the changes in the age-sex structure. Analysis reveals a steady ageing trend in the past 30 years, a result of the decrease in fertility and gradual shrinking of the population group aged 0–14 (from 21.6 to 15.5 million) and the simultaneous expansion of the elderly (65+) group (from 11.7 to 16.5 million). The total fertility rate has a downward trend reaching 1.37 (compared to 1.94 in 1989) and the average age has risen to 41.3 years. While similar trends are present for both the urban and rural populations regarding the changes in age groups, and in recent years the differences have been decreasing, in case of the life expectancy at birth these differences are still present, especially for males. Depopulation trends in Ukraine are also intensified by emigration processes. As there are social and economic challenges due to demographic ageing, low life expectancy is a constraint on a further increase in pensionable age.

Keywords: demographics, ageing, demographic dependency, potential support ratio, population pyramid, Ukraine.

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1. Introduction

Ageing is a phenomena that has been gaining momentum, especially in recent decades. Demographic ageing – the inevitable increase in the proportion of older persons that results from the decline in fertility and improvement in survival that characterise the demographic transition – is occurring throughout the world. Each of the 201 countries or areas with at least 90,000 inhabitants in 2017 is projected to see an increase in the proportion of persons aged 60 or over between 2017 and 2050. Although the process of demographic ageing is most advanced in Europe and in North America, where more than one person in five was aged 60 or over in 2017, the populations of other regions are growing older as well (UN 2017). The demographic ageing trend poses important fiscal sustainability challenges in the medium and long term, as (all else being equal) larger cohorts of pensioners put pressure on public pension expenditures (Carone et al. 2016). Ukraine belongs to the group of countries characterised by a high rate of ageing, as according to the proportion of the population aged 60 and older it is among the 30 "oldest" nations (UISR MHU 2018).

The steady population decline in Ukraine is occurring primarily due to the long-term changes in its age structure, which has undergone significant deformations over the past 30 years. Analysis of the main indicators of demographic changes in Ukraine reveals key signs of demographic crisis and ongoing processes of ageing in the population. The latter is the combination of its two types: the "bottom-up" ageing – reduction in the number of children due to the fall in the birth rate and the "top-down" ageing – reduction in mortality of the elderly population due to an increase in life expectancy, which is manifested through the absolute and relative growth of population in the oldest age groups.

2. Method and materials of research

The aim of the research is an understanding of key demographic trends in the past 30 years in Ukraine in terms of ageing, with a focus on the differences between the urban and rural populations, as well as analysing the phenomena through the prism of national trends and regional disparities. Key indicators to be evaluated in the course of analysis include the dynamics of population with regard to age groups, demographic dependency, average age, potential support ratio, life expectancy at birth and changes in the age-sex structure (based on the population pyramid). Based on the results obtained, key social and economic implications with regard to Ukrainian development peculiarities are to be defined.

The basic source of statistical information for demographic development in Ukraine is the extensive database ("Population of Ukraine" portal) provided by

the State Statistics Service of Ukraine. Years covered by the current research include 1989–2018, which reflect data from the last census carried out in the USSR and current data for the following years. For the "life expectancy at birth" indicator the data is restricted to 1992–2017 due to limited availability.

An important issue is the consistency of the data in the selected timeframe due to Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and the following unavailability of direct statistical data obtainable from the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea (AR Crimea) and the occupied parts (ca. 30% of the area) of two eastern regions of Ukraine – Donetska and Luhanska. While the AR Crimea influenced a sharp shift in data series (visible on particular graphs), for the occupied areas in the eastern Ukraine the data is still being estimated by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, yet limited errors are possible.

The issues of Ukraine's demographic development are revealed in publications by many researchers. Among others, an analysis by Anna Blyumina et al. (2005) has provided a substantial input towards understanding of ageing in Ukraine in the context of older people's involvement in economic life, family transition and problems of older people's loneliness, housing conditions, access to knowledge and healthcare, as well as social welfare, pensions and poverty. Research on Ukraine's position in the global ranking of various ageing indicators (average life expectancy, survival rate in the oldest age group) was focus of Iryna Tarabukina et al. (2011) et al. (2011), yet as the report notes "the socio-demographic policy in Ukraine in the recent five years is characterized by some revitalization", which was in fact the case of the mid-2000s and since then both the demographic trends and the socio-economic implications have changed under the influence of several financial crises. More recent research entitled "Population of Ukraine: Imperatives of demographic aging" (NSAU 2014) financed by the United Nations elaborated numerous demographic issues of both social and economic dimensions. While the above-mentioned researches give a substantial overview of many past and existing issues connected to demographic ageing in Ukraine, this particular research stands out by its focus on differences between the urban and rural populations in demographic ageing, while also revealing both national and regional peculiarities.

