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*Research Article*

**Albania:**  
**Trends and patterns, proximate determinants**  
**and policies of fertility change**

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**Albania:  
Trends and patterns, proximate determinants  
and policies of fertility change**

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**Abstract**

For a very long time, Albania has had one of the highest levels of fertility in Europe: in 2002 the total fertility rate of 2.2 children per woman was the highest in Europe. Although this current level is high, the country has experienced a rapid fertility reduction during the last 50 years: a TFR decline from 7 to 2.2. This reduction has occurred in the absence of modern contraception and abortion, which indicates the significance of investments in the social agenda during the communist regime that produced policies with indirect effects on fertility. Most significant of these were policies focused on education, in particular on female education. Social and demographic settings for a further fertility reduction in Albania have been present since 1990. Contraception and abortion have been legalized and available since the early 1990s, but knowledge of their use is still not widespread in the country, largely due to the interplay between traditional and modern norms of Albanian society. This chapter points out that future fertility levels will be determined not only by new policies that might be introduced, but predominantly by the balance of this interplay.

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## **1. Socio-economic development in communist Albania 1950-1990**

It is difficult to understand any achievements or setbacks in the development of Albania without considering the impact of communist rule in the second half of the twentieth century. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the communist regime faced an unparalleled task: not only did it have to re-build a country destroyed by the war, it also had to create a modern country from the ruins of a semi-feudal society. The economy was in a shambles: farming was the main economic activity, involving about 85% of the population; heavy industry was limited and focused primarily on the extraction of a few minerals, despite the country's wider wealth of mineral deposits. The country had no large industrial establishments; instead it had primitive forms of cottage industry supplementing agriculture or stock-raising activities (Mason et al. 1945). Industrial output had made an insignificant contribution to the country's economy since the start of the Italian occupation in the late 1930s.

The post-war Albanian government followed a policy not unlike that of other socialist countries in order to accomplish its development strategy. Emphasis was placed on the development of an industrial base to bring about basic structural changes and a balanced development of agriculture. The country's goal was set as the transformation of Albania from an agricultural society (85% of the population being rural in 1939) to a developed industrial-agricultural one. Although the Albanian government tried to keep a balance in its policy of development between agriculture and industry, the main focus of its development for 50 years was the industrialization of the country. The government based its policy on the Stalinist model of rapid industrialization, developing both light and heavy industry, and the principle of long-term economic planning was adopted. At the end of the second five-year plan in 1955, it was announced that a light industrial base was to be created, and that Albania had now become an agricultural-industrial country. The total output of the mineral industry increased dramatically.

In the later Albanian economic plans the focus remained the intensification of industry, but now with a more difficult priority - the development of heavy industry for Albania. Until the mid-1970s, the Albanian government was moderately successful in industrializing the economy and the income per capita increased rapidly at an average of more than 8.2% a year (Gjonça, Wilson, and Falkingham 1997). The government's rapid industrialization policy led to the creation of a relatively modern multi-branched industrial sector, which by 1985 was generating 43.3% of the total national income (Golemi and Misja 1987). After the break with China in the late 1970s, however, the industrial sector and the rest of the economy soon showed signs of decline. Despite the progress of the early decades, by the end of communist regime Albania emerged as the

poorest country in Europe with a gross national product (GNP) per capita of about US\$380 (World Bank 1996).

There were two significant demographic consequences of the industrialization of the Albanian economy. The first was the change in the rural-urban ratio. The urban population grew from 15% in 1938 to 36% in 1989, and to almost 50% by 2001. The industrialization brought important changes in the working pattern for women, who made up 47% of the total labour force in 1989 (INSTAT 1992).

A new social system was needed for a patriarchal and agrarian society, in which more than 80% of the population lived in extreme poverty (Mason et al. 1945). The health of the population was extremely poor, with malaria and tuberculosis being widespread: twenty percent of the population was infected with malaria (Skendi 1956), while tuberculosis accounted for 17.8% of all deaths (Gjonça 2001). Other infectious diseases (such as smallpox, typhus fever, and syphilis) were prevalent across the country. Just after the Second World War, life expectancy at birth was no more than 50 years for both sexes. Infant mortality was at unprecedented levels for the region at 148 infant deaths per 1000 live births. This was higher than that of any of the neighboring Balkan countries, such as Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria. By the end of the 1990s the communist government could rightly claim a success story with respect to improvements in the health and survival of the population. Life expectancy at birth had improved to 70.7 years and the infant mortality rate was reduced to 45.4 deaths per 1000 live births (Gjonça 2001). By 2000 these figures had further improved, with life expectancy for both sexes reaching 74.4 years and infant mortality further reduced to just 22 deaths per 1000 live births.

The social system in Albania in the aftermath of World War II (WWII) was also in a dreadful state. Large regions of the country did not have access to basic standards of hygiene, medical needs, or education. There was no access to safe drinking water in most areas of the country and only a few cities had a central water provision. For the majority of households drinking water was obtained from private wells. There were only ten hospitals in the country and they could not even cope with the needs of the populations of the main cities. Most of the country's population did not have access to a medical doctor in their own locality, and going to a hospital would involve traveling, sometimes for a whole week. The number of medical personnel was very low. There were about 1.1 doctors per 10,000 people, and the investment in health was only 1% of the state budget. The total investment in the social agenda was very low.

Illiteracy was widespread. More than 80% of the population was illiterate and female illiteracy stood at 92% (Publishing House 8 Nentori 1982). It was more widespread in the rural areas and the undeveloped north-eastern part of the country. The communist government took improvements in education seriously and a campaign against illiteracy was one of the first to be introduced in 1947: in a very short period of

time, by the start of the 1970s, illiteracy was eliminated for people under 40 years of age; by 1989 the proportion of illiterates in the population was less than 8%; and by 2001 it was 5.6% (INSTAT 2004b).

The social organization was based on a patriarchal system that disadvantaged women in all aspects of their social life. The social structure was basically tribal in the north and semi-feudal in the centre and south of the country, with kinship and descent playing central roles. The basic unit of society was the extended family: a married couple with their married sons and their offspring, as well as any unmarried daughters. This extended family was the basic single residential unit and the basic economic entity. The size of these families was very large, and by the end of WWII some numbered as many as 60 to 70 members.

There was no social security system at the end of WWII: it was first introduced in 1947. While it initially covered only a fragment of the population, by 1967 the social insurance program covered most of the population.

## **2. Data description**

The analyses in this paper are based on both aggregate level data and individual data. A large amount of information about fertility histories, marriages, and other socio-economic indicators in Albania exists at an aggregate level, and this paper has made use of these sources. The information was only made available in the mid-1990s. Until 2002 there were no individual data for the analysis of fertility in Albania. Most of the previous work (Falkingham and Gjonca 2001) was based on aggregate level data. For the first time, this paper makes use of individual data from the Albanian Living Standard Measurement Survey (ALSMS), which was implemented in 2002 and surveyed 3,544 households providing information on 16,634 individuals. It follows the standard format of the Living Standard Measurement Surveys (LSMS) and contains not only rich information on income and consumption expenditures, but also on education, employment, and, importantly for this analysis, full information on retrospective fertility histories for all women in the household. The 2002 ALSMS forms the basis for a longitudinal survey, with a sub-sample of households and individuals re-interviewed in 2003 and 2004.

After the background on socio-economic development in Albania and a brief description of data, this paper analyses the trends and patterns of fertility change in Albania since 1950, using both aggregate and individual data. The analysis is followed by a discussion of the proximate determinants. Policies that brought fertility down to the present level are analyzed following the discussion of the proximate determinants, with a particular focus on the recent setting for fertility change. The paper concludes

with a discussion of the future of fertility in Albania, focusing on the interplay between the traditional and modern norms of society, and possible policies that might change the trend.

