

**DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES OF THE RUTHENIAN NATIONAL MINORITY  
IN THE PROVINCE OF VOJVODINA DURING  
THE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND BEGINNING OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Rusyns or Ruthenians reside on the territory of Vojvodina since the mid-eighteenth century. They have always distinguished themselves from the population among whom they lived there - Serbs, Hungarians, Germans and Slovaks – they were a separate ethnic community; and as they are also Greek-Catholics they have distinguished themselves from the community of Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Protestants. At the end of the eighteenth century there were about 3,500 Ruthenians in Vojvodina, while in the mid-nineteenth century there were around 8,500 of them. During the twentieth century there were about 20 thousand Ruthenians, and in the last fifty years, their number gradually decreased. The largest number of Ruthenians in Vojvodina live in four municipalities: Kula, Vrbas, Šid and Žabalj. Analysis of demographic processes during the twentieth and early twenty-first century, indicate changes in the Ruthenian minority in Serbia, which is characterized by a total reduction of population, aging population, emigration, assimilation. This work aims to improve the knowledge about the demographic characteristics of Ruthenians in Vojvodina, and that they, like most ethnic minorities in Vojvodina, share the fate of the majority of Serbian people, with the unavoidable process of silent assimilation and integration with Serbian majority.

**Keywords:** Vojvodina, Ruthenians/Rusyns, Ruthenian language, censuses of population, depopulation

**INTRODUCTION**

The Vojvodina region is the north region of Serbia. It covers only 21.506 square kilometers. This region is situated in the southeast part of Pannonia plain, on the contact point of the Balkan and Middle Europe. Vojvodina region consists of three sub regions: Bačka, Banat, and Srem. Today, Vojvodina region represents a multiethnic, multiconfessional and multicultural space. In addition to Serbs, there is a large number of national minorities in Vojvodina. According to their origin, tradition, culture, mother tongue, religion and demographic characteristics, they are extremely diversified. Good inter ethnic relationships, ethnic and confessional tolerance, respecting the rules and protection of the rights of minorities are very important for stability, demographic and democratic development of Vojvodina [2]. This paper attempts to explain the demographic process in the Ruthenian national minority in Vojvodina.

## **METHODS**

The facts given in this paper are the result of consulting a lot of sources. Data was taken from different yearbook statistics, received in the form of internal documents from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia or calculated by using different mathematical and statistical methods. The sources of the National Council of the Ruthenian national minority and the Institute for Culture of Vojvodina's Ruthenians were used, as well as demographic monography "The Ruthenians of Bačka and Srem in their homeland and in the world, 1745-1991", which includes data from the registers of the first two Ruthenian villages - Ruski Krstur and Kucura, where most of Ruthenian national minority in Vojvodina still lives.

## **HISTORY**

The Ruthenians/Rusyns live more than 260 years on the territory of present Serbia. The year 1751 was signed the first official document – Contract concerning the settlement of 200 Ruthenian Greek-Catholic families on the heath named Big Krstur. It was the official beginning of present Ruski Krstur, the oldest, the biggest and the most familiar place of the Ruthenians in Vojvodina and Serbia. After the end of the Austria-Turkey war period, in 1739 Habsburg Monarchy got possession of fertile but almost deserted territories of South Hungary. Then it was decided to colonize and economically renew them. Among the people that came and settled on the fertile Vojvodina plain there were the Ruthenians. They came from north-eastern counties of former Hungary, from the regions which are nowadays in East Slovakia, Transcarpathian region of Ukraine and Hungary. Under similar circumstances, in 1763 in Sombor, a document concerning settlement of another Ruthenian centre – Kucura was signed. According to regulations of these contracts the colonists should have been of the Rusyn/Ruthenian nationality, in the status of free people, confessionally Greek-Catholics (Uniates). Out of diligent inhabitants of these two villages, both out of the first 350 families mentioned in the contract and out of the new settlers from homeland called Hornjica (Горніца, the Upper lands of Austria-Hungary), the national community of the Ruthenians in Vojvodina was developed in time. During the second half of the 18<sup>TH</sup> century the population of the mentioned settlements was constantly growing. Since there was not enough land, the whole 19<sup>TH</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>TH</sup> century were marked by migration of the Ruthenians from Ruski Krstur and Kucura to the Bačka and Srem plains where symbolically around ten new Ruthenian colonies were sown [4].

