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Original article

## REGULATION OF THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF RURAL TERRITORIES UNDER DEPOPULATION CONDITIONS

*D.V. Khripkova, K.A. Khripkov,  
S.A. Vangorodskaya, G.N. Gaidukova*

### *Abstract*

**Background.** The article is devoted to the study of the problem of social reproduction of rural territories under depopulation conditions complicated with consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also includes the effect of the special military operation on country's rural border territories. According to authors, social reproduction is necessary to consider as self-regulated and regulated process of renewal of quantitative and qualitative resources of rural areas for stabilization of the rural socio-territorial community, overcoming of degradation processes and further sustainable growth. The aim of this article is to analyze modern reality regarding demographic processes taking place in rural territories and to identify the main directions in the regulation of the social reproduction process in rural areas. The paper has implemented the dispositions of rural residents regarding demographic potential and demographic trends, as well as the expert community in the regard of risks and threats to socio-demographic security of rural territories of the Central Black Earth Economic Region. It is noted that the statistics of Russian rural population' demographic development clearly shows the trend of depopulation of these areas which is determined not only with a combination of demographic factors, including the demographic transition, but also, perhaps to a greater extent, by socio-political and economic conditions.

**Purpose.** The objective of the present investigation is to study of the problem of social reproduction of rural territories under depopulation conditions complicated with consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Materials and methods.** When considering the process of social reproduction of rural areas, we will rely on the concept of rural networks developed by a team of authors led by Dutch economist Frederick Van der J.D Ploeg. Dutch scientists have

combined numerous theoretical concepts and ideas regarding rural development, rural networks, in their opinion, appear to be multidimensional, multifunctional with a multitude of intrasectoral interactions. In the framework of the proposed concept, scientists identify several conceptual blocks in the structure of rural networks (among them: endogeneity, sustainability, social structure of the population, social capital, etc.), which are in dynamic interaction.

The empirical basis of the study is made up of: 1) statistical data characterizing the birth rate, mortality rate, migration of the population; 2) complex of sociological investigations of the demographic potential and demographic trends in rural areas conducted in the Belgorod region in 2021-2024 by a team of scientists from the National Research Institute "Belgorod State University" which include the mass sociological questionnaire survey N=1000 (2021), series of focus-group interviews and expert surveys (N=50, annually).

**Results.** Our theoretical and empirical analyses allow us to formulate a number of practical recommendations to the authorities of various levels, business community and public structures, etc., aimed at improving the main parameters of demographic development of rural areas:

1. Formation of regional expert groups in the sphere of demographic development. "The problem of the efficiency and effectiveness of demographic processes and measures to regulate them affects the interests not only of civil servants and politicians making certain attempts to respond to demographic crises, but also of scientists engaged in the study of demographic challenges" – N.P. Goncharova writes.

The solution to the problem of strengthening the principle of scientific validity of demographic policy in rural areas requires large-scale involvement of experts in the development and implementation of demographic development programmes and projects. In our opinion, the selection of experts should be differentiated and involve scientists specialising in different fields of knowledge, in particular, experts in demography, sociology of management, sociology of family, sociology of youth, social gerontology. This will allow for a targeted and more concentrated approach to the development of projects and programmes for demographic development.

Modern digital technologies make it possible to search for experts throughout the country and ensure their inclusion in the working process. It is promising to create an electronic database of experts in the field of demographic development, which in parallel functions as an interactive platform for discussing issues and problems of demographic development, and which in the future can be used to organise open online conferences, forums and symposia.

2. Development of science-based comprehensive monitoring of the regional demographic policy performance. The objectively demanded tendency to search for new

tools and technologies of demographic development of rural areas implies the development and implementation of systems of indicators for assessing regulatory impacts.

In a turbulent and highly dynamic society, the problem of indicators and indicators with the help of which it is possible to assess the effectiveness/efficiency of the demographic policy is of great importance. Today it is necessary to scientifically substantiate and develop indicators that will allow us to assess the sociodynamics of demographic processes. They should reflect their objective and subjective sides.

Based on the analysis and synthesis of state and regional documents in the field of demography, generalisation of information sources, including the Federal State Statistics Service data, we propose a set of indicators, which should be monitored and allow to assess the effectiveness of demographic policy in rural areas: a) monitoring of the reproduction plans of the population; b) monitoring of population' incomes and participation in social programs; c) monitoring of population' state of health; d) monitoring of the quality and accessibility of services in such spheres as education, healthcare and social services, promotion of employment; e) monitoring of infrastructure' quality; f) sociological survey "Demographic wellbeing of the population of rural territories".

The proposed indicators are assessed using a set of methods, such as: evaluation of information in official sources, data on adopted and existing legislative acts and program documents in the field of the demography and family policy; official statistical data describing the demographic and socio-economic situation available on the website of the Federal State Statistics Service, as well as in the Unified Interdepartmental Information Statistical System; data from periodic sample surveys of the Federal State Statistics Service on demographic problems; and data on the demographic and socio-economic situation in the Russian Federation.

