



DEMOGRAPHIC SECURITY AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Although demographic problems are less obvious than economic, they are still highly relevant, as they relate to the vital needs of the country and its people. It should be noted, however, that even under the best of circumstances and with a highly successful demographic policy aimed at increasing fertility and reducing mortality, the natural population decrease will persist for many years, and will be only partly offset by immigration to Belarus.

The 2002 Law «On Demographic Security» and national and regional demographic security programmes are intended to provide a coherent framework for future demographic policy. Such a policy will lay the ground for future demographic improvements, and better conditions for population development. The legal foundations for better health care and disease prevention were laid by the laws «On Health Care», «On Public Health Protection», «On Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons», «On Ratifying the Protocol on Uniform Implementation of Technical, Medical, Pharmaceutical, Sanitary, Veterinary, Phitosanitary and Environmental Norms and Standards to Goods Imported in the Customs Union Member States», and «On Ratifying the Basic Agreement between the Government of Belarus and WHO on Technical Cooperation».

The promotion of healthy lifestyles is another significant priority. Such activity is being supported by the Council of Ministers Resolution «On Healthy Lifestyle Promotion among Secondary, Upper-secondary and Tertiary Students», and the State Health Promotion Programme for 2002 – 2006, adopted in 2001. Other important documents include the «Strategy for Preventing the Spread of Illicit Drugs», and the «National Programme of Action for the Prevention of Heavy Drinking and Alcoholism».

Social support for families with children is guaranteed by law. The labour law provides legal protections for mothers with children that regulate their employment, dismissal and working conditions. Some of these protections have been extended to men who are raising children. As required by the law «On State Benefits to Families with Dependent Children», the amount of such benefits is being regularly reviewed to reflect changes in the subsistence minimum. Benefits are being paid for 678,000 children, representing one-third of the total child population. Over 90% of families with children below three years of age are recipients of monthly child support benefits, which are not means-tested. Entitlement to benefits for children over three years of age depends on the total family income.

Tax breaks, childcare fee waivers, textbook fee waivers, free and reduced-cost meals, free infant feeding programs, reduced-cost medical drugs and subsidized transportation fares are some of the other means of economic support for families with children. Considerable progress has been made in clarifying the relevant legal framework and entitlement criteria. Further measures to improve the housing conditions of families with many children have been introduced by presidential and government edicts and regulations. These include subsidized housing loans and partial housing debt cancellation. Significant priority is being attached to the support of orphaned children and children left without parental support.

The Council of Ministers Resolution «On Cash Compensations to Families upon the Birth of Twins» and the presidential decree «On Improving Financial Support to Families with Newly Born Children» took effect in January 2005. Work is in progress on a new programme of action for implementing the law «On Demographic Security». In light of all these efforts, the country's demographic futures should improve.