Aging of population with trends in social development taken into account

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Abstract

Research background: The issue of population aging, recently discussed across the entire society, has greatly affected all generations of the society. The aging is a long-term and natural process that governments should be ready to accommodate if they want to keep the demographic situation stable despite the increasing fertility and decreasing mortality of inhabitants.

Purpose of the article: The resultant changes in population can be attributed primarily to better healthcare, to social and economic development and to new patterns of reproductive behavior. Developing countries have lately been experiencing a more rapid pace of population aging than the developed ones, where the process has had much longer history (United Nations, 2019).

Methods: The paper aims to present newly found facts, to offer their wider context and, with the benefit of practical experience, to analyze, evaluate, argue and interpret the dynamics of population aging, while identifying its causes and effects. To accomplish the aim, the author has defined these milestones: searching and discussing relevant literature; characterizing major causes of population aging; defining indicators useful for measuring the process of aging; applying chosen demographic indicators to analyze trends in population aging; interpreting what can be considered "active" aging; and appraising the positive and negative aspects of population aging.

Findings & Value added: The SWOT analysis, relying on information obtained from the current Internet and literary sources, has assessed the strengths and weaknesses of population aging together with the process’s opportunities and threats. The research method was chosen so that the found facts could be synthesized and abstracted. The text is based on statistical data and demographic prognoses of population aging, specifically on the World Population Prospect database administered by the United Nations.

Keywords: aging; analysis; population

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1 Introduction

Drawing on contemporary literature about time-limited international migration and supported by a much wider array of works on migration and aging.

The authors judging by their experience, the authors expect rather substantial differences between countries. The World Bank supposes that by 2025 the group of persons in productive age available in developed economies will be depleted by 25 million individuals. Within the same time the low-income countries will witness the group of productive persons to be enlarged by one billion persons. Aware of this demographic trend, we can anticipate that migration, massive as it already is, will grow even more extensive. Not surprisingly, an ongoing debate centres on what forms the process may assume and/or should assume – whether its envisaged effectivity and consequences favor the permanent or the circular form of migration. (Dwyer, 2013), (Bal and Willems, 2014), (Crawley, H. et al. 2017), (Cummins, 2018), (Fransen and Rius, et al., 2017), (Nova, 2016), (Costinot and Donaldson, et al, 2019).

The systematic study of population started with an attempt at establishing universal principles made by Thomas Robert Malthus, an English cleric and economist, in his Essay on the Principle of Population, published 1798. The Malthusian principle implies that food sufficiency stimulates strong population growth which in turn leads to fast using up the food resources. Put otherwise (Malthus, 1998), population increases faster (by geometric progression) than the available sources of sustenance (increasing by arithmetic progression).

The theory of so-called Second Demographic Transition submitted by Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, found the key indicator in changing needs. Growing population grew also more affluent and better educated and these two factors then resulted in increased needs, starting from the basic ones, such as keeping alive, safety and belonging, to the need of social esteem, self-actualization, fundamental democracy and education. (Lesthaeghe, 2014).

The Second Demographic Transition is closely associated with the concept of transition from the materialistic values to the postmaterialism of (Iinglehaer, 1990) and with the concept’s relevance for family behavior. Considered materialistic are the values of physical well-being, sustenance, and safety, while the post-materialistic priorities cover the quality of life and the possibility of self-expression.

Chesnais inquired into the main mechanisms underlying the modernization of demographic behavior. Amassing a wealth of materials about 67 countries of the world, the author explained in what way a decrease in mortality came before a drop in fertility, and how the drop in fertility depended on social changes. He elucidated also the relations between international migration and the course of the demographic transition and argued that the theory of demographic transition must have included the effect of population changes on the economic progress of society. (Chesnais, 1992)

Population aging has been defined in a variety of ways, but currently it is typically simplified to the retirement age of 65. Maintain that a population is considered relatively old when the percentage of persons above 65 years of age rises above 8 to 10 percent of the whole. (Gavrilov and Heeuveline, 2003) However believes that the age limit is a highly controversial criterion since each country has to face different developmental, demographic and epidemiological scenarios. The author suggests that age can be better defined in consideration of the years of life still expected than those already lived. (Lloyd-Sherlock, 2010)

