

Greece and Its Western Balkan Neighbours – Common Challenges in a Changing Europe

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Demographic Processes in the Western Balkans: A Long Term Perspective

Vladimir Nikitović

Introduction

After Croatia joined the EU in 2013, the Western Balkans are usually referred to the region that comprises populations of Serbia excluding Kosovo*, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo*, FRY Macedonia (since February 2019 North Macedonia) and Albania. It is generally recognised as the region with divergent demographic trends primarily caused by the differential natural growth of the population. At the beginning of twenty-first century, it is evident that the demographic trends in the region converge, at least when it comes to the natural components of demographic change. This process is generally understood in the context of the theory of demographic transition. On the other side, international migration in the region has undergone more complex changes since 1990. After the intensive displacements of autochthonous population within and out of the region, induced by the 1990s wars, and the fall of Iron curtain in case of Albania, the whole region is recognised as an emigrational at the beginning of this century.

Former high fertility sub-region, including Kosovo as a European outlier, no longer exists. The northern part of the Western Balkans was among the first in Europe to experience population decline mainly due to the long period of below-replacement fertility, supported by emigration that recently has spread to most of the region. Based on the literature review,¹ a rough estimate on the number of people who left the region could point to about

* The disputed territory of Kosovo, which unilaterally proclaimed independence of Serbia in 2008, is currently recognised as an independent state by 108 of 193 UN member states and 23 out of 28 European Union member states.

¹ Josipović, Damir: The Post-Yugoslav Space on a Demographic Crossway: 25 Years after the Collapse of Yugoslavia. In: *Stanovništvo*, 1/2016, pp. 15-40. Demalija, Rifat: Migration and Social Transformation. the Case of Albania and Greece. In: *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1/2016, pp. 115-123.

5 million inhabitants since 1990. Furthermore, this region lacks an attraction for long-term immigration from third countries.

On the other hand, the most recent sudden influx of asylum seekers from West Asia and North Africa, whose final asylum destination represent primarily the ‘old’ EU countries, has its transition route through the region. This, so called, Western Balkan route came as a great surprise for most of public and officials given that the immigration issue, at best, has not been recognised in the public discourse and relevant legislation in the region. Consequently, it quite directly opened an issue of future migration in the region in terms of both the below-replacement fertility of autochthonous population and the demographic surpluses in politically instable origin societies of immigrants.

Given much higher uncertainty of future migration patterns in comparison to fertility and mortality trends, it might seem reasonable to address a long-term perspective of migration impact on demographic change. The point of such an exercise could be similar to the purpose of hypothetic fertility (instant-replacement) and mortality (constant) scenarios – by examining the current limits of demographic development, we try to achieve two goals at the same time: to assess realistic future outcomes and to warn decision makers on future implications of demographic and migration trends.

As it seems that the populations of the Western Balkans could experience common migration trends in the future, the central issues of the paper are as follows: Is the transition to the net immigration stage across the whole region possible by the mid-century and what might be the effects of expected international migration patterns on future demographic change in the region?

The Conceptual and Methodological Framework

In accordance with the goals of the paper, it was of particular importance to choose the methodological approach which would enable long-term assumptions on future population dynamics in the Western Balkans region in the context of relevant theoretical and empirical background. The projection model that is used by the Population Division of the UN (hereafter the UN model) for its latest release of the *World Population Prospects* (WPP

2017) meets the criteria as it is based on the recent theoretical achievements in terms of the demographic transition, while draws its strength from the data on fertility and mortality for all countries of the world.² The model has also the technical benefits – it is well documented, fully transparent, implemented in the open-source R software, thus, allowing for easy adjustments and modifications of input parameters. On the other hand, most commonly used models of future population dynamics by national statistical offices or institutes, including those by Eurostat, are not adequately documented, relying in most aspects of a projection procedure only on subjective opinion of authors, with little or no explanation about the reasoning behind chosen assumptions.

