

Towards new scenarios of Albanian labor migration

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Albania is among the European countries with the highest labor migration flows and migration stock in Europe, in relation to the size of the country's population. Actually, about 1.4 million Albanians are international immigrants, compared to some 2.8 million living within the country. Most of the immigrants are settled in Greece, around 600,000-700,000 and Italy (480,000) and the rest in the US, Canada and other EU countries.

However, placed in the global context of international migration, the migration of Albanians remains still exceptional due to several characteristics, such as:

- the vulnerability of the sending country in the global migration system,
- dimension of migration flows and migration stock,
- its role as the principal factor of economic survival of the country and of the population,
- the impact on political and electoral situation in receiving countries,
- the high level of stigmatization of Albanian immigrants followed by high level of integration,
- the evolving character,
- the high rates of family, female and minors migration,
- the correlation between domestic and international migration.

These characteristics have also shaped the symptoms of Albanian migration, which developed during the two decades of migratory experience.

The vulnerability of Albania in the global migration system, the context and background of such a weakness and the nature of Albanian migration as a particular case of international migration, **have shaped some of the symptoms of contemporary Albanian migration**, which are linked with its vulnerability, dynamic, particularity and exceptionality.

The number of emigrants is reaching record levels. Albania is actually the European country with the highest migration flow. There are over one million Albanian emigrants. The emigrants' community consists of above 25 percent of the population and above 35 percent of active population. Actually, the average migration flow in developing countries is approximately 5-6 percent of the active population. Consequently, the Albanian emigration flow is 5-6 times greater than the average flow of developing countries.

The skills and economic performance of Albanian immigrants is declining. This is happening due to the limited capacities of receiving country's labor market to absorb foreign labor force because of structural reforms to meet the EU standards and to the impact of recent economic crisis. These make the national labor markets in receiving countries more demanding. Ageing factor is also to be considered. The first generation of emigrants is reaching the pension age and the second generation is encountering diverse barriers and difficulties to join the labor market.

Albanian Immigrants' earnings continue to be lower than natives. This is linked with worsening of their economic performance. The gap between immigrants and natives earnings is narrowing slowly. Historical migratory experience shows that the immigrants-natives gap narrows only 10 percent in the first two decades of migration (Borjas, 1999). Contemporary Albanian migration is actually celebrating its 20th anniversary.

Ethnic origin of Albanian immigrants does still matter. Albanian immigrants consist of the majority of immigrant community in Greece and the second community in Italy. The so-called phenomena of victimization, incrimination and *demonization* and the public perception of Albanian immigrants have been mostly accredited by local press and media. However, they seem to continue having a visible impact on shaping migration policies and social behaviors of native population in receiving countries. (Perrone, 1998). Despite the noticeable progress, the gap between the image of Albanian immigrant and image of other immigrant communities is still to be considered.

Albanian immigrants harm the economic and employment opportunities of least skilled natives. This happens not only because most of Albanian immigrants have a poor level of skill and education and the higher qualified immigrants are installed into least skilled jobs and employment sectors in the destination countries. Such a competition in the labor market has influenced the anti-immigrant feelings and expectations among the native low skilled or manual workers, who are mostly affected by foreign (Albanian) labor force.

Albanian immigrants have a severe fiscal impact on the receiving countries economy and welfare system. The least skilled the immigrants, the more heavy is their fiscal burden and fiscal effect on welfare systems, especially in Greece and Italy, where the welfare systems have experienced several problems during the last decade. The surveys on international migration show that for the first 15 years of migration experience, immigrants consist of a burden and after that they become a sponsor to the welfare system in receiving countries. Departing from this theoretical framework, we may now conclude that Albanian immigrants have recently started to contribute to the welfare system in Italy, Greece and other receiving countries.

Net economic gains from Albanian immigrants in European receiving countries are significant. As Albanians enter the labor market in Greece and Italy, the wage of native workers falls and they lose because immigrants drag their wages down. But at the same time the native-owned firms gain, as they are hire workers at lower wages. Consequently, employers gain because immigrants drag wages down and reduce the labor costs. From the consumers' perspective, the native consumers gain as the lower labor market costs lead to cheaper goods and services offered to population. Generally, immigration induces a substantial redistribution of wealth, away from native workers who compete with Albanian immigrants and toward employers and other users of Albanian immigrants' services in the receiving countries. In this perspective, Albanian immigration's impact on the economy and welfare system of receiving countries can be viewed as an income redistribution program, a transfer of wealth from local workers who compete with immigrants toward employers and consumers who use immigrant labor,

products and services. Immigration may benefit or harm the receiving countries even through externalities: products and services born by immigrants: cuisine, cultural products etc. But in this perspective the impact of Albanian immigrants is insignificant, as Albanian cuisine and other products and services are not relevantly expanding in receiving countries.

Illegality versus legality: Migration of Albanians started as illegal and is transformed into a legal migration. At the first wave of Albanian immigration, both Albania, as e sending country, and destination countries, Italy and Greece among them, were unprepared to manage the outgoing and incoming flow. In the context of efforts to regulate the Albanian immigrants flow, Albania signed the respective agreements on migrant seasonal workers with Greece in spring 1996 and with Italy in autumn 1997. The adjustment of migration legislation framework had a visible impact on the changes of the regular-irregular flows and the domination of regular versus irregular immigrants started in 1998. Around 70, 000 Albanian illegal immigrants per year were legalized in both countries, Greece and Italy, during 1998-2005. Consequently, during in 2006 the rate regular-irregular Albanian immigrant was 1.5-1 in Greece and 3-1 in Italy. Actually, such a rate is changing in favor of regular immigrants. Scholars and researchers have particularly explored and evidenced several features of the process of installment and integration of Albanian immigrants in Italy (Barjaba & Perrone, 1996; Barjaba, 2002; Barjaba, 2008; Melchionda, 2003; Pittau & Forti, 2004).

Albania has a high level of minors, women's and family migration. As all Balkan countries (Booth, 1992), Albania has experienced a high level of family migration, favored by cultural, linguistic and geographic neighborhood and by the low cost of migrating in neighbor countries. The

country has also experienced a high migration flow of accompanied and non accompanied minors as well as of female migration. Women's migration has been favored by the easiness of entering the labor market, especially in domestic activities. This caused a different widowhood typology: Albania has not "white widows" as in the case of migration from other developing countries, but a sort of "white widowers". Some husbands remained at home, meanwhile their wives emigrated.

High level of brain drain and its trend versus brain loss or brain waste. The high migration flow of qualified people is another feature of Albanian migration. About 50 percent of all lecturers, researchers and intellectuals in the country, most of them young and trained in part in European universities, have left Albania since 1990. Nearly 66 percent of Albanians who have carried out a PhD in Western Europe or the US universities since 1990 have either emigrated from Albania, or never returned to the country after graduation (UNDP, 2006). Most of Albanian qualified professionals are installed in the labor market sectors other from those which fit to their profession and qualification. This has caused "Brain-drain" in Albania has symbolically been labeled as the "Canada phenomena", as Canadian migratory policies are favoring migration of qualified people and have attracted thousands of qualified Albanian professional to emigrate to Canada.

Migration and consumption source versus migration and development. As mentioned above, researchers have defined that for the first 15 years, migration serves as a source of economic survival and consumption for the population of sending country. This is also the case for Albanian migration. The policies and actions to use migration as a factor of

country's development are very recent (King & Vullnetari, 2004). The Country Strategy of Migration Management has been approved in 2005 and measures and incentives to support the voluntary return of the successful immigrants during the last years.

The country's economic dependency from remittances is proverbial in the case of Albania. IMF estimates that remittances consist of around 15 percent of Albania's GDP and around 13 percent of family incomes. Migration is still one of the principal sources in guaranteeing economic endurance to Albanian households by providing a way out and survival from poverty. Surveys show that one year of temporary migration produces a five percent growth in consumption. This impact is 50 percent higher in the families with permanent immigrants. 35 percent of households have actually at least one member abroad as international immigrant and 50 percent of them have multiple members abroad. Albania is the country with the highest dependency rate from remittances. India, which is the world's biggest remittances recipient receives an average of 30 USD per capita, meanwhile Albania receives around 500 USD per capita (MPI, 2009). The high dependency rate makes necessary the smart and visionary management of remittances and increases the risks and consequences of poor management. The poor remittances management is demonstrated even as a lack of synergies between remittances and other important sources of development, such as Foreign Direct Investments and trade.

Impact of migration on population ageing: The population of Albania declined about 8 percent from 2001 to 2011. Average age of population declined from 28.3 in 2005 to 32.8 in 2011. There are two

principal factors causing the decline and ageing of population: lower birth rates and higher migration flow. Population over 65 has increased from 7.5 percent in 2001 to 10.5 percent in 2011.

The emerging Albanian migrants' entrepreneurship networks: Analysis of Albanian migration reveals the view that emigration was the only way out of the economically and politically chaotic situation of the country. The initial overriding of refugees to labor migrants served as a cause to delay the Albanian migrants' entrepreneurship networks and activities. Despite the size of the Albanian migrant communities in Greece and Italy, the Albanians have demonstrated a lower tendency to take up self-employment than other Eastern European communities. This weakens Albanians' opportunities for transnational entrepreneurship activities, which are mainly used by males. This was the context which shaped the features of Albanians' emerging trans-nationalism and its characteristics. In this context, Albanian emigrants act as transmitters of knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Transnational practices are increasing and there is an emergent transnational social and economic space, encompassing Albania, Greece and Italy.

There are also some other positive promising features of the migration of Albanians. **One of them is the collapse of the so-called "myths" about Albanian immigrants:**

- the myth of demon and criminal is being replaced by the myth of neighbor;
- the myth of usurper of the natives' jobs is being replaced by the myth of competitor;

- the myth of burden on welfare system is being replaced by the myth of sponsor to the welfare system.

These positive developments not only will contribute to improve the image of Albanian immigrants, but also will help to make labor migration management more effective, efficient and productive and influent to the country.

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