

PREFACE

Low fertility, ageing, migration, population development and the like are not only basic topics of demography but belong to the most exciting issues of public interest today. These phenomena are studied by many and approached in various ways but are not easily clarified and are sometimes simplified. Having followed discussions in public life, opinions expressed by socio-political decision-makers, having answered questions of the press, and having consulted students interested in the subject the researchers of the Demographic Research Institute of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office have similarly come to this conclusion. It seems that the actual research results are familiar only to the narrow circle of people with inside knowledge, so they do not reach the public and those in the position to form public opinion. Consequently we decided to issue a publication more or less regularly, covering all basic issues of demography in short and easily understandable chapters. The present volume entitled *Demographic Portrait of Hungary 2009* is the first of the scheduled row of these publications.

Informing the general public about population issues they need to know requires approaches and techniques unusual for a researcher. We have to omit references and

the strict enumeration of all bibliographical items supporting our statements as well as the extended discussion of relevant theories and methods. The bibliographies at the end of the individual chapters and other contributions of the authors provide further information for those interested in the details. This time our primary aim is, however, to make the basic information about the population issues available for the general public.

We plan to publish a similar report every three years, since although demographic processes are usually slow, our world today is apt to produce abrupt changes. So the intended timing seems justified.

The book covers all major fields of demography. We deal with classical topics like fertility, nuptiality, mortality, ageing, and migration, their basic tendencies and interpretation. As regards items like family policy and retirement the specific Hungarian arrangements are emphasized. The probably most discussed subject of population projection, arousing general interest, is included, also.

The structure of the individual chapters is uniform.

The subjects are discussed consistently in international comparison, as it is indispensable for the better understanding of the characteristically Hungarian phenomena. We find it especially important to compare the Hungarian results not only with those of Western Europe but also with those of the former socialist countries. As regards perspective, we concentrate on recent developments (which speaking demographically means the past two or three years) but in certain cases the introduction of longer preceding periods proved inevitable. We usually referred to the basic tendencies of the two decades since the change of

regimes in 1989-90 and went further back only exceptionally. Besides analyzing the objective data we intended to show the subjective aspects of the changes as well, together with the attitudes, motives, and values of the people concerned.

We analyze population issues mostly in time series, based on statistical correlations. However, this time we omit detailed statistics. The interested public can find them in the population yearbook (*Demográfiai évkönyv*) published by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO). The present volume shows only the most important trends illustrated by diagrams.

As it is common in similar volumes, the major findings of the individual chapters are summed up and enumerated at the beginning of each chapter under the heading *Major findings*.

Demography can be considered a 'lucky discipline' of empirical social science as it can rely on a huge number of data, the events representing its fields of interest are highly standardized and can be easily interpreted and compared in international terms. For our present purposes we used three basic sources that are different in character. As regards birth, marriage, divorce, and death we relied on the vital statistics regularly produced and published by the HCSO. The

second important source was the census taken every ten years. In the meantime microcensuses fill the gap and help us follow the demographical changes. Our third source is the survey *Turning Points of the Life Course* by the Demographic Research Institute of the HCSO. This investigation enables us to make a dynamic analysis following the changes in the living conditions and values of a certain group of people by collecting data about them every three years. This project is part of the international *Generations and Gender Program* (GGP) that focuses on the causes and consequences of demographic change in Europe using the same methodology. The individual chapters can naturally rely on certain other sources, too. In that case they are duly indicated. The interested public can find the individual surveys and studies in various forms elsewhere, so enumerating them here is not necessary.

We hope that the present publication can meet the demands of the representatives of several fields and professions. It can be useful for decision makers in socio-political matters, researchers, university professors, students, and the press alike. Last but not least, the authors count on the attention of the general public directly affected by both the favourable and the unfavourable aspects of population development.