

POPULATION AGING IN MURCIA REGION: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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A series of changes have taken place since late of the demographic transition, which have created a new reality, complementary to the increase of life expectancy. The traditional lifestyle has been lost, mentality has changed and children are not appreciated the same way as before, since they are not as necessary as they were in the past. It causes a high birth rate reduction, which is reflected in delaying average age of motherhood. This fact, with an almost stagnant mortality rate in the recent decades, has caused a significant slowdown in the population growth rate in Spain.

In addition, this population decrease and the changes in fertility rates have been complemented by the widespread incorporation of women to work and her new role in society. In this way, women delay motherhood until consolidate their work situation, so most births happen in the 30-34 age group.

Similarly, the labor market does not help to consolidate a large family unit, because the dynamic "unemployment-temporary employment contract-unemployment" does not help to take a compromise for the rest of life as a child.

On the other hand, the birth and fertility have been palliated somewhat by the influx of foreign immigrants, which has helped slow the global process of aging population and mitigate instabilities in the labor market. It could be said that immigration helps to rejuvenate somewhat the resident population. On the one hand, contributing with young and adult population, and on the other hand, contributing with higher fertility rates than those of the Murcia Region.

However, the economic crisis occurred in Spain since 2008 has meant an increase in unemployment, which causes a change in trend. Because of this crisis has occurred a lower intensity in the marriage, as the cause of youth unemployment and difficulties in access to find housing, which results in a delay in leaving the family home by youth population. Consequently, youth population take longer to marry, causing a delay in the age of marriage and average age of motherhood, as well as a reduction of relations during the fertile period of the woman.

These circumstances give rise to a number of children per woman really low, away from generational replacement. The replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman is not exceeded at any time during the period from 1991 to 2013. What's more, is not close enough to the replacement rate, as the maximum rate in this period is 1.68 in 2008.

These variables have caused a change in the age structure of the population, since it is increasing at older ages whereas youth population is reduced. This results in an aging population. Such aging is seen as a substantial and permanent increase in the number of people over 64 in relation to the rest of the population, so that the population age structure is modified.

This alteration results in a decrease in the percentage of working-age population or contributors and an increase in the population over 65 or retired, representing an increase in the dependency rate and a significant pressure on the sustainability of pension systems.

Additionally, the progressive increase of aging is causing another new reality: the population overaging. The percentage of people over 75 is increasing dramatically. This overaging is not really beneficial if you consider that this population constitutes an extensive group in which contributions are applied.

In coming decades if trends in the fertility rate and life expectancy are maintained and the influx of foreign immigrants is decreased, the elderly population growth rate will continue to increase gradually. In the same way, the emigration of young people to abroad will not help to improve this situation.

However, within this scene, the Murcia Region has got birth and fertility rates better than the national average and most of the regions. On the Mediterranean coast there are different reasons of interest to foreigners. The reasons which could be highlighted are the good climate, landscape and accessibility. These factors, coupled with the intense urbanization, are responsible for attracting young people from diverse origin, resulting in higher fertility and birth rates. It causes that Murcia Region can be one of the Spain regions with better demographic rates.

If the current situation of dependence and economic recession there is not improved, the Welfare State can be compromised in its maintenance and its continuity will be more difficult with an aged demographic structure. It is a certainty that in coming years there will be a great number of retired population and is not sufficiently clear that a proportional increase can be able to happen in the number of members of Social Security.

In conclusion it could be said that the evolution of fertility will be conditioned by the greater facility of access of young people to the labor market, which could advance their emancipation and the marriage age; the existence of effective policies to reconcile work and family life; and family support. As for immigration, if the economic and productive circumstances are not modified, is likely to increase its rate toward abroad. Moreover, nowadays a great number of foreigners do not arrive to Spain, which make situation worse.

The current birth rates are difficult to increase even more in the situation of severe economic crisis present today. But it is a mistake to think that it is not possible to carry social policies out to improve birth rate, since this rate is an essential element in our society to maintain the Social Security System. Therefore, in the Murcia Region, and in general in Spain, it should start considering the implementation of birth rate policies to get better aging rates. Thus, the fertility rate would increase, which would decrease the number of the elderly population.

If the policies do not take place in coming years, demography will be altered long-term, therefore, the recuperation of the birth and fertility rate will be less likely. Consequently, there will be to make structural reforms in the economic and social policies to deal with a great number of pensions. In the same say, there will be other aspects that will be harmed to improve the situation of pensions. Furthermore, Murcia Region and Spain will have populations with a minimum vegetative growth, a progressive aging, a worse dependency rate and a negative migration balance.