3. Creation of regional and municipal Centers for the support of social practices of active longevity. The methodology of preserving and developing the resource potential of the older generation is proposed to be used more widely, which allows for a differentiated approach to the formation of an active longevity strategy, taking into account the capabilities and motivation of different groups of elderly and old people.

**Conclusion.** In the conditions of modern dynamically changing reality, the prospects of demographic development of rural areas are ambiguous, and forecasting the situation regarding demographic development is difficult. At present, in the era of turbulence of socio-economic processes, there is no agreement in the demographic forecasts of researchers.

In modern conditions, scientific and methodological support and systematic monitoring of demographic processes in rural areas become the key to prompt and adequate response to demographic challenges.

**Keywords:** depopulation; rural territories; demographic development; social reproduction; socio-demographic security

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Научная статья

## РЕГУЛИРОВАНИЕ ПРОЦЕССА СОЦИАЛЬНОГО ВОСПРОИЗВОДСТВА СЕЛЬСКИХ ТЕРРИТОРИЙ В УСЛОВИЯХ ДЕПОПУЛЯЦИИ

*Д.В. Хрипкина, К.А. Хрипков,  
С.А. Вангородская, Г.Н. Гайдукова*

### *Аннотация*

**Обоснование.** Статья посвящена изучению проблемы социального воспроизводства сельских территорий в условиях депопуляции, осложненной последствиями пандемии COVID-19. Исследуется также влияние специальной военной операции на сельские приграничные территории страны. По мнению авторов, социальное воспроизводство необходимо рассматривать как саморегулируемый и регулируемый процесс обновления количественных и качественных ресурсов сельских территорий для стабилизации сельского социально-территориального сообщества, преодоления деградиционных процессов и дальнейшего устойчивого роста. Целью данной статьи является анализ современных реалий в отношении демографических процессов, происходящих на сельских территориях, и выявление основных направлений в регулировании процесса общественного воспроизводства на селе. В работе реализованы диспозиции сельских жителей относительно демографического потенциала и демографических тенденций, а также экспертного сообщества в отношении рисков и угроз социально-демографической безопасности сельских территорий Центрально-Черноземного экономического района. Отмечается, что статистика демографического развития сельского населения России наглядно демонстрирует тенденцию депопуляции этих территорий, которая определяется не только совокупностью демографических факторов, включая демографический переход, но и, возможно, в большей степени, социально-политическими и экономическими условиями.

**Цель.** Целью данного исследования является изучение проблемы социального воспроизводства сельских территорий в условиях депопуляции, осложненной последствиями пандемии COVID-19.

**Материалы и методы.** Рассматривая процесс социального воспроизводства сельских территорий, мы будем опираться на концепцию сельских сетей, разработанную коллективом авторов под руководством голландского экономиста Фредерика Ван дер Дж.Д. Плоэга. Голландские ученые объединили множество теоретических концепций и идей, касающихся развития сельских территорий, сельские сети, по их мнению, представляются многомерными, многофункциональными с множеством внутриотраслевых взаимодействий. В рамках предложенной концепции ученые выделяют несколько концептуальных блоков в структуре сельских сетей (среди них: эндогенность, устойчивость, социальная структура населения, социальный капитал и т.д.), которые находятся в динамическом взаимодействии.

Эмпирическую базу исследования составляют: 1) статистические данные, характеризующие рождаемость, смертность, миграцию населения; 2) комплекс социологических исследований демографического потенциала и демографических тенденций в сельской местности, проведенных в Белгородской области в 2021-2024 гг. коллективом ученых НИУ «БелГУ», включающий массовый социологический анкетный опрос N=1000 (2021 г.), серию фокус-групповых интервью и экспертных опросов (N=50, ежегодно).

**Результаты.** Проведенный нами теоретический и эмпирический анализ позволяет сформулировать ряд практических рекомендаций для органов власти различных уровней, бизнес-сообщества, общественных структур и т.д., направленных на улучшение основных параметров демографического развития сельских территорий:

1. Формирование региональных экспертных групп в сфере демографического развития. «Проблема эффективности и результативности демографических процессов и мер по их регулированию затрагивает интересы не только государственных служащих и политиков, предпринимающих определенные попытки реагирования на демографические кризисы, но и ученых, занимающихся изучением демографических вызовов».

Решение проблемы усиления принципа научной обоснованности демографической политики на селе требует масштабного привлечения экспертов к разработке и реализации программ и проектов демографического развития. На наш взгляд, отбор экспертов должен быть дифференцированным и включать ученых, специализирующихся в разных областях знаний, в частности, экспертов в области демографии, социологии управления, социологии семьи,

социологии молодежи, социальной геронтологии. Это позволит обеспечить адресный и более концентрированный подход к разработке проектов и программ демографического развития.