3. The national dimension of population ageing in Ukraine

As of 1 January 2019, the permanent population of Ukraine accounted for 42,153,200 people[1] (disregarding the occupied Crimean peninsula). In general,

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[1] Here and throughout the article all the demographic data presented in the text (unless mentioned otherwise) is based on the official website of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine and the government

during the last 5 years (2014–2018) the population has decreased by 919,200 (or 2.0%), yet altogether with the population lost to Russia the number increases to 3.27 million (or 7.2%). Analysis of this indicator since 1989 reveals its rapid decline up to 2010, and the slowdown in the rates of decline from 2011 to 2014 (Figure 1). However, the annexation of the Crimea and military occupation of the eastern regions of the country have drastically influenced the decline, weakened the conditions for natural reproduction of the population and provoked migratory processes from eastern regions to the rest of the country.
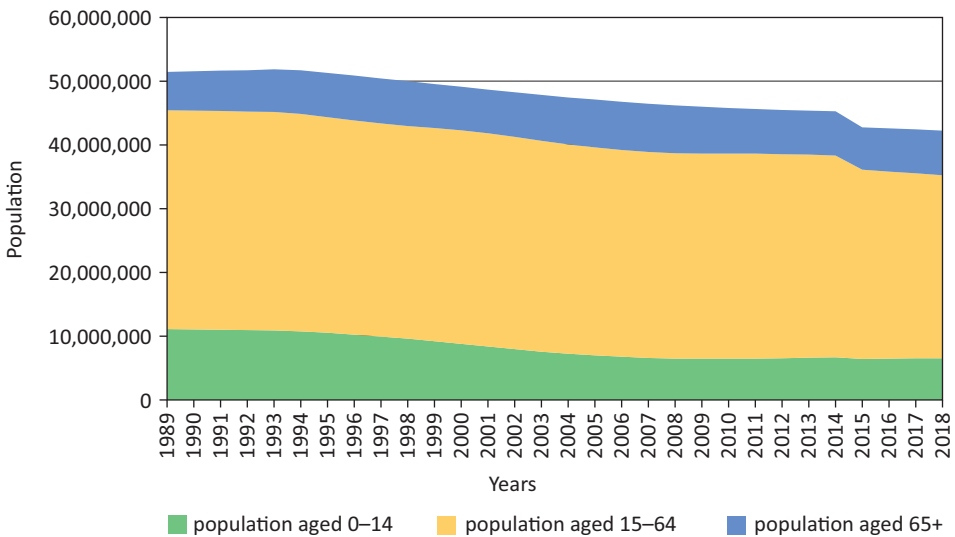

Figure 1. Population of Ukraine 1989–2018 – total number and age groups
Source: based on data from the "Population of Ukraine" portal (State Statistics Service of Ukraine).

The data presented also reveals the significant changes in the population's age structure. First, there has been a fall in the number of children – from 11.1 million in 1989 to 6.5 million in 2018. The same trend is present for the working-age population – a decrease from 34.3 million to 28.7 million respectively. The absolute number of people aged 65 and older has increased from 6 to 7 million, and in 2007 the number of this age group has reached its maximum of 7.6 million. This indicates that ageing in Ukraine over the period analysed results primarily from the "bottom-up" type, as a reflection of the gradual (yet relatively swift)

portal "Population of Ukraine" maintained by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine. All of the national-level data after 2014 is presented without input from the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and same concerns all of the indicators calculated.

reduction in the number of children (mainly due to the falling birth rate). However, the positive dynamics of life expectancy at birth (Table 1) against the increase in the elderly population groups' indicates a so-called "top-bottom" ageing, which occurs from a decline in mortality among the elderly with a simultaneous relatively slow increase in the number of children.

The key indicator of demographic ageing is the growth of the proportion of the 65+ age group in the age structure. Data in Table 1 proves this growth was especially rapid during 1989–1995 and 2000–2007. For the entire 30-year timeframe analysed, the proportion of people aged 65+ grew by 4.8%. It should be noted that along with the significant reduction in the working age population, its share increased by 1.3%.

