



The Territorial Reform and its Impact to Demographic Profile of New Municipalities in Albania

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Received: 22 September 2022 / Accepted: 24 November 2022 / Published: 20 December 2022

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Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv9n4s221

Abstract

The territorial reform of 2014, according to which there is a new re-composition of municipalities does not imply changes in the population at the county level, but is accompanied by drastic changes of the population at the municipal level. Meanwhile the population at the national and regional level has declined, the population in the new administrative units has been increased and almost "doubled" in some cases due to the merger of the former municipalities with the rural areas. This situation unsurprisingly has brought the multiplication of problems related to the good management of natural, property and human resources of the new administrative local units. Demographic change is becoming a key challenges and affecting all countries and developing economies. Fertility rates are falling, the population is ageing, youth unemployment is a challenge and the complexity of urban-rural shrinkage is posing numerous challenges for industrial development, job creation and sustainable development agendas. Strategic solutions cannot be based on addressing one of these factors alone but need to take into account the interplay of these elements within a particular local area of development (urban or rural) (OECD, 2011a). Since demographic processes are complex in nature, the solutions to their problems naturally "affect" various aspects of economic and social life, such as the regional labor markets, spatial planning of the territory, the consumption model of goods and services, always in response to structural demographic changes of the population. The object of study of the article is the analysis of demographic changes of the population and their impact on the territory at the regional level as well as the evaluation of regional policies in response to these changes. Demographic statistics will be used as a source of information to analyze the demographic profile of the new municipalities and furthermore the differences between regions, raising the awareness of policymakers on the necessity of using demographic data in policy making of sustainable regional development.

Keywords: Population, migration, territory, spatial planning, demographic statistics

1. Introduction

The territorial reform of 2014, according to which there is a new re-composition of municipalities does not imply changes in the population at the national level, but is accompanied by drastic changes of the population at the municipal level. While the population at the national and regional level has declined, the population in the new administrative units has been increased and almost "doubled" in some cases due to the merger of the former municipalities with the rural areas. This situation unsurprisingly has brought the multiplication of problems related to the management of natural, property and human resources of the new administrative local units. In addition to that, fertility rates are falling, the population is ageing, youth unemployment is a challenge and the complexity of urban-rural shrinkage is posing numerous challenges for industrial development, job creation and sustainable development, so demographic change is becoming a key

challenges both at national and municipality level. Since demographic processes are complex in nature, the solutions to their problems naturally "affect" various aspects of economic and social life, such as the regional labor markets, spatial planning of the territory, the consumption model of goods and services, always in response to structural demographic changes of the population. Strategic solutions cannot be based on addressing one of these factors alone but need to take into account the interplay of these elements within a particular local area of development (urban or rural) (OECD, 2011a).

2. Materials and Methods

The research objective of the article is the analysis of demographic changes of the population in new administrative units as the results of the latest territorial reform. Demographic statistics published by INSTAT will be used as a source of information. In addition, demographic data compiled and published by author are also used for calculating the stock and the structure of the resident population by gender and group-age at the municipality level. Both data as above described are used to compile various demographic indicators such as dependency indicators, projection of population and to define the demographic profile of the new municipalities. Those indicators are also used to identify and measure the differences between regions and municipalities, raising the awareness of policymakers on the necessity of using demographic data in policy making in order to guarantee sustainable regional development.

3. Analyses, Results and Discussions

In January 1,2021 the Albanian resident population has reached about 2.82 million inhabitants or a decrease compared to last year for about 0,6% and compared to year 2001 for about 8.3%. The only exception during this period is the year 2017 in which a positive population growth rate was recorded for about 0.03%. The population of Albania, has recorded a decline estimated as annual long-term average, about 1 percent. The largest annual decline of the national population was recorded in 2008, estimated at about 0.8 percent. The greatest positive contribution to the annual population change at the national level is "offered" by the municipalities of Tirana and Durrës. The rest of municipalities in the country contribute with negative growth rates to the annual population change. The performance over the years of the municipalities' population, follow the same negative trend as the stock of the national population. Despite the systematic increase of the population of the municipalities of Tirana, Durrës, Vlora, (mainly due to the migration factor) the positive increase of the population in these municipalities does not compensate the decrease of the population from other municipalities of the country resulting in a reduction of the population 's stock at the national level.

As expected, the municipality with the largest number of resident population is Tirana with about 678 thousand residents in January 2021, or about 24% of the national resident population. Compared to the 2011 census data, the population of this municipality has been increased by about 22%. The positive population's growth rate, are also identified in other municipalities within the Tirana's region, such as Kamzas and Vora municipalities. The average annual growth rate for these municipalities is estimated at about 2.4% and the highest level was recorded in 2018 at about 2.5 %. In terms of population, Durres municipality is the second largest one with about 193 thousand inhabitants, representing about 7% of the total population at the national level. The population of this municipality in 2021, compared to the census data in 2011, has recorded a positive growth rate for about 11.4%, an increase which in fact represents a systematic phenomenon for this municipality and as an annual long-term average (for period 2011-2021) is estimated for about 1.4 percent. The highest level of the average population growth rate was recorded in 2018 with about 1.7 percent.

