

## 5. POPULATION

### General population trends

Belarus entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with demographic characteristics that resemble those seen in most European countries and which reflect international demographic trends. Periods of growth and decline have characterized the **historical dynamics of population** in what is now Belarus. Various external factors have influenced the population of the country (*Table 5.1*), causing unpredictable disruptions and changes in its demographic development. During the Soviet era, there was a 1.5-fold increase in the total population of today territory of Belarus (the increase in Europe was 1.8-fold and in Poland – within its contemporary borders – 2.1-fold). The disruption of two world wars, political repression and foreign occupation resulted, more than once, in a drastic decrease in the country's population. The population in 1920 was 88% of what it had been in 1914; in 1946 it was 72% of what it had been in 1942 (Pirozchnik, I.I. 2000). In Belarus almost half of the Soviet era was characterized either by significant demographic loss or by compensation and the restoration of the demographic potential (1915–1925, 1941–1972, 1986–2000). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the longest period of peace in Belarus occurred after 1945 (Manak, B., Antipova, E.A. 1999).

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to changes in the livelihoods of people. Radiophobia caused by Chernobyl, as well as insecurity, unemployment and poverty, led to a sharp decline in fertility. Declines in health and living standards contributed to an increase in mortality. The transition to independence was accompanied by economic restructuring and social reforms. These factors caused a breach in the dynamics and spatial distribution of the population and the nature of demographic reproduction.

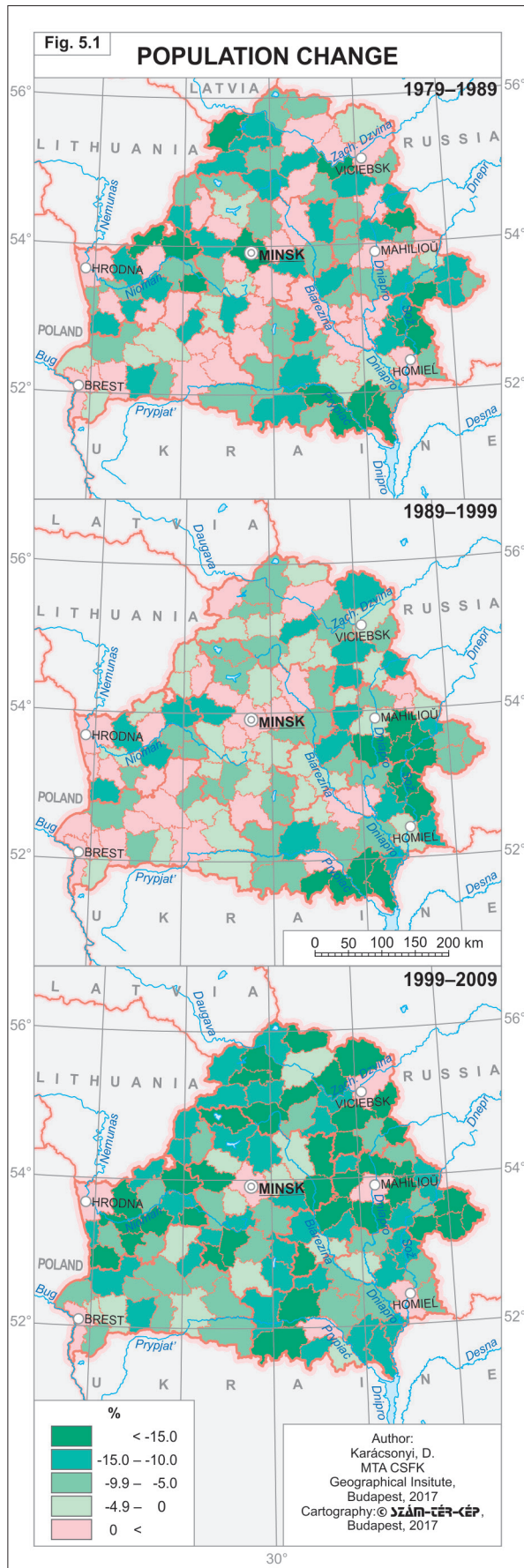
Belarus's population peaked in 1994 at 10.3 million. By early 2005, the population had fallen to less than 10 million, which meant it had returned to the level of 1986. According to the 2015 data, the population of the country was 9,481,000 (including 7,325,000 urban and 2,156,000 rural residents). Annual population declines – around 0.3% per year – characterize the dynamics of population in Belarus. The same phenomenon is seen in most Eastern European countries.

The **regional dynamics of population** are characterized by heterogeneity (*Figure 5.1*). In the 1990s, regional demographic processes were still fundamentally influenced by the Chernobyl disaster. Owing to the evacuation and resettlement of people, the recipient areas – above all towns, cities and their environs – exhibited favourable demographic changes temporary. Until the 2000s,

*Table 5.1 Change of total population in the present-day territory of Belarus (1897–2015)*

Year	1897	1914	1926	1939	1950	1959	1970	1979	1989	1999	2009	2015
Population (thousand persons)	6,673	6,899	4,986	8,912	7,709	8,056	8,992	9,533	10,152	10,045	9,504	9,481
Urban population (thousand persons)	899	990	848	1,855	1,620	2,481	3,891	5,234	6,641	6,962	7,065	7,325
Rural population (thousand persons)	5,774	5,909	4,138	7,057	6,090	5,575	5,102	4,298	3,510	3,084	2,439	2,156

Source: [http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/solialnaya-sfera/demografiya\\_2/metodologiya-otvetstvennye-za-informatsionnoe-s\\_2/index\\_704/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/solialnaya-sfera/demografiya_2/metodologiya-otvetstvennye-za-informatsionnoe-s_2/index_704/)



changes in the population of the various regions reflected such resettlement rather than local natural increase or (spontaneous) migration. By that time, however, the major resettlement initiatives had been concluded, and significant population declines were recorded everywhere except the capital city and county seats.

The capital city, Minsk, differs from all other areas in that it has tended to exhibit a positive demographic trend, with an annual increase of up to +1%. The increase has two components, natural growth and immigration. In the period 1999–2014, Minsk’s population grew by more than 14%. Meanwhile, a population decline was recorded in each of the other six regions. The largest demographic losses were seen in the Viciebsk and Mahilioŭ regions (12.7% and 11.6%). Here, the most potent factors were population ageing and increased migration outflows from the northern and eastern regions. Such areas are regarded as the “socio-economic periphery” in Belarus.

**Urban-rural population gap.** Urban and rural areas are characterized by even greater heterogeneity in terms of population dynamics. In the 1980s and 1990s, the effects of the Chernobyl disaster were most dramatically felt in rural areas (Figure 6.8). Since 1999, the urban population has increased on average by 0.2% per year, while the rural population has decreased by 1.4% (Antipova, E.A., Korotaev, V. 2014). In rural areas, the demographics are homogeneous, with population declines being recorded in every region. In the period 1999–2014, the rural population declined by 29%. The highest rates of decline were recorded in the Viciebsk, Hrodna and Mahilioŭ regions and the lowest rates in the Minsk and Brest regions. In urban areas, the demographic trends are heterogeneous, with population increases being recorded in some areas (the Brest, Homiel, Hrodna regions and Minsk city) and population decreases in others (the Viciebsk, Minsk, Mahilioŭ regions).

