

## Current Trends in the Demographic Development of the Population of Small Villages in Zakarpattia Region

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**Abstract.** One of the dominant features of modern civilisation is the growing correlation between economic growth and the quality of its human potential, the level and condition of which are vital components of national wealth and the driving force of economic prosperity. Hence the increased attention to the analysis of current trends in demographic development of the population. This particularly concerns the lower administrative-territorial level, because it is there that the demoreproducing processes are developed and the life processes of the population take place. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the main trends of demographic development of the population of small rural settlements of Zakarpatska Oblast and identify factors that generate depopulation phenomena and, consequently, formulate recommendations for minimising the impact of said factors on the demographic processes among the rural population. In accordance with the set purpose, the study analyses the main trends in the demographic development of the population of small rural settlements in the Zakarpatska Oblast over the past 30 years. The demoreproducing processes were studied considering the population structure in terms of natural and economic zones of the region, covering small villages of lowland, foothill, and mountain natural and economic zones. It was established that vertical zoning affects not only the conditions of business affairs and entrepreneurial activity of the population, but also the dynamics of natural population growth. Considerable attention is paid to the analysis of the dynamics of change in the population living in small settlements. The study identifies the main reasons that determine the strengthening of depopulation in small villages of the mountain natural economic zone. The authors prove the fact of decrease in the population density of small villages with their remoteness from regional centres and cities. The paper also features an analysis of changes in the age and sex structure of the population of small rural settlements, as well as identifies factors that deform the sex and age structure of the population, the effect of which in the near future will lead to decrease in the number of the economically active population and increase in budgetary expenditures for the maintenance of retired persons. The authors provide sound justification of the necessity of measures aimed at ensuring the effective implementation of demographic policy, thereby improving the quality of the human potential of the rural population, as well as preserving and reproducing its life and labour potential

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## Introduction

Overcoming the demographic crisis in Ukraine, achieving sustainable demographic development and normalising the processes of population reproduction today largely determine the effectiveness of market transformation processes in Ukraine and its national security. The processes of population depopulation, which have become sustainable in Ukraine and its regions, have substantially intensified the study of demographic processes. Therefore, the authors of the present study agree with the opinion that “a thorough analysis of demographic processes at different levels of territorial communities is necessary to create favourable conditions for the development and effective organisation of social and demographic potential of the country and its regions” [1, p. 6].

Peculiarities of each region as a territorially social community in the sphere of life support of the population is manifested, first of all, in demographic processes and structures, the state of the population health and the system of its protection. The system of settlement in the region and the level of its urbanisation also has a significant impact on demo reproduction processes.

The intensification of scientific research, which lays the scientific foundations for justifying population policy, allows distinguishing three main approaches to its understanding, which differ from each other in the set of components included in the process of population reproduction. The first approach is described by the reduction of the processes of demographic creation of the population only to natural reproduction, that is, fertility and mortality [2-4], which, to a certain extent, is evidence of a simplified approach to understanding demographic policy, since its tools are reduced to the effect on fertility and mortality. Proceeding from knowledge that describes only quantitative changes between fertility and mortality, the role of demography is essentially reduced to stating quantitative changes, without explaining the reasons that determine changes in the processes of natural reproduction of the population. The second approach substantially expands the scientific area of population research, since, apart from the natural movement of the population, it includes migration as a component of demographic policy and a specific component of social policy [5; 6].

The third approach, which is inherent in modern research, examines population reproduction and, accordingly, demographic policy in a broad sense, including a considerable scope of issues in the analysis, shifting the emphasis towards the qualitative parameters of the population – its sex and age structure, level of education, professional training, sectoral structure of employment [7-12]. According to the authors, it is the third approach that is the most promising, since it allows investigating the population processes in all the complexity and multidimensionality of this process and hierarchical levels of management. This is crucial, since the vast majority of studies analysing the demographic processes cover only macro- and mesoscale. As for the lower administrative level (village, township, city), this issue, with minor exceptions, has not received proper coverage [13].

Meanwhile, the dynamics of demographic processes is reflected in the rate of natural increase/decrease in the population, changes in its sex and age structure, life expectancy and a number of other indicators that are decisive in the development of social and labour potential, are formed precisely at the lower administrative territorial level. Hence the relevance and importance of the scientific analysis of demographic processes at the level of taxonomic units of the basic level. This refers to small rural settlements that provide life processes on their territory.