### **3. Fertility trends and patterns 1950 – 2000**

It is difficult to build any fertility histories and trends for the period before World War II. Available data on crude birth rate(s) start from the early 1930s, at a time when the vital statistics registration system was set up in Albania. However the quality of such data is questionable for a variety of reasons. Most important of all is the existence of a birth registration tax in the period before WWII, which was a considerable burden for the budget of a typical Albanian household. Another factor was the high level of illiteracy in the country, which affected the registration of all events. In addition, one needs to take into account that the vital statistics registration system had just been introduced and was either incomplete or non-existent in some of the less developed areas of the country. Consequently, there was either a lack of data for complete regions or inaccurate reporting of the vital events for that period. It is for this reason that the analyses here focus on the period after 1950. However, here another important issue has to be taken into account: for the period 1950-1990 there is no data on individuals and it is only in 2002 that the first individual data to build fertility histories and analyze the fertility behaviour of Albanians was collected.

By the end of WWII Albania had the highest fertility in Europe, with an average of about six births per woman. High fertility was reinforced by traditional patriarchal norms. The total fertility rate (TFR) rose during the 1950s, reaching a peak of almost seven children per woman by 1960. This was followed in the 1970s by a steady decline, with a TFR of less than four in 1980 and just over three children per woman in 1990 (Figure 1). The 1990s saw a continuing reduction in fertility, with both vital statistics data and survey data confirming a TFR of about the replacement level of 2.2 children per woman. While the total fertility rate steadily declined during the 1950-2000 period, it was accompanied also by a steady decrease in the mean age of childbearing (MACB) (Figure 1). The MACB fell from 31.4 to 27.7 in 2000. This decrease is not unduly sharp and coincides with the high levels of fertility in Albania during the period under consideration. After the baby boom of the 1960s, the relationship between the TFR and MACB becomes clearer. Thus, when fertility dropped sharply in the mid 1970s, the decrease in the MACB slowed down: the MACB hardly changed. This trend continued into the 1990s. As the TFR decreased from 3 to 2.2 children per woman, the mean age of childbearing remained almost constant at about 28 years for women. In most European countries the postponement of or reduction in fertility is very much associated

with changes in the MACB. In the case of Albania, this relationship is not so straightforward. The distinctive feature of fertility reduction in Albania is that when fertility decreased during the 1960-2000 period, it decreased for women of all ages (Figures 2a and 2b), thus the changes in the MACB were not dramatic.

The rise in period fertility during the 1950s and 1960s mirrors the experiences of many European countries at the end of the Second World War. As one of the countries with the highest per capita losses, it is not surprising that fertility increased in Albania immediately after the war. However, in no other European country did the post-war baby boom start from such a high underlying rate. An alternative interpretation of this trend is that it represents a pre-decline rise in fertility of the kind studied by Dyson and Murphy (1985), which they showed to be a widespread characteristic of fertility transition. The baby boom of the 1960s was accompanied by a decrease in the mean age of entrance into marriage (MAM). The mean age of marriage dropped from 21.8 years in 1950 to 21.2 years in 1960, remained at a similar level in 1965, and increased to 23 years in 1990. Since a first birth was universal, the trend in the MAM should follow the same trend in the mean age of first birth, which fell from 23.4 years in 1950 to 22.55 years in 1965. It subsequently increased to 24.51 years in 1990. It is also important to mention here that infant mortality started declining rapidly in the 1950s (Gjonça, Wilson, and Falkingham 1997) and that might have had an initial inverse effect in the early stages. By the mid 1970s the infant mortality rate (IMR) was almost half that of 1950 (143 per 1000).

When Albania opened up in the 1990s, immediately after the collapse of communism, it came as a surprise to learn that in the intervening period, fertility had fallen to around three children per woman, despite a pro-natalist Marxist regime and in the virtual absence of contraception and abortion.

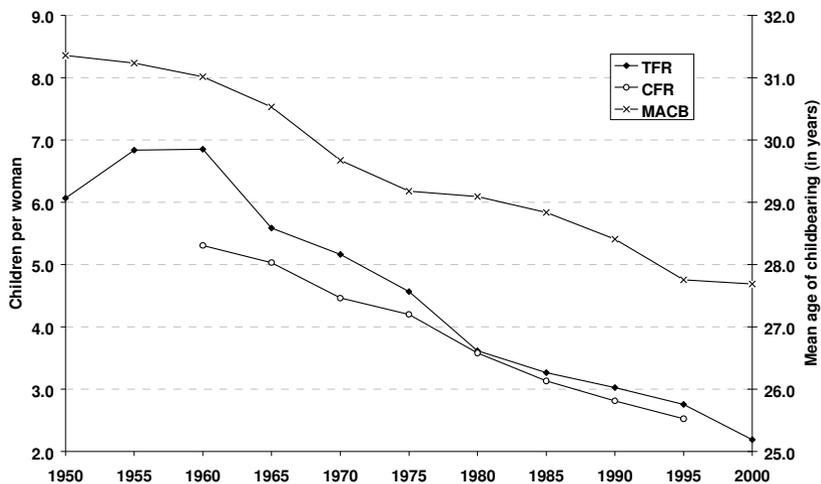
The rise in fertility between 1950 and 1960 was made up of a rise in age-specific fertility rates for all ages; the increase was most marked amongst young women under the age of 30 (Figure 2a). Once fertility began to decline, the process was irreversible and the TFR fell by approximately 1.28 children per woman per decade during the period 1960 to 1990. While this is not as rapid as some of the most famous fertility declines of that era, such as those seen in China or Thailand during the 1970s, the fall in fertility was substantial nevertheless, especially when compared with most other countries at similar levels of economic development. Note that while family planning policies were in place in these other countries (e.g. the 'one child policy' in China), in Albania the reduction of fertility during these years occurred in the absence of family planning policy. Despite this reduction, the level of fertility at the end of the communist regime was still high in comparison to other Southern and Eastern European countries, such as Italy, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria. The absence of a clear family planning

policy, the existence of a pro-natalist environment, and the absence of the means of birth control kept the level of fertility relatively high through to the end of the 1980s.

Cohort fertility data show that the Cohort Fertility Rate (CFR) is not as high as the TFR, reinforcing the earlier view that the rise in fertility from 1950 to 1955 was in part an effect of timing, exacerbated by a boom in early marriages immediately after the war (Figure 1). Secondly, the downturn for both the TFR and CFR coincide, although the fall in cohort fertility is more gradual. Both measures, however, point to a fall in total family size from between 5 and 6 to just above 2 children per woman. It is important to mention here that just as in many other European countries, during the 1960s' baby boom all cohorts contributed to the increase in the level of fertility (Figure 2b).

For the period before the late 1990s it was difficult to build any fertility histories due to the lack of individual data. Here, we use fertility histories based on data from the Albanian ALSMS in 2002. As well as describing the trends, semi-parametric statistical survival techniques are used to analyze the fertility differentials in Albania, based on demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 show the results of the Kaplan Meier estimates by birth cohort, education, region, and rural/urban division against birth order. Since the purpose of this paper is to describe the fertility

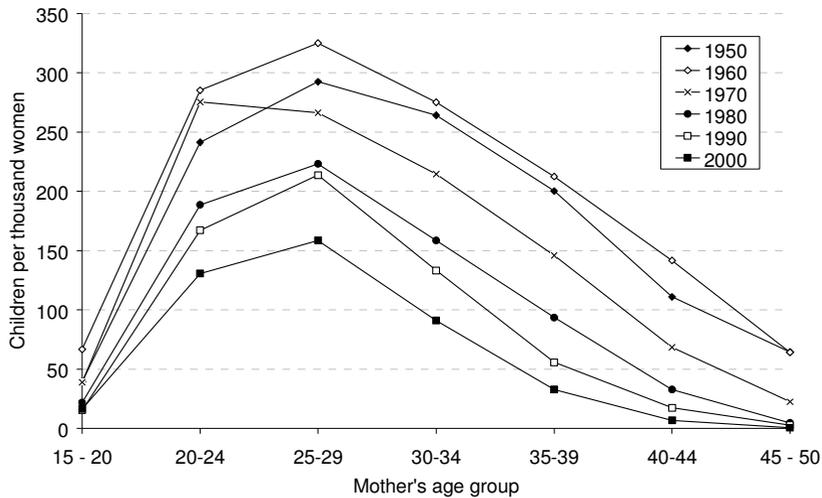
**Figure 1: Total period and cohort fertility rates, 1950-2000**



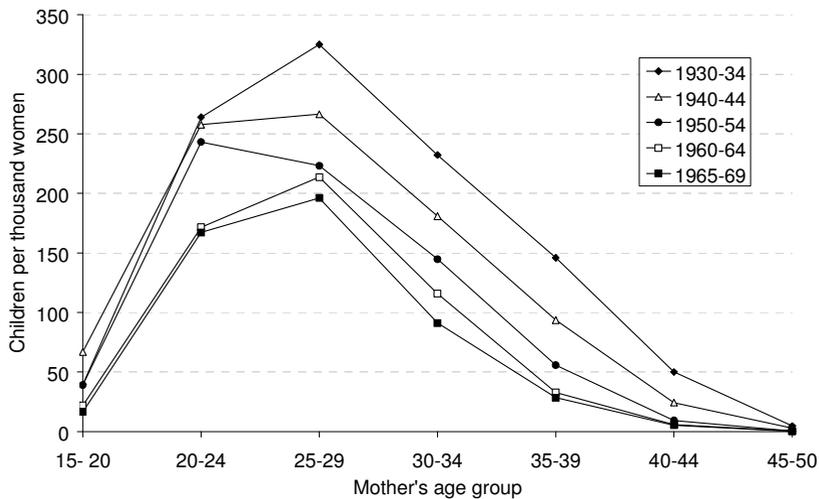
Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT, 1992, 2003b).

Note: Cohort fertility rates are plotted against time with the mean age of childbearing for each cohort indicated on the right hand axis. Values are interpolated in order to fit the 5 year calendar periods.

**Figure 2a: Age-specific period fertility rates, 1950-2000**



**Figure 2b: Age-specific cohort fertility rates**



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from INSTAT 1992, 2003b.

changes and explain the differentials by different socio-economic characteristics, rather than analyze the quantum and tempo changes of Albanian fertility, this paper analyses some of the main variables, such as cohort, education, and rural/urban residence, against birth order in order to understand why and how fertility decreased in Albania. The fertility changes due to the other two variables (region and poverty level within the household) are presented for all births together as they did not reveal any differentials by birth order. Interpretation of the time dimension is somewhat difficult since some women were aged 15 when they gave first birth. The time to the second birth event is measured as that which has elapsed since the first birth, and for the third birth it is the time that has elapsed since the second birth. However, what we are interested in are the overall differentials more than differences by birth order.

Figure 3 shows the Kaplan Meier estimates by birth cohorts and birth order. Six birth cohorts are defined, the first capturing those born between 1930 and 1939. The subsequent cohorts are those born between 1940 and 1949, 1950 and 1959, 1960 and 1969, 1970 and 1979 with the last being those born between 1980 and 1986. It is clear that the last two cohorts have not yet completed their fertility cycle. Similar to the results from the aggregate data, these estimates show that there is a clear difference between cohorts, with the younger cohorts entering childbearing later compared to the previous ones. An interesting point that attracts attention when analyzing by birth order and cohort is the extent to which the two youngest cohorts differ from the older ones. Overall, the estimates show that there is little difference between cohorts for the first birth and very little difference for the second, but there is a distinct difference between the youngest and the two older cohorts for the third birth. This indicates that a first birth is generally universal in traditional Albanian society. Even in 2000, when the TFR is at 2.2 children per woman, first birth is given at a relatively young age immediately after marriage. For the higher parities we see strong differences, showing that the decline in fertility (as seen in Figures 1, 2a, and 2b) is driven primarily by a decline in higher-order births. Estimates (Kaplan Meier) for the first birth in particular, and for the other two to a lesser extent, approach zero for early cohorts. This suggests a very high proportion of women having a first birth, which fits the observation that the overall level of fertility for these cohorts was very high (Figure 2b). However, there may be other explanations. First, the data collected in these types of surveys, where fertility histories are investigated, tend to under-represent groups of women who are not married, divorced, or childless. This may well apply to Albania: it is a country that has been, and to a certain extent still remains, a traditional and patriarchal society. However, these results may also be affected by the fact that marriage was universal in Albania for the period under consideration and in particular for the early cohorts, where childbearing outside marriage was almost zero (Falkingham and Gjonça 2001, INSTAT 2005).

Previously, we emphasized the role of education in the reduction of fertility in Albania (Falkingham and Gjonça 2001), but we were unable to quantify this effect. Figure 4 shows clearly the difference in fertility between women with different levels of education and by birth order, with the most educated being later entrants and having a lower level of childbearing for all birth orders. It is interesting to see the behaviour of the women with the two lower levels of education. When birth orders are compared, the effect of educational differences is apparent in all of them, but this effect is most evident in respect of the third birth. Note that even low levels of education make a difference when fertility is considered. This is particularly the case between the lower levels of education (0 to 4, 5 to 7 and 8 to 11 years) when the third birth is analyzed. While for the first birth the differences between these levels of education are not significant, for the third birth they are distinctive. The very small differences for the lower three levels of education where the first birth is concerned again prove that having a first birth in Albania remains universal even today. For the first birth, it is worth noting that women with 5 to 7 years of education have the highest likelihood of having more children, closely followed by women with 0 to 4 years of education. This can be explained by the fact that the groups with these levels of education are mainly the oldest cohorts (Gjonça 2001). For them, the traditional values are universal and widespread; the only difference resulting from the additional years in education would be in the time of childbearing, rather than in the number of children.

It is difficult to build an accurate indicator or variable to measure the historical incomes or development of Albania. However, a relatively good proxy for the level of development in the case of Albania is regional location, although this is clearly not entirely accurate because of the large internal migration within the country during the 1990s. There are four main regions in ALSMS: the coastal region (more developed), the mountainous region of the north east (the least developed in the country), the central region, and the capital, Tirana, which is the most developed region. The differences between three of the regions are very small (Figure 6). This can be seen as showing either that development was not an important factor in determining the level of fertility in the past in Albania, or it could be seen as confirming an expectation that there would be no major differences in a very egalitarian society where income distribution was the flattest of all the Eastern European countries. However, there are aspects of development that affect the level of fertility in such circumstances: physical infrastructure is one; access to institutions (including health and education) is another; and there are many more specifically associated with life in the capital city. These aspects are indeed reflected in the differences of the Kaplan-Meier estimates between Tirana, the capital of the country, and those of the other three regions. A very similar argument applies when the rural/urban fertility differential is considered. The differences are small but clear in both the level of fertility and the late entrance to

childbearing in the urban areas (see Figure 5). These differences are more evident for the third birth. The rural/urban differences seem to be not very significant when compared to the experiences of other developing countries. However, this could be specific to the Albanian case, where the country experienced the lowest income inequality in the whole of former Eastern Europe (Gjonça, Wilson, and Falkingham 1997, Gjonça 2001). The narrowing of the income gap between the rural and urban areas and, in particular, the improvement of female education in rural areas was seen as a priority by the former communist government. These two policies might have had an effect in minimizing the fertility differences between the urban and rural areas.

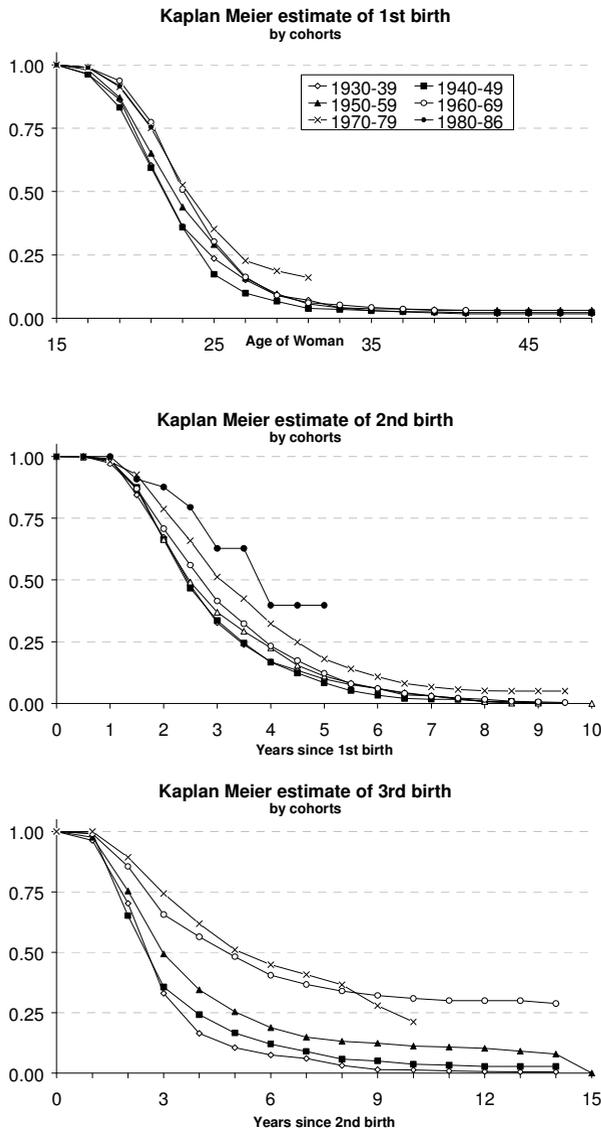
The Living Standard and Measurement Survey allows us to build a poverty variable based on both consumption and income levels of households. As for the poverty variable for the fertility differences by regions and rural/urban locations, this variable does not reveal a significant effect on the fertility level in Albania.

