INTRODUCTION

Unlike the other countries of the former Yugoslavia, at the time of its disintegration, these two countries were not affected by the war conflict and therefore not by excessive displacement of the population. Even though the fertility rate in both countries has been steady for many years, natural increases have been positive up until recently and yet, the much-anticipated censuses showed a different picture - the population of North Macedonia decreased significantly, whereas the population in Montenegro slightly increased, as the first results show. The research will demonstrate that the explanation can be identified in the recently collected results from the latest censuses, by examining the birth rate, mortality, fertility, and the effects of migration in previous decades.

Key words: Montenegro, North Macedonia, birth rate, mortality, fertility, migration

DATA AND METHODS

Data used in this article were mostly provided by government statistical offices. For Montenegro - Statistical Office of the Republic of Montenegro (MONSTAT) and for North Macedonia the data used to analyse originates from State Statistical Office of North Macedonia. Data on fertility, mortality and birth rates were taken from Eurostat database and compared with data from the statistical institutes of the mentioned countries. In regard to the migration data, it is taken from both public results from the previously mentioned institutes and articles. Additional data has been collected through civil registration and vital statistics, population censuses and population registers from each statistic institute.

RESULTS

Fertility

- Montenegro has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe, with a modest increase during the observed period.
- The fertility rate in North Macedonia has fluctuated, from stagnation to decline, to return to a level above 1.5 in recent years.

Recent population changes in Montenegro and North Macedonia and their cause

Age structure

Montenegro age distribution in 2022:
- 0-14 years: 18%
- 15-64 years: 65%
- 65 years and over: 17%

North Macedonia age distribution in 2022:
- 0-14 years: 17%
- 15-64 years: 67%
- 65 years and over: 16%

These percentages illustrate that both countries have similar age distributions, with most of the population in the working-age group (15-64 years), and smaller proportions of children (0-14 years) and elderly (65 years and over).

This data is sourced from Eurostat, which provides comprehensive statistical information on European countries, including those in the Western Balkans.

Migration

- Return Migration has been a trend of Montenegrin expatriates returning to the country, particularly after spending time abroad for work or education.
- Even in cases where overall net migration seems negative, this return migration can support population numbers.
- Nowadays, there still new immigrants moving to Montenegro.
- According to the European Commission, these immigrants may include people from nearby nations or other areas looking for a better quality of life in Montenegro.

- The top five countries of origin for foreigners who obtained a permit for temporary residence in Montenegro in 2015 were: North Macedonia (1,039), Russia (2,585), Ukraine (1,169), Serbia (8739), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (3,945).

- In reference to North Macedonia, many North Macedonians have left the country in quest of more stable political contexts, better living conditions, and greater economic prospects.
- According to the European Commission, this migration has been especially noticeable among young people and skilled workers, creating a "brain drain" that exacerbates the population decrease.

SUMMARY

The population of Montenegro has increased for several reasons, despite periods of negative net migration rates. Key factors contributing to population growth include natural population growth and return migration which added a significant spike especially during COVID years. Although Montenegro has a relatively low birth rate, natural population growth still contributes to the overall population increase. All this contributed to a 2.6% increase in the population compared to the last population census, according to the preliminary results of the census in Montenegro. Over the past ten years, a combination of these causes has caused North Macedonia's population to steadily decline; this is in line with wider regional patterns in the Western Balkans, where migration and population dynamics are influenced by the interplay of political, demographic, and economic variables. After all mentioned, we can conclude that the population decline in this country, as indicated by the most recent census, was inevitable.

REFERENCES

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