

Long-term Demographic Implications of Low Fertility in the Region of Former Yugoslavia

Permeation of countries in the region and long-lasting links between them, which date back to long before the time of the former Yugoslavia, have caused the current interplay of migration flows, as well as certain similarities in demographic development. Decades-long same socio-economic framework and the dominant cultural model in socialist Yugoslavia certainly contributed to the process of demographic homogenization of the region, in particular to mitigate the differences between sub-regions in which they were most pronounced after the Second World War. These are the reasons why the long-term demographic implications of current low fertility trends in the countries of the region makes sense to consider as a whole, bearing in mind the correlations between countries.

Until the break-down of Yugoslavia in 1991, population of the country had been increasing almost linearly. Due to the 1990s wars, the region experienced intensive migration flows and further fertility decline that followed the one caused by recognized structural reasons. These massive movements of population along with introducing new international boundaries between former republics including intra-territorial disputes worsened accuracy and availability of migration and demographic statistics, which in turn affected reliability of population estimates in the region. In addition, census rounds are not being held regularly in each country as of 1991. Thus, making population estimates and projections for the countries in the region seems to be rather challenging contrary to the period of former Yugoslavia. It could be seen even when one tries to compare Eurostat and UN figures describing population trends in these countries.

The two largest countries (Serbia and Croatia) that remained after the break-down of big federal state were among the first in Europe to experience population decline. Indeed, those two including Slovenia were the first republics in former Yugoslavia to face below replacement fertility. On the other side, the decline to below replacement levels was delayed two-three decades in other three republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia). Estimates based on the 2011 census round indicated stabilization of total population growth in all four smaller countries. Only Slovenia could be perceived as an immigration country.

Since the long history of the common state, it could be useful to examine if the similar demographic patterns as regards population dynamics and ageing are in work two decades after. Furthermore, the sub-region of Kosovo was demographically for decades in sharp distinction to the rest of Yugoslavia showing extreme values even in the global context. Recent world population prospects by United Nations (UN) pointed to depopulation trend in the region on the long run. However, there were some major drawbacks regarding demographic indicators of population living in Kosovo. Even it was the first probabilistically based set of world projections by UN, the issue caused by territorial disputes between Kosovo entity and Serbia burdened the quality of projection outcomes. This paper made an effort in order to overcome obstacles in terms of historic data and jump-off projection values not only in this case but for the whole region in accordance with adjusted data from national records. Besides, it offers the first probabilistically consistent set of population projections across the region starting from UN methodology. Thus, it is possible to evaluate demographic implications of long term population trends across the countries particularly from the aspect

of current differences among them. The official projections of national statistic institutes are used as an evaluation tool.

Although until recently its total fertility rate was much above the replacement level, the population living in Kosovo is small compared to the largest countries in the region. Therefore, the expected further decline in fertility in this sub-region, targeting long-term below replacement level, will induce its population momentum to be eventually absorbed by dominant trend in the region. The previous differences in population dynamics between countries in the region have led primarily to changes in terms of the share of the smaller entities, while the Serbian and Croatian populations are still the most numerous. However, the population reduction and ageing in the two largest states is expected with certainty for a longer period of time, which essentially determines the demographic future of the region particularly as regards migration flows.