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DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS IN UKRAINE (PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES)**ДЕМОГРАФІЧНА КРИЗА В УКРАЇНІ (ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА ВИКЛИКИ)****Biduchak A.S.***MD, PhD, associate professor**ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3475-1497**Bukovinian State Medical University,
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Abstract. *The article provides a comprehensive scientific analysis of the demographic crisis in Ukraine and proposes strategic directions for overcoming it in the context of deep socio-economic and political transformations. The study is based on modern statistical data, demographic theories and interdisciplinary approaches, which allows us to consider the crisis as a multidimensional phenomenon caused by a combination of a number of structural factors: a decrease in the birth rate, high mortality, intensive emigration and progressive aging of the population. The paper emphasizes that demographic processes in Ukraine are significantly influenced by long-term socio-economic disparities, military operations in 2014-2024 and global migration trends. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of state and social mechanisms that can contribute to the stabilization of the demographic situation. The author reveals the role of family policy, reforming the healthcare system, increasing life expectancy, improving migration policy and adapting labor potential as key elements of the demographic strategy. A significant place is given to the need for institutional support for demographic policy, the creation of modern statistical and analytical monitoring tools.*

The article justifies the need to transition to a long-term state demographic strategy, which should integrate economic, social, medical, cultural and managerial components. It is emphasized that the way out of the demographic crisis is possible only under the condition of synergy of interstate and regional policies, active participation of civil society and improvement of the regulatory and legal framework. The results of the study can be used in the development of national demographic development programs and strategic documents in the field of social policy.

Key word: *demographic crisis, depopulation, birth rate, mortality, population aging, migration policy, reproductive health, demographic strategy, human potential, socio-economic development.*

Introduction.

The demographic situation in Ukraine over the past decades has been characterized by a steady deterioration in the main indicators of population reproduction. A decline in the birth rate, a high mortality rate, an increase in the share of the population of older age groups, large-scale migration processes and significant human losses caused by the war form a complex demographic crisis [1]. In modern conditions, it poses a significant threat to the socio-economic development of the state, national security and the potential for future population reproduction. The situation is becoming particularly acute in connection with Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine since 2022, which has deepened all key demographic disparities [2].

Analysis of demographic statistics in Ukraine:

Population. Since the declaration of independence, Ukraine has lost a significant portion of its population. While in 1991 the population was about 52 million, in 2021 it was 41.4 million (excluding temporarily occupied territories). After 2022, according to various estimates, only 28–32 million people live in Ukraine. Thus, the state has lost more than 20 million people in less than three decades, making the rate of depopulation one of the highest in Europe [3].

Birth rate. The decline in fertility is one of the key factors in the demographic crisis. In 2012, 520 thousand children were born in Ukraine, while in 2021 – 273 thousand, in 2022 - 187 thousand, and in 2023 - approximately 205 thousand. The total fertility rate is only 1.0-1.1 children per woman, which is significantly lower than the threshold of simple reproduction of generations (2.1). The rapid decline in fertility is due to a combination of socio-economic and military factors, including uncertainty about the future, migration of women of reproductive age, a decline in living standards, and worsening maternity care conditions [4].

Mortality. For many years, Ukraine has maintained one of the highest mortality rates in Europe. In 2021, 616 thousand deaths were registered, and in 2022-2023 – according to estimates – 500-550 thousand annually. The main causes are circulatory system diseases, oncological diseases, external causes (trauma, road accidents), as well as significant combat losses. Mortality significantly exceeds the birth rate, which forms a chronically negative natural population growth [5,6].

Natural growth. Ukraine has been in a state of stable depopulation since 1991. In 2019, natural growth was about –250 thousand people, in 2021 –343 thousand. In 2022-2023, total demographic losses in combination with migration and military events amount to 0.7-1 million people each year [7].

Population aging. Ukraine is part of the group of countries with an "old" demographic structure: the share of the population aged 60+ exceeds 24%, and the average age is over 41 years. Forecasts indicate further aging, which is due to low birth rates and active emigration of young people. This creates an additional burden on the labor market, pension system and healthcare [8].

Migration. Migration processes are one of the most destructive demographic factors. After 2014, more than 3 million people left the country. After 2022, the number of Ukrainians abroad reached 8-9 million, with a significant share of women and children. According to expert estimates, about a third of them may not return, which significantly reduces the potential for future population reproduction and deepens the imbalance in the labor market [9].

Forecast of the development of the demographic situation. According to the UN and Ukrainian demographers, in the absence of comprehensive state measures, the population may decrease to 26-29 million people by 2030 and to 24-25 million by 2050 [10]. This poses a threat to the long-term economic stability and sustainable development of the state.

Based on statistical data, a number of key problems can be identified:

- a large-scale reduction in the population due to low birth rates, high mortality and migration;
- a deepening of age-related disparities, which increases the burden on socio-economic systems;
- a high mortality rate among men of working age;
- a decrease in labor potential and labor shortage;
- loss of human capital due to emigration;
- demographic consequences of the war, including human losses and forced migration.

Challenges and directions of overcoming the demographic crisis. To stabilize the demographic situation, long-term structural changes in social, economic and migration policies are necessary [11].

1. Modernization of state family policy: effective support for families with children involves increasing material assistance, developing childcare infrastructure, creating flexible forms of employment and improving parental support programs.