Sanderson and Scherbov defined what is called the "prospective age", i.e., the median age standardized in view of the remaining life expectancy. They thus distinguished two ages of a person: (i) the chronological /or retrospective/ age, i.e., the number of years already lived and (ii) the prospective age, i.e. the expected remaining years of life. The term "standardized" was later replaced by the adjective "prospective". Both the ages are complementary, and they measure ages viewed from different angles. (Sanderson and Scherbov, 2008)
The aging of population is a lifelong, law-obeying and irreversible process experienced by individuals. With the process in progress, the morphology of people and their physiological mechanisms are changing. Moreover, aging can be affected by also other factors like the way of life, mental condition and social standing. (Kalvach, and Zadak, et al., 2004)

Developing countries have recently been negotiating a higher rate of population aging than what had previously been observed in the developed ones, because the developed countries embarked on the process much earlier and were being affected by it much longer. Consequently, the developing countries have to adapt to the process faster, while having a lower national income. (United Nations, 2015)

Walker´s article outlines five key social and economic policy challenges presented by the ageing population of the European Union (EU). These challenges are (i) maintaining economic security in old age; (ii) preserving intergenerational solidarity; (iii) combating the social exclusion of the elderly; (iv) providing long-term care in the context of changes in family and residence patterns; and (v) enabling the elderly people to participate in society as full citizens. (Walker, A. 1999) Population ageing will also have an impact on the development of entrepreneurship and the rise of 'silver economy' which promotes the development and marketing of innovative products and services aimed at elderly consumers. (Kurek and Rachwal, 2011)

2 Methodology

The paper aims to present newly found facts, to offer their wider context and, with the benefit of practical experience, to analyze, evaluate, argue and interpret the dynamics of population aging, while identifying its causes and effects. To accomplish the aim, the author has defined these milestones: searching and discussing relevant literature; characterizing major causes of population aging; defining indicators useful for measuring the process of aging; applying chosen demographic indicators to analyze trends in population aging; interpreting what can be considered "active" aging; and appraising the positive and negative aspects of population aging. The Results section of the paper offers the SWOT analysis of the milestones listed above.

The SWOT analysis, relying on information obtained from the current Internet and literary sources, has assessed the strengths and weaknesses of population aging together with the process’s opportunities and threats. The research method was chosen so that the found facts could be synthesized and abstracted. The text is based on statistical data and demographic prognoses of population aging, specifically on the World Population Prospect database administered by the United Nations.

3 Results

Employing the chosen SWOT method, the paper’s author analyzes the most significant findings and observations of her population aging research. Indicated are the relevant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

SWOT analysis

Strengths:
- Longer life expectancy and longer prospective age.
- Low mortality attributable to better healthcare.
• Low overall fertility magnified by low death rate in infancy; by better social status of women (higher education, family planning); and by improved life conditions of the offspring.
• Migration reducing imbalance between economically active and inactive segments of population; more young people in childbearing age.
• Beneficial environment and supportive political attitude to active aging.
• Extensive experience and the ability of handling problems in a dispassionate manner typical of the senior citizens.
• Financial and emotional support given to the family by their elderly.
• More leisure on hand.

Weaknesses:
• Standardized low overall fertility short of the simple reproduction.
• Migration draining human resources from underdeveloped countries (aka brain drain).
• Enhanced chance of more remaining years of life and, therefore, longer time of retirement.
• Chronic diseases and deteriorating mental health.
• Exacting informal care and difficult cooperation with caregivers.
• Difficult access to job opportunities for the elderly.
• Insufficient public awareness of the trend towards population aging.
• Age discrimination (prejudices against the elderly).
• Decreased mobility and worse performance at work (manual workers).
• Dependence on other people.
• Lower workplace adaptability of elderly persons; lack of understanding new technologies; need of repeated retraining / reskilling.