Demographic and migration statistics in the Western Balkans suffered a lot in terms of reliability after 1990. Therefore, the WPP 2017 dataset is used as the best available source of demographic inputs in the paper. However, several preconditions in terms of input parameters had to be fulfilled before the model could be employed for producing simulations of future population in the region. The initial population had to be adjusted for known weaknesses of the WPP dataset as regards Bosnia & Herzegovina and Serbia.³ In case of the former, the 2013 census results were not available to the UN staff when they prepared the estimate on initial population structure but those of the quite distant 1991 census.⁴ As for the latter, apart from the fact that the WPP dataset does not recognise the population of Kosovo*, adjustments of the WPP dataset had to be made for population who boycotted both censuses in 2011 – Albanians in Central Serbia and Serbs in Northern Kosovo, and for significant overestimation of the total population by the census conducted in Serbia excluding Kosovo.

² United Nations: World Population Prospects. 2017 Revision. Methodology of the United Nations Population Estimates and Projections. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. New York 2017.

³ Reliability of the UN population estimation for Macedonia is also disputable as it is based on distant population census (2002). As we do not have enough grounds for better estimation, we kept the initial population from the UN dataset.

⁴ While calculating initial population, we took into account a dispute between the two constitutional entities (Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina) on the final results of the 2013 census relying on the recent literature overview on the topic.

The Crucial Hypotheses for the Long-term Population Dynamics

From a long-term perspective, changes in fertility behaviour are decisive for the size and age structure of a given population in the absence of sudden catastrophic events. The UN model, in accordance with the new evidences of recovery of post-transitional fertility, predicts a convergence of total fertility rates in the region towards the level of 1.8 by the end of the century. This implies that the total fertility rate (TFR) across the region will only experience a mild increase by 2055, ranging between 1.55 (Bosnia & Herzegovina) and 1.79 (Albania). For the sake of an insight in “theoretical” limits of future demographic change, we, also, calculated the UN traditional high and low variants, which differ from the medium variant (forecast) in total fertility rate by ± 0.5 child per woman, respectively. For example, the implementation of the UN model in the case of Kosovo suggests that there are even 10% chances that TFR in this population could fall by 0.5 (low variant) until 2100. It means reaching the “lowest-low” fertility that the post-communist CEE countries experienced in the beginning of the century. However, the official TFR projection for Kosovo is more pessimistic than the UN model. It predicts the range between the low and high variant, aimed to cover possible paths of the future TFR, of 1.1-1.9 in 2061,⁵ while the 80% prediction interval based on the UN model points to 1.22-2.05 for the same year.

In the UN model employed for *World Population Prospects* (WPP 2017), current levels of net migration across countries of the world were generally kept constant until the mid-century, except for recent large fluctuations. However, despite the practical considerations that guided the authors of the WPP, the general assumption on constant net migration by 2050 is disputable from the viewpoint of smaller world areas, such as the Western Balkans region, or individual countries. For that reason, we aimed to rely on the theoretical framework which could provide more stable grounds for assumptions on future net migration in the region than the constant hypothesis.

⁵ Kosovo Agency of Statistics: Kosovo Population Projection 2011-2061 (December 2013). <http://ask.rks-gov.net/ENG/publikimet/doc_download/1126-kosovo-population-projection-2011-2061>, accessed on 20.08.2015, p. 27-28.

What were the guidelines for making assumptions on net migration in the paper? Despite different views regarding the role and significance of the drivers of international migration, there is no doubt that demographic and economic differentials induce the general shape and intensity of migration flows. It seems that the current strategic goals of all governments in the region are consistent when it comes to the EU accession. As one of the objectives of the paper refers to the most probable demographic future from the viewpoint of migration impact, we adopted the official standpoints on the EU future as the pivotal for the long-term assumption on general migration pattern in the region. In spite of the recent slowdown (“fatigue”) of the integration process in the Western Balkans, enlargement of the EU towards the area, that was set as a priority of EU expansion at the 2003 European Council summit in Thessaloniki,⁶ still represents the official EU strategy. Even if the reasons for the previous enlargements towards south and east of the continent are considered more political than economic, in comparison to the initial association of the countries from Western Europe,⁷ certain economic conditions have to be fulfilled if a country aims to join the EU. Thus, joining the EU implies that a member country, apart from required stability of institutions, achieved the existence of a functioning market economy. In practice, realisation of these factors in a member country should provide the living standard and quality of life of its citizens that would reduce outflows and increase inflows of migrants in the country on a long run.

