

ALBANIA

Introduction

Population censuses were being taken in Albania at the time of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. Following the country's independence, ten censuses were conducted between 1923 and 1989, most being conducted after the Second World War; the latter was taken with UNFPA support. The 2001 Population and Housing Census is the first carried out in the new political and social context of Albania in the nineties, where many un-recorded people are moving from rural areas to cities and from the country abroad, resulting in the consequent lack of reliable statistics. No modern and up-to-date registers are available in the country. Civil registration of live births and deaths is not completely applied. Recent annual population estimates were based on the latest UN population projections.

In this situation only a country-wide survey, taken as a census, could provide a satisfactory view of the size, structure, spatial distribution and socio-economic profile of the Albanian population, which is fundamental to further statistical activities (such as sample surveys) and for implementing development policies. At the end of 1998, with this objective, INSTAT⁽¹⁾ concentrated support from several donors – the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the governments of Greece, Italy and Switzerland - towards this aim. A **multi-donor project** was so launched, with the objective of the conducting a population and housing census, the wider objective being that of enabling INSTAT to handle all phases of future population censuses and other statistical surveys, ensuring the development of a master sampling frame and the basic infrastructure of the whole statistical system. An *Advisory and Co-ordination Committee of Donors* (ACCD) was also established having full responsibility for the timely provision of financial and technical assistance needed at the different phases of implementation.

Legislation

Preparation for the legislative basis of the Census started in 1999. This was accomplished in connection with the existing Statistical Law dated 16 March 1993 (No. 7687) and largely used internal and external consultations. The Census Law (No. 8669) was adopted by Parliament on 26 October 2000.

The Census Law made provisions for planning the instruments and means to conduct the census, including organisational structure, central and local commissions, reference date, duration of field survey, and related bylaws, it also aims to contribute to the institutional building of the country. In fact the law states that census results may be used to modernise the national administrative system, such as the establishment of electoral lists and the improvement of the civil registration system. This objective is also reflected in the set of census questionnaires.

¹ The National Statistical Institute of Albania founded in 1993.

Preparatory phases

Apart from legislative aspects, preparatory phases effectively began at the beginning of 2000. As the operative unit coordinating the project, INSTAT set up and established a Census Implementation Unit (CIU) in separate premises, with a Census Manager and four dependent departments.

A **Pre-test** and a **Pilot Survey** were conducted on samples of 300 and 3 000 households respectively about one year and 6 months before the census date. These surveys were used to assess the questionnaires and instruction book. Questions considered optional under the international requirements – such as income, ethnicity and religion of respondents – were excluded after careful evaluation. Enumeration Areas for the Pilot Survey were selected in such a way as to duly represent the application of different enumeration methods and regions that suffered from departure of the population or massive settlement of newcomers.

As a particular objective of data collection, in order to (partially) evaluate emigration out of the country, basic information was requested of each household on members who were abroad for more than one year. This was part of a *household member's summary questionnaire*, purposely designed for possible further use of data.

Determination of the Enumeration Areas (EA), one of the crucial pre-census activities, was challenging. This was because of the unavailability of documentation from the previous census, lack of maps, new administrative boundaries and denominations, and mostly the recent population movements and uncontrolled settlement around the main cities. Finally, after evaluation of different options, budget and time constraints, activities were based on:

- maps and lists of households for city blocks in the urban areas;
- lists of heads of households for rural areas.

More than 3 500 persons worked at the central and local level, for periods from three to nine months depending on the task, so as to elaborate tools for the cities and update the household lists made available from the 1998 Agricultural Census. Among other aspects, it was extremely complicated to deal with the hundreds of names of heads of household in urban areas as well as determine the borders between the cities and nearby villages in the recently urbanised areas. Finally the EAs amounted to approximately 10 000, each including from 80 to 120 households.

Considerable effort was made to address procurement and equipment (including the means of dealing with the winter electricity shortage) for the premises to store questionnaires and carry out data entry. The premises for data entry were found rather late and required significant reconstruction, causing delays between the end of data collection and the start of data entry.

Publicity and information

Preparation of public awareness and the information campaign began only a few months before the Census, thus activities were mostly concentrated in the last month and during enumeration. Campaign was based on advertising (TV and radio spots, posters and leaflets in public institutions and main streets) and information events on the objectives and methods of the Census (TV broadcasts, a videotape, which also was used for training purposes, press conferences and articles). The younger student population was reached through specific publicity material including gadgets. Finally the budget share devoted to publicity should amount to just over 1% of total project cost.

The Census took place many years after the preceding, in a totally changed environment, and obtaining population consent was essential. As indicated by the positive reaction from respondents to the enumeration, it seems this objective has been adequately achieved. Special credit for this should be given to the TV messages.

The census related publicity campaign also helped promote the presence and duties of INSTAT throughout the country.

Field operations

Despite difficulties with census geography and delays encountered in printing and dispatching census material within the country, it was feasible to respect the planned date. Starting from 1st April 2001 some 12 500 people - supervisors, controllers and enumerators - conducted the field work. Data collection was carried out by enumerators through interviews and *control lists*, the auxiliary forms intended to monitor work, summarise results and later issue preliminary results.

