

MIGRATION OF ALBANIANS IN THE LAST TEN YEARS THE EVOLUTION AND CHANGES OF IMMIGRATION PATH

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1. Introduction

The migration of Albanians abroad is not a new phenomenon. It is documented at least since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the departure of a large number of inhabitants from Albanian territories. It still remains active and gives its significant impacts on both the demographic as well as the social and economic aspects of the country.

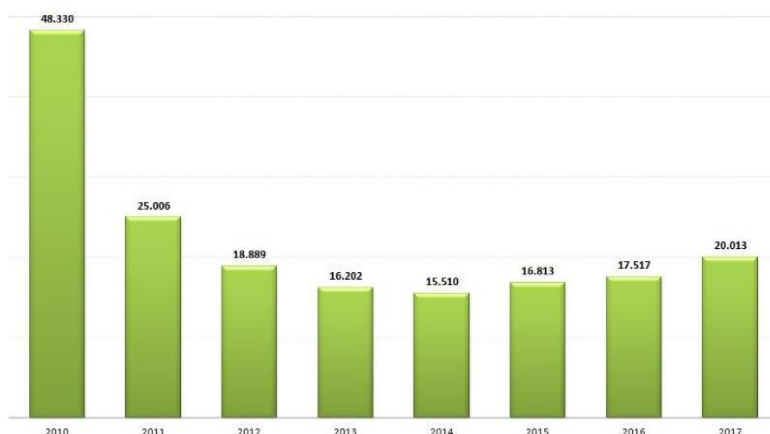
Albania has been significantly affected by the phenomenon of emigration since the early 1990s. A prevailing trend has been that of Albanian emigrants to the most developed countries in Europe, but also in America and Australia. For a long time, emigration from Albania has been largely irregular. For decades, the opportunities for regular emigration have been limited. With visa liberalization in 2010, the patterns and trends of emigration from Albania have changed. Its citizens can move within the Schengen area for 90 days in 6 months.

In 2010, Albania ranked fourth among the countries with the most access to Italy. With 48,330 entries, Albania was preceded only by Morocco, China and Ukraine. Between 2011 and 2012, the total number of entries was significantly reduced. The decrease also affected Albanians, whose inflows decreased until 2014, when they reached the minimum value of recent years, with the figure 15,510. Minimal is said in the context, because in any case it was about a consistent number of Albanian emigrants who received a residence permit in Italy. The turnaround started in 2015 with 16,813 entries, until 2017 when the quota of twenty thousand entries to Italy was exceeded. Therefore, the arrivals from Albania have never stopped. On the contrary, there has been a resumption recently. This trend is also confirmed by official Albanian statistical data. INSTAT noticed in early 2018 a population decline and positive net migration.

2. Albania in numbers: the last ten years

During these years, family motives have been the most common reason for entry into Italy. In 2010, the number of Albanians who came to Italy for family reasons and the number of those for work reasons did not change much. The gap between the two motives has widened over the years: the rise of family motives and the decline of job entrances. From 2010 to 2017 (Rando, 2018, pp. 218-228), it was increased from 49.6% to 69.8% of entries for family motives and it was decreased from 44.3% to 6.3% of entries for work motives. The significant increase of the first category and the decrease of the second are related to the economic performance and the decrease of the regular flows for work motives, already limited only for seasonal work (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - *New entries of Albanians in Italy, years from 2010 to 2017*



Source: INSTAT. For graphic processing Rondo Devole (2018).

To better understand the circumstances and factors that lead to the increase in the number of people leaving the country en masse, an in-depth socio-political and economic analysis should be done. However, in our opinion, the change of these factors does not happen from one year to the next. But even if it did, this change would not be so obvious.

Conditional circumstances we believe vary by generations and decades. For example, the factors that prompted immigration in the '90s were very different from the factors and circumstances that prompted immigration in 1997, or the factors that prompted immigration over the last 3-4 years. In the early 1990s, immigration was seen as the green light missing for decades due to the communist regime, and land across borders was an enigma that aroused curiosity and hope, mainly for the poor

people. The post-war period 1997 meant unconditional emigration and against any compromise, not only for the poor, but also for a considerable part of the intellectuals, considering leaving the country as the only way of survival. What remains troubling, in our opinion, has to do with the fact that today, after so many years, circumstances seem to have deteriorated and the tendency to leave has become not only a trend but also a focus for every social category.