Starting from the general principles of labour migration theories such as “push and pull” models, we based our reasoning behind the migration assumptions more specifically on the recently developed “model of the migration cycle”. It assumes that a country adapts to a new demographic and economic conditions by developing a mechanism to handle new or evolving migratory circumstances, which is referred to as a migration cycle. The model is based on evidence from the ‘old’ immigration countries in Europe, which experienced the transition from an emigration to an immigra-

⁶ European Commission: EU-Western Balkans Summit, Thessaloniki (21 June 2003). <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-03-163_en.htm>, accessed on 30.09.2016.

⁷ Bache, Ian/George, Stephen/Bulmer Simon: Politics in the European Union. New York 2011.

tion country in conditions of the below-replacement fertility. This heuristic concept seems to be very convenient to explain possible transformation of migration pattern in the region. Furthermore, recent empirical evidence suggests that the model is not only applicable to the Southern European countries, which are becoming typical immigration ones, but that the Eastern European states are heading to the same direction.⁸ The Czech Republic is the best example, as it turned from a negative migration balance in the 1980s to a positive one in the 1990s and 2000s.

According to the migration cycle model, during the process of transition from an emigration to an immigration country, former emigration countries go through at least three different stages which constitute the migration cycle: an initial, pre-transition or preliminary stage (emigration is more important than immigration); an intermediate or transition stage (immigration typically outweighs emigration); and a net immigration or post-transformation stage (immigration is acknowledged as a necessary supplement). This very general process involves system stability, disturbances and, finally, the emergence of a new stability, whilst the duration and characteristics of the stages are country-specific.⁹

The migration cycle model, used as the theoretical background for the migration hypothesis in this paper, implies gradual long-term transition from net emigration to net immigration. During the intermediate or transition stage of the migration cycle, a former emigration country becomes, step by step, a new immigration country. According to this heuristic concept, the Western Balkans region could be considered as stuck in the initial, pre-transition stage, although some of its territories might be candidates for entering the intermediate stage sooner than others.

In this paper, we limited our perspective on future migration trends to the 40-year horizon (2015-2055), which we thought of the longest meaningful. Consequently, the stages of the migration transition are interpreted in relation to the symbolic turnaround of the transition process in the Western

⁸ Fassmann, Heinz/Reeger, Ursula: 'Old' immigration countries in Europe. The concept and empirical examples. In: Okólski, Marek (Ed.): *European Immigrations: Trends, structures and policy implications*, Amsterdam 2012, p. 88.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 67-68.

Balkans, which is set to the middle of the horizon (2035) implying that the whole region will certainly join the EU by the time. The region out of Kosovo and Albania is supposed to exit the initial or pre-transition stage by 2035-2040, and to experience the intermediate or transition stage afterwards (Figure 1). Indeed, some parts of the region could even progress to the post-transformation stage by the end of the projection according to the model interpretation, but that is beyond the considerations in the paper. In any case, it is assumed that immigration typically outweighs emigration in the Western Balkans excluding Kosovo and Albania beyond 2035. The latter two populations are not supposed to undergo fundamental changes of the system needed for entering the intermediate transition stage during the projection period. Such an assumption is in accordance with recent official migration projections and studies on emigration from that sub-region.¹⁰ Thus, the slow reduction in net emigration seems to be the maximum achievement for population in Albania but particularly in Kosovo in the next four decades.

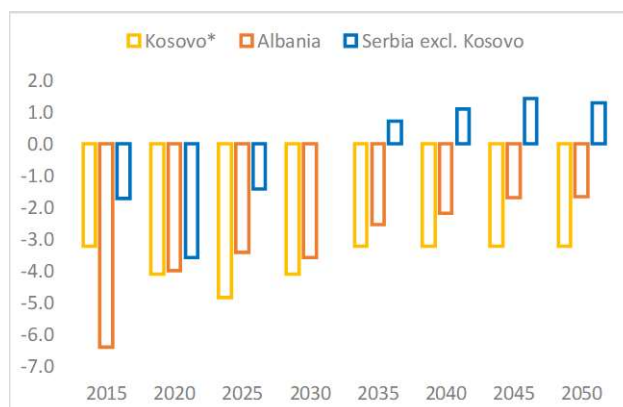


Figure 1: Assumed average net migration rate per thousand of the 2015 population: three distinctive populations, 2015-2055 (5-year periods)¹¹

¹⁰ Gollopeni, Besim: Kosovar emigration: Causes, Losses and Benefits. In: Sociologija i prostor, 3/2016, pp. 295-314; Demalija: Migration and Social Transformation, p. 122.

