



## DEMOGRAPHIC STATUS OF THE CENTRAL REGIONS IN BULGARIA

M. Shishmanova\*

South -West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

### ABSTRACT

General demographic characteristics, an approach to population dynamics, basic demographic processes – natural and mechanical growth rate, basic demographic structures – age-groups and educational characteristics, occupation and unemployment, are presented for the central regions, respectively agglomeration areas in Bulgaria.

**Key words:** central regions, agglomeration areas, demographic status quo, educational structure, unemployment

### INTRODUCTION

The present investigation considers the demographic status of the central regions in Bulgaria. Agglomeration areas are formed within the range of the central regions in Bulgaria – 6 agglomeration areas with a center – a big city, 30 agglomeration areas with a center – a medium-sized town. Six of the agglomeration areas are formations with more than three municipalities, five of them are with three municipalities each, ten are with 2 municipalities and the rest 15 are independent municipalities with a formed kernel. These areas represent the backbone of the economy, social and human potential of the country. They are with the highest degree of competitiveness and attractiveness for investments and innovations.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Information from the National Statistical Institute was used for the study of the demographic status – current demographic statistics and the census in 2001, and from the Employment Agency. Comparative analysis for consecutive years and periods was principally applied.

\*Correspondence to: Maria Shishmanova,  
South -West University “Neofit Rilski”,  
2700 Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria,  
[valkova\\_chich@abv.bg](mailto:valkova_chich@abv.bg)

### 1. General demographic characteristics

Eighty eight 88 municipalities with total population of 5885455 people (1) are included within the range of the agglomeration areas, which represent 77.4 % of the population of the country. The differences between the municipalities are in the range from 1247050 for the Sofia municipality, 347400 for Plovdiv and 326528 for Varna, to 6546 for Kuklen. One fifth of the population of the agglomeration areas is on the territory of the Sofia municipality and together with the other two municipalities with big city centers (Plovdiv and Varna) this share becomes 32.6 % (Fig. 1).

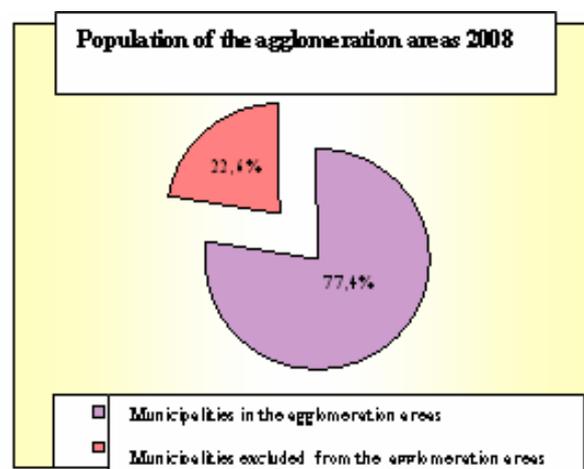


Fig. 1

The settlements falling within the territory of the agglomeration areas are 2299 – 43.4 % of all the settlements in the country. The concentration of the population in the agglomeration areas in the towns is 79.6% and in the villages – 20.4%, the average for the country being respectively 71.1% for the towns and 29.9% – for the villages. The similar values for the urban and rural population of the agglomeration areas and for the country show that the greater part (87%) of the urban population in Bulgaria falls within the range of the agglomeration areas.

## 2. Dynamics of the population

Two basic periods are outlined in the trends of population dynamics of the agglomeration areas, which are analogous to these for the total population of the country:

- Constant growth of the population from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 90-ies of the same century.
- Gradual decrease of population between the last two censuses (1992-2001 r.), which continues at present too. In the period 2001-2008 the population of the municipalities from the agglomeration areas was reduced with 124 thousand people or with an average annual rate of -0.3%, the average rate for the country being -0.5%.

At the background of the general decrease, a part of the municipalities in the areas exhibit positive growth.