Moving to neighbouring countries has historically been seen as the quickest and safest solution to economic problems, for low-income families and insufficient educational level to survive in the labour market. On the other hand, emigration has been seen and continues to be seen as a long-term investment, for those families who want to provide not only a basic income for a living wage or guarantee a normal life, but also for the future of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Migration is an expression of people's aspirations for dignity, security and a better future¹.

3. Albanian emigration in Europe

Before starting the analysis on Albanian migration to Germany (and the European Union), we must keep in mind that Albania has historically been an emigrant country. Albanians are Europeans, considering that Tirana is geographically closer to Berlin or Paris than with Athens or Sofia (Albania artificially looks far away from Europe because of its modern history and specifically 45 years of communist self-isolation. Currently 38% of Albanians born in Albania live abroad, which means that from a population of three million inhabitants, there are approximately one million Albanian citizens living abroad, mostly in Europe. Therefore, leaving abroad (and returning) are historically delineated traces of Albanians.

In recent decades, Albania is probably the only country in Europe that has been under constant pressure from high emigration. In addition to emigration, it remains evident that Albania tops the world list for high emigration potentials. A study by Professors I. Gëdeshi and Russell King (2018), recently published on behalf of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), showed that Albania ranks among the 15 countries for high emigration of educated people with scientific degrees.

¹ Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon defined migration as “an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family”, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2013-10-03/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-dialogue-international>.

In 2010 and 2011, it was found that about 31.3%² of the Albanian population with higher education was in emigration. The exodus of people with higher education is an internal problem of countries where economies of scale are lacking and the labour market presents no potential. According to OECD data, the emigration of educated Albanians in 2010 and 2011 increased by 223% compared to 2000 and 2001. This increase was greater than the emigration of other parts of the population with secondary and lower education.

The migration wave of 2014 and 2015 is notable for its “normality” (Cooperation and Development Institute, 2017). If in the previous waves of migration, leaving Albania and seeking asylum abroad was very dangerous, today this effort is planned almost as a “normal” trip. The costs are at least 10 times lower than before, and the preparation time varies on average from two to three days. The nature of the incentive to leave the country is difficult to determine accurately: it is a combination of factors, where most of them have to do with socio-economic conditions (and surprisingly with physical security). But the fundamental reason remains the provision of more suitable conditions, which would offer opportunities for a better future for them and their children.

Germany was selected because of its dominant advantages in attractive factors: an organized host system as well as generous cash benefits while the asylum application is in process. An even more interesting feature is the reputation of being a place that offers better living opportunities, which is a serious and structured country for this goal. Italy and Greece were relatively “easier” to reach, but they did not offer the kind of “future” that Germany enables. The effect of the 2008 financial crisis served as the impetus for the decision to emigrate. Common motivating factors (economic issues, poverty, housing and unemployment) form the basis of the tendency to seek a better life. Moreover, the decline in remittances, the slowdown in economic activity, and the return of the majority of emigrants from Greece and Italy, helped the migratory pressure to reach a turning point.

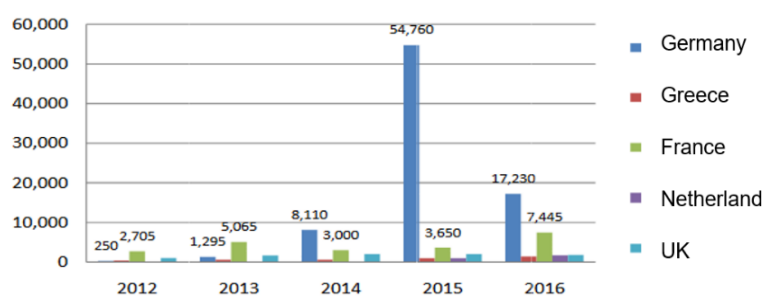
The year 2014 and the beginning of 2015, marked the peak of the number of Albanian migrants and asylum seekers in Germany. In particular, the number of young people in this outflow was high. EUROSTAT data show that 53,805 Albanians applied for asylum in Germany in 2015, of which 24,390 or about 45% belonged to the age group 18-34 years, 3,130 or 5.8% were 14-17 years old and 32,410 (60%) were male (EUROSTAT, 2016). Following the inclusion of Albania in the list of safe countries of origin, in Germany in 2015, and the increase of repatriation and forced return, the implementation of major information campaigns, as well as the increased efforts of the Albanian authorities to prevent departure from Albania, the movement calmed down somewhat. Out of 23,300 final decisions taken