Современные цифровые технологии позволяют искать экспертов по всей стране и обеспечивать их включение в рабочий процесс. Перспективным представляется создание электронной базы данных экспертов в области демографического развития, которая параллельно функционирует как интерактивная площадка для обсуждения вопросов и проблем демографического развития, и которая в дальнейшем может быть использована для организации открытых онлайн-конференций, форумов и симпозиумов.

2. Развитие научно обоснованного комплексного мониторинга эффективности региональной демографической политики. Объективно востребованная тенденция поиска новых инструментов и технологий демографического развития сельских территорий предполагает разработку и внедрение систем индикаторов для оценки регулирующих воздействий.

В условиях турбулентного и высокодинамичного общества проблема индикаторов и показателей, с помощью которых можно оценить результативность/эффективность демографической политики, имеет большое значение. Сегодня необходимо научно обосновать и разработать показатели, которые позволят оценить социодинамику демографических процессов. Они должны отражать их объективные и субъективные стороны.

На основе анализа и обобщения государственных и региональных документов в области демографии, обобщения источников информации, в том числе данных Федеральной службы государственной статистики, мы предлагаем набор показателей, мониторинг которых позволит оценить эффективность демографической политики в сельской местности: а) мониторинг планов воспроизводства населения; б) мониторинг доходов населения и участия в социальных программах; в) мониторинг состояния здоровья населения; г) мониторинг качества и доступности услуг в таких сферах, как образование, здравоохранение и социальное обслуживание, содействие занятости; д) мониторинг качества инфраструктуры; е) социологическое исследование «Демографическое благополучие населения сельских территорий».

Для оценки предлагаемых показателей используется комплекс методов, таких как: оценка информации в официальных источниках, данные о принятых и действующих законодательных актах и программных документах в области демографии и семейной политики; официальные статистические данные, характеризующие демографическую и социально-экономическую ситуацию, размещенные на сайте Федеральной службы государственной статистики, а

также в Единой межведомственной информационно-статистической системе; данные периодических выборочных обследований Федеральной службы государственной статистики по демографическим проблемам; данные о демографической и социально-экономической ситуации в Российской Федерации.

3. Создание региональных и муниципальных Центров поддержки социальных практик активного долголетия. Предлагается более широкое использование методологии сохранения и развития ресурсного потенциала старшего поколения, что позволяет дифференцированно подходить к формированию стратегии активного долголетия с учетом возможностей и мотивации различных групп пожилых и старых людей.

**Заключение.** В условиях современной динамично меняющейся действительности перспективы демографического развития сельских территорий неоднозначны, а прогнозирование ситуации с демографическим развитием затруднено. В настоящее время, в эпоху турбулентности социально-экономических процессов, в демографических прогнозах исследователей нет согласия.

В современных условиях научно-методическое обеспечение и систематический мониторинг демографических процессов в сельской местности становятся залогом быстрого и адекватного ответа на демографические вызовы.

**Ключевые слова:** депопуляция; сельские территории; демографическое развитие; социальное воспроизводство; социально-демографическая безопасность

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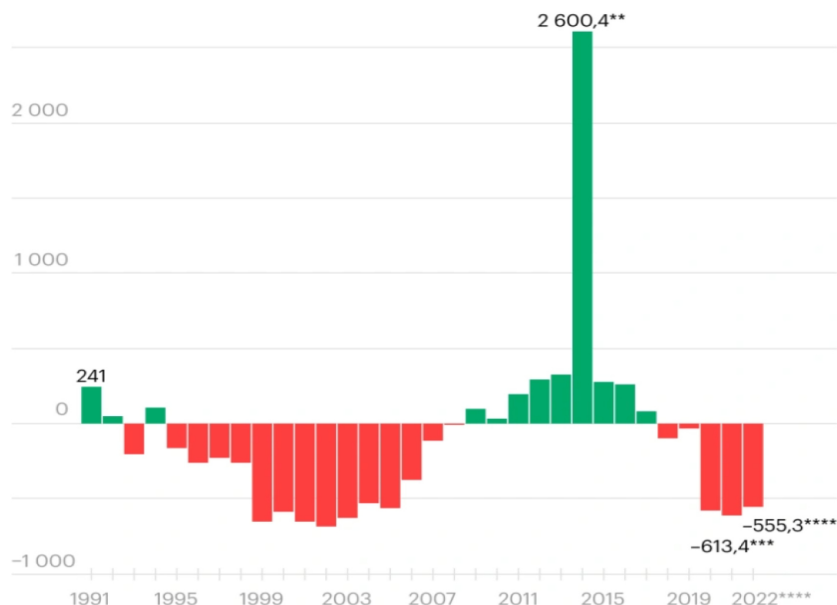
## Introduction

One of the strategic objectives of the Russian State Policy is the solution of urgent problems in the sphere of demography. The abovementioned goal is particularly relevant in modern conditions of significant changes, both in their characteristic and possible consequences, composition and size of the population. Investigations of the Human Capital Multidisciplinary Research Centre state that “demographic waves are typical for Russia – fluctuations in the number of births and individual age groups due to both demographic and socio-economic natures. In some years they soften, for instance, in Russia in 2000-s, and in others, such as in the 2020-s, on the contrary, they intensify these trends” [1]. Official data from the Federal State Statistics Service attests that “constant number of Russian residents as of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 was 146.425 million

people and was down 555 thousand (minus 0.38%) over the year. This follows from the preliminary estimate of the resident population posted by the Federal State Statistics Service on 31 January” [2] – Fig.1.