This occurred due to the rapid decline in the birth rate in this period. The most representative indicator in this case is the total fertility rate, calculated as the average number of children per female. Since 1989, this indicator has begun to decline sharply – from 1.94 in 1989 to as low as 1.12 in 2000 (Table 1). In the following years there was a gradual increase in the total fertility rate; however, the fluctuation of this indicator within the range of 1.21-1.51 points to the above-mentioned further decrease in the proportion of children in relation to other age groups.[2] In general, over the 30 years, the number of children per 100 population aged 65+ has fallen almost twofold – from 184 to 94.

There is a slightly different ratio between the categories of working age and elderly population groups. While the overall demographic load has decreased due to decline in number of children, the load caused by the population aged 65+ has increased by ca. 1.5 times and is expected to maintain this ratio (Table 1).

There are significant differences in the process of ageing between the urban and rural populations (Figure 2). Depopulation of Ukrainian rural areas began in 1979, as there has been a steady outflow of rural youth to the urban areas, gradually resulting in increasing differences in the proportion of elderly people in cities and villages, which for a long time was quite high – 7.1–7.3% during 1989–1998. Later on a steady approximation of this indicator occurred with its simultaneous growth for both rural and urban populations. As these growth rates were higher in the cities, by 2018 the difference between the population shares at the age of 65+ was only 1.3%. In other words, the population of cities and urban villages[3] in Ukraine has aged significantly during the last 30 years (the elderly group has grown by 6.7 p.p.), while the rural population aged by only 0.9 p.p.

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[2] In order to maintain the basic population reproduction the total fertility rate should equal 2.0-2.2.

[3] Urban villages (precisely "villages of an urban type") is a post-Soviet legal definition from 1981 (still used in Ukraine) for villages with populations of over 2,000 and serving an important purpose.

Table 1. Demographic indicators of Ukraine

Indicators		1989	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015*	2018**
					Years			
Population (total), thousands		51452.0	51300.4	49115.0	47100.5	45782.6	42759.7	42216.8
Age structure	population aged 0–14, %	21.6	20.5	17.9	14.8	14.2	15.1	15.5
	population aged 15–64, %	66.7	65.9	68.2	69.2	70.2	69.3	68.0
	population aged 65+, %	11.7	13.6	13.9	16	15.6	15.6	16.5
Total fertility rate (per female)		1.94	1.40	1.12	1.21	1.45	1.51	1.37
Population 0–14 per 100 people aged 65+		184	151	129	93	90	97	94
Demographic dependency on population aged 15–64 (per 1000 people)	total	499	517	465	445	425	443	470
	population aged 65+	176	206	203	230	223	225	243
Potential support ratio		5.7	4.9	4.9	4.3	4.5	4.4	4.1
Average age, years		36.5	37.2	38.4	39.5	40.2	40.7	41.3
Sex ratio of the population aged 65+ (females per 100 males)		241	215	204	194	200	201	198
Life expectancy at birth, years	male	65.6	61.2	62.1	62.2	65.3	66.4	67.0
	female	74.8	72.5	73.5	74.0	75.5	76.3	76.8

* Excluding data from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea due to unavailability.
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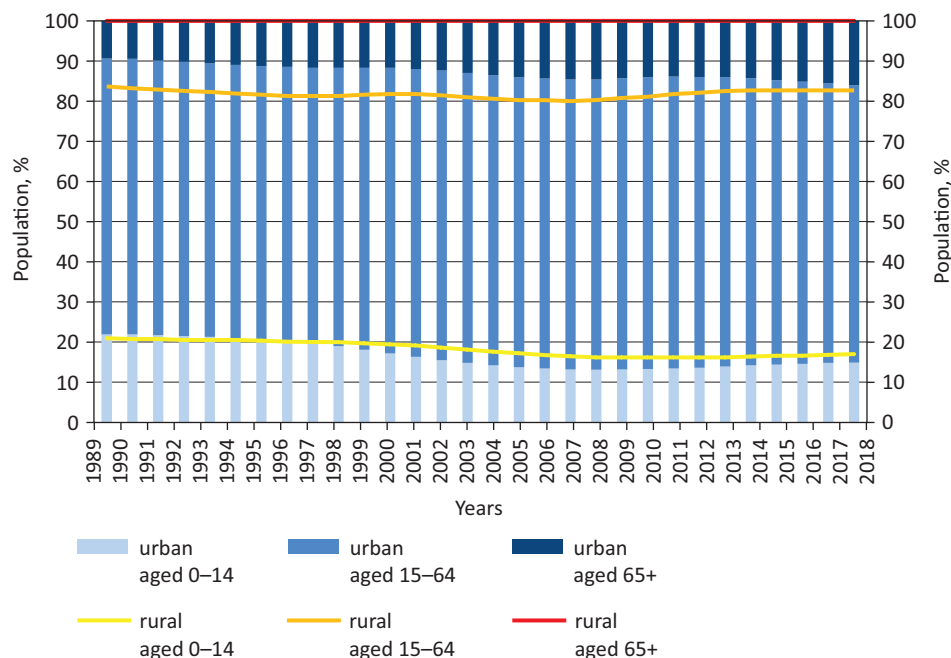Source: based on data from the "Population of Ukraine" portal (State Statistics Service of Ukraine).