¹¹ Source: Author's calculations based on the existing national projections, UN WPP2017, and EU PopProj. 2015.

When transforming previously determined general patterns of net migration hypothesis to projection numbers, we started from the revised UN migration dataset. Technically, we modelled net migration in terms of rates rather than absolute numbers since future net migration does not relate to the future population and, thus, it may take on unrealistic values. A hypothesis about future average annual net migration rate is made for each five-year projection period.¹² There are two reference points in the projection horizon – zero net migration at some point in the period, and the target rate at the end of the projection (net migration per thousand of the 2015 initial population), while for Kosovo and Albania only the target rate is made. The rates are changing linearly between these reference points.

The benchmarks for the forecast of net migration rates were both the current population projections by Eurostat (EU PopProj. 2015) and national statistical agencies, and recent studies on impact of migration on demographic change. For Serbia excl. Kosovo*, the target rate for the mid-century is assumed to be similar to that predicted by EU PopProj 2015 for Croatia.¹³ Yet, unlike the Eurostat projections, we account for the strong post-accession emigration due to increased labour mobility associated with slow economic growth in new EU members by analogy to the evidence from the Eastern enlargement and based on the expectations from the future in the EU.¹⁴

Technically, the projection method is cohort-component, widely used among demographers, but the approach for obtaining medium or most probable variant, is based on probabilistic projections of future fertility and mortality. We followed the UN approach to use the median of probabilistic distribution of both future paths of total fertility rate and life expectancy at birth as the most probable variant of these components of demographic change. In line with the main goal of the paper, we will focus on the medi-

¹² The age and sex distribution of the future net migration were derived according to the UN model taking into account specific patterns for the region.

¹³ Eurostat: Population projections at national level (2015-2080) (January 2018). <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=proj_15nanmig&lang=en>, accessed on 19.08.2018.

¹⁴ Rašević, Mirjana/Nikitović, Vladimir/Lukić-Bošnjak, Dragana: How to motivate policy makers to face demographic challenges? In: Zbornik Matice Srpske za društvene nauke, 3/2014, pp. 607-617.

um variant, i.e. the *Forecast* (we will use this term hereafter) and *Zero-migration* variant.

Thus, the results of the projection should be considered as the exercise which implemented the concept of migration transition (in the framework of the UN model) across the Western Balkans in order to assess the impact of such a migration future on population dynamics of the region. It should be noted that the turnaround from net emigration to net immigration is determined according to the current prospects of further EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. Projection simulations presented in this paper were carried out by the means of specific statistical packages within the open-source software R, developed by the team from the University of Washington.¹⁵ The packages contain procedures for the execution of the complete population projection according to the methods used for the WPP 2017.

Results of the Projection Simulations

According to the most likely path (median of distribution) of the UN based forecast simulation, the total population of the countries in the region of Western Balkans will drop from 17.79 to 14.68 million between 2015 and 2055, a decrease of -17.5 percent over the next forty years (Figure 2). The main driver of the decrease will be the negative natural change, which will be 3.5 times larger in absolute terms than the negative net migration. Significant structural changes should be expected, as the share of population aged 65 and above will increase by 84% (from 14.93% to 27.41%) and the old-age dependency ratio will double by 2055. It is particularly worrying to notice negligible uncertainty around the forecasts of structural indicators (Figure 2 – right). Moreover, currently young populations of the region are expected to experience much stronger effects of population ageing in the following decades than those already old populations (Figure 3).

¹⁵ Raftery, Adrian, E./Alkema, Leontine/Gerland, Patrick. Bayesian Population Projections for the United Nations. In: *Statistical Science*, 1/2014, pp. 58-68.