Population size of the RSFSR\* as of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1991 – 148.27 million.

Population size of Russia\* as of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 – 146.425 million.



\*\*Data about the change of Russia’s population size in 2014 included Crimea’s residents for the first time

\*\*\*Changes for 2021 excluding census

\*\*\*\*Changes for 2022 including census

**Fig. 1.** Dynamic of the population size of the Russian Federation, thousands of people [2]

Modern processes of rural depopulation represent one of the key socio-economic problems that have a significant impact on the sustainability and development of agricultural regions. Population decline, increased migration processes, as well as a decrease in the birth rate and aging of the population lead to transformations of the social potential of rural communities and, as a result, to disruption of the mechanisms of social reproduction. In these conditions, it becomes critically important to develop and implement effective regulatory strategies aimed at stabilizing and replenishing the social capital of rural areas.



The process of social reproduction in rural areas encompasses the formation and maintenance of socio-demographic, cultural and economic conditions that ensure the qualitative and quantitative renewal of the population and labor resources. Depopulation, acting as a systemic factor, reduces the level of accessibility of social benefits, complicates the functioning of infrastructure and undermines traditional social ties, which dictates the need for an integrated approach to managing the reproduction process.

In common, the relevance of the topic is due to the contradiction between the need to preserve and develop rural areas as the most important elements of the national socio-economic system and the increasing demographic risks caused by depopulation.

Demographic processes are currently undergoing significant changes under the influence of several key factors. First, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made significant adjustments to the dynamics of population development. The impact of the spread of the virus and related restrictive measures has affected not only the reproduction rates of the population, but also the psychological attitudes and life strategies of citizens, thereby exacerbating a number of existing socio-economic difficulties.

Secondly, the processes of accelerated automation and digitalization of the economic sphere have an important impact, which transform the structure of labor activity and social relationships, having an indirect impact on the demographic situation and social behavior of the population. I.E. Kalabikhina emphasizes that «under the influence of digitalization the preconditions for inequality of different demographic groups in the near future are being formed. Digitalization of the economy can affect different socio-demographic groups in different ways: women and men, young and old, households with and without children, urban and rural dwellers. <...> It is crucial today to systematize the directions of possible mutual influences of demographic development and digitalization” [3, p. 149].

The third factor is the increased risks and uncertainty caused by the Special military operation and its economic and geopolitical consequences. This has the greatest impact on the border areas – Belgorod, Kursk and Voronezh regions. As a result of the special operation, there is a massive outflow of the economically active population from Russia, while an increase in the birth rate is not noted and is not predicted. According to experts, “the main impact on the birth rate in Russia will be indirect, because families will not be able to plan for the birth of children. The longer the mobilization lasts, the greater the impact. The Russian economy is already experiencing a shortage of young workers and is in

danger of stagnation, which may last a long time after the special operation” [4]. As I. Yefremov notes, “if hostilities continue in the coming months, as expected, less than 1.2 million people may be born in Russia next year, which is the lowest figure in modern history” [4]. Thus, experts agree that the consequences of the pandemic, as well as “the consequences of the February and especially September events, will be perhaps the most serious demographic challenge for Russia in recent history” [5], including because “the anxiety level has jumped higher now than at the beginning of the special military operation and at the peak of the pandemic” [5].

All three of the above factors have a complex impact on the demographic situation. On the one hand, they pose significant challenges: increased risks and uncertainty reduce the attractiveness of living in border regions, lead to an outflow of economically active population and exacerbate demographic decline, especially in terms of fertility. On the other hand, such conditions can stimulate government support measures, resource mobilization, and social programs aimed at stabilizing and developing regions, which can potentially mitigate negative trends. Thus, the influence of factors is ambiguous and requires a comprehensive analysis to develop an effective demographic policy.

Insufficient development of infrastructure, especially social infrastructure, relatively low-income levels, and limited employment opportunities exacerbate the process of rural depopulation. This demographic trend is observed in most developed countries of the world, including Russia, and is characterized by a demographic imbalance, when rural areas become donors of population for agglomerations.