Figure 2. Age structure of urban and rural population of Ukraine (1989–2018)

Source: based on data from the "Population of Ukraine" portal (State Statistics Service of Ukraine).

These differences also apply to life expectancy at birth. As stated in the Table 1, this indicator has been falling for males from 65.6 years in 1989 to 62.1 years in 2000, yet later regained its former level and even exceeded it in 2018 with a value of 67.0 years. It is similar with the female indicator, at 74.8 years in 1989 and later characterised by a gentler decline followed by a sharper upward dynamic from the mid-90s, reaching 76.8 years in 2018. Yet a breakdown of this indicator into urban and rural populations (Figure 3) shows wide margins between these types of resident, which have been growing in the past 13 years for females and for 17 years for males. As of 2017 rural male life expectancy was 65.5 years and was 2.35 years less for urban residents, while for females in rural areas the same indicator was 76 years, 1.13 years less than the urban population.

Another crucial trend is the proportion of children (0–14 years) in the urban and rural populations. While at the end of millennium the urban population had a slight advantage according to this indicator, from 2000 up to 2017 the proportion of children in the rural population was consistently above the corresponding indicator for urban areas (by 2.0–3.2 p.p.). Urban settlements concentrate labour demand, so the proportion of the working-age population there is higher compared

to villages. However, reaching its maximum in 2003 (9.3 p.p.), by 2018 the difference between them was the lowest for the entire period analysed – 3.2 p.p. All three trends analysed indicate a gradual convergence in the demographic development of urban and rural areas in Ukraine.
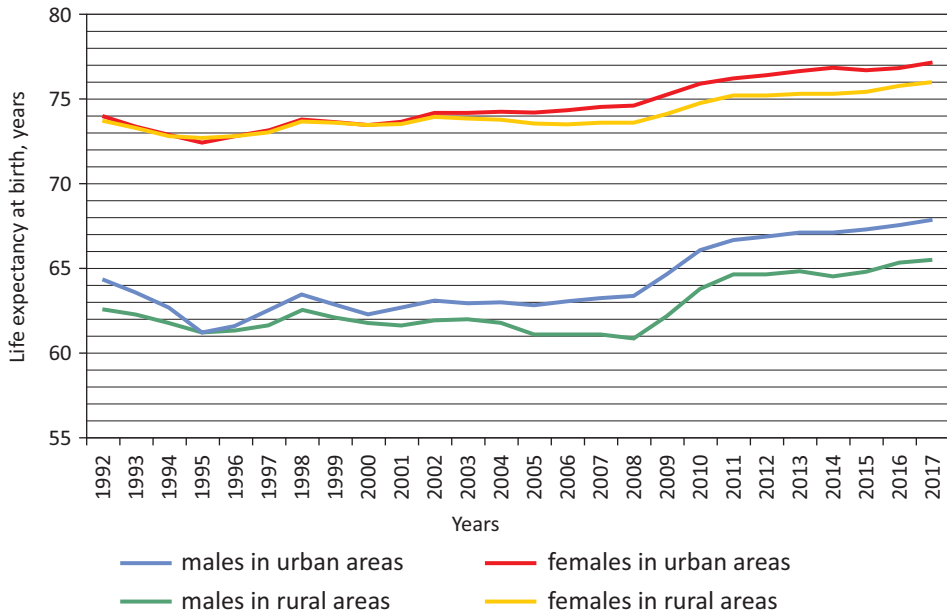

Figure 3. Life expectancy at birth for urban and rural residents of Ukraine (1992-2017)

Source: based on data from the "Population of Ukraine in 2017", State Statistics Service of Ukraine.