The number of the municipalities with a positive growth for the period is 11, including the Sofia municipality, Plovdiv, Varna and Svishtov. The rest 7 municipalities are situated along the Black Sea coastal area. The rural population of 16 municipalities is also with a positive growth, mainly due to positive migration balance. The negative pace of growth is formed by negative natural reproduction and net migration. The differences between the municipalities with negative growth are within the range from -0.2% for Peshtera to -2.1% for Belovo. Eight municipalities with district town centers are among the municipalities with higher negative growth (exceeding -1.0%) – Vidin, Lovech, Vratsa, Silistra, Kyustendil, Gabrovo, Montana, Pernik. The diminution for the greater part of the municipalities is formed by a negative natural growth, complemented by a negative migration growth.

At the background of the general decrease of the population in the municipalities of the areas, the rural population exhibits higher average annual rates of diminution (-0.7% for the period 2001-2008), determined by the ageing of the population in the villages and the higher mortality-rate. The decrease of the urban population is minimal (-0.2% average annual rate for the period after 2000). The decrease for part of the municipalities (Razgrad, Silistra, Shumen and others) is accompanied by significant external migration with attenuating intensity.

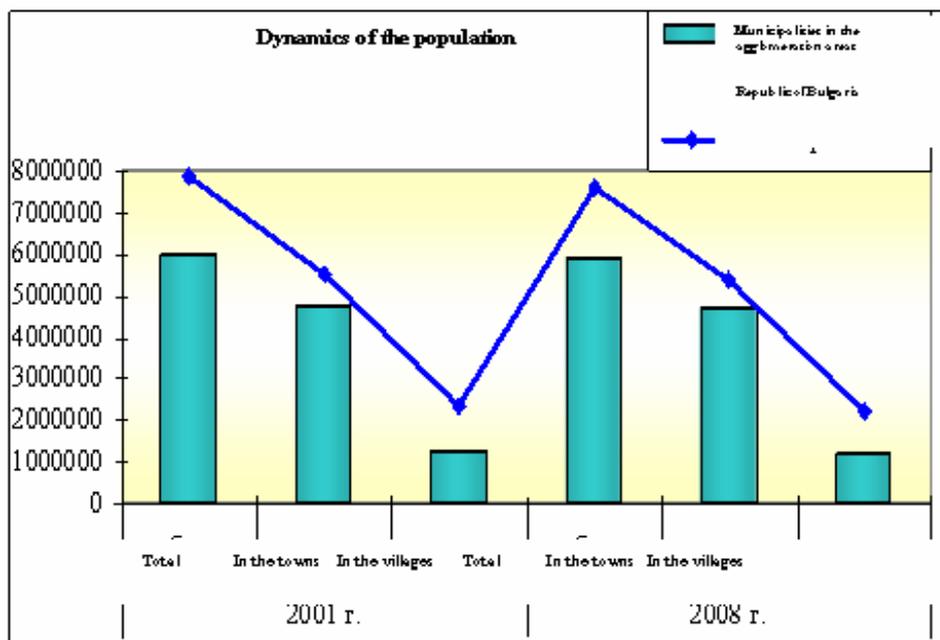


Fig. 2

### 3. Basic demographic processes

#### 3.1 Natural growth of population

The natural reproduction of the population is realized with decreasing negative natural growth. For the period 2001-2008 the values of the natural growth of population in the agglomeration areas are -4.5‰ and -3.0‰ (the average for the country being -5.6‰ and -4.3‰) (Fig. 2). The changes in the natural growth are determined by the increased birth-rate – both by the absolute number of the newborn (with 9.5 thousand people), as well as by the birth rate coefficient (from 8.7‰ to 10.5‰). The mortality also increases slightly from 13.1‰ for 2001 to 13.5‰ – for 2008. In 2008, as a result of the negative natural growth, the population of the municipalities from the agglomeration areas decreases with

almost 18 thousand people.

