

## **DEMOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WESTERN-ROMANIAN COUNTIES` HUNGARIAN POPULATION**

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*Abstract: The revolution from 1989 and the following transition towards market based capitalism and democracy, the alternation of the structure and policies brought in new tendencies in terms of demographic behavior too in Romania. A sudden fall has been noticed in the terms of fertility rate and other phenomena also appeared which created a new situation to face. Within this context we focus in this paper on the country`s ethnic Hungarian minority, especially on the Hungarian population of Western Romania, who live along the border in Bihor, Satu Mare, Arad and Timis counties.*

*The decrease in fertility rate, the increasing figures of emigration shaped the size of this population, but beyond the facts we will create a narrative and interpretational frame in which we can understand more profoundly the basic dynamics of these demographic processes.*

**Keywords:** Hungarians in Romania, demography, fertility rate, emigration, reproduction rate

We can affirm with confidence, that the demographical tendencies which characterize the Hungarian minority in Romania are well researched and properly documented. As in the case of all major demographical tendencies, the regular censuses held in every ten year in Romania always serve as a starting point and also as a feedback for the various analyses carried out by demographers. Besides that, the National Institute for the Minority Related Researches from Cluj-Napoca has published regularly scientific papers on such issues, and so has the Hungarian Institute of Population which has also conducted researches with comparative aspects related to

the differences between the Hungarian and Romania`s ethnic Hungarian populations` demographical behavior (Spéder, 2009).

The year 1989, which was crucial in all major aspects for Romania marks a milestone in the demographical evolution of the country`s ethnic Hungarian minority. We can mention two major alternations which proved to be long lasting tendencies but had their roots in this period. The first thing that we intend to mention is not specific to the ethnic Hungarians, but a rather common phenomena which took place in all the countries which left behind communism and continued in the frame of democratic market capitalism. With the fall of the communist dictatorship the rigorous birth control carried out by the state authorities was over, and the young couples who chose a more conscious family planning could involve all the modern means which their counterparts had already used for decades in the free world. As a result, the condoms, contraceptive pills, spirals and other birth-control related means became not only permitted but widely used and tolerated.

Another social aspect which changed profoundly the demographic tendencies and meant an end of the period from the end of the second world-war until the late 1980`s, was the fall of the new structures and the slow formation of the new ones in the period 1989-1990. This transition had rather serious economic consequences, the most hurting and the most media-covered has been the massive decrease of the production and mining sector, leading on the one hand to the shutting down of hundreds of factories and on the other hand to the unemployment of ten thousands of miners and former factory workers. These events reached the Romanians as a shock and in this context there`s little to wonder that rather few of them felt confident in their future as much to be brave enough to take the responsibility of assuming children, so the postponing of the family-founding, which is a lasting tendency had its roots back in the early 1990`s in the context of the general uncertainty.

Another impact that influenced the demographical evolution of the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania has been the gradually increasing possibility to migrate to Hungary, which was especially intense in the region which we focus on in the current paper, North-Eastern Romania. The reasons have been different, but the two main aspects were the hope for higher

living standards and to some extent the possibility of reunion with family members living in Hungary, but the first factor can be described mostly as dominant (Pongrácz, 2009).

In this paper we put into context the demographical figures available for the ethnic Hungarians in Romania, the time-span of the research including data from 1990 till 2015 and we also analyze from various approaches the most characteristic demographic tendencies which can be observed in the case of the Hungarian communities along the Hungarian border, including Bihor, Satu Mare, Arad and Timis counties.

