

Assessing the Quality of Migration Statistics in Former Yugoslavia—Lot of Strategies but Less Implementation

Goran Miladinov¹

¹ Independent Researcher, Macedonia

Correspondence: Goran Miladinov, Independent Researcher, Macedonia.

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the quality of migration statistics in the countries of former Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro) including Kosovo and Metohija as well. The comparative aspect of the research study provides an analysis on assessing the quality of migration statistics in terms of sources and data of migration statistics. The research results show that the region of the former Yugoslavia, except for Slovenia has ineffective migration statistics registration and serious limitations in this part. Furthermore, in a situation of absence of population registers almost within the whole region of former Yugoslavia, the population census and the administrative data serve as the only source for migration statistics. Moreover, almost all of the former Yugoslav republics have some existing problems in implementation of censuses regarding estimates of the usual resident population. Therefore, the migration statistics in the former Yugoslavia region provided by its national institutions should be considered as questionable.

Keywords: former Yugoslavia, migration statistics, registers, census, resident population

1. Introduction

It is undoubtedly that data of migration trends becomes of fundamental significance (Cukut-Krilić & et al., 2019). Consequently, a debate on the comparability and the necessity of providing comprehensive migration statistics is in line with the academic purposes. In a modern society, transparency should be a general principle of official institutions (Zeelenberg & de Bie, 2012). It means that a credible statistical institution has to be responsible as to the quality, validity and dissemination of its statistics using unbiased and

comprehensive methods. Zeelenberg and de Bie (2012) point that the public, policy makers and journalists should be informed about the fundamental development indicated in the statistical data. In the opinion of Santo Tomas et al. (2009), statistics on international migration persist to be substandard because many governments have ignored the recommendations from expert groups since a long period ago. However, some progress has been made by international bodies in the past period. This paper discusses aspects related to the quality of migration statistics of the

former Yugoslavia. Coping migration statistics remains a specific challenge for this region in terms of both data quality and policy implications. Because of the unreliability of migration statistics on the former Yugoslav region it often makes it hard to answer the question: How many people live in the region of former Yugoslavia? Misinterpretations of this type are common and altogether well-reasoned because of the lack of reliable data as well as because demographic statistics on the former Yugoslavia are often used fraudulently for political purposes. Policy analysts, scholars and journalists often use the last Yugoslav census, taken in 1991, as a starting point for their research work on the former Yugoslavia. As a result of the 1990s conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, a large number of people are registered as living in or being citizens of more than one former Yugoslav republic and, sometimes, reside somewhere else completely (Judah & Vračić, 2019).

It is a fact that statistical offices in much of the former Yugoslavia lack the financial resources and political circumstances to collect accurate statistics. The statistical offices in former Yugoslavia proceeded with its work during the political changes in the whole region and still have many conceptual, methodological and technical problems to solve (Flinterman & Kupiszewska, 2009). There are initiatives by Eurostat in attempting to address the weaknesses in statistics on this region because the EU categorizes most of the countries of former Yugoslavia as potential future EU member states. Thus, the European Commission has supported recent research projects on the harmonization of databases regarding migration trends in the EU and beyond with more relevant, available, and comparative indicators (Cukut-Krilić & et al., 2019). The fundamental goal of this research is to critically discuss and identify the gaps in migration statistics in former Yugoslavia. The identified gaps might be a starting point for the assessment and validation of new methodologies for better understanding of the migration statistics. These countries have many common features, and all of them used to be part of a common state called Yugoslavia. Some of the countries (Slovenia & Croatia) are already EU member states and all others have EU aspirations. Almost all of them are

multi ethnic societies and it is important from the view of certain political rights of some ethnic communities that depend on their quota in the total population. There were a lot of studies on the recent demographic trends in countries of former Yugoslavia, although rarely a substantial comparative study about migration trends across these countries could be found. Thirty years after the break-up of Yugoslavia, there is still a need to address the challenge of methodological difficulties in generating such comparative research across this region. The author uses a qualitative research approach. The research contribution is to understanding the importance of having a relevant migration statistics management within the region of former Yugoslavia. Section 2 contains the country's background regarding migration statistics. Section 3 continues with further aspects on migration statistics assessments in the region of former Yugoslavia. Section 4 shows policy implications and Section 5 concludes.