2. Support for youth and reducing emigration: it is necessary to increase the level of wages, develop the labor market, guarantee stability, affordable housing programs and encourage the return of Ukrainian specialists from abroad.

3. Strengthening the healthcare system: it is necessary to invest in disease prevention, modernize medical infrastructure, and increase the availability of medical services and psychological rehabilitation of the population, especially post-war.

4. A comprehensive demographic strategy after the war: Ukraine needs a systemic state strategy focused on the return of refugees, the reconstruction of deoccupied territories, the stimulation of fertility, and the reintegration of affected communities.

Strategy for improving the demographic situation in Ukraine: a scientific approach. The demographic crisis in Ukraine has acquired a complex and systemic character, which actualizes the need to form a holistic and long-term state strategy for demographic development. Over the past decades, the country has faced deep depopulation, which is manifested in a steady decline in the birth rate, high mortality, significant migration losses and progressive aging of the population. These processes are significantly exacerbated by foreign policy circumstances, socio-economic transformations and the consequences of military actions, which causes the destruction of traditional demographic structures and destabilization of the country's human potential. In this context, the development of a scientifically sound strategy for improving the demographic situation becomes one of the key tasks of state policy and national security [12].

The strategic vision of the demographic development of Ukraine should be based on the creation of socio-economic prerequisites that are capable of ensuring the restoration of the reproductive potential of society. Increasing the birth rate is possible only under conditions where the birth of a child is not associated with an increase in the material or social burden on the family. Scientific studies prove that the decision to add to the family is the result of a combination of multiple factors: income stability, housing affordability, employment flexibility, the level of social security and support for parenthood [13]. That is why the priority of state policy should be the formation of a favorable family environment, which provides for comprehensive support at all stages of family life. The effectiveness of increasing the birth rate depends not only on financial incentives, but also on the development of childcare infrastructure, the creation of conditions for combining family responsibilities and professional

fulfillment, as well as on the modernization of the reproductive health care system.

One of the key prerequisites for demographic recovery is the reform of the healthcare system with an emphasis on prevention and early detection of diseases. The high mortality rate in Ukraine, especially among men of working age, is due not only to chronic diseases, but also to social factors such as stress, inadequate health culture, and low availability of quality medical services. Therefore, the demographic development strategy should include strengthening medical institutions, expanding preventive programs, reducing the prevalence of risk factors, and creating conditions for psychological and rehabilitation support for the population affected by the consequences of war. Mental health is becoming one of the key dimensions of life expectancy in modern conditions, and its support should be integrated into the national demographic policy [14]. An equally important component of the demographic strategy is the regulation of migration processes. Migration has become one of the most significant factors in reducing the population of Ukraine, and its impact has reached critical proportions after 2022. Given that a significant part of the economically active and reproductive population is abroad, state policy should be aimed at creating conditions that will motivate citizens to return. These conditions include ensuring social and economic security, affordable housing, facilitating employment and supporting young professionals. At the same time, Ukraine, like many European countries, should take into account the potential of moderate immigration as a tool for partially compensating for labor and demographic deficits. It is important, however, that immigration policy be balanced, take into account cultural characteristics and provide effective integration mechanisms.

A serious challenge for Ukraine is the aging of the population, which has long-term socio-economic consequences. The growth of the share of elderly people creates a burden on the pension system, healthcare and the labor market. The demographic strategy should focus on the development of institutions of "active longevity", which allow older people to maintain economic, social and cultural activity. This is not only about measures of a medical or social nature, but also about creating conditions for continued employment, retraining, and participation in public life. Improving the

quality of life of older people should be considered as an investment in demographic stability, and not as an exclusively social duty of the state.

The effectiveness of the implementation of any demographic strategy largely depends on institutional support. Ukraine needs to create a holistic system of demographic process management, which includes specialized state agencies, modern statistical tools, regular monitoring and forecasting, as well as interdepartmental coordination [15]. Only the coordinated work of government structures, scientific institutions, local governments, and civil society can ensure the consistency and sustainability of demographic policy. The implementation of a demographic audit and regular analytical reviews will allow for a prompt response to changes and adjust policy depending on current trends.

Thus, the strategy for overcoming the demographic crisis in Ukraine provides for a set of measures that must be integrated into a long-term vision of the state's development. It cannot be limited to individual social programs or financial support for families, since demographic processes reflect the general state of society, the level of economic development, the stability of institutions and the quality of life of the population. Demographic policy should become intersectoral, synergistic and focused on creating a favorable environment for population reproduction. Only with a systemic approach that combines economic, social, medical, cultural and migration components, Ukraine will be able to stop the process of depopulation and ensure the restoration of its human potential in the coming decades.

Conclusions.

The demographic crisis in Ukraine is a complex multifactorial phenomenon that has been formed under the influence of long-term socio-economic trends, migration processes and the consequences of the war. Statistical data indicate a rapid decline in the population, critically low birth rates, high mortality and the aging of the nation. Given the current trends, demographic losses may become irreversible. Therefore, comprehensive, strategic and systemic state policy measures are necessary, aimed at restoring demographic potential, strengthening social infrastructure and creating favorable conditions for the development of human capital. Only under these

conditions will the state be able to ensure its stable future and competitiveness in the global world.

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