### **The regional and global context of the Romanian ethnic Hungarians` demographic behavior after 1989**

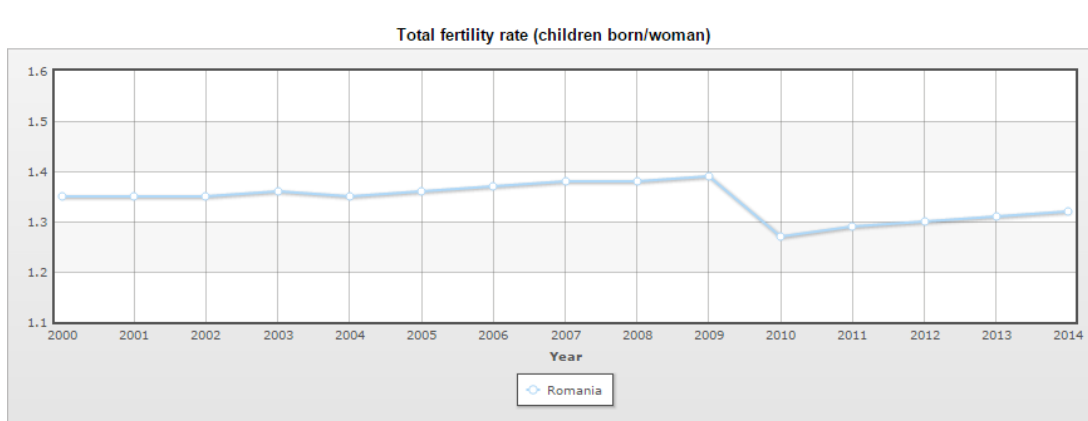
In order to understand more profoundly the transition which affected not only Europe, but the whole western with more or less the similar patterns, it is worth to put into context all these processes. Among demographers there`s a widely accepted consensus that the net reproduction rate`s global average level is at about 2.1, meaning, that statistically spoken each woman should give birth during her life to at least 2.1 descendants ((Weeks, 2007), so the number of population in a given country could be reproduced in intergenerational context (the + 0.1 is statistically plausible, as a compensation of the babies who die at a very young age , often before filling the age of 1, generally more common in third world countries, but thus affecting the global statistics). This only means, that the population of the country maintains its size, neither increasing nor decreasing. Of course, there is another, more and more common source of population increase or decrease, which is the migration, which can easily outweigh the natural population reproduction tendencies.

This border- value of the total fertility rate (2.1), which assures the sustainability of the population size is not achieved in any countries of the European Union. The closest is France and Ireland, with values of 2.0, slightly in front of Sweden and Finland, with 1.9 and 1.8 (World Population Prospects, 2015). The only European country, however not member of the European Union is Iceland with its value of 2.1, just enough to maintain the population size, but the average of the European Union member countries` fertility rate moves around 1.45 (World Population Prospects, 2015). The case is remarkably worse in Central and Eastern Europe, in the

case of the countries which mostly joined the European Union after 2004. The highest fertility rates can be found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where most of the countries have a total fertility rate value over 5.00, while the countries boasting with the highest total fertility rate in the world are also in this region. The leader of this list is the state of Niger with a total fertility rate of 7.6, and all the top ten countries (all from Sub-Saharan Africa) have a value over 6.00, and these values also rise the world average to the figure of 2.5 despite the low European and generally speaking western-culture related figures ((World Population Prospects, 2015).

The reasons which explain the gradually decreasing European and Western total fertility rate values and the galloping values delivered by the Sub-Saharan nations are complex and the limits of this current paper don't permit the detailed presentation of the various, complex reasons. The two most complex tendencies are however accepted by general approval from the world leading demographers, these being on the one hand the lack of family planning methods and attitudes in these African societies, and on the other hand, as there are hardly any forms of social insurance and pension system, having a large number of children is the single possible insurance for the people as they can hardly count on any help from the central care system when they will become elderly (McFalls, 2007).

