

## Relations between the Social and Demographic Changes in the Republic of Macedonia: Case Study of the East Region

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### Abstract

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The subject of this paper is an analysis of the demographic trends and social problems of the population in the Eastern region in the Republic of Macedonia. Apart from the positive movements of the total population of the region that characterized the region until 2002, there are significant differences in the demographic characteristics and processes within the region itself. While major urban centres note positive movements, depopulation and demographic aging affect many settlements. The findings of the abovementioned issues at an aggregate level are undoubtedly extremely important as the principal root for the formulation of the fundamental principles and goals of the social and population policy. However, this is not enough for the determination of the immediate measures of that policy due to the pronounced regional and local differences in addressing the social issues in question. With a detailed introduction to the situation and changes in this respect, and with the possible assessment of the tendencies in the future, a scientific basis for specific social action and involvement of the demographic and social development in the social purposes is created.

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**Keywords:** Social changes, Demographic changes, Poverty, Migration, Fertility rate, Satisfying

### 1. Introduction

The social and economic policy in socialist Macedonia (1945-1990) was based on the urban location of the industry, which fostered the focus of life and encouraged the development of cities, the transformation of the agrarian population into non-agrarian one and the underestimation and neglect of agriculture and the rural way of life." Until 1945, the rural population moved more to other villages (49,224 people or 68.8%), and less in the cities (22,910 people or 31.2%). Then the structure of the movement changed in favour of the cities. In the period from 1953 to 1961, 55,000 people moved from the village to the city, between 1961-1971 a total of 140,000 people moved, and in the period 1971-1981 a total of 94,000 people moved from the village to the city" (Kjurciev, 1981:298-299).

From these data it is obvious that the intensity of migrations was in a strong increase between the first two inter-census periods. The industry concentrated in the capital city of Skopje and in several cities, and not only villages that did not have living conditions were emptied, but also those villages that had conditions for agricultural production .

Non-agricultural activity in the Republic of Macedonia (industry, construction, trade, etc.) was mainly carried out in urban and suburban areas, with certain representation in several mining settlements, former municipal centres and several larger villages. As a consequence of such concentration of non-economic activities in the cities (state administration, education, health, culture) and migrations of the population was mainly carried out from the hilly and mountain villages to the towns and suburban unurbanized ("wild") settlements, from the more remote and unconnected villages with roads and transport, towards the bigger and closer to the towns valley villages, and in general from all the villages to the towns, from the smaller to the bigger towns, and from all of them to Skopje - the economic, administrative, educational and health and cultural centre of the country.

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"Since 1948, and compared to the last census year of 2002, the Skopje region has grown by 3.5 times, or by 405999 inhabitants" (Jakimovski, 2007: 128). The pressure of agrarian overpopulation has been weakening in the course of time, due to the increasing employment of the population in the industry. Moving out of the village and requesting work outside of the agriculture became a "necessity" and frequently "a one-way road without return". The unfavourable conditions in which agriculture developed and especially the poor socio-economic position of agricultural producers, together with the high agrarian overpopulation and the very unfavourable conditions for living in the villages influenced the population to massively leave the agriculture and the village and migrate to the cities (Miljovski, 1973).

In the Republic of Macedonia, deagrarrization not only happened with a faster pace, but the deagrarrized population migrated to the cities, it became urban, and on this basis there is a relatively high rate of depopulation of the rural population. Namely, from 8 900 that left agriculture on an annual basis, only about 3 000 remained to live in the village (Georgiev, 1985).

## 2. Research Methods and Date

In parallel with the analysis of the data from the State Statistical Office on the number of population, the situation with fertility, age structure, migrations and the poverty rate, data from the survey were used. The households in the East region provide the survey unit. As a basis for the selection of representativeness, data on the number of households from the last census in 2002 were taken. Stratification of the whole region is carried out according to the territorial organization and further, according to the place of residence (village/city). The survey was conducted on a representative sample of 1028 households, on the territory of all 11 municipalities in the East region, in a total of 52 settlements. The survey was conducted simultaneously in all municipalities in the period from 3 February 2014 to 14 March 2014.