After Krstur and Kucura the oldest Ruthenian colony was founded in a city environment, in Novi Sad, where the third Ruthenian parish in Bačka was established in 1780. The Ruthenians began to settle the property of the Križevci bishop in Šid in 1803. After the 1848 revolution several new colonies in Berkasovo and Vrbas were founded, and since the eighties of the 19<sup>TH</sup> century the number of the Ruthenians in Đurđevo and Gospođinci had been growing. The Ruthenian colonies in Bačinci, Bikić Do and Sremska Mitrovica were founded, too. The Ruthenians moved to Novo Orahovo after the Second World War and a larger number of members of our community began to appear in Subotica as well [4].

At the 2011 census 14,246 citizens declared their nationality as Ruthenian which is 0,2% of the population of the Republic of Serbia. Out of all the settlements where the Ruthenians live, Ruski Krstur and Kucura have remained the biggest and the most

important Ruthenian centres. Krstur, with its educational, cultural and church institutions represents the main centre of the Ruthenians in Serbia [4].

As far as historical origin is concerned the Ruthenians belong to Eastern Slavs. All inhabitants of the Kievan Rus were called Rusyns in the Middle Ages. During the centuries borders and states changed. The ethnonym defined all the subjects of the Habsburg Monarchy who lived in the 19<sup>TH</sup> century in Galicia and North East Hungary. The Ruthenians themselves say that they are Rusnaks (Руснаци), they call their language ruski (руски), and they write in Cyrillic. The language of the Ruthenians in Serbia is considered to be the youngest literary Slavonic language [4].

Since the time of the settlement of the Ruthenians in Bačka the Greek-Catholic Church has played a special role. Greek-Catholics recognize Roman Pope to be their spiritual Sovereign Pontiff, but they cherish the Eastern rite, they use Church Slavonic books, and their priests are allowed to get married. A bishopric with its seat in Križevci was founded for all Greek-Catholics in this part of Habsburg Monarchy in 1777 Nowadays, with regard to church organization, the Ruthenians belong to the Apostolic Exarchate for Greek-Catholics in Serbia and Montenegro which was established in 2003. Its seat is in Ruski Krstur [4].

#### THE NUMBER OF RUTHENIANS IN VOJVODINA

Ruthenians in Vojvodina were small and isolated denominational community that is at the end of the eighteenth century numbered up to 3,500 inhabitants, in the middle of the nineteenth century in Backa and Srem there were about 8,500, according to the census of 1921 in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes there were is about 21,000 [6].

View of the number of Ruthenians, as well as their share in the total population in Serbia and Vojvodina in the period 1948-2011, is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Changes in the number of Ruthenians in Serbia and Vojvodina 1948-2011

Censuses	Number of Ruthenians in Serbia	Share in population of Serbia (%)	Number of Ruthenians in Vojvodina	Share in population of Vojvodina (%)
1948	22,667	0.35	22,083	1.32
1953	23,720	0.34	23,043	1.35
1961	25,658	0.34	24,548	1.32
1971	20,608	0.24	20,109	1.03
1981	19,757	0.21	19,305	0.96
1991	18,052	0.23	17,652	0.88
2002	15,905	0.21	15,626	0.77
2011	14,246	0.20	13,928	0.72

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia [10]

Frequent changes in census methodology of ethno-statistical parameters and changes in statistical classification, which implied the introduction of new or omission of the earlier question, led to certain instability in comparison of ethno-statistical data for the Ruthenian national minority in censuses from 1948 to 2011. Up to Census 1971 summary are grouped Russians and Ukrainians, so that the difference in the number of listed Ruthenians 1961 and 1971 mainly caused by this phenomenon. According to Census 1971, there were 5,643 Ukrainians what the sum was 26.251 Ruthenians and Ukrainians. If we look at the territory of the Republic of Serbia, it is observed that the concentration of Ruthenians in Vojvodina, which has around 98% of Ruthenians in Republic of Serbia. [1]. In the period from 1971 to 2011, the number of Ruthenians in Vojvodina decreased from 20,109 to

13,928, and their proportion in the total population of the 1.03% to 0.72%.

Of the total number of Ruthenians in Vojvodina according to Census 2011, 49.13% of them were male and 50.87% female.