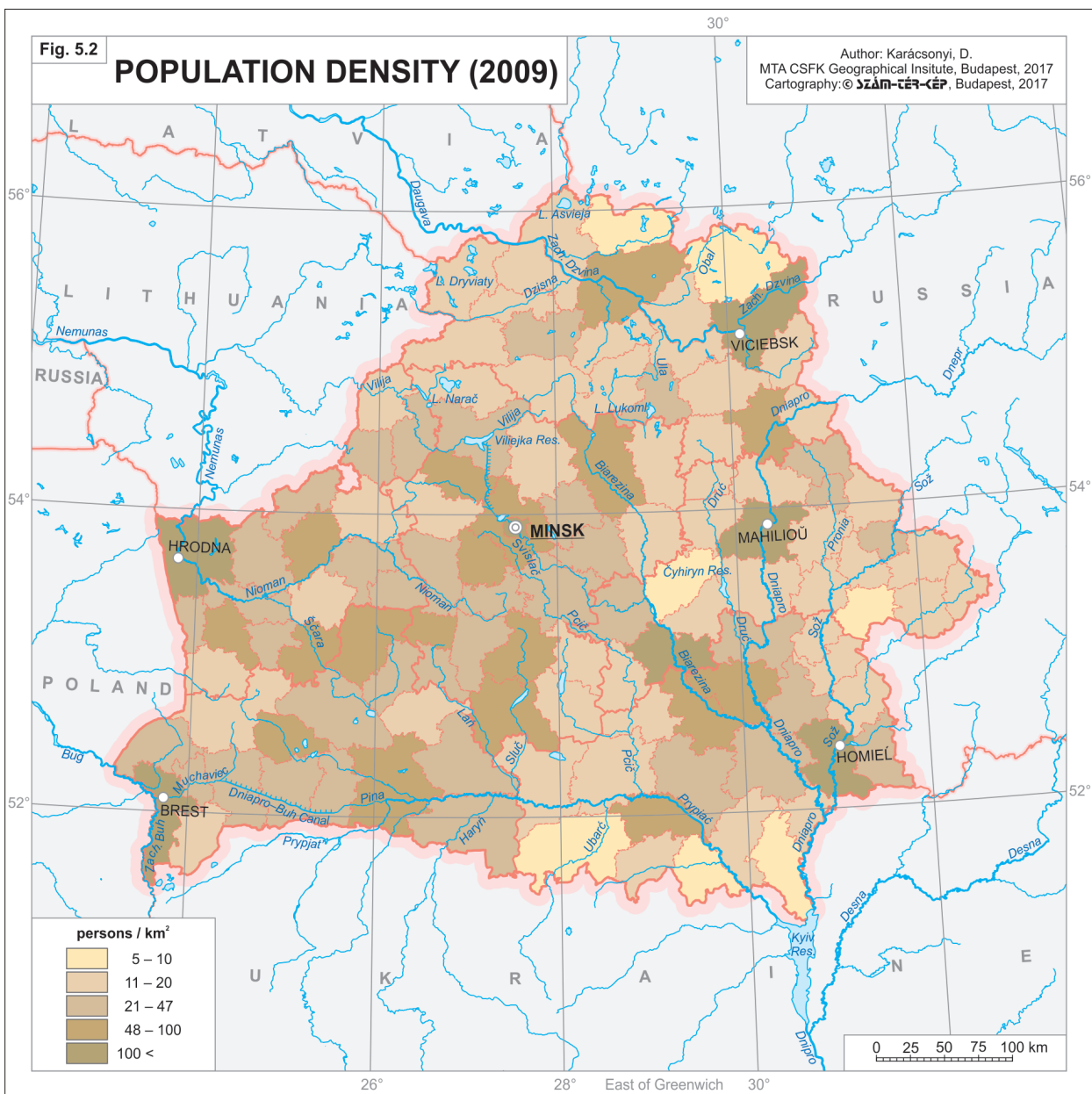
In the period 1999–2014, the differences between demographic development in urban and rural areas strengthened (Antipova, E.A., Korotaev, V. 2014). These differences reflect the socio-economic disparity between urban and rural areas. This factor is the root cause of the outflow of the working-age population from rural areas, which in turn leads to population ageing and increased mortality rates in those areas.

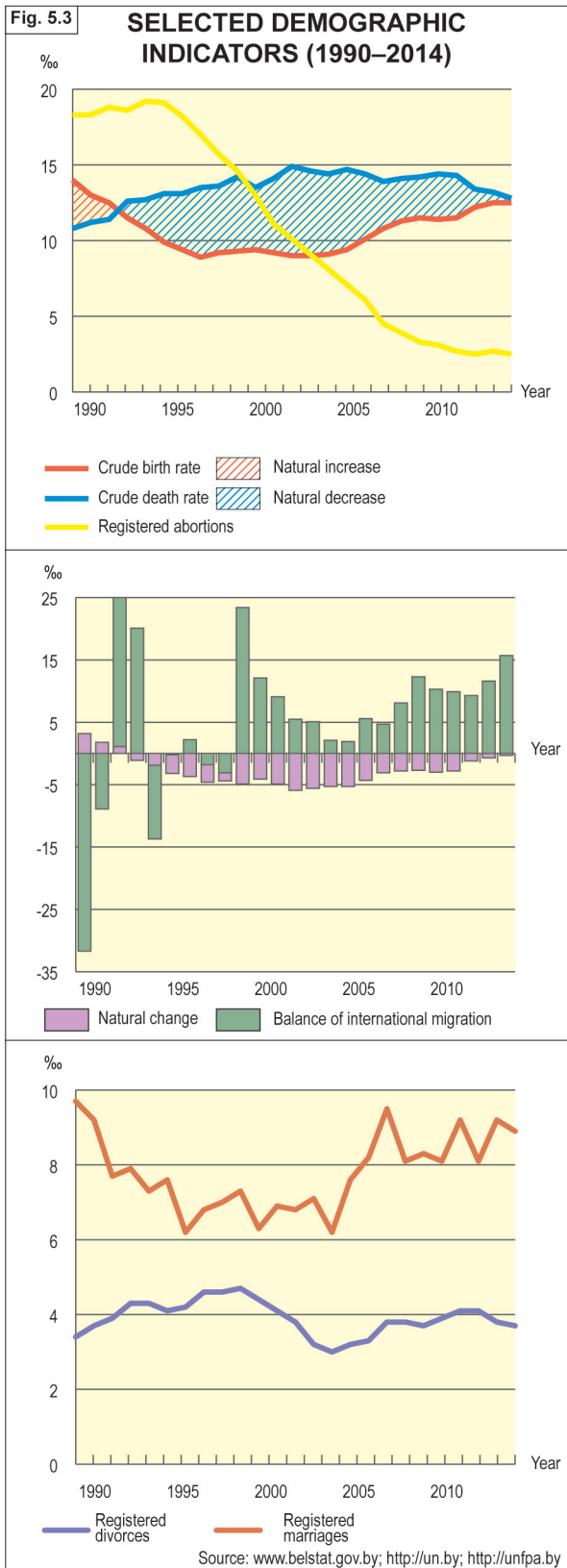
**Population density.** Belarus is less densely populated than its western neighbours, but more densely populated than Russia's Smolensk Oblast, which lies to the east. Whereas in 1979 the least densely populated areas lay in the Belarusian Lakeland and in the eastern part of Paliessie, by 2009 enormous holes had been left in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster. Population density in such areas is lower than it was in earlier decades, owing to evacuation/resettlement and outward migration (Figure 5.2). The change is particularly striking in the rural population density (Figure 6.11).

### Natural population change

The general and contemporary population trends in Belarus are characterized by a reduced birth rate and higher mortality, owing to demographic ageing (Figures 5.3, 5.5, 5.7, 5.9, Table 5.2). The same phenomena are seen in most European countries.

The **natural population change** is characterized by population decline. Since 2002, however, the rate of decrease has fallen from 5.9 to 0.3‰. Among the rural population, natural decrease appeared 20 years earlier (in 1975) than among the urban population (in 1995). This difference





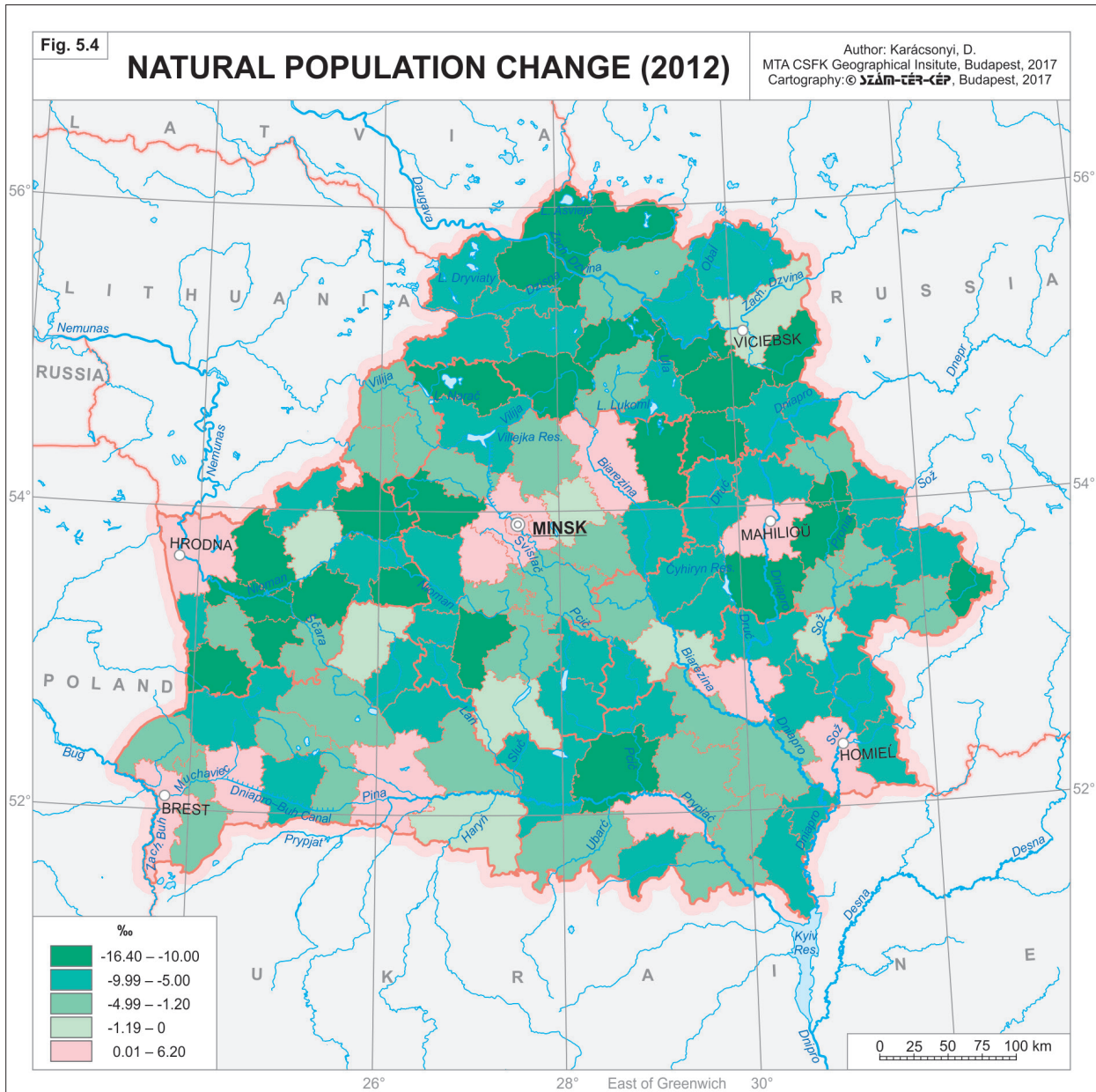
can be explained by high levels of rural-urban migration in the post-1950 period, caused by in-

dustrialization and urbanization. A distinctive feature of Belarusian demographics is the polarization between urban and rural areas, with a natural population increase (2.1‰) in the former and a natural population decline (-10.2‰) in the latter. The tenfold gap between the respective rates is noteworthy. This trend is indicative of the relative demographic revitalization of towns (since 2007 the birth rate in the urban population has exceeded the death rate) and of the demographic stagnation of rural areas (which started in the late 1970s) (Antipova, E.A., Fakeyeva, L. 2013).