## 3. Migration

The migration from the village to the city has a twofold impact: in the rural population, the share of generations between 15-40 years of age is weakening, and in the cities it is strengthened. The consequences in both directions have an impact on the natural growth of the population and its renewal, which does not have a positive character. In the first case, i.e. the village population, there is a constant exodus of generations, the most important ones is the reproduction of the population, as well as the influence of urban environments to control and plan birth gives rise to lowering the birth rate and increasing mortality and reduction in natural growth and the possibilities of their own recovery. When this process is long-term and socially uncontrolled as it is in the Eastern region, the process of aging of the population is expanding and it is hard to stop it, there are existential and other social problems of the elderly population. The rejuvenation of the urban population with migration undoubtedly improves the age structure, it increases the reproductive power in a certain period, but on the social side, this process does not compensate for the loss that has occurred in the rural population. The migrant population is easily accepting celibacy, postponing marriage, and not creating a family with a large number of children due to education and the acquisition of qualifications, unemployment, lack of a place to live, lower standard of living than expected and rapid integration into the urban mentality. These favourable conditions created by migration in urban areas are not sufficiently exploited.

Migrations are selective by gender, age, family status, occupation, education, economic characteristics, and the like (Peterson, 1961; Shaw, 1975; Ogden, 1984). It is generally known that women are more involved in migration at a short distance, as well as the most mobile population between 15-40 years of age. R. P. Shaw (1975) in the migration survey confirms that people between the ages of 15 and 35 migrate more than others, which is interpreted as the fact that young people are easily adaptable to new environments. The old population finds it difficult to decide on changing the place of residence, primarily due to the habits of living in a certain place and the connection with a certain way of life.

H. Browning (1971) believes that selective migration is a landmark in the initial phase of urbanization and industrialization, but with time it is decreasing. The longer the fast urbanization lasts, it is likely that the educational selectivity among migrants from rural areas will be reduced.

For more than 25 years (1990-2016), the socio-economic development of the Republic of Macedonia has been accompanied by numerous difficulties and problems that have all the characteristics of an economic and social crisis. It is felt in almost all spheres of everyday work and live, and it is normal to expect that it will have a significant impact on the awareness and the people's sense of the economic and social situation of the country.

#### 4. Poverty

Poverty is often accompanied by unemployment, low status of women and limited access to social and healthcare services, as well as to reproductive health services, which also include family planning. All of these factors contribute to a low level of fertility and a high level of mortality and morbidity. Poverty is also closely linked to inadequate spatial distribution of the population. The families of young married couples are sensitive to the consequences of social and economic change. The living conditions for many families have deteriorated over the past years due to the lack of productive employment and state measures that would require balancing of their budgets by reducing social spending.

According to the final data, the at-risk-of-poverty rate in the Republic of Macedonia in 2015 was 21,5%. The non-monetary dimension of poverty (especially the poor housing conditions and the low educational level) affects an additional 30% of the population. The reasons for the worsening of living standards are in the contraction of employment and low sectoral growth in high productivity sectors. Sectors with a relatively high level of productivity, such as trade, transport and communications, and the manufacturing industry, release labour force during this period. Industrial production in relation to 1990 declined to 55.3% in 2011. Agricultural employment rose from 10.5% in 1995 to 16.6% in 2016. During this period, the Republic of Macedonia is de-industrialized and converted into an agrarian state.

For most of the people living in the Macedonian society, wages are the main source of income (65.4% in 2015, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia, 2016: 304). According to the State Statistical Office, over two thirds of the employees (67.1%) in the Republic of Macedonia have a salary of less than USD 380 (Labour Force Survey 2016: 99). The minimum living standard of a four-member household usually exceeds average wage earnings in households, as the average household employment rate in Macedonia is 1.01. Every second household (52.2%) with two adults and with three or more dependent children lives in poverty.

**Table-01:At-risk-of-poverty rate in the Republic of Macedonia 2013-2015**

	2013	2014	2015
% of population	24.2	22.1	21.5
0-17 years	30.9	29.0	28.6
Households of two adults with three or more dependent children	49.9	50.9	52.9
Unemployed	43.7	40.5	39.7
At-risk-of poverty rate before social transfers	41.0	41.7	40.5
At-risk-of poverty threshold of single-person household-annual equivalent income in dollars	1 343	1 375	1 498
At-risk-of poverty threshold of four person household ( 2 adults and 2 children aged less than 14) annual equivalent income in dollars	2 821	2 887	3 145

**Source:** My calculations & State Statistical Office Poverty line, News Release, No: 4.1.16.101.

The findings in the table show numerous implications. First of all, they confirm the thesis which has been previously established, for unequal distribution of resources in some households that contributes to a higher level of poverty experienced by the unemployed. In households with lower income it is more likely that the unemployed will receive less of the resources, as well as that they will give up on some personal use items to buy those needed by children or the entire household. Children are relatively more likely to feel poverty compared to older age groups. Indicators for families confirm this with three or more children, of whom almost one-half (53%) live in poverty

One of the most important implications of poverty is how attention is transferred from the interest in material resources and the distribution of income to social and relational issues (Room, 1995). Critics of that thesis rightly point out that Townsend's definitions for poverty and deprivation (Townsend, 1979) are framed within the social and relational conditions. These are the theses for the inability of certain people to fulfil the social roles which are expected from them, based on their membership in the society, and as a consequence of the lack of material resources.