At municipal level there are significant differences in the natural growth of the population due to reasons of both demographic aspect and social-economic conditions.

Positive natural growth of the population in 2008 is exhibited for 10 municipalities, the growth values being within the range from 0.3‰ for Burgas municipality to 2.7‰ for Aytos municipality. The other 77 municipalities are with negative natural growth. The variation amplitude of the municipalities with negative growth is from -0.3‰ for Sliven to -16.2‰ for Belovo and Tundzha.

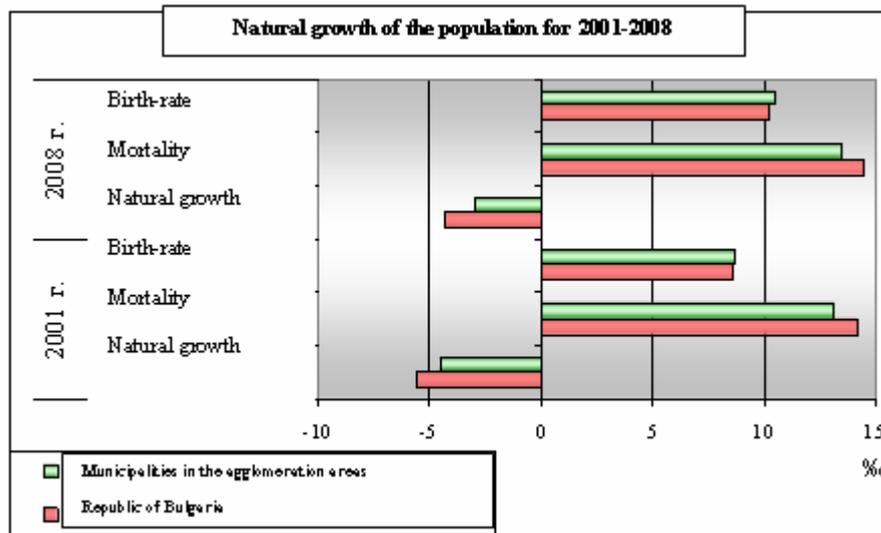


Fig. 3

The Sofia municipality is characterized by negative natural growth (-0.6‰, 2008), the Plovdiv and Varna municipalities are with positive natural reproduction.

From the total new-born children in 2008 4/5 are on the territory of the municipalities in the agglomeration areas, which predetermines also the values of the indicator for the country and forms the regime of reproduction.

#### 3.2. Mechanical growth of the population

The mechanical growth of the population of the areas has always been positive, with an expressed trend towards increasing of the values in the recent years. It is 6473 people for 2001 and 10760 people – for 2008. The share of men and women in the total flux of the

people, who have changed their residence, is almost equal. No significant gender differences are observed.

Decrease in the mechanical growth intensity is recorded both in the municipalities of the agglomeration areas and on a national level. Two groups of municipalities are formed with respect to the total growth: with negative mechanical growth – 54 municipalities; with positive mechanical growth – 34 municipalities, but this growth is significant and predetermines the overall positive growth of the municipalities in the areas. Eleven municipalities of all the municipalities with district city centers are with positive net-migration, and 17 – with negative migration, the greater part of them being on the territory of North Bulgaria.

Among the municipalities not only in the agglomeration areas but also in the country, the Sofia municipality exhibits the highest mechanical growth and as a result the population of Sofia has been increased with 7075 people (2008). Varna ranks at the second place with 3754 people, followed by Plovdiv with 2028 people. High mechanical growth is recorded also for the municipalities Burgas (1239), Svishtov (939), Veliko Tarnovo (592), etc. The highest reduction of the population is observed as a result of migration in the municipalities of Lovech, Vidin, Silistra, Nova Zagora, Sliven, Yambol (within the range of 300-400 people).

