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## MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CHANGES: ALBANIAN DIASPORAS OF ALBANIA, KOSOVA, MONTENEGRO AND MACEDONIA

**Abstract:** Albanians have the highest migration flow in Balkans. More than 25 percent of Albanians from Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia are actually migrants. Migration of Albanians has shown some specific features as compared to migration of other populations in the region. The higher dependance from remittances and the delay in the synergy between migration and development are the most important addressed in this paper. The impact of Albanian Diasporas on homelands is linked with typologies and phenomenologies of installment of migrants into labour market and host societies and with economic and fiscal aspects of Albanian migration in destination countries. The participation of Albanian migrants in homeland electoral processes needs particular attention and resources.

**Key words:** *Albanian migration, migration and development, economic impact of migration, migrants right to vote*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the role of migration and diasporas in economic, social and political development of Albania, Kosovo as well as Albanian communities in the region: Macedonia and Montenegro. During the last two decades, the potential, flow and stock of Albanian migration have been the highest among populations of the Balkans: over 25 percent of Albanians from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro have emigrated.

#### 1. ALBANIANS: THE LARGEST MIGRANT FLOWS IN THE REGION

Albanians of Albania continue to have the highest flow and stock migration. In 2011, Albania had about 1.4–1.5 million of foreign immigrants or about 33 percent

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of the country's population. Meanwhile, external migrants of Kosovo, Montenegro, and Macedonia accounted for 25 percent<sup>1</sup> 33 percent<sup>2</sup> and 25 percent of population<sup>3</sup>. Compared to other ethnic groups of population, Albanians in Montenegro have the highest flow and stock of external migration. Thus, the flow of Albanian migration from all countries in the region is five to six times greater than the average flow of developing countries.

Like the other Balkan countries, Albania has a high level of family, women's and minors migration<sup>4</sup>, favored by cultural, linguistic and geographical proximity/similarity, as well as low cost to migrate to neighboring countries. Meanwhile, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro have lower rates of family, women's and minors migration of Albanians. This is due to different circumstances of Albanian migration from these countries as well as migration non-economic push factors.

High migration rate of skilled workers is another characteristic of the Albanians in Albania, compared to Albanians in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. A considerable aort of high qualifgied people and intelelcvtuals have left the cuntry during the last 20 years.

## 2. "ALBANIAN" DELAY OF THE SYNERGY BETWEEN MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Migrant remittances in Albania are mainly used for basic survival and consumption. They grew in importance with the collapse of social support mechanisms, as a result of the economic liberalization in the transition period. Social protection was not efficient and countries failed to develop preventive and active social policy, due to specific circumstances of the region's development. These social changes created an ontological conflict between cultural formations and the dynamics of migration through economic, social, cultural and political transition. Cultural formations infleunced the relationship between political ideologies, lifestyle and behavior.<sup>5</sup> The link between politics, culture, society and migration flows explains the delay of reurn migrantion and the weak synergy between migration and development.

<sup>1</sup> Causes and effects of of migration of Albanians from Montenegro – Shkaqet dhe pasojat e emigrimit të shqiptarëve nga Mali i Zi, Koha Javore, 10 Janar 2009;

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kosova-Ministria e Diasporës e Republikës së Kosovës, Prishtinë, 2012;

<sup>3</sup> Markiewicz, M. Migration and remittances in Macedonia, CEA, Center for Economic Analysis, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Booth, H. 1992 The migration process in Britain and West Germany, *Avebury, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, England*;

<sup>5</sup> Barjaba, K. King, R., 2005 Introducing and Theorizing Albanian Migration, in King, R., Mai, N., Schëandner-Sievers, S. (eds) 2005, *The New Albanian Migration*, Sussex Academic Press

During the first 15 years of migration, immigrants are considered to be a source of economic survival and consumers of the country of origin.<sup>6</sup> This belief applies to the Albanian migration, too. Recently, policy-makers are focusing on making migration a development factor for the countries of origin. Especially in the case of Albania and Kosovo, migrant communities abroad are encouraged to be intermediators in business development, trade and investment between the receiving country and homeland/country of origin. In addition, the Albanian government is promoting an institutional dialogue with the new Albanian Diaspora on how to support and strengthen the Diaspora ties with the country of origin. Meanwhile, in Macedonia and Montenegro, the impact of such policies has been small, due to Albanians not being part of the economic and social development.

