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Demographic Changes Among Hungarians in Vojvodina: Insights from Serbia's 2022 Census

Abstract: The initial results of the 2022 Serbian census came as a genuine shock to demographers, as they highlighted alarming trends of overall population decline and aging. This shock was even greater and more unsettling within the Hungarian community of Vojvodina, which experienced a significantly higher rate of population loss compared to national and provincial averages. By 2022, the number of Hungarians in Serbia and Vojvodina fell below 200,000 for the first time, marking a significant psychological threshold. The website of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has since published more detailed data, which this study analyzes to provide a comprehensive overview of the demographic situation of Hungarians in Vojvodina. The findings are compared with data from previous population censuses.

Introduction

Serbia's 2021 census was postponed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The information gathering eventually began on October 1, 2022, and the fieldwork phase was concluded by November 7. Shortly before the year's end, on December 21, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (Serbian: Republički zavod za statistiku) released initial data. These figures revealed that the country's population had decreased by 539,859 over 11 years—from 7,186,862 in 2011 to 6,647,003 in 2022.[1]

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Serbian: Autonomna Pokrajina Vojvodina), located in northern Serbia, receives special attention in this study, as nearly 99% (98.8%) of Serbia's Hungarian national minority resides in this region. While Serbia's population

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1   Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2022. godine. Excel tabele (2022 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings). Republički zavod za statistiku (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). Beograd, 2023 Available at https://data.stat.gov.rs/?caller=3104&languageCode=sr-Latn; accessed 11 October, 2024.

as a whole declined by 7.5% during this period, the decrease in Vojvodina was even more pronounced. In 2022, Vojvodina recorded 1,740,230 residents,[2] a 9.9% drop—or 191,579 fewer people—compared to 1,931,809 inhabitants[3] in 2011. The data were deeply unsettling for Serbian society overall but especially shocking for the Hungarian minority in Serbia, particularly in Vojvodina. While the community had anticipated a continuation of the decades-long population decline, the extent of the decrease—27.4% both nationally and in the province—was unprecedented.

Although experts studying the demographic trends of Hungarians in Vojvodina had made pessimistic predictions, local political leaders often voiced a more optimistic outlook, shared by many within the community. They believed that while population decline was expected over the past decade, the number of Hungarians in Vojvodina and Serbia would remain above 200,000. However, the 2022 census shattered this expectation, showing that the Hungarian population had fallen below this psychological threshold. The census recorded 184,442 Hungarians nationwide and 182,321 in Vojvodina,[4] marking a loss of 69,457 people nationally and 68,815 in Vojvodina compared to the 253,899 Hungarians counted in Serbia and 251,136 in Vojvodina in 2011.[5]

An overview of the census data at the national level

The following offers a brief overview of the population changes in Serbia between 2011 and 2022, broken down by region and the largest ethnic groups.

At first glance, the following table may appear complex, but with a brief explanation, it becomes straightforward. It presents the numerical and percentage changes in Serbia's

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2   Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2022. godine. Excel tabele (2022 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings). Republički zavod za statistiku (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). Beograd, 2023. Available at https://data.stat.gov.rs/?caller=3104&languageCode=sr-Latn; accessed 11 October, 2024.

3   Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2011. u Republici Srbiji. Knjiga 1: Nacionalna pripadnost (2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia. Book 1: Ethnicity). Republički zavod za statistiku (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). Beograd, 2012. Available at https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2012/Pdf/G201218001.pdf; accessed 14 August, 2024.

4   Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2011. u Republici Srbiji. Knjiga 1: Nacionalna pripadnost (2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia. Book 1: Ethnicity). Republički zavod za statistiku (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). Beograd, 2012. Available at https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2012/Pdf/G201218001.pdf; accessed 14 August, 2024.

5   Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2011. u Republici Srbiji. Knjiga 1: Nacionalna pripadnost (2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia. Book 1: Ethnicity). Republički zavod za statistiku (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). Beograd, 2012. Available at https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2012/Pdf/G201218001.pdf; accessed 14 August, 2024.

population between 2011 and 2022. Serbia is divided into five NUTS 2 regions: 1. the Belgrade Region; 2. the Vojvodina Region (together comprising the NUTS 1 region called Serbia-North); 3. the Šumadija and Western Serbia Region; 4. the Southern and Eastern Serbia Region; and 5. the Kosovo and Metohija Region (together forming the NUTS 1 region called Serbia-South).[6] The table's columns list the six largest ethnic groups in the country, including the majority Serb population. The rows display the total population of Serbia and the populations of the five NUTS regions, broken down by ethnicity for both 2011 and 2022. For each row, the absolute population figures (in individuals) are accompanied by percentages, showing the share of each ethnic group within Serbia's total population or within the respective region.

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6   Éva Szügyi, "Régiók és regionalizmus Szerbiában," *DETEUROPE – The Central European Journal of Regional Development and Tourism* 5, no. 3 (2013): 97–130. 114–117.

Table 1: Changes in Serbia's total population and its six largest ethnic groups between 2011 and 2022, presented in absolute numbers and percentages at national level and by NUTS 2 regions

		Total	Serbs	**Hungarians**	Roma people	Bosniaks	Croats	Slovaks
Serbia	2011	7,186,862	5,988,150	**253,899**	147,604	145,278	57,900	52,750
	%	100.00	83.32	**3.53**	2.05	2.02	0.81	0.73
	2022	6,647,003	5,360,239	**184,442**	131,936	153,801	39,107	41,730
	%	100.00	80.64	**2.77**	1.98	2.31	0.59	0.63
Belgrade	2011	1,659,440	1,505,448	**1,810**	27,325	1,596	7,752	2,104
	%	100.00	90.72	**0.11**	1.65	0.10	0.47	0.13
	2022	1,681,405	1,449,241	**1,386**	23,160	1,515	4,554	1,656
	%	100.00	86.19	**0.08**	1.38	0.09	0.27	0.10
Vojvodina	2011	1,931,809	1,289,635	**251,136**	42,391	780	47,033	50,321
	%	100.00	66.76	**13.00**	2.19	0.04	2.43	2.60
	2022	1,740,230	1,190,785	**182,321**	40,938	718	32,684	39,807
	%	100.00	68.43	**10.48**	2.35	0.04	1.88	2.29
Šumadija and Western Serbia	2011	2,031,697	1,799,394	**433**	20,649	142,767	1,645	164
	%	100.00	88.57	**0.02**	1.02	7.03	0.08	0.01
	2022	1,819,318	1,547,121	**374**	17,167	151,374	994	122
	%	100.00	85.04	**0.02**	0.94	8.32	0.05	0.01
Southern and Eastern Serbia	2011	1,563,916	1,393,673	**520**	57,239	135	1,470	161
	%	100.00	89.11	**0.03**	3.66	0.01	0.09	0.01
	2022	1,406,050	1,173,092	**361**	50,671	194	875	145
	%	100.00	83.43	**0.03**	3.60	0.01	0.06	0.01
Kosovo and Metohija	2011	N/A	N/A	**N/A**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	%	N/A	N/A	**N/A**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2022	N/A	N/A	**N/A**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		N/A	N/A	**N/A**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Data based on the author's research

The table above clearly shows a significant decline in Serbia's population over a decade. Among the country's regions, only the Belgrade region saw an increase in population, driven largely by internal and external migration to the capital. As Serbia's largest and fastest-developing city, Belgrade draws people with its role as the capital, its many universities, and a wide range of educational opportunities. However, this growth has come at the cost of rural areas, which continue to lose residents and face depopulation. The majority Serb population decreased by over 600,000, with its share of the total population falling below 81%, compared to over 83% in 2011. Most national minorities also experienced population declines, though there were a few exceptions. Among the groups listed in the table, only the Bosniak population showed a slight increase. Meanwhile, the Albanian population, not included in the table, saw a significant rise. Additionally, the number of people identifying as Yugoslav increased in 2022 compared to 2011, and the category of those with unknown nationality also grew in the latest census.

