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## Demographic profile of Gjirokastra region

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Nowadays, demographic change is one of the key challenges for local development, without forgetting, climate change, development of the green economy, inclusiveness and poverty. Strategic solutions cannot be based on addressing one of these factors alone but must take into account the interplay of these elements within a particular local area of development, urban or rural. (Cristina Martinez&al,2012). According to the latest administrative-territorial reform of local government, the number of municipalities in Albania, has been reduced from 370 to 61 municipalities, while the number of regions still remained unchanged at 12. The reform does not imply changes in the number of population at the region level, but has brought drastic changes at the municipality level. While the population at the national and regional level has been declined, the population in the new administrative units has been "increased" almost doubled, due to the merger of the former municipalities with rural areas, "bringing" in the same-time multiplication of problems related to the need of implementing efficient management of natural and human resources of new administrative units. More specifically 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 highest annual rate decline of the national population for the same

period, was recorded in 2020, estimated for about -0,58 %. The greatest positive contribution to the annual growth rate of national population is "offered" by Tirana and Durrës municipalities, meanwhile the rest of municipalities have contributed negatively to the annual growth rate of population. Despite the systematic increase of the population at Tirana, Durrës, Vlora municipalities, mainly due to internal migration factor, the positive increase of the population in these municipalities does not compensate the decrease of the population from other municipalities (due to migration and emigration) resulting in a reduction of the total population stock at the national level. The continuous process of large-scale emigration, as well as the decline in fertility rate and increased of mortality rate, high flows of internal migration have an enormous impact on the demographic structure of the regional population. From the point of view of the demographic process, the population of Gjirokastra region follows the same model of demographic development as the population at the national level, which means that demographic challenges at the county level are the same as the demographic challenges at regional level, such as high emigration, low fertility rate and high mortality rate. In addition, the demographic model of the population change at the country level is very similar to the model of internal migration (INSTAT, 2014), showing that internal migration is a process of great significance in population change in the regions of Albania. Gjirokastra region is the smallest region in the country in terms of population, representing about

Municipalities of Gjirokaštër region	2011	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020
<b>Gjirokaštër municipality</b>	<b>28,673</b>	<b>27,633</b>	<b>27,022</b>	<b>26,195</b>	<b>25,009</b>	<b>23,590</b>
Libohovë municipality	3,667	3,534	3,456	3,350	3,198	3,017
Tepelenë municipality	8,949	8,624	8,434	8,176	7,805	7,363
Memaliaj municipality	10,657	10,270	10,043	9,736	9,295	8,768
Përmet municipality	10,614	10,229	10,003	9,697	9,258	8,732
Këlcyrë municipality	6,113	5,891	5,761	5,585	5,332	5,029
Dropull municipality	3,503	3,376	3,301	3,200.01	3,055	2,882
<b>Region of Gjirokaštër</b>	<b>72,176</b>	<b>69,557</b>	<b>68,020</b>	<b>65,939</b>	<b>62,952</b>	<b>59,381</b>
Albania	2,907,368	2,885,796	2,875,592	2,876,591	2,870,324	2,845,955

Table 1. / Resident population by municipalities and years. Source / INSTAT at region level, author's estimation at municipalities level



2% of the total population. The region is composed by 7 municipalities where Gjirokastra municipality represent about 40% of the region's population.

The population of the region, over the years has experienced a huge decline compared to year 2001, for about (-41.5%), while the average annual population decline, after 2001, is estimated to be around (-3.3 %). It is also worth noting that during the period 2008-2012, are recorded the highest rates of population decline, and in the last

decade the region has "lost" about 22% of its total population. The highest negative annual growth rate has been recorded in year 2018 for about 4,5%. The negative growth rates of Gjirokastra region's population are considered as the highest rates in the country, compared not only with the national average growth rate but also with the growth rates of other regions in the country.

Demographic indicator regarding the ratio of urban / rural distribution of the population at the region level, looks to have the similar tendency as the indicator at the national level, showing after year 2008, the predominance of the urban population over the rural one. In case of Gjirokastra's region this indicator is estimated to be in favor of urban population starting from the year 2011 and actually is estimated to be 53%: 47% in favor of the urban population. It is important to note that at the municipality level, in addition to the

Region	Inflow in the region	Outflow from the region	Balance of migration flows	Resident population in 2001	Resident population in 2020	Changes 2001-2020	Impact of migration to the stock of population
Gjirokastra	5,112	20,139	(15,027)	112,726	58,031	(54,695)	27.4%

Table2. / Impact of internal migration to the stock of region population.

