MODERN TRENDS AND DIRECTIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract. The main stage of the sustainable development strategy of developing a country is the assessment of the current s+tate and the identification of dominant trends in demographic, economic, environmental, and social development. Sustainable development is a complicated, multifaceted, and multi-factor dynamic process, which occurs with varying intensity across many countries around the world. In this regard, it is a long-term process that requires extensive scientific and empirical research, especially in matters related to demographic development and the evaluation of the dynamics and size of the population. The primary regulatory mechanism lies in the demographic policy implemented in the country and the adoption of long-term measures that should meet the needs of the population to maintain economic stability and social and political security globally. This article presents the main directions of Azerbaijan's demographic policy aimed at creating a sustainable and inclusive society.

Key words: sustainable development, demographic policy, population size, inclusive society.

Introduction. The modern development of civilization is possible only within the context of sustainable development, which ensures economic efficiency, social justice, environmental security, and co-evolutionary progress. The issue of the necessity and possibility of transitioning to long-term economic and environmental stability was first formulated in D. Meadows' report "The Limits to Growth", based on a mathematical model of the world that considered global processes: rapid industrialization, population growth, increasing food shortages, depletion of non-renewable resources, and environmental degradation (Donella Meadows et al,1972, pp. 22–23).

The study of the main components of sustainable development has been the focus of many researchers. In his works, A. Peccei linked sustainable human development to capabilities, human capital, the state of the ecosystem, and the production system of the planet, all purposefully aimed at self-preservation (Peccei A., 2020, 135–136 p).

The object of research in sustainable development is the system of relationships between the natural environment, the economy, and society, aimed at ensuring a balance between the needs of the present generation and the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In this regard, the connection between sustainable development, demographic processes, and demographic policy, which is one of the key areas of modern socio-economic research is indisputable (Anderson. B., 2014, pp. 57–59).

Demographic processes (birth rates, mortality rates, migration, age structure of the population, etc.) directly affect the sustainability of societal development, while demographic policy serves as an instrument for managing these processes. (Alakbarov U.K., 2018, pp. 78–80).

Scientific results obtained in this field create conditions for comparative analysis of different countries worldwide. The study of demographic processes in Azerbaijan is also significant for identifying the specific features of demographic development (Muradov Sh. M., 2008, pp. 266–267).

Discussion. Demographic policy is an integral part of the general socio-economic policy. Demographic policy encompasses a system of goals and means of achieving them and covers the following areas of public activity:

1) influence on the reproduction of the population;

2) influence on the process of socialization of the younger generation;

3) regulation of labor market resources and labor force;

4) regulation of migration and territorial structure of the local and migrant population, etc.

Demographic policy measures are divided into three groups:

• economic: paid leave and numerous benefits for the birth of children, child benefits, tax, and housing benefits, etc.;

• administrative-legal: legislative acts regulating marriages, divorces, the status of children in families, alimony obligations, the protection of motherhood and children, abortions, and the use of contraceptives, working conditions and work regimes of working mothers, etc.;

• education and propaganda designed to form public opinion, demographic norms and standards of behavior, a certain demographic climate in society. In other words: demographic policy is a state activity aimed at regulating the processes of population reproduction (Sanderson W., Scherbov S., 2020, 90 p).

Demographic policy developed and spread in the second half of the 20th century. For thousands of years, some countries have been experiencing a population explosion, while others have been experiencing a crisis. Mechanisms for implementing demographic policies to regulate demographic processes have become the agenda of many states. At the initiative of the United Nations, world conferences were held in Rome in 1954, in Belgrade in 1965, in Bucharest in 1974, in Mexico in 1984, and in Cairo in 1994. The first demographic policy in the world was developed at the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994. The Cairo Conference noted the need to shift political attention from population management to human rights and freedom of choice. For the first time, definitions of reproductive health and reproductive rights were given (Miettinen A, Basten S, Rotkirch A. 2011; 472 p.).

The Programme of Action defines reproductive health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system." Reproductive rights include the right of men and women to information and to safe, effective, affordable, and acceptable methods of family planning.