Vojvodina, though still multiethnic, has become less diverse over the years. Its total population fell from 1,931,809 in 2011 to 1,740,230 in 2022—a decline of nearly 200,000 residents in just 11 years. While the number of Serbs, the largest ethnic group in the northern region, also decreased, their proportion of the total population slightly increased. This indicates that the population decline of the national minorities in Vojvodina was even more significant than that of the majority Serb population.

Hungarians, the largest national minority in Vojvodina, saw their population dip below the symbolic 200,000 mark for the first time in 2022, reaching 182,321. Despite this sharp decline, they still account for just over 10% (10.48%) of the province's population. This is a notable drop from the 2011 census, which recorded their share at 13% and their number at 251,136. Other key national minority groups in Vojvodina, including Slovaks, Croats, Bunjevci, Rusyns, and Romanians, also experienced significant population declines over the same period.

An additional table shows the population changes, in absolute numbers and percentages, among the total population and the six largest ethnic groups to provide a clearer perspective. The table below highlights the differences observed between the 2011 and 2022 censuses.

Table 2: Population changes in Serbia and Vojvodina, along with the six largest nationalities at the national level between 2011 and 2022, shown in absolute numbers and percentages

	Total	Serbs	**Hungarians**	Roma people	Bosniaks	Croats	Slovaks
Serbia (number)	-539,859	-627,911	**-69,457**	-15,668	+8,523	-18,793	-11,020
Serbia (%)	-7.51	-10.49	**-27.36**	-10.61	+5.87	-32.46	-20.89
Vojvodina (number)	-191,579	-988,50	**-68,815**	-1,453	-62	-14,349	-10,514
Vojvodina (%)	-9.92	-7.66	**-27.40**	-3.43	-7.95	-30.51	-20.89

Source: Data based on the author's research

The above table builds on Table 1, presenting the differences and changes between the 2011 and 2022 data shown there. The columns indicate the changes in absolute numbers and percentages for the total population and the six largest ethnic groups in the country/province, along with the direction of change (positive or negative). The rows specify whether the data pertains to Serbia as a whole or Vojvodina.

The number of Croats in Serbia dropped by nearly one-third, both nationwide and in Vojvodina. Similarly, the Hungarian population experienced a significant decline of over 27%, amounting to a loss of nearly 70,000 individuals. The Slovak community lost more than 20% of its members between 2011 and 2022. In contrast, the Roma population showed only a slight decrease, while the Bosniak population grew at the national level, primarily due to immigration. The Serbian majority experienced a decline of almost 10.5%, which was higher than the national average. However, in Vojvodina, the decline was more moderate at 7.66%, remaining below the provincial average. This trend indicates that the ethnically mixed region is becoming increasingly homogenized, with the proportion of Serbs in the total population rising as the share of major national minorities continues to shrink.

Demographic changes and the Hungarian community in Vojvodina

This section shifts the focus to the 2022 census data, specifically examining Vojvodina and its Hungarian community. The following analysis explores these findings in depth.

Overview of Vojvodina and its population

Vojvodina is a multicultural and multiethnic region, home to more than 20 ethnic groups and 34 religious communities.[7] This diversity is deeply rooted in the region's turbulent history, marked by multiple changes in sovereignty and numerous wars over the past few centuries, including the last century. These events often led to significant population movements, shaping Vojvodina's unique demographic composition. However, it is important to note that this diversity is gradually diminishing. The population of ethnic groups outside the state-forming Serbian majority has been steadily decreasing despite once making up a significant share of the province's total population. As a result, the ethnic composition of Vojvodina is increasingly dominated by the Serbian population. Despite these shifts, the multicultural consciousness remains evident in Vojvodina, as exemplified by the fact that the province has six official languages: alongside Serbia's official language, Serbian, these include Hungarian, Croatian, Rusyn, Romanian, and Slovak.[8]

Ethnic composition of Vojvodina's population
and the local Hungarian community in 2022

The following tables present the ethnic composition of Vojvodina's population in 2011 and 2022, showing the changes in the size and proportion of each ethnic group over the 11 years between the two censuses. These changes are listed in both absolute numbers and percentages. The tables include only those ethnic groups whose population in 2022 reached 10,000 or more; smaller communities are not listed here.

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7   Irén Gábrity Molnár, "Vajdasági egyházak, vallásgyakorlási nehézségek." In Közérzeti barangoló, ed. Gábrity Molnár Irén–Mirnics Zsuzsa (Szabadka: Magyarságkutató Tudományos Társaság, 2005): 91–106. 91.

8   Republic of Serbia, Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Available at https://www.vojvodina.gov.rs/hu/vojvodina/o-vojvodini; accessed 5 October, 2024.

Table 3: Changes in Vojvodina's population in absolute numbers and percentages, 2011–2022 (for ethnic groups exceeding 30,000 individuals)

	Total	Serbs	**Hungarians**	Roma people	Slovaks	Croats
2011	1,931,809	1,289,635	**251,136**	42,391	50,321	47,033
2022	1,740,230	1,190,785	**182,321**	40,938	39,807	32,684
Numerical Difference	-191,579	-98,850	**-68,815**	-1,453	-10,514	-14,349
Percentage Difference	-9.92%	-7.66%	**-27.40%**	-3.43%	-20.89%	-30.51%

Source: Data based on the author's research

The table above presents familiar figures, showing the population changes in Vojvodina between 2011 and 2022 for both the total population and ethnic groups with more than 30,000 members. A general decline is evident for both the total population and each of these ethnic groups, though the extent of the decrease varies significantly. Among the larger ethnic groups, the Croat population experienced the steepest drop, with a 30.51% decline, followed by the Hungarian population, which saw a 27.4% decrease. The Slovak community also faced a significant decline of 20.89%. In comparison, the majoritarian Serbs (-7.66%) and Roma people (-3.43%) experienced more moderate losses, both of which were below the overall provincial population decrease of 9.92%.

Table 4: Changes in Vojvodina's population in absolute numbers and percentages, 2011–2022 (for ethnic groups with populations between 10,000 and 20,000)

	Romanians	Yugoslavs	Montenegrins	Rusyns	Bunjevci
2011	25,410	12,176	22,141	13,928	16,469
2022	19,595	12,438	12,424	11,207	10,949
Numerical Difference	-5,815	+262	-9,717	-2,721	-5,520
Percentage Difference	-22.88%	+2.15%	-43.89%	-19.54%	-33.52%

Source: Data based on the author's research

Among the ethnic minorities indigenous to Vojvodina with populations between 10,000 and 20,000, the Bunjevci suffered the greatest loss, with a 33.51% decrease compared to 2011. However, the number of Montenegrins, not indigenous to the region, fell by 43.89%,

surpassing even the Bunjevci loss. Significant population declines were also experienced by the Romanians (22.88%) and Rusyns (19.54%). At the same time, there was a slight increase in the number of people identifying as Yugoslavs (+2.15%).