Source / INSTAT at region level, author's estimation at municipalities level

Years	Gjirokastrë region	Albania
1/1/2001	101.6	99.5
1/1/2005	101.4	99.6
1/1/2011	102.3	100.3
1/1/2015	103.8	102.1
1/1/2016	103.6	102.6
1/1/2017	101.4	102.5
1/1/2018	98	100
1/1/2019	96	100
1/1/2020	95	100
1/1/2021	94	99

Table 3. Gender coefficient of Gjirokastra region

factors such as massive emigration and demographic events (low fertility rate, high mortality rate, natural increase of the population), another very significant factor in determining the size of stock of the resident population of the regions is also the internal migration of the population, so-called movements of the population from one municipality to another. In case of Gjirokastra region, based on data produced from population census, the analysis of the migration movements on the region, clearly demonstrate that the net balance of the movements is a negative one, which shows that the outflows from the region are 3 times higher than the inflows of the population in the region.

The impact of migration movement to the stock of resident population is estimated to be about 27,4%, so only for the effect of internal migration, the population of Gjirokastra region has been decreased by about 27%, during the period 2001-2020. The evolution of the gender ratio over the years (males to 100 females) proves that during the period (1990-2000), international migration was dominated by males, creating a lower gender ratio, or in favor of the female population. Because migration is a gender-related process, it affects men and women in different ways. But although emigration began as a typical phenomenon for men, it has turned into a gender-balanced process in the last decade resulting in a slightly higher gender ratio in 2011. In addition to international emigration, internal migration is another important factor that plays a role in determining the gender ratio. The analysis

of this phenomenon showed that internal migration has a significant impact on gender differences between regions, the ratio of internal migrants is quite different for men and women highlighting the fact that women tend to migrate within the country more than men. The reasons for the qualitative change of the gender ratio in recent years, in a gender ratio with gender balanced according to demographic studies, turn out to be family reunifications, as well as the increase in emigration of women for study and employment, thus "compensating" the excess of men in the age group 20-29 emigrated in the first decade after the 90s. The demographic indicator related to the gender ratio of the population for Gjirokastra region, is presented with a high value than the average value of this coefficient at the national level, thus demonstrating a slight advantage of the male population over that of females. The analysis of this indicator over the years, especially comparing it with the gender coefficient at the national level, shows not only a systematic predominance of the male population over the female population, but also an increase of this indicator for the entire period 2001-2017. The reasons for the predominance of the male population over women in addition to the above factors, are also related to the still significant weight of the rural population in the total population, as well as the presence of the phenomenon of selective abortion by gender, preferring male children born. (UNFPA 2012). This indicator has started to be declined starting from the year 2018 and actually during the last three years is estimated to be 5 points lower than the national average. Further studies are needed to be undertaken to find out the reasons behind this situation. The continuous process of large-scale emigration as well as the decline in fertility and mortality had a very great impact on the demographic structure of the population in Albania and by regions. The analysis of the group-age structure of the Albanian population as well as its average age, show that currently the Albanian population continues to be still a young population. The results show that data on the region differs from the data at

Municipalities of Gjirokastra region	Structure of resident population by group-age			
	Total/ as % to the region	(0-14)	(15-64)	(65+)
<b>Gjirokastra municipality</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Libohove municipality	5%	16%	65%	19%
Tepelene municipality	12%	19%	67%	14%
Memaliaj municipality	15%	19%	67%	14%
Permet municipality	15%	16%	66%	18%
Kelcyre municipality	8%	17%	67%	16%
Dropull municipality	5%	8%	59%	34%
<b>Region of Gjirokastra</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>16%</b>
Albania		18%	69%	13%
Dependency indicators				
	Total dependency	Youth dependency	Elder dependency	Index of elder population /total population
Region of Gjirokastra	<b>49</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0.16</b>
Albania	<b>44</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0.1</b>

Table 4. Structure of resident population by group-age and municipalities. Source / INSTAT at region level, author's estimation at municipalities level

the national level.

So at regional level, structure changes are more evident in population groups of youth and elder respectively 1% lower and 3% higher as the average structure at national level. Also in reference to the time series data analyses of the population by group-age, due to the decrease of the young population (0-14 years) and the increase of the elder population (+ 65 years), the population of the region as well as the Albanian population has entered to the path of "aging". The group- age data on the population can be used to calculate other indicators such as total dependency ratio, (ratio of age groups (0-14) + (+65)/ (15-65) the youth dependency ratio (ratio of age group (0-14) / (15-65) and elderly dependency ratio (ratio of age group (+65) / (15-65). The analysis of these indicators are very important because based on them it's possible to assess human resources capacities that can be potentially participating in the labor market and consequently affect the improvement of economic performance of the country as a well as the region. From these analyses for the period 1979-2011, it's identified that Albania in year 2011 has reached its lowest level of the total dependence indicator for about 47 percent, which means that for every 100 persons at working age, there are 47 persons at non-working age. Furthermore the value of this indicator (total dependence) in time series shows that the country has enter in the so-called episode of "demographic dividend" due to high number of economic active population (15-65) versus a low number of young population (0 -14) and

the elderly (+65). The phenomenon of "demographic dividend" is also present in Gjirokastra region with value slightly different from the average values at the national level, more concretely 49 or 5 points higher than national level. Whether Albania and the region will benefit from this "demographic dividend" depends on the effectiveness of socio-economic policies undertaken by policy makers, including education and sufficient training of the labor force to enable its integration into productive work which then will affect not only the improvement of economic performance but also the increase of the welfare of the population. While the coefficient of total dependence at the national and region level speaks of the existence of a "demographic dividend", the analysis of other indicators of dependency over time (1979-2011) shows a significant increase in the number of elder people 65 years and older, (from 9% to 17%) and a decline in the young population (from 60% to 30%) clearly demonstrating the "entry" into a new demographic phase of the population, in that path of "aging" population. Another important aspect in demographic studies is the preparation of population projections, for at least 2 decades. Population projections provide information about the future number, demographic structure and territorial distribution of inhabitants according to the most likely hypotheses of trends in demographic behavior, and serve as a basis for planning the socio-economic development of the country or region, including also market research.

Municipalities of Gjirokaštër region	2011	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020
<b>Gjirokaštër municipality</b>	<b>25,009</b>	<b>25,479</b>	<b>23,231</b>	<b>21,257</b>	<b>25,009</b>	<b>23,590</b>
Libohovë municipality	3,198	3,259	2,971	2,719	3,198	3,017
Tepelenë municipality	7,805	7,952	7,251	6,634	7,805	7,363
Memaliaj municipality	9,295	9,470	8,634	7,901	9,295	8,768
Përmet municipality	9,258	9,432	8,600	7,869	9,258	8,732
Këlcyrë municipality	5,332	5,432	4,953	4,532	5,332	5,029
Dropull municipality	3,301	3,363	3,066	2,805	3,055	2,882
<b>Region of Gjirokaštër</b>	<b>62,952</b>	<b>64,136</b>	<b>58,478</b>	<b>53,508</b>	<b>62,952</b>	<b>59,381</b>

Table 5. Projection of population by municipalities. source: INSTAT at region level, author's estimation at municipalities level

It is also worth noting that the population projections for the case of regions, have been calculated using the scenario of medium growth, in periods of 5 years, while there is no calculation of projection population data at the municipal level and local units. According also to population projections, the population stock is foreseen to decline with yearly average rate for about 0.3%. Similar to national population, the population of Gjirokastra region is projected to decline and the average rate of negative growth is estimated to be about (-2%). One of the factors predicted to influence the size of the stock of the resident population in the coming years, is the migration factor, which for the period 2015-2031, is justified with continuous departure of young people from the agricultural sector, student's migrations that are transformed into a long-term attitude beyond studies, as well as the importance of patriarchal norms in starting a family, which will maintain a high migration of women at a young age. (INSTAT,2014)

**As conclusions**, the declining of population and its structural changes at the municipal level, continues to be strongly influenced by migration movements, low fertility rate, high mortality rate, and negative natural increase, following the same profile of demographic development as national population. Furthermore, population projections at the municipal level "speak" also for a progressively declining of the population again due to migratory movement, as an essential factor.

**As recommendations**, there is an urgent need to set up, administrative and statistical databases at the municipal level, together with the building of human capacities and the necessary infrastructure for data sources management. The connection of data with the territory has become a necessity for decision-making at the local and central level. Current and

future expected demographic changes, such as population decline, structural changes of population, increase of life expectancy and population aging, should be taken into account in the design of territorial development policies, along with other challenges such as: rising rates urbanization, increasing demand for housing, "emptying" of the rural areas, etc.

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