ON AGEING AND OLD AGE IN SERBIA

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According to relevant demographic indicators, Serbia (without Kosovo and Metohia) belongs to the group of the oldest countries in the world mainly due to five decades of below-replacement fertility (net reproduction rate is below one since 1955). Also, sudden drop in total fertility rate occurred in Serbia 10-15 years earlier than in the most of European countries. Apart from that, high actual values of median age (41.2) and of ratios indicating demographic pressure of old population, such as ageing index 65/0-19 (0.81) and old-age dependency ratio 65/20-64 (0.28) have been also influenced by significant rise of life expectancy at birth as well as by permanent emigration of people in the most vital age during the last five decades. These three factors, of which below-replacement fertility is the crucial one, manifested themselves in the process of population ageing which is characterized by simultaneous decrease of the young and increase of the old population. The process was specially intensified during the last three decades. Nowadays, there is obvious regularity according to which economically underdeveloped societies are rich in children while economically wealthy states are poor in children. In this context, Serbia is a phenomenon: economically poor society, poor in children (Djurdjev, 2006), which makes consequences of population ageing in Serbia more profound than quantitative indicators can show.

Stochastic forecast of Serbian population up to 2050 shows that population ageing will certainly progress. This is manifested by the permanent increase of the median age which, from the present 41.2 (2009) will reach expected 47.0 years at the end of the projection period, whereby the chances are just in theory that the median population age in 2050 will be lower than today, even if Serbia becomes a typical immigration country. In other words, not even an inflow of migrants in their best reproductive-productive age can practically stop the process of population ageing. The causes of this phenomenon are not just in the assumed below replacement TFR level and expected increase of life expectancy (the most probable future) but in the unfavorable age structure of actual population (Nikitović and Tucci, 2010), which is mostly regressive and only partially stationary (Penev, 2006). Considerably smaller generations born from the middle of the 1980s until the end of the 2000s, in comparison with cohorts born in the period 1971-1984, cannot prevent the expected drastic decrease of the number of young people in the next decades not even under the assumption of fertility recovery. On the other hand, it is quite certain that the number of people aged 65 and over will be greater, in mid-century, than the present number of young people. Namely, these two groups will exchange their present positions in the population structure of the country (Nikitović, 2010). As a result, it is quite certain that the number of people aged 65 and over will increase from present 1.27 to 1.43 million in 2020 while at the same time the number of people aged 0-19 years will decrease from actual 1.55 to 1.38 million, which indicates that old population will outnumber the young for the first time in modern history of the country as soon as the end of this decade (Nikitović, 2009).

The analysis of the dependency ratios shows that the main pressure in the following decades will come from the increasing number of the old-age population as opposed to the actual situation. Besides, there are not even theoretical chances that the expected pressure of the old-aged (65 and over) on the potential workers (20-64) in 2050 will be at the present level (28/100) ever again. On the contrary, the greatest chances are that this ratio will be 46/100. The ageing index shows that it is most probable that during the mid-century more than 3 old-age people (65 and over) will come on every 2 people younger than 20. In addition to this, more than 1 old-age

person will come on every 2 people aged 20-64 according to the 30% of all simulations (Nikitović, 2010).

None of the scenarios leaves even the slightest possibility for OADR to go back to the present level in the year 2050, regardless of the conditions taken into account for their creation. In reality, one could claimed with high certainty that not even a combination of fertility increase and lower life expectancy in conditions of significant migration surplus (the youngest age structure) in the following decades could reduce the increase of the old aged population pressure on the working age contingent (Nikitović and Tucci, 2010).

Secondary analysis of the results of representative researches, conducted during the past few years, allows us to single out basic problems of the elderly population in Serbia more specifically. They are poverty and weak institutional and instrumental support. Namely, the representative poll on standard of living (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2007), conducted during the midyear of 2007 indicated that the poverty rate of the elderly is high (9.6%), being significantly higher than the average (6.6%). What more, the risk of poverty is higher by 40% with the elder population than the average percentage for the population of Serbia. Significant results of this research also show that old women are poorer than men of the same age; the highest poverty rate, from the point of education, is amongst the old people who do not have the primary school degree; the poorest old people are located in Eastern Serbia; the high poverty rate has been confirmed for the elder population in rural settlements, too.

However, only a small number of old people who are poor have material provision of the family, which is the most important method of the social policy of the state (Satarić, Rašević, Miloradović, 2009). The reasons for this small number is lack of information of potential beneficiaries, difficulties during the process of gathering documentation, as well as harsh revenue and property conditions for exercising the rights to this type of social transfer. At the same time, material provision of the family are small in amount. To be precise, persons receiving financial family benefits are amongst the most vulnerable part of the elderly people. The assumed condition of their health, their ability to function in everyday situations, their emotional status, the quality of living and household characteristics are significantly lower in regard to the poor elderly people having their own income. On the one hand, the results indicate that selection of those who do receive social benefits has been successful, but on the other hand open a question: shouldn't material provision of the family reduce the poverty of its beneficiaries in greater extent?

The interviews conducted with 826 elderly people aged 70 or more (Satarić, Rašević, 2007) show that in spite of the fact that as many as four out of five people are chronically ill, the majority of the interviewees think that they are functionally capable of living in their own household. However, a great number of elder population, i.e. each fourth person, needs help of others in order to function in everyday situations inside or outside of their homes. The elderly who need help in everyday life rely on a family member in most cases, as much as 80 percent. Family gives support to the highest extent regardless of the fact that the elder person lives alone or not. Important people in the surroundings of the elderly are also their friends and neighbours (they rely on them in 30% and 27% respectively). The results of this research have shown that institutions have marginal role in the network of supporting the elder population. Namely, elderly people rely on the aforementioned institutions which can support them only potentially between 1 and 3 percent.

Since the beginning of transition, there have been adopted several strategic acts and legal measures relevant to the quality of live of the elder population. The most important documents are *Strategy for poverty reduction* in year 2003, and *National strategy on ageing for the period of 2006-2015*. Ensuring of economic stability in older age and creating such conditions that the elderly can live with their families or their own households, have been recognized as important aims of actions in both these documents. The first results have been achieved. The poverty rate of

people aged 65 or more has been halved in the period of 2002-2007 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2007). There have also been good results in the area of developing strategies for helping and supporting the elderly to live in their homes, because the number of municipalities which have developed relevant services has doubled in number. But, in spite of that, in 46 municipalities there is not any organized method of household help for the elderly (Rašević, Penev, 2009). What more, only 0.73% of people older than 65 have been included.

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