Opportunities:
• Longer prospective age thanks to improved prevention, medical care and a healthier way of life.
• Pro-natalists and family policies designed to tackle the low overall fertility.
• Migration as a means of attracting highly educated and qualified workers.
• Support provided to the so-called "silver economy" and to age management.
• Stronger emphasis on the process of active aging.
• Increased number of economically active people.
• Expansion and popularization of social & medical services in response to population aging.
• Pressure put on society to tap its still idle human resources.
• Increased efficiency of all systems and services needed to cater for the elderly.
• Implementation of plans aimed to keep people gainfully occupied while taking care of their relatives; providing compensation for the care.
• Implementation of policy formulated to govern intergenerational relations.
• Increased number of volunteers in economy.
• Intergenerational cooperation at workplaces (wedding valuable experience and skills of the old to the language competence of the young).
• Encouragement of traveling at a riper age.

Threats:
• Low overall fertility short of simple reproduction does not guarantee full population recovery.
• Large-scale emigration accelerates aging in underdeveloped regions.
• Increased share of poorly educated migrants with just a temporary residence permit ⇒ slim chances of integration.
• Challenge to politicians and the programs of support.
• Untenable pension schemes and social & healthcare systems.
• Raising age of retirement.
• Lowering pensions and, consequently, poverty and indebtedness; financial difficulties and a drop in the living standard of senior citizens.
• Cancelation of programs enabling early retirement.
• More frequent and longer-term medical care needed at advanced age.
• More inhabitants included in the cohort of the elderly people and, therefore, a heavier economic burden on society.
• Smaller share of children in population.
• Exclusion of the older generations from community.
• Flagrant financial exploitation, neglect and abuse of the elderly.

4 Discussion

How to be prepared for population aging. The World Health Organization asserts that the problem of aging population is well addressed in countries whose governments and civil societies, supported by international organizations, have implemented programs & policies of active aging. Such programs & policies should be grounded on rights, needs, preferences and abilities of the elderly. If the process of active aging is stimulated by suitable factors, e.g., by employment policy, by labor market and social & educational policies, chronic old-age diseases can be minimized and the cases of premature death at the most productive stages of life can be reduced. Such active aging programs and policies may increase the number of inhabitants living better and longer, while remaining active in their social, cultural, political and economic lives. In addition, the programs and policies can cut the costs of care for old people. Persons staying healthy even at advanced age might remain economically active longer provided their competencies and capabilities are properly considered. (WHO, 2007)

Zaidi mentions five different areas of public policies instrumental in preparing for the future ageing of population: (i) Pension policy; (ii) Health and long-term care policy; (iii) Employment policy; (iv) Migration and integration policy; and (v) Infrastructure development. Policies concerning the process of population aging should be easily understandable so that they can be well integrated into the overall strategy. The future political strategies should focus on the above-mentioned active aging so that the potential of older generations can be realized in full. The relevant policies should be pursued by also the private sector and the civil society - they are not a matter of just the public sector.
Early in the process of population aging countries will have to allocate an adequate sum to pension schemes so that pensioners do not suffer a drop in their living standard, let alone a fall into poverty. On the other hand, pensions should not be exceedingly generous and, therefore, unmanageable but they should be claimable even by those not represented in the formal schemes. This applies particularly to women who take care of their children / parents or provide other hardly quantifiable services. (Zaida, A. 2008) Such support offered primarily to informal caregivers is premised on the expectation that they will be relieved of stress and thus able to deliver the care for a longer time. Even today, when there are paid-for nursing services available, the informal care remains by far the commonest form of long-term assistance. If fact, the prolonged life expectancy makes it probable that children will have to assist their enfeebled parents for a time substantially longer than what was usual fifty years ago. (Winer, 2003)

Another challenge that the pension policy of the future will be facing lies in ensuring what is termed the “intergenerational fairness”. Viewed from the opposite side, overgenerous pensions would burden the next generations of workers. The policies of healthcare and long-term care should foster awareness about the way of life that can keep the people healthier and in better condition till advanced age. It is of paramount importance that people start caring for healthy lifestyle when still young - then they may reach ripe age in good health. The healthcare and long-term care policies should incite individuals to assume responsibility for the maintenance of their family members, especially seeing that this informal care will grow in importance. A prominent role will also be played by effective partnership among all parties involved in providing the care thus made available. (Zaida, A. 2008)

