Census data corrections and intercensal estimates in Serbia for the period 2002–2022

Censuses in Serbia often introduce new methodological solutions, making it increasingly challenging to analyse population changes. Methodological differences in the results of the last three censuses (2002, 2011, and 2022) hinder accurate data comparisons and lead to significantly varied interpretations of census data. Assessing net migration in the inter-census period and generating annual postcensal estimates of the total population, which form the basis for calculating demographic indicators, rely on census-derived data. Annual population estimates can deviate significantly from actual values, particularly when the base year (census year) is distant. As a result, estimates for 2021 and 2022 differ by over 180 thousand due to being based on different censuses. Intercensal estimates have not been conducted in Serbia to date, but they can substantially impact the correction of demographic indicators, especially at lower territorial-administrative levels. Intercensal estimates refer to population estimates between two censuses and are deemed more precise than postcensal estimates as they approximate data between two specific points in time. Leveraging census results (2002, 2011, and 2022), vital events in the inter-census period, and internal migration data, annual population figures at the municipal level and the extent of external migration will be computed. These calculations will enable the estimation of population figures and total net migration for all higher territorial-administrative units, starting from the municipal level. Consequently, the fundamental demographic indicators for 2002–2022 will be reevaluated based on the acquired data. The outcomes are expected to reveal the extent to which population estimates were overstated in official reports due to the exclusion of external migration in their computation. This imprecision led to inaccuracies in basic demographic indicators. By rectifying the data, it is anticipated that death rates and fertility levels will slightly surpass the officially published values during the inter-census period. The data obtained from intercensal estimates should demonstrate how the migration component influences population fluctuations at the municipal level.

Keywords: Census data, intercensal estimates, net migration, demographic indicators, municipal level.