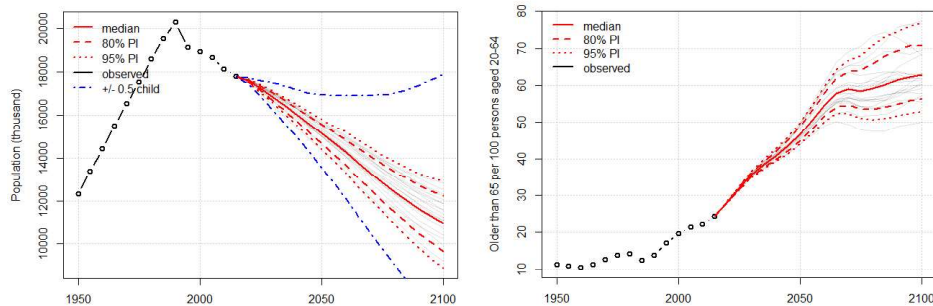


Figure 2: Western Balkans: Observed and forecasted population size (prediction intervals and the UN low-high variants) and old-age dependency ratio (prediction intervals) according to the UN model¹⁶

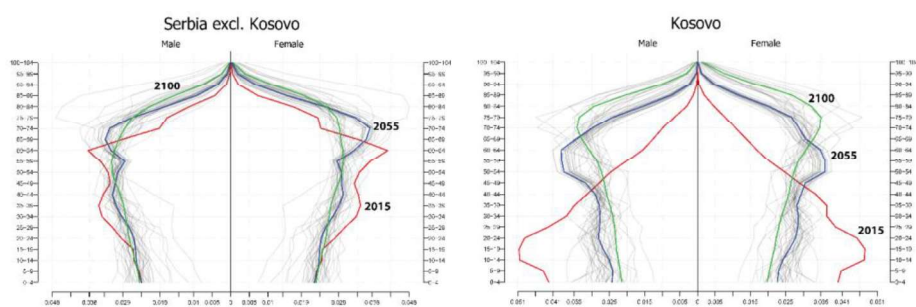


Figure 3: Population pyramid of Serbia excl. Kosovo* and Kosovo*, 2015, 2055, 2100¹⁶

If we take a look across the region, only Kosovo will not experience decline in total population (Table 1). However, the population decrease, as to the median of the prediction interval, will not be of high magnitude in Macedonia (−7.8%) and Montenegro (−8.2%). On the other hand, a strong decline is expected in Serbia excluding Kosovo* (−28.5%) and Bosnia & Herzegovina (−22.0%). Furthermore, Table 1 suggests that significant chances for maintaining actual population size by the mid-century refer only to Albania and Kosovo. Yet, the decline of these two populations is expected as of 2035 due to continuing lowering of TFR. For other populations, we can firmly say that the decline in their size cannot be stopped in the following

¹⁶ Source: Author's calculations based on the UN model.

decades. Most interestingly, the traditional high and low variant in regular UN world population prospects, representing bounds of ± 0.5 in relation to the TFR of the UN medium variant, are much wider than the 80% prediction interval of the forecast even in the case of Kosovo (Table 1). It indicates that the role of migration balance could be of greater importance for the region on a long run if compared to the previous periods. It is further discussed in the next sub-chapter as the projection results are decomposed with regards to the impact of net migration.

Country / Territory	Year	80% prediction interval			median TFR ± 0.5	
		lower limit	median	upper limit	-0.5	+0.5
Western Balkans	2015		17,789,140			
	2035	16,183,983	16,426,132	16,665,751	15,583,487	17,333,200
	2055	14,159,995	14,677,985	15,180,868	12,824,274	16,887,460
Albania	2015		2,896,679			
	2035	2,785,750	2,904,566	2,974,096	2,741,973	3,067,620
	2055	2,323,315	2,607,017	2,776,403	2,247,170	3,007,824
Serbia excl. Kosovo	2015		6,996,215			
	2035	5,640,035	5,774,646	5,900,948	5,496,328	6,059,359
	2055	4,728,966	5,000,839	5,247,676	4,377,188	5,708,931
Bosnia & Herzeg.	2015		3,336,159			
	2035	2,910,077	3,036,299	3,165,730	2,878,364	3,201,833
	2055	2,336,819	2,602,087	2,850,310	2,280,929	2,981,373
Montenegro	2015		625,781			
	2035	584,989	611,938	633,595	580,144	645,556
	2055	514,705	574,424	624,018	502,387	658,373
Kosovo*	2015		1,855,853			
	2035	1,980,099	2,067,377	2,155,741	1,942,859	2,195,571
	2055	1,829,773	2,028,908	2,244,909	1,753,505	2,353,193
Macedonia	2015		2,078,453			
	2035	2,000,313	2,054,909	2,107,681	1,945,838	2,166,371
	2055	1,778,462	1,917,250	2,034,864	1,674,383	2,191,691

Table 1: Total population forecast (median and 80% prediction interval) across the Western Balkans, 2015-2055, including traditional UN bounds of the forecast (± 0.5 child in relation to the median TFR)¹⁷

From the policy point of view, a population decrease, especially of the magnitude forecasted for Serbia excluding Kosovo and Bosnia & Herze-

¹⁷ Source: Author's calculations according to the UN model.

govina should not go unnoticed. Although the times when the significance of states was defined mainly by their population size may long since be gone, large population decreases could result in regional and sub-regional depopulation, both of which have been observed throughout the region for a fairly considerable length of time. A severe population decrease may lead to deficits in labour supply, which could be a strong limitation factor for already weak economies of the region. To date, except for periods of war, the populations in modern economies have been growing, so we have little empirical evidence of the economic consequences of population decline. Nevertheless, it would be prudent to curb large population decreases by means of policy measures.

Impact of Migration on Future Population Dynamics

Given the expected negative impact of below replacement fertility on population dynamics in the region over the following decades, the migration issue comes to the fore in terms of future demographic development. This section summarises the key results of forecasted migration impact on population change across the region from the aspect of the assumed stages of the migration transition during the projection. To assess this impact, apart from the *Forecast* simulation, we prepared the *Zero migration* simulation based on the assumptions that all the age-specific fertility and mortality rates are as per the *Forecast*, while the net migration is set to zero. The comparison between the two simulations as regards total population size across the Western Balkans is presented in Table 2.

This impact of migration may be decomposed into a direct and an indirect component. The former consists of the total net migration flows summed over the forecast period, while the latter refers to the births and deaths which the migration either prevented or caused to happen, depending on the overall direction of migration flows, also summed over the forecast period. It should be noted that, in terms of indirect migration impact, no reference is made to the hypothetical demographic events which might have happened to the emigrants had they not emigrated. Table 3 shows the calculation of all the migration-related components of population change.

Country/Territory	Initial population in 2015	Population in 2035		Population in 2055	
		<i>Zero migration</i>	<i>Forecast</i>	<i>Zero migration</i>	<i>Forecast</i>
Albania	2,896.7	3,148.2	2,890.0	3,136.9	2,669.2
Serbia excl. Kosovo	6,996.2	6,087.5	5,774.6	5,206.0	5,000.8
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3,336.2	3,084.8	3,036.3	2,642.6	2,602.1
Montenegro	625.8	618.1	611.9	573.1	574.4
Kosovo*	1,855.9	2,251.6	2,067.4	2,419.6	2,028.9
Macedonia	2,078.5	2,072.1	2,054.9	1,930.6	1,917.3
Western Balkans	17,789.4	17,266.8	16,426.1	15,906.8	14,678.0

Table 2: Total population (000) in *Zero migration* and *Forecast* simulation (median), 2015-2055 ¹⁸

Country/Territory	Migration impact 2015-2035 (000)				
	Total	Direct	Indirect (natural change)		
			Total	Births	Deaths
Albania	-258.2	-197.9	-60.3	-55.2	5.1
Serbia excl. Kosovo	-312.9	-235.8	-77.1	-70.0	7.1
Bosnia & Herzegovina	-48.5	-38.0	-10.5	-9.3	1.2
Montenegro	-6.1	-4.0	-2.1	-1.7	0.5
Kosovo*	-184.2	-148.3	-35.9	-32.2	3.7
Macedonia	-17.2	-13.0	-4.2	-4.0	0.3
Western Balkans	-826.1	-637.0	-189.1	-172.6	16.6

Country/Territory	Migration impact 2015-2035 (000)				
	Total	Direct	Indirect (natural change)		
			Total	Births	Deaths
Albania	-209.5	-98.2	-111.3	-104.2	7.1
Serbia excl. Kosovo	107.7	157.5	-49.8	-48.0	1.8
Bosnia & Herzegovina	7.9	20.0	-12.0	-10.4	1.6
Montenegro	7.4	13.0	-5.6	-1.6	4.0
Kosovo*	-206.5	-118.6	-87.8	-79.3	8.5
Macedonia	3.9	12.0	-8.1	-5.0	3.0
Western Balkans	-289.4	-14.4	-275.0	-248.8	26.2

Table 3: Impact of migration on population change – difference between *Forecast* and *Zero migration* simulation (median of the distribution), 2015-2035-2055 ¹⁹

¹⁸ Source: Author's calculations.