Changes in the age structure of the Ukrainian population can be well illustrated by the population (or the "age-sex") pyramids. Figure 4 shows that it was precisely after 1989 that a sharp decline in the birth rate occurred, so during the last 30 years the average age group was dominant. However, the decline in the birth rate at the beginning of the period analysed is already reflected in the size of the working-age population, as it is being supplemented by fewer young people, while the elderly group is increasing. The population pyramid in 2018 clearly indicates the inevitable further reduction of the nation's population and the growth of the 65+ age groups in its structure. Large gender imbalances in elderly age groups are also noticeable – despite the decline in the sex ratio of the population aged 65+ (number of females per 100 males), the female population in this group is twice as high.
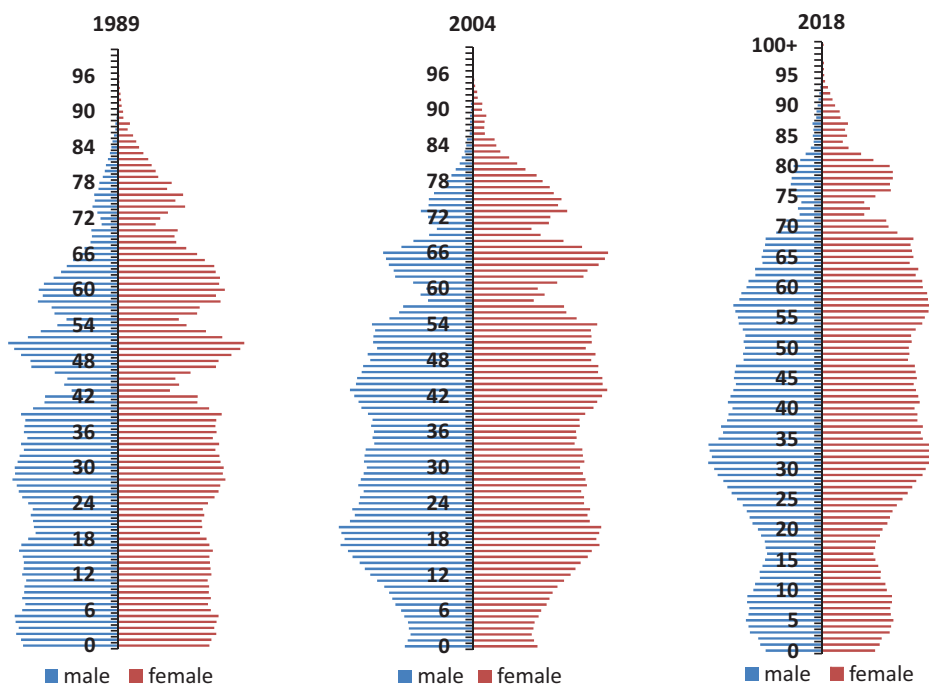
Figure 4. Population pyramids for Ukraine in 1989, 2004 and 2018

Source: based on data from the "Population of Ukraine" portal (State Statistics Service of Ukraine).

4. Regional peculiarities of population ageing in Ukraine

Historically influenced by differing political, economic and social factors, Ukrainian regions have developed peculiar characteristics of demographic reproduction, as well as a particular age structure of the population (Figure 5).

One of the most representative indicators of ageing phenomena is the average age of the population. Nationwide this figure has grown dynamically, from 36.5 years in 1989 to 41.3 years in 2018. Yet regional analysis shows a gradual increase in the average age from west to east and from south-west to north-east. At the same time, ageing is more typical for urban residents in the eastern urbanised industrial regions, and for rural areas in the north-east. The highest level of rural demographic ageing is therefore typical for the Chernihivska, Sumska and Luhanska regions. A high average age of the population is also typical for the central regions – Poltavska, Kirovohradska and Cherkaska, where the urban-rural differences in the average age of the population are relatively low. Farther to the west (beginning from Kyivska, Vinnytska, Khmelnytska regions) – the urban population is slightly younger.