Table 1. Resident population by municipalities

Administrative units	1 January 2018	1 January 2021	Index of change, 2021/2018	Annual average change
	total	total		
Region Berat	127,431	119,450	-6.26%	-2.1%
municipality Berat	53,893	50,518		
municipality Ura Vajgurore	24,504	22,969		
municipality Kucovë	28,066	26,308		
municipality Skrapar	11,135	10,438		
municipality Polican	9,833	9,217		
Region Dibër	120,978	113,683	-6.03%	-2%
municipality Dibër	54,394	51,114		
municipality Bulqizë	27,551	25,890		

Administrative units	1 January 2018	1 January 2021	Index of change, 2021/2018	Annual average change
	total	total		
municipality Mat	24,364	22,895		
municipality Klos	14,670	13,785		
region Durrës	289,628	292,029	0.83%	0.3%
municipality Durrës	192,997	194,597		
municipality Shijak	30,707	30,962		
municipality Krujë	65,924	66,471		
Region Elbasan	278,547	266,245	-4.42%	-1.5%
municipality Elbasan	133,436	127,543		
municipality Cërrik	25,842	24,701		
municipality Belsh	18,364	17,553		
municipality Peqin	24,609	23,522		
municipality Gramsh	22,816	21,808		
municipality Librazhd	30,029	28,703		
municipality Prrënjas	23,451	22,415		
Region Fier	298,144	286,002	-4.07%	-1.4%
municipality Fier	115,917	111,196		
municipality Patos	22,057	21,159		
municipality Roskovec	20,888	20,037		
municipality Lushnjë	80,374	77,101		
municipality Divjakë	32,909	31,569		
municipality Mallakastër	25,999	24,940		
Region Gjirokastër	62,952	58,031	-7.82%	-2.6%
municipality Gjirokastër	25,009	23,054		
municipality Libohovë	3,198	2,948		
municipality Tepelenë	7,805	7,195		
municipality Mëmaliaj	9,295	8,568		
municipality Përmet	9,258	8,534		
municipality Këlcyrë	5,332	4,915		
municipality Dropull	3,055	2,816		
Region Korçë	210,178	202,193	-3.80%	-1.3%
municipality Korçë	72,484	69,730		
municipality Maliq	39,828	38,315		
municipality Kolonjë	10,559	10,158		
municipality Devoll	25,482	24,514		
municipality Pogradec	58,688	56,458		
municipality Pustec	3,138	3,019		
Region Kukës	77,394	74,388	-3.88%	-1.3%
municipality Kukës	43,542	41,851		
municipality Has	15,235	14,643		
municipality Tropojë	18,617	17,894		
Region Lezhë	126,800	120,678	-4.83%	-1.6%
municipality Lezhë	62,094	59,096		
municipality Mirditë	20,911	19,901		
municipality Kurbin	43,795	41,681		
Region Shkodër	204,994	197,177	-3.81%	-1.3%
municipality M.e Madhe	29,341	28,222		
municipality Shkodër	129,092	124,169		
municipality Vau-Dejës	28,975	27,870		
municipality Pukë	10,537	10,135		
Municipality Fushë-Arrëz	7,049	6,780		
Region Tiranë	883,996	912,190	3.19%	1.1%
municipality Tiranë	657,568	678,540		
municipality Kamëz	122,909	126,829		
municipality Vorë	30,094	31,054		
municipality Kavajë	47,297	48,805		
municipality Rrogozhinë	26,127	26,960		
Region Vlorë	189,282	187,675	-0.85%	-0.3%
municipality Vlorë	112,969	112,010		
municipality Selenicë	17,669	17,519		
municipality Himarë	8,425	8,353		
municipality Sarandë	21,798	21,613		

Administrative units	1 January 2018	1 January 2021	Index of change, 2021/2018	Annual average change
	total	total		
municipality Konispol	8,885	8,810		
municipality Finiq	11,347	11,251		
municipality Delvinë	8,188	8,118		
ALBANIA	2,870,324	2,829,741	-1.41%	-0.5%

Source: At region level data are from INSTAT, at municipality level, compilation of data by author

Other large municipalities in the country, always in terms of population, are municipalities of Elbasan, Shkodra, Fier and Vlora, respectively representing about 4.6%, 4.5%, 4% and 3.9% of the population at the national level. The population growth rate in these municipalities are different and only Vlora has faced positive growth rate for about 7.8 percent while the others (Elbasan, Fier and Shkodra) have faced negative growth rate of population respectively for about 5.8%, 4.8% and 3.9%.

The municipalities with the smallest number of population are Pustec and Dropull, inhabited mainly by a minority population, and each of them represent about 0.1 percent of the population at the national level and continue to record negative growth rate, estimated as an annual average for about 0.6 and 1.6 percent.

Other small municipalities from the point of view of the population inhabited by Albanian residents are the municipalities of Këlcyrë, Libohovë, Fushë-Arrëz, and Himara, which together constitute about 0.8% of the national population and are characterized by negative annual growth rate of the population.