¹⁹ Ibid.

As to the assumptions of the forecast model, the turnaround is set to the year of 2035 when it is assumed that large post-accession emigration waves, induced by the EU enlargement towards Western Balkans, will disappear throughout the region (except for Kosovo and Albania).

According to the *Forecast*, the population in the Western Balkans region in 2035 will be smaller by 826.1 thousand than it would be if there was no migration. The direct impact of migration on population in the *forecast* equals –637 thousand. This is the net migration, aggregated over the period from 2015 to 2035. In the case of negative net migration, the indirect impact of migration consists of both the loss of births owing to the emigration of potential mothers and the loss of the emigrants' deaths. As Table 3 suggests, the effect of the latter is small. The number of births which female emigrants would have delivered had they not emigrated during the first 20-year period of the forecast accounts for 172.6 thousand. The number of deaths was reduced by 16.6 thousand by migration; these people might have died anyway, but their death occurred after they emigrated, so it cannot be counted in the figures for Western Balkans, as they did not number among the population of the region at the time of death. The overall indirect impact of migration is –189.1 thousand.

In relative terms, migration is directly or indirectly responsible for 61% of the overall population decline expected in the region over the first 20-year period of the *Forecast*. In the parts of the region characterised by positive population momentum, net emigration represents significant counterweight to the very high positive natural change, which would amount to 21% (397 thousand) and 9% (249 thousand) of the initial population (2015) of Kosovo and Albania, respectively, if there were no migration (Tables 2 and 3).

Almost a quarter of the migration induced (direct and indirect) decline of population in the Western Balkans region by 2035 is due to migration-related, potential, but not 'consumed', natural change. This share varies between 19% and 35% across the region indicating that for every 3-4 emigrants one more is added on account of prevented natural change (Table 3).

During the second 20-year period of the *Forecast*, the population decrease in the Western Balkans region will be smaller by 289.4 thousand than it would be if there was no migration. The migration induced loss is exclusively driven by the negative net migration in Kosovo and Albania after 2035. The overall indirect impact of migration in Kosovo and Albania is –36 and –60 thousand by 2035, and even –88 and –111 thousand between 2035 and 2055, respectively. It is worth noting that despite the reversal of the sign of net migration from negative to positive (direct migration impact) in the rest of the region after 2035, the indirect migration impact (natural change) will remain negative throughout the Western Balkans over the second 20-year period of the forecast. The rationale for this result stems from the age structure of the population, which is truncated in the most vital parts due to decades' long emigration. It clearly suggests that the assumed amount of positive net migration in the region out of Kosovo and Albania is not large enough to compensate for the negative change in population dynamics induced by previously long history of net emigration and below-replacement fertility.

We quantified the relative impact of migration on selected demographic indicators by calculating the percentage difference between the value of the indicator for 2035 in the *Forecast* and the *Zero migration* simulation, scaled to the latter (Figure 3). Apart from population size, migration has also a significant impact on the age structure of population. As assumed in the *Forecast*, it would decrease the share of youngest while increase the share of oldest population until 2035. It would also increase the old-age dependency ratio most noticeably in the two youngest but also pronouncedly emigration populations. If we exclude these two populations when comparing projected age structures for 2035 and 2055, the main difference refers to the share of young population – the migration impact is no longer negative throughout the region in 2055. Besides, the pressure of older population on the working-age contingent is reduced or negligibly changed (Figure 3). On the other hand, the absence of a turnaround in the net migration pattern in Kosovo and Albania after the first 20-year period highlights the long-term importance of migration particularly for the age structure of population.