Most areas in Belarus are characterized by natural population decline. The exceptions are the Brest region and the city of Minsk, which both show natural growth. At the level of the raions, natural population increase is only observed in the highly urbanized raions and in the Minsk agglomeration (Figure 5.4). The urban population in all areas, except for the Viciebsk region, shows natural growth, with the highest values (more than 5‰) in the Brest and Hrodna regions and in the city of Minsk. The rural population everywhere shows natural decline, with the highest values (over 10‰) in the Viciebsk and Hrodna regions and the lowest (less than 5‰) in the Brest and Minsk regions. Since 1999, 31 towns (27%) have made the transition from natural population decline to natural population increase.

In the early 2000s, the **crude birth rate** in Belarus was comparable with that seen in the Central European countries (Figure 5.5). In recent years, however, the birth rate has risen on account of two factors: first, a relatively large number of children were born in the early 1980s (before Chernobyl) and they have now reached reproductive age; second, government measures in support of young families have been introduced. The birth rate is 12.5‰ (2013–2014). This is similar to the rate in Eastern and Northern Europe but higher than the rates in Western Europe (10‰) and Southern Europe (9‰).

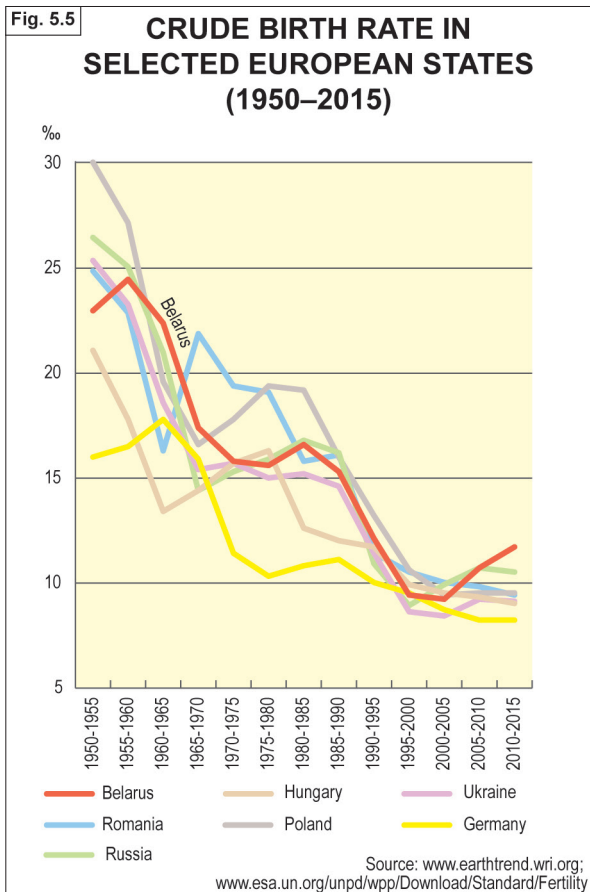
The birth rate in Belarus in 1950 was estimated at 25.5‰. The birth rate fell to its lowest level of 9‰ in 2002. Since then, it has steadily increased. The period 1970–1985 was the most favourable in terms of stable and relatively high birth rates. The highest crude birth rate in the demographic history of Belarus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was recorded in 1983 (17.6‰). Thereafter the country experienced a rapid reduction in



the crude birth rate. Between 1986 and 1997 the birth rate declined by more than 8‰. The urban and rural birth rates differ just slightly. The absence of a significant difference between the urban birth rate (12.5‰) and the rural birth rate (12.4‰) indicates similar reproductive behaviour among both urban and rural women. This has been the trend since 2002 (Antipova, E.A. 2014). There are, however, two geographical areas with relatively high birth rates – the Brest and Minsk regions, where this indicator exceeds 15‰ (Antipova, E.A. 2012; Antipova, E.A., Fakeyeva, L. 2012). The Viciebsk region, with the

highest level of demographic ageing, and the city of Minsk, which has achieved a relatively high level of socio-economic development, exhibit the lowest birth rates in the country (Figure 5.6).

The **crude death rate** in Belarus exceeds the Central European one and is closer to the average for the Eastern European countries (Figure 5.7). Accordingly, the death rate is noticeably higher than in other parts of Europe (Northern Europe – 9‰, Southern and Western Europe – 10‰). Since the Second World War the death rate in Belarus has varied by around 8–9‰. In the late 1980s, when the country began to be affect-



ed by population ageing, the death rate started to increase rapidly. In the period 1987–2002, the death rate increased by 5‰ and reached its maximum in 2002. Thereafter it declined, and it is estimated to be 12.8‰ (2014). Such a death rate is regarded as relatively high in an international comparison. The main groups of population that account for increased mortality are the elderly and males of working age. The principal factors influencing the death rate are demographic ageing, alcoholism (mainly in the countryside), and the general lack of emphasis on healthy lifestyles. The common causes of death are problems of the circulatory system and cancer.

Unlike the birth rate, the death rate exhibits differences between the rural population (death rate: 22.6‰) and the urban population (death rate: 10.4‰). The gap in mortality can be attributed to the ageing of the rural population. Due to its higher level of socio-economic development and relatively advanced healthcare system, the city of Minsk has the lowest mortality rate in the country. Among the country's regions, the

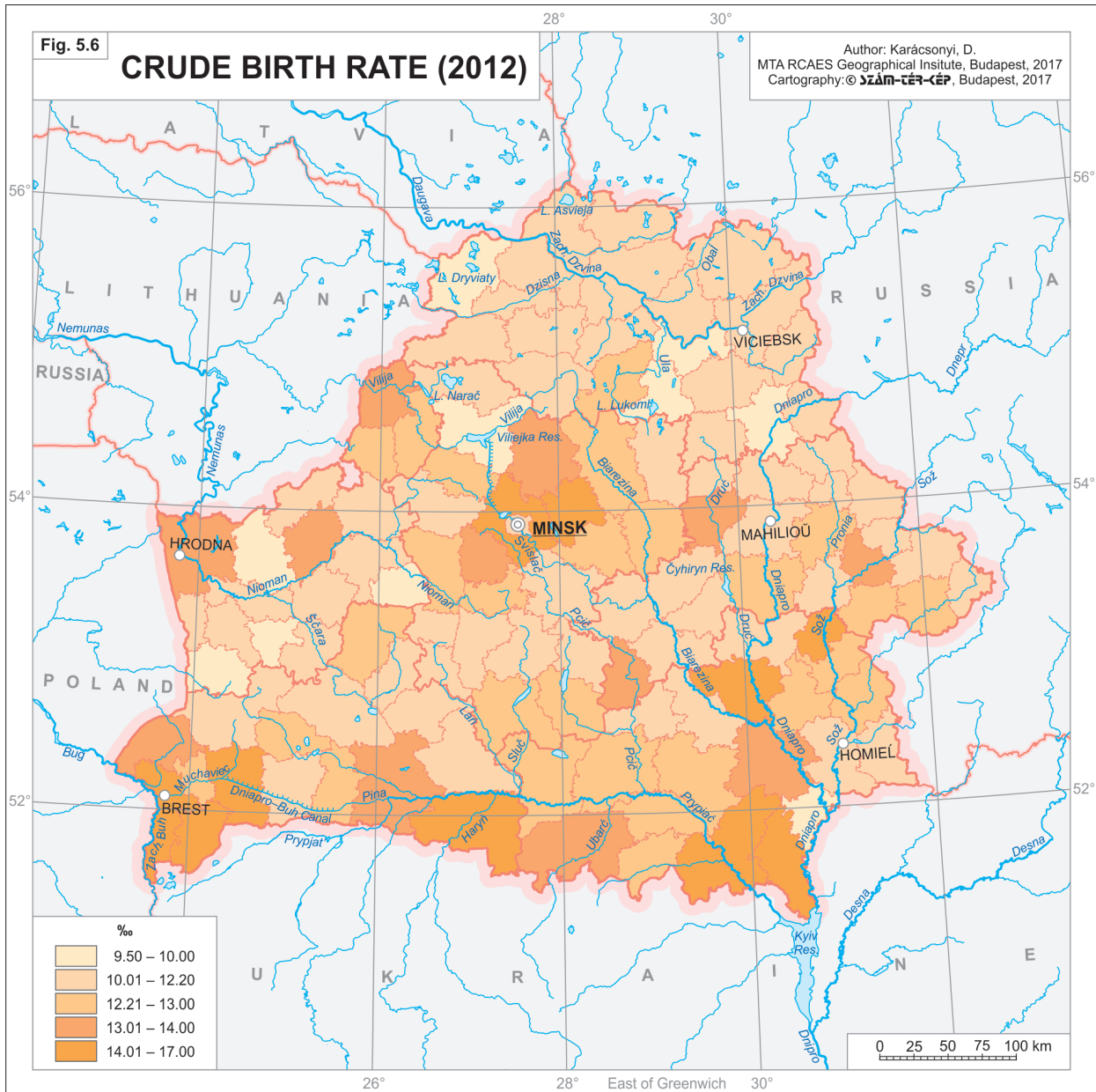
Viciebsk region has the highest mortality rate; it is also the most demographically aged one (Figure 5.8).