The youngest population, according to the average age indicator, is in the western Ukraine, in the Zakarpatska, Rivnenska, Volynska and Chernivetska regions. All of these have a high share of rural population, which at the same time is the youngest in the country (in these four regions the rural population is on average younger than the urban).
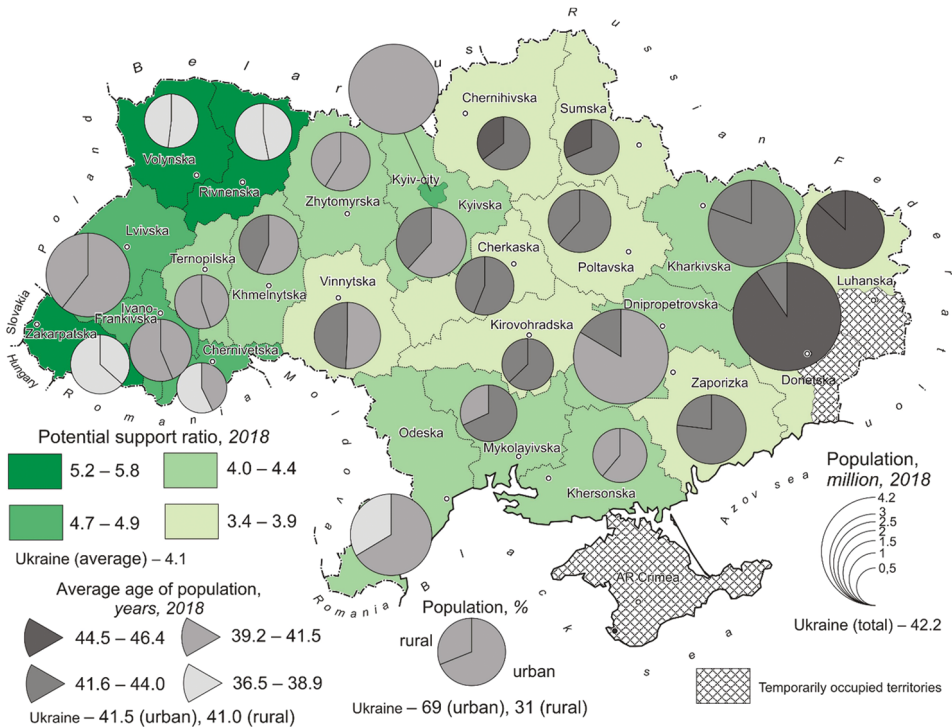

Figure 5. Regional differentiation according to potential support ratio and the number and average age of urban and rural population in Ukraine

Source: based on data from the "Population of Ukraine" portal (State Statistics Service of Ukraine).

The economic consequences of demographic ageing, in particular its impact on the social security system, are demonstrated by indicators that reflect the ratio of the population group aged 65+ compared to the working-age group. One such indicator is the potential support ratio that the elderly group can count on (population aged 15–64 in relation to the population aged 65+) (NSAU 2014). In Ukraine, this indicator has decreased from 5.7 to 4.1 over the past 30 years. The regional distribution of this indicator broadly corresponds to the peculiarities

of the age structure – the regions of western Ukraine and the city of Kyiv have much higher potential support ratio (4.7-5.8) than the overall national level.

In order to determine the rate of demographic ageing in the regions of Ukraine, the average annual growth rate of the population aged 65+ over the 1989-2018 period was calculated (Figure 6). Despite the differences in the course of this process in the region, all of them are characterised by an increase in the proportion of population aged 65 and older.
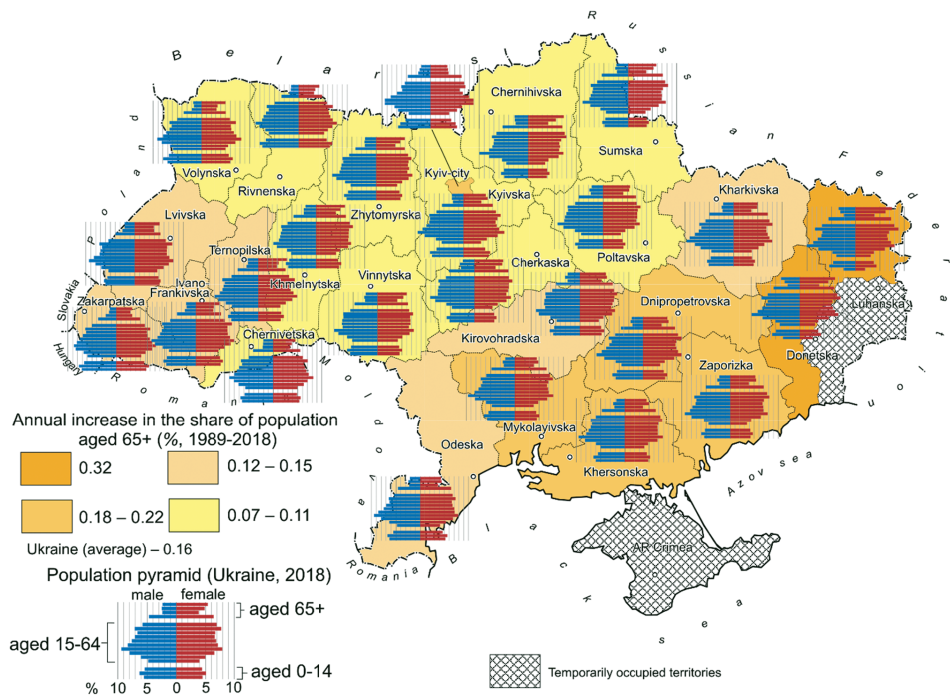