Very important in this analysis is the role of education (investment in the social agenda) relative to the other variables that show the level of development in the country, such as region and poverty variables. It is of particular importance when the policies affecting fertility change in Albania are considered later in this paper. It emphasizes the greater importance of the policies addressing the social agenda in the country, compared with those addressing economic development.

#### **4. Emigration and fertility in Albania**

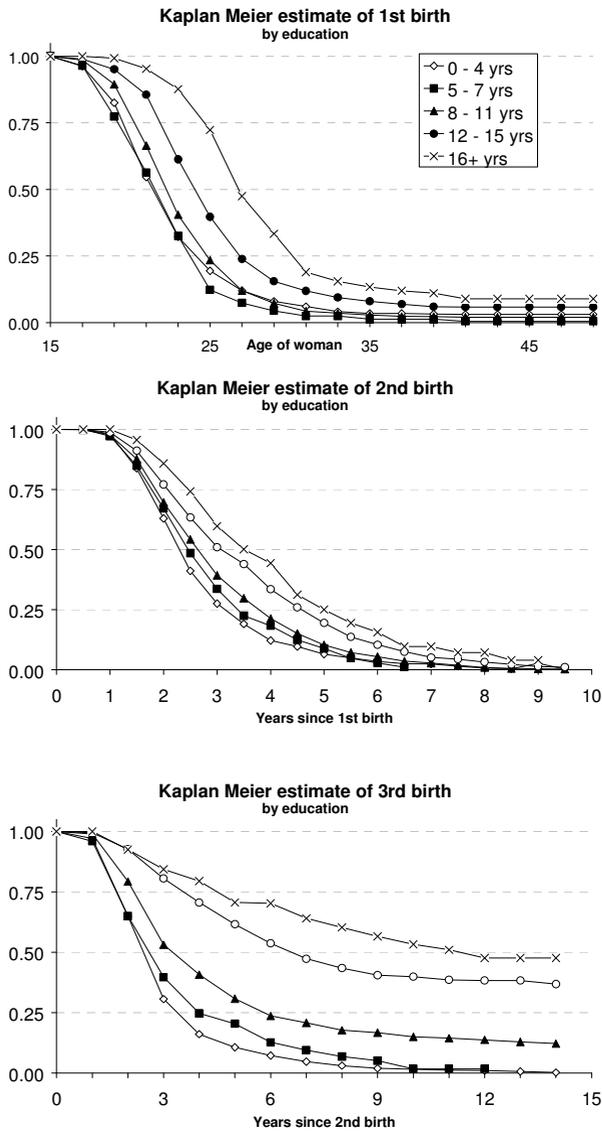
Since 1990 Albania has experienced one of the largest and fastest growing rates of international migration in the recent history of Europe. About 24% of the country's population emigrated between 1990 and 2001 (INSTAT 2002). Most of this emigration was concentrated in the reproductive age groups (Figure 7). The most affected ages are the 25 to 35 year olds with a clear over-representation of men. From Figure 7 it is also clear that the number of children born between the two censuses declined dramatically. It is obvious that this flow of out-migrants, taking place in a very short period of time, has had an effect on the absolute numbers of children born. However, it is difficult to judge if this large emigration has had an effect on the level of fertility. Clearly, in order to evaluate the possible effects of emigration on the level of fertility, data on both emigration and fertility histories are required. Unfortunately the Albanian Living Standard and Measurement Survey of 2002 includes only those members of households who have been present for more than six months in the past year. This has the unfortunate effect of excluding any household members that have been away for more than six months. A substantial component of the emigration is seasonal, so this ALSMS

**Figure 3: Kaplan-Meier estimates by cohorts and birth order**



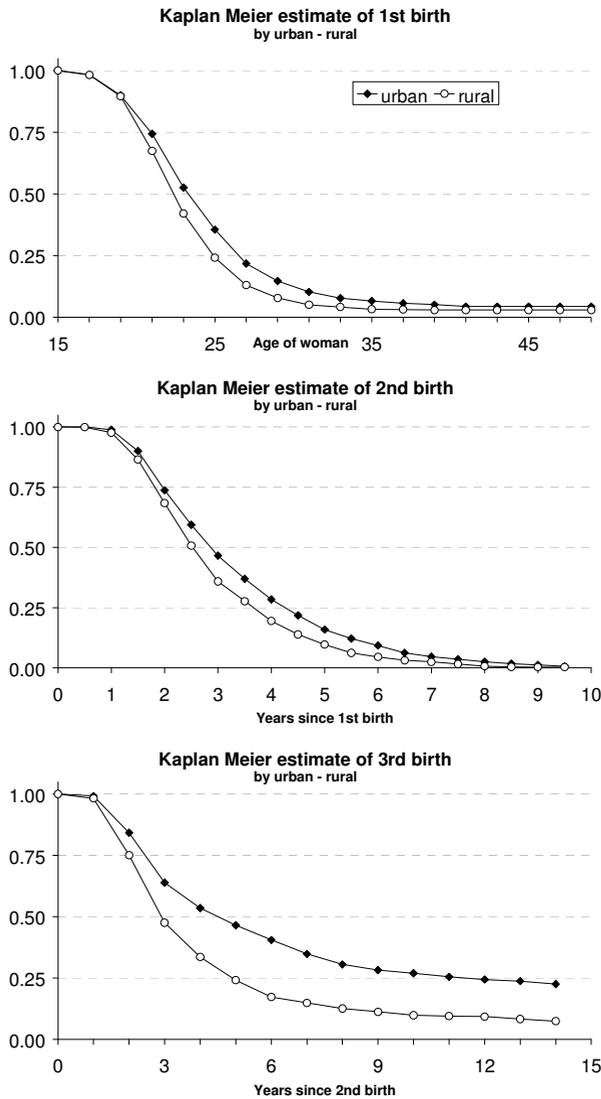
Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ALSMS, INSTAT 2002.

