

# Gerontological Education in Albania. The Historical and Social Approach

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**Abstract:** *The social developments in Albania, in the end of 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, have dictated continuous changes in the education system, which has evolved in accordance with the global and national social needs. A wide spread phenomena lately in the Albanian society is the aging of its population. The number of the elderly has increased several times as the result of a decrease in the number of births and number of deaths, a decrease in the number of active youngsters who immigrate, an increase in the longevity, etc. Albania has more than 400000 elderly today (14% of the actual population). On the other hand, differently from most of the countries in the region, Albania has not inherited from the past a traditional and integrated education system of social and health care for the elderly. This is a very strong argument for the necessity of educational programs in the gerontological field.*

*Seen from this perspective, this paper aims to present a short historical of the development of gerontological education globally and nationally. The main purpose is the analyses of the actual situation of the third age and the preparation of gerontologists through education for services towards this target group in our country, also aims to highlight some recommendations for the development of gerontological education as an important field of the education system and of the Albanian society in general*

*Throughout the research, generally it has been applied qualitative methods resulting in a cumulative, descriptive and evaluating research.*

**Keywords:** *education, gerontology, third age, elderly, educational program, gerontologist*

## 1. Introduction

After the World War II the world population increased rapidly. In a period of 60 years, the world population has almost tripled and until 2011 it reached 7 billion (Telo, 2011). Lately it has been noticed throughout the world the phenomena of low birth rate and a further increase of the longevity index. This caused an increase in the aging of the population.

In the following table, there are some data on the structure (in percentage) of world population according to age groups. The data for 2050 is a predicted prognosis by the researchers of UN<sup>1</sup>.

TABLE I: The World Population

Population groups according to age	1950	2011	2050
Primary age up to 15 years old	34.2	28.1	23.0
Secondary age 15 - 65 years old	60.7	64.2	65.0
Tertiary age 65 years old and above	5.1	7.7	12.0

<sup>1</sup> “Demografia” Journal, 2017

The above data show a decrease in the specific weight of the population in the primary and secondary age, which will continue further on in the future, and an increase in tertiary population.

## 2. Demographic developments in Albania

In most of the European countries the aging of the population has started decades ago, meanwhile Albania has started to feel the effects of the aging population only lately, after a period of demographic transformation never seen before in its history. During this period, the number of the elderly in relation to the number of the population has increased several times, while there has been a decrease in the number of children due to low fertility and in the number of young adults due to immigration.

Albania has 400,000 elderly or 14% of the total population with a growing tendency in the future years (MOSHA, 2018). Around 60% of them live in isolated areas.

The Albanian population in January 1st 2019, resulted in 2.862.427 inhabitants, showing a decrease by 0,3 %, compared to January 1st 2018 (INSTAT, 2019). The demographic transition in Albania peaked remarkably with a gradual “aging” of the population during the last decades.

According to INSTAT statistics the birth number in our country has started to fall, while the number of deaths has started to grow, which has brought changes in the age of the society and taking our society towards aging. The number of births, for the first trimester of 2019 results in 7.403, meaning a decrease of 9,9 %, compared to the third trimester of 2018. The number of deaths, for the third trimester of 2019 results in 4.716, meaning a decrease by 5,1 %, compared with the third trimester of 2018<sup>2</sup>.

The average longevity has continuously grown and there are continuously more and more people that can and must take part actively in the society even after the retiring age.

The improvement of the living conditions has brought an increase in longevity, which has caused a higher number of the elderly than before. Thus, according to INSTAT the average longevity of the Albanian population in 2018 has increased for males up to 77.4 years old and for females up to 80.5 years old<sup>3</sup>. The growth of the average longevity index is a very important factor which affects the aging of the population. When people live longer, the percentage of the elderly grows. From 51.6 years old which was the average longevity index in 1950, in the last years reached 76.3 years old.<sup>4</sup>

An important aspect in the aging process is the progressive demographic process of the elderly population itself. The increasing number of oldest elderly is direct result of the increased longevity, which has been noticed in the previous decades and is thought to continue even in the future decades. Within the group of the elderly, the oldest people above 80- are again the fastest growing segment. Their percentage in the total number of the population has increased from 0.9% in 1989 to 2.1% in 2.1% in 2011 (58 thousand people) and it is expected to become 4.6% in 2031.<sup>5</sup>

The immigration at a fast pace is another important factor in the aging of the population. After 1990, with the ratification of a law according to which everyone can choose its own residence, 1.4 million people have immigrated or around 35% of the population.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the working population has left after 1990. This has affected the aging population index.

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/treguesit-demografik%C3%AB-dhe-social%C3%AB/lindjet-vdekjet-dhe-martesat/publikimet/2019/treguesit-demografik%C3%AB-t3-2019/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/treguesit-demografik%C3%AB-dhe-social%C3%AB/popullsia/#tab2>

<sup>4</sup> Statistical yearbook 2010-2014, INSTAT, pg. 15

<sup>5</sup> Statistical yearbook 2010-2014, INSTAT, pg. 15

<sup>6</sup> Statistical yearbook 2010-2014, INSTAT, pg. 16

The aging process will continue for some other decades. The number of the elderly is expected to reach 591 thousand in 2031 representing 33% of the total population. The future increase in the ratio of the elderly dependence shows a doubling from 17% in 2011 to 34% in 2031<sup>7</sup>.

The following graph shows the movement of the population, according to age, where the full graph shows its real movement up to 2015 while the lined part shows a prediction until 2060.

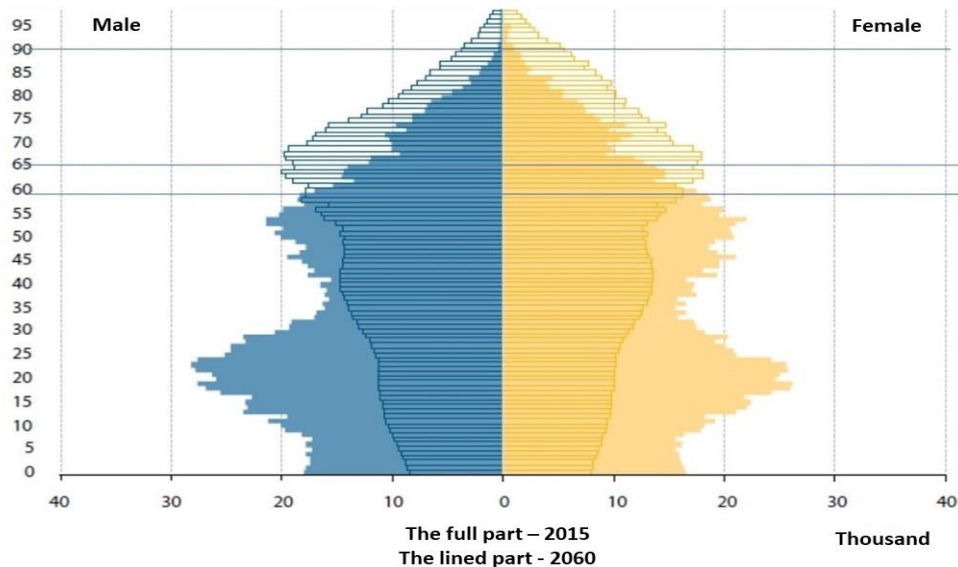


Fig. 1: The movement of population

### 3. General situation

The absolute and relative data shows that even in our country the population will age, just like in the other European countries, and this asks for measures to be taken now to face the growing demands of the third age population in order to create correct relationships between generations.

In the past, Albania had the big family in its foundations, where the elderly were the most important people in the family and in decision making, and the number of the elderly who lived as a couple or alone was very little, or inconsiderable. The new developments of the society and the fast demographic transition have been accompanied by the family becoming smaller and the lost of its traditional role of supporting the elderly.

Another influencing factor is the high level of youth and middle aged immigration<sup>8</sup>, causing the number of the elderly who live alone to increase considerably. Based on the data, there are 34.945 people above 65 years old that leave alone. The age difference is big, 26 thousand are lonely women, while males are only 9 thousand. The combination between a small number of children, a bigger stock of housing and the growing dominance for independence has as a consequence the fact that in average the elderly today live in a smaller economic family unit than in the past decades. The percentage of the elderly who live in economic family units with more members has decreased from 30% in 2001 to 19% in 2011 and the percentage of those living as a couple without children has increased from 24% to 32% in the same decade between censuses. (MOSHA, 2017). The implications of these tendencies are that relatively fewer elderly are supported by the family members. Around 30% live in economic family units