² <https://www.monitor.al/shqiperise-ka-ikur-truri-2/>

by the German authorities for Albanian asylum seekers in 2015, only 55 decisions were positive. After the refusal, about 16,000 asylum seekers returned to Albania in 2015, following the removal order (EUROSTAT, 2016) and many more returned during 2016. The data are incomplete due to the difficulties encountered by the Albanian authorities in registering all forced returnees.

Referring to the Figure 2, there is a significant decrease of Albanians seeking asylum in EU countries, mainly in Germany. The phenomenon of Albanian migration to Germany during 2014-2016 (Hackaj, Shehaj, Zeneli, 2016), is characterized by influential parameters that are newly identified and / or previously unobserved. Albanian emigrants misunderstood and underestimated their chances of staying in Germany through the asylum procedure. EUROSTAT data shows that despite 53,805 asylum applications in 2017 and 34,000 by October 2017, only 65 applications have received positive responses from the German authorities. No individual work permit has been issued.

Figure 2 – Albanian citizen who has sought asylum in the 5 main countries, years 2012 - 2016



Source: General Directorate of Border and Migration, Tirana, 2017(Data from EUROSTAT, processed).

Analysing these data, we came to the conclusion that this phenomenon was a disorderly migratory wave and not a departure caused by political persecution. The main factor explaining the disproportion in the magnitude of applications and admissions was misinformation about: (i) the employment opportunities that Germany was supposed to offer and, (ii) the probability of Albanians obtaining a work permit through the asylum application procedure.

In this paper, we have ascertained the strong presence of a phenomenon that has had an effect on the profile and intensity of the Albanian migratory flow in Germany, during 2014-2016, and we have named it “*the connectivity or linking factor*” (European Commission, 2017). It can be explained as a situation where neither the market nor the state offer the individual the opportunity to express his / her value, or

to achieve his / her life goals. For example, someone may be qualified and able to have a successful career in Albania, however he / she is convinced that he / she is not given the opportunity by the state or the market to try it. In this case, the citizen feels “*disconnected*” from the system. Thus connectivity can be defined by: (i) one's perceived ability to achieve life goals, whether economic, social or simply personal success (including those of his / her family); and (ii) the decision to be made on the most appropriate country where these life goals can be achieved: either in his / her country of birth or by migrating to another country.

Migration is a phenomenon that affects the entire Balkans Western. The region is being emptied of young people, intellectuals, professionals and the middle class in general. This phenomenon has been seen since the departure of doctors from Albania, becoming an important point of the so-called phenomenon “*brain drain*”. For this reason, the Albanian governments have acted in different ways to solve the shortcomings that exist in our system. During the years 2006 - 2011, under the program for “*brain recovery*”, 62 people with scientific degrees returned to Albania, however some of them left again.

3.1. *Emigration of Albanian doctors to Germany*

The migration of doctors and other health workers, internationally, is not a new phenomenon, but nevertheless, it has attracted more attention in recent years, due to concerns that it could lead to the collapse of the situation of lack of qualified health care staff in certain countries, especially in some developing countries that are currently suffering from critical labour shortages. Based on the data obtained from the Order of Doctors, it turns out that there is an increase in the number of doctors who are seeking the “*Certificate of good behaviour*”. This Certificate is issued by the Order / Chamber or the Association of Doctors of his/her country, where it is confirmed that the doctor is registered, exercises the profession and that during the exercise of the profession there is no disciplinary measure against him / her.

The data show that in the last five years, the number of doctors who have requested this Certificate is increