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THE CONCEPT OF DEMOGRAPHIC WINTER AND PROPOSALS OF MEASURES TO ESTABLISH A PRONATAL POLICY IN SERBIA

Abstract

Demographic winter is a long-term process of population decline, caused by low birth rates, population aging, and continuous emigration. Its consequences directly affect the political, economic, and social capacities of the state. Serbia has been in this process for several decades, as confirmed by negative natural growth, an increase in the average age of the population, a decrease in the number of families with children, and intensive emigration of young and working-age people. This paper is based on the assumption that demographic pointers can be seen as an early indicator of future economic, social, and geopolitical changes, because the population structure affects the capacity of the state to maintain its institutions, economic productivity, and political stability in the long term. Starting from the framework of demographic transition and the concept of demographic winter, the causes of depopulation of Serbia are analyzed, with special emphasis on unplanned childlessness, decreasing maternity rates, and changing reproductive value patterns. At the same time, the limited scope of existing population policies, primarily focused on financial incentives, is pointed out. The methodological framework of the research is based on the analysis of statistical data, a case study of the Republic of Serbia, and a comparative review of contemporary demographic literature. The spatial framework of the research covers

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the territory of the Republic of Serbia, and the time frame is the last two decades. The paper contributes to the theory of public policies by showing that demographic reproduction is a prerequisite for political sustainability and the preservation of the institutional capacities of the state. The particular contribution of this study lies in distinguishing between the total fertility rate, the motherhood rate, and the number of children per mother, as well as in conceptualizing pronatalist policy through three interrelated dimensions: institutional design, value framework, and policy instruments. The study advances the thesis that the demographic winter does not represent a temporary statistical phenomenon, but a profound social challenge that requires a long-term, value-based, and institutionally coherent state policy.

Keywords: demographic winter, unplanned childlessness, maternity rate, population policy, Serbia

INTRODUCTION: THE PHENOMENON OF DEPOPULATION AND THE CONTINUOUS DECLINE OF SERBIA'S POPULATION

Contemporary demographic trends indicate that a large number of countries, particularly in Europe and East Asia, are facing a prolonged decline in fertility rates below the level of simple reproduction. This trend, which can no longer be viewed as a temporary phenomenon but rather as a new demographic norm, leads to profound transformations in the structure of the population and the functioning of societies. In this context, depopulation ceases to be solely a demographic issue and becomes one of the key challenges to the economic sustainability, social cohesion, and political stability of modern states.

Depopulation represents a process of continuous population decline, primarily driven by low birth rates and significant migratory outflows. This phenomenon affects numerous countries and regions around the world, leaving substantial economic, social, and cultural consequences. As Johnson and Lichter point out, "Depopulation represents a chronic loss of population that prevents a country from returning to its previous period of population growth" (Johnson and Lichter 2019, 3). Therefore, depopulation cannot be understood solely as a quantitative reduction in the number of inhabitants, but as a process

with deeper structural consequences for society. In this context, this process can lead to a state referred to in the literature as a demographic winter – a situation in which persistently low fertility, population aging, and weakening reproductive norms put the long-term sustainability of society at risk (Eberstadt 2010; Lutz 2006).

The gravity of this issue is further amplified by the fact that low fertility and population aging are largely self-reinforcing processes, producing mechanisms that deepen over time. A reduction in the size of younger generations leads to a smaller pool of potential parents, which further lowers the number of births, creating the so-called “low fertility trap.” Under such conditions, even significant public interventions often have limited impact, as they operate within an already altered demographic structure.

It is within this broader context that demographic trends in Serbia should be understood. These trends do not represent an isolated case but are part of a wider European pattern, albeit with specific intensity and structure. Key demographic indicators in Serbia confirm the continuity of negative trends, primarily through a long-term decline in fertility rates, a negative natural population growth, and pronounced population aging. These processes indicate that the demographic crisis in Serbia is not a short-term disruption but a structural phenomenon with long-term consequences for the economic, social, and institutional development of society. Faced with these trends, the state seeks to respond to negative demographic patterns through various measures.