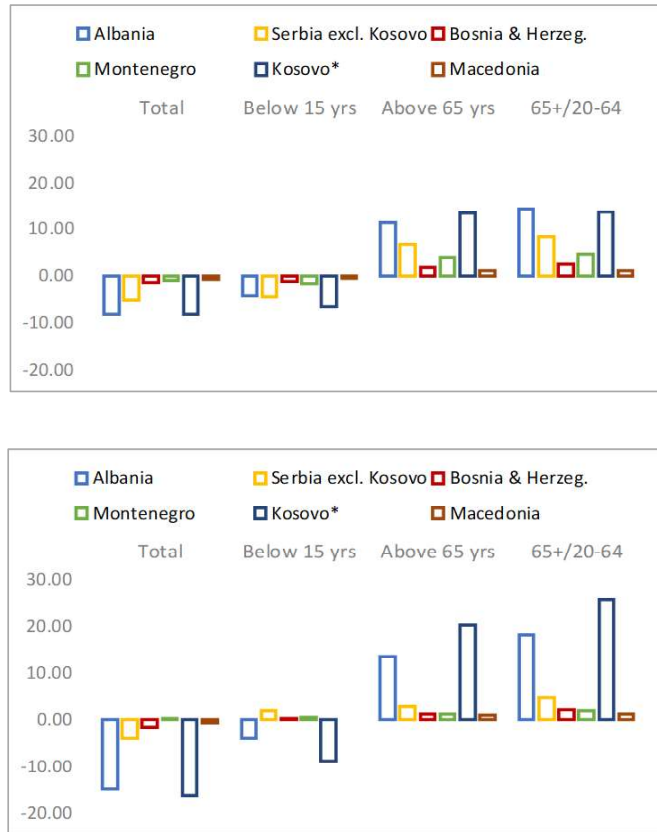


Figure 3: Migration induced changes for selected demographic indicators: percentage difference between *Forecast* and *Zero migration* simulation (median of the distribution), 2035 (above) and 2055 (below)²⁰

Conclusion

If we accept that Europe is in the process of transformation into an immigration continent, as well as the process generally spreads from the northwest to the southeast, similarly to the widely accepted demographic transition, it was assumed that the Western Balkans region will be soon heading to the same direction despite its currently unfavourable demographic and migration indicators. Given that the transition to net immigration directly

²⁰ Source: Author's calculations.

depends on economic progress, enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans is taken as a prerequisite for the model and empirical considerations in the paper. In accordance with the principles of the 'migration cycle' concept, which is used as the theoretical framework for the migration assumptions, and the experiences of new immigration areas in Europe, we assumed a longer period would be needed for societies in the region to adapt to the new reality. Not only the 'migration cycle' model, but also a longer historical perspective of empirical evidence from this region (not explicitly stated in the paper), indicate that the region will probably experience new immigration on the long run as it already was the case throughout the history.

Despite the decisive role of natural change, particularly that induced by fertility, on the decrease and ageing of population in the Western Balkans by the mid-century, the simulations of future population dynamics based on the theoretical considerations of the post-transitional mild increase of fertility and long-term transition to net immigration suggest that migration component could have important impact on demographic change, especially in terms of moderating the effects of below-replacement fertility on the age structure.

In addition, the notable indirect migration impact on the decline and ageing of population during the net emigration stages highlighted significance of side effects of typically young profile of emigrants (loss of future births). On the other hand, the sooner a country leaves the pre-transitional stage, the faster the country's age structure will face positive impact of migration. Thus, the transition to stable net immigration will increasingly gain in importance over the next decades given the negative population momentum in the region, which will affect even Kosovo – the youngest European population. Furthermore, achieving the long-term post-transformation stage of stable net immigration should be the ultimate policy goal for the whole region. However, the Western Balkans is currently being far from both the significant increase of fertility and the attractiveness to immigrants. Thus, the reduction of net emigration should be one of the primary tasks of population and economic policies in the next decades.

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There is more that Greece and its Western Balkan neighbours have in common than separates them. This publication of the 37th workshop of the Study Group “Regional Stability in South East Europe” ascertains the shared interests and challenges that require fostering good neighbourly relations for the above-mentioned states. Positive and critical aspects of bilateral relations are analysed in depth, common tasks regarding transnational as well as social and economic challenges are identified. Finally, possible paths for guaranteeing energy security in this part of Europe and beyond in the future are outlined.

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