

POPULATION AGING IN GEORGIA UNDER CONDITIONS OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

Population demographic development in Georgia in the XX century generally went like European population. After World War II it entered the third stage of demographic transition. Since the mid-70s population of Georgia has already been aged. Due to the evolutionary demographic development the aging process didn't go at a high pace, but it was of an irreversible nature.

Like many other countries, demographic aging in Georgia was conditioned by steady reduction of fertility during the XX century. Its peculiarities were determined by the specificity of demographic transition. Namely, unlike classical scheme, fertility reduction in Georgia began in the very first phase of demographic transition (the first quarter of the XX century).

In 1898-2002, demographic and statistical studies of population age structure evolution in Georgia showed that in the noted period the population size increased three times and the number of population 60 years of age and older grew seven times. The average median age at first birth for population rose by 14.5 years and became 34.5 years.

It was found the following tendencies that are inherent to population aging:

- a) Steady reduction of 0-14 population age group share;
- b) Growth and further stabilization of the population in the 15-59 age group;
- c) Growth of the share of people over 59 and acceleration of their growth pace;
- d) Marked increase of the share of people above the age of 65.

Changes in Georgia's Population Age Structure in 1897-2002 (According to the population censuses) (%)

	1897	1926	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	2002
0-14	40.3	38.3	36.8	29.3	30.5	26.0	24.7	
15-59	53.0	53.4	54.4	59.7	57.7	61.4	60.9	
60 and older	6.7	8.3	8.8	11.0	11.8	12.5	14.4	
Median Age	20.0	21.0	22.3	26.5	28.7	29.1	30.7	

Through the comparative analysis of urban and rural population age structure it was found that due to the migration processes rural population aged 30 years earlier with comparison to urban population. For this reason there is a big difference in the urban and rural population labor structure. Over the past one hundred years the share of working age population grew by 7.7 percent in rural population; it decreased in urban areas; in recent years it has become stable.

During the economic and political crisis that emerged in post-Soviet period population's grave social and economic situation was caused by fertility reduction and intensive emigration processes that accelerated the process of population's demographic aging; extremely high rates of aging were fixed in the 1990s. According to the 2002 census, the population over age 59 made up 18.6 percent, while it was only 14.4 percent in 1989. It is significant that demographic burden didn't increase in the noted period; presumably it was caused by reduction of average life expectancy. In the same period aging process developed more profoundly in rural areas than in urban ones. All the regions of the country have aged considerably. At the present time in Georgia not a single region or ethnic group is demographically young. Age structures were deformed most of all among Russians, Ukrainians, Ossetians and Greeks. The level of longevity has declined too with which Georgia had always been a distinguished country.

Famous French scientists J. Vallin and F. Mesle deem that the high level of longevity of the Caucasians and among them Georgians doesn't correspond to the truth and as if artificial increase of longevity rates occurred because of pleasing and hypocritical attitude toward Stalin.¹ This is a wrong assumption. The existence of the great share of long-livers in Georgia throughout the previous century is proved in scientific studies of life expectancy.

Even though the whole country is demographically aged, due to the ethnic and regional diversity in Georgia there are still contrasting regions and ethnic groups. For example, in Georgia there is a region called Racha-Lechkhumi where the share of population 60 years of age and older is 38.0 percent, median age – 49 years; in Kvemo Kartli region the same indicators are 15.0 and 31 respectively; in the ethnic group of

¹ J. Vallin et F. Mesle. *Vivre au dela de 100 ans. Population et societe's*. № 365, Fevrier 2001.

Kurds every tenth person is 60 years of age and older (median age – 28 years); 40 percent of Ukrainians is 60 years of age and older and their median age is 52.6 years.

Naturally, such different age structures require different methods usage to solve the problems arisen from the population aging. For instance, we consider that it is expedient to work out a scientifically grounded targeted program “The Olds Region” for the most aged regions. Such a program can serve as a good example for an analogous region of any country.

At the present time Georgia is a country of particular situation where economy is extremely retarded and its population aged. By the aging index (61) Georgia is close to such developed countries as Poland (60), Australia (66), US (59).² By human development index Georgia ranks 100th among world countries.

Due to the economic and political crisis in the 1990s, Georgia retreated from the evolutionary way of its demographic development and at present starkly different model of demographic aging has been formed. Under weak economic conditions all social, economic, psychological and moral problems associated with population aging were brought out much severely. For example, in parallel with the growth of pension expenses incurred by high level of aging, retirement-age increase becomes more and more actual issue. It should be noted that in Georgia where according to the official statistics the unemployment level is 15.1 percent, retirement age increase cannot give the same results as it can give in developed countries. In our opinion and as it attested by studies, the rise of retirement age for the country which is under conditions of economic crisis will lead to the further increase of unemployment, acceleration of emigration processes, “brain drain” and decline in the country’s intellectual potential in the long run. It will intensify social tension even further; intergenerational relations will become acute. All the above will deepen economic crisis.

Proceeding from this, for the country being under economic crisis in our opinion it is necessary to seek original ways to solve all the problems resulting from population aging. For this it is necessary to conduct in-dept scientific researches that unfortunately have no financial backing.

² An Aging World. 2001. p.. 14.

At present, population aging in the countries of the Caucasus region is intensive and characterized by many peculiarities. Georgia is the most aged country among them. In Georgia manifold gerontological researches were conducted in the period before the crisis. Georgia along with Ukraine occupied a leading position in the former Soviet Union by gerontological researches. Hence, we consider that it is expedient to raise the issue about the creation of the international research center for studying social and economic problems of population aging in Georgia.

Mzia Shelia, PhD

Senior Lecturer at Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
Department of Labour Economics

Senior Researcher at The Institute of Demography and Sociological Studies

Tbilisi 0164, Georgia
Varketili – 3, I mikroraion
Korp. 35 Apt. 24

Tel.: (995 32)27-08-40
E-mail: mziashelia@yahoo.com