The OECD countries - their society, economy and labor management - will confront no tougher challenge than that of population aging. In addition to the above-mentioned inter-generational fairness and a fair distribution of costs needed to support the aging population, there is one more challenge, i.e. the effective labor organization in companies. Corporate culture should encourage workers to remain in the labor market as long as possible. Beneficial conditions will not only keep older persons in employment, but they will also raise their productivity. Quite a few counties have already introduced pension reforms - they typically increased the retirement age, cut the pensions and abolished premature retirements. Another issue of importance rests in the assistance offered to women that would help them strike a balance between job and family. The same applies to policies aimed at the disabled and, therefore, unemployed persons. (Zaida, A. 2008)

Pivotal role is performed by migration, a process that may also boost the available labor, but solely on condition that the immigrants remain highly employable. This is a consideration because even immigrants grow old, retire and claim pensions and social welfare. Put otherwise, the influx of young immigrants will alleviate the shortage of labor, but it will not end the process of population aging. [22]. One of migration benefits can be seen in the fact that people unable to find a job at their home country can seek employment elsewhere. Money earned abroad is then partially remitted back to their country of origin which benefits the country’s development. Europe is challenged to integrate the migrant workers into the labor market and the whole society. Countries abandoned by young workers can be damaged by such emigration. Chiefly the East European countries are typical of many people who have already emigrated to Western Europe or are planning to do so in the future. It means that while some countries will benefit from migration by having their aging workforce rejuvenated, others will have their problems aggravated. (Zaida, A. 2008) With this situation in mind, a new system of migration now being established relies of granting only seasonal and/or temporal work permits. The changes thus instituted put the migrants into circulation in an attempt at easing the growing worries about so-called brain drain affecting the developing countries. Moreover, the member states try to adjust their asylum policy - unskilled and/or temporary workers are only accepted in consideration of job vacancies
available in the target country and, concurrently, an entry to the local labor market is made easier. Despite the fact that a large number of migrants would expand the overall labor market of the European Union, in the long perspective it would worsen the ratio of economically active and inactive persons. A greater wave of migrants could disturb the process of integration and, by extension, complicate situation on the labor market. This threat highlights the importance of the integrative effort. (Lutz and Skribekk and Testa, 2006)

Employers wishing to cut the cost of labor put pressure on their employees to increase productivity. Older workers, disadvantaged by their supposed lower productivity, are thus driven out of the labor market. If the public policy on employing aged workers is to be effective, this negative supposition will have to be removed. It would not be amiss if more nurses and caregivers were trained to render medical and social services. To prepare for the issues of future population aging, all societies will have to undergo a specific kind of infrastructural development. The relevant policy will decide whether the problem of aging population mushrooms into a catastrophe or whether it turns out to be an opportunity. The result will depend on our approach to the situation. We shall have to seek and find new social coherence across the younger and the older generation. (Zaida, 2008)

**Conclusion**

The paper explores the dominant trends in the process of population aging, trying to analyze, appraise and interpret the dynamics of the process in the regions of Europe. Special attention was paid to identifying the causes and effects of population aging. Findings of the exploration were processed in the SWOT analysis, where their strengths and weaknesses were defined, and the major opportunities and threats of the process were presented.

The beginnings of population aging could be traced back to the Second Demographic Transition when the mortality and fertility stabilized at a low level. Population aging results from three demographic processes: natality, mortality, and migration. In-depth analysis required using indicators such as overall fertility; rough figures of mortality; prospective age; and migration balance.

If the adverse effects of population aging are to be mitigated, it is necessary to develop policies of active aging plus a range of programs and strategies, e.g. the European Year for Active Aging and/or Europe 2020. These projects are intended to prevent age discrimination and keep the society informed about the demographic process of population aging, which should not be regarded only as a burden. The HelpAge International found that the elderly were best off in Switzerland, where a 60-year-old citizen can expect to live another 25 years, out of which 19 in full health.

At present, the governments of countries are taking steps preparatory to challenges constituted by demographic aging. The aspects of the process presented above, both the positive and the negative ones, lead us to believe that the process can even be beneficial if the human resources of the elderly are used to their best advantage.

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