The researchers note that “the rural population in Russia is rapidly declining both in absolute and relative terms. Long-term trends towards a progressive (without returning to the indicators of previous years) decline in the rural population began to take shape in the RSFSR by the end of the 50s of the XX century” [6, p. 152]. In turn, A.A. Vyalshina emphasizes that “in parallel with the desertification of significant territories in part of the population, there is also a so-called ‘desertification in terms of services’ (for example, ‘medical desertification’, lack of banking services, poor-quality Internet). Rural areas located near urban centers are involved (actively involved) in the processes of economic, transport and infrastructural development due to counter-urbanization, labor migration or secondary residence. While in remote areas, the gap between urban and rural areas turns many residents into a kind of ‘second-class citizens’, as its consequences increase internal social inequality and worsen the situation of the most vulnerable groups of the population” [7].

Currently, ensuring the sustainable development of rural areas and, as a result, their social reproduction is of particular importance in demographic policy.

Considering the concept of social reproduction, we will rely on the methodological principles of population reproduction, however, we will take into account not only the quantitative change in the population, but also the transformation of its qualitative characteristics. In this regard, we consider the social reproduction of rural territories as a self-regulated and regulated process of renewing the quantitative and qualitative resources of rural territories necessary to stabilize rural socio-territorial communities, overcome degradation processes and ensure its sustainable further growth.

The purpose of the article is to identify the main directions of regulating the social reproduction of rural areas based on the analysis of demographic processes taking place in them.

**Purpose.** The aim of the article is to analyze the current reality regarding the demographic processes occurring in rural areas and to identify the main directions of regulating the process of social reproduction of rural areas.

### **Materials and methods**

When considering the process of social reproduction of rural areas, we will rely on the concept of rural networks developed by a team of authors led by Dutch economist Frederick Van der J.D Ploeg [8]. Dutch scientists have combined numerous theoretical concepts and ideas regarding rural development, rural networks, in their opinion, appear to be multidimensional, multifunctional with a multitude of intersectoral interactions. In the framework of the proposed concept, scientists identify several conceptual blocks in the structure of rural networks (among them: endogeneity, sustainability, social structure of the population, social capital, etc.), which are in dynamic interaction.

In addition, the work is based on the concept of sustainable development. This concept considers rural development through the prism of a balanced interaction of economic, social and environmental factors, which makes it possible to ensure the long-term viability of rural communities. Within the framework of sustainable development, the emphasis is on preserving natural resources, strengthening the social structure, developing the local economy and improving the quality of life. The work of Teresa de Noronha Vaz and Peter Neukamp “Multitasking in rural areas: Technological change and sustainable development” is of methodological interest. The study pays special attention to the demographic characteristics of rural regions, which affect the employment structure and the possibilities of using technology. The authors show that the

introduction of technology and the ability to perform several types of activities simultaneously (multitasking) make it possible to maintain employment and involve a wider age range of the population, including youth and the elderly. Technological changes are contributing to the creation of jobs that do not require a permanent presence in the city center. This reduces the level of migration from rural areas and contributes to demographic stabilization [15, p. 111].

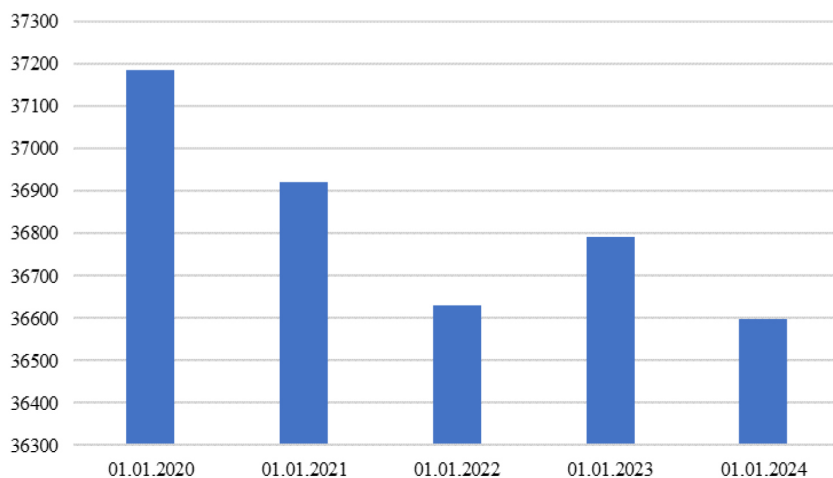
The empirical basis of the study was:

Statistical indicators reflecting the levels of fertility, mortality and migration of the population;

The results of comprehensive sociological studies of the demographic potential and trends in the development of rural areas of the Belgorod region, conducted by a team of scientists from the National Research University “Belgorod State University” in the period from 2021 to 2024. This includes a massive questionnaire survey with a sample of 1,000 people conducted in 2021, as well as a series of focus group interviews and expert surveys with 50 participants, which were conducted annually.

## Results

The demographic situation in rural areas of Russia is characterized by an ageing population, low birth rate, high mortality and active migration outflow, which causes a pronounced demographic trend of rural population loss.

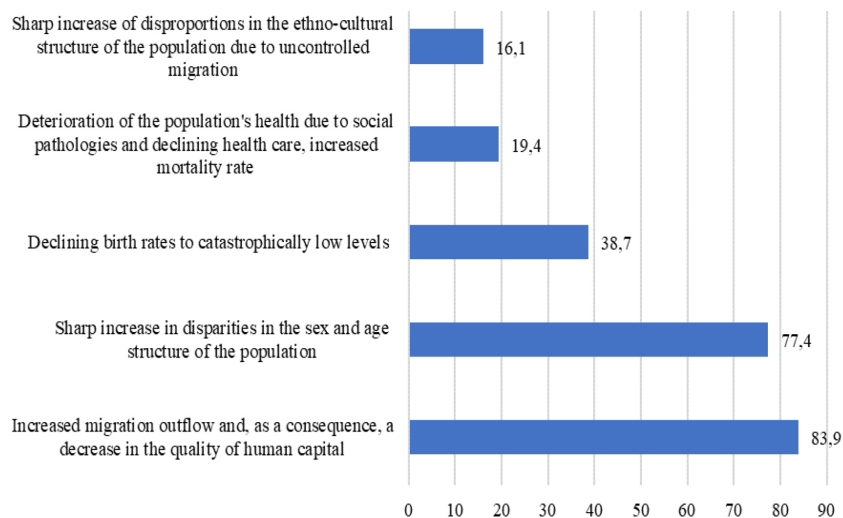


**Fig. 2.** Change in the rural population in the Russian Federation in 2020-2024, thousands of people

The processes of rural population loss continue to increase due to both natural population decline and migration outflow. The analysis of changes in the rural population of the Russian Federation has shown that over the last five years it has decreased by 588.2 thousand people – Fig. 2. When extending the time range and comparing 2024 with 2010, the reduction in the rural population of the country will amount to more than 3 million people or 8.6%.

The citizens living in rural areas surveyed by us in the course of sociological research noted the negative dynamics of mortality, fertility and migration rates and expressed their conviction that “the situation will not change” in the near future (94%).

As for the representatives of the expert community, most of them noted that “the current reality regarding demographic processes in rural areas can be described as ‘risky’” (74%). Experts have identified the main threats to the socio-demographic security of rural areas of the Central Black Earth region: a decrease in the birth rate to a critically low level – less than 1.3 children per 1 woman of reproductive age (38.7%), an increase in imbalances in the sex and age structure of the population, in particular, population aging, gender imbalance (77.4%), as well as increased migration outflow, and as a result, a decrease in human capital (83.9%) – Fig. 3.



**Fig. 3.** Distribution of experts' answers to the question: “What threats to socio-demographic security in rural areas of the Central Black Earth Region, from your point of view, are most likely to materialize in the next 10 years? (specify up to 3 answer options)”, %

According to experts, most of these threats can be realized in the next 10 years, while the greatest concern is the increased migration outflow and the associated decrease in the quality of human capital, as indicated by 83.9% of respondents. This indicates a critical problem of leakage of labor and intellectual resources from rural areas, which negatively affects its development. The second most important factor is the sharp increase in imbalances in the gender and age structure of the population, selected by 77.4% of experts, which indicates a demographic imbalance with a predominance of elderly residents and a shortage of young people. A decrease in the birth rate to a catastrophically low level was noted by 38.7% of respondents, which exacerbates the long-term problems of population reproduction. The deterioration of public health, as well as a sharp increase in imbalances in the ethno-cultural structure of the population, are assessed as less likely, but still significant threats, with indicators of 19.4% and 16.1%, respectively.

Indeed, in today's unstable and rapidly changing social and economic environment, demographic prospects seem ambiguous. As V.G. Dobrokhleb notes, "for the third year, the Russian population has been in a situation of a 'perfect storm': in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, rapid technological changes associated with the digitalization of the entire living space, and increasing international tensions taking place against the background of the aging of the country's population" [9, p. 67]. This creates additional challenges for ensuring demographic sustainability, especially in rural regions of the Central Black Earth region. In the current era of turbulence of socio-economic processes, "there is no agreement in the demographic forecasts of researchers" [10, p. 86], which underlines the complexity and ambiguity of forecasting the demographic development of territories.

Experts suggest using a range of technologies to overcome the current demographic and social situation. First of all, digitalization of healthcare and the introduction of telemedicine have great potential to reduce mortality from chronic diseases by 15-20% in five years, which is important in the context of an aging population. Automation and robotization of agriculture can increase the productivity of the Central Black Earth regions by 25-30%, creating economic incentives to retain the young population. Digital educational platforms and retraining programs will reduce youth unemployment to 10% in 3-4 years, improving employment in remote and rural areas. The development of smart cities with modern infrastructure is designed to improve the quality of life and attractiveness of the regions, contributing to population growth by 5-7% in the long term. Also, the introduction of digital services to support young families –

unified social assistance portals and mortgage programs – will help increase the birth rate by 10-15% in the target territories. With investments of about 1-2% of GDP annually, the integrated implementation of these technologies will help stabilize the demographic situation and ensure socio-economic development in the region.