In countries where demographic policy is aimed at increasing the natural population growth, the government is trying to prevent population decline, aging and reduce the demographic burden. Examples of countries pursuing a stimulating demographic policy include France and Japan. Most countries are pursuing a demographic policy aimed at reducing the natural population growth. The most striking examples in this regard are the two most populous countries in the world – China and India (David S. Reher., 2011, p. 16).
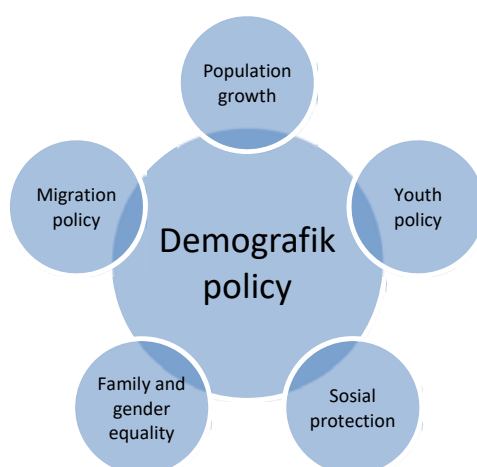
Fig. 1. Main directions of demographic policy in Azerbaijan

After the Republic of Azerbaijan gained independence, both political and socio-economic changes that took place in the country had a serious impact on demographic development. In this regard, the Demographic Development Concept was developed to improve the demographic situation in the Republic of Azerbaijan and formulate the country's demographic policy. This document was signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev by Order No. 290 dated December 9, 1999.

The document considers the priority directions of demographic policy, monitoring, and complex assessment of demographic processes, and, as a result, the preparation of the State Program in the field of demography and population development for the period up to 2005. The state demographic policy in Azerbaijan is implemented through the activities of various state bodies and the adoption of relevant programs. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population and the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Issues, and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation play a key role in this process.

To assess the main directions of demographic policy, we will briefly characterize the current state and dynamics of population growth in Azerbaijan. According to modern UN estimates, the population of Azerbaijan will continue to grow and in the mid-2040s the population of Azerbaijan will be 11 million people, that is, an increase of one million people compared to 2020. Over 50 years, the population of Azerbaijan has tripled (in the mid-1950s – 2.92 million people, 290 million people). Azerbaijan is experiencing natural population growth, which differs from its neighbors in the South Caucasus. Armenia and Georgia completed their demographic transition and entered the stage of "depopulation" in the second half of the 1990s (figure 2).

It can be seen from the data presented in Figure 2. that the population of Azerbaijan increased during the period 1959–2024. However, for the last years (2020–2024), there has been a slight decrease in the number, which corresponds to global and regional demographic processes.

In the indicators of the urban and rural population ratio for the period 1959–2024, a stable increase in the urban population number is observed, connected with many socio-economic, political, and demographic factors. As follows from the data presented in Figure 3, the rural population prevailed over the urban population only in 1959 (Mammadova M. N. et al. 2007, 218 p).