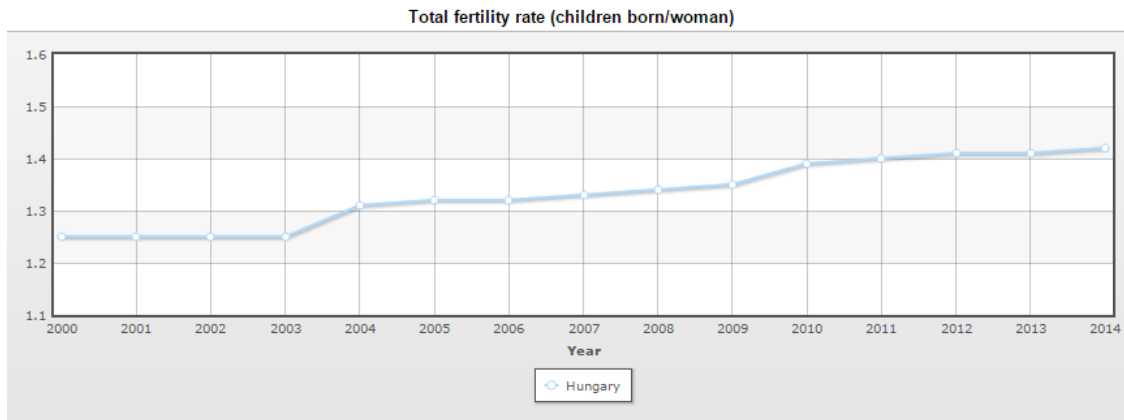
In the case of Romania, the total fertility rate is far from the average of the European Union, 1.45, let alone from the reproduction rate value of 2.1 or the world average total fertility rate of about 2.5. Below we can see, how the total fertility rate of Romania has been quite stable during the period 2000-2009, with a significant setback in 2010, likely having to do with the global economic crisis, the effects of which became hurting on level of the population in 2009, resulting in uncertainty, which according to the widely accepted demographical theories is one of the key reason for postponing or cancelling birth giving (Klein, 2004).



| Country | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Romania | 1.35 | 1.35 | 1.35 | 1.36 | 1.35 | 1.36 | 1.37 | 1.38 | 1.38 | 1.39 | 1.27 | 1.29 | 1.3  | 1.31 | 1.32 |

(Source: <http://www.indexmundi.com/> -datas based on the CIA World Factbook 2015)

As Spéder (2009) discovered, the demographical behavior of the ethnic Hungarians from Romania is in many aspects similar to the population from Hungary (the two main differences can be observed in the relatively low fertility of the females with university diplomas and the often noticed earlier age when it comes to giving birth to the first baby, but also a significant ratio of delay or cancel in terms of the second one) we should also take a look to the figures of Hungary. Another reason why this is worth to check is that recent studies have proved that a large share of the media consumption among the ethnic Hungarians from Romania is from Hungarian websites and TV programs, thus the value-shaping effect of these can be rather significant within this community.



| Country | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Hungary | 1.25 | 1.25 | 1.25 | 1.25 | 1.31 | 1.32 | 1.32 | 1.33 | 1.34 | 1.35 | 1.39 | 1.4  | 1.41 | 1.41 | 1.42 |

(Source: <http://www.indexmundi.com/> -data based on the CIA World Fact book 2015)

In the case of Hungary, we see slightly higher values in terms of total fertility rate, but it seems more relevant (as the difference isn't truly significant) that there is no setback, we can even see a modest increasing tendency. A plausible explanation can be that the period after 2010 brought a new government with a dominant 2/3 majority, and curiously in the history of western democracies, the same party could repeat this electoral performance in 2014, showing a wide social confidence in the strategies and approval of the main directions of the government (and also the lack of viable alternatives). This positive thinking in social dimensions might be reflected in the lack of setbacks in terms of childbirths. However, we believe that as the difference is within a range of 0.1, this does not influence significantly any possible difference as side effect on the fertility of the ethnic Hungarians from Romania in comparison with the majority ethnic Romanians in the country.

### **Demographic behavior of the ethnic Hungarians in Western Romania**

As the first census in Romania after the fall of the communist regime took place in 1992, relying only on official data, we can analyze the demographical evolution of the Hungarian community from Romania in the time span from 1992 to 2011. In these 19 years the loss of the community in quantitative perspective was quite significant, as compared to the 1992 figure of

1,624,959 Hungarians in Romania, two decades later their figure was lower with 397,336, meaning a total loss of 24,46% from the starting figure from 1992, so almost a quarter of the population disappeared from the statistical evidences (Kiss-Barna, 2012).

Researches carried out in the last two and half decades have scientifically and convincingly proven that there can be identified two main reasons which are responsible for this decrease: decreasing fertility rate and emigration. Both factors are valid reasons for the population decrease not only in the case of ethnic Hungarians but for the total population of Romania, however, there are some peculiarities which characterize primarily the Hungarian community both in quantitative and qualitative approach.

As a general phenomenon for Romania, the fall of the total fertility rate happened very shortly after the fall of communism, as in 1988 the fertility rate was 2.4, as a result of the restricted access to birth-control methods, but giving birth and having at least two children was also one of the fundamental social expectations and norms of the society in that time (Muresan-Hoem, 2010). As this fell to the value of 1.5, it resulted in a long lasting negative natural reproduction figure, meaning that the number of annual deaths is higher than the number of annual births. For example, in the period 2002-2011 in Romania, the total numbers of deaths was with 416,146 higher than the total number of births. Similarly, in the case of the Hungarian minority in the same period there has been a minus of 66, 870. However, looking at the figures in terms of population shares, there's a significant difference, as this loss was of 1.9 percent among the Romanians and 5.2 percent among ethnic Hungarians, so the deaths outweighing births caused a three times higher decrease in population numbers (Kiss-Barna, 2012).

The other key issue has been the emigration, especially since 2004, the year when travel restrictions into the vast majority of European Union member states were lifted, thus we believe that the real emigrational milestone was this year, not 2007 when Romanian joined the EU officially, even if the migration wave exploded only after residing in any other member state without any special permission or visa became a basic law for all Romanian as fresh citizens of the European Union. For Hungarians, there can be identified two major waves of migration, with different patterns and destinations.

Firstly, in the first years after the revolution, as many families decided to move to Hungary, on the one hand because they believed that they could reach higher living standards and also that they would not suffer from disadvantages they believed they could have suffered from as members of an ethnic minority group in Romania (Szilágyi, 2007). On the other hand, the decision of the Hungarian Government in 2010 about giving the possibility of applying for Hungarian citizenship to all ethnic Hungarians in Romania resulted in the fact that a large share of them started to possess Hungarian passport too, and the most important collateral benefit of it was that even if the German and British (and several other) labor market access was restricted for Romanians as fresh EU citizens, the Hungarians could apply for jobs with Hungarian passport on equal basis with local applicants. This caused a second migration wave, which has been lasting since end of 2010.

However, there's another aspect of the migration, which is quite recent, as has to do with the fact that since Romania became member of the European Union, crossing the border on a daily basis became possible. This is not only reflected in many people from Western Romania (including several ethnic Romanian families too) buying houses in Eastern Hungary due to the difference in real estate prices, another important factor which largely can determine the future of generations is that there's been a remarkable share of Hungarian families who decided to send their children to high schools in Hungary, and not in Romania (Szilágyi, 2008). The reasons can be complex, Márton (2012) believes that there's still an optimistic expectation in terms of the Hungarian living standards.

As for the numbers, in the specific counties which we listed as belonging to Western Romania, in the following table we will show the aggregate regional number of the ethnic Hungarians, measured by the three censuses, indicating the numeric and percentage-ratio based decrease of the population.

|                    | <b>1992</b> | <b>2002</b> | <b>2011</b> |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| N                  | 453848      | 390758      | 325594      |
| $\Delta N$ (1992-) |             | -63090      | -128254     |



|            |  |        |         |
|------------|--|--------|---------|
| Δ %(1992-) |  | -13.9% | -28.26% |
|------------|--|--------|---------|

The change of population in the Western European counties (Bihor, Satu Mare, Timis, Arad, Caras-Severin)

Own data collection

We can only put these number into context, if we check the situation in terms of population loss for the whole ethnic Hungarian community in Romania, where the loss of population during these 19 years was slightly under this -28.26% figure, -24.46%. It is very likely, that having also in this region a rather homogeneous area of ethnic Hungarians (mostly covering the Northern Bihor and Southern Satu Mare), the difference originates mostly from the area's emigrational potential due to its proximity to the border and due to the possibility of crossing the border with far less difficulties than before.

### Conclusion

In our paper we put into context the demographical evolution of the Ethnic Hungarians in Romania. We started by presenting the most important demographic tendencies of our times, focusing also on the possible socio-economic reasons. In the specific case of the decreasing population size of the ethnic Hungarians in Romania, we separated the tendencies, in order to prove, that the population loss is also influenced, among other factors by the geographical situation of the region (in our case Western Romania) and by the legal-administrative conditions too.

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