A chronicle of decline over more than half a century

The decline of the Hungarian population in Vojvodina did not begin in the past decade. This decreasing trend has persisted for several decades, and alongside the numerical decrease, the proportion of Hungarians within the province's total population has also steadily diminished with each census. The following sections present census data from the post-World War II period, particularly focusing on the chaotic period after the war from a Hungarian perspective. The analysis tracks changes in the Hungarian population in Vojvodina from 1948—the first census conducted after the war—up to the most recent population census in 2022. The tables include data on the Hungarian population in Vojvodina, changes in the total population of the province, and the number of majority Serbs living in the region, allowing for a comparative perspective.

Table 5: Changes in the Hungarian population of Vojvodina from 1948 to 2022, in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the province's total population

	Total	**Hungarians**	Serbs
1948 (nr)	1,663,212	**428,932**	841,246
1948 (%)	100	**25.79**	50.58
1953 (nr)	1,712,619	**435,345**	874,346
1953 (%)	100	**25.42**	51.05
1961 (nr)	1,854,965	**442,561**	1,017,717
1961 (%)	100	**23.86**	54.86
1971 (nr)	1,952,533	**423,866**	1,089,132
1971 (%)	100	**21.71**	55.78
1981 (nr)	2,034,772	**385,356**	1,107,378
1981 (%)	100	**18.94**	54.42
1991 (nr)	2,013,889	**339,491**	1,143,723
1991 (%)	100	**16.86**	56.79
2002 (nr)	2,031,992	**290,207**	1,321,807
2002 (%)	100	**14.28**	65.05
2011 (nr)	1,931,809	**251,136**	1,289,635
2011 (%)	100	**13.00**	66.76
2022 (nr)	1,740,230	**182,321**	1,190,785
2022 (%)	100	**10.48**	68.43

Source: Data based on the author's research

The Hungarian population in Vojvodina grew from 1948 until 1961, reaching its peak during that period. However, starting with the 1971 census, a decline began, which not only became a constant trend but also intensified with each subsequent census. The following table illustrates how the Hungarian population in Vojvodina changed in size—both in absolute numbers and percentages—between the censuses conducted from 1948 to 2022.

Table 6: Growth and decline in the Hungarian population of Vojvodina from 1948 to 2022, in absolute numbers and percentage

	Number	%
1948–1953	+6,413	+1.50
1953–1961	+7,216	+1.66
1961–1971	-18,695	-4.22
1971–1981	-38,510	-9.09
1981–1991	-45,865	-11.90
1991–2002	-49,284	-14.52
2002–2011	-39,071	-13.46
2011–2022	-68,815	-27.40

Source: Data based on the author's research

Between 1948 and 1953, and again between 1953 and 1961, the Hungarian population in Vojvodina grew slightly, by 1.50% and 1.66%, respectively. However, by 1971, the community had decreased by 18,695 people, representing a 4.22% decline compared to 1961. By the next census in 1981, the decline had more than doubled, with the population shrinking by 38,510 individuals, meaning 9.09%. By 1991, the loss increased to nearly 12% (45,865 individuals), and by 2002, another 49,284 individuals (14.52%) were lost. Although the rate of decline slowed slightly to 13.46% by 2011, this still meant a decrease of 39,071 individuals, leaving the community with just over 250,000 members. The most recent period, from 2011 to 2022, saw a dramatic acceleration in the decline, with a staggering 27.4% loss—equivalent to 68,815 individuals. With the exception of the 2002–2011 period, the data clearly show that as the Hungarian population in Vojvodina declines, the pace of this

decrease is accelerating. The most recent 27.4% drop has been an unprecedented blow to the community, potentially jeopardizing its future. This sharp decline means a significant reduction in the number of kindergarten- and school-aged children, as well as in the reproductive population. As a result, Hungarian-language classes, kindergartens, and schools may close. The workforce is shrinking, and there are fewer Hungarian voters, leading to a considerable weakening of the community's representation and advocacy. Furthermore, the well-established institutional network of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina is at risk of significant weakening or even partial disintegration in the foreseeable future.

Negative natural growth and assimilation

It has been mentioned earlier that a significant portion of the population decline among Hungarians in Vojvodina has been linked to emigration, although precise data on the number of emigrants are unavailable, with only estimates to rely on. However, the primary driver of this decline is negative natural growth, with assimilation accounting for a smaller share of the loss. Thanks to the work of Róbert Badis, a sociologist-demographer from Senta (Hungarian: Zenta), accurate figures on this issue are available.

The table below presents the number of Hungarian newborns and the crude birth rate (number of newborns per 1,000 population) between 2002 and 2022.

Table 7: Number of births in the Hungarian community of Vojvodina, 2002–2022

	Number of births (absolute numbers)	Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)
2002	2,817	9.7
2003	2,839	9.9
2004	2,861	10.2
2005	2,490	9.0
2006	2,489	9.1
2007	2,333	8.7
2008	2,236	8.5
2009	2,164	8.3
2010	2,175	8.5
2011	2,092	8.3
2012	2,030	8.3
2013	2,028	8.5
2014	1,966	8.5
2015	1,822	8.1
2016	1,731	7.9
2017	1,807	8.5
2018	1,708	8.2
2019	1,601	8.0
2020	1,569	8.1
2021	1,499	7.9
2022	1,333	7.3

Source: Data based on the author's research (using the summary of Robert Badis's presentation A vajdasági magyarok demográfiai jövőképe [The Demographic Future of the Hungarians in Vojvodina])

The data clearly show a steady decline in both the number of births and the crude birth rate. While the numbers do not necessarily drop every single year, the overall trend is undeniable. In 2002, a total of 2,817 Hungarian babies were born, corresponding to a crude birth rate of 9.7 per 1,000 population. By 2011, these figures had decreased to 2,092 births and a crude birth rate of 8.3. The decline continued sharply through 2022, with only 1,333 births recorded and a crude birth rate of just 7.3. For context, back in 1953, the number of Hungarian newborns was around 8,500. It is also important to note that maternity wards record the mother's nationality on the newborn's datasheet because national identity,

which individuals declare themselves, typically develops later in life.[9] Throughout the years examined, the number of deaths consistently exceeded the number of births, with the difference determining the rate and direction of natural population change.

Another important factor in understanding population trends is fertility rate, which measures the average number of children a woman has during her reproductive years. Among Hungarians in Vojvodina, this rate has consistently fallen below the replacement level of 2.1–2.2 over recent decades.

Table 8: Changes in the fertility rate of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina, 2002–2022

	Fertility rate
2002	1.51
2003	1.55
2004	1.60
2005	1.42
2006	1.45
2007	1.39
2008	1.37
2009	1.35
2010	1.39
2011	1.37
2012	1.38
2013	1.43
2014	1.44
2015	1.38
2016	1.37
2017	1.49
2018	1.47
2019	1.44
2020	1.48
2021	1.49
2022	1.40

Source: Data based on the author's research (using the summary of Robert Badis's presentation A vajdasági magyarok demográfiai jövőképe [The Demographic Future of the Hungarians in Vojvodina])

9   Summary of the lecture titled "The Demographic Future of Hungarians in Vojvodina" by Róbert Badis, presented at the 14th Vojvodina Hungarian Scientific Conference (2024) organized by the Vojvodina Hungarian Academic Council, held in Subotica. Available at https://vmat.rs/2024/05/26/a-vajdasagi-magyarok-demografiai-jovokepe/; accessed 14 October, 2024.

The data in the table show some fluctuations, but no clear upward or downward trend is apparent. The fertility rate remained relatively steady from 2002 to 2022, suggesting that the number of children Hungarian women of childbearing age in Vojvodina choose to have has not changed significantly over the past two decades. Women today have about the same number of children as women had in the early 2000s. As such, without additional context, these figures alone do not fully explain the significant population decline. However, the reasons for this trend become more evident when examining the next table.

Table 9: Changes in the age structure of Hungarians in Vojvodina, 2011–2022

	2011 (nr)	2022 (nr)	Change in numbers	Change in percentage
0–14 years	29,736	19,739	-9,997	-33.62%
15–29 years	41,387	23,238	-18,149	-43.85%
30–49 years	66,311	44,047	-22,264	-33.58%
50–64 years	60,034	42,837	-17,197	-28.65%
65–84 years	50,157	48,611	-1,546	-3.08%
85 years or older	3,511	3,849	+338	+9.63%

Source: Data based on the author's research

The data clearly show that the Hungarian community in Vojvodina is aging, with younger, childbearing generations declining rapidly. Between 2011 and 2022, the number of children aged 0–14 fell by one-third. Since this age group represents the future of the community, their 33.62% decrease points to a significant population decline in the years ahead. During the same period, the 15–29 and 30–49 age groups, who are of childbearing age, also saw substantial losses. The former nearly halved in size (a 43.85% decrease), while the latter shrank by one-third, a decline similar to that of the 0–14 age group.

The number of individuals aged 50–64 dropped by 28.65%, while those aged 65–84 experienced a smaller decline of 3.08%. In contrast, the oldest age group—those aged 85 and above—saw their population grow by nearly a tenth (9.63%) compared to 2011. Since the 2002 census defined the oldest age group as 75 and older, unlike the classifications used in the 2011 and 2022 censuses, the population figures for the oldest group cannot be directly compared across all three censuses. However, the figures for younger age groups are comparable and clearly highlight a steep decline in both childbearing-age and pre-childbearing-age populations. In 2002, there were 38,662 individuals in the 0–14 age group, but by 2011, their numbers had dropped by 23.09%. Similarly, the 15–29 age group, which had 51,909 members in 2002, decreased by 20.27% over the following nine years. The 30–49

age group saw a 12.71% decline, falling from 75,971 in 2002. The decline in the 50–64 age group was less severe compared to the most recent decade but still notable, with a 4.71% decrease from an initial population of around 63,000. The older age groups cannot be directly compared due to differences in how age categories were defined in the 2002 census, where individuals were classified into 60–74 and 75-and-older groups.[10] These negative demographic trends are further reflected in the rising average age of Hungarians in Vojvodina, underscoring the community's aging population.

Table 10: Trends in the average age of Vojvodina's total population and its Hungarian community, 2002–2022

2002 Total population of Vojvodina	2002 Hungarians in Vojvodina	2011 Total population of Vojvodina	2011 Hungarians in Vojvodina	2022 Total population of Vojvodina	2022 Hungarians in Vojvodina
39.8 years	43.1 years	42 years	45 years	43.64 years	48.50 years

Source: Data based on the author's research[11]

Over the past two decades, the average age of Hungarians in Vojvodina has risen by five years, increasing from 43.1 years in 2002 to 45 years in 2011 and reaching 48.5 years in 2022. Additionally, Hungarians in Vojvodina are generally older than the region's overall population, which is also experiencing an aging trend.

Assimilation is the third major factor contributing to the decline of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina. This is due partly to mixed marriages involving Hungarians and partly to linguistic assimilation, which is particularly common among those living in scattered minority communities. According to Badis, in mixed marriages where the mother is Hungarian, 80% of the children adopt the father's national identity. On the other hand, when the father is Hungarian and the mother belongs to a different nationality, 50% of the children identify as Hungarian.[12] The table below displays the number of children born

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10   Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2022. godine. Excel tabele: Nacionalna pripadnost, starost i pol (2022 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings. Excel tables: Ethnicity, age and sex). Republički zavod za statistiku (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). Beograd, 2023. Available at https://data.stat.gov.rs/?caller=3104&languageCode=sr-Latn; accessed 11 October, 2024.

11   In the 2011 census database, the average ages are rounded to whole numbers, and decimal-point precision data is not available.

12   Summary of the lecture titled "A vajdasági magyarok demográfiai jövőképe" (The Demographic Future of Hungarians in Vojvodina) by Róbert Badis, presented at the 14th Vojvodina Hungarian Scientific Conference (2024) organized by the Vojvodina Hungarian Academic Council, held in Subotica. Available at https://vmat.rs/2024/05/26/a-vajdasagi-magyarok-demografiai-jovokepe/; accessed 14 October, 2024.

to Hungarian mothers in 2020, 2021, and 2022, categorized by whether their father was Hungarian, Serbian, or of another nationality.

Table 11: The fathers' nationalities for children born to Hungarian mothers, 2020–2022

	Mother Hungarian	Father Serbian	**Father Hungarian**	Father Other nationality
2020	**1,569**	349	**998**	222
2021	**1,499**	341	**951**	207
2022	**1,333**	353	**799**	181

Source: Data based on the author's research (using the summary of Robert Badis's presentation A vajdasági magyarok demográfiai jövőképe [The Demographic Future of the Hungarians in Vojvodina])

The data from the three years presented above suggest that assimilation through mixed marriages is on the rise. This trend is reflected in the decreasing number of children born to Hungarian mothers each year, the relatively stable number of Serbian fathers, and the gradual decline in the number of Hungarian fathers.

Linguistic assimilation has significantly impacted the Hungarian community in Vojvodina. Data reveal that some Hungarians in the region no longer consider Hungarian their mother tongue. Instead, they tend to think, feel, and express themselves more comfortably in another language, predominantly Serbian. In 2022, 184,442 individuals across Serbia and 182,321 in Vojvodina identified as Hungarian by nationality. However, only 170,875 nationwide and 169,518 within the province declared Hungarian as their mother tongue. The table below shows how many individuals identifying as Hungarian in Serbia and Vojvodina in 2022 reported Hungarian, Serbian, or another language as their mother tongue.

Table 12. The mother tongue of Hungarian nationals in Serbia and Vojvodina, 2022

	Mother tongue Hungarian (number and %)	Mother tongue Serbian (number and %)	Mother tongue other (number and %)
Serbia (184,442 Hungarian)	**163,735 (88.77 %)**	18,558 (10.06 %)	2,149 (1.17 %)
Vojvodina (182,321 Hungarian)	**162,588 (89.18 %)**	17,671 (9.69 %)	2,062 1.13 %)

Source: Data based on the author's research

According to the data, 88.77% of ethnic Hungarians nationwide speak Hungarian as their mother tongue, 10.06% speak Serbian, and 1.17% speak another language. In Vojvodina, 89.18% of those who identify as Hungarian have Hungarian as their mother tongue, 9.69% speak Serbian, and 1.13% speak another language.