This circumstance is explained by the consequences of the Second World War, the restoration of the system of collective farms and state farms, and the availability of work in the countryside. In the following years, the process of industrialization, development of oil and gas, chemical industry,
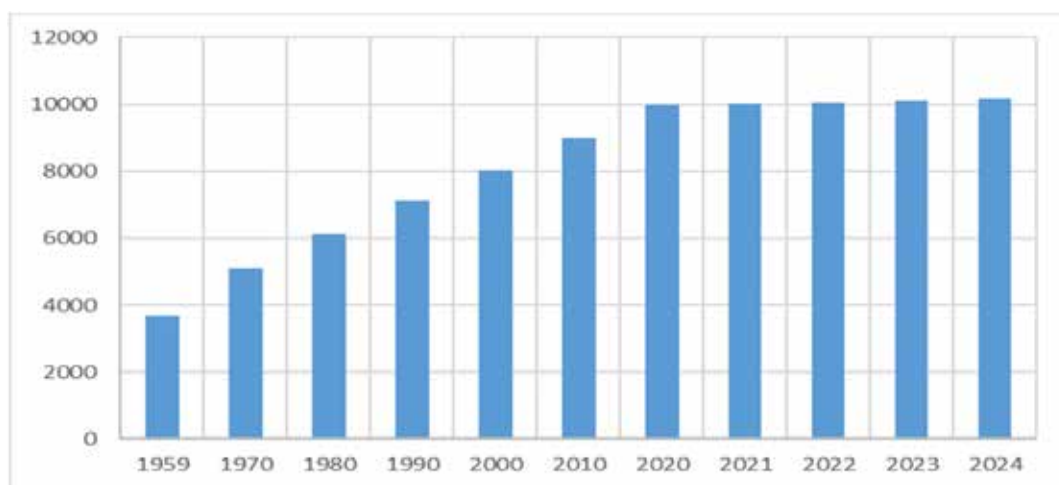
Fig. 2. Indicators of population dynamics in Azerbaijan (1959–2024)
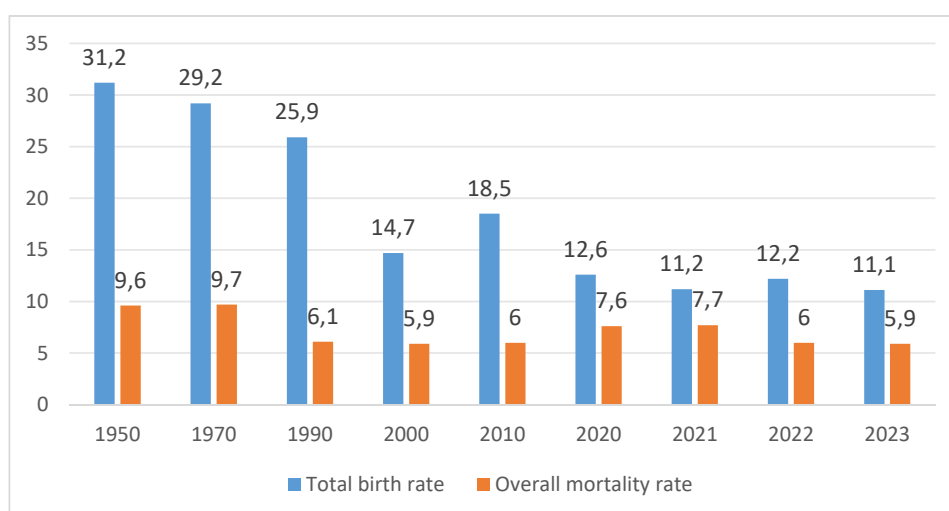*(State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023, p. 13)*
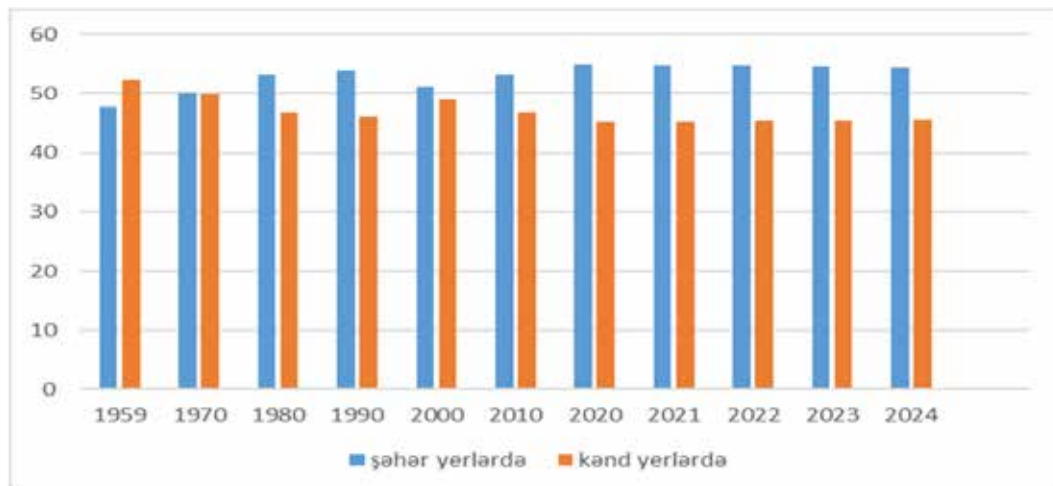
Fig. 3. Ratio of urban and rural population of Azerbaijan (1959–2024)

(State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023, p. 14)

machine building, especially in Baku and Sumgait began (Muradov Sh. M. 2008, 123–127 p). As a result, people moved to cities in search of work at industrial enterprises. Infrastructure was developed in the cities, some settlements received the status of cities, which automatically increased the number of the urban population. In the period 1990–2000 years, because of the annexation of 25% of the territory of Azerbaijan, mass resettlement of refugees and displaced persons was carried out in cities. It is necessary to note that the signing of the Contract of the Century, the presence of oil and gas projects Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and others stimulated the growth and development of cities, making them attractive for foreign investments. Young people were sent to cities to get education, work, and career growth. As a result, the urban population's growth is steadily growing.

For a comprehensive description of the dynamics of population growth rates, general indicators of birth and death rates are used. General indicators of birth and death are the main demographic indicators that play a significant role in the analysis and forecasting of the size, structure, and rate of change of the population.

**Fig. 4. Indicators of the total birth and death rates in Azerbaijan (1950–2023)**

(State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023, p. 15).