According to the 2002 census, 38.47% lived in urban, and 61.53% in rural areas, according to Census 2011; 40.68% Ruthenians lived in urban, and 59.32% in rural areas. Members of the Ruthenian national minority living mainly in Bačka, and to a lesser extent in Srem, mixed with the Serbs and other ethnic groups. Ruthenians in any municipality do not make the majority population, and their participation is notable in the structure of the population in the municipalities of Kula, Vrbas and Žabalj in Bačka, and Šid in Srem. In these four municipalities there are about 73% (2011) of Ruthenians in Vojvodina.

**Table 2.** The number of Ruthenians in the municipalities of Vojvodina, according to Census between 1971-2011

Censuses	1971		1991		2002		2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Vojvodina	20,109	1.03	17,652	0.88	15,626	0.77	13,928	0.72
Kula	6,812	13.98	6,055	12.28	5,398	11.16	4,588	10.64
Vrbas	4,732	10.88	4,221	9.10	3,765	8.21	3,375	8.02
Žabalj	2,229	8.78	1,610	6.23	1,407	5.11	1,198	4.58
Novi Sad	2,194	1.03	2,300	0.87	2,032	0.68	2,160	0.63
S.Mitrovica.	905	1.15	819	0.96	691	0.80	620	0.78
Šid	2,139	5.52	1,515	4.17	1,318	3.38	1,027	3.00
B.Topola	357	0.82	301	0.74	292	0.76	254	0.76

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

In table 2. there is an obvious reduction in the number of Ruthenians in all these municipalities, as well as reduction of the share of Ruthenians in their total population. The percentage of Ruthenians who live in these four municipalities (from 79% to 73%), is also reduced, which is explained by their relocation to Novi Sad.

**Table 3.** The number of Ruthenians in the settlements of Vojvodina, according to Census between 1971-2002

Censuses	1953		1991		2002	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Ruski Krstur	6,021	98.46	5,026	89.18	4,483	86.00
Kula	912	7.77	824	4.27	725	3.76
Kucura	3,052	63.81	2,413	51.20	2,200	47.18
Vrbas	1,655	10.70	1,716	6.63	1,478	5.70
Đurđevo	2,298	47.68	1,395	30.88	1,198	23.31
Gospođinci	370	11.20	186	5.23	172	4.41
Novi Sad	1,038	1.25	1,809	1.01	1,556	0.81
S.Mitrovica	937	6.06	732	1.88	620	1.59
Bačinci	764	42.09	288	22.18	215	15.64
Berkasovo	531	43.00	220	19.94	184	14.98
Bikić Do	289	38.64	183	61.20	160	47.62
Šid	1,048	14.42	735	5.14	681	4.18
Novo Orahovo	494	17.28	216	9.54	181	8.92

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

From the settlements in which members of the Ruthenian nationality have significant share in the population or in which lives the largest percentage of the Ruthenian population of Vojvodina, Ruski Krstur and Kucura stand out in particular with about 42%

of all Ruthenians in Vojvodina, Vrbas, Đurđevo and the city of Novi Sad in Bačka and villages in Srem in the municipality of Šid.

The number of settlements in which Ruthenians are the majority population also decrease; during the half of 20<sup>TH</sup> century these were Ruski Krstur, Kucura and Bikić Do, but according to the results of Census 2002, the population of Ruthenians in Kucura dropped below 50%. There is a noticeable decline in Ruthenian population in Đurđevo (from 47.68% to 23.31%). The data from the settlements according to Census 2011 have not been published.

### **NATURAL MOVEMENT OF RUTHENIANS IN VOJVODINA**

Natural change of Ruthenians is not much different from other ethnic groups in the province. In the future we should expect a further reduction in the number of Ruthenians primarily due to the negative population growth rate, which is due to unfavorable age structure.

The age structure and the old age index with Ruthenians are less favorable than the average for the entire population of Serbia. Comparing the results of the Census 2002 and 2011, the average age of Ruthenians increased from 42.98 to 45.1 years; while the overall average age of the population in Serbia increased from 40.25 to 45.53 years. This is also reflected at the old age index that has increased from 1.36 to 1.82 with Ruthenians; while the aging index for the Republic of Serbia rose from 1.01 to 1.22. If the old age index (ratio of the population aged 60 years and over population from 0 to 19 years) is less than 0.4 - the population is young, and if it is above 0.4, then the population is showing signs of aging. Woman fertile population with the Ruthenian national minority in 2002 was represented with 22.54%, which is below the national average (24.13%) [3].