From the point of view of group-age structure, Albania continues to be a population with an average age of about 37.6 years, where the young population (0-14 years) represents about 21% of the total population. The age structure of the population of the municipalities is different, although the values in percentage are similar to the average age structure of the population at the national level. The share of the working age population (15-65 years old) is in fact an indicator that has almost the same relative value in all municipalities around (65-67)% and similar with national average at country level. The only exception to this rule is the municipality of Tirana, where the active working age population is estimated to be for about 71% of the total population of this municipality. Also, the lowest relative value of this population category is recorded in the municipality of Himara, where the population at the group-age (15-65 years old) represents about 59% of the total population of this municipality. There are differences between municipalities regarding the group-age structure of the population especially the groups (0-14 years) and over (+65 years). More specifically, the municipalities with the highest percentage of the young population (0-14 years old) are the municipality of Kukes, Has and Kamza where this group represents about 30% of the total population of these areas. These municipalities have also the same group-age structure for other groups of population (15-65 years old) and (+ 65 years old) estimated for about (29%; 64%; 7%). This group-age structure is the best indicator to paraphrase the population of these municipalities as a young one.

In addition to municipalities where high percentage of young people is present, based on population data we also identify municipalities with a relatively high number of group-age of (+ 65 years). The presence in such a high level of this group, is an expression of the "aging" of population, a phenomenon which is more present in the south of the country due to the historic decline in fertility and the highest emigration level since 1990s (Instat, 2014). These areas in a relatively short time are transformed into areas where the population of large group-ages predominates. Thus, municipalities of Himara, Finiq, Përmet, and Devoll, register a relatively high number of this group of population estimated around the interval (18-25)%, due to a massive emigration of the economically active population and significantly reduction of births.

The population of regions, as well as the population at the national level, in the medium term, is projected to decline. The demographic decline of the population according to the scenario of medium growth of population projections is predicted to be present in all regions, except the population of the Tirana region. (Instat, 2014). So based on the projection numbers for regions are prepared the estimation of population's projections at municipalities level and naturally also these number reflect the decline of population also at municipality level. The hypotheses supporting this decline are "dedicated" to the reduction of the supposed birth rate and high rate of emigration and both together will negatively affect the growth rate of the population. According to this scenario, the population of Albania in 2031 will reach a number of inhabitants of about 2,782,310 inhabitants. In terms of regions and municipalities, in addition to the emigration factor, declining fertility, a large impact on the population size of municipalities, will be also the migration factor (internal population movement) which, as found in recent population censuses, (2001, 2011) was stronger in the peripheral regions in the south and north of the country (especially in Gjirokastra, Berat, Kukës, and Dibër) and oriented towards the regions, Tirana and Durrës and the coastal areas.

Regarding to the projection of population data on municipality level is worth to underline that there is no official estimates in medium term, but based on population projections at country and region level, "oriented projection estimates" have been prepared. From an overview of population projections at the regions level, as well as at the municipal level we can conclude that:

1. In the municipalities of Tirana and Durrës the population will be increased and this is mainly from internal migration but also from international immigration (return of emigrants). The population growth rate in these municipalities is estimated as the average annual average, respectively 0.7% and 0.04%
2. The municipalities of Kukës, Dibër and Gjirokastrë will continue to experience a large population decline due to emigration and migration of the population of these areas, across the border and towards Tirana and coastal areas. The rate of population decline as an annual medium-term average is projected at around 1.7% for all three municipalities.
3. The municipalities within the regions of Berat and Fier will also experience a decrease in population but the rate of its decline is lower than the municipalities mentioned above and specifically it is estimated at 0.9% as the average annual average.
4. Municipalities such as Lezha, Elbasan and Shkodra represent another group of municipalities in which the demographic decline of the population until 2031 is presented in minor negative terms and is estimated at about 0.6% as the annual average medium term.

As summary the demographic profile of municipalities can be described as follow:

- decline of the stock of resident population (low fertility rate and emigration)
- shrinking of population in especially in rural area, due to emigration and migration
- increase in population structure of the group of (+65) and decrease of group (+14) years
- due to above factors, population has entered into a path of aging
- as per projection population in medium terms, the size of the stock of resident population both at national and municipality level is foreseen in decline.
- the demographic profile of population in municipality follows the same path as the national one

4. Conclusions

As summary, the demographic decline of the population as a whole will be strongly influenced by the assumed emigration which will "affect" both the population at the national level but also at the municipal level, while internal migration is another important factor that will continue in the future to predetermine the number of population at the municipal level, accompanied by the displacement of the population from northern and southern areas of the country, towards the municipalities of Tirana and coastal areas, Durres, Vlora. Consequently, current and expected demographic changes must be taken into account and treated with care, not only as part of the description of problems but also of their solution. Demographic analyzes are necessary at all stages of the planning process and the development of the territory and the economy. Through them, the problems and needs of the population are identified, objectives are set, alternatives are "built" for reallocation of resources and in the same time raising the awareness of policymakers on the necessity of using demographic data in policy making which will guarantee sustainability in regional development.

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