2. Country's Background

For most former Yugoslav countries, except *Slovenia*, it is hard to find the presence of a population register and it is difficult to know how many migrants reside abroad. Slovenia introduced the population register in the first half of the 1950s, first on a card basis, and later on in an electronic system (Risteski, 2000). Since 1986, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia begun to consistently publish the data on population of Slovenia by age and sex from the Central Population Register (SORS, 1997).

The available data on the number of emigrants and immigrants in *Macedonia* from administrative and statistical sources are rather scanty and unreliable (UNDP & MLSG, 2004). There is no relevant official data related to emigration, in spite of the fact that moving abroad was extremely large in scope and intensity over the last decade of the 20th century and of the last two decades. The basic sources of information for the analysis of the migrations in Macedonia are the population censuses and the joint research of the Ministry of Interior and State Statistical office on emigrants and immigrants. In studying the migrations on these mentioned sources it has to be borne in mind that these sources are insufficient for complete discerning of the scope and direction of

the population movement. From the two censuses that were carried out in Macedonia, in 1994 and in 2002, the results from the 1994 having been disputed, in particular by the main minority, the Macedonian Albanians (Courbage, 2003)¹. Macedonia held its previous census in 2002 and has indefinitely postponed its 2011 census due to turmoil within the ethnic parties, or as a result of ethnic politics. The previous Census in the Republic of Macedonia was organized in 2002, and the results it gave were long out of date. The reasons behind the two decades postponement have been also the same reasons why particular political parties and groupings disputed the methodology and results of the 2021 Census (Gjorgjioska, 2022). To be specific, since the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001, the Census has obtained a deeply ethno-political character. Thus, on the report of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, specific special rights and treatments are provided for that ethnic group, which consist of at least 20% of the population in the country. Consequently, ethnic demography has since had serious implications on both the institutional set-up of the country and socio-political organization, converting the Census into more than a simple statistical operation (Gjorgjioska, 2022).

In Visoka and Gjevori (2013), the Macedonian 2011 census brought on the surface all the problems of the previous censuses. These authors point to a few key serious difficult situations or confusions, such as: Who was going to count whom? Accordingly, to be specific, Albanians wanted Albanian enumerators in the areas inhabited mainly with ethnic Albanians, as did the Turks. On the other hand, the Macedonians were concerned that local enumerators would artificially increase the numbers of their specific residents. Visoka and Gjevori (2013) add that when the Albanian and Turkish members of the Macedonian Census Commission resigned, they emphasized about the distrust felt towards Albanians, Turks and others, while the Turkish representative stated that they could not accept not having an only officer from Turkish minority in a municipalities having 46,000 Turks. These kinds of troubles were well known in previous censuses as well (2002, 1994, 1991²), but in that time the censuses were not interrupted suddenly

as this one was in 2011 (Visoka & Gjevori, 2013, p.13). This indicates that even enumeration of the population was influenced by the institutional and political pressures that describe the political system as a whole. One of the biggest challenges in assessing the migration-development relationship in the Macedonian context arises from the absence of reliable data on population. Significant inconsistencies remain between the assessments of international and national institutions. In this direction, as the most notable state institution, the State Statistical Office (SSO), have consistently underestimated the population change in the country. Thus, according to Gjorgjioska (2021), for example, the estimates by SSO in 2013 were that only 11,380 individuals had emigrated for the period 1994–2013. Against this, international organizations estimated that between 450,000 to 630,000 citizens or 20–30% of the total population in the country had emigrated for the mentioned period (Gjorgjioska, 2021). In addition, Gjorgjioska (2021) mentions three main reasons for such an underestimation of the population by SSO. One of the reasons behind such underestimates by the SSO is methodological; since SSO only takes into account the citizens who have officially provided information to the authorities of their residency abroad. The second reason is institutional, i.e., the devastating impact on the state institutions has also affected their capability to perform even basic operations such as population enumerations. The third reason seems to be political.

In the Strategy for demographic policies of the Macedonia 2015–2024 from 2015, in the area of migration policies, the following priorities are listed as main: Availability of relevant migration data, reduction of emigration, establishing cooperation with the diaspora and usage of their developed potentials and encouraging return migration flow (MLSP, 2015). *On March 30, 2022, the Macedonian State Statistics Office announced the results of the Population Census held in September 2021. The results revealed that the total resident population is 1,836,713, which is 185,834 less than the population registered in the previous census in 2002. The Census results have been the subject not only for the big difference in the number of people between the two censuses but to sharp criticism, with accusations about conducting fraudulently, methodological*

anomalies and inconsistencies in the published results coming from various political angles (Gjorgjioska, 2022). As a consequence, the Census itself has become a divisive field, with some seeing it as a great achievement and others refusing to acknowledge the process and the credibility of the results. The director of the State Statistics Office stood firmly on his position that the statistical operation was successfully and professionally conducted and that the results reflect reality. (Gjorgjioska, 2022).

One of the three laws, together with the corresponding by-laws, that is, the Law on the Central Population Register, was adopted in 2019 in accordance with the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration for 2019–2021 (European Commission, 2020). Therefore, the need for the Population Register in Macedonia has finally become a reality, but with financial assistance from the European Union. Thus, Macedonia received the long-awaited Population Register in October 2019 with EU funding. In the past, there have been unsuccessful attempts by the ruling government to establish a Population Register, but enormous sums of money have been spent on many other unproductive purposes (e.g., the Skopje 2014 project). Thirty years after the independence of Macedonia no funds were allocated for this purpose. In other words, Macedonia has been waiting for all these years for the EU to establish a Population Register. This is certainly a Big plus for the Macedonian State, its ruling parties and for the academic fella as well. Few institutions will be used for updating data in the database of the Central Population register: the Ministry of Interior, the Registry Office at the Ministry of Justice and from the Central Registry. The primary purpose of the population register is to keep documentation of all persons living in a certain region of the country and its citizens living outside this region, as well as to respond to the need for precise and synchronized statistics (Memetech, 2020). The implementation of the population Register improves the accuracy, quality and process of updating the data used by the administrative officials. At the same time with the National Population Register, a unique electronic number for persons (EEBG) was instituted (European Commission, 2020).

Migration data is scanty and most of the variables

relevant to migration research are still not enabled for use in Croatia. It seems that no one knows exactly how many Croatian citizens emigrate from Croatia or who is responsible for keeping confident and accurate documentation (Čipin & et al., 2017). If comparisons are made between the Croatian Bureau of Statistics' publications on natural movement with the real actual migration by itself there could be a huge difference in the quality and availability of relevant data. The Migration Policy Strategy for 2007–2008 and the Aliens Act were adopted in July 2007 in order to regulate the temporary and permanent residence of non-Croatian citizens (Chonkova & et al., 2011). In the opinion of Judah and Vračić (2019), the number of Croats living abroad is also compounded having in mind that some of them, possibly more than 20 percent, were actually from Bosnia and Herzegovina but own EU passports by claiming to be a Bosnian Croats and with that they have a right to Croatian citizenship.

Croatia has traditionally been a territory of significant emigration movements, as emigration has always dominated over immigration (Popović, Župarić-Iljić & Kardov, 2022). Thus, it is well known that Croatia has one of largest diaspora communities among the states with the same and similar size of population. Hence, The State Office for Croats Abroad possesses data that about 3 million of Croats and their descendants live abroad (Knezović & Grošinić, 2017). In fact, the official number of Croatian emigrants is still determined according to the census procedures conducted every decade. The Croatian Bureau of Statistics from 2014 came up with data that the total number of population in Croatia reduced from 2001–2011 by 152,571 persons (Knezović & Grošinić, 2017). Also, Eurostat data confirm the previously mentioned declining trends for Croatia. Hence, the declining trends between these two censuses and between each subsequent year could not be absolutely associated with emigration trends but these trends could be a good indication for both registered and unregistered migrants in the country. Croatia has also adopted a Permanent Residence Act 30 and accordingly these issues are regulated by this act, and the official statistics for emigration from Croatia actually takes into consideration only the registered cases (Knezović & Grošinić, 2017, p.27–28). In other words, as

Croatian emigrants are considered only those who left their place of residence for a period of more than one year and informed the Ministry of Interior. In the absence of a Central Register of Population, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) of Croatia is estimating mid-year and end-of-year population numbers based on data from the partial registers of deceased and live births kept by the CBS's office and the Ministry of the Interior on residence registration as well as from the last census (Čipin, 2017). Having this situation, it is needless to say that there is a great need to improve migration statistics and estimates to provide up-to-date statistics on demographic and population indicators for Croatia. As Čipin (2017) adds, without valid data, a proper assessment of population trends would be not worth considering. Thus, Croatia definitely needs adequate policies and institutional systems to properly implement a migration statistics database.

The absence of a population register and statistics on emigration flow based on the population census is the only source of data in *Serbia* on Serbian citizens residing abroad (Reynaud & et al., 2017). The preliminary census results from 2011 recorded 294,000 Serbian citizens living abroad (ISS, 2013). It is assumed that the real number of these citizens is larger. Furthermore, according to Reynaud et al. (2017, p.13) the great lessening in the number of respondents abroad could be attributed both to the boycott of ethnic Albanians of the 2011 Census (it is considered as usually low covered and it is estimated to at least about 50%) and to the partial change in the method of gathering census data of persons abroad (2011 census data about such persons was collected completely based on statements of members of their households who remained in the country). Referring to the report of the European Commission on Serbia for 2016, Judah and Vračić (2019) emphasize that Serbia is only to a certain extent prepared to collect population statistics data. Thus, the need to strengthen the capacity of the statistical office of Serbia and particularly the increasing of the number of its staff and their qualifications are stated as major priorities within the mentioned report of the European Commission for 2016. Besides, as claimed by ISS (2013), the statistical observation of migration data, especially international migration is significantly

less advanced in Serbia.

The Statistical office of Republic of Serbia observes only internal migration in its regular annual research (since 1988) on the basis of the records of the Ministry of Interior and based on change of place of residence. On the other hand, population censuses represent the main source of data on immigration as well as data on emigration (in censuses carried out from 1953 and 1971 respectively to 2011), (ISS, 2013, p.16). The Republic of Serbia is an emigration country, but, as many other countries, does not keep complete documentation of people emigrating from the country, so migration profile of the country is prepared on the basis of data obtained from Eurostat, published by EU member states for the number of immigrants in the present year. In addition to regular submission of data on the estimated population size for the present year, countries also submit data to Eurostat on immigration and emigration, at the national and regional levels together with demographic indicators obtained from the data, which are published yearly (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2019). Although a complete census of the Serbian diaspora and Serbs in the region has never been done, according to information from the Government of Serbia (2019), it is estimated that the number of Serbian diaspora, including Serbs in the region is about 5 million people nowadays. Of this whole, close to 2 million Serbs live in the former Yugoslav countries, Romania, Albania and Hungary.

A few strategic documents associated with migration management have also been adopted in Serbia. The focal point of this official documentation is addressing on specific matters such as refugees and domestically displaced persons, reintegration of returnees, prevention of illegal migration, human trafficking or issues related between native country and diaspora (Rašević, 2017). In this context, it is worth mentioning that the Parliament of Serbia adopted the Law on Central Population Register in March 2019 and to start practically with its work as of September 2020 (Stojković Attorneys, 2020; SOG lexellence, 2022). It was planned by the Register to include the personal data about their citizens from different official databases and data about the residence, temporary residence abroad, social

security and tax payer's data, as well as the number of foreigners in the country. In addition, the Central Population Register would also intend to contain the whole number of the refugees, asylum seekers and foreigners with permanent and temporary stay permits in Serbia (Stojković Attorneys, 2020). Preparations for this long-awaited regulation were made by the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government with the technical support of the Government of Serbia (SOG lexellence, 2022). According to this law, the Population Register is a unique, electronically managed database containing personal data of Serbian citizens, as well as foreign citizens. The Law began to be applied on September 1, 2020, because it was the deadline for the formation of the Population Register (SOG lexellence, 2022).

