
CHALLENGES ON MEASURING MIGRATION IN ALBANIA

MAJLINDA NESTURI, INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS
mnesturi@instat.gov.al

Abstract

Emigration was one of the major reasons of population decline in Albania between the 2001 and the 2011 censuses. Given that Albanian emigrants have not systematically registered when leaving the country, and because there have been few incentives to register their departure with the local authorities, the use of 'indirect methods' was the possible way to produce an estimate of the individuals who have emigrated between 2001 and 2011. According to INSTAT's indirect estimations, during this period about 481,000 Albanians left the country. On the return side, Census data revealed that about 139,827 Albanians returned to the country during 2001-2011. Apart from the 'indirect methods' used for calculation of net-migration, this article puts its focus, as well, in Labour Force survey as a new approach on measuring migration.

Migration remains the main component which drives the population changes. For this reason, its measure is the main challenge encountered when calculating the annual population.

1. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International migration has been a major force in population change in the past two decades. The main reason for the population decline observed in the last two censuses was the large-scale emigration of Albanian citizens. In Albania, as usually elsewhere, migration particularly involves young adults, who migrate for reasons of employment and education opportunities, and for family reasons. Consequently, youth particularly figure in migration statistics and were main contributors to the recorded population decline in Albania.

Emigration was the main reason for the declining population in Albania prior to 2001, and between 2001 and 2011. The abolition of emigration barriers and the social turmoil in the 1990s generated successive waves of emigration in these years. Several hundreds of thousands of Albanians left the country (e.g. Carletto et al. 2006), a loss that was not offset by immigration and natural increase. This massive emigration was the main cause for the complete reversal from a high annual population growth in the 1979-1989 inter-census period of 2.0 percent, to a negative growth (-0.3 percent annually) in the subsequent 1989-2001 inter-census period. In absolute terms, the population increase of almost 600 thousand persons that was observed in the inter-census period before 1989, turned into a decrease of more than 100 thousand in the one after 1989. The 2011 census conclusively showed that emigration was the most important factor in the net population loss of 269 thousand persons between 2001 and 2011, accounting for 8.8 percent of the 2001 population. According to INSTAT indirect estimations, during this period about 482 thousand Albanians left the country, a number that was only partially compensated by immigration and natural growth.

Part of the reason for the continued emigration may be sought in the changing characteristics of Albanian emigration. It is thought that during the 1990s migration was dominated by young single men looking for work abroad, in a time where Albania was in turmoil. In the first decade of this millennium migration seems to have diversified: migration is still dominated by young adults, but in addition to men, women increasingly go abroad as well. The share of children has somewhat increased too, and this is a clear indication of the process of family reunification and marriage migration that often follows the earlier 'pioneering' migration of a first male-dominated wave. Such a process of family reunification and marriage migration tends to enable continued high migration levels at least for some years after the first wave of migration.

1.1 EMIGRATION – THE INDIRECT METHOD

Emigration is one of the major reasons for the declining population in Albania between 2001 and 2011. Given that Albanian residents are not systematically registered when they leave the country, and because there are few incentives to register a departure with the local authorities, there are no reliable measures of the number of individuals who have left Albania. It is possible, however, to use indirect methods to produce an estimate of the individuals who have emigrated between 2001 and 2011. This indirect method consisted on comparing data from both the 2001 and the 2011 Censuses. Over that decade, the population of Albania decreased with 8.8 percent, from 3,1 million to 2,8 million. In order to estimate to what extent external migration was responsible for this decline, the population was projected forward from the 2001 census, using revised figures on deaths and births from the civil register, and assuming no external migration happened (Migration in Albania, 2014).

In a first step, the population as of January 2001 is taken as the basis. Both age and sex of individuals are considered. In a second step, information on live births was taken for each year, taking into consideration the number of males and females born. In a third step, the number of deaths by age and sex are calculated using the specific death rates based on the population projections of the 2001 census (Population Projections for Albania, INSTAT edition, 2004). For each age group, the number of deaths was subtracted from the population in 2001. For the population aged zero, the number of live births in the preceding year was taken into consideration. This procedure was then repeated for each year until January 2012.