The 2002 and 2011 census data do not provide a breakdown of how many residents of a specific nationality have that nationality's language as their mother tongue. However, it does show how many people identified a particular language as their mother tongue. The following table compares the number of people who declared themselves Hungarian by nationality or mother tongue in Serbia and Vojvodina in 2002, 2011, and 2022.
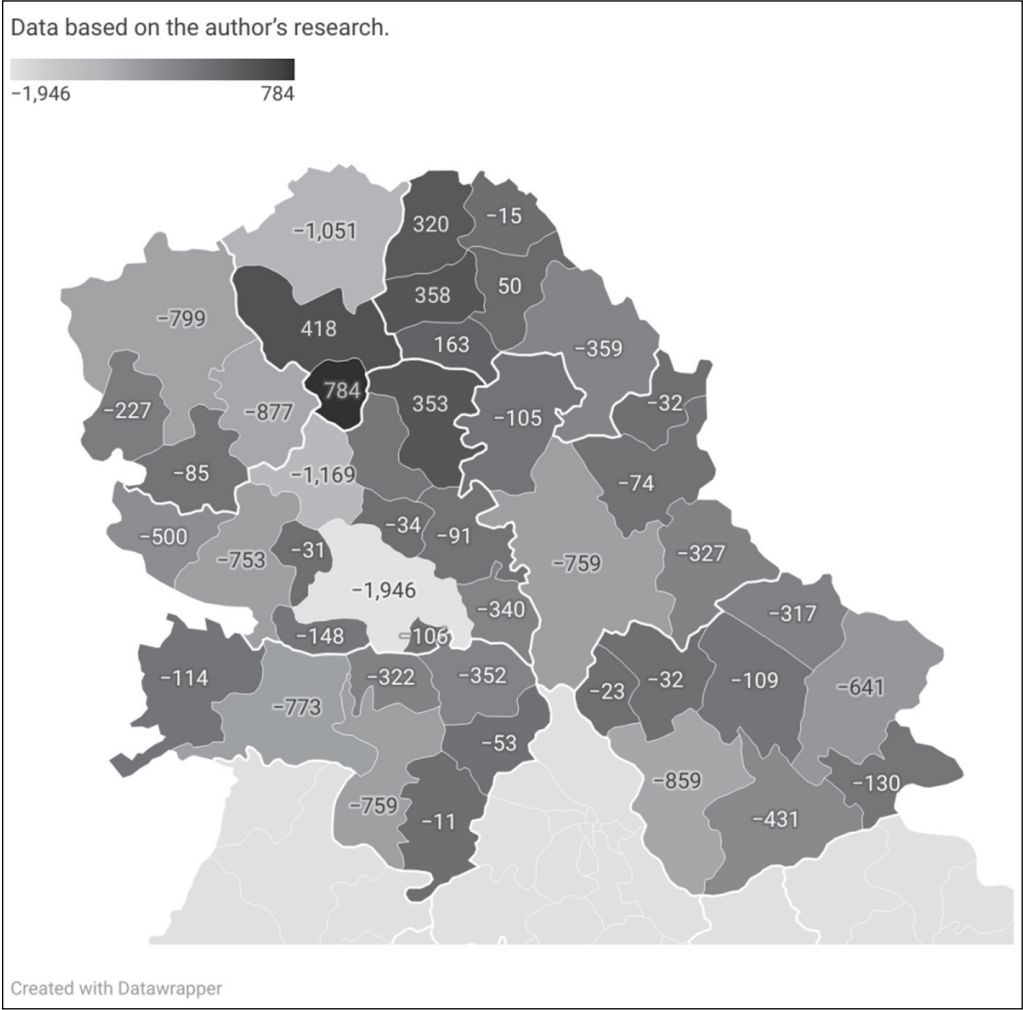
Table 13: Number of Hungarian nationality and Hungarian speakers in Serbia and Vojvodina, 2020–2022

	Nationality Hungarian (nr)	Mother tongue Hungarian (nr)	Hungarian speakers among the Hungarian nationality population (percentage)
2002 Serbia	293,299	286,508	97.68%
2002 Vojvodina	290,207	284,205	97.93%
2011 Serbia	253,899	243,146	95.76%
2011 Vojvodina	251,136	241,164	96.03%
2022 Serbia	184,442	163,735	88.77%
2022 Vojvodina	182,321	162,588	89.18%

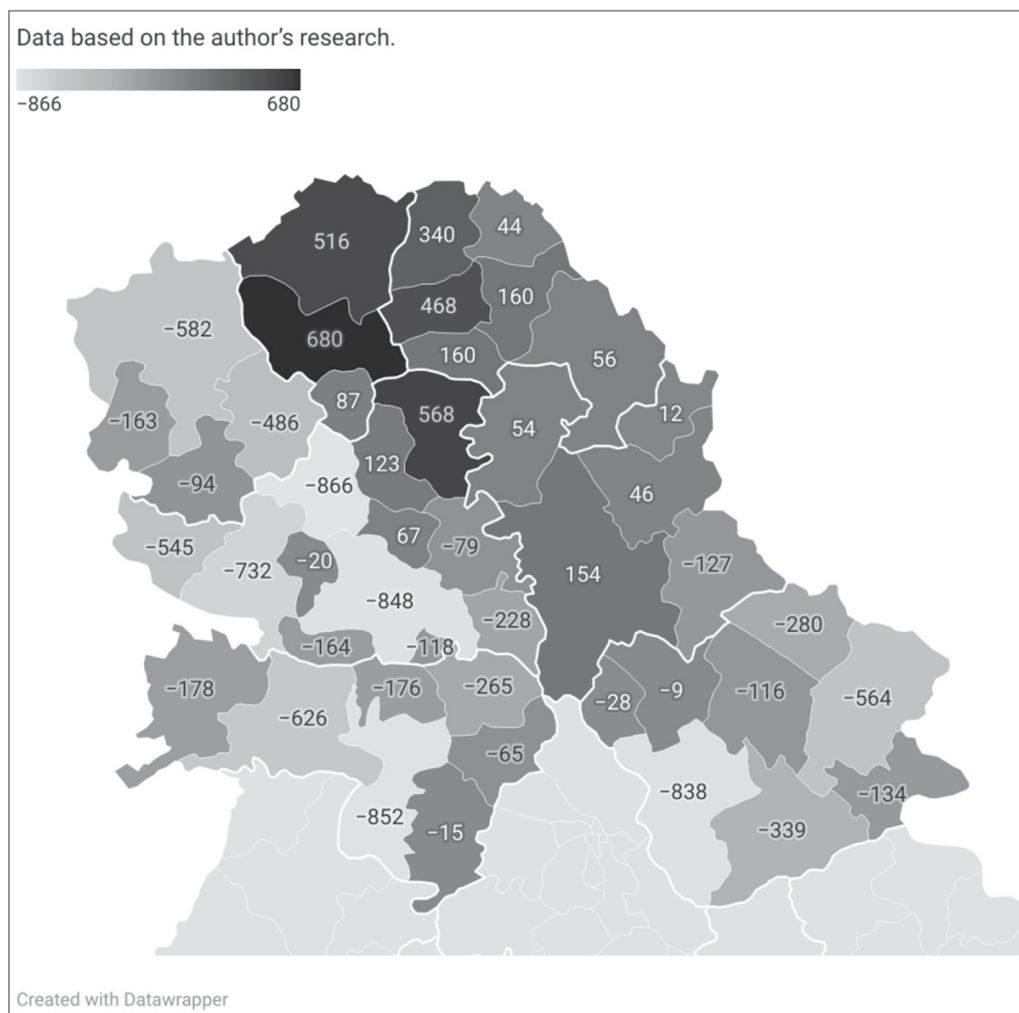*Source: Data based on the author's research*

Naturally, there are notable differences between the municipalities of Vojvodina, particularly between the Hungarian-majority areas and scattered minority communities, regarding changes in the number of people of Hungarian nationality versus native Hungarian speakers. These differences, and how they have changed over the two decades from 2002 to 2022, are illustrated both numerically and visually in the following two maps.