All citizens of *Montenegro* at work or staying abroad during the 1970s–1990s were placed in the total population of the country, regardless of the length of their stay (Monstat, 2008). Such a statistical practice was changed at the 2003 census by accepting international recommendations. The 2011 Census of population, households and dwellings in Montenegro was the first census after Montenegro gained its independence in 2006 and the tenth conducted in the territory of Montenegro (Daskalovska, 2017). Officials in Montenegro are developing a comprehensive system for migration management, and the Government of Montenegro has adopted a lot of laws as well as strategic documents and corresponding action plans (IOM, 2020). This includes strategies to migration management and ensuring that it contributes to the development of the country by addressing migration flows occurring constantly, improving the legal migration framework, and establishing an appropriate institutional system. Migration movements have been a significant characteristic of Montenegro over the past few decades and it is connected with both international and internal migration (Golubović). The policies related to migration have not been well regulated so far, for that reason, Golubović (2021) considers that migration policies must be proceeded toward in a more comprehensive way.

It is important to point out the lack of data kept also in *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina is publishing

data which have been obtained from three sources: The Institute of Statistic of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic Institute of Statistics of Republika Srpska and the Statistical Bureau of District Brčko of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Lukić & et al., 2012). All of these entities are parts of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and all of them have their own statistical institutions. Bosnia and Herzegovina held its last census in 2013, but its results were marked by controversy associated to ethnic groups' urgent requests to their relatives and family members abroad to come home for the time of the census. When it comes to the European Commission's 2016 report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Judah and Vračić (2019) emphasize the weakness of the statistical system in this country and the recommendations given by the Commission. Thus, there are three separate statistical agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina that mostly do not work jointly with each other in the main divisions. Furthermore, the recommendations by the Commission's report from 2016 referred to the fact that these agencies should follow shared methodologies and harmonized working practices on migration and overlapping citizenships. Therefore, it seems that the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a nest of intrigue having in mind the existing political structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina with two entities. Thus, the Federal Bureau of Statistics in Bosniak-Croat Federation uses the principle of permanent residence population, where a person is regarded as permanent resident if he/she was present in a particular place more than one year in the 2000–2015 periods (Josipović, 2016). In addition, if a person was absent from the place for more than a year (for instance, living abroad), that person would have been eliminated from the permanent population.

However, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, throughout its territory, during the last population census carried out between 1–15 October 2013 was applied the usual residence principle. Despite the accepted general instructions for performing a census, the census in 2013 differed particularly in the details that caused considerable misunderstanding between the entities in terms of how the current population actually was defined. As mentioned earlier, permanently or temporarily absent

persons from the country or the displaced persons were called to attend the census by many of the local ethnic communities, organizations, and political leaderships in order to obtain achievable responses. As a result, about 260,000 of enumerated persons were not counted as usual residents and also other 196,000 were regarded as a problem and disputed mostly in the Serbian entity after the first book of final results has already been published by the Central Statistical Bureau of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Josipović, 2016). Thus, according to Josipović (2016) the quality of the 2013 census data in Bosnia and Herzegovina was questioned due to the exclusion of these already enumerated persons, which in turn has led to actual reduction in the total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The total number of emigrants born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of their citizenship status in 2015 was estimated to 1,727,173 in 51 countries, of which about 60% or 1,039,236 live in EU-28 countries (Klempić Bogad & et al., 2018). Citing the World Bank data, Klempić Bogad et al. (2018, p.40) estimate that roughly 44.5% of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been in emigration, which is 16th out of 214 countries with considering to the emigration rate in terms of total population (3,531,159). These scholars also have concluded that there is a significantly higher emigration rate than the rates of the neighboring countries, for instance, Croatia (20.9%) and Serbia (18%).

In *Kosovo and Metohija*³, the problem is even more complicated. In 1991 those Albanians who lived in the former Yugoslavia including Kosovo and Metohija boycotted the census, so the authorities then estimated their numbers. Every year after that, official estimates were used of the previous years and ignoring the fact that the fertility rate had dropped dramatically from its high pre-conflict level (Judah & Vračić, 2019). The 2011 Census of population, households and dwellings in Kosovo was the first census after 1981 (the last complete census in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija province) since 1991 was incomplete and it was boycotted by the ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo (Daskalovska, 2017). Therefore, it did not help so much when a census was finally held in 2011, because at that time also Serbs in the north part of Kosovo and Metohija boycotted the census.

