

Understanding of Population Ageing by Russian students

Population decline in Russia is accompanied by ageing, as well as in other developed countries, but virtually the main cause of ageing in Russia is the birth rate decrease. According to the United Nations projections for Russia by 2050 the proportion of people 65 and older will reach the Japan's level of 2010 [1]. Over the past 50 years it increased by 2 times from 11.8% in 1959 to 23.1 % in 2013. This increase amounts to more than 19 million people in absolute terms. According to the population forecast for the years 2014 to 2031 conducted by the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (hereinafter - medium projection), in the next 20 years the number of people 65 and older is expected to increase by 8 million to 40.8 million (or 28,9% of the population)[2].

Moreover in the next few years the country will face a sharp decline in the population of working age. RF FSSS forecasts the decline in number of this age group by 13 million people till 2031 [2]. These factors lead to an increase in demographic burden.

Obviously demographic burden index should increase: from 578 per 1000 (historical minimum, 2007) to about 700 per 1000 - in 2015, step over 800 per 1000 in 2020 and will continue to increase [2]. The contribution of the elderly to this index should exceed 60% in 2030. The old age dependency ratio is expected to increase considerably (over 400 per 1000) in the western and south-western regions of Russia. The "oldest" regions will include the Central Federal District (482 per 1000), North-West Federal District (423 per 1000), Volga Federal District (440 per 1000).

Russia's retirees can be divided into three age groups: 55-64 (14.2 million), 65-69 (3.9 million) and 70 and over (14.4 million). The youngest pensioners (young retirees) are in the first group, some of them stay on the labour market. The third group (70 +) includes the oldest population.

Until 1989 the proportion of the young retirees dominated in the old age dependency ratio, but in recent decades the proportion of "the oldest" increased sharply. The increase in the old age dependency ratio is likely to contribute to a later retirement and to increase the period of labor activity of the elderly.

The ageing of population impacts as well family structure. Transformation of family ties from 2-3 generations to 3-4 generations occurs under the influence of increasing life expectancy and falling birth rates. As a result, seniors receive less support and feel neglected. In a three generations family 30-40 year olds take care both of their children and their ageing parents. In a four generations family, 50 –60 year olds help their elderly parents as well as their children and grandchildren.

In Russia traditionally the burden of caring for elderly parents falls on women, both within the family and within society. The men's high mortality in middle age and feminine service-sector jobs are the reasons. Already there is more than one elderly person per woman aged 40-59. In 2022 there should be more than one elderly person per woman aged 35-59 [2].

Thus already in the 2020s women could not cope with the increased transfer burden and fully understand the problems of belonging to the «sandwich generation».

The process of ageing has a strong impact on all aspects of life. Economic growth, labor markets, taxation, social support system and intergenerational transfers are highly affected. The structure of savings, investment and consumption are changing as well. In the political sphere the increase in the proportion of elderly may affect the distribution of votes and the proportion of different age groups in power.

Due to the population ageing in the future young people are expected to face more difficult financial conditions caused by the increased tax burden generated by the reduction in the number of taxpayers and the increase in the number of recipients of transfers resulted in boost of social spending. The other problem they should deal with is lack of career opportunities caused by prolonged working careers of more qualified elderly workers.

Nevertheless population ageing stimulates the society to use human capital more efficiently, and families and government to care for the elderly creating more balanced social systems.

Problem of negotiations between generations in terms of ageing is not only a question of intergenerational transfers, but also a matter of perception of the elderly community. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that at the moment the Russian society, including the business community perceives the elderly in accordance with the negative stereotypes emerged under the influence of advertising images.

There is almost no advertisement intended for the elderly. Those which exist contain a distorted image of an elderly person. So far Russian advertising segment has been focused on young people (with a certain degree of conditionality, it is possible to determine this segment as an age group between 18 and 35 years), children and middle-aged working population (mostly women).

Stereotypes about older people imposed on by advertising (feebleness, cantankerous character, obsession), are not unique. All countries with ageing population faced the problem of inadequate perception of the elderly.

To test the hypothesis about inadequate perception of the elderly among children the authors offered 550 school students of 8 – 11 classes (14-17 years old) to answer the questions about positive and negative effects of population ageing in the social, economic and other spheres of life for their generation as a part of Open Economic Championship for schools. The aim of the case studying was to find out how the younger generation understands the challenges they are going to face in the future due to the changes in population structure. Students in a group of 5-6 people had to hand in the written answers after 20 - minutes discussion.

Interviewed students mainly represent the European part of Russia. This fact does not reduce the quality of the research: namely this region should experience the sharpest ageing, as mentioned above.

Most of the students perceive ageing only in a negative way. At the same time, a lot of them do not understand that once they become older people themselves. They call think retirees are "low activity", "not capable of a productive work", "easily accessible victims (for speculators)," "conservative". Almost unanimously students agree with the growth of public spending, because "everyone has to receive a pension". Some of the students even think about the fact that they will have to work harder to find a job: in their version of the future elderly will not work longer, there will be more jobs "labor shortage". Some of them even believe that "the demand for young increases, the wage rate will increase too".

Nevertheless some students said that "the positive effects (of ageing) include life experience transferred by the elderly, spiritual and material values". That means children understand unwittingly the value of the elderly human resources in spite of calling retired "disabled people" in almost every case answer. At the same moment young generation often refuses to take this experience over from the elderly considering it outdated.

Thus, we see that young people are afraid of ageing and older people are perceived inadequate to their status and role in the society. The Russian society and its youngest part are not prepared to answer the challenges of an ageing population yet. It is very important for the government to prepare the population of the country to the new demographic calls in order to achieve the most efficient intergenerational interaction.

References and Notes

1. United Nations, World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision. URL: http://esa.un.org/wpp/Excel-Data/DB04_Population_ByAgeSex_Annual/WPP2010_DB4_F1B_POPULATION_BY_AGE_BOTH_SEXES_ANNUAL_2011-2100.XLS
2. Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service Prospects 2014 – 2031; Statistical Bulletin FSSS. URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/progn3.htm