**Life expectancy** at birth has tended, historically, to be high and reached 70 years in the 1950s. A difference between life expectancy in Belarus and that observed in other European countries is the consistent broad gap between male and female life expectancy (Table 5.2). The difference was 10 years in the 1970s and reached almost 13 years in the late 1990s. In the 1990s, female life expectancy increased whereas male life expectancy fell. For a period lasting two decades (1992–2002), the average male Belarusian died before reaching retirement age (65 years). Average life expectancy is 73.2 years (2014), and the difference between males and females has narrowed slightly. Life expectancy is 67.8 for males and 78.4 for females (2014).

The low fertility rates pose a demographic threat to the country. For this reason, a top priority for government policy is creating the necessary conditions for sustainable demographic development. Currently, the government of Belarus is actively implementing several programs aimed at solving this demographic problem: the “National strategy for sustainable development for the period until 2020” (adopted in 2004), the “National demographic security program for 2011–2015”, and the “State program for sustainable development of rural areas for 2011–2015”.

The **structure of population by sex** indicates female dominance in Belarus. Indeed, there are 1,151 females per thousand males. The various age groups exhibit differences in terms of the gender ratio. Among people aged less than 34 years, males prevail, with a thousand men per 993 women. In the other age groups, however, females outnumber males. Owing to the gap in life expectancy, the number of males drops sharply among older age groups. In this way, the structure of population by sex becomes ever more distorted. Among people aged more than 70 years, there are 2.4 females per male. Moreover, there is no noticeable difference in the structure of population by sex between the urban and rural populations.

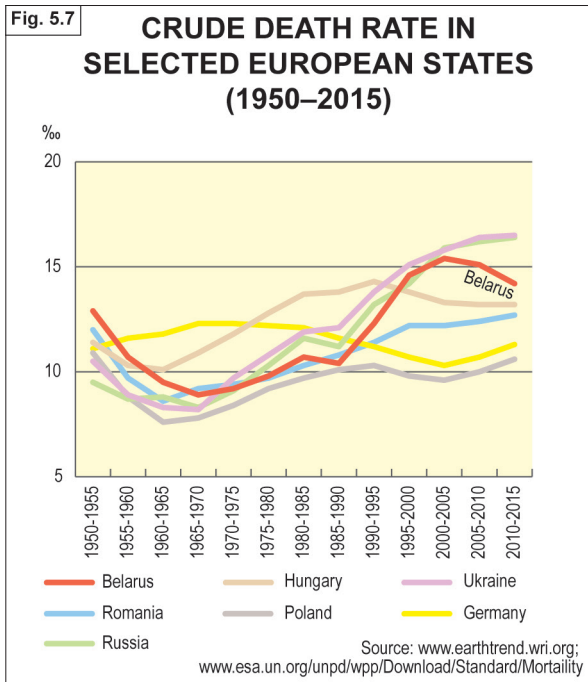
As in most European countries, the **structure of population by age** is characterized by demographic ageing. As early as the 1950s the proportion of the elderly was already more than 13%. Still, at that time, the proportion of



children (31%) was also high. Over the years, age structure has changed by decrease young population and increase of people of retirement age. After the Second World War, Belarus had a relatively high proportion of people of working age, with the figure exceeding 60% in the 2000s. Currently, the proportion of people of working age in the total population is 58.6% and falling. The structure of population by age among the urban and rural populations differs only slightly in the share of children (16.7% in urban areas and 16.6% in rural areas). On the other hand, there is a very noticeable difference between urban and

rural areas in terms of the elderly (21.7% in urban areas and 31.2% in rural areas).

**Population ageing** has been a trend ever since the 1950s. Belarus, along with many other European countries, has seen a sustained increase in the proportion of elderly people in recent decades. The share of the population aged over 60 is 18%, which is comparable with the figure for Eastern Europe (19%) but less than the figure for Europe as a whole (22%). According to this indicator, Russia is in the same group as Belarus. The share of people aged over 65 years is 16%, which is equal to the average for Eastern Europe.



The urban population exhibits a high level (19.7%) and the rural population an extremely high level (30.7%) of population ageing. The proportion of elderly people is highest in the northern and north-western areas of the country (Figure 5.9).

## Migration

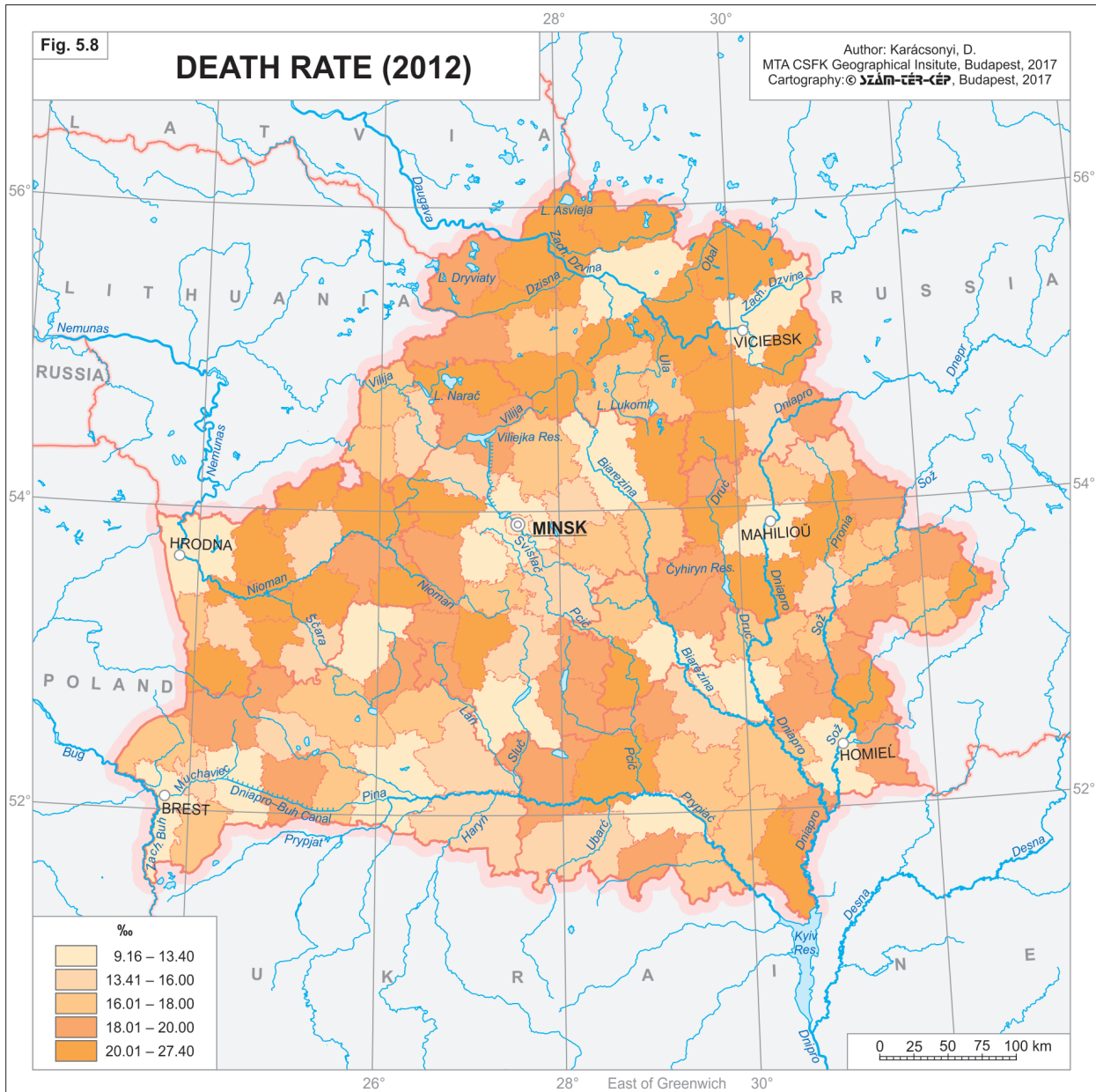
The **internal migration** of the population is less intensive than in many developed countries, where internal migration is the main factor in levelling socio-economic disparities. Annually, more than 200 thousand people change their place of residence within the country. The share of internal migration from total accounts for about 91.4% of all movements. It is dominated by intra-regional migration (inter-district): 52.8%. Meanwhile, inter-regional migration accounts for 47.2% of total internal migration (these figures are for 2013). In 2000, the respective figures were 41.8% and 58.2%. Thus, since 2000, the relative significance of inter-regional migration has increased. All intra-flows have exhibited positive net migration for the urban areas and negative for the rural areas (Figure 5.10). The main magnet for internal migration is Minsk. Each year, Minsk receives about 15 thousand migrants, mostly young people of working age.