There is no data migration of Ruthenian national minority, but if you compare the number of citizens with the values of natural increase, you can observe the basic trends. Between 1971 and 1981 the number of Ruthenians in Vojvodina decreased by 804, while the negative effect of natural increase was 420 people, and the remaining 384 people were the result of assimilation, change in ethnic affiliation, but also a negative migration balance. In the next decade 1981-1991, this trend was even more obvious in the reduction of the total number of Ruthenians in Vojvodina for 1,653 people, a negative natural increase was accounted for 620 people, and the other factors decreased for 1,033 people [11]. In the last decade of the twentieth century, after the collapse of Yugoslavia, the migration balance of Ruthenians has increased as a result of immigration from the former Yugoslav republics to the traditional center of their concentration - Vojvodina, or is expressed emigration of younger, educated population, mostly in Canada (even 21.7% with higher education), but not more pronounced than in other ethnicities.

### **RUTHENIAN MOTHER TONGUE AND EDUCATION IN VOJVODINA**

The usual method in the ethno-demographic studies is the statistical analysis of the difference between subjective and objective ethnic characteristics. Therefore, in order to obtain more precise results, we use an intersected answer about their nationality and about their mother tongue.

Ruthenians are among the ethnic communities with the highest level of ethnophony, although there is the declining degree of congruence of national identity and mother tongue (from 93% to below 80%). Among those whose native language does not match

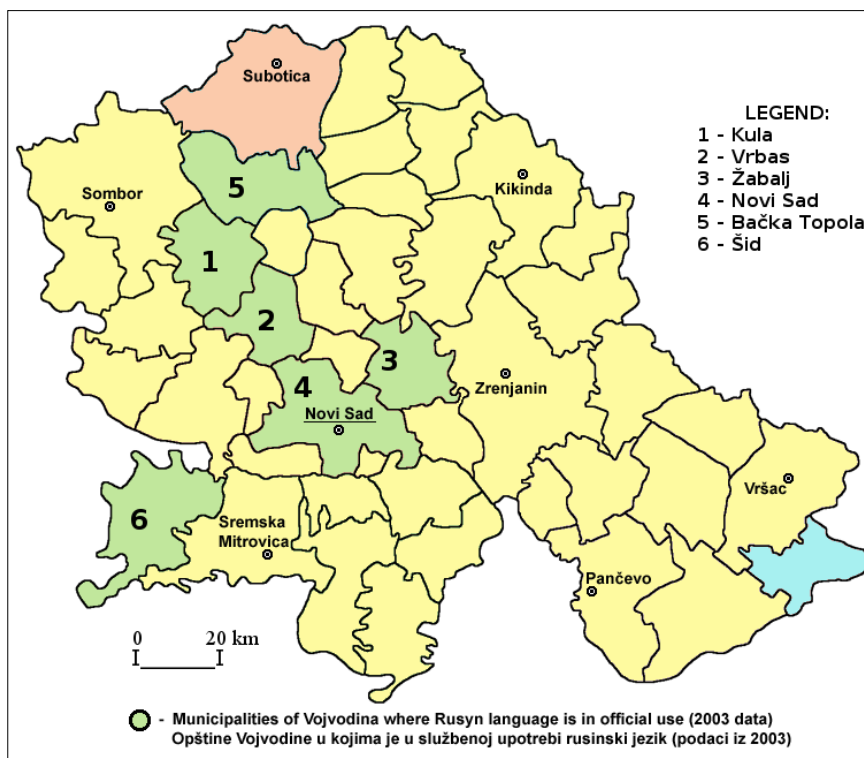
the ethnicity is mostly the offspring of mixed marriages of parents with different native languages, and also the change of the ethnic affiliation to another linguistic group - usually, and most rarely the language acquisition of the prevailing ethnic environment for the members of other nationalities. The average age of Ruthenians who have ruthenian mother tongue is 47.0; and those who have another mother tongue is 36.9, which is a significant difference of nearly 10 years [7].

