

5 Demography

The average density of population in the Carpathian region is 120/km². Behind this average, however, the differences are very large. In the proper mountains, where the economic carrying capacity is rather low, the density of population is 10–25/km². In the fore-lands of the mountains, it is rather high, over 150/km². It is especially high along the external “market line”, (a chain of cities), where it is more than 200/km². But the two areas, with different densities of population cannot be regarded separately. The economic base for a significant share of the population in the densely populated area is in the mountains (and in their products). On the other hand, the population in the mountains would be even smaller without the demand of the population in the fore-lands for their services and products.

The development of the size of the population is the result of birth and death rates and migratory movement of the population.

During the 20th century, birth rates in the Carpathian area were rather high, higher than in other areas of Central Europe. The reasons for it were different: rural way of life, deeper religiosity, but also lower educational level. However, in the last decades, birth rates decreased radically, more radically than the respective national averages. They are still higher, than in the surrounding plain areas, but the difference is much smaller than before.

The highest birth rates can be found in the proper mountainous areas in the Northeast Carpathians (in Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine). The lowest birth-rates are in Austria, Hungary and –interestingly – also in some parts of Poland and Slovakia.

The regions with the highest death rates are exclusively in Hungary and Romania – mostly in Hungary – and in the southern part of the Carpathian area. The regions with the lowest death rate are exclusively in Poland and Slovakia – mostly in Poland – and in the northern part of the Carpathian area. Low death rates are mostly due to the younger age structure of the population, due to the former higher birth rates.

It has to be noted that even the highest natural increase figures are rather low in international comparison. The dominant trend in the Carpathian area is natural decrease. Out of the 88 NUTS3 regions of the Carpathian area, only in 23 was natural increase registered, in the other 65 region natural population flow had a negative balance.

This natural population flow is modified by migration.

The regions with the highest out-migration figures are not the less developed agricultural counties, but the industrialised ones (Hunedoara, Sibiu, Brasov, Caras-Severin and Timis). It is partly the consequence of the collapse of industrial plants established in the socialist period. On the other hand, the skilled, more mobile

workers of these counties are those, who can find work in other regions, especially abroad.

In a longer historical perspective: the proper Carpathian area was – since the 19th century – one of the main sources of European emigration. The restricted economic carrying capacity of the mountainous areas and the high population growth resulted in very high emigration figures. The numbers of emigration statistics of Eastern Slovakia, Galicia, Szeklerland at the beginning of the 20th century were comparable with the respective figures of Britain and Ireland. A part of this emigration was of temporary character. Slovak workers, for example, worked for some years in the USA and then returned to their home country with their savings.

But anyway, because of these large emigration flows, the number of population did not increase at a rate, which could be supposed based on the high birth rates. In contrast: there are regions, where the population is less than a century ago. Besides voluntary migration, war, forced re-settlement and the holocaust also contributed to the slower growth or even decrease of population in some areas (for example in Galicia and in the Banat). In the last decade, hundred thousands, even millions of people – mainly from Romania and Poland – had left their home country, looking for employment and higher earnings in Western Europe.

Ethnic and religious affiliations

There are 8 countries in the Carpathian region, so the population is divided between different nations and ethnic groups. But even within the individual countries, the population is of multiethnic character. There are Hungarians and Ukrainians in Slovakia, Ukrainians and Germans in Poland, Romanians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, Russians and Germans in Ukraine, Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians and Serbs in Romania, Romanians, Germans, Slovaks and Serbs in Hungary, Romanians, Hungarians and Slovaks in Serbia, Croatians in Austria and Poles in the Czech Republic in the Carpathian area. Roma population is spread in the whole Carpathian region, their number in the whole Carpathian region is more than 2 million.

But even the Ukrainian population in the Carpathians is divided into different ethnic groups. There are Rusyns, Lemkos, Bojkos and Hutsuls, all living in the Carpathian Mountains. Mountain ranges divided and isolated them from each other, therefore they could develop their own dialects and ethnic identities. In South Poland, in the Carpathians live the Góral, whose language is based on Polish, but contains many words from the Slovak and Vlach languages. The Szeklers in the Eastern Carpathians speak Hungarian, but their origin is different from the other Hungarians. Another Hungarian group, the “Csángos”, lives in the Eastern side of the Carpathians, in Moldavia. Because of the long time of isolation, a substantial part of Csángos have lost already their Hungarian language and speak Ro-

manian. The “Moți” in the Apuseni Mountains speak Romanian, and regard themselves Romanians, but supposedly they have also other origin than the other Romanians. Many Czech citizens in the Czech Carpathian region regard themselves as Moravians or Silesians. Summarising: there is a very colourful ethnic mosaic in the Carpathians.

The composition of the Carpathian population according to religious affiliation is also diversified. The majority of the Polish, Slovak, Czech, Austrian and Hungarian population is Roman Catholic. Nevertheless, among those Hungarians, who live in the Carpathian region, the majority is Protestant (Calvinist). A minority of the Slovaks and Germans in Southern Transylvania are Lutherans. A substantial minority of the Szeklers belongs to the Transylvanian Unitarian Church. The larger part of Romanians and Serbs are Eastern Orthodox Christians.

The Eastern Catholic Church (or the Greek Catholic Church) has a special significance in the Carpathian region, because its adherents in Europe live almost exclusively in the North-Eastern or Eastern Carpathian area. Ethnically, they are mostly Ukrainians and Romanians but there are also Slovaks and Hungarians. After Russia (and later the Soviet Union) annexed this area, the Greek Catholic Church was eliminated, and its adherents were regarded to be of Orthodox religion, who were formerly forced to leave the Orthodox Church. After 1990 the Greek Catholic Churches have been revived in these countries and now they are competing with the Orthodox Churches for the faithful people.

Before World War II, the Carpathian area was one of the most important settlement areas of Jewish people in Europe. Their number in the Carpathian area was more than 5 million. The Holocaust, emigration and natural decrease have radically reduced their presence in the area. They number now hardly 100 thousand in the area.

In the last decades – in all countries of the region, although to different extent – new Religious Movements and small Churches could attract an increasing number of people. The deterioration of living conditions, the collapse of earlier systems and ideals, and sometimes their charitable activities contribute to the growing number of adherents of new religious movements.