### 3. ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ALBANIAN MIGRATION ON DESTINATION COUNTRIES

Albanian migration, particularly the migration of Albanians in Albania, as a newer phenomenon, is experiencing contradictory developments,<sup>7</sup> which hinder the synergy between migration and development.

**The skills and economic performance of Albanian immigrants are declining.** This decline can be attributed to the failure of the host countries' labour market to fully absorb and accommodate foreign workers. The limited capacity of the labour market is due to the current economic crisis and the structural reforms of destination countries to meet EU standards. Meanwhile, the first generation of emigrants from Albania is reaching retirement age and the second generation is facing major obstacles in entering the labor market. Meanwhile, Albanian immigrants from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, are a generation ahead in experiencing these developments.

**Incomes of Albanian immigrant households continue to be lower than those in native households.** This is due to the decline of their economic performance. The immigrant experience shows that the immigrant-native income gap has decreased by only 10 percent in the first two decades of emigration.<sup>8</sup>

**Ethnicity of Albanian immigrants does still matter.** Albanian migrants from Albania are the largest group of immigrants in Greece and the second largest group in Italy. Studies show that there is an ethnic trace in immigrants employment sectors. Negative stereotypes about immigrants are mainly accredited by the media and not from the phenomenology of migrants direct interactions with natives. The phenomenon of victimization, criminalization and demonization and the public

<sup>6</sup> Borjas, G. 1999 *Heaven's Door. Immigration Policy and the American Economy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey;

<sup>7</sup> Barjaba, K. Barjaba, J, (2011) Main symptoms of Albanian migration in the in the global context – Simptomat kryesore te emigrimit shqiptar ne kontekstin nderkombetar, EURO-MEDITERRANEAN, Nr. 3. 12/2011.

<sup>8</sup> Borjas, G. 1999 *Heaven's Door. Immigration Policy and the American Economy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey;

perception about Albanian immigrants in local medias in receiving countries are changing. However, the so far negative perception continues to have a significant impact on the immigration policies and the development of social behavior in host countries.<sup>9</sup>

**Albanian immigration jeopardizes employment opportunities for less-skilled native workers.** The labor-market competition between immigrants and natives has contributed to increased anti-immigrant sentiments.<sup>10</sup>

Albanian immigrants have a severe fiscal impact on the economy and welfare system of the host countries. The higher the number of low-skilled immigrants, the greater the fiscal burden, especially in Greece and Italy, which have been facing difficulties in their social welfare system in the last decade. Studies on international migration show that immigrants impose a burden on host countries in the first 15 years; after this period they play a significant role in sponsoring the welfare system.<sup>11</sup> That said, Albanian immigrants from Albania have just begun to contribute to the welfare system of Italy, Greece and other host countries. While Albanians from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro have been contributing to the welfare system of host countries for nearly three decades.

**Immigrants are a mixed bag for the economy. Albanian immigrants' net gains in the host countries are significant.** The entry of Albanians in the host country's labour market increases job competition and lowers wages. Immigrant workers reduce wages of domestic workers but at the same time increase the productivity of domestic firms in the host countries. Domestic firms gain due to changing/reducing labor costs. Reduction of labor costs affects the price of goods and services. Thus, consumers also benefit from the declining price of products made by immigrants' labor. Consequently, the impact of immigrants on the receiving country's economy and welfare system can be considered as a redistribution program, a wealth transfer from domestic workers who compete with immigrants, to employers and consumers.

**All countries have a high dependancy level from migration financial capitals.** Remittances are playing an increasingly large role in the economies of Albania, Kosovo and other countries in the region. In Albania, remittances account for 9–15 per cent of GDP and about 15 percent of household income. At their peak in 2007, Albania was the country with the greatest dependence on remittances in the region, with about 500 USD per capita.<sup>12</sup> In 2009, remittances from Kosovo emigrants totaled EUR 506 million.<sup>13</sup> High dependancy and reliance on remittances sets the need for forming more effective policy for managing remittances.