Namely, Visoka and Gjevori (2013, p.13) emphasize that to a certain degree, the Serb boycott did the same in return for the Albanian boycotting of the 1991 census in Kosovo and Metohija, thus these authors draw parallels of the political implications of censuses in the two different periods of time in similar context. The population census of 2011 showed that approximately 30% of Kosovars live abroad. According to administrative data, between 2011–2017, more than 180,000 Kosovars emigrated, and between 2013–2017 about 170,000 left via both regular and irregular migration (Hajdari & Krasniqi, 2021). Thus, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, recorded that 220,000 Kosovars emigrated over the last decade and only between 2014 and 2015, according to institutional data in Prishtina, 100,000 Kosovars emigrated for EU countries (Hajdari & Krasniqi, 2021). Under the overall objective of the program project: Strengthening of the Statistical System of Kosovo, 2019–2023 (FCG Sweden, 2020) the following tasks are planned for Kosovo: preparation for a population register and for the implementation of 2021 population census in Kosovo and Metohija; contribution to the strengthening of the statistical system of Kosovo and Metohija by enabling the development of reliable statistical information; and increasing the capacities of Kosovo Agency of Statistics to carry out its core activities in a standardized and independent manner and in line with EU standards.

3. Further Aspects on Migration Statistics Assessments in the Region of Former Yugoslavia

Further, our discussion will be focused on assessment of data quality of migration statistics. Demographic and migration statistics in former Yugoslavia underwent a lot in terms of reliability following the disintegration of the common state in 1991 (Nikitović, 2017). Reliability of emigration statistics is usually much lower than for immigration statistics, particularly in the countries of former Yugoslavia, because people who migrate have an inclination not to deregister in their country of previous residence (Flinterman & Kupiszewska, 2009). When speaking about the region of former Yugoslavia, switching from the concept of permanent place of residence to the concept of usual resident population has had a significant impact on the overall preparation of

the census and its implementation, as the concept of persons temporarily working abroad causes a problem. The place of usual residence is of great significance for guaranteeing comparability of the population size and to avoid double counting (Daskalovska, 2017). The acceptance of Regulation (2007) by the European Parliament Regulation on Community Statistics on Migration and International Protection preserved the concept of usual residence and also the duration limit of one year that was included in the UN recommendations adopted in 1998 (Cukut-Krilić & et al., 2019, p.17). Accordingly, an international migrant is defined as a person who changed the country of their usual residence, and thus there exists a difference between long-term and short-term migrants on the basis of duration of their stay. As stated by Josipović (2016, p.23), the censuses of 1981 and 1991 in former Yugoslavia were maintained in line with the basic ideas put in the 1971 methodology (where the principle of permanent population was replacing the principle of present/absent population). These grounds were conducted together with the changes in the 1974 constitution of Yugoslavia (Josipović, 2016).

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the publications of census results in 1991 have diverged to some extent from both the concepts of registered population and the prognostics of population along the republics⁴. The last common data by Yugoslav Statistical Yearbook was published in 1990. Thereafter, the central statistics collapsed and every successor state or province gradually started to implement the international recommendations and to abide by the European standards of statistics (Josipović, 2016). According to this scholar, following the EU recommendations, i.e., the harmonization of statistics with the European 2007 directive on the usual residence was first applied in Slovenia in 2008. The main difference with the 1995 definition of the principle of usual residence was that a usual resident can become a person with a permanent or temporary residence of one year that actually or prospectively is living in a certain place in Slovenia. Serbia employed this definition in the 2011 census, following the Croatian census from 2011. In Macedonia, agreement on the publication of the last census results in 2011 was not reached, thus population data in this country were assessed

by different methodology approaches used earlier (Josipović, 2016).

According to the approach of the usual population, the enumeration includes only the usual residents of the country and those who may not be currently present in the country on the reference date (UN, 2017). In addition, visitors and other persons staying in the country on a short-term basis are excluded from the enumeration. In the opinion of Daskalovska (2017) regardless of how long entirely absent households or absent households members were residing abroad, there is a perception among the domicile population, that these absent persons are still within their household members and have to be treated as temporarily working abroad. As a result, all former Yugoslav republics have some similar problems in implementation of censuses. This includes: Politicization of the census⁵ mostly based on the inclusion of ethno-cultural characteristics of the population (ethnicity, religion and language) and arrangements that should be covered with the census, common distrust among the different ethnic communities in the implementation of censuses, boycott and non-acceptance of census methodology and disputing of the census results (see Daskalovska, 2017, pp. 408–409). Relying on some analysis of cases, Visoka and Gjevori (2013) also declare that the 2011 censuses in the former Yugoslav region have proven to be a highly politicized process, which revealed disputed citizenship affiliations, double ethnic affiliation, and lack of civic duty.

The validity of statistics in the former Yugoslavia can be considered doubtful. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo and Metohija, the estimates of the usual resident population fail to take international migrations into account. The migration estimates in other former Yugoslav countries do not reflect migrations realistically (Flinterman & Kupiszewska, 2009). For example, the observed net migration is often positive, whereas the opposite is true in reality. Thus, an issue that has appeared within the data generated by the Statistics Offices of Croatia and Macedonia was showing large discrepancies when compared against data from the countries of destination, which means that, besides the limited availability, another problem was in the comparability between emigration data from sending countries

and immigration data from the countries of destination. This phenomenon was indicated clearly by Flinterman and Kupiszewska (2009), pointing out that the registration of emigrations in Western Balkans countries is not effective, i.e., only an insignificant portion of emigrations has been usually recorded. In addition, Flinterman and Kupiszewska (2009) indicate that due to the differences in definitions of migrations; it is often not possible to directly compare flows to and/or from various European countries. For that reason, these scholars recommend that when analyzing the data on migrations in former Yugoslavia with the ones from EU countries to take into account the international definitions for migration statistics.

4. Policy Implications

Policymakers often lack the minimal statistical evidence necessary to make informed decisions, while academics lack the basic data needed for scientific research (Fargues, 2018). The uses of existing resources in migration statistics are inefficient in general for all these countries. By implementing a well systematic approach certain basic issues can be overcome. Understanding the scope and implications of these changes is crucial for developing appropriate policy responses at the national, regional or transnational level. To achieve an ideal condition, where migrant flows and supplies can be calculated at any given time for any given country of origin and destination, Fargues (2018) points that statisticians should address the following essential difficulties: separating migrants from the travelers, coherence of the entry and exit data, determine the total number of not present population, and counting of circular, seasonal and temporary and irregular migration. It is considered that the National Population Registers provide one of the best sources of comprehensive statistics on international migration. The Population Registers contribute to the statistics of migration on both inflows and outflows and if provided with valid information for the foreigners similar to registration regulations for their citizens, Population Registers can generate statistics covering the movements of both foreigners and citizens in a very similar way (UN, 2017; Poulain & Herm, 2013). The countries of former Yugoslavia also have Population Registers, but

they are not as well developed as in EU and EFTA countries. Since still 2009, Flinterman and Kupiszewska (2009, p.36) have noticed that in Montenegro the system was still based on paper registers, i.e., on books, that the coverage of existing population registers is often limited to the citizens of Kosovo and Metohija or as it was the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia where the registers have covered only the citizens and foreigners having a permanent residence permit.

Fargues (2018) points to two serious limitations in a situation of absence of Population Register and where the population census is the only source of the migration statistics. First restriction is that censuses are generally conducted once in every ten years and for that reason fail to notice the temporary migrations that take place between two consecutive censuses. The second limitation is the way migrations are processed in the former Yugoslavia since it does not allow a proper measurement of out-migration. Duration of stay, whether factual or done with purpose, is a key criterion for the measurement of international migration movement. Therefore, all National migration systems in Former Yugoslavia should adopt the definition from the Global Migration Group (2017, p.3) that: "A long-term migrant is a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), and thus that country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence". This definition should not be mixed with the various administrative or legal definitions that are used in each country. Use of this definition enables the collection of comparable data on international migration at a global level, including former Yugoslavia as well. In addition to the above views, the findings by Popović, Župarić-Iljić and Kardov (2022) seem to be very useful and interesting in that direction, since it provides an example when a solution for migration management was found. As a result of the closing down of the Balkan corridor in 2015, the movement of forced migrants mostly from Syria into and out of the countries of the Balkan route put the countries of the region in a challenging situation (Popović, Župarić-Iljić & Kardov, 2022). Thus, according to these scholars, the countries had to develop migration

management systems that would enable acceptance and integration of refugees.