Unlike most developed countries, which partially mitigate depopulation through immigration, Serbia faces the simultaneous effects of negative natural population growth and intensive emigration, further accelerating population decline and aging. This process is long-term and structural in nature, gradually constraining the biological, economic, and political capacities of the state. This is also highlighted in a United Nations report, which emphasizes that population aging and declining birth rates have long-term implications for economic development, the labor market, and the sustainability of social protection systems (United Nations [UN] 2020, 3). For this reason, depopulation can be understood as an indicator of future societal changes – a signal that policymakers should heed. As Professor Rašević notes, “A comprehensive response across all public policies is necessary to build a society in which young women and men want to live, work, start families, have children, and age” (NIN 2025).

The central research question of this study is: Is the low fertility rate in Serbia primarily a result of economic constraints, or of bigger value-based and institutional changes in contemporary society? If the latter is the case, demographic policy cannot be reduced solely to a set of individual social measures. In such a scenario, it becomes a matter of a broader value and institutional framework within which individuals make life decisions that affect not only their personal lives but also the future of the wider community.

Based on the above, the aim of this study is to theoretically and empirically examine the phenomenon of demographic winter in Serbia and to propose a systemic framework for pronatalist policy. The contribution of this study lies in its effort to approach the demographic crisis not solely through the lens of economic constraints, but as the result of a complex interaction between institutional conditions, value orientations, and public policies. In this sense, the study proceeds from the assumption that understanding low fertility requires analyzing the broader social context in which decisions about parenthood are made. The study is structured to first consider the concept of demographic winter, then analyze its specific characteristics in Serbia, and finally formulate the framework of pronatalist policy along with its strategic objectives.

DEMOGRAPHIC WINTER

In this study, demographic winter is used as an analytical framework for understanding the deep social, political, and value-based transformations in society that accompany persistently low fertility. The concept of demographic winter entered usage in the second half of the 1970s to describe a situation in which a society “enters a period of demographic cooling, in which the number of births falls long-term below replacement level, leading to population aging and biological decline” (Chaunu and Sufferet 1976, 15–16). Although the term itself is less frequently used in Serbian academic literature, domestic demographers point to the same phenomenon. For example, Vladimir Nikitović concludes that “the aspiration to achieve fertility levels necessary for long-term generational replacement has, for at least two decades, remained more in the domain of desire than of possibility” (Nikitović 2012, 40).

Demographic winter, therefore, represents a profound structural transformation of the population, reflected in changes to the age pyramid, redefinition of intergenerational relationships, and the increasing burden on public systems to respond to the new needs of society. One of the key consequences is the transformation of family structures, which are becoming increasingly vertical – more generations live simultaneously, but the number of relatives within each generation is decreasing. Such a structure leads to a weakening of traditional family support networks and an increased pressure on state institutions to develop alternative support systems in order to protect the most vulnerable groups (Jiang *et al.* 2025).

The popularization of the term demographic winter was significantly influenced by the American demographer Nicholas Eberstadt, who emphasizes that the decline in fertility rates is a global phenomenon affecting both developed and developing countries (Eberstadt 2010). In other words, low fertility has become the reproductive norm and a widely accepted societal life pattern (Eberstadt 2010). This phenomenon is theoretically linked to the second phase of the demographic transition, characterized by low birth rates and changes in value orientations, particularly the rise of individualism and the weakening of traditional family norms.

Discussing individual behavior as a determinant of natural population fertility, Mirjana Rašević highlights the importance of the role of social norms, moral codes, and legal regulations – products of social consciousness – which influence and oversee the decisions of women and men regarding family life and childbearing (Rašević 1997, 11). In contemporary societies, parenthood is losing its status as a central life value and is increasingly perceived as a limiting factor in career development and personal self-realization. As a consequence, even under conditions of economic stability, families do not grow larger, as this is no longer aligned with dominant social expectations.

The consequences of demographic winter are manifold: increased pressure on pension, healthcare, and social systems; reduction of the available labor force; decreased production; and reduced consumption. In addition, there are less visible consequences, such as a decline in youthful energy, enthusiasm, innovativeness, and creativity. Bricker and Ibbitson illustrate this vividly: “An unwritten poem, an undiscovered medicine, an unfinished technology – because there are fewer living

this year than the previous one – how can this be quantified? How can we measure the loss of creative energy due to a smaller number of young people?” (Briker i Ibitson 2019, 219). This argument points to a difficult-to-measure but real loss of future human potential, not only in the economy but also in culture, science, and public life.

Demographic winter is difficult to reverse, particularly due to changes in the age structure of the population. Even if fertility rates were to increase over a relatively short period, the reduced cohorts of women of reproductive age mean fewer potential mothers. This phenomenon, known as “demographic inertia,” represents a significant limitation for public policies, as the effects of interventions cannot be observed in the short term. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the short-term effects of measures and long-term structural outcomes, which depend on the age pyramid, migration patterns, and social norms regarding family and parenthood, as well as the societal status attributed to family and parenting.

Gérard François Dumont emphasizes that demographic winter also has geopolitical consequences (Dumont 2019, 30). Using Europe as an example, Dumont notes that at the national level, this process changes the structure of the electorate and affects political relations; at the level of the European Union, it can lead to an uneven distribution of political power; and at the global level, it can result in the relative decline of Europe’s influence in the world (Dumont 2019, 30). According to data from the United Nations (UN World Population Prospects), the EU’s share of the world population decreased from 12% (1960) to 6% (2022), and it is expected to fall to 4% by 2070 (European Commission 2023, 9).

These indicators suggest that demographic winter has not only social but also strategic implications – a smaller and older population reduces the state’s capacity for productivity, defense, and overall geopolitical significance and potential. Accordingly, the state cannot remain a neutral observer of reproductive processes but becomes an active participant in shaping them.

The causes of demographic winter are complex and include economic insecurity, prolonged education, urbanization, the weakening role of family and religion, as well as an overall shift in life values. According to Eberstadt’s analysis, approximately half of the world’s population lives in countries where fertility rates are below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman (Eberstadt 2010, 55),

indicating that demographic winter represents a global structural process. The intensity and consequences of this phenomenon depend on migration flows, the institutional capacities of the state, and cultural patterns that shape family life.

DEMOGRAPHIC WINTER IN SERBIA

Serbia has been experiencing a pronounced demographic winter for several decades, characterized by low fertility rates, prolonged negative natural population growth, and an unfavorable migration balance. Official statistical data provide insight into the scale of these processes, clearly indicating the intensity and structure of demographic changes in Serbia over recent decades. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, negative natural population growth has shown a continuous increase, from -26,134 in 2004 (Republički zavod za statistiku [RZS] 2025b), to -34,786 in 2014 (RZS 2023f), and -37,385 in 2024 (RZS 2025c). At the same time, the average age of the population has reached 43.8 years, nearly one-third of the population is over 60 years old, and the number of single-person households is rising (RZS 2023e).

The paradox of a simultaneous decline in population and growth in the number of households points to a profound transformation of social life patterns, including weakening intergenerational relationships and increasing social fragmentation. These trends suggest that the demographic crisis in Serbia is not solely a consequence of economic constraints, but also of structural changes in lifestyle and value orientations. At the same time, these processes introduce a new dimension to the problem – the issue of mental health, loneliness, and social exclusion among the elderly population (World Health Organization 2020).

Comparative data from the last two censuses, presented in Table 1, illustrate the scale of the demographic crisis in Serbia. They show not only a decline in the total population, but also changes in household and family structures, as well as a pronounced increase in population aging.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Census Data from 2011 and 2022

	2011	2022
Population	7.186.862	6.647.003
Number of Households	2.487.886	2.589.344
Number of Families	2.125.772	1.904.314
Number of Childless Families	649.667 (44,01%)	592.602 (45,18%)
Number of Families with Children	1.476.105	1.311.712
Elderly (65+ years)	1.250.316 (17,4%)	1.468.855 (22,1%)
Average Age	42,2	43,8

Source: RZS 2011 n.d.a; RZS 2017a; RZS 2017b; RZS n.d.b;
RZS 2023c; RZS 2023d.