INSTAT permanently monitored the work through the CIU and its 36 regional offices and sent personnel from headquarters to each district. This allowed for a better understanding of the ongoing process and the sharing of experience. Difficulties at this phase arose out of the country's poor infrastructure and from refusals of enumerators to perform the work, especially in some areas surrounding the city of Tirana.

However the main problem arose from part of the Greek minority in the south who temporarily refused to participate in the Census because the question regarding ethnicity was not asked. This was a limited phenomenon, and there was more often a delay in providing questionnaires to local authorities. Anyway, in the end the organisation leading the boycott accepted the Census.

At the beginning of field operations INSTAT benefited from the support of international specialists sent by the ACCD. The experts recognised difficulties related to the preparation and implementation phases, but gave a positive overall impression on conduction of the project.

Data collection was completed after a maximum of three weeks in about 90% of the country, and ended a few days later in the remaining areas – Tirana, some rural areas in the south and the district of Kukes.

Quality issues

To ensure quality, methods used included the way the questionnaire was designed (with easy to understand clearly stated questions), consistency checks were made of the data entry software and field visits were conducted by INSTAT experts a few weeks after enumeration, especially in the most delicate EAs on the Tirana's border. In fact, post-enumeration surveys were not planned because of budget constraints.

Final data quality was evaluated as fairly good despite the finding of some classical effects. In general, a positive sign was the satisfactory agreement between preliminary and final results. The good coverage of Tirana was more recently confirmed by the establishment of a GIS for the city. About 3.1°million inhabitants enumerated by the Census is, however, less than that for all population estimates worked out for Albania for that time. Reasons for this difference may be related more to data used for estimates (live births, deaths, migration) than to an undercount of the population by the Census.

Data processing

Advanced software for assisted data entry was developed in Visual Basic. The system, which resulted in a SQL Server database, was based on the following main features:

- set of masks reproducing the census questionnaires on screen (*building, dwelling, household, household members summary, individual sheets*);
- checking the respecting of consistency rules, such as out of range values;
- linkages and cross-checking between questionnaires, with the possibility of re-entering data in case of inconsistencies between answers;
- automatic coding for selected variables (with the exclusion of classifications ISCO and NACE which were developed "a posteriori");
- follow-up of the operational flow of data entry organisation and evaluation of the operators' performance.

While data entry of *control lists* was carried out at INSTAT headquarters, final data entry was executed in more adequate premises definitively set-up for this purpose only seven months after enumeration. Equipment included UPS and generators used to support the system during power cuts, that occur often during the winter. About 300 operators, supervisors and archivists were organised into two shifts. Entering the questionnaires and solving of any resulting quantitative and qualitative differences (such as, individual records temporarily unassigned to a household because of the mismatching of identifier keys or inconsistencies between data from different sheets of the same questionnaire) took about six months - until the end of April 2002.

Checking and correction of data entry results occurred in May and June 2002. The most delicate point was correction of household composition, which mostly resulted from misunderstanding of the relationship code for each member and the household's reference person or from missing data. Many errors/limits were progressively solved deterministically, however the most complex cases (about 13 000 out of 727 000) required more time-consuming manual editing. Errors in individual records were afterwards detected and edited through the application of CONCORD, a product developed by ISTAT (Italy) for the deterministic correction of systematic errors and the probabilistic correction of casual errors in survey results. Building and dwelling data were checked and corrected using deterministic rules.

Data dissemination

Preliminary data from the Census were issued three months after enumeration (July 2001) through a paper publication and a press release. About one year later a draft version of the tabulation program, containing results at the district level and further tables for Tirana's 11 mini-municipalities were prepared for the first publication, a descriptive analysis of results published for the end of 2002. The publication with the main tabulation program is expected soon after; further publications including detailed analysis on selected topics will follow in 2003 and 2004.

At the beginning of 2002 a specific **post-census cartographic module** was launched for the dissemination of data: the digitalisation of Albania (at level of prefectures, districts, communes and villages) and the EAs for the city of Tirana, the creation of a WGS84 (GPS coordinate system) GIS-georeferenced environment and the linkage to census results were achieved.

Proposals are under discussion to set-up a database, starting with the census database, to facilitate the production and management of population and social statistics at INSTAT.

Costs

Costs may only be estimated as the project is still ongoing. Basing indications mainly on the provisional budget, the planned total amount of about €7°million, mostly from international donors, may be split as follows:

- 32% for preparation, overall management and all international expertise,
- 46% for enumeration (mainly temporary workers, census material and logistics),
- 14% for data entry and processing, and
- 8% for publication, analysis and dissemination of results.

The share of costs for material, equipment and facilities should represent overall about 33% of the total budget. While for preparation, census management and enumeration this portion represents about 1/4, for data processing and dissemination it should come to 53 and 72% respectively. For a correct evaluation of this information,

it serves to note that labour costs in Albania are relatively much lower than material or equipment, which are often bought abroad.

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Conclusion and future plans

Despite some difficulties in the preparatory phase and some burdensome procedures in the disbursement of funds from donors, the Census started on time and seems not to have been unduly influenced by poor infrastructure, the boycott, the delay in starting data entry, etc.

However, the role of the international contribution was fundamental. In this context, the success of the project depended more on human resources and their firm engagement. After the Agricultural Census, taken three year before, INSTAT and Albania may now build on this experience and its results and move towards further development and new goals. For the present, the conduction of another traditional census in ten years time seems the most appropriate course of action.

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