Pensions are important, because not only they reduce the poverty of the elderly, but also since they support other family members. Social assistance programmes account for the poor in large part in comparison with the non-poor, with significant funds (75%) going to the poor, which indicates to the unnecessary spending of funds. The government allocates more than half of its total revenue to social security transfers, or one fifth of its GDP, to current transfers. Most of these transfers are for pensions and the rest for various types of social assistance. Resources allocated to social transfers are a heavy burden on public finances and take resources from other important and with a higher rate of return on invested funds - costs, including infrastructure investments. There is no good infrastructure, which is an important national benefit, which will improve the well-being of the population and will help investment. These negative tendencies are taking place in the background of economic and social disturbances that have attacked the country as a market economy.

Access to the labour market and salaries are crucial in determining the assets of individuals and households, and are also important in providing security and control over those assets. Thus, the position of young people in the labour market is the main determinant of their wealth or poverty, so research shows that the position of young people in this case is significantly different from the position of adults. The number of employees in a household is the most important indicator of the poverty rate of all household members, including children, but employment throughout life affects the rate of poverty after retirement. It is usual that the impact of employment on poverty is positive. Earnings from paid work is the largest source of income, while lack of earnings is the main cause of poverty (Sutherland et al, 2003). Changes in the working status or earnings are the main reason for the movement in or out of poverty (Jenkins and Riggs, 2001).

## **5. East Region**

The Eastern region is located in the eastern part of the Republic of Macedonia, it covers the area of the river Bregalnica, that is, it extends through the Maleshevo-Pijanica, the Stip valley and the Kocani field. The region borders with the Republic of Bulgaria on the eastern side, to the north with the Northeast planning region, to the west with the Vardar planning region, and to the south with the South-East planning region. The Eastern planning region includes 11 municipalities with a total of 217 settlements, of which 8 town and 209 village settlements.

The territory of the Eastern region covers an area of 3 538.59 km<sup>2</sup>, and according to the estimates of the population of the State Statistical Office in 2015 (state of 30.06.2015) 177 145 inhabitants lived in this region, representing 8.7% of the total population in the Republic of Macedonia or 50.06 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

### **5.1 Movement of the total number of population and inhabited areas**

The analysis of the data on population movements in the past six decades – in total and regionally (at the level of regions and municipalities) shows that major changes have occurred in the growth of the total population and in particular the spatial distribution of the population in the region expressed in the continuous deepening of the uneven distribution of the population.

**Table-02: Dynamics of total population in the East Region**

Years	Population	Changes in number	Changes in percentage
1948	120 656	-	-
1953	138 327	17671	14.6
1961	143329	5 002	3.6
1971	157 369	14 040	9.8
1981	172 163	14 794	9.4
1994	180 084	7 918	4.6
2002	181 858	1 777	1.0
2015	177 145	-4 713	-2.6

**Source:** State Statistical Office, Population censuses in the Republic of Macedonia 1948, 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 1994, Book IX, Skopje, 2002, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002 year, Book XIII, Skopje, 2004 and Statistical Review: Population and Social Statistics, Population Percentages on 30 June 2015 by 31 December 2015 by gender and age, by municipalities and statistical regions: NUTS 3-2007).

In the time period from 1948 to 2002, the population in the Eastern planning region increased by 61 202 persons or by 50.72%. In this area, agrarian overpopulation was a key socio-economic factor, which has initiated the spatial mobility of the population, gradually leading to rural exodus and social restructuring of the agrarian population. The employment in the cities in some parts of the region caused the abandonment of industrially isolated settlements and permanent resettlement in the settlements which are industrially well connected with the cities i.e. the city areas (Stip, Kochani). The permanent migration of entire families has adversely affected bioreproduction, weakening the biodynamic force of many rural settlements in the region, and thus has deepened inequality between rural and urban areas.

The rapid development of the industry in the Eastern region has initiated the city population growth and the large concentration of economic entities in urban areas, the textile industry and mining have expanded, and the tertiary industry has gradually entered the city area. The demographically depressive areas mainly coincided with the peripheral parts of the municipalities, which were industrially isolated and distant from the municipal centres. Depopulation trends stopped in the settlements that have received better industrial connection with urban areas, and urbanized environments. In the period from 2002 to 2015, the Eastern region has been involved in a process of depopulation, whereby the population reduced by 4 713 persons or by 2.6%. The biggest and most serious reason for discharging of certain regional units and settlements is probably the low social standard and the uncertain existence of the population living there.