<sup>9</sup> Perrone, L. 1998 I flussi migratori albanesi tra stereotipi e pregiudizi, *Da Qui*, 4;

<sup>10</sup> Barjaba, K. Immigrazione Albanese, integrazione e sviluppo, in Devole, R.; Pittau, F., Ricci, A., Urso, G. Gli Albanesi in Italia, Conseguenze economiche e sociali dell'immigrazione, 2008, Edizioni Idos;

<sup>11</sup> Borjas, G. 1999 Heaven's Door. Immigration Policy and the American Economy, *Princeton University Press, New Jersey*;

<sup>12</sup> Migration Policy Institute, *Washington DC*, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Open Data Albania, Tirane, 2012

Recently, remittances from Albanian immigrants are estimated to have declined due to the global economic crisis. The economies of the two of the most popular receiving countries, Greece and Italy, are undergoing one of their most difficult crisis in the last 50 years. This crisis has also affected the employment, income and integration of Albanian immigrants. However, remittances continue to be a major catalyst for significant economic development, increase of consumption and improvement of the quality of life in the region. Studies show that one year of migration of a family member increases family consumption by 5 percent.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. THE ROLE OF DIASPORA IN HOMELAND DEVELOPMENTS: THE RIGHT OF MIGRANTS TO VOTE

Studies show that migration consolidates social and political values of immigrants. Living in a democratic society, immigrant communities, besides contributing to the social life in receiving countries have created social, cultural, and political capital, beneficial for society and democratic consolidation in the homelands. Given the fact that Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro, have experienced prolonged transitions, delayed process of Euro-Atlantic integration, malfunctioning of democratic institutions, poor government performance etc., diasporas can contribute to development in the home countries. Diasporas are in social and intellectual position to undertake development activities in their homelands. The values, experiences, and models earned by diaspora in the host countries can serve as resources for the economic, social and political development in the homelands.

Legislation of Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro guarantees political freedom for immigrants, giving them the right to vote and engage in homeland politics. Therefore, the governments have created favorable conditions for immigrants to exercise their right to vote in their countries of origine. However, only the legislation of Macedonia and Kosovo regulates the migrants' voting rights in the hosting countries. Migrants from Kosovo and Macedonia have taken part in recent elections of their countries by voting in the destination countries. Albanians had demonstrated mixed and contradictory reactions to the idea of creating legislation and conditions for migrants to cast their vote in destination countries. There has been a strong political rhetoric on this issue, but not followed by the proper political and legislative measures. Meanwhile, in Montenegro there have been attempts to deny the voting right to migrants even in their homeland under the 2010 Electoral Code of Montenegro. The Electoral Code indicates that in order to be eligible to vote, the citizen has to prove that has lived in Montenegro for 24 consecutive months. This legislation was criticized by the Council of Europe, Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR.<sup>15</sup> The Electoral Code of Macedonia states that Macedonians living abroad are entitled to vote and are represented by three seats in the Parliament. The 2008

<sup>14</sup> Albania: Urban Growth, Migration and Poverty Reduction, World Bank, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Opinion No. 630 / 2011, Council of Europe, Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR, Strasbourg, 18 May 2011.

Electoral Code of Kosovo foresees the modalities of voting process in destination countries for Kosovo citizens living abroad.

Considering that 25 percent of the Albanian population (of Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia) lives abroad, guaranteeing the right to vote to immigrants is important, in both parliamentary and local elections. The current trend in the member states of the Council of Europe is towards taking effective measures to practically guarantee the right to vote. Regarding the voting from abroad, the Venice Commission provides guidance and recommendations on how to guarantee to migrants the right to vote in destination countries for electing governments in their homelands.

## CONCLUSIONS

Migrants are catalysts and promoters of economic, social and political development of both sending and receiving countries. There is a direct link between migration and development. However, migration of Albanians is experiencing a delay in creating the synergy between migration and development. This appeals for better migration and integration policies in the region. Migration consolidates also the social and political values of immigrants. Therefore, guaranteeing the right to vote to immigrants, both legally and practically, is important for Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia.

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