The most intensive population exchanges occur between neighbouring areas. For example, most of the population of the Brest region enters and leaves from the nearby Minsk and Hrodna regions, and the lowest exchange occurs with the Viciebsk region. In the case of the Minsk region, the main exchange of population occurs with the Viciebsk, Brest and Hrodna regions. For the Viciebsk region, it is with Mahilioŭ, and for the city of Minsk with the Minsk region.

**International migration** (Table 5.3). In terms of international migration, Belarus has long been a donor country. Political and socio-economic factors have led people in Belarus to emigrate to the other republics of the former Soviet Union or to countries in Europe, North America and Asia. As a result, the balance of international migration has tended to be negative. In terms of transit, the country lies in a favourable economic and geographical situation. As such, it has become a corridor for international migration, both legal and illegal. Meanwhile, in view of its relative social and economic stability in comparison with the other post-Soviet countries, Belarus has become recently an attractive destination for citizens of the CIS and other foreign countries who seek temporary or permanent employment.

The migration peaked in 1990, thereafter there was a steady decline both in immigration and emigration. In 1990, Belarus had a negative migration balance. The main explanatory factor for these processes was the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the initial years of independence, the net external migration balance was – for the first time in the history of Belarus – positive. In Belarus, migration to and from the CIS countries is particularly significant. The total number of new arrivals from CIS countries was 623.9 thousand people between 1991 and 2013. The number of new arrivals from non-CIS countries was almost 5 times less: 124.6 thousand people. The main exchange occurs with the following CIS countries: Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Together, those three countries accounted for 72.3% of the total external migration. Russia is in the first place. Since 2010, Belarus has witnessed an influx of specialists mainly in the sphere of construction and trade. There has also been an increase in the number of foreign students (from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan in particular) studying at universities in Belarus (Antipova, E.A., Fakeyeva, L. 2014).





In terms of new arrivals from non-CIS countries, Lithuania was in first place, both in 2000 and in 2010. In the intervening period, the Lithuanian share increased from 1.5 to 4.6%. These figures reflect the migration of ethnic Belarusians to Belarus. The number of legal immigrants from China fell over the 10-year period by approximately a third. This may indicate the growth of illegal migration from China, mainly construction workers.

Latvia moved up from third to second place, with an almost twofold increase in the proportion of migrants. In 2010 it accounted for 2.1%

of new arrivals, compared with 1.1% ten years earlier. The reasons for this growth are identical to those affecting migration from Lithuania – the return of Belarusians to their homeland. Other important countries in terms of immigration to Belarus are Poland, Lebanon and Israel. Here, the most significant factor is so-called return migration from countries that were the destination for mass emigration in the early 1990s. Migrants are now returning to Belarus as repatriates.

The main recipient countries of Belarusian guest workers are Russia, the United States, Poland and Germany. The combined share of

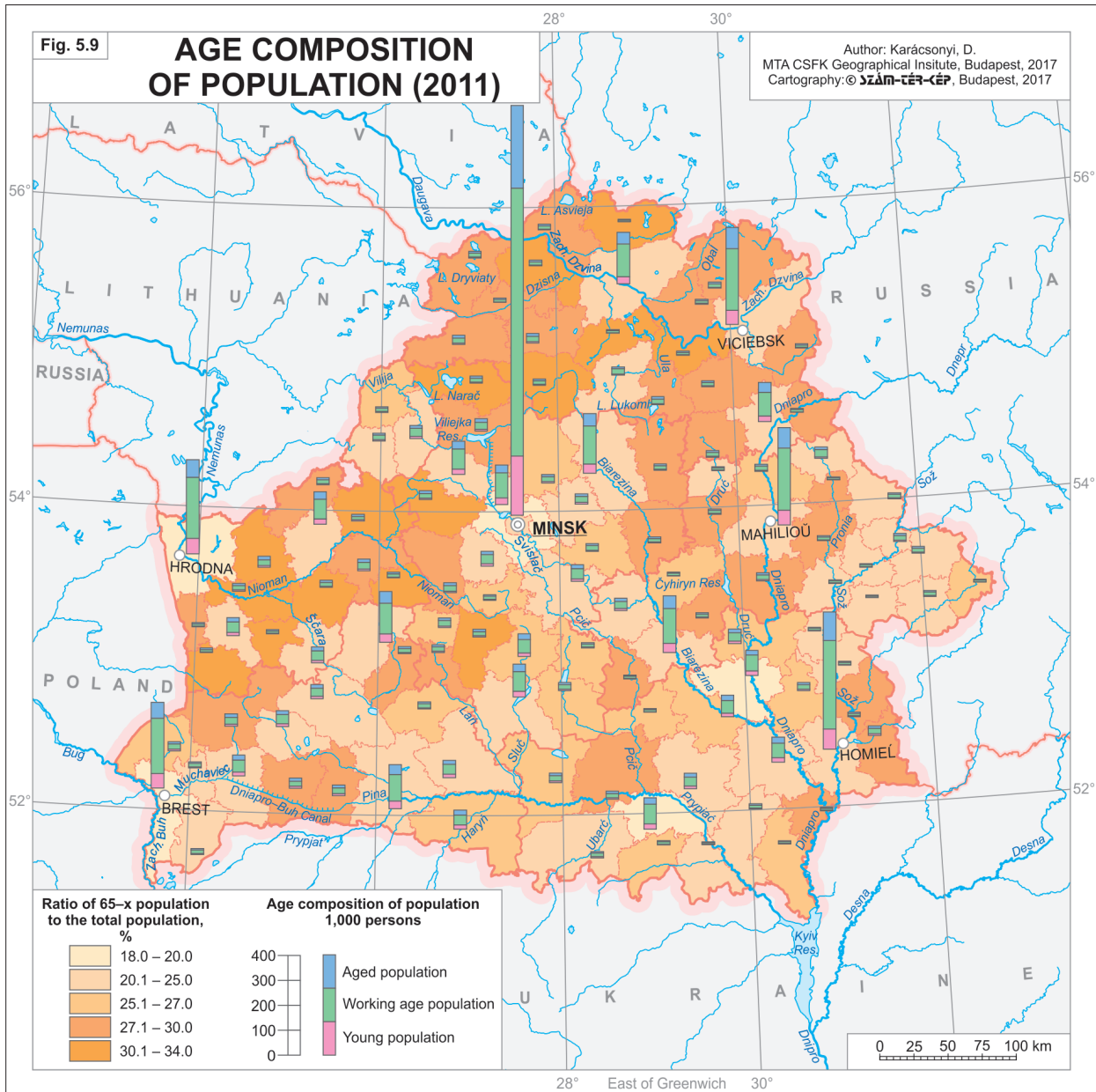
Table 5.2 Selected demographic indicators (1990–2015)