**Table-03: Same basic indicators**

		Gross value added 2014		Gross Fixed capital formation 2014		Average net wage paid per employee 2016	
		Millions of dollars	%	Millions of dollars	%	Dollars	%
<b>Republic of Macedonia</b>		8 757	100.0	2 362	100.0	427	100.0
<b>East Region</b>		720	8.2	195	8.3	319	74.4

**Source:** My calculations & State Statistical Office, Regions of the Republic of Macedonia, 2017

Namely, the Eastern region has an average net salary per employee at 74% of the national average and participates with only 8.3% in the total gross fixed capital formation and 8.2% in the creation of the gross added value. The process of urbanization positively affects the development of the cities and the larger villages, as well as the villages in the vicinity of the cities. The population in these settlements can be employed without leaving their domicile. However, the population from remote settlements leaves their homes and permanently moves into cities - in the unurbanized "wild settlements" where it builds a roof over its head. Due to the migration, in many settlements the population has decreased, and this has contributed the number of settlements up to 99 inhabitants in 1953 to increase by 4.9 times in 2002.

**Table-04: Dynamics of populated places number and structure**

	1953 year		2002 year	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Structure</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Structure</i>
To 99	18	8.29	105	48.39
100 – 299	75	34.56	35	16.12
300 – 499	50	23.04	28	12.90
500 – 999	43	19.83	28	12.90
1000 – 4999	29	13.36	14	6.45
5000 – 9999	1	0.46	3	1.38
Over10000	1	0.46	4	1.84
Total	217	100.00	217	100.00

**Source:** My calculations & State Statistical Office, Population censuses in the Republic of Macedonia 1948 1953, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 1994, Book IX, Skopje, 2002 and Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia 1953 and 2002 years, Book XI, Skopje, 2004.

As a result of the silent migration, a number of rural settlements have become completely unpopulated (16, according to the 2002 census). This situation poses a serious task for the region to revitalize at least one part of those settlements. Of these, a particular problem are the villages with less than 50 inhabitants, and there are 60 or 67.41% of such villages in the region of the total number of villages of up to 100 inhabitants, or 27.65% of the total number of villages in the Eastern region.

From this subgroup (up to 50 inhabitants) it can be expected that some villages, and especially those up to 10 inhabitants will be completely evicted. In the past years, changes in the structure of the population by their place of residence have been particularly pronounced. They are emphasized in favour of increasing the city population. While in 1953 the population in the city was 26.73% or 36,975 persons of the total population in the region and in rural areas 101,350 or 73.23%, in 2002 this ratio changed significantly when two-thirds of the population lives in the city (66.29%) , and one third in rural areas (33.71%).

The spatial-demographic polarization also affected changes in the redistribution of the population in the urban areas according to the size. In 2002 in the Eastern region there were 6 small towns (from 3,000 to 12,000 inhabitants) and 2 medium ones (20,000 to 50,000 inhabitants). From the aspect of the spatial distribution of the city population, its concentration in cities according to their size is interesting. Thus, the share of the population from small towns in the total city population is 40.29%, while in the medium cities it is 59.71%.

The aging of the population affects the developments on the labour market, the financial and the commodity market. At the macroeconomic level, labour is relatively insufficient (and capital is relatively extensive) in countries where the aging process of the population is accelerated. Changes in labour price relations will lead to greater capital investment, and can generate major changes in the flow of labour, capital, and commodities in countries where aging is slower. At the microeconomic level, changes in the age structure of the workforce will affect labour productivity (Borsch-Supan, 2005).

The total fertility rate shows that the simple reproduction of the population, in terms of renewal of generations, is not guaranteed in the Republic of Macedonia, and even less in the Eastern planning region. This is due to the demographic transition of the population, which takes place from a large family with a short life span to a small family with a long life span. Despite the fact that a lot of couples wish to have more children, the socio-economic factor such as education, the delay in acquiring employment, the high and constant unemployment rate, job insecurity, the inability to harmonize family and work responsibilities results in considerable decline of the number of children in the family. All this leads to a negative natural growth, a negative increase in the population and contributes to the aging of the population.

**Table-05: Total fertility rate and Mean age of mother at birth of first child**

	2002	2006	2010	2012	2014	2015
<b>Republic of Macedonia</b>						
Total fertility rate	1.59	1.50	1.60	1.50	1.52	1.49
Mean age of mother at birth of first child	24.6	.....	26.0	26.0	26.8	27.0
<b>East Region</b>						
Total fertility rate	1.43	1.30	1.40	1.30	1.29	1.29
Mean age of mother at birth of first child	23.7	.....	25.0	26.0	26.2	26.6

**Source:** State Statistical Office, Regions of the Republic of Macedonia, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2016.

The total fertility rate in the Eastern planning region is reduced from 10%, i.e. from 1.43 in 2002 to 1.29 in 2015. The data show changes with unfavourable implications for the restoration of the population. The average age of the mother at the birth of the first child in the Eastern region by 2010 was lower than that at the state level. But in 2015, the average age at the state level moved and it was 26.6 years in 2015. Birth well beyond the needs of simple population reproduction, marks the demographic situation of the Eastern planning region. The Eastern planning region belongs to the category of low-fertile area since 2002 when the low birth threshold was passed.

Demographic changes that are expressed in declining of the birth-rate/fertility depend first on the impact of demographic and other non-economic factors (economic and social, socio-psychological and socio-cultural) in relation to those factors that have influenced the stage of classical demographic transition. It is as many authors say (Bongaarts, 2002; Frejka, 2010; Van de Kaa 2008; Wanheimer-Baletic,1999) that there were primarily economic and social factors associated with the significant spreading and influence of the process of modernization of the society of low demographic variables, that is, of low reproductive norms that determine the number of children in the family. The demographic factors that affect birth-rate/fertility decline can be summarized as follows: increasing of the average age of women in entering into marriage, an increase in the average age of women at the birth of their first child and related to that the shortening of the woman's fertile period, the long duration of the women's education process, increased employment of women in non-agricultural activities, an increase in the number of single mothers, and an increase in the new form of life communities.

**5.2 Age dependency factors**

Of the indicators that determine the degree of demographic aging, the analysis of the so-called aging index, which is the ratio between the number of the population aged 60 and over and the population under the age of 20, is particularly interesting. In the Eastern region, the participation of the age contingent of 60 years of age and more prevails. Namely, for one person at the age of 0-19 there are 1.1 persons aged 60 and more.

**Table-06: Indicators of demographic aging in 2015**

	% of total population				Index of age (4/2)
	Average age	Young population (0-19)	Young and middle aged population (0-39)	Old population on (60+)	
	1	2	3	4	
<b>Republic of Macedonia</b>	38.5	23.0	53.6	18.8	0.81417
<b>East Region</b>	40.6	19.9	49.2	21.5	1.07697

**Source:** My calculations & State Statistical Office, Statistical Review: Population and Social Statistics, Population Percentages on 30 June 2015 by 31 December 2015 by gender and age, by municipalities and statistical regions: NUTS 3-2007).

The aging process of the population also affects the changes in the aging of the workforce in the region. It is very important to determine the burden on the working contingent of the population, which is a demographic framework for the formation of the largest part of the workforce, depending on the possibilities for activating the workforce. Indicators for utilization of the work contingent are the factor for age dependence of the total population, the factor for age dependence of young people and the factor for age dependence of the elderly.

The factor of total age dependence shows the degree of workload of the population of working age with young people and the elderly; i.e. the workload of the working contingent with the pre-employment and the post-employment contingent. The factor of age dependence of young people is the level of the burden on the working age population with the youth contingent, i.e. persons of pre-employment ability (0-14 years of age). The age-dependent factor of the old is the degree of burden on the working age population with the contingent of the old population, that is, the people of the post-employment population (65 years or more).

The depending old population, can greatly burden the public spending (pensions, health care and the like), because a smaller number of working people support a growing number of pensioners.

**Table-07: Factor of age dependency on the population, young and old**

	Factor of total age dependence		Factor of dependency on youth		Factor of dependency on old	
	2002	2015	2002	2015	2002	2015
<b>Republic of Macedonia</b>	46.3	41.9	30.9	23.7	15.4	18.2
<b>East Region</b>	42.1	40.4	26.1	20.1	16.0	20.3