**Map 1: Distribution of the mother tongue surplus in the municipalities
of Vojvodina according to the 2002 census**

Source: Data based on the author's research

**Map 2: Distribution of the mother tongue surplus in the municipalities
of Vojvodina according to the 2022 census**

Data based on the author's research.

-866   680

516   340   44
-582   468   160
680   160   56
87   568   54   12
-163   -486   123   46
-94   -866
-545   67   -79   154   -127
-732   -20   -228   -280
-848   -118   -28   -9   -116   -564
-178   -164   -176   -265
-626   -65   -838   -134
-852   -15   -339

Created with Datawrapper

Source: Data based on the author's research

When comparing the two above maps, significant changes can be seen between the 2002 and 2022 data. In 2002, there was a surplus of Hungarian speakers in all municipalities in the North Bačka and North Banat districts, in all but one of the municipalities in the Central Banat District, and in the municipalities of the South Bačka District that were part of, or close to, compact Hungarian areas (such as Bečej and Srbobran [Hungarian: *Óbecse* and *Szenttamás*]). However, by 2022, Subotica (Hungarian: Szabadka), saw a shortage of Hungarian speakers, and similar trends were observed in all municipalities of the North Banat and Central Banat districts. In other municipalities where a Hungarian language

surplus remained, its size has generally decreased over the past two decades. Across Vojvodina as a whole, there has been a shift to a Hungarian language shortage (meaning there are fewer Hungarian speakers than Hungarian nationalities), and this shortage has grown between 2002 and 2022.

Hungarians in Vojvodina: in the compact area and scattered communities

The majority of Hungarians in Vojvodina reside in the compact Hungarian area in the northern part of the province. According to the 2022 census data, both the North Bačka and North Banat districts have Hungarian populations exceeding 100,000, with municipalities where Hungarians form the absolute or relative majority. Additionally, there are municipalities and settlements in the South Bačka District with notable Hungarian populations. The following table provides an overview of the total population and the number of Hungarians, Serbs, and other ethnic groups across the seven districts of Vojvodina.

Table 14: The number and percentage of Hungarian, Serbian, and other ethnic group inhabitants in the seven districts of Vojvodina in 2022
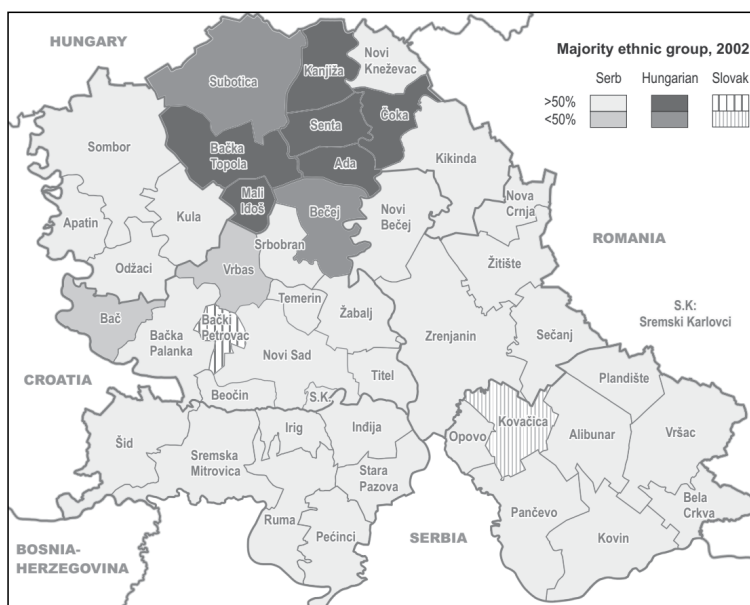
	Total	Hungarians (nr)	Hungarians (%)	Serbs (nr)	Serbs (%)	Other (nr)	Other (%)
South Bačka District	607,178	**35,356**	**5.82**	446,591	73.55	125,231	20.63
South Banat District	260,244	**8,782**	**3.37**	187,253	71.95	64,209	24.67
North Bačka District	160,163	**56,973**	**35.57**	48,672	30.39	54,518	34.04
North Banat District	117,896	**50,643**	**42.96**	51,848	43.98	15,405	13.07
Central Banat District	157,711	**15,765**	**10.00**	115,815	73.43	26,131	16.57
West Bačka District	154,491	**11,846**	**7.67**	102,406	66.29	40,239	26.05
Srem District	282,547	**2,956**	**1.05**	238,200	84.30	41,391	14.65

Source: Data based on the author's research

In the North Bačka District, the population is almost evenly divided among Hungarians, Serbs, and other ethnic groups, primarily Croats and Bunjevci. It is the only district among the seven where Hungarians form the relative majority of the total population. The North Banat District has the highest percentage of Hungarians at 42.96%, although Serbs hold the relative majority there with 43.98%. In the Central Banat District, Hungarians account for just 10% of the population, while in the other four NUTS 3 regions of Vojvodina, their proportion is well below 10%. The compact Hungarian area primarily consists of Hungarian-majority settlements in the North Bačka and North Banat districts, complemented by the Hungarian population of the municipality of Bečej in the South Bačka District.
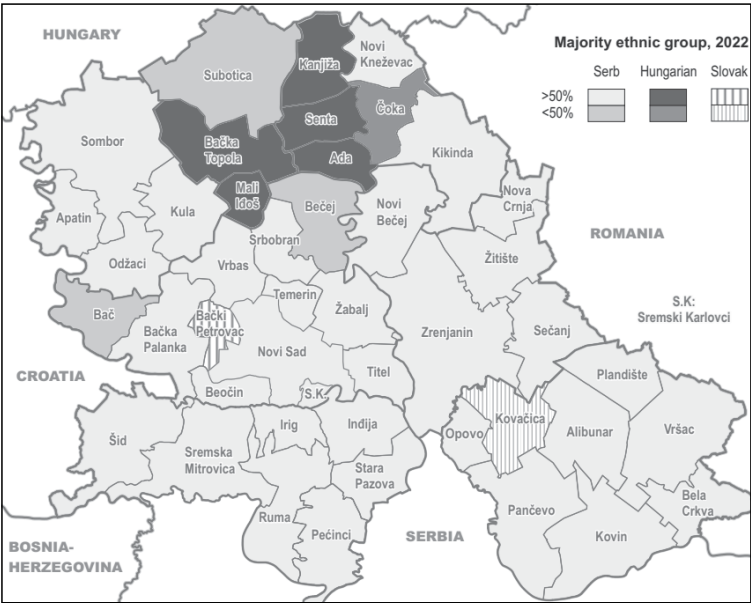
Until recently, including the 2011 census, there were eight Hungarian-majority municipalities in Vojvodina: Ada (absolute Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Ada), Čoka (relative Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Csóka), Mali Iđoš (absolute Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Kishegyes), Kanjiža (absolute Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Magyarkanizsa), Bečej (relative Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Óbecse), Subotica (relative Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Szabadka), Bačka Topola (absolute Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Topolya), and Senta (absolute Hungarian majority, in Hungarian Zenta). However, by 2022, shifting ethnic proportions reduced the number of Hungarian-majority municipalities to six. Subotica and Bečej saw Serbs take the relative majority of the total population, with Hungarians relegated to the second position.