Years	Crude birth rate	Crude death rate	Natural increase/ decrease	Balance of international migration	Registered			Ratio of population		Ageing index	Life expectancy at birth		
					Marriages	Divorces	Abortions	aged under working (0–15)	aged over working (m:60 and over; f: 55 and over)		Both sexes combined	Male	Female
1990	14.0	10.8	3.2	-3.1	9.7	3.4	183	24.5	19.6	80.0	71.3	66.5	76.0
1991	13.0	11.2	1.8	-0.9	9.2	3.7	183	24.5	19.9	81.3	70.5	65.5	75.5
1992	12.5	11.4	1.1	2.4	7.7	3.9	188	24.4	20.2	83.0	70.2	64.9	75.4
1993	11.5	12.6	-1.1	2.0	7.9	4.3	186	24.2	20.5	84.9	69.1	63.8	74.4
1994	10.8	12.7	-1.9	-1.3	7.3	4.3	192	23.9	20.7	86.7	68.9	63.5	74.3
1995	9.9	13.1	-3.2	0.0	7.6	4.1	191	23.5	21.0	89.1	68.6	62.9	74.3
1996	9.4	13.1	-3.7	0.2	6.2	4.2	182	23.1	21.2	91.7	68.7	63.0	74.3
1997	8.9	13.5	-4.6	-0.2	6.8	4.6	170	22.6	21.4	94.7	68.6	62.9	74.3
1998	9.2	13.6	-4.4	-0.3	7.0	4.6	157	22.0	21.5	97.4	68.6	62.7	74.4
1999	9.3	14.2	-4.9	2.3	7.3	4.7	146	21.2	21.5	101.8	68.0	62.2	73.9
2000	9.4	13.5	-4.1	1.2	6.3	4.4	130	20.6	21.5	103.8	69.0	63.4	74.7
2001	9.2	14.1	-4.9	0.9	6.9	4.1	111	20.0	21.3	106.8	68.5	62.8	74.5
2002	9.0	14.9	-5.9	0.6	6.8	3.8	101	19.3	21.4	110.3	68.0	62.3	74.1
2003	9.0	14.6	-5.6	0.5	7.1	3.2	91	18.6	21.3	114.7	68.5	62.7	74.7
2004	9.1	14.4	-5.3	0.2	6.2	3.0	81	18.0	21.3	118.6	69.0	63.2	75.0
2005	9.4	14.7	-5.3	0.2	7.6	3.2	71	17.3	21.5	123.7	68.8	62.9	75.1
2006	10.1	14.4	-4.3	0.6	8.2	3.3	61	16.8	21.5	128.1	69.4	63.6	75.5
2007	10.8	13.9	-3.1	0.5	9.5	3.8	45	16.4	21.7	132.1	70.3	64.5	76.2
2008	11.3	14.1	-2.8	0.9	8.1	3.8	39	16.2	21.9	135.8	70.5	64.7	76.5
2009	11.5	14.2	-2.7	1.3	8.3	3.7	33	16.0	22.2	138.7	70.5	64.7	76.4
2010	11.4	14.4	-3.0	1.1	8.1	3.9	31	15.9	22.5	141.3	70.4	64.6	76.5
2011	11.5	14.3	-2.8	1.0	9.2	4.1	27	16.0	22.8	143.0	70.6	64.7	76.7
2012	12.2	13.4	-1.2	1.0	8.1	4.1	25	16.1	23.2	144.1	72.2	66.6	77.6
2013	12.5	13.2	-0.7	1.2	9.2	3.8	27	16.4	23.5	143.8	72.6	67.3	77.9
2014	12.5	12.8	-0.3	1.7	8.9	3.7	25	16.7	23.9	143.3	73.2	67.8	78.4
2015	12.4	12.6	-0.2	-	-	-	-	17.0	24.4	143.5	-	-	-

Source: [http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/solialnaya-sfera/demografiya\\_2/g/obschie-itogi-migratsii-naseleniya-respubliki-belarus/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/solialnaya-sfera/demografiya_2/g/obschie-itogi-migratsii-naseleniya-respubliki-belarus/)  
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these countries in terms of migrants from Belarus was 97% in 2008–2013. In contrast to the temporary migrants, 90% of those whose departure from the country involves a change of permanent residence had a higher education.

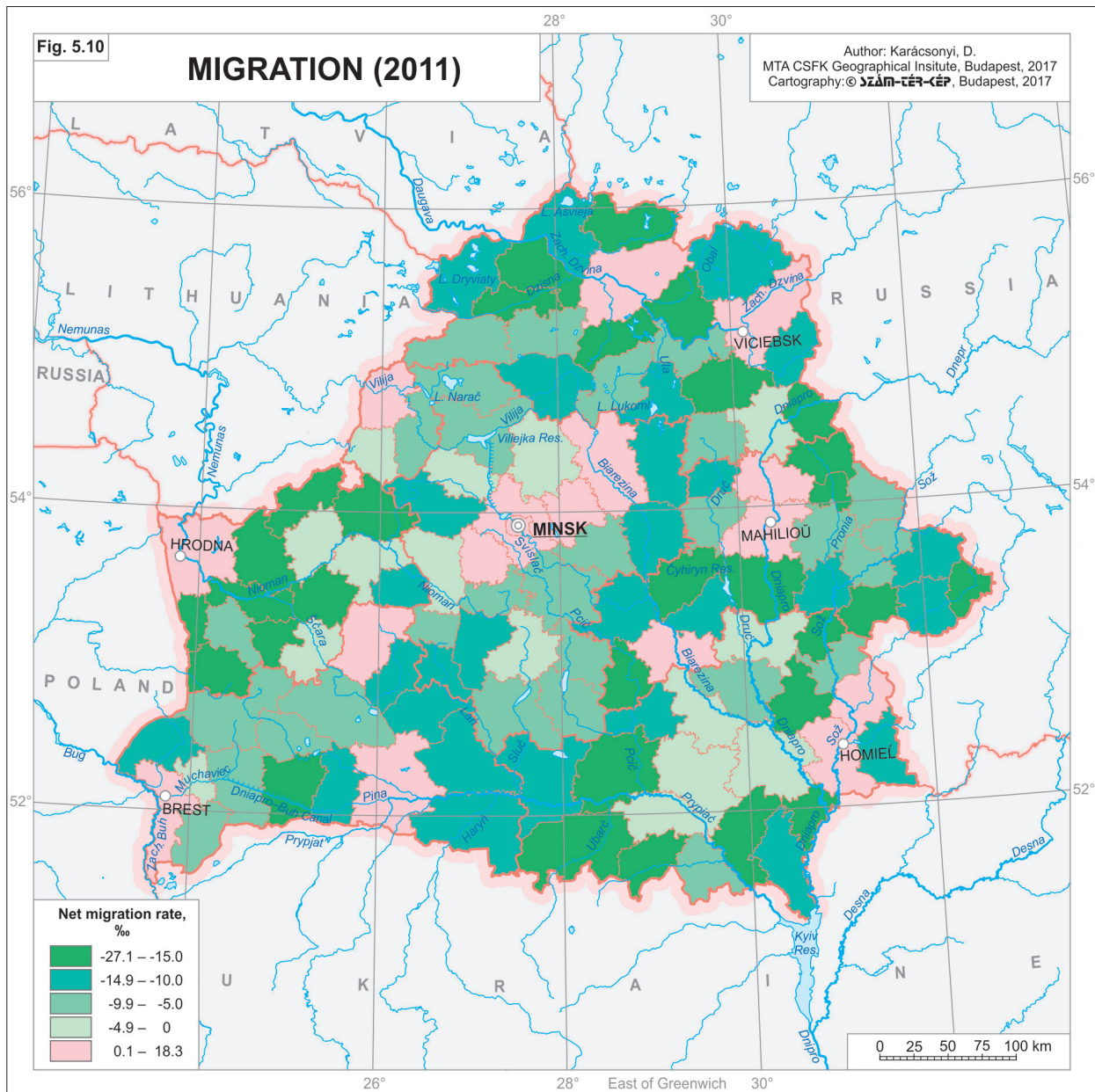
The most attractive destination for Belarusian emigrants is Russia; more than 90% of labour migrants go to Russia. Currently, many workers in the construction, agricultural, and oil production sectors are temporarily working in Russia.



The Ukrainian labour market is less popular among Belarusian emigrants. However, in recent years, for both economic and political reasons, some professionals (journalists, businessmen, mass media and cultural staff, etc.) have moved to Ukraine.

The labour markets of Europe can be divided into several categories in terms of the spheres of employment that are attractive to Belarusian migrants. In Poland, for example, there are two groups. The first group comprises highly educated professionals (professors, PhD holders, university lecturers, physicians). These people are greatly needed in Poland, as they may replace

the Polish professionals who have moved to other EU countries. The second group comprises skilled workers (e.g. truck drivers). Belarusian migrants either permanently live in Poland for the whole length of the contract term or they regularly return to Belarus (e.g. for 1–2 weeks each month). In the Lithuanian labour market, Belarusian migrants make up four categories: university professors, young well-educated scientists, students, and journalists and opposition politicians. The labour markets of other EU countries have fewer separate categories of Belarusian workers. They are mostly scientific researchers



and IT professionals. Almost all EU countries benefit from the Belarusian labour migrants, since most of them have a vocational or higher education degree (or its academic equivalent) and comply with the laws of the host country and there are no any movement restrictions except the visa regime of the Schengen zone (EU).