The data presented reflect not only a quantitative decline in population but as Vladimir Nikitović emphasizes, demographic changes in Serbia do not only mean a reduction in the number of inhabitants, but also a profound transformation of the social structure, such as population aging, a decrease in the number of younger generations, and a change in the ratio between economically active and dependent populations (Nikitović 2022a). Analysis of the data from the last two censuses reveals three important trends. First, a decline in population accompanied by a simultaneous increase in single-person households, indicating fragmentation of family structures. Second, a decrease in the number of families with children reflects a reduction in the reproductive potential of society. Third, an increase in the share of the population aged 65 and older, along with a rise in average age, confirms that Serbia is in a phase of pronounced demographic aging.

The demographic picture of Serbia is further complicated by migration processes, which lead to a selective outflow of young and educated individuals. According to demographer Vladimir Nikitović, “migration contributed between at least 15% and at most 26% to population decline during the period between the 2002 and 2011 censuses,” (Nikitović 2022b, 55) with the trend of net emigration continuing after 2011. According to data from the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development, Serbia is among the countries with the most intensive emigration flows. The average age of emigrants is 28.7 years, and one in five has a higher education degree (Vlada Republike Srbije 2020). The World Bank estimates that approximately 14% of the population left Serbia over the past two decades, while data published in the Strategy on Economic Migration of the Republic of Serbia for 2021–2027 indicate a high potential for continuation of this trend, as 41.6% of respondents expressed willingness to seek employment abroad (Vlada Republike Srbije 2020).

Intensive emigration is not a transient phenomenon, but a long-term trend indicating a structural mismatch between the expectations of young people and the institutional and economic opportunities available in society. Such a pronounced outflow of human capital has multiple consequences – not only demographic and economic, but also political and security-related. As Nebojša Vuković emphasizes, depopulation processes can lead to “negative geopolitical consequences,” including changes in territorial control and the ethnic composition of the population (Vuković 2010, 43).

It can be concluded that depopulation in Serbia is not solely the result of low fertility rates, but a consequence of a complex combination of natural population decline and out-migration, which accelerates population aging and reduces the number of potential parents. An additional indicator of future demographic trends is school-age population data, which points to a reduction in younger cohorts. Over the course of just one decade, the number of primary school students in Serbia decreased by approximately 60,000 (from 558,869 in the 2014/15 school year to 500,514 in 2023/24) (RZS 2024). Concurrently, the number of primary schools declined from 3,385 in 2015/16 to 1,131 in 2024/25 (RZS 2025a). While caution is required in interpreting these data, the trend is unequivocal.

These data do not merely reflect the current situation statistically, but also serve as indicators of future demographic trends, as they suggest that in the coming decades, there will be progressively fewer young cohorts entering the education system, the labor market, and the reproductive cycle. Low fertility, population aging, and migration do not act in isolation; rather, they reinforce each other and contribute to the deepening of the demographic crisis. Therefore, the analysis of low fertility cannot be limited solely to the total fertility rate. It is also necessary to consider phenomena such as unplanned childlessness,

the motherhood rate, and the number of children per mother, as these indicators reveal how low birth rates arise, why mothers have fewer children, and why a smaller proportion of women become mothers at all (Shaw 2025b).

The childlessness rate represents the share of women who remain without children throughout their reproductive life (Shaw 2025b). Childlessness can be voluntary (the result of a conscious decision not to have children), medically conditioned, situational (resulting from certain social circumstances), or unplanned. Unplanned childlessness refers to situations in which individuals have not consciously decided to remain childless but have delayed parenthood until it is no longer biologically possible (Shaw 2025b). According to research by Steven Shaw, approximately 10% of childless women choose not to become mothers, a similar percentage remain childless for medical reasons, while in the majority of cases, it is due to unplanned childlessness (Shaw 2025a, 42, 28).

Data from the most recent census in Serbia indicate that approximately 30% of the population of reproductive age has no children (36.6% of men and 25.67% of women) (RZS 2023a). Of a total of 1,904,314 families recorded in the 2022 census, 592,602 (31,12%) are childless families (RZS 2023b). This phenomenon is associated with delayed parenthood, prolonged education, uncertain entry into the labor market, and later formation of partnership and family relationships. As Tomanović and Stanojević note, “the transition to parenthood occurs in an unsupportive institutional environment, so the resources of the family of origin become one of the main structural contexts in which family formation and parenthood take place, in which young people choose one of two strategies: a network of strong informal support for parenthood or delaying childbirth, reducing the number of children, and foregoing parenthood” (Tomanović i Stanojević 2015, 42). Additionally, contemporary narratives about the possibility of freezing eggs and reproductive material, as well as parenthood at later ages, contribute to the increase in unplanned childlessness.

Research on the biological limitations of fertility reminds us that the window for parenthood is temporally limited. According to data from the U.S. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, the probability of conception declines particularly after the age of 35 (Dunson, Baird and Colombo 2004). In Serbia, the average age of women at childbirth is 30.5 years, while the average age at first birth

is 29.1 years (RZS 2025c), indicating a strong link between delayed parenthood and the overall decline in fertility.

Unplanned childlessness also has broader societal implications, as it influences the transformation of value patterns and the normalization of life without children. In contexts where parenthood does not hold a clear prestigious status in society, and a significant portion of the reproductive-age population has no children, it becomes common for individuals to prioritize personal goals over family formation. In this way, value patterns favoring individualism and career self-fulfillment are reproduced, leading to phenomena such as in Japan, where the number of household pets exceeds the number of children (*Japan Today* 2021).

A better understanding of contemporary fertility trends requires distinguishing the total fertility rate from indicators that focus on mothers. The total motherhood rate measures the share of women who become mothers during their reproductive life, while the number of children per mother indicates the average number of children born to women who become mothers (Shaw 2025b), excluding women who do not give birth. Research by Steven Shaw shows that the total motherhood rate can decline sharply while the number of children per mother remains relatively stable, revealing a hidden dynamic of fertility that is not apparent through the total fertility rate alone (Shaw 2025b). This has important implications for population policy, as measures aimed at supporting families to have two, three, or more children cannot achieve their full effect if the underlying question of how young people decide whether or not to become parents is not addressed first.

In Serbia, these two processes occur simultaneously – the increase in the number of people without children and the predominance of one-child families (711.826, or 53.45% of all families with children) (RZS 2023c). Families with two children account for 35.57% of families with children, or only 24.87% of all families, while families with three children represent just 7.7% of families with children, or 5.4% of all families in Serbia. Families with five or more children have become exceptional, making up only 0.29% of families in Serbia (RZS 2023c). These data point to a profound shift in reproductive patterns – delayed parenthood, a lower probability of having larger families, and smaller cohorts entering reproductive age – which further reduces the potential for changing the existing demographic situation.

These trends confirm that the demographic winter in Serbia represents a long-term structural process. Understanding its causes

requires an analysis of the broader social and institutional context in which reproductive decisions are made. Factors such as economic security, employment stability, housing availability, opportunities to reconcile work and parenthood, access to and quality of childcare services, and other social policy measures aimed at raising fertility all play a role. In conditions where these factors are not stable and predictable, the decision to have children becomes more uncertain and is more frequently postponed.

PRONATALITY POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF DEMOGRAPHIC WINTER: SYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIC GOALS

Serbia is experiencing a prolonged demographic winter, which makes demographic policy one of the key state priorities. Demographic policy, understood as a set of deliberately designed measures through which states seek to influence demographic processes such as fertility, mortality, and migration (Demeny and McNicoll 2003), has a strongly intersectoral character, connecting various public policies and institutions. Although in its full scope demographic policy also encompasses the management of migration flows and societal adaptation to population aging, this study focuses on pronatality policy as a central dimension of demographic renewal, since stabilizing the birth rate is essential to halting further depopulation.

This study argues that effective pronatality policy requires simultaneous action on institutional conditions, value frameworks, and public policy instruments. Demographic outcomes are not solely the result of individual choices but are structurally conditioned by institutional, economic, and cultural contexts. Therefore, pronatality policy can be understood as a systemic framework encompassing three interconnected dimensions: institutional arrangements, value frameworks, and policy instruments. Their interaction shapes the conditions in which individuals make decisions about family formation and childbearing.