Map 3: *Municipalities of Vojvodina by the ethnicity of the majority population, 2002*

Source: Data based on the author's research

Map 4: *Municipalities of Vojvodina by the ethnicity of the majority population, 2022*

Source: Data based on the author's research

The two maps above visually represent the territorial decline of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina and the process of growing dispersion, which is already noticeable in areas that were once predominantly Hungarian. As a result, Hungarians are starting to become a minority in regions that once were compact Hungarian. Subotica along with Senta, remains the key cultural, educational, and political center for Hungarians in Vojvodina, but Serbian ethnic dominance is becoming more apparent in the city. This shift can be seen in the city's appearance, local decision-making, the composition of municipal leadership, and the goals they set.

The following two tables show how the number and percentage of Hungarians, Serbs, and other nationalities in the total population of the eight Hungarian-majority municipalities in Vojvodina changed between 2011 and 2022.

Table 15: Number and percentage of Hungarians, Serbs, and other nationalities in the eight Hungarian-majority municipalities, 2011

	Total (nr)	Hungarians (nr)	Hungarians (%)	Serbs (nr)	Serbs (%)	Other (nr)	Other (%)
Ada (Ada)	16,991	**12,750**	**75.04**	2,956	17.40	1,285	7.56
Čoka (Csóka)	11,398	**5,661**	**49.67**	4,437	38.93	1,300	11.41
Mali Iđoš (Kishegyes)	12,031	**6,486**	**53.91**	2,388	19.85	3,157	26.24
Kanjiža (Magyarkanizsa)	25,343	**21,576**	**85.14**	1,830	7.22	1,937	7.64
Bečej (*Óbecse*)	37,351	**17,309**	**46.34**	15,451	41.37	4,591	12.29
Subotica (Szabadka)	141,554	**50,469**	**35.65**	38,254	27.02	52,831	37.32
Bačka Topola (Topolya)	33,321	**19,307**	**57.94**	9,830	29.50	4,184	12.56
Senta (Zenta)	23,316	**18,441**	**79.09**	2,533	10.86	2,342	10.04

Source: Data based on the author's research

Table 16: Number and percentage of Hungarians, Serbs, and other nationalities in the eight Hungarian-majority municipalities, 2022

	Total (nr)	Hungarians (nr)	Hungarians (%)	Serbs (nr)	Serbs (%)	Other (nr)	Other (%)
Ada (Ada)	13,293	**9,666**	**72.71**	2,429	18.27	1,198	9.01
Čoka (Csóka)	8,556	**3,835**	**44.82**	3,470	40.56	1,251	14.62
Mali Iđoš (Kishegyes)	9,983	**5,174**	**51.83**	2,313	23.17	2,496	25.00
Kanjiža (Magyarkanizsa)	20,141	**16,740**	**83.11**	1,443	7.16	1,958	9.72
Bečej (Óbecse)	30,681	**12,482**	**40.68**	12,996	42.36	5,203	16.96
Subotica (Szabadka)	123,952	**37,200**	**30.01**	38,174	30.80	48,578	39.19
Bačka Topola (Topolya)	26,228	**14,599**	**55.66**	8,185	31.21	3,444	13.13
Senta (Zenta)	17,953	**13,590**	**75.70**	2,102	11.71	2,261	12.59

Source: Data based on the author's research

By comparing the two tables above, the trend of decline and territorial loss becomes evident, even in the compact Hungarian areas. In nearly all of the eight municipalities, the overall population is shrinking. Nevertheless, the decline of Hungarians is occurring at a faster pace than that of Serbs, leading to a shift in the proportions in favor of the Serbs. If we strictly consider the eight municipalities presented as the compact Hungarian area, 62.14% of Hungarians in Vojvodina (113,286 people) lived in these majority areas in 2022, while 37.86% (69,035 people) lived in scattered communities. In 2011, 60.52% (151,999 people) of Hungarians lived in majority areas, compared to 39.48% (99,137 people) in scattered communities. Beyond the overall population decline, these numbers suggest that the Hungarian community in Vojvodina is increasingly concentrated in traditionally compact Hungarian areas and displays a faster decline in the scattered communities.

There are municipalities near the compact Hungarian areas where Hungarians still make up a significant portion of the population, and the geographic proximity strengthens their ties to the compact areas. Examples include Novi Kneževac (Hungarian: Törökkanizsa) in the North Bačka District, as well as Srbobran (Hungarian: Szenttamás) and Temerin (Hungarian: Temerin) in the South Bačka District, where the Hungarian population is relatively smaller, and Novi Bečej (Hungarian: Törökbecse) in the Central Bačka District. In the West Bačka and South Bačka districts, Hungarians mostly live in isolated communities, while in the Srem District, their numbers are very small compared to the previously mentioned two NUTS 3 regions.

Two additional tables are presented below: the first shows the five municipalities in Vojvodina with the largest population declines between 2011 and 2022, along with figures highlighting the decrease in the Hungarian ethnic population. The second table lists the five municipalities in Vojvodina where the decline in the local Hungarian ethnic population was most significant.

Table 17: Five municipalities in Vojvodina with the largest population decrease between 2011 and 2022, with data on the decrease of the local Hungarian ethnic population

	Total population 2011	Total population 2022	Change (nr)	Change (%)	Hungarians 2011	Hungarians 2022	Change (nr)	Change (%)
Čoka (Csóka)	11,398	8,556	-2,842	-24.93	5,661	3,835	-1,826	-32.26
Novi Kneževac (Törökkanizsa)	11,269	8,627	-2,642	-23.44	3,217	1,956	-1,261	-39.20
Senta (Zenta)	23,316	17,953	-5,363	-23.00	18,441	13,590	-4,851	-26.31
Ada (Ada)	16,991	13,293	-3,698	-21.76	12,750	9,666	-3,084	-24.19
Bačka Topola (Topolya)	33,321	26,228	-7,093	-21.29	19,307	14,599	-4,708	-24.38

Source: Data based on the author's research

Čoka experienced the most significant population decline among Vojvodina's municipalities between the two censuses, losing nearly a quarter of its residents by 2022 compared to 2011. Novi Kneževac, Senta, Ada, and Bačka Topola also saw their populations drop by more than 20% during this period. Of these five municipalities, four are part of the compact Hungarian region, and Hungarians are not in the majority only in Novi Kneževac. However, Novi Kneževac is geographically very close to the compact Hungarian area, located opposite Kanjiža on the other side of the Tisza River. This geographic closeness fosters regular interaction between the populations, including both Hungarians and other ethnic groups. Notably, in all five municipalities listed in the table, the Hungarian population declined at a faster rate than the overall population. Notably, in all five municipalities listed in the table, the Hungarian population declined at a faster rate than the overall population. Between the 2011 and 2022 censuses, Novi Sad was the only municipality in Vojvodina to experience population growth, increasing by 8%. Its population rose from 341,625 to 368,967, largely due to migration from other parts of Vojvodina and Serbia, drawn by the city's status as a regional capital. However, even in Novi Sad, the Hungarian population saw a significant decrease of 26.22%.