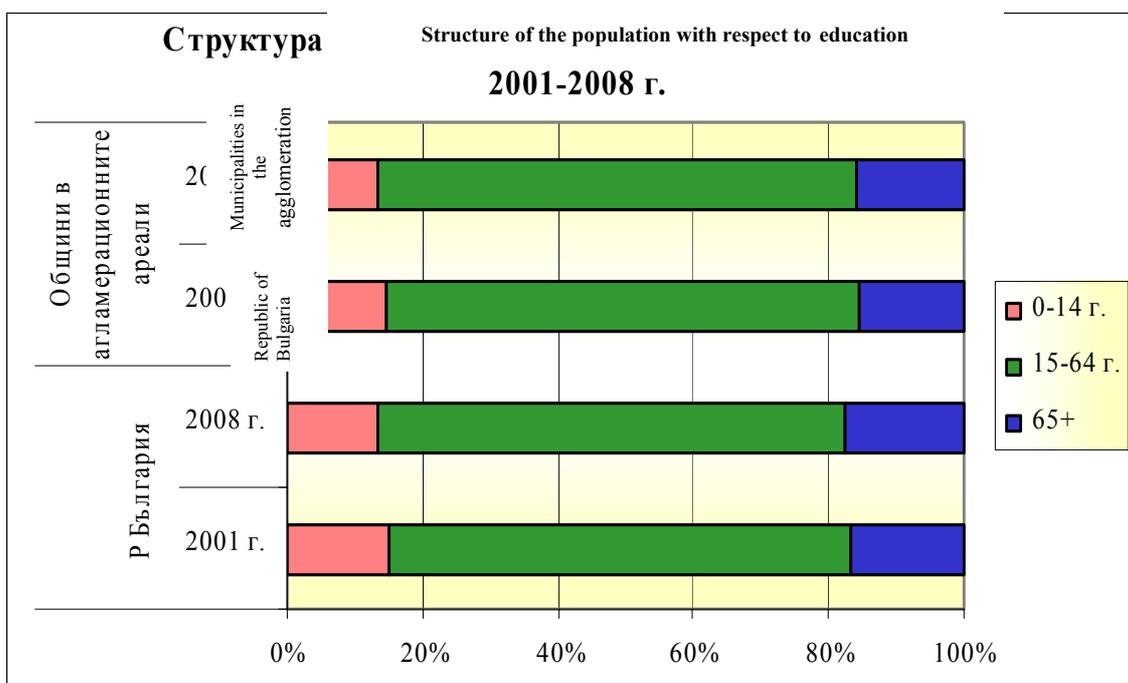
#### 4. Basic demographic structures

##### 4.1 Age structure of the population

Changes in the age structure of the population in the agglomeration areas are observed at the background of the general ageing of the population of the country. They are expressed

in reducing the number and relative share of the people younger than 15 years and increasing the share of the people older than 65 years. While in 2001 the relative share of the people younger than 15 was 14.8%, and the share of the people older than 65 years – 15.6% of the whole population of the municipalities in the agglomeration areas, in 2008 these values were respectively 13.3% and 16.1% (**Fig. 3**). The ageing process is more expressed among women than among men. This difference is due to the higher mortality of men and as a consequence of it – the lower average life expectancy for this gender group.

The population in active working age (15-64 years) towards the end of 2008 is 154 thousand people or 4/5 of the active population of the country and is concentrated in the municipalities of the agglomeration areas. In the period 2001-2008 this number is reduced with 33.4 thousand people.



**Fig. 4**

The differences between the municipalities are expressed in the ratio between the single age groups of the population:

- Favourable age structure, high share of young people and lower share of elderly people are typical for 15 municipalities – Peshtera, Nova Zagora, Aytos, Devnya, Sliven, Velingrad, Dulovo, Gotse Delchev, Kardzhali, Yambol, Varna, Burgas, Dobrich, Nesebar, Blagoevgrad.