5. Conclusions

Migration statistics is becoming an important demographic phenomenon. Migration data are still very scarce within the countries of the former Yugoslav region. Comparisons on migration data from and to the region of former Yugoslavia are reflecting an unrealistically situation as a result of the quality and availability of relevant data. The assessments on migration statistics of these countries are not completely reliable and can be interpreted with caution.

In a situation where quantitative data for migration are not exact or even not available, as it is the case with the most part of former Yugoslavia, it is strongly recommended that scholars dealing with migrations should use migration data from renowned international organizations as UN and its estimations, Eurostat, Council of Europe, IOM, World Bank or OECD. In addition, some of the international organizations in collaboration with the national statistics offices and individual-free agents have enhanced technologies and advanced methodologies where also the information from Big Data are raised at a level to be potential alternative sources for generating more reliable statistics on international migration (Scheel & Ustek-Spilda, 2018; Scheel & Ustek-Spilda, 2019). Big Data is frequently defined as data sets whose size is beyond the capability of typical database software tools to store, capture, manage and analyze. As stated by Parviainen (2016), despite the fact that the emphasis is placed a lot on the aspect of size, it is worth knowing again that Big Data is by no means only about large data sets. Thus, Big Data is, first and foremost, network relational data. Without question, size is a characteristic of great significance in itself, but the power to connect, create and/or unlock patterns, as well as visualize relationships, is what makes Big Data such an attractive investment field (Parviainen, 2016). For various reasons, especially largely of a financial nature, many of the statistical offices of the former Yugoslavia are not yet ready to accept these advanced methodologies. The need to address these weaknesses and issues in migration statistics systems within this region is more than urgent. In this regard, it is also important to note the concept of Yusifov (2021).

He proposes an e-demography model system based on public registers. Accordingly, an e-demography system will enable tracking the population register and analyzing various demographic indicators from different registers integrated into the e-government portal. This system may lead to the ending of the traditional census and to allow virtually uninterrupted online population census. Given the importance of the topic, Yusifov (2021) considers that future research will address the matters of analysis of Big Data collected via social media as well as from public registers in order to administer various in-depth demographic analyzes (including the precise migration statistics).

The findings of this study indicate that almost all countries in this region are undertaking something and adopting some strategies (e.g., Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Croatia), but many of them are far from real and actual implementation on the ground. What represents migration and how it is measured is not a matter of international standards. The reasons for this situation may be imputed to the sociopolitical events in respective countries and maybe also to historical development of the notion of the ethnicity state.

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census operations—a presence that according to Courbage (2003) was more than is necessary in view of the small size of the Macedonian population, some two million inhabitants.

² The minority of Macedonian Albanians boycotted the Macedonian census in 1991 (Josipović, 2016, p.32).

³ XK-Kosovo (under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99).

⁴The overall demographic balance after the breakup of Yugoslavia was rather destabilized. Data for 1989 is considered for more reliable, while the 1991 census results were produced partly via post-census estimation of considerable or relatively great size of population, because mainly the Albanian citizens boycotted the census in Kosovo-Metohija, Preševo Valley (Central Serbia), and Macedonia (Josipović 2016).

⁵Daskalovska. (2017). Understands census politicization as attempts or real interference for political reasons by individuals, politicians or government bodies in the professional activities of the census, census law, census methodology or population response to the census and census results.

¹ Worthy of mention also was the close international monitoring that accompanied these censuses (Courbage 2003). Repeating the experience of 1994, in 2002 census, fifty European observers travelled all over the country for three weeks in order to verify the transparency of the