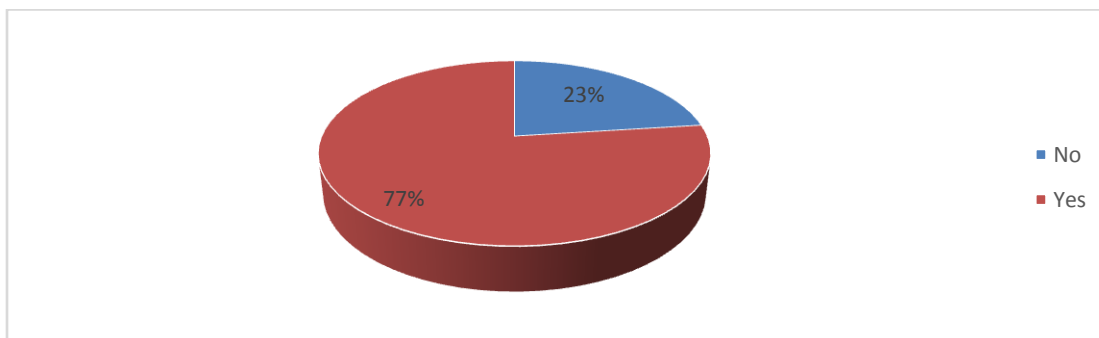
**Source:** My calculations & State Statistical Office, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002 year, BookXIII, Skopje, 2004 and Statistical Review: Population and Social Statistics, Population Percentages on 30 June 2015 by 31 December 2015 by gender and age, by municipalities and statistical regions: NUTS 3-2007).

Statistical data show that the factor of total age dependence in the Eastern region is shifting from 42.1% in 2002 to 40.4% in 2015. This shift arises from the significant decrease in the working age population burdening with persons of the pre-employment age (from 26.1% to 20.1%).

**5.3 Satisfying basic life needs**

**Cost of food.** Only 77.1% of the surveyed households in the Eastern region can cover their food costs, while 22.9% are not able to provide food resources.

**Chart-01: Are you able to pay for food costs?**



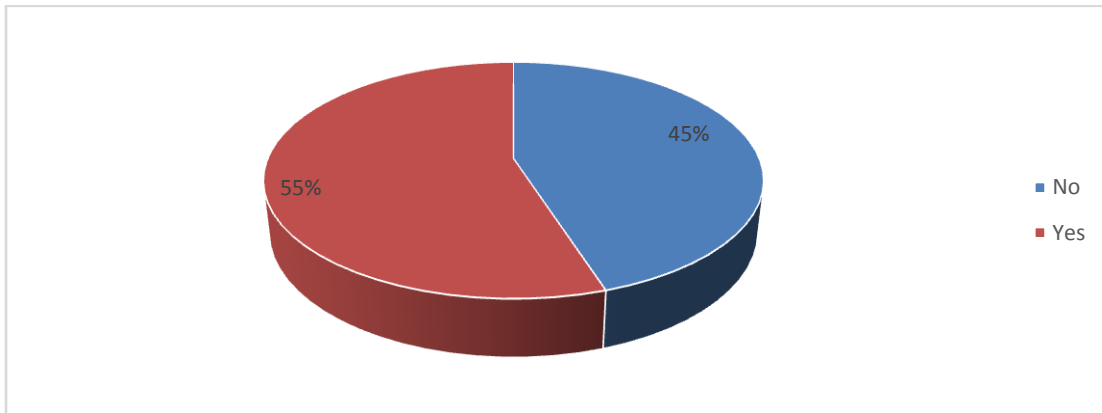
Certainly, the place of residence of households influences the answers to this question. Households living in the countryside (50%) are characterized by an above-average statement *that they can not provide funds for food*.



If we analyse the attitudes of the respondents in the household regarding this issue, structured according to the activity, and the education, we will notice that the largest number of respondents who answered that *they can not cover the costs of food* are the unemployed people who are looking for work (45.6%), the unemployed who do not look for work (32.4%), housewives (35.2%), respondents with uncompleted primary education (37.0%), primary education (33.8%).

**Costs of clothing and footwear.** 54.7% of households reported that they can cover the cost of clothing and footwear, and 45.3% are unable.

**Chart-02: Are you able to pay for clothing and footwear costs?**

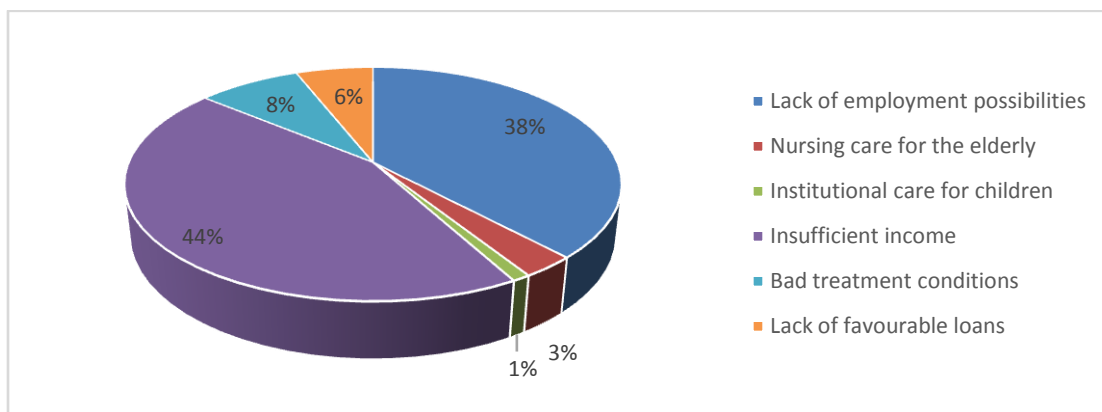


The working status of the respondents has a certain impact on their determination, so if in the total population 45% of the households can not cover the cost of clothing and footwear, such a response is found in two-thirds (2/3) of unemployed persons who look for work (67.0%), 63.0% among housewives, and 62.2% for unemployed people who are not looking for work.

**5.4 Significant problems in the household**

On the question *"Which of the problems most affects your household over the course of these 23 years?"*, the general distribution of responses suggests that households face low incomes and lack of employment conditions. Namely, 43.7% of households mostly suffer from *insufficient income*, 38.1% - *lack of employment conditions*, 8.4% - *bad treatment conditions*, 5.8% - *lack of favourable loans*, 32.7% - *care of elderly people*, and only 1.3% *care of children in institutions*.

**Chart-03: Which of the problems have mostly affected your household in the past 23 years?**

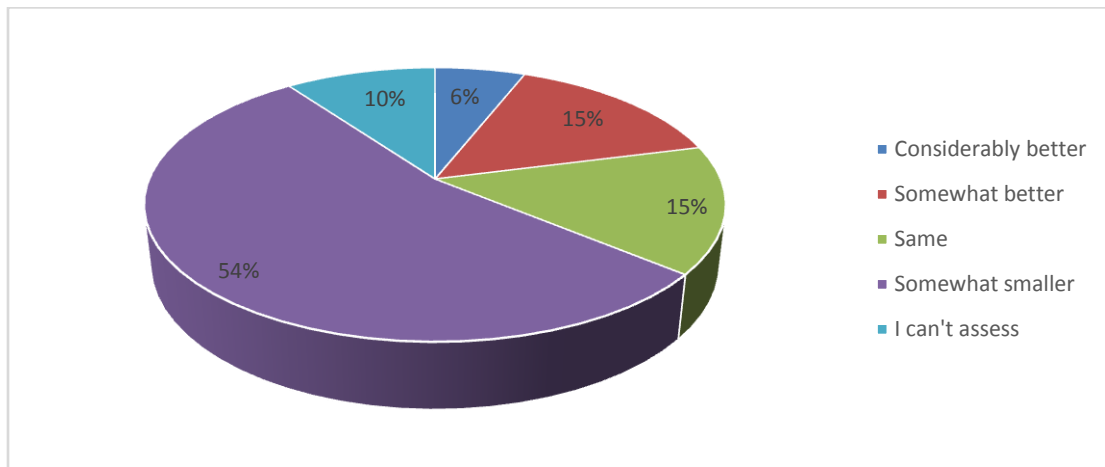


The inhabited area shows a relative dependence, and this is a greater displacement in relation to the general distribution of the modality - *the conditions for employment* - is observed in the village settlements in the municipality. Namely, every second household in the village (50%) considers *that there are no employment conditions*.

### 5.5 Chances for employment of young people

The assessment of the efficiency of the invested efforts or the effectiveness of the measures undertaken in solving the unemployment problem is an integral part and even an inevitable issue for assessing the demographic situation of the population. The responses of the households exposed clearly indicate the strict approach or criticism of the public when evaluating the results of the efforts for youth employment. In every second surveyed household (53.6%), the chances for employment of young people in the Eastern planning region are estimated *to be smaller* than 23 years ago (1990), the estimation that the chances *are bigger* are greatly reduced (20.7%), while the estimation that the chances *are the same* (15.4%) is noticeably less present.

**Chart-04: Are the chances of employment of young people today better than 23 years ago?**

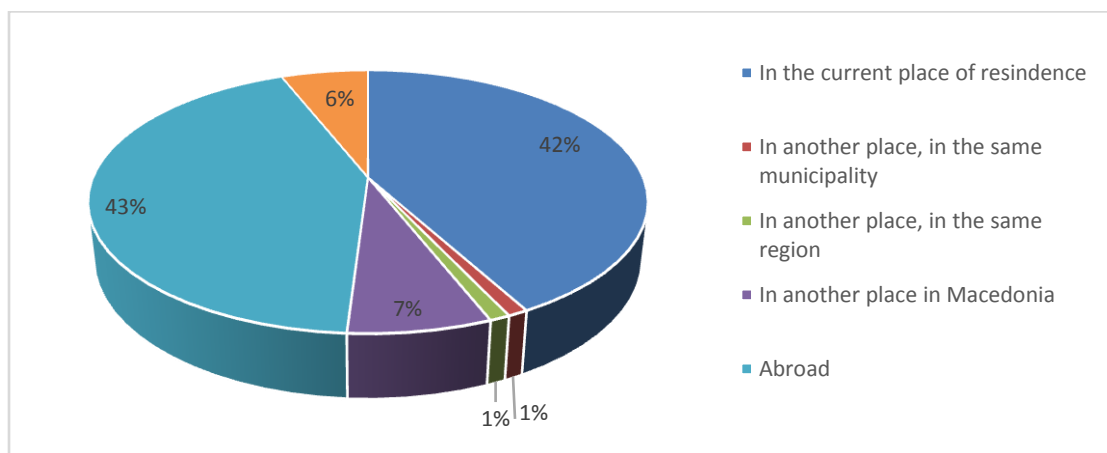


The public in the region is not extremely impressed by the chances of employment, because the increase in the number of unemployed leaves a stronger impression than the employment of new persons.

### 5.6 Preferred place of residence

The answers to this question about the performance of the place of residence can complete the perception of the respondents about the general situation in the Eastern planning region and their attitude towards it. According to the received answers, striking is the separation of two modalities: “abroad”- 42.7% and “current place of residence”- 42.4%.

**Chart-05: If you had the opportunity to choose, where would you live?**



Regarding the level of education, significant deviations occur in the category "pupils and students", of whom 60.7% would choose life outside the Republic of Macedonia. The deviation is also not less noticeable among the respondents with higher level of education. Thus, 62.5% of the respondents with a degree "Doctor of Science" and "Master of Science" would live outside the country. In contrast, 52.6% of the respondents without education and 54.3% of the respondents with incomplete primary education would remain in the current place of residence, while only 36.8% - without education and 37.0% with unfinished primary education would leave the country. Lastly, by increasing the level of education, the number of respondents who choose to live outside the state increases.

## Conclusion

Although the overall population development of the Eastern region until 2002 had a positive mark, a large part of the region has had a characteristic of depopulation and aging of the population for decades, which is a consequence of several years of unfavourable demographic movements that directly influenced the weakening of the population base of individual municipalities and cities. Such population dynamics, influenced by a number of historical and geographical factors, influenced the urban and rural polarization of the region, made balanced distribution of the population difficult, and significantly influenced the socio-economic development of individual settlements.

The aging of the population in the Eastern region has a characteristic of an accelerated process. The emigration has had a major influence on the negative demographic movements and the population discharge of many settlements in the region, and with the selective character of emigration, on the change in the age structure of the population. Old age is most pronounced in rural settlements, which the emigration of the population completely emptied and took the young and educated population away. The analysis of the age structure of the population shows that every fifth citizen in the region is 60 years of age and older. Therefore, it is expected that the already existing differences in the quantitative (number) and qualitative (structure) characteristics of the population will be deepened. According to current data and conditions for population development, it is unrealistic to expect restoration of their working and reproduction capable contingent, and thus a balanced and satisfying social and economic life.

The process of urbanization is one of the most important factors of the spatial redistribution of the population in the country and in the Eastern planning region. This results in a steady flow of population into the urban settlements (beginning in the 1970s), which is reflected in the secondary demographic balance. While the population in urban settlements has steadily been increasing, it has been declining in the rural areas. The reason for the increase of the urban and the decline of the rural population is not only in the qualitative difference in the balance in the mechanical movement of the population (positive for the urban and negative for the rural), but also the change in some relative demographic structures, resulting in negative processes in the rural environments (aging process), which as a final effect has a noticeable decline in natural growth in rural areas.

After 26 years of pluralistic democracy and market economy, the problem of the labour market in the Republic of Macedonia is so current and difficult and the dimensions of unemployment have obtained such a proportion that the question rightfully arises: Did it have to happen? The current social problems of the unemployed have a significant impact on human security. Basically, underdeveloped areas can be attractive from the point of view of migration movements, if the process of economic convergence continues, because the development of the economy is the most relevant factor for attracting immigrants, but the question arises whether convergence can come faster in order to prevent the possibility that region and micro-region disparities reach the point from which there is no return, i.e. when reaching further is not enough.

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