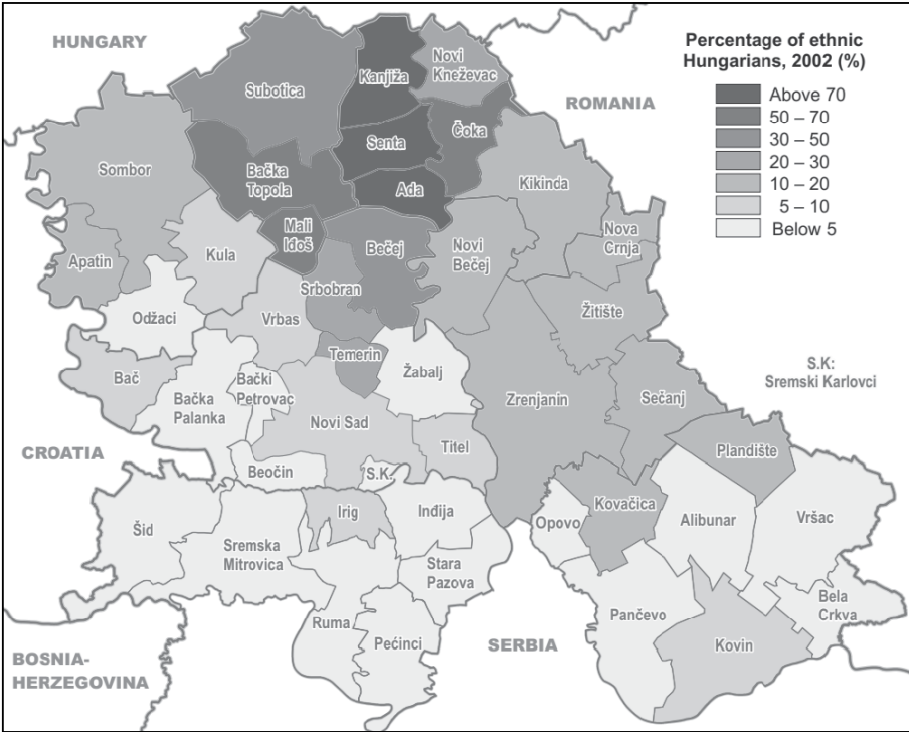*Table 18: Five municipalities in Vojvodina with the largest decrease in the Hungarian ethnic population, 2011–2022*

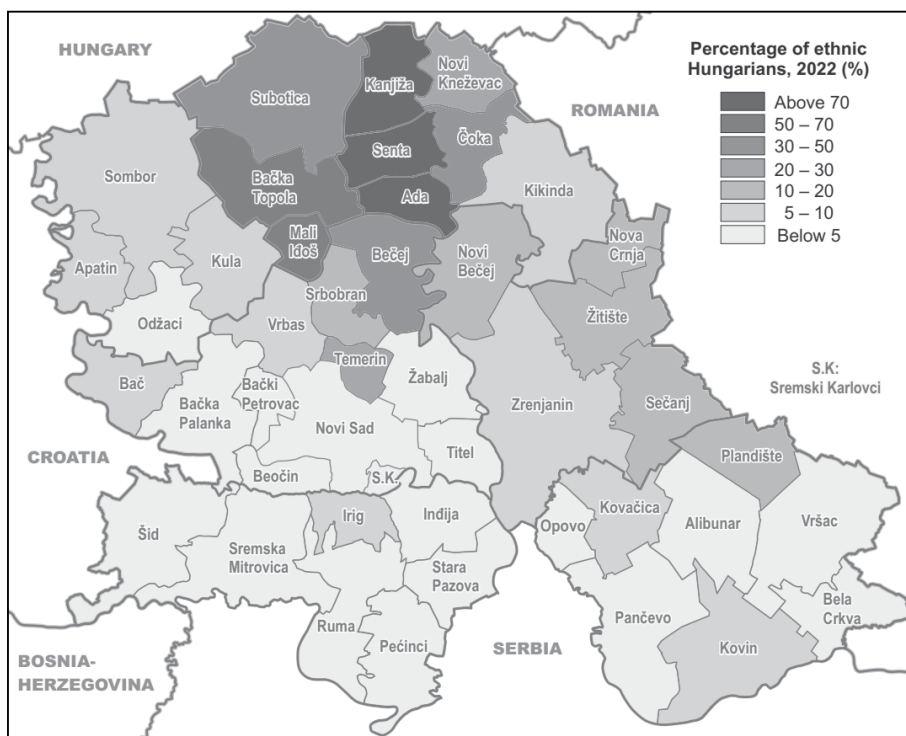|	Hungarians 2011	Hungarians 2022	Change (nr)	Change (%)
Kovin (Kevevára)	3,001	1,778	-1,223	-40.75
Apatin (Apatin)	3,102	1,870	-1,232	-39.72
Novi Kneževac (Törökkanizsa)	3,217	1,956	-1,261	-39.20
Kovačica (Antalfalva)	2,522	1,597	-925	-36.68
Opovo (*Ópáva*)	54	35	-19	-35.19

Source: Data based on the author's research

As shown in Table 17, which mostly lists municipalities from the compact Hungarian area, the Hungarian population suffered the greatest proportional losses in the scattered minority communities.

Finally, the following two maps show the percentage of the Hungarian population in the municipalities of Vojvodina in 2011 and 2022.

Map 5: Proportion of the Hungarian ethnic population in the municipalities of Vojvodina, 2002

Source: Data based on the author's research

Map 6: Proportion of Hungarian ethnic population in the municipalities of Vojvodina, 2022

Source: Data based on the author's research

Summary

This study begins by presenting and comparing the most important national-level results from Serbia's 2022 census with data from 2011. This comparison helps to contextualize the main focus of the study—the statistics of the Hungarian minority in Serbia, specifically in Vojvodina. The study delves into the population changes of this group and provides explanations for these shifts. From the outset, it becomes evident that, along with the overall populations of Serbia and Vojvodina, the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina is rapidly declining. However, the Hungarian minority population decrease is much more significant compared to those of the Serbian majority or the overall population. The study frequently presents different sets of data for the same periods and trends to more accurately capture the scale of the decline, its acceleration, and the losses of linguistic position within the province. Additionally, the study examines the three main factors contributing to population decline—negative natural population growth, emigration, and assimilation—addressing the demographic challenges posed by each factor.

The study compares the recent 2022 data with census results from previous decades. The population trends of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina can be tracked from the post-World War II period to the present. However, the 2022 census data are most frequently compared with the 2002 and 2011 results. This is because the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia conducted the last three censuses using consistent methodologies, ensuring their full comparability.

The study's findings can be summarized as follows: the Hungarian community in Vojvodina has been declining for decades, with the pace of this decline accelerating, especially in recent years. The main factors behind this demographic crisis are low birth rates, increasing emigration, and assimilation. As a result, not only is the Hungarian population shrinking, but it is also aging rapidly, which points to the continuation and worsening of these negative trends. If these demographic challenges do not change in the foreseeable future, they could lead to the loss of Hungarians in Vojvodina—both in terms of physical presence and in political, economic, and symbolic terms—particularly within the boundaries of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The number of Hungarians in scattered minority communities is decreasing more quickly, and the remaining Hungarian population is becoming increasingly concentrated in the compact Hungarian area.

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