- The normal age structure is typical for 23 municipalities, including the predominant part of the municipalities with district city centers, as well as also for some other municipalities – Novi Pazar, Pomorie, Beloslav, Petrich, Botevgrad, Balchik, etc.
- The rest of the municipalities are characterized by disturbed age structure with higher share of the elderly persons compared to the young generations. Municipalities with enhanced process of

ageing of the population are recorded among them, for example Tundzha, Dolna Mitropolia, Avren, Parvomay, Chirpan, Troyan, etc.

#### 4.2 Educational structure of the population

The trend towards increasing the share of the highly educated population (with higher university and college, as well as all kinds of secondary education) in the country is typical for the investigated municipalities too. Education is of high priority in the wholesome policy of the municipalities. This is due to the realized awareness of the social necessity for educational training of the young generations, which is adequate to the contemporary conditions.

According to census data the share of the persons with higher university and higher college education amounts to 16.5% of the population at the age of 7 years and more, included in the range of the agglomeration areas, which exceeds the average level for the country (14.1%). There are significant differences for the single municipalities. The Sofia municipality, respectively Sofia City, are outlined with the bigger share of people with higher education (23.1% with higher university and 5.8% with higher college education) – exceeding significantly the average level for the country and the municipalities in the agglomeration areas (Fig. 4). The great share of the persons with higher university education

(more than 10%) is also typical for the municipalities: Varna, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven, Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Gabrovo, Shumen, Ruse, Stara Zagora, Dobrich, Vratsa, Lovech.

The population at the age of 7 years and more with secondary education (all types) amounts to 40.7%. As in the case with the university graduates, the differences according to municipalities are significant and are within the range from 48.7% for Gabrovo to 16.1% for Dobrich-rural. In 31% of the municipalities the share of the persons with secondary education is above the average level for the population in the agglomeration areas.

The number of persons with primary, elementary and unfinished elementary education is reduced. In 2001, 24.9% of the population at 7 and more years is with primary education, the average for the country being 27.5% for the country. The share of the population with elementary and lower education is 16.2% (the average for the country is 18.4%). The differentiation of the primary education according to municipalities is within the range of 15.4% for the Sofia municipality, 19.4% – for Varna, 19.5% – for Plovdiv, to 42.4% for Devnya and 41.8% for Dobrich-rural. With respect to the primary education the range is from 10.3% for Sofia to 33.4% for Dobrich-rural.

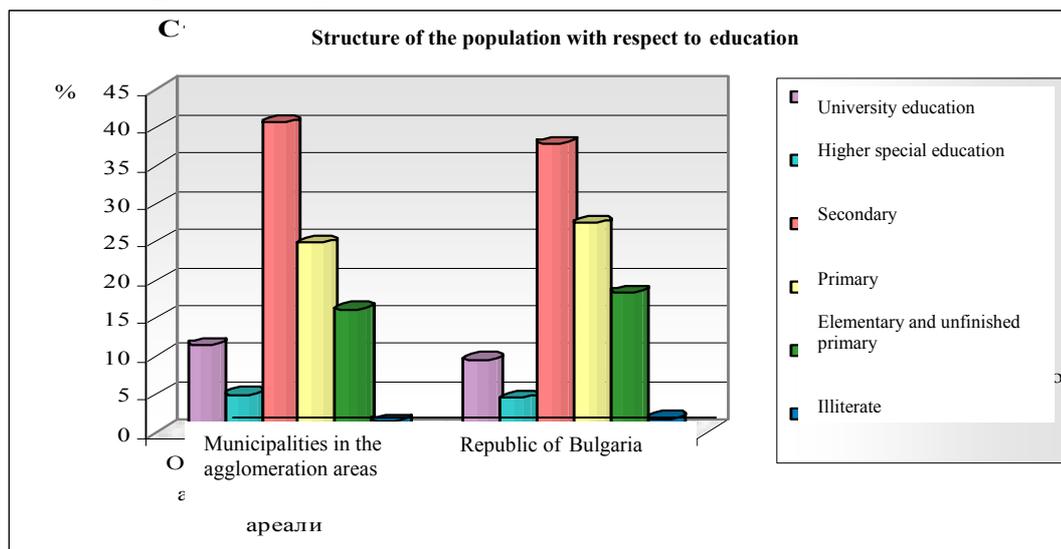


Fig. 5

## 5. Employment and unemployment

### 5.1 Employment of population

The economically active persons in the municipalities, included in the agglomeration