### Marriages and divorces

Majority of Belarusian people have traditional views on **marriage and family**. At the same time,

the political and socio-economic transition of the 1990s, collapse of the Soviet Union, and spread of European family norms (families with a small number of children, an increase in the age of first marriage, loose family bonds and the emergence of various forms of cohabitation), have led to changes in the rates of marriage and divorce. In the 1990s there was a significant reduction both in the number of marriages and in the general marriage rate. The decrease can be explained by several socio-economic factors, principally changes in the structure of population by age and sex. During the 1990s, the marriage rate decreased from 10%

Table 5.3 Dynamics of international migration (1990–2014)

Years	Immigration	Emigration	Migration balance	Arrivals from CIS	Emigration to CIS	Balance with CIS	Arrivals from non-CIS	Emigration to non-CIS	Balance with non-CIS
	thousand people								
1990	116.1	147.8	-31.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
1991	95.8	104.7	-8.9	-	-	-	-	-	-
1992	117.7	92.7	25.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
1993	86.0	65.9	20.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994	53.1	66.8	-13.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
1995	34.9	35.1	-0.2	31.2	25.6	5.6	3.7	9.5	-5.8
1996	31.9	29.7	2.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
1997	31.4	33.2	-1.8	-	-	-	-	-	-
1998	33.2	36.3	-3.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
1999	30.8	7.4	23.4	-	-	-	-	-	-
2000	25.9	13.8	12.1	23.5	7.3	16.2	2.4	6.5	-4.1
2001	23.4	14.3	9.1	21.0	8.2	12.8	2.4	6.1	-3.7
2002	18.9	13.4	5.5	16.8	8.5	8.3	2.1	4.9	-2.8
2003	18.1	13.0	5.1	15.9	8.2	7.7	2.2	4.8	-2.6
2004	14.6	12.5	2.1	12.5	8.2	4.3	2.1	4.3	-2.2
2005	13.0	11.1	1.9	11.4	7.5	3.9	1.6	3.6	-2.0
2006	14.1	8.5	5.6	12.4	6.2	6.2	1.7	2.3	-0.6
2007	14.2	9.5	4.7	12.0	7.2	4.8	2.2	2.3	-0.1
2008	17.4	9.3	8.1	14.2	6.9	7.3	3.2	2.4	0.8
2009	19.9	7.6	12.3	15.6	5.3	10.3	4.3	2.3	2.0
2010	17.2	6.9	10.3	14.3	5.1	9.2	2.9	1.8	1.1
2011	17.5	7.6	9.9	14.7	5.8	8.9	2.8	1.8	1.0
2012	18.0	8.7	9.3	13.4	6.5	6.9	4.6	2.2	2.4
2013	19.4	7.8	11.6	14.7	5.4	9.3	4.7	2.4	2.3
2014	24.9	9.2	15.7	19.8	5.9	13.9	3.1	3.3	1.8

Source: [http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/solialnaya-sfera/demografiya\\_2/g/obschie-itogi-migratsii-naseleniya-respubliki-belarus/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/solialnaya-sfera/demografiya_2/g/obschie-itogi-migratsii-naseleniya-respubliki-belarus/)  
[http://www.pac.by/dfiles/001178\\_204439\\_5.pdf](http://www.pac.by/dfiles/001178_204439_5.pdf)

to 6‰. However, when the large generation of young people that had been born in the late 1980s (before the collapse of the Soviet Union) reached reproductive age, the marriages rate started to increase. In 2013 the estimated rate was 9.2 marriages per 1,000 people. This is significantly higher than the rate in the Western European countries of Great Britain, Germany and France.

The **marriage** rate is higher among the urban population (9.9‰) than among the rural population (7.0‰). This is due to population ageing in rural areas. The number of remarriages and their share as a percentage of total marriages has increased throughout the post-war era (Shakhotko, L.P. 2013). Unlike in other European countries, most marriages are between people in the younger age groups (the 20–24 and 25–29 age

groups). In Belarus, the age of first marriage is relatively low: 25 years for women and 27.1 years for men. In recent years, however, it has steadily increased. Public opinion has become more tolerant towards alternative forms of marriage. This is reflected in the high number of cohabitations, the so-called “consensual marriages”. The 2009 population census showed that 5.1% of men and 4.2% of women live in cohabitation. [Same-sex marriage is not accepted in Belarus, even same-sex unions are not legally recognized as well as in other Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland or Ukraine by 2017 (D. Karácsonyi, ed.).] The 2009 population census also revealed an increase in the number of single people: 5.9% of men and 3.9% of women aged 50 years have never been married.

A key indicator of the strength of the family as an institution is the **divorce** rate. The relatively high rate (3.7, 2014) represents a demographic threat to the sustainable socio-economic development of the country. In the period 1970–2013, the number of divorces increased substantially first of all among urban residents with a growth of 32% in the period 1970–2010. The highest number of divorces are among the 25–29 and 30–34 age groups. Nowadays, on average, one in two marriages ends in divorce. In the 1990s there was one divorce for every 3 marriages on average. In other words, marriage has grown more unstable in recent decades. The average duration of the first marriage is 10 years and that of the second one is 8 years (Antipova, E.A., Gubareva, Y. 2013).

### Labour market and education

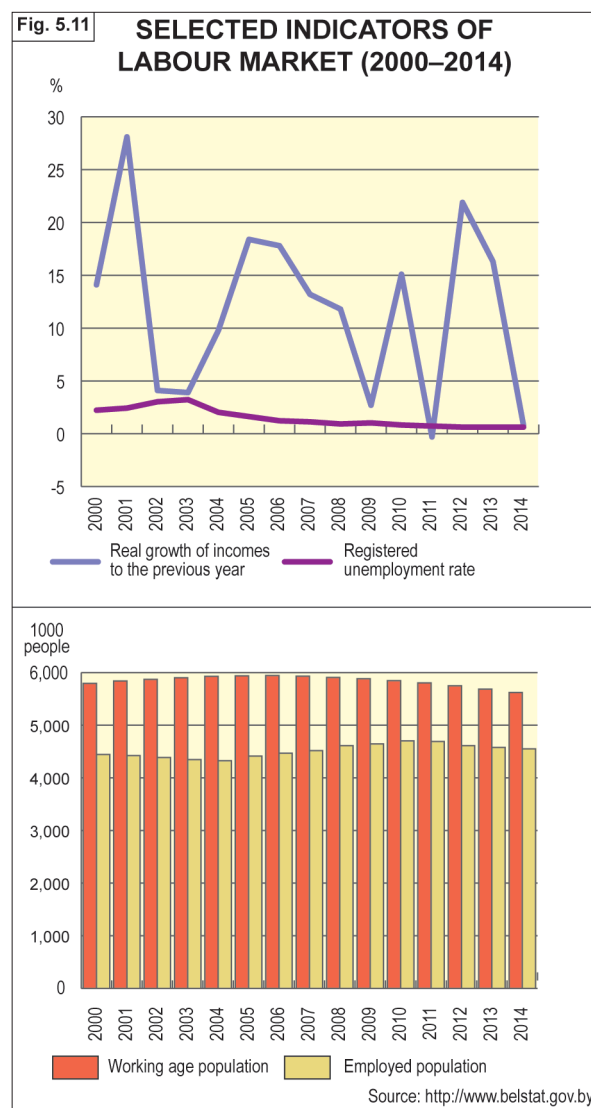
The Belarusian population has traditionally had a high **level of education**. All censuses conducted since the Second World War have testified to a continuing improvement. The literacy rate in Belarus is one of the highest in the world: 99.7% of the adult population and 99.8% among young people. As the most recent census revealed, only 0.1% of the urban population and 1.0% of the rural population have no education. On average, a person receives 11.5 years of school education. With this figure Belarus is ranking on the 10th place among the countries of the world.

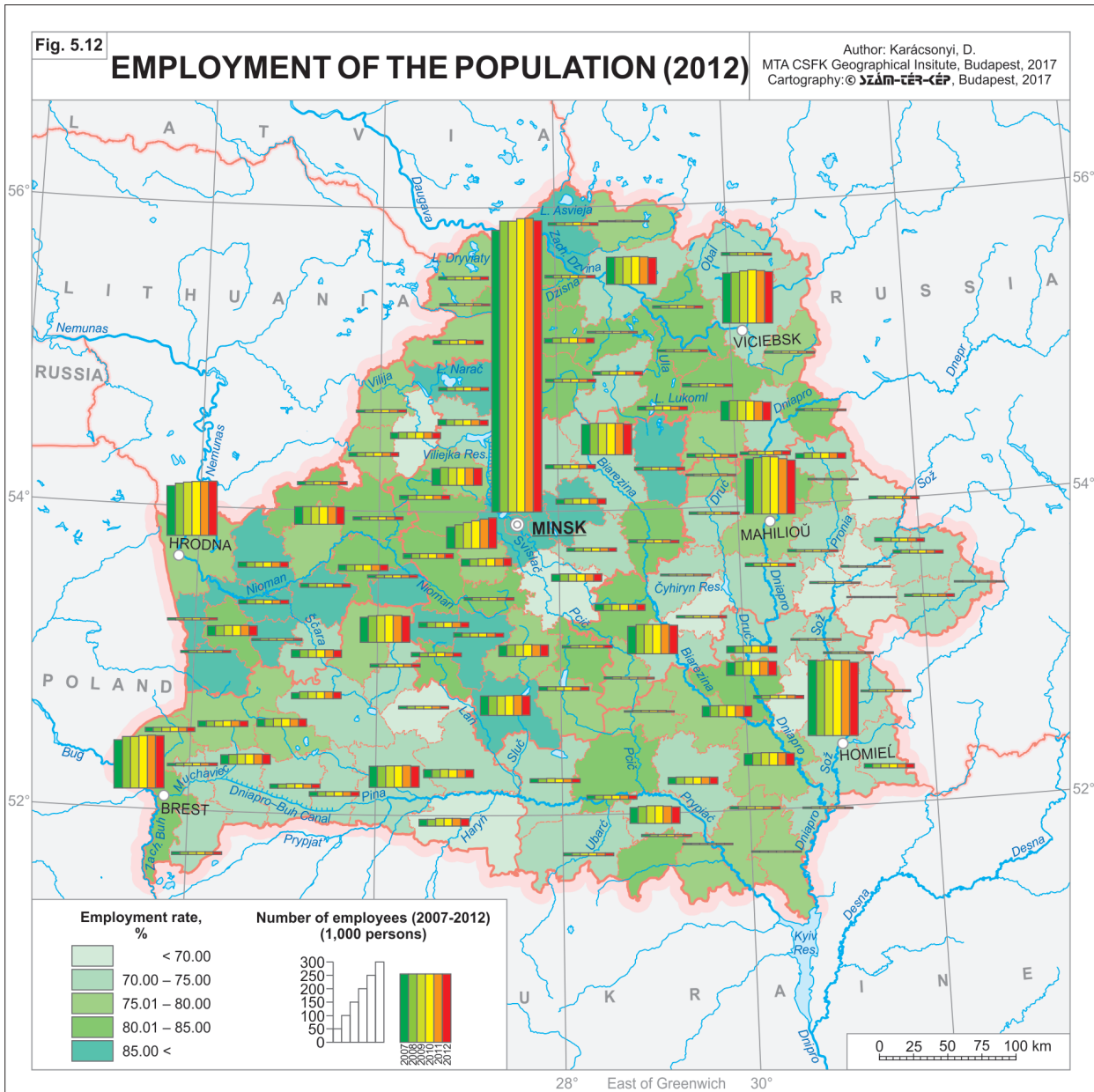
At the time of the last census in 2009, 90% of the population aged 15 years or over had been educated at higher, secondary specialized, vocational technical, general secondary and general basic schools. A more revealing indicator for Belarus is the share of people with higher education. The share of the working-age population with higher education is 20.5%. In the 25–29 age group, however, this indicator is much higher: 31.1%. Interestingly, Belarus’s educational statistics show that women are educated to a higher level than men.