**Figure 4: Kaplan-Meier estimates by education and birth order**



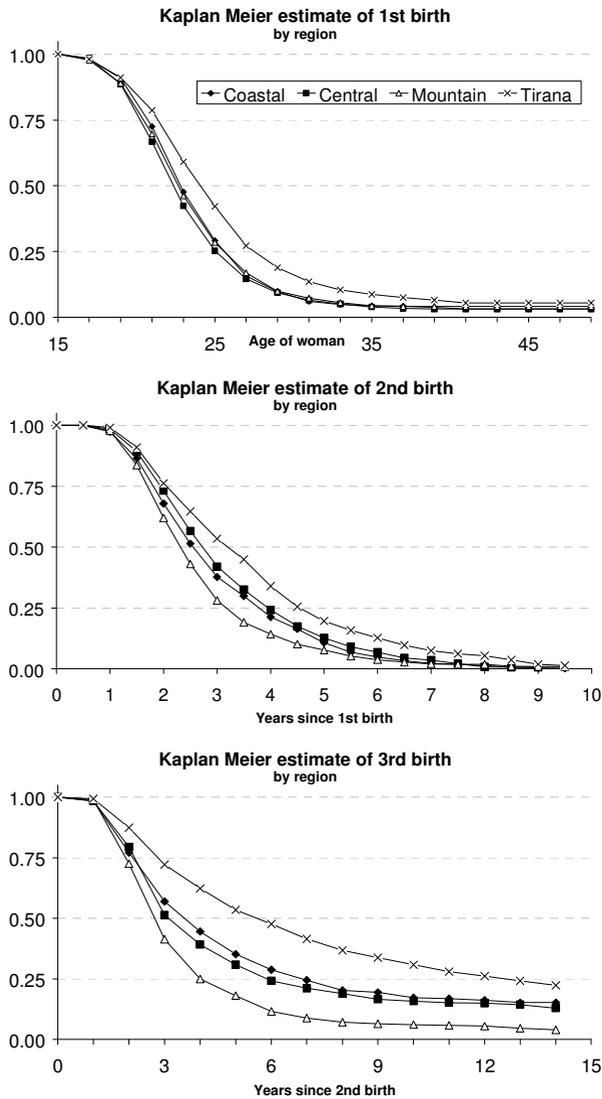
Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ALSMS, INSTAT 2002.

**Figure 5: Kaplan-Meier estimates for all births by rural/urban division**



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ALSMS, INSTAT 2002.

**Figure 6: Kaplan-Meier estimates for all births by four major regions**

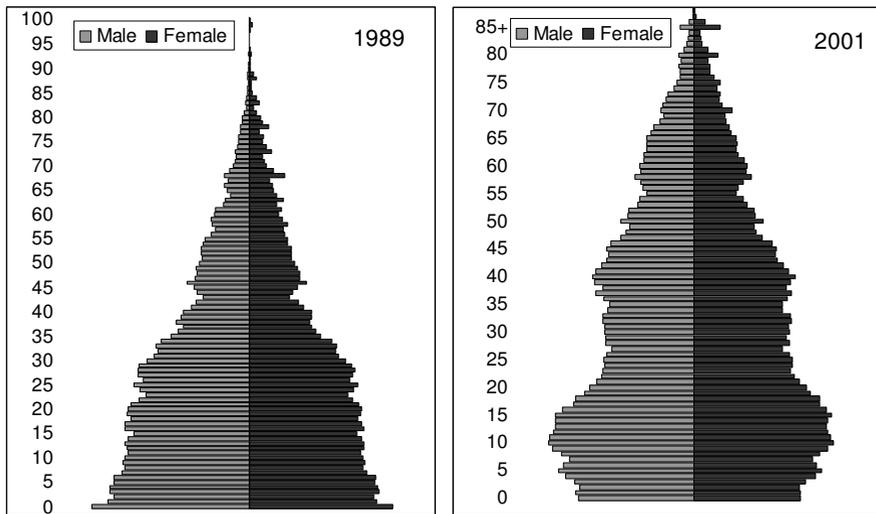


Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the ALSMS, INSTAT 2002.

feature will necessarily exclude an important part of those working abroad. As a result, it is difficult to use this data source to establish possible links with emigration and fertility outcomes.

However, aggregate data sources do give some clues to this issue. In the early years, migration was initially male dominated and thereby reduced the potential for childbearing due to the lack of matching partners. This might have affected the level of fertility initially, at least in the early years of the 1990s. Later, however, the gender difference became much more balanced, and it is believed that by the late 1990s this effect became negligible. Another issue to consider here is that migration is usually selective in terms of the individual education, place of residence, and work history. However, the census data showed that in Albania emigration has affected all areas of the country (INSTAT 2004c), people with different levels of education, and people from different social groups. In that respect the effect on fertility has not been unequal in different areas or within different groups of the population. Another relevant issue concerns remittances. As far as fertility decisions are affected by economic circumstances, one would expect remittances to have a positive effect on fertility. By and large, emigration is driven by difficult economic circumstances in the country of origin, and clearly remittances play an important role for household survival. From the 2002 ALSMS we know that one-third of household budgets came from remittances (World Bank 2003). This is a substantial amount and will affect all processes that are in any way income-related, and here, of course, childbearing is not an exception. However, as we have demonstrated, fertility has certainly decreased during this period and thus the effect of remittances on fertility is not a significant one. Therefore, it has to be concluded that factors other than income have driven the reduction of fertility since 1990. This is also supported by the results of our analyses, which show that poverty is not a significant factor in explaining variation in fertility in Albania during past years.

Another major event that had the potential to affect the level of fertility in Albania was the forced displacement of Kosovo Albanians during the 1999 war in Kosovo. About 66% of households in Kosovo were displaced (Spiegel and Salama 1999), mainly into Albania (71% of all the displaced population) and Macedonia: altogether an estimated 700,000 people (ICC 1999). The conflict ended in a matter of months rather than years, and the displaced population of Kosovo returned home within three months of the conflict: the 2001 Albanian census and the 2002 Kosovo LSMS data show that they did so immediately after the war. Hence, the number of people settling in Albania was insignificant, and we would thus not expect to see any significant affect on fertility levels.

**Figure 7: Population age pyramids of Albania, 1989, 2001**

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT, 1991, 2002).

## 5. The proximate determinants of fertility in Albania

While work has been done on the trends and patterns of fertility in Albania in the past 50 years, not much is known about the proximate determinants of fertility in Albania. This paper looks at the proximate determinants of fertility in Albania for the first time, using data from the Albanian Reproductive and Health Survey (ARHS) conducted in 2002 (INSTAT, 2003a).

### 5.1 Marriage

Marriage plays a central role in Albanian society. Marriage has been almost universal in the past and continues to be so even today. The ARHS data show that by age 25, 72% of females are married and by age 35, only 8% of them have remained single (Figure 8). The percentage of single women 16 years of age or older in the population in 2001 was only 19.6%. These figures show clearly that where marriage is concerned, Albanian

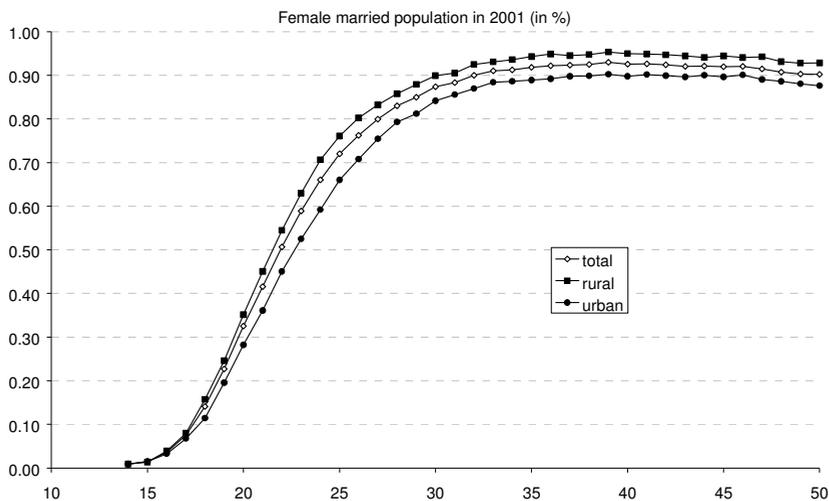
society remains traditional. This is interesting if one takes into account that despite dramatic improvements in education, and in female education in particular, the marriage pattern still has not changed in Albania. This is also supported by the fact that the mean age at marriage has changed very little. Thus, in 1950, the mean age at marriage for a female was 22.0 years, while in 2000 it was only 23.0 years. The same applied for men, with a mean age at marriage of 27.7 years in 1950 compared to 28.1 years in 2000. The picture is quite different when compared with neighboring countries, such as Greece, where in 2000, the mean age at marriage for females was 28.6 and for males 32.8, and Serbia and Montenegro, where the figures were 26.8 for females and 30.6 for males. As for the age at marriage, the marriage rate has not changed much. The crude marriage rate (marriages per thousand of population) in 1950 was 10.1 (INSTAT, 1992); in 2001 it was 8.4 (INSTAT, 2003b). It is understandable that with these high marriage rates, childbearing continues to be within marriage. Vital statistics show an insignificant number of children being born outside marriage. In 2003 the number of births out of wedlock was less than 0.5% of all births. Since marriage rates are so high one would expect cohabitations to be very low. Indeed, among the young population, those aged from 15 to 29, the proportion cohabitating was 0.2% (INSTAT 2005). Despite the strong traditional values, there are signs of increased cohabitation in Albania, in particular within the younger age groups. The introduction of new legislation (the Family Code) in 2003 is expected to affect the levels and trends of marriage and cohabitation.

## **5.2 Induced abortion**

Unlike many Eastern European countries where induced abortion was the primary means of birth control, abortions were illegal in Albania until 1991. However, this does not mean that abortion was not practiced at all: it was allowed on medical grounds, and a large number of pregnancies in the major cities would end with an abortion justified this way. This makes it difficult to analyze abortion in communist Albania. The data from the ARHS on induced abortions differ from those coming from official figures, which is most probably due to under-reporting. While under-reporting of abortions through surveys or vital statistics reports is universal in most societies, be they developed or developing (Henshaw, Singh, and Hass 1999), in the case of Albania under-reporting is very significant; the most likely explanation is the reluctance to report having had an abortion in a patriarchal society. The survey rate for abortion is about 73 per 1000 live births (INSTAT, 2003a), while the official figures (routinely collected from the health system) show a rate of 200 per 1000 live births (INSTAT, 2003b). There are some reasons for this difference. One may be the under-reporting of

unwanted pregnancies themselves. Another may be the under-reporting of illegal abortions outside the medical system, and yet another may be the tendency to classify induced abortions as spontaneous or as miscarriages. Comparing the survey figures over time reveals a declining trend in the abortion ratio: the figure of 73 quoted above compares to the figures of 241 in 1999 and 172 in 2001 (INSTAT, 2003a). Prior to 1990 abortion was illegal so earlier records are not accurate. In 1991, abortion was legalized through a decree of the Council of Ministers approving the activities of family planning clinics in Albania. The law for the interruption of pregnancy which was later passed in parliament (1995) allows the termination of a pregnancy within the first 22 weeks for health and social reasons, and within 12 weeks for psychological reasons.

**Figure 8: Proportions of Albanian female population married in 2001, by place of residence**



Source: Population and housing census, INSTAT, 2001.

### **5.3 Knowledge and use of contraception**

The analysis of fertility by age suggests an increase in childlessness among the young generation (or a postponement of childbirth to later years). It is only reasonable to assume that this has been a consequence of the introduction of modern methods of contraception. However, different sources of information give conflicting evidence on the issue. The ARHS data show that nine out of ten Albanian women know of at least one modern method of contraception, and about 87% know of at least one traditional method of contraception. While 81% of women know about condoms, only two-thirds have heard of oral contraception and less than 35% have heard of any other modern contraceptive methods. The situation is very similar for men. There is a strong belief that traditional methods are better than the modern ones, in particular, the importance of withdrawal versus the use of a condom. While the prevalence of any contraception is high among the married population (about 75% of women and 77% of men), the adoption of modern methods is very low at 8% for women, and 3% for men. Modern contraceptive use was found to be high only in women with higher education and living in the capital, Tirana (INSTAT, 2003a).

### **5.4 Age and frequency of intercourse**

The age of first sexual intercourse in Albania remains relatively high compared to other European countries. The ARHS data indicate that the proportion of women who experienced sexual intercourse before the age of 18 was 10% for women aged between 40 and 44 and 16% for women aged between 20 and 24. The average age for first sexual intercourse for women was 21.1 years, only a few months younger than the average age of first marriage, at 21.9 years. Usually the first birth follows at an age of 23.4. For men the age of first sexual intercourse is similarly late (21.5 years). The median age at first marriage for men is 26.5 years.

## **6. Population and social welfare policies in Albania**

When the communists took control in 1945, the social environment was already pronatalist with regard to marriage and fertility. Albanian society was a patriarchal and traditional one. Population growth in Albania, as in some other communist countries that applied Marxist ideology, was seen as positively correlated with economic growth. As Misja and Vesju (1985, p.8) state:

“The essence of the socialist law of population is the full employment and rational utilization of all sources of labour, the ceaseless growth of the population, the ceaseless raising of the material and cultural well-being of the people.”

It is important to start this discussion by explaining the difference between the explicit and implicit population policies implemented in Albania. In an environment where fertility was already high due to strong traditional and cultural norms, the government did not need to have any explicit population policy in order to increase the level of fertility. However, other population policies, such as the reduction of infant and maternal mortality policies, had an indirect effect on fertility reduction in Albania. The communist government also invested considerably in improving the social agenda of the country through policies that would have a significant effect on the level and pattern of fertility in Albania, not just in the period 1950 to 1990, but also to the present day. The discussion that follows will be focused on two main streams of factors and policies, the ones that tended to keep fertility high during the past 50 years and the ones that reduced the fertility from 6 to 2.2 children per woman.

## **6.1 Pro-natalist environment and traditionalism kept fertility high in communist Albania between 1945 and 1990**

In contrast to most other communist states of Eastern and Central Europe, which produced considerable pro-natalist propaganda, population issues were given little attention in Albania. The literature on the country tells us that there was no debate on population policy in Albania during the communist rule, either in policy discussion or in research work (Macura 1974). In fact, the only population-related policy was the reduction of infant and maternal mortality, and all demographic developments were seen in connection with this policy.

There were two sets of factors that kept fertility high in Albania. First were the pro-natalist environment and policies. Second, there were the traditional and cultural norms which were very strong in the patriarchal Albanian society in the aftermath of WWII.

### **6.1.1 Pro-natalist environment and policies**

Despite the value placed on mothers and children by the communist government, there was no provision for family planning. The most significant pro-natalist policy, if it could be called such, was the restriction of access to the means of birth control.

Contraceptives were not widely available and unlike in many European communist states, abortion was prohibited by law. It was only permitted on very narrow medical grounds, making Albania's abortion law by far the most consistently restrictive in Eastern Europe (David 1970). Also there were no incentives to provide any form of education or information on the use of contraception; in a patriarchal society, the lack of knowledge about contraception would in effect restrict its use even if it were available. Contraception was never prohibited, but neither was it promoted. The main means of birth control was *coitus interruptus*; this has remained so to the present day, despite the availability of contraception and abortion (INSTA 2003a, INSTAT 2005).

Other areas of state policy also acted to sustain the high fertility level, either through strong financial incentives for mothers, or through the reduction of the 'cost' of childbearing. In order to encourage women to join the labour force, extensive provision of pre-school care was introduced. Infants and children under the age of three could be placed in daycare or even overnight accommodation for fees payable by the parents and their employers. All children aged between three and six were entitled to a free place in a state-funded kindergarten. This had a double benefit for the state: women were freed from childcare responsibilities and were thus able to work; and children could be inducted into the socialist education system at an early age. It also created a significant externality favoring large families.

Other policies reduced the 'cost' of children, both directly and indirectly. The price of children's clothes was kept deliberately low. Canteens were provided both at the workplace and in local residential areas to lighten women's loads, as were launderettes and labour-saving devices to assist women to combine their roles of workers and mothers (Hall 1994). Albania also adopted the Soviet practice of presenting medals to women who were particularly fecund, and this continued right up to the end of the 1980s. On the first birthday of the eighth surviving child a woman was awarded the accolade of 'Heroic Mother', while third, second and first class awards of 'Mother's Glory' were bestowed on women with between four and seven children.

Pregnancy leave was extended from six weeks to six months in 1981, with the woman's right to return to her job protected by law (Bërzhholli and Qiriazzi, 1986). The positive influence of such measures on fertility was reflected in the fact that over 20,000 more births were recorded in the four-year period after this measure was enacted than in the previous four years (Hall 1994). In the years following this four-year period, however, the trend was reversed. The impact on the fertility rate was nonetheless insignificant for this whole period: a slight change in the fertility rate was seen in the urban areas, where the Crude Birth Rate (CBR) increased from 20.5 in 1980 to 22.3 in 1985 and then decreased in the following years. For the same period in the rural population the CBR decreased from 29.5 to 28.2. This is understandable on two grounds. First, the urban population was more educated than the rural one, and thus

could react more quickly to the introduction of new policies. Second, the way employment was regulated in the rural areas meant that the financial benefits of the pregnancy leave were not significant in the agricultural cooperatives. Nonetheless, the increase in the pregnancy leave did have an immediate beneficial effect on infant mortality: in the following year, 1982, the infant mortality rate dropped by 18%, with mortality at two to five months being most affected (Skenderi and Vejsiu 1983).

These measures, applied in a traditional society like Albania where children were already seen as beneficial, only served to reinforce the psychological base for a large number of children (Falkingham and Gjonça 2001).

### **6.1.2 Cultural and traditional values**

Under communism Albanian women were given little choice but to procreate (Hall 1994). For most women, traditional Albanian life was characterized by discrimination and inequality compared with men. These were further reinforced by a wide range of cultural norms. While the Canon (a traditional 14<sup>th</sup> century set of laws) subjugated women in the northern upland areas, religion abetted their oppression in the rest of the country. The birth of a girl was considered a burden and a misfortune on the family. Most marriages were arranged (Hall 1994). In the immediate pre-war period there were just 21 female teachers in the country, two women doctors, and no female engineers, agronomists, or chemists (Ash 1974). Only 2.4% of secondary school students were girls (EBNA 1984). In the 1946 constitution immediately following their accession to power, the communists introduced a number of laws to regulate marriage and divorce. Marriage was based on equal rights for both spouses. The traditional concept of the 'head of the family' was rejected by the new legislation, with each of the spouses having the right to choose his/her own occupation, profession, and residence. The introduction of the new legislation gave unprecedented rights to women in a traditional society. However, the persistence of traditionalism in the rural areas and north of the country made the emancipation of Albanian woman difficult. Divorce law for the first time provided women with the right to petition it on the same grounds as men (Keefe et al. 1971). The modifications made to the divorce law in 1970 made it somewhat easier for couples to divorce, in particular for the women. Thus, we see almost a doubling of the number of divorces from 1,041 in 1965 to 1,903 in 1975. Since all childbearing took place within marriage this change in the divorce law might have made a slight contribution to the sharp decline of fertility in the 1970s (Figure 1). However, marriage rates increased from 5.8 per 1,000 in 1938 to 8.5 by 1985, one of the highest levels in Europe (Hall 1994). Equality between men and women was stressed continuously and

was even included in the constitution. The constitution of the People's Socialist Republic (PSR) of Albania (Article 41) stated:

'The woman enjoys equal rights with a man in work, pay, holidays, social security, education, in all social-political activities as well as in the family' (Kuvendi Popullor 1976).

The move towards equal rights, despite being sanctioned by law, was a slow process. On the one hand, improvements in rights and equality in educational institutions and the workplace took place, but on the other hand, the traditional norms were enforced and survived in families and households in many parts of the country, in particular the countryside and the highlands. In these parts of the country women faced the double burden of having to work full time and at the same time cope with all the household responsibilities, despite the authority of the 'master of the family' being considerably reduced. Although the legislation had been introduced, its implementation was difficult. For example, when the divorce legislation was changed in 1970, giving both men and women equal rights to divorce, the person suing for it had to present the case publicly in court, thus making it not just difficult, but also creating a lack of privacy and showing 'interference' from the state. The situation has changed significantly today, but equal rights at home are still an issue that deserves to be addressed in current Albanian society.

## **6.2 Social and economic policies reducing fertility in communist Albania between 1945 and 1990**

Although there were few explicit family planning policies, there were other social and economic policies that had a much more significant and implicit effect on fertility in Albania, in particular the ones that improved the social agenda in the country. There were two main achievements of the communist policies that affected the level of fertility in the country. First, the improvement in female education, and second the improvements in the employment rates for females.

The investment in education, particularly female education, was unprecedented in Albania. Female illiteracy improved from 92% in 1945 to less than 8% in 1989, and by 2002 it was less than 5%, similar to most developed European societies. The government instigated its campaign against illiteracy in the aftermath of the Second World War; it started on a voluntary basis and by 1950 primary education was made compulsory by law. The law that made the seven years of primary education obligatory affected the entire population from 12 to 40 years of age. It also established the foundations for vocational training and specialized technical education. By the early 1970s the government had achieved a remarkable success in the area of education,

proclaiming the eradication of illiteracy. This success was accepted even by the harshest critics of Albanian communism (Logoreci 1977). More importantly, the 1946 constitution of the country guaranteed free education for all, which opened the doors to all strata of society, most importantly the rural population. The promotion of education remained high on the communist agenda even in the last years of its existence. Thus, by 1985 the government was spending about 29% of its budget on education (Misja, Vejsiu, and Bërzhholli 1987). This is unprecedented for any former communist government in Eastern Europe. In terms of enrolment, Albania had a broad-based system, with more than 90% of pupils completing compulsory primary education, and 70% of them continuing into secondary education. From these, more than 40% went on to university (Gjonça 2001).

Attention was paid to female education, in particular in the less developed areas of the country. It is well known that improvement in female education has a significant effect directly and indirectly on the level of fertility and other demographic processes (Caldwell 1986, Caldwell and Caldwell 1991). Table 1 shows the percentages of female students at all levels of education. It is clear that dramatic improvements were made during the period under consideration, and at the end of communist rule female education was on a par with male education. There is an important point to focus on here with regards to fertility changes: in 1967 Albania banned religion, with the government arguing that it was the major source of female oppression. Unquestionably, female educational opportunities improved, and the figures show that. The increase in the number of female students in secondary (not compulsory) and higher education in 1970 and 1980 is exceptional. This also affected the employment rates for females, and by 1970 we see most of the improvement. These measures are the ones most likely to account for the sharp decline in fertility in the following years from 1970 until 1980 (Figure 1). It has to be emphasized that these results were part of a whole package of measures giving women equal rights with men. All these measures together made the decline in fertility in the 1970s sharper than in previous periods.

It was not only female education that the communist regime invested in. Since the government was interested in full female employment, it also invested in the pre-school education system, creating a system of day-care nursing and kindergartens across the whole country. By 1970 women made up 45.3% of the labour force, an increase of more than one-quarter compared to 1960 (35.9%). Although the authority of the 'master of the family' was greatly reduced, the old patriarchal system survived, especially in the highlands.

Another aspect of the communist social agenda, one of the few explicit statements concerning population and the only articulated population policy, is to be found in Albania's communist constitution, which stated that:

“The State gives special protection to the interests of mother and child”.

In order to improve maternal and child health, medical care and prescriptions for pregnant mothers and for infants were free. There is a wide range of literature showing that the reduction of infant mortality to historically low levels generally leads to a reduction in the level of fertility (van de Walle 1986, Palloni and Rafalimanana. 1999). In the case of Albania, Gjonça, Aassve, and Mencarini (2006) found that the survival of a child had a strong effect on fertility reduction in the country. The 1950s and the 1960s saw most of the improvement in under-five mortality, reducing it to less than half of the 1950 value. This in itself could explain a significant part of the reduction of fertility in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

**Table 1: Percentages of female students at different levels of education**

	1938	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Primary education	32.4	45.4	42.3	46.9	47.2	47.9	48.6
Secondary education	22.0	28.8	29.8	40.9	44.7	45.0	49.2
Higher Education	n/a	n/a	16.6	32.5	49.6	50.1	61.4

Source: INSTAT 2000).

### 6.3 Transition and the new setting for ‘family planning’ in Albania, 1990-2006

The period after the collapse of communism was characterized by the introduction of many new laws and policies to regulate the transition to a more market-oriented and modern society. In this context, population policies were no exception. One of the first changes in legislation that the Albanian government introduced in 1991 was the legalization of abortion, which brought about a dramatic increase in their number, from almost zero to about 172 per thousand live births in 2002 (INSTAT, 2003a). Contraception became widely available, but the level of information and education for its use were, and still remain, very low. Another important policy was the increase of maternity leave from six months to nine months. All these changes took place in the early 1990s and should have had some effects on the level of fertility.

It is clear that we have a new setting in Albania with regards to fertility change during the 1990s: the introduction of modern methods of birth control, which were non-existent before 1990. However, as Coale (1973) suggests, the availability of contraception is only one of the pre-conditions for a fertility decline. The contrast between the traditional values of a patriarchal society and the more modern values

implied by recently introduced family planning policies are reflected in the use of birth control. While the practice of abortion has increased rapidly, the use of contraception is still very low, due to a lack of knowledge. Sex education has just been introduced in the secondary system, but it comprises a one-off lecture and is presented only in the secondary school systems in the main cities. It is precisely because of this that Albania is not experiencing a decline in fertility as sharp as that experienced in Southern Europe.

It is worth noting that education continues to remain high on the agenda of Albanians even after the collapse of communism and the introduction of the market economy. The 1990s experienced a few changes with regards to enrolment. The gross enrolment rate for primary education has decreased from 102% in 1990 to about 99.8% in 2002. While secondary enrolment has decreased from about 80% in 1990 to 44% in 2002, university enrolment has gone up by 5%. The drop in enrolment for secondary schooling is very significant. This may be due to the increased poverty and inequality in the country which has forced a large number of secondary students to enter the labour market. Illiteracy rates do not show much difference between the overall rates for males and females: the LSMS data show an illiteracy rate for males of 2.8% and for females of 6.2%; the census data show an even smaller and insignificant difference (1.2% and 1.9%). For a traditional society such as the Albanian one, this overall parity represents the achievement of social equality between genders, particularly as any remaining differences can be attributed to illiteracy in the older generations, where female illiteracy for over 60 years is about 34.8% and that of males only 12.4%.

When educational attainment is examined, it is clear that overall male/female differences are very small. Thus, for primary education the number of female graduates is higher at 52% of all graduates. For secondary education female graduates represent 47% of all graduates. The only level of educational attainment where there is a clear male advantage is the university level, where female graduates comprise just 41% of all graduates. However, this pattern will change in the years to come as the number of new students registering at university in the last 10 years has increased for females and decreased for males. By 2000 more than 60% of students registered in universities were female (INSTAT, 2000).

Another change that has affected the level of fertility during the transition is the hardship caused by the economic development of the country, which is accompanied by very high rates of unemployment. These have increased to about 22.7%, and are even higher for women (28.4%). The data show that recorded unemployment is much higher in the 2001 census than in the 1989 census, the last one under communism. This is understandable as the communists took pride in the 'full employment policy' of their administration. The unemployment figures for women are higher in all areas of the

country and in particular in the urban areas, where the rate reaches a peak of 45.5% (excluding Tirana).

Female participation in the labour market has decreased from 47.4% in 1989 to 40.7% in 2001, and 45.1% of women not working outside the home are categorized as housewives. This represents about 22.7% of the total active female population, which means that the proportion of housewives has increased. Once unemployed or made redundant, a woman finds it hard to return to the labour market, particularly in the private sector, and in most cases she decides to remain at home.

**Table 2: Unemployment rates by sex and place of residence for the 1989 and 2001 censuses**

	1989 Census	2001 Census
Men		
Tirana urban	10.4	19.7
Other urban	10.7	22.8
Rural	5.5	16.4
Country	7.4	18.8
Women		
Tirana urban	14.5	34.3
Other urban	16.3	45.5
Rural	10.1	14.5
Country	12.4	28.4
Total		
Tirana urban	12.4	26.1
Other urban	13.4	33.0
Rural	7.7	15.7
Country	9.8	22.7

Source: INSTAT 2004a.

It is clear that while education continues to be a high priority in Albania, the opposite is the case with female employment, as demonstrated by the reduction in the number of women in the labour force and the higher number unemployed. The increase in the number of housewives shows a trend in the country similar to more developed societies where the percentage of housewives is at comparable levels. Despite this trend, the high unemployment rate among women and the large number of redundancies in the 1990s have had an effect on fertility during this period (Gjonca, Aassve, and Mencarini 2006) and will continue to affect it in the coming years. This is believed to be responsible for maintaining the universal first birth feature of Albanian marriages, even in the 1990s.

## 7. Concluding notes – family planning policy in Albania

At about 2.2 children per woman, the level of fertility in Albania continues to be high compared to other European countries. If the trend continues and follows the experiences of other South-Eastern European countries, the next five years will see the level of fertility in Albania falling below the replacement level. Despite its present high level by European standards, Albanian fertility dropped dramatically in a short period of 50 years from 7 to 2.2 children per woman.

At the start of this paper we discussed the interplay between *implicit and explicit policies* in Albania during the communist period through to the present day. There was no explicit population policy in Albania during the period of communist rule until 1990: ideologically the government linked population growth to economic growth, and since there was already a high-fertility environment, there was no need for any population policy to help increase the level of fertility, as happened in some Eastern European countries. On the one hand, the government implemented a number of health policies that were aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality, which indirectly affected the changes in fertility in the country. The reduction of infant mortality from 148 to 22 per thousand in a period of 50 years had a strong effect in reducing the level of fertility (Gjonça, Aassve, and Mencarini 2006). On the other hand the government implemented a considerable number of policies affecting social changes in the country, such as educational reform and, in particular, female education reform, which had a large effect in reducing fertility. Equal employment and full employment policies were again policies that affected the level of fertility in the country and these were followed by complementary policies to help mothers, such as a system of government sponsored nurseries and kindergartens. All of these policies created a more emancipated environment for women in which to make their own decision with regard to family formation, and all these policies had an indirect effect in reducing fertility.

The other dimension of the discussion in this paper was the interplay between *traditional and modern values* with regard to demographic behaviour in Albania. It was argued that Albania was, and to a certain extent still remains, a traditional society with a patriarchal social and family organization which has affected a number of the determinants of fertility, such as *marriage and contraception*. Large families, common in the past, are today only to be found in small numbers in the north of the country. This reduced number of siblings living together in the same household also has an indirect effect on fertility reduction. Tradition is still affecting the marriage patterns in Albania, with marriage and a first birth being universal and with an early entrance into marriage for both men and women. Cohabitation is rare and the signs are that it is going to remain low for a long period to come. This could also be affected by the lack of housing and the lack of resources for the young population, which is the poorest compared to all

other age groups in the country (World Bank 2003). The interplay between traditional and modern values is also seen in the use of *methods of birth control*, where traditional forms of birth control (withdrawal is the dominant one) are still the norm. The use of modern methods of contraception is slowly but surely increasing, and changes are expected to take place here faster than changes in the marriage pattern. This is due to the availability of contraception and the dissemination of information among the younger population in recent years.

This discussion of the factors that affected fertility reduction in Albania was structured around the factors that sought to keep fertility high in Albania and those that decreased fertility over the past 50 years. It is clear from the analyses in this paper that the investments of the communist regime in the social agenda, in particular, policies and measures that improved women's education and position within society and family, were by far the most important determinants in bringing the fertility rate down.

While in many European countries the discussion has been focused for a long time on ways and policies to increase the level of fertility, in the case of Albania this discussion is either non-existent or has just started to be recognized by scholars. There are two possible explanations for this. First, Albania still has a high level of fertility compared to the rest of Europe. Thus, at this stage of transition, the high level of fertility is not a cause for worry for many demographers and policy makers. However, and most importantly, this level of fertility has not been sustained over a long period of time. Only ten years ago the level of TFR in Albania was 3 children per woman. Under such circumstances, the question that needs to be raised is, "Should one wait and see if the level of fertility will continue to decrease, or should there be policies introduced to sustain this current level?" Even if the answer is to introduce policies to sustain the current level of fertility, that would be very difficult to achieve since the society is changing rapidly from a traditional one to a more modern one and such a change is reflected in the demographic behaviour of the population. Second, and even more importantly, to a population that has been denied basic human rights for more than 50 years, the right to the availability and use of the means of birth control is seen as a fundamental one. Some family planning programs have already started to be implemented in Albania, but they mainly focus on the use of contraception. It is important to point out here that Albania still has a high rate of abortion, as well as of sexually transmitted diseases. Infant mortality remains high and maternal health is not at the levels expected in a developed country. In this respect, policies that would integrate the family planning demands of the population with the issues that address the reproductive rights of women and children would probably be the way to implement any population policy in Albania.

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