*The purpose of the study* is to clarify the main trends in the development of demographic processes in small rural settlements of the Zakarpatska Oblast based on the analysis of key quantitative indicators that make it possible to find out the nature of the course of demographic processes, to identify factors that enhance the depopulation phenomenon and to propose recommendations of an applied nature for the development of local programs for the reproduction of qualitative characteristics and density of the rural population.

## Materials and Methods

The study of demo-reproducing processes in small villages of Zakarpattia region is determined by a number of important factors. First, small villages provide natural population growth in the region. Second, they are providers of human resources for urban settlements, essentially ensuring their development. Third, they form the core of labour migration. There are a number of other strong arguments, but these are enough to understand the impact of small rural settlements on the population processes of the region.

The main source of information for the study were the passports of small villages, monitoring of the rural population, data from State Statistics, census materials. The study was conducted in 2017-2019 under the theme “Social and economic development of small settlements in the Zakarpatska Oblast in terms of decentralisation”. In the course of the survey, which covered more than 450 rural residents, data were obtained on the values of respondents, population size, fertility, mortality, life expectancy, gender and age structure of the population, family and marriage relations, and population health. Social and economic characteristics of respondents, adaptation to market conditions, propensity for entrepreneurial activity, efficiency of doing business, satisfaction with the activity of social infrastructure institutions in their places of residence, migration sentiments, etc. were also registered. The study of the influence of these factors is important from an instrumental and theoretical point of view, since they allow identifying key indicators of the impact on demo-creative processes in empirical data.

Factor analysis identifies two main factors that determine the development and evolution of the population. First, the type of natural movement of the population of a certain area, and second – the migratory activity of the working population. In the first case, if an extended type of reproduction is achieved, there is a predominance of the share of economically active population in the population

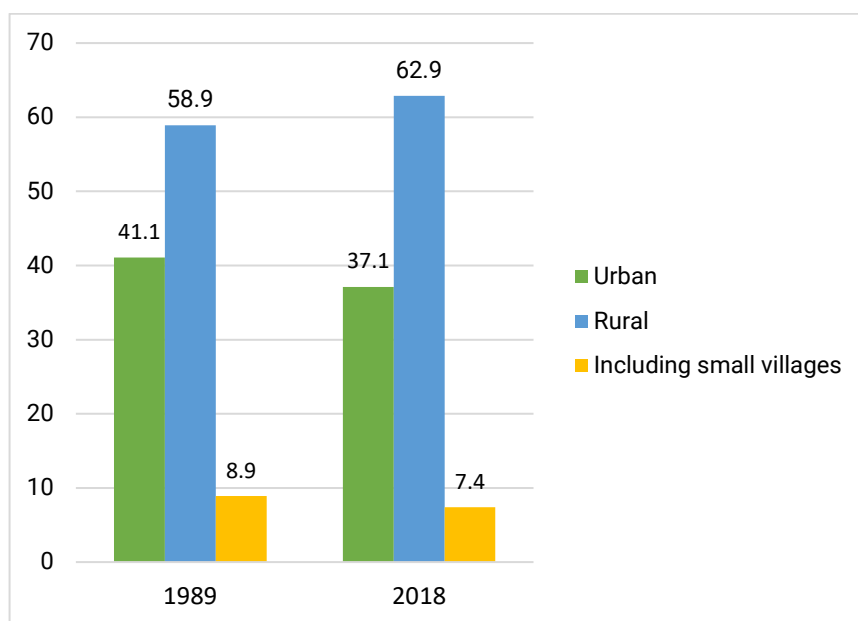
structure with a relatively small proportion of people of retirement age. In the second case, the migration movement, which today is a determining factor that characterises the development of social and labour relations, shapes the situation in local labour markets, employment, welfare, consumption and conservation, reproduction regime [14, p. 44]. From this theoretical position, it follows that a systematic analysis of the main trends in the development of the population of small villages in the region is carried out based on two interrelated processes: natural and migration movement of the population.

Consequently, when analysing and assessing the prospects for demographic development and choosing a model of social and demographic policy, the dominant approach is the analysis of indicators of population movement.

### Results and Discussion

Population dynamics, its age composition, reproduction regime in general are the main components that create the preconditions for the development of human potential of the

rural population, determine its quantitative limits and partially qualitative characteristics and opportunities. The results of research showed that despite the increase in the population of the region during the analysed period (+4692 people) the potential of the negative natural balance was laid in previous years. Natural population growth until 2018 was ensured mainly due to the demographic potential accumulated in previous decades and the favourable demographic structure of the population. As a result, the region was among the few regions of the country that provided an expanded type of population reproduction. However, starting from 2018, the processes of demoreproduction of the population in Zakarpattia region have identified negative national trends, although they do not have such sharp manifestations. During 2018, there was a total population decline of 1,353 people, which was 1.1 people per 1,000 inhabitants. The decrease in population was due to the reduction of natural population growth in the number of 1437 people [15, p. 40; 16, p. 39] (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** The structure of the current population in the towns and villages of the Zakarpatska Oblast in 1989-2018  
**Source:** created by the authors according to [15; 16]

From the data shown in Figure 1, it is seen that the dynamics of population decline in urban settlements is much higher than in rural areas. The number of urban residents during the analysed period decreased from 41.1% to 37.1%, which indicates a low level of urbanisation in the region. At the same time, the share of rural residents in the total population structure of the region increased from 58.9% in 1989 to 62.9% in 2018. Two fundamentally important conclusions follow from this. First – rural settlements are a source of reproduction, i.e., the development of social and labour potential of the region. Second – population processes during the last period acquire clear intra-regional differences, which significantly increases the scientific interest

in their research, in particular small settlements, which occupy a significant share in the settlement structure of the region.

The data shown in Figure 1, indicate that the increase in the rural population during the analysed period (+53439 people) is accompanied by an increase in the population in small rural settlements of the region (+1352 people).

The analysis of changes in the population dynamics of small rural settlements in terms of natural and economic zones of Zakarpattia region, which is shown in Table 1, indicates a general trend towards its growth. The growth of the population in the foothill zone is especially noticeable, the number of small villages of the lowland natural and economic zone is growing at a slightly slower pace. In the

mountain zone, the dynamics of declining population living in small villages is growing. At the same time, in each of the natural and economic zones there are rural settlements,

where there is a tendency to reduce the number of rural residents (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Dynamics of change in the population of small rural settlements in the Zakarpatska Oblast for 1989-2018

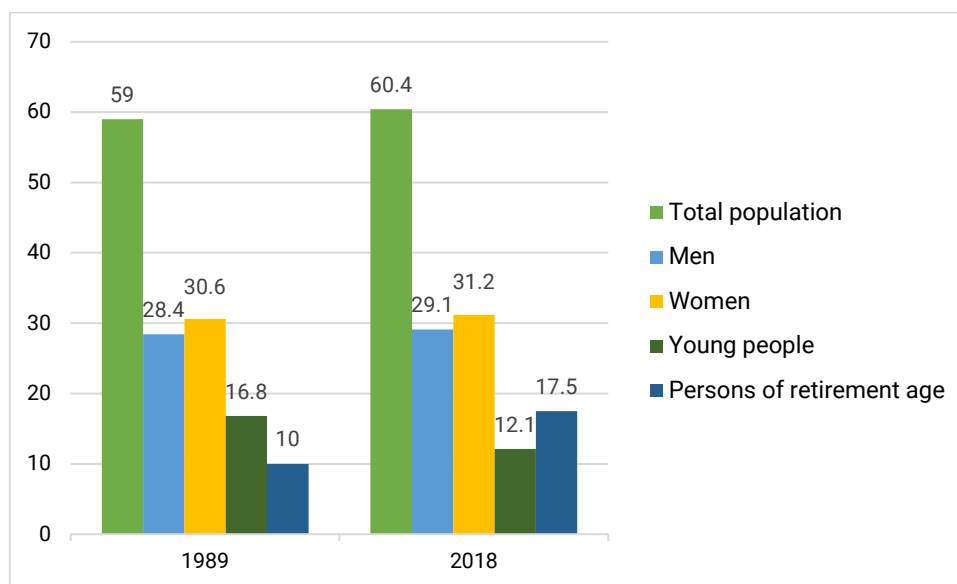
Natural and economic zones	Number of small settlements	Population, persons		Increase (+) / decrease (-), %
		1989	2018	
Lowland	75	24 623	25 193	+2.3
Foothill	43	11 980	12 980	+8.3
Mountain	70	22 396	22 178	-1.0

The total increase in the population of small villages in the region can also be explained by the increase in the total number of small villages, the number of which increased by 9 units and at the beginning of 2019 amounted to 188 villages. Despite the general increase in the population living in small villages of the region, depopulation trends can be clearly seen here. The main reason for the intensification of depopulation processes in small rural settlements is the natural population decline due to declining birth rates. In 2018, 13,883 children were born (11.7 people per 1,000 available population), which is approximately the same as in 1999. If during 2008-2014 on average 50-52 babies were born every day, in 2016-2017 – less than 45, and in 2018 – only 38 [15, p. 42]. The above indicates a radical change in the reproductive behaviour of young families, the vast majority of which focus on single-child families. Present-day issues include gradual loss of value of the family, reducing need for children, as well as reducing number of marriages, and more frequent divorces. The overall marriage rate decreases and the number of consensual (unregistered) marriages increases. The number of divorces remains high, and the divorce rate for a long period of time remains consistently high – 2.3 per 10,000 population [17, p. 51]. Thus, the problems in the field of fertility are not limited to its reduction, but are increasingly associated with changes in fertility rates and family structure.

An important factor that determines the processes of depopulation of the rural population is the strengthening of the trend towards an increase in mortality, which is confirmed by the data of state statistics bodies. Starting from 2005, the mortality rate in rural areas remains stably high at 12.2 persons per 1000 population. Analysis of trends in mortality in the context of deepening decline in natural population growth that has emerged over the past period of time prompts to consider the situation in rural areas from the standpoint of the demographic security of the region. After all, the negative tendencies of almost all components of the demographic process – fertility, mortality, intensive labour migration, especially among rural youth – lead to the loss of human potential, its core – the economically active population. The current situation requires a deep understanding of the nature and specifics of modern demographic

processes, analysis of the effectiveness of the tested mechanisms of influence on the reproduction processes by the state, regions, territorial communities. The appeal to the existing experience of many highly developed countries of the world unequivocally proves that regulatory instruments, which in the past provided positive dynamics of population growth, today do not bring the desired result. The way out of the current situation is to focus population policy on prolonging life expectancy and reducing mortality. Focused efforts on labour protection, reduction of occupational injuries, deaths as a result of road accidents, fight against drug addiction, alcoholism, smoking – not a complete list of problems that are now the direct object of regulatory impact on the dynamics of reproductive processes. Their inclusion in the strategic documents of regulation of demographic processes at any hierarchical level brings a significant dose of specification of program documents and the possibility of their actual implementation. Therefore, the authors support the opinion of E. Libanova that among the whole range of demographic problems of modern Ukraine, the problems of mortality are perhaps the most pressing. The roots of their development, according to the author, lie in the events of at least half a century ago, when a deep gap in the trends in mortality and life expectancy of the population of the USSR and economically developed countries gradually began to emerge [18, p. 23]. Hence one of the most important tasks – maintaining the reproductive health of the rural population by improving preventive and curative care, ensuring the availability and quality of medical services, reorganising the primary care system, improving the supply of medicines to low-income people. Admittedly, the solution to this complex knot of problems is largely associated with the transition to insurance medicine.

It is well known that the dynamics of mortality and life expectancy are largely determined by the sex and age structure of the population. Analysis of the population structure of small rural settlements in the region for the analysed period on the main social and demographic indicators, which is presented in Figure 2, demonstrates new trends and processes in the field of demographic development of the population of small settlements in the region.



**Figure 2.** Changes in the sex and age structure of the population of small settlements in the Zakarpatska Oblast for 1989-2019

The slowdown in the population growth of small villages in the region is accompanied by changes in the demographic proportions of the sex and age structure due to an increase in the share of the population that is beyond working age. This is clearly confirmed by the data presented in Figure 2. During the analysed period, the share of people older than working age was 29.8% of the total population of the region. This indicates an aging population. This conclusion is confirmed by the assessment on the UN scale. In countries where the proportion of people aged 65 and over exceeds 7%, the population is considered old. In Ukraine, the share of such population on January 1, 2019 was 16.8%, and in the Zakarpatska Oblast – 11.8%, which is the lowest indicator among the regions of the country [15, p. 37]. The deformation of the demographic space of small villages is due to the aging process of the population and a decrease in the proportion of people younger than the working age, in the near future it will negatively affect the situation on local labour markets and will lead to the need to increase resources for the maintenance of disabled people, and the growth of budgetary expenditures. A good example of this is the study of this problem by the American economist D. Weil, whose results show that in the United States, almost 60% of all expenditures can be tied to certain age groups. According to the calculations of the above cited author, the budgetary expenditures for older people are 8 times higher than the costs for a person of working age and 25 times the costs for a child [19].

The rapid growth of the aging population in Ukraine and its regions requires the implementation of effective pension reform, the implementation of which must be accompanied by a set of economic, legal and administrative measures aimed at preserving and strengthening the health of pre-retirement and retirement age to maintain the ability

to work activities. Thus, the analysis of the main trends in the demographic development of the population of rural settlements is important both scientifically and practically. The practical significance of assessing the demographic processes is that based on quantitative criteria and their content analysis it is possible to conduct cluster analysis, the results of which can serve as a scientific basis for developing and implementing local strategies for demographic development of each small rural settlement.

According to the results of the study, three clusters were formed depending on the demographic situation in each small rural settlement. The first cluster with rates exceeding the regional average population growth rate includes small villages of Rakhiv, Tyachiv and Berehiv districts. The second cluster includes Khust district with a positive increase in rural population. And, finally, the third cluster includes rural settlements of Mukachevo and Uzhhorod districts, where the dynamics of population growth has slowed down, local processes of population depopulation and an increase in the share of people older than working age have appeared.

Analysis of the development of the demographic potential of small rural settlements in Zakarpattia region over a thirty-year period shows that due to the intensification of migration processes, the transformation of individual villages into urban-type settlements, the intensification of urbanisation processes, changes in the rates of natural growth and mortality of the population, complex and ambiguous processes are taking place in the development of the rural population. These changes are transformed in the ekistic structure of the population and in combination with the economic component reflect not only the trends of the past and present, but also lay the foundation for future social and economic relations and demographic development. Hence the relevance and importance of the study of



demographic processes not only at the macro and meso levels, which is typical for most scientific publications [20-22], but also at the local level, since it is here that the dynamics of the demographic development of any taxonomic unit is formed.

Indicative in this regard is the Zakarpatska Oblast, which for a long time was one of the few regions of Ukraine, characterised by positive dynamics of population growth, but in the last period of time there are depopulation and loss of natural population growth. Zakarpatska Oblast is the least urbanised region of the country, as 62.9% of the population lives in rural areas [15, p. 40; 16]. In the structure of rural settlements, 32.5% are small villages (up to 500 people), where as of January 1, 2019 lived about 10% of the rural population of the region. The share of small rural settlements in the spatial cut is sharply differentiated – from 48.0% in Uzhhorod district to 10.7% – in Rakhiv district.

Considering the pronounced spatial vertical zoning of Zakarpattia region, including lowland, foothill and mountain natural-economic zones, differing in climatic conditions, natural resource and production potential, altitude, relief, it is extremely important to analyse demographic processes in small rural settlements in the context of natural and economic zones of the region. These factors require their consideration in the process of developing a strategy for the development of small settlements and adequate mechanisms of state support for problem settlements, since they actively influence the efficiency of doing business, the value of transaction costs, the competitiveness of production, and, consequently, the standard of living of the rural population [23, p. 70].

Existing natural differences, which are objective in nature, create unequal economic conditions, resulting in deepening disparity in social and economic development of territories and small settlements in particular, as most of them in the past developed on a residual basis, which created unequal conditions of their entry into market relations. In terms of natural and economic zones of Zakarpattia region, the largest share of small rural settlements falls on the lowland natural and economic zone. Almost 40.0% of all rural settlements of the region are concentrated in the lowland economic zone, of which 39.9% belong to the category of small settlements.

The share of small villages in the total number of rural settlements in the mountain economic zone, which is the least developed in economic terms, is 37.2%, of which 46.3% have the status of mountain ones. In areas with mountain settlements, the number of small villages ranges from 41.9 to 54.8%. In this zone 7 small settlements are sparsely populated, where the population does not exceed 150 people. In the foothills of the natural economic zone, the share of small settlements is 22.9% of the total number of rural settlements, of which 14.5% have the status of mountain ones.

The analysis of the settlement structure of the population in terms of natural and economic zones of Zakarpattia region allows clarifying numerous important trends. Rural settlement is characterised by a large proportion of small villages. The average size of a small rural settlement is 317 people in a mountain natural and economic zone, 301 people in a foothill zone, and 336 people in a lowland zone. There is a clear decrease in population density as the distance from district centres and towns increases. The lowest population density is recorded in small mountain settlements. The number of small villages with a population of up to 150 people is increasing. The largest number of sparsely populated villages is concentrated in Khust and Mukachevo districts – 7 and 6 settlements, respectively, which is evidence of increasing trends in depopulation of rural settlements, which is a negative phenomenon, since small villages were long described by a positive balance of population growth, playing an important role in demo-reproduction processes and provision of labour to the adjacent district centres and cities of the region.

Thus, local-spatial aspects in the development of strategies for demographic development should consider the existing asymmetry of demographic development. This circumstance objectively determines the need for further research carried out on the methodological basis of multi-factor analysis, considering geoinformation, ethnocultural, ecohomologous projections of regulation of demo-reproducing processes.

## Conclusions

The current demographic situation in small settlements of Zakarpattia region is influenced by the transformation of the social and economic system of deep economic crisis and declining living standards of the rural population, underdeveloped industrial and social infrastructure, lack of effective social protection of young families, people of retirement age. These problems directly affect the demographic development of the rural population, exacerbating the deformation of its gender and age structure, accelerating the depopulation of villages, intensifying labour migration, especially rural youth. The threat of losing the demographic potential of the village requires the implementation of effective demographic policies aimed at increasing fertility and mortality, improving the health and life expectancy of the rural population, implementing measures to protect motherhood and children, promoting family values, optimising migration. The prerequisite for solving this complex problem is to increase the social activity of the rural population by creating an effective business environment in rural areas, mobilisation of investment resources, the transfer of the rural economy to an innovative path of development, economic diversification, competition.

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## Сучасні тенденції демографічного розвитку населення малих сіл Закарпаття

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**Анотація.** Однією з домінуючих рис сучасного цивілізаційного розвитку є зростаюча залежність між економічним зростанням країни та якістю її людського потенціалу, рівень і стан якого є важливим компонентом національного багатства та рушійною силою економічного поступу. Звідси підвищена увага до аналізу сучасних тенденцій демографічного розвитку населення, особливо на нижчому адміністративно-територіальному рівні, оскільки саме тут формуються демовідтворювальні процеси і забезпечуються процеси життєдіяльності населення. Метою наукової роботи є дослідження основних тенденцій демографічного розвитку населення малих сільських населених пунктів Закарпатської області та виявлення чинників, які генерують депопуляційні явища і на цій основі сформулювати рекомендації прикладного характеру щодо мінімізації їх впливу на демовідтворювальні процеси сільського населення. У відповідності до поставленої мети у статті проведено аналіз основних тенденцій демографічного розвитку населення малих сільських населених пунктів Закарпатської області за останні 30 років. Дослідження демовідтворювальних процесів здійснено з урахуванням структури населення в розрізі природно-економічних зон області, що охоплює малі села низинної, передгірської та гірської природно-економічних зон. Встановлено, що вертикальна зональність впливає не тільки на умови ведення бізнесу, підприємницьку активність населення, але і на динаміку природного приросту населення. Значна увага приділена аналізу динаміки зміни чисельності населення, що проживає у малих населених пунктах, виявлено основні причини, які детермінують посилення депопуляції населення в малих селах гірської природно-економічної зони. Доведено факт зменшення щільності населення малих сіл по мірі віддаленості їх від районних центрів і міст. Проаналізовано зміни статеві-вікової структури населення малих сільських поселень, виявлено чинники, які деформують статево-вікову структуру населення, дія яких у недалекій перспективі призведе до зменшення чисельності економічно активного населення та зростання бюджетних витрат на утримання осіб старше працездатного віку. Обґрунтовано необхідність здійснення комплексу заходів, що покликані забезпечити ефективну реалізацію демографічної політики, спрямованої на підвищення якості людського потенціалу сільського населення, збереження та відтворення його життєвого і трудового потенціалу

**Ключові слова:** демографічний розвиток, сільське населення, депопуляція, динаміка





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