The outlined procedure calculates a closed population which does not take into account migration. To calculate the number of emigrants, it is necessary, as a next step, to compare the closed population, as calculated above with the census population. First, the estimated population as of 1 January 2012 (i.e. the closed population) was extrapolated to 1 October 2011 to match the population on the same date (1 October 2011). The difference between these two figures is the estimated net migration.

1.2 RETURN MIGRATION

Given the strong increase in the number of Albanians residing abroad over the decade, return migration has not been very substantial. Nevertheless, in the 2011 census a total of more than 100 thousand people reported that they had returned from residence abroad since 2001. Census analysis demonstrated that returns have been on the rise every year, in particular after 2008 (Migration in Albania).

While some of these return migrants settle in Albania permanently, for many of them the return is temporary in nature. In this sense, the return migration captured in the census is a snap-shot of on-going circular migration. Moreover, the migration figures are based on the internationally accepted definition of an international migrant, as someone who stays abroad for at least one year.

2. DIFFICULTIES MEASURING MIGRATION FLOWS

International migration has become an increasingly important issue for many countries in the world, affecting countries of both origin and destination. Very little is known about the actual number of annual migrants throughout the world, and the scarce information available is contradictory. Today, countries typically rely on their own definitions of what constitutes a "migration". This creates inconsistencies among international data and makes it challenging to understand the process by which people move across national borders.

It has often been pointed out that statistical information on migration is insufficient and incomplete in terms of availability, harmonization of concepts and definitions and accuracy. It is widely recognized that migration data are not easy to collect and that data collections systems, as well as definitions, used to define migration events vary significantly.

Consistent migration flow data are needed for a range of reasons that are critical to the development of a reliable evidence base for migration policies and research. One of the main obstacles is the absence of a standard definition for measuring migration flows. There also needs to be communication and sharing of data between countries of origin and destination, and procedures to assess the reported migration flows.

In Albanian case, measuring migration flows is the main challenge. As introduced above, the only data available concerning migration was the Albanian Population and Housing Censuses, which gives an estimation concerning migration stock within inter-censal period. As it is known using censuses on measuring migration has its own difficulties or limitations. Population and housing census is carried out every 10 years, accommodates only small number of questions and it cannot capture all migration events like entire families that moved as well as seasonal/temporary, circular (night prior to census date). Therefore, it cannot constitute a source of annual statistics on international migration. Moreover, in absence of the administrative data, INSTAT started to focus on social surveys such as QLFS. INSTAT is evaluating also other ways on measuring migration based on the other countries experiences. These methods consist on conducting a specific survey and using mirror statistics. Mirror statistics, sharing of data between countries of origin and destination, will be a good solution if there will be a harmonized definition, as well as defined procedures to assess the reported migration flows.

3. MEASURING MIGRATION USING LABOR FORCE SURVEY

The Quarterly Labour Force Survey is a household based survey. All individuals aged 15 years and over in the selected household are subject of labour force survey. The sample is based in a two-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage are selected the geographical areas with a proportional probability to the size of the enumeration area. In the second stage within each of the geographical areas (once selected in the first stage) are selected a fix number of 8 households by equal probability systematic sampling method. In 2014, for the first time, in the LFS quarterly survey was incorporated a new module for measuring internal, international as well as returned migration. This information through this module is collected on quarterly basis but the data are processed and published on annual basis. The new migration module has been incorporated to LFS questionnaire in 2014; this was a pilot test to check if everything worked. According to LFS 2014, the data collected from this module had some problems, the number of emigrants was underestimated (very low), while on the other hand the returnees was better captured. In 2014, the migration questions had as reference the 2011 census year, in order to capture the entire post-census period, while in 2015 and further on the reference period was the previous year. This module was added to the roster of the questionnaire, this is a part of the questionnaire that collects basic demographic information for all

the household members, and not only for those that are subject of the survey. Data processing consists of several procedures and controls, and then the respective data are used to calculate the population on January 1. The quality of the data collected has continuously been improving and the coverage is more complete on both sides, for emigrants and returnees.