Figure 6. Relative growth of population aged 65+ and population pyramids for the regions of Ukraine

Source: based on data from the "Population of Ukraine" portal (State Statistics Service of Ukraine).

The population of the Donbas (which includes both the Donetska and Luhanska regions) is ageing at the highest rate – primarily due to emigration, mostly people of working age taking their children away from the area of military occupation. This is evidenced by the "foundations" of population pyramids specific for these areas – these are much narrower in comparison to the groups of working age (especially its upper cohort) and the elderly.

The population in the south is ageing rapidly as well, due to the presence of large proportions of working-age population in the upper cohorts. The low rates of ageing in the north-eastern and central regions indicate the beginning of this process even before 1989. Relatively favourable relations between age groups of the population in the western regions (absolute and relative prevalence of the number of children over the number of elderly population) indicate a much slower process of demographic ageing than in other regions.

In addition to the above indicators reflecting the ageing of the population, migration has had an important influence on this process. A distinctive feature of modern migration processes in Ukraine is the domination of Ukrainian migrants from the most active (and, at the same time, childbearing) age. Even with a relatively favourable demographic situation, the transformation of the temporary migration (mainly labour) to permanent (emigration), it could play a decisive role in the reduction of population in particular regions and nationwide.

Growth in the size of the elderly population along with a decrease in the working-age population, as well as the decline in fertility form new challenges for the national and regional economies. These can be divided into several main activity areas (NSAU 2014) and the following directions for necessary actions:

- public finances (distribution of budget funds and forming of regional support programmes),
- labour market (ensuring competitiveness and decent wages),
- social security (levelling the growth of the burden on the working-age population, which is decreasing),
- education (the need for life-long learning, functioning of the "silver universities"),
- healthcare (provision of an extensive network of specialised institutions for the elderly, taking into account the interests of the older generation in medical reforms),
- housing and infrastructure (proper equipment for houses, landscaping, functioning of public transport),
- family relationships and intergenerational interaction (overcoming the gender imbalance and inter-generational distances).

Further scientific and practical research into the ageing issue should be aimed at solving the above tasks and changing the role and importance of the older generation in the economy and society.

So far one of the fundamental adaptation measures has been the pension reforms. These were introduced in most EU member states in the early 2000s aimed at improving fiscal sustainability and maintaining adequate pension incomes, as all of them have experienced changes in the age structure due to increasing longevity and low fertility (Carone et al. 2016). The pension reform in Ukraine in 2011

(currently still undergoing modifications) basically consisted of similar elements, key ones being the rise in both pension age and the minimum required contribution period. The pension age was raised to 60 years for both males and females. The minimum required contribution period has changed to 30 years for females and 35 for males. Transition to the new requirements has been gradual and is to finalise in 2028. Yet there is at least one crucial difference between the EU and Ukrainian experience, as there is large difference in life expectancy. As mentioned above, for rural males in Ukraine this indicator is currently at 65.5 years, only slightly over retirement age. And while in the EU it is possible to raise the pensionable age further and still fulfil the social obligations to the elderly, in Ukraine this would not be possible.