areas, amount to 2856596 people (2008). The coefficient of economic activity is 56.0% (ratio between the economically active persons and the population at 15 years of age and more –

according to the requirements of Eurostat), similar to the average level for the country (56.3%).

The coefficient of employment (ratio between the number of employed persons and the population between 15 and 64 years) for the municipalities is similar to the average one for the country (58.6%). The degree of employment of the population is determined by

the economic conditions. The structural changes in the municipal economy are related mainly with increasing the employment in the private sector and decreasing the employment in the public sector.

The sector distribution of the persons employed in the economic sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary) is 2.0%: 38.1%: 59.9% (Fig. 6).

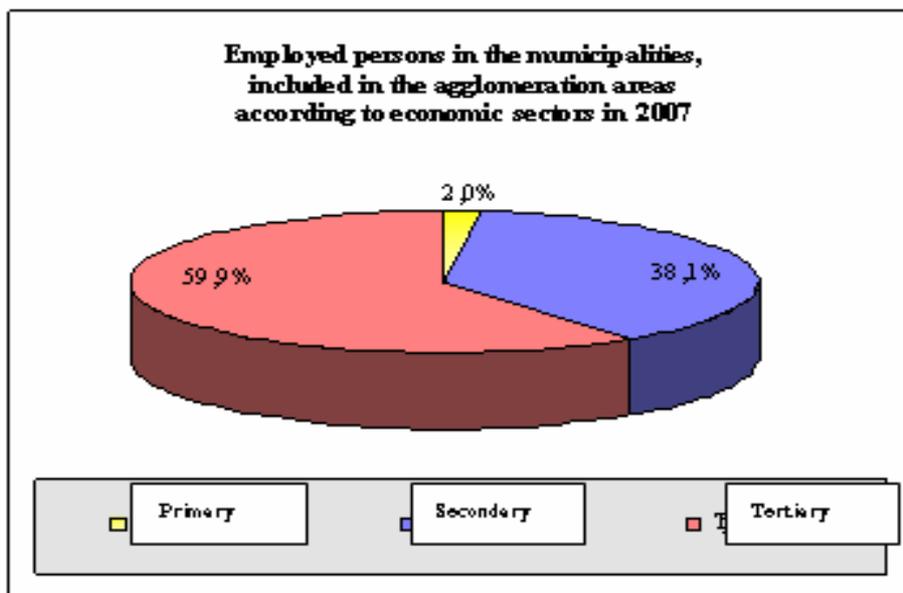


Fig. 6

The greater part of the employed persons are in the private sector (74.5% of the total number of the employed 2066.5 thousand people in 2007).

The predominant share of employment in the public sector is in services (89.3% from the total number of involved persons in the sector) – mainly in the social sphere (education and health care) and 9.3% are employed in industry.

The share of employment in the private sector is 49.8% in services, 48.0% – in industry, and 2.2% – in agriculture, hunting and fishery.

The characteristic of employment – the low share of the involved in the primary sector and the high share of the employment in the tertiary and secondary sector, is due mainly to the municipal centers.

According to the published quarterly (and annual) reports of the Municipal services on employment and unemployment a margin of work force movement may be specified within

the range of +4-5% of the active population from April till October and –1-2% for the rest of the months (during the less active season). This is due to the seasonal employment mainly in the primary sector of economy.