Institutional arrangements encompass the overall organization of the social system within which individuals' life decisions are shaped. This includes the structure and stability of the labor market, the availability and quality of childcare services, the nature of housing policy, as well as the legal and regulatory framework that affects the possibility of reconciling professional and family roles. The institutional

context determines the material, temporal, and organizational resources necessary for parenthood. Research shows that the ability to balance work and parenthood has a direct impact on reproductive behavior, as “establishing equilibrium in this area increases individual life and job satisfaction, enhances labor productivity, results in healthier and wealthier families, ensures childcare is more evenly shared between partners, and consequently raises fertility levels” (Rašević i Bjelobrk 2021, 5). Therefore, institutional design represents one of the key mechanisms through which the state indirectly influences demographic outcomes.

In parallel with institutional conditions, the value framework of society shapes the meaning of family and parenthood. The value framework determines whether childbearing is perceived as a social value of general importance or solely as a private life decision of individuals. Value orientations define the hierarchy of life priorities and behavioral patterns. Research within the theory of the second demographic transition shows that “the acceptance and spread of a post-materialist value system brings a range of changes in behavior and attitudes regarding marriage, family, and parenthood, which are reflected in fertility decisions” (Šobot 2022, 151). Without a change in the dominant social narrative recognizing parenthood as a valued social role, the effects of individual measures remain limited.

In addition to institutional conditions and the societal value framework, specific instruments of public policy influence demographic behavior – that is, the measures that the state implements to affect the reproductive behavior of the population. These include financial incentives, tax benefits, parental leave systems, support for assisted reproduction programs, housing policy measures, and the development of childcare infrastructure. The goal of these measures is to reduce the economic and organizational costs of parenthood and increase the security of family planning. However, their effects are neither automatic nor linear. As highlighted in the National Human Development Report, “it is too expensive to attempt to raise fertility rates to the level of simple reproduction solely through cash incentives” (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] 2022, 45). Similarly, Demeny emphasizes that “fertility declines when changes in these factors make limiting childbearing favorable for couples,” with “social and institutional conditions” being decisive in shaping reproductive behavior (Demeny 2011, 260). Therefore, policy measures should be viewed as part of

a broader, systemic framework of demographic policy, rather than as isolated instruments. Their full effect is realized only when integrated with institutional arrangements that provide stable conditions for family life and with a value framework that recognizes parenthood as a socially relevant and desirable role. Otherwise, their effects remain limited and short-term.

Within this conceptual approach, pronatalist policy measures can be systematized around three key strategic objectives: (1) increasing the number of parents, (2) reducing unplanned childlessness, and (3) increasing the likelihood that families have more children. These objectives are interdependent and interconnected.

Increasing the number of parents represents a fundamental prerequisite for a long-term demographic turnaround. In conditions of a growing share of the population without children, measures aimed solely at increasing the number of children per family have limited reach. Therefore, an effective pronatalist policy should primarily focus on reducing barriers to entering parenthood. This aspect of pronatalist policy primarily falls within the domain of institutional design, as the decision to become a parent depends on employment stability, housing availability, the possibility of reconciling work and parenthood, and the accessibility and quality of childcare services. As Professor Bobić notes, “the higher the ‘cost of children’ (both economic and psychological), the lower their supply,” and “if the level of benefits and services aimed at mothers and children is higher, the supply of children will increase, because these benefits reduce the immediate economic and opportunity costs of parenthood” (Bobić 2003, 77).

The second objective focuses on reducing unplanned childlessness, which is not the result of a conscious choice but often stems from postponement, institutional constraints, and insufficient information. Achieving this goal requires an intersectoral approach, encompassing coordinated action by the health, education, and social policy sectors, as well as creating an environment that encourages early and planned decisions about parenthood. While assisted reproduction measures are significant at the individual level, their demographic impact is limited, as “assisted reproductive procedures have a negligible effect on national fertility rates” (Präg *et al.* 2017, 46). Therefore, preventive action is necessary, through systematic education of young people about reproductive health, removal of structural and economic barriers that delay parenthood, and support for decisions that allow family planning

in line with personal and career goals. Only through integrated action across these three levels can unplanned childlessness be reduced and a more stable demographic development be promoted.