According to the data provided, the total birth rate was: 31.21 births per 1,000 population in 1950, 29.2 in 1970, and 25.9 in 1990 (Figure 3). Since 2000, these figures have decreased from 14.7 to 11.1. The total death rate was 9.6 per 1,000 population in 1950, 9.7 in 1970, and 6.1 in 1990. While these indicators were 5.9 since 2000, a slight increase in these indicators was observed in subsequent years, reaching 7.7 in 2021, which is equivalent to 2–3 indicators in 2021. Analysis of these indicators shows that the natural population growth has a positive trend and indicates that population growth continues, albeit at a slower pace.

As in many countries, Azerbaijan is experiencing significant changes in the family and demographic relations of the population. Late marriage, delayed reproductive behavior, and increasing divorce rates are becoming increasingly noticeable trends, especially in urban areas (fig. 2). According to the number of marriages and divorces in Azerbaijan (per 1,000 population), fundamental changes were observed in 1950–2024. In the 1970s, the number of marriages began to decline sharply (fig. 5). This was due to a gradual decrease in the birth rate and a decrease in the number of young people of marriageable age and ready for marriage. Slowing economic growth, active participation of women in public life, etc.

The second wave of a sharp decline in the number of marriages was observed in the 1990s and lasted for about 10 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union, changes in the socio-economic structure, mass migration, loss of 25 percent of territory, loss of confidence in the future and disruption of economic stability were the main reasons.

The age structure of the population is important for assessing the labor potential, the level of burden on the healthcare, education, and social protection systems. The main groups of the population: 0–14 years (covers children and adolescents), 15–64 years (working-age population), 65 years and older (elderly population). According to 2024 data, in Azerbaijan 0–14 years old makes up about 22–24%, 15–64 years old – about 68–70%, 65 years and older – about 6–8%. Basis of the features of the age structure of the population of Azerbaijan, it can be concluded that there is a young population by European standards, an increase in the proportion of elderly people due to increased life expectancy, internal and external migration affect the balance of the working-age group, etc. Thus, the 15–64 years old group is the backbone of the national economy and the development of society, which makes up about 70% of the population of Azerbaijan according
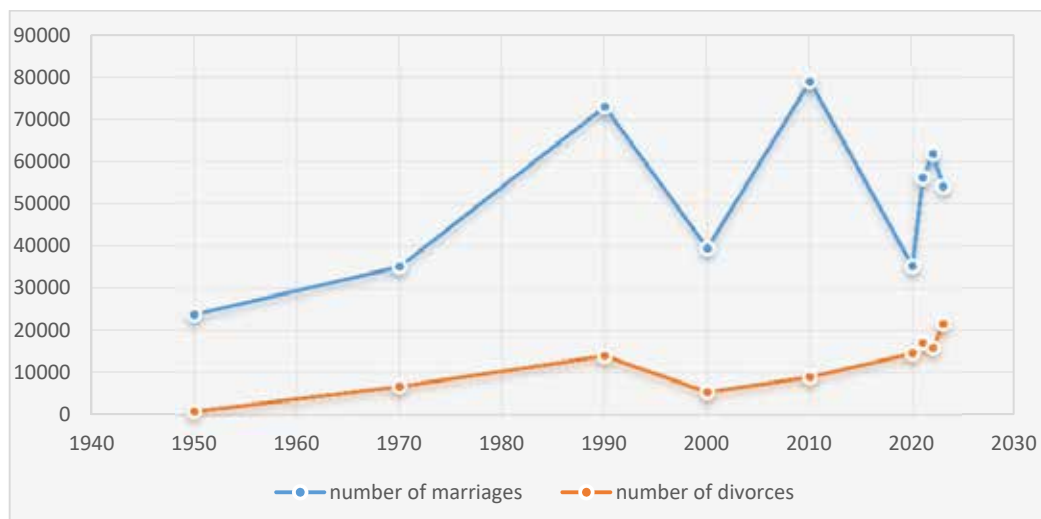
Fig. 5. Number of marriages and divorces in the Republic of Azerbaijan (per 1000 population)
(State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023, p.51).

to 2024 data. An effective demographic policy must provide jobs and maintain a balance between education and market needs.

Conclusion. Based on the data provided, it can be concluded that the share of 65+ in the demographic structure of the population is gradually increasing due to the growth of life expectancy and a decrease in the birth rate. Moreover, this trend will intensify in the next 10–15 years, especially in cities. This circumstance creates an additional financial burden on the pension system and health care. Using world experience and the policy of active longevity, the development of healthy aging programs, leisure, and involvement in social life. In this regard, the most priority areas in demographic policy are support for the birth rate and family values, sustainable development of the working-age population, migration management, improving the quality of demographic data and forecasting, etc. In recent years, the main trends in demographic policy in Azerbaijan reflect the state's desire to ensure sustainable reproduction of the population, improve socio-economic living conditions, and balance migration processes.

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