Experts unanimously recognize regional authorities as the main subject of demographic policy, since they are the ones closest to the real problems and needs of the local population. It is the regional authorities that have the necessary resources and powers to adapt federal programs to the specifics of specific territories, taking into account their socio-economic and cultural characteristics. In addition, they effectively interact with the local community, businesses and social institutions, which allows them to quickly respond to changes in the demographic situation and implement targeted support measures. This approach contributes to a more accurate allocation of funds and an increase in the effectiveness of demographic initiatives, which is critical for the sustainable development of the regions.

According to 95.7% of experts, today there is an objective need to improve the tools used by government authorities to manage the demographic development of rural areas. Our theoretical and empirical analysis allows us to formulate a number of practical recommendations designed to improve the indicators of social reproduction of rural areas in conditions of depopulation.

1. *Formation of regional expert groups in the field of demographic development.* As N.P. Goncharova notes, “the problem of the effectiveness and efficiency of demographic processes and their regulatory measures affects the interests of not only civil servants and politicians who are making certain attempts to respond to demographic crises, but also scientists involved in the study of demographic challenges” [11, p.14]. The formation of regional expert groups in the field of demographic development is one of the key measures aimed at improving the effectiveness of demographic process management at the local level. Such groups should consist of qualified specialists from various fields: demographers, sociologists, economists, representatives of government authorities and public organizations, as well as experts working directly with rural areas. The main task of these teams is a comprehensive analysis of the socio-demographic situation, taking into account regional and local characteristics, which makes it possible to identify the causes of depopulation and develop adaptive strategies to reduce it. Regional expert groups ensure regular monitoring of key indicators of demographic potential, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and initiatives. Based on the data obtained, they form

practical recommendations that promote sustainable social reproduction and create conditions for improving the quality of life in rural areas. An important aspect of their work is the organization of interaction between different levels of government and stakeholders, which contributes to the coordination of actions and the formation of integrated approaches to solving demographic problems. The creation of such groups helps to reduce the risks of errors in decision-making, accelerate the implementation of innovative solutions and social initiatives aimed at stabilizing the population. However, for the effective implementation of this recommendation, it is necessary that the initiative comes from regional authorities with the involvement of federal resources and ensures a constant exchange of information with local communities. Financial and institutional support for expert groups is important for their long-term activities and achieving sustainable results. Thus, the formation of regional expert groups becomes the foundation for the development of an adaptive management system for demographic processes, which is especially important in the context of increasing depopulation of rural areas.

2. *The development and implementation of adapted social programs* is one of the key strategies aimed at the stabilization and development of rural areas, taking into account their unique characteristics and needs. Authorities are required to develop a set of targeted support measures that take into account the specifics of local conditions and affect the main aspects of the population's life – housing conditions, quality and accessibility of medical services, education, as well as infrastructure that directly affects the comfort level and prospects of residents. Improving housing conditions is not only the construction of new housing, but also the modernization of existing ones, increasing the energy efficiency of houses, providing utilities, which creates a stable basis for living and significantly increases the attractiveness of rural settlements. An important component is the modernization of the healthcare system, including the development of primary health care, equipping paramedic and obstetric centers with modern equipment, attracting qualified personnel and using telemedicine technologies, which is especially important due to the remoteness of many rural areas from large medical centers. The improvement of the education system involves the introduction of teacher training programs, the creation of conditions for distance learning and additional education, which contributes to the formation of competitive human capital and reducing the educational gap between urban and rural areas. The central effect of such programs is a significant improvement in the quality of life, which helps to retain young people and stimulates migration back from cities, thereby reducing the level of regional extinction. Special attention



should be paid to an integrated approach, when social measures are integrated with economic initiatives that create jobs and opportunities for self-realization. For the successful implementation of these programs, constant feedback from the local population and the expert community is needed, allowing timely adjustment of support measures to meet changing conditions. Thus, adapted social programs become the foundation for sustainable rural development, reducing social tensions and increasing the demographic stability of the region.

3. *Active cooperation with public and religious organizations* is an important element of an integrated approach to social development and strengthening of civil society. Public and religious structures act as intermediaries between State institutions and the population, having a deep understanding of local traditions, values and needs. Effective cooperation with them allows authorities to more accurately identify the problems of human settlements, respond to social challenges in a timely manner and create conditions for the sustainable development of communities. Interaction with public organizations promotes the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes, increases the level of social activity, and creates an environment of trust and mutual assistance. Religious organizations, in turn, play an important role in strengthening the moral foundations of society, supporting family values and providing psychological assistance, especially in times of crisis. Joint projects implemented with the participation of these organizations cover a wide range of areas, from social services for vulnerable groups to educational programs and cultural initiatives, which contribute to the harmonious development of society. It is important to emphasize that in order to maximize the effectiveness of such interaction, it is necessary to establish a permanent dialogue and partnership based on mutual respect and consideration of the interests of all parties. Government agencies should create conditions for the creation of advisory councils and working groups with the participation of representatives of public and religious associations, as well as ensure transparency and openness of joint actions. This approach not only improves the quality of implemented measures, but also strengthens social stability, reduces the level of conflict, and helps to form civic identity and responsibility. Ultimately, active cooperation with public and religious organizations contributes to the formation of a more cohesive, sustainable and harmonious society.

## **Conclusion**

In the context of rural depopulation, comprehensive regulation aimed at preserving and reproducing the social potential of the region is becoming important. The main problem is the decline in the number and aging of the pop-

ulation, which exacerbates the demographic and economic situation, reducing the quality of life and social activity. To stabilize the situation, it is necessary to strengthen the role of state institutions and activate local communities, including public and religious organizations, in order to create a sustainable system of social support and motivation for living in rural areas. An important area is infrastructure development, improvement of employment conditions and social protection, which helps to retain and attract residents. Regulation should take into account measures to strengthen family values and support young families, which increases fertility and contributes to demographic stabilization. In general, a successful solution to the problem of depopulation requires a comprehensive multi-level approach, taking into account the specifics of rural areas and their socio-economic context.

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#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Dianna V. Khripkova:** implementation of the research, interpretation of the results, preparation of the text of the article.

**Kirill A. Khripkov:** implementation of the research, interpretation of the results, preparation of the text of the article.

**Svetlana A. Vangorodskaya:** implementation of the research, interpretation of the results, preparation of the text of the article.

**Galina N. Gaydukova:** general management of the research, interpretation of the results, preparation of the text of the article.

### **ВКЛАД АВТОРОВ**

**Хрипкова Д.В.:** проведение исследования, интерпретация результатов, подготовка текста статьи.

**Хрипков К.А.:** проведение исследования, интерпретация результатов, подготовка текста статьи.

**Вангородская С.А.:** проведение исследования, интерпретация результатов, подготовка текста статьи.

**Гайдукова Г.Н.:** общее руководство исследованием, интерпретация результатов, подготовка текста статьи.

### **DATA ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Dianna V. Khripkova**, PhD in Social Studies, Associate Professor of the Department of Social Technologies and Civil Service  
*Belgorod State University*  
85, Pobedy Str., Belgorod, 308015, Russian Federation  
davtyan@bsuedu.ru

**Kirill A. Khripkov**, PhD in Social Studies, Associate Professor of the Department of International Relations, Foreign Regional Studies and Political Science  
*Belgorod State University*  
85, Pobedy Str., Belgorod, 308015, Russian Federation  
khripkov@bsuedu.ru

**Svetlana A. Vangorodskaya**, Doctor of Social Studies, Professor of the Department of Social Technologies and Civil Service  
*Belgorod State University*  
85, Pobedy Str., Belgorod, 308015, Russian Federation  
vangorodskaya@bsuedu.ru

**Galina N. Gaydukova**, PhD in Social Studies, Associate Professor of the Department of Management  
*RANEPA St. Petersburg*  
57/43 Sredny prospect, Vasilievsky Island, 199178, Saint-Petersburg, Russian Federation  
gaydukova-gn@ranepa.ru

### **ДАННЫЕ ОБ АВТОРАХ**

**Хрипкова Дианна Вазгеновна**, кандидат социологических наук, доцент кафедры социальных технологий и государственной службы

*Белгородский государственный национальный исследовательский университет*

*ул. Победы, 85, г. Белгород, 308015, Российская Федерация*

*davtyan@bsuedu.ru*

**Хрипков Кирилл Александрович**, кандидат социологических наук, доцент кафедры международных отношений, зарубежного регионоведения и политологии

*Белгородский государственный национальный исследовательский университет*

*ул. Победы, 85, г. Белгород, 308015, Российская Федерация*

*khripkov@bsuedu.ru*

**Вангородская Светлана Анатольевна**, доктор социологических наук, профессор кафедры социальных технологий и государственной службы

*Белгородский государственный национальный исследовательский университет*

*ул. Победы, 85, г. Белгород, 308015, Российская Федерация*

*vangorodskaya@bsuedu.ru*

**Гайдукова Галина Николаевна**, кандидат социологических наук, доцент кафедры менеджмента

*Северо-Западный институт управления – филиал РАНХиГС*

*Средний проспект В.О., 57/43, г. Санкт-Петербург, 199178, Российская Федерация*

*gaydukova-gn@ranepa.ru*

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