The third objective concerns increasing the likelihood that families choose to have more children. Although this aspect is often limited to financial incentives, experience shows that their effect remains constrained without broader institutional and cultural support. Decisions to expand a family are not purely economic but depend on the stability of the parental support system, availability of services such as childcare, and a flexible working environment, as well as the social recognition of parenthood as an important and valued role. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure long-term predictability and consistency of measures so that families can plan to expand in an environment that encourages and values parenthood, rather than only facilitating it in the short term.

Effective pronatalist policy implies an integrated approach, simultaneously addressing institutional conditions, the societal value framework, and concrete public policy measures. Such a comprehensive strategy is a prerequisite for sustainable demographic renewal and the preservation of the state's demographic sovereignty, ensuring that parenthood is once again recognized and valued as a key social role.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The process of demographic winter in Serbia represents a long-term structural challenge with profound economic, social, and cultural consequences. Negative demographic trends cannot be reversed without systematic and long-term measures. Therefore, demographic policy is not merely one of many public policies but a strategic issue that affects economic sustainability, institutional stability, and the future of society.

Pronatalist policy plays a central role within population policy, with three main objectives: encouraging entry into parenthood, reducing unplanned childlessness, and supporting families in having more children. Research shows that entry into parenthood is a critical point in demographic dynamics, and measures aimed at encouraging the birth of a second or third child have limited impact in contexts where the share of childless families is increasing.

Demographic trends cannot be explained or altered solely through economic instruments. Decisions about childbearing are formed within a broader institutional and value framework, which requires the integration

of economic, social, health, and educational policies, as well as clear societal affirmation of parenthood. Reliance on partial measures, without simultaneously addressing structural barriers and the social status of parenthood, cannot lead to a long-term demographic turnaround.

Effective pronatalist policy implies an integrated approach that combines institutional conditions, value orientations, and concrete public policy measures. In this way, population policy becomes a matter of state capacity to ensure its biological, political, and institutional continuity, supporting sustainable demographic renewal and a stable societal future.

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ПОЈАМ ДЕМОГРАФСКЕ ЗИМЕ И ПРЕДЛОЗИ МЕРА ЗА УТВРЂИВАЊЕ ПРОНАТАЛИТЕТНЕ ПОЛИТИКЕ У СРБИЈИ

Резиме

Демографска зима представља дуготрајан процес опадања броја становника, условљен ниском стопом рађања, старењем популације и континуалним иселјавањем становништва. Последице овог процеса директно утичу на политичке, економске и друштвене капацитете државе. Србија се већ неколико деценија налази у овом процесу, што потврђују негативан природни прираштај, раст просечне старости становништва, пад броја породица са децом и интензивна емиграција младих и радно способних лица. Овај рад полази од претпоставке да демографски показатељи представљају рани индикатор будућих економских, социјалних и геополитичких промена, будући да структура становништва дугорочно одређује институционалне, економске и политичке капацитете државе. Полазећи од оквира демографске транзиције и концепта демографске зиме, анализирају се узроци депопулације Србије, са посебним нагласком на непланирано бездетство, смањење стопе материнства и промену репродуктивних вредносних образаца. Рад указује и на ограничен домет постојећих популационих политика које су превасходно усмерене на финансијске подстицаје. Методолошки оквир истраживања заснива се на анализи статистичких података, студији случаја Републике Србије и компаративном прегледу савремене демографске литературе. Просторни оквир истраживања обухвата подручје Републике Србије у временском оквиру последње две деценије. Рад доприноси теорији јавних политика показујући да је демографска репродукција предуслов политичке одрживости и очувања институционалних капацитета државе. Посебан допринос рада огледа се у разликовању укупне стопе фертилитета, стопе материнства и броја деце по мајци, као и у концептуализацији

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пронаталитетне политике кроз три међусобно повезане димензије: институционални дизајн, вредносни оквир и инструменте јавних политика. Рад заступа тезу да демографска зима не представља пролазни статистички феномен, већ дубоки друштвени изазов који захтева дугорочну, вредносно утемељену и институционално доследну државну политику.

Кључне речи: демографска зима, непланирано бездетство, стопа материнства, популациона политика, Србија

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