Belarus has a relatively large **labour force**, as a percentage of its total population. The working-age population in the period 1990–2013 was around 6 million. In 1990 the labour force had made up 58.3% of the population, but by 2014 the share had increased to 62.9%. The increase is due to the entry into the workforce of the large

generation of young people who were born in the late 1980s. The highest number of people in the labour force is observed in the capital city of Minsk: 1,406,700 people.

The **economically active population** is 4.5 million people, and the figure fluctuated only marginally between 1990 and 2014 (Figure 5.11). External labour migration during the 1990s did not have a significant effect on the size of the economically active population. However, after 2005, the impact of this factor grew influencing the decrease of labour force. Until 2012, the ratio of the economically active population by sex was characterized by a slight dominance of females over males. In 2014, however, males (2,305,000) outnumbered females (2,267,000 people). The changing proportion of men and women in the





economically active population reflects these figures. In 1995, men accounted for 47.5% and women for 52.5% of the economically active population, but by 2014 the male share had increased to 50.4%, while the proportion of women had fallen to 49.6%. This shift was due to the influx of male foreign workers. In 2010, the country had 6,337 male migrant workers but only 479 female ones. In 2014, there were 27,503 male migrant workers and 4,785 female ones.

The **employment** rate remains high – 75.9% – despite a steady decline in the number of employees. The number of employed working-age

people in 2013 was 1,443,500 (25.8% of the working-age population).

Low mobility and an uneven distribution of labour resources are the main explanations for a labour surplus in some regions and skills shortages in others. There is also an imbalance in the professional structure of local labour markets (Figure 5.12). More than 37% of the labour force is concentrated in the central part of the country – the city of Minsk and the Minsk region, while the lowest shares are seen in the Hrodna (10.6%) and Mahilioŭ (11%) regions. Significantly, more than four-fifths of the labour force (82.6%) are concentrated in urban areas.

The **unemployment** rate was 0.5% in 2014, and there were no significant variations between regions (it varied from 0.2 in Minsk to 0.7% in the Hrodna, Mahilioŭ and Viciebsk regions). According to the official statistics, unemployment decreased radically in Belarus in the 2000s (*Figure 5.13*). In 2005, the unemployment rate exceeded 3% in only a few peripheral districts.

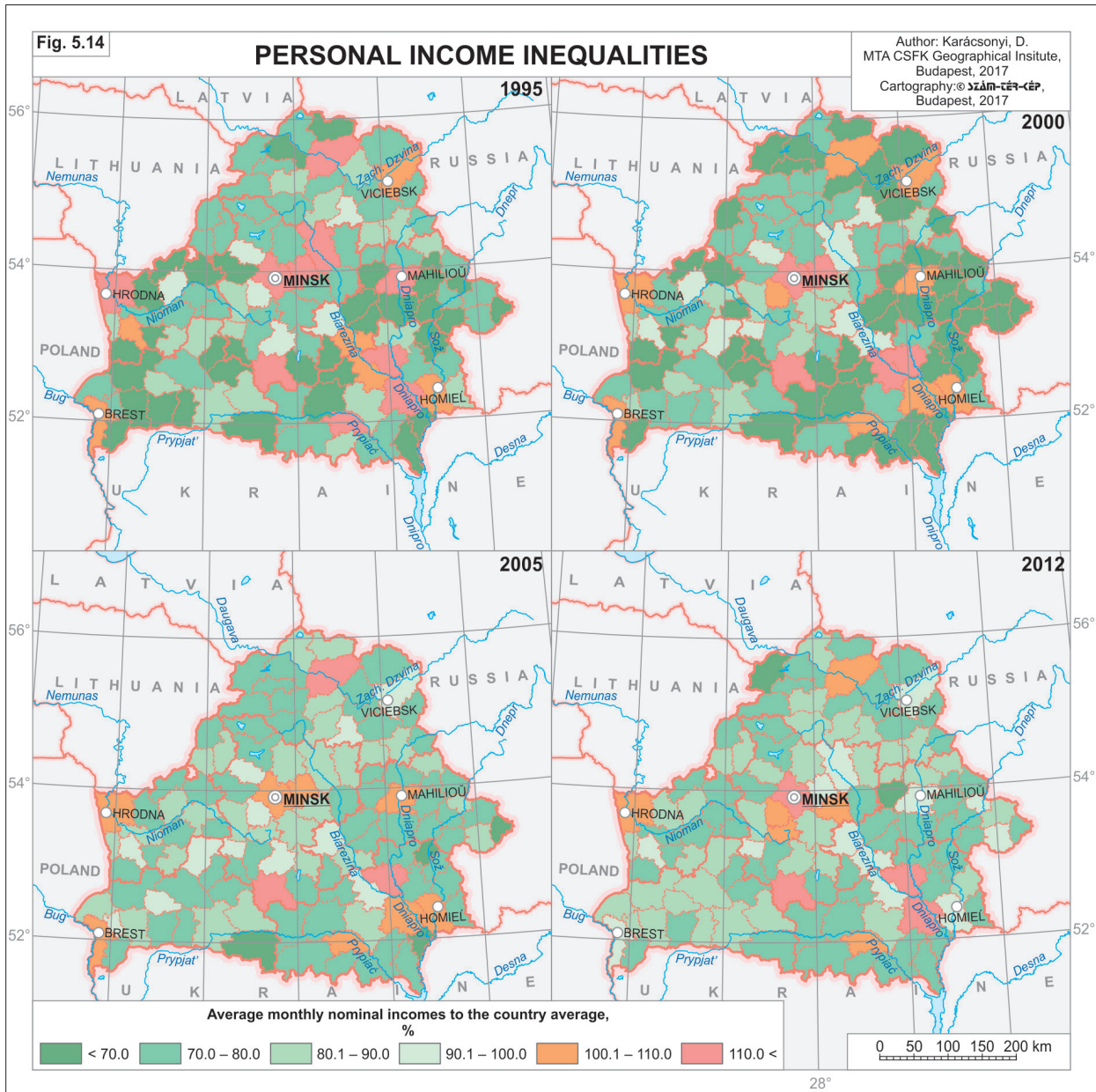
In 2014, the total **personal income** in the country was estimated at 526,275.8 billion Belarusian rubles (BYR). On average, personal incomes in the city of Minsk were 2.5 times higher than incomes in other areas of the country. Other regions by income in descending order were: Minsk, Homiel, Brest, Viciebsk,



Chat with a family in an agrogorodok (rural township). The head of the family studied medicine in Hrodna, than his job as village doctor was organised by the state. He have to work and live here for couple of years in return for his studies financed by the state. He rents the house for free which was built by and owned by the state. (Photo: Karácsonyi, D. 2011)







Hrodna and Mahilioŭ. Cash incomes per capita in 2014 were estimated at BYR 4,629 thousand per month, which is the equivalent of USD 253. The largest cash incomes were registered in the capital city of Minsk (BYR 6,719 thousand per month).

In 2014, the nominal average monthly salary of employees in Belarus reached 6,054.2 thousand BYR (around 330 USD). The capital city of Minsk has the highest level of salary (7,731.0 thousand BYR) (Figure 5.14). High salaries are also typical in the country's leading industrial centres – Salihorsk, Žlobin, Navapolatsk and

regional centres. In the 2000s, there has been a substantial levelling of incomes. Today, there are no areas with significant income shortfalls, albeit average incomes are lower in peripheral rural areas. Since 2011, cash incomes and real salaries have declined. The share of the population earning less than the subsistence wage is estimated at 4.8%.

Regarding the various categories of income, salaries and wages are in first place (62.5%), followed by social transfers (21.1%), income from entrepreneurial activity (8.5%), income from property (4.4%) and other sources (3.5%).