5. Conclusions

Analysis of demographic processes in Ukraine during the past 30 years indicates a steady trend towards ageing, which from the demographic point of view is the process in which the proportion of elderly people in the total population is increasing. The duration of such changes plays a key role in the reproduction of the population, and in Ukraine these changes are evidently having a long-term effect. Apart from the typical key factors a number of specific conditions influence the negative trend in Ukrainian demographics, namely the absolute and relative decrease in income levels and living standards (especially in rural areas), the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula and military aggression in the eastern part of the country (causing intensive emigration from these areas since 2014). Also, a rather positive issue – introduction of the visa-free regime with the European Union – stimulates the development of Ukrainian human potential and provides opportunities for its optimal utilisation both abroad and in Ukraine, yet has also emerged as a powerful migration factor for the economically active population, leading to a wide range of migration duration (from seasonal, through short-term to long-term), yet also to permanent emigration of the nation's human capital.

The average age of the population in Ukraine rose by 4.8 years through the 1989-2018 period is currently at 41.3 years. In the regional dimension the growth of the middle-aged population is clearly visible in the direction from west to east and south-west to north-east. Ageing is more typical for urban residents in the eastern urbanised industrial areas and for rural residents in the north-east. Western regions have relatively favourable demographic dynamics, so the average age of the population here is the lowest. Overall, a gradual decrease in the disparity between the demographic development of urban and rural areas is evident: the urban population is ageing faster and the proportion of children in rural areas is higher

than in urban areas. The population pyramid for 2018 clearly indicates the inevitable further decline of the country's population and the growth in the proportion of older age groups in its structure. These processes are intensified by ongoing migratory movements (mainly from rural areas to cities or emigration abroad from rural and urban areas), predominantly from the working-age population.

The long-standing process of depopulation is causing an intensification of demographic research in Ukraine, which makes it possible to outline new challenges for economic and social development. The permanent natural population began its swift decline in the 1990s and was a reflection of two steady trends: a sharp drop in birth rate and a relatively slower increase in the mortality rate, caused by the population's age structure (a high proportion of people aged 65 and over). Since the beginning of the 20th century, depopulation has been intensified by powerful migration processes, which reflect different vectors and characteristics. Due to this development of the demographic situation in Ukraine over the past three decades, the age structure of the population has become substantially distorted.

In a socio-economic sense ageing means the reduction of potential support for the elderly and an increase in the demographic load on the working-age population. This process initiates additional complications requiring solutions in various areas of social and economic development at both national and regional levels. These solutions are necessary to adapt to the changing proportions of different age groups in the overall population, utilisation of the existing labour potential, maintaining the quality of life for society as a whole and for each age group in particular.

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Starzenie się ludności Ukrainy. Trendy demograficzne, implikacje społeczne i gospodarcze

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest prezentacja kluczowych trendów dotyczących procesów starzenia się ludności na Ukrainie, zachodzących w ostatnich 30 latach. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono różnicom istniejącym między ludnością miejską i wiejską oraz analizie możliwych społecznych i gospodarczych implikacji starzenia. W badaniu uwzględniono zarówno trendy krajowe, jak i zróżnicowanie regionalne, przedstawiając kluczowe wskaźniki demograficzne. Analizowane wskaźniki obejmują dynamikę populacji w odniesieniu do grup wiekowych, obciążenie demograficzne, średni wiek, współczynnik wsparcia, średnią oczekiwaną długość trwania życia oraz zmiany w strukturze wieku i płci. Analiza ujawnia stały trend starzenia się ludności w ciągu ostatnich 30 lat, będący wynikiem spadku wskaźnika urodzeń i stopniowego kurczenia się populacji w wieku 0–14 lat (z 21,6 do 15,5 mln) przy jednoczesnej ekspansji grupy osób starszych (65+) (z 11,7 do 16,5 mln). Współczynnik płodności ma tendencję spadkową, osiągając poziom 1,37 (w porównaniu z 1,94 w 1989 r.), jednocześnie średni wiek populacji wzrósł do 41,3 lat. Podczas gdy w odniesieniu do zmian w grupach wiekowych podobne tendencje występują dla ludności miejskiej i wiejskiej, a w ostatnich latach różnice się stale wyrównują, w przypadku oczekiwanej długości trwania życia różnice te są nadal ewidentne, zwłaszcza w przypadku mężczyzn. Tendencje depopulacji na Ukrainie nasilają się także w wyniku procesów emigracyjnych. Mimo wyzwań społecznych i gospodarczych związanych ze starzeniem się społeczeństwa istnieje ograniczenie dalszego zwiększania wieku emerytalnego ze względu na niską oczekiwaną długość trwania życia.

Słowa kluczowe: demografia, starzenie, obciążenie demograficzne, współczynnik wsparcia, piramida płci i wieku, Ukraina.