**Table 4.** Number of members of the Ruthenian national minorities and people whose mother tongue is Ruthenian in the Republic of Serbia, according to the Census from 1953 to 2011

Censuses	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002	2011
Ruthenians	23,720	25,658	20,608	19,757	18,052	15,905	14,246
Ruth.tongue	22,111	23,944	19,209	16,215	16,095	13,458	11,340
%	93.21	93.32	93.21	82.07	89.16	84.61	79.60

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011 Census of Population in the Republic of Serbia, Religion, mother tongue and ethnicity, Belgrade 2013

Ruthenian is in official use in both the provincial authorities of Vojvodina, and the six municipalities where Ruthenians live in the greatest number.



**Figure 1.** Municipalities of Vojvodina where Ruthenian language is in official use

The first Ruthenian, then denominational school, opened in Ruski Krstur in 1753. and today there is an education vertical in the Ruthenian language generated from preschool to university education. Department of Ruthenian Language and Literature, now called the Department of Ruthenian Studies, was established in 1992 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. Classes in Ruthenian are organized in three municipalities in three elementary schools (municipality of Kula - school in Ruski Krstur, municipality Vrbas - Kucura school, and in the municipality Žabalj - school in Đurđevo). Coverage of the Ruthenian nationality students who attend elementary school in their native language

in the period 1989-2001 was between 43.4% (1989/90.) and 50.9% (2000/01. years). This is significantly less than that of other national minorities in the same period, the coverage of the Hungarian national minority education in their mother tongue in Vojvodina is 79.2 to 81.2%; Slovak minority from 72.9 to 76.5%, a Romanian national minority from 56.9 to 63.9%. The total number of first grade students of Ruthenian nationality in the school year of 2012/13 was 101, of which 33 or 32.7% included teaching in the mother tongue. This is a significant reduction, especially in relation to the previous school year when the coverage was 41.4% [9].

Students who are not covered by tuition in their mother tongue have the right to learn their mother tongue with elements of national culture. Thus, in the 2000/01 school year, out of 608 students of Ruthenian nationality who do not attend classes in their mother tongue, 298 of them (49.2%) had learned Ruthenian, which is at the level of other national minorities (Hungarians 52.3%, Slovaks 56.6%, Romanians 24.5%). In the school year 2012/13, elective courses from the subject of Ruthenian language with elements of national culture with two hours per week are carried out in eight municipalities - in 18 elementary schools [5].

High school classes in the Ruthenian language are carried out in one school, in high school in Ruski Krstur, and in the period from 1993 to 2001 between 10.4% and 14, 9% of pupils of Ruthenian nationality were included [7].

Illiterate population Ruthenian ethnicity is about 0.4% (far below the national average), over 50% have secondary education and 15% have higher education [3].

## **ANALYSIS**

In the last decade of the twentieth century and on the threshold of the third millennium, the globalization process leaves all the important clues in the Ruthenian national community. Most of the ethnic communities share the fate of Serbs in terms of reducing their population size. Disturbances in the age structure of the population caused by decades of low fertility rates are the main reason for the decrease in the population size of a large number of ethnic communities. The process of migration of younger people to the cities is another process that is affecting the residents of the municipality in which Ruthenians live. In these areas, primarily in Novi Sad, where there is a significant concentration, the attitude of the young generation to issues of national life and national identity Ruthenians changes. In urban areas, the process of acculturation is more emphasized than in rural areas, where established practice and tradition preserve the illusion that there is no significant shift in the direction of latent withering away of the national community [6].

A significant part of the young generation who were growing up in the last decade of the twentieth century are hard to be included in mainstream public life of this national community awareness, and there is not a small percentage of those who see their future in non-national company or abroad. Very negative consequences for the future life of the Ruthenian national community has the the outflow of young staff, and the consequences of this process will be more emphasized in the years and decades to come[6]

## **CONCLUSION**

In the Republic of Serbia and Vojvodina the Ruthenians today are not numerous, but their tradition and their cultural characteristics make a distinct national community. Thanks to

over two and half centuries of existence in this area, Ruthenians consider the Republic of Serbia as their homeland. They are also the mediators in relations of Serbia with the regions and countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where they have historical roots. At the end there is a statement that Ruthenian community in Vojvodina on the threshold of the third millennium has very good perspective for further development in all areas of their social and public life, it has a good infrastructure and human resources, but it must be mentioned that there is a sentient tendency of decreasing the number of members of the community, that the process of acculturation or assimilation is more emphasized in urban areas, that religion is now a less important element of national identity, that the young generation does not see itself as future actors in the field of cultural, educational and national life of the community, all of which leads to sad statement that there is a more apparent prospect of its silent decay.

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