The differences in the municipalities vary within a broad range depending on the built base of economy and its structure. The higher share of the employed in the primary sector is typical mainly for the municipalities with centers villages and small towns. In the municipalities with district centers and medium-sized towns the share of employed in the services and in the secondary sector of economy is high. The agglomeration area of the capital is specific due to the concentration of sites of national importance in it.

## 5. 2. Unemployment

The level of unemployment in the municipalities of the agglomeration areas (annual average of 5.43% for 2009) is 1.4 times lower than the average value for the country (7.59%). For comparison – the average annual level of unemployment in EU-27 is 7.13%, and in the Eurozone – 7.42%.

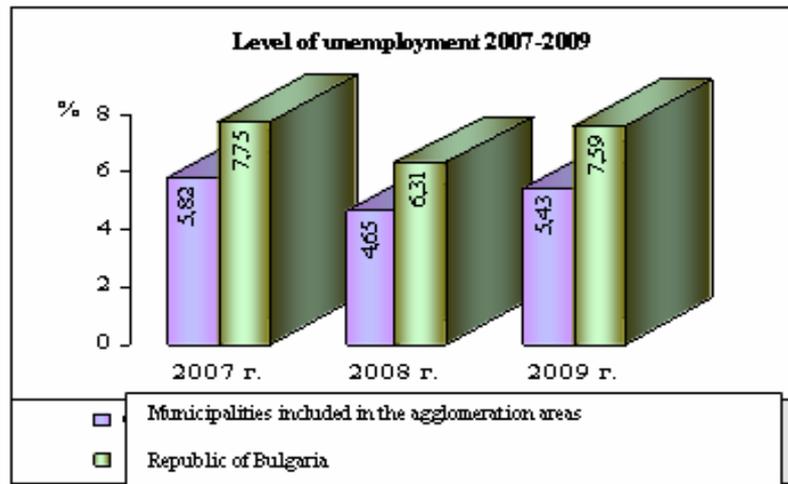


Fig. 7

The trend for the period 2001-2008 is towards decreasing the number of unemployed persons registered in the Labour Bureau for both the studied municipalities and the country. In 2009 growth of the unemployment level is observed due to the world financial crisis, Bulgaria being also a part of this world. The rise of the unemployment level in the municipalities of the agglomeration areas in 2009 compared to 2008 is with 0.8 percent points (from 4.65% to 5.43%) with an average value for the country 1.3 percent points (from 6.31% to 7.59%).

The average annual number of unemployed in 2009 in the municipalities of the agglomeration areas reaches 156 thousand people.

The active policy of the Employment Agency is directed prioritarily towards supporting the involvement and return to the labour market of young and disabled people.

The unemployed young people (till 29 years inclusive) in the municipalities follow a trend to decreasing till 2008, their number being increased after that reaching 31.8 thousand in 2009 (20.4% of the total number of the unemployed persons). The share of the unemployed young people in the municipalities is close but higher than the average level for the country (18.3%).

The group of the permanently unemployed persons for a period longer than one year in the Labour Bureaus comprises 40.1 thousand unemployed people (annual average number) and decreases as an absolute number but exhibits relative fluctuations within the range of 25-50%. The share of this group reaches 25.7% in 2009 (lower than the average level for the country – 28.4%).

The restructuring of economy and mainly of industry represents a basic factor influencing the size and structure of unemployment. The high share of the unemployed with primary and lower education coincides to a great extent with that of the unemployed with low qualification and without specialty, who are most often released when workplaces are reduced. The unemployment among the persons with secondary education is determined mainly by the restructuring of the economic activities.

The internal differences with respect to unemployment on municipal level are very high – from 1.99% for the Sofia municipality and 2.31% for Burgas to 23.22% for Velingrad. In 2/3 of the municipalities the level of unemployment exceeds the average for the agglomeration areas and in 32% of the municipalities the unemployment is higher than the average for the country. Regardless of the lower level of unemployment in the agglomeration areas, it still remains to be one of the major social problems. The low levels of employment are reflected on the high levels of unemployment. Efforts are made for ensuring equal access to education and employment for the young and disabled people.

The measures and programmes of the Employment Promotion Act are instruments of the active municipal policy for balancing the processes of the labour market.

#### **Main conclusions from the analysis of the demographic development of the municipalities, included in the agglomeration areas**

The development of the population in the municipalities exhibits trends, close to these for the country, but it displays its own specific characteristics related to the impact of the

demographic factors (the processes of reproduction and the formed structures) and the social-economic conditions. Differences on municipal level with respect to all demographic indicators are observed in the demographic development of the areas.

- Two basic periods are outlined in the population dynamics:
  - Continuous increasing of the population from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 90-ies due to high mechanical growth and positive natural reproduction.
  - Gradual decreasing of the population between the last two censuses (1992-2001), which continues at present too. In the period 2001-2008 the population of the municipalities in the agglomeration areas was reduced with 124 thousand people or at an average annual rate of -0,3%, the average value for the country being -0,5%.
  - On the background of the general dynamics of the population, differences are observed for the municipalities, mainly due to the presence of big cities in them.
    - The natural reproduction of the population is realized with decreasing negative natural growth. In the years 2001-2008 the values of the natural growth of the population in the agglomeration areas are -4,5‰ and -3,0‰ (the average for the country are -5,6‰ and -4,3‰). Of the total number of the new-born children in the country in 2008, 4/5 are on the territory of the municipalities in the agglomeration areas, which predetermines the values of this indicator for the country and forms the regime of reproduction.
    - The mechanical growth of the population has been always positive, with expressed trend towards increasing its values in the recent years.
    - The typical feature of the age structure is that the processes of population ageing are less expressed here and the type of the age structure contributes to the normal demographic reproduction.
  - Concentration of population in active (working) age is observed due to the accumulation of labour force in the Sofia municipality, the municipalities with big town centers, the district centers and some of the medium-sized towns (Veliko Tarnovo, Svishtov, Ruse, Vratsa, Silistra, Razgrad, Pleven, Montana, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Vidin, Dulovo, Kozloduy).
  - The age structure of the population in the rural and mountain regions is characterized by higher share of the persons at pension age (above 65), low share of the young people (lower than that of the population above 65) and large and

permanent drop of the active population (age of 15-64).

- The educational level of the population is high (16.5% with higher education – graduated university and college, and 40.7% with secondary education), which is a favourable prerequisite for the economic and social development of the municipalities.
  - The highly educated population of the capital shows a pronounced distinction (28.9% of the population at the age of 7 and more is with higher education – graduated university and college, and 44.6% are with secondary education).
  - The district and university centers are also distinguished by bigger share of the population with higher education.
- Employment and unemployment are characterized by dynamics influenced by the structural changes in economy. More than half of the occupied persons are in the tertiary sector and the share of the employed in the primary sector is very low (2.0%).
  - The structural changes in the municipal economy are related mainly with increasing the employment in the private sector and its decreasing in the public sector (74.5% of the totally employed 2066.5 thousand people in 2007 are in the private sector).
  - After a period of decreasing, the unemployment in 2009 rises because of the financial crisis on a world scale. Nevertheless, the average annual level of unemployment in the municipalities of the agglomeration areas (5.43%) is lower than the average for the country (7.59%).
    - The share of the unemployed persons with primary and lower educational level is high.
    - Significant differences in the level of unemployment are observed for the single municipalities, which remain constant for the period.

The demographic development of the municipalities included in the agglomeration areas is similar to that of the country but with more favourable parameters. The reproduction of the population is a process, which is determined economically and socially as a part of the wholesome social development of the country.

## REFERENCES

1. Annual of the National Statistical Institute, 2007
2. National Statistical Institute, current demographic statistics
3. Data of the Employment Agency