<sup>7</sup> Statistical yearbook 2010-2014, INSTAT, pg. 15

<sup>8</sup> <https://tvklan.al/35-mije-te-moshuar-jetojne-vetem-38-e-tyre-jetojne-ne-varferi/>

with two people usually the old husband/wife and 8% live alone; thus these people become vulnerable. Most of the 77% of the elderly who live alone are women.<sup>9</sup>

The elderly who live alone or in poverty, are faced with different barriers (such as specific health conditions and poor infrastructure) which hamper their full and effective participation in society. The elderly who live alone or even as a couple are more at risk to suffer social isolation and thus may require special support.

On the other hand taking care of the third age is a service that is offered by institutions such as private and public residential centers for the elderly, daily centers for the elderly, hospitals, but also from private employment agencies that offer this service in houses for the elderly who live alone or have special needs.

Actually based on the monitoring and observations of the market offering these services to the elderly in the family, has resulted that the services are offered by unqualified and untrained people in every aspect, starting from the way of treating the diseases in the third age, psychosociological development, psychomotoric and cognitive development, entertainment, treatment in emergency cases, accompanying people with special needs, recognising different family cultures, etc

Being a profession that has started late and it has found a wide spread, it has developed in uninstitutional ways and it has been offered by unspecialised people and often without the necessary formation. Often this results in ugly situations that have been fatal for the lives of the elderly.

These developments have found our society unprepared and on the other side it has not paid any attention to the preparation of professionals that should treat and work with the elderly individuals making that in today's situation there is a thirst in the labour market for people who can take care for the elderly, especially those who live alone.

We can refer only to the two latest situations that Albania went through, the earthquake of November 26th 2019 and the pandemic 2020-2022, to understand the great importance that the specialists and the professionals have for the third age. Many elderly were left without concrete care because of the earthquake which directly affected the quality of their life. The world pandemic situation highlighted a great lack of care for this age. The high number of the elderly deaths is a direct result of the lack of care they had. The fact that they live alone makes them take care of their needs themselves starting from buying the groceries to their routine medications. This way the inevitable contact with other people exposes them with infection and increases the probability for contagion. If we had these well prepared professionals before, active and certified, the situation will have been at least better.

#### **4. Need for intervention**

The demographic process of the aging of the population presents an important task for policymakers and the organisations of civil society to deal with these issues and to create the possibility for the growing percentage of the elderly to participate actively and productively in today's and tomorrow's society. At the same time, policies and programmes should take in consideration the specific vulnerable groups within the elderly, such as widows, people with disabilities, the poor housing conditions the lack of family support and stable financial means.

That is why everything starts from education and preparation of the generations of professionals. In most of the countries in the region and especially in European countries gerontology and the education of gerontologists is more developed to treat, serve and help the elderly, this is even because the fact that they have felt the aging effects long before Albania which has not inherited a past traditional and integrated education system or a social and health care for the elderly. This is a strong argument for the necessity of opening education programmes in gerontology, for the education and preparation of the future generations of gerontologists as a response to the fast demographic changes and to what we will be facing in the future.

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<sup>9</sup>[http://www.instat.gov.al/media/1734/mplakja\\_e\\_popullsis\\_situata\\_e\\_t\\_moshuarve\\_n\\_shqip\\_ri.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/1734/mplakja_e_popullsis_situata_e_t_moshuarve_n_shqip_ri.pdf)

When we talk about taking care of the third age in today's life we should bear in mind that information and resources on education, psychosocial care, health and safety are continuously changing. For this reason, the education of students in such programmes should adapt to the national and international standards of the social care services for the elderly in their families, residential and day centers.

Opening such programmes and encouraging youngsters to attend them takes this profession towards institutionalisation and certification and ensures not only professionals, but also guarantees quality to the individuals or groups that need these professionals and these are education programmes which focus on improving the quality of services and social well-being, without mentioning here that a certified profession is an income source for the government in the form of taxes.

Albania has at its disposal a good legal framework for the opening of such education programmes and the preparation of professionals, however it is needed a more visionary education policy to precede or to be in tune with the demographic developments and to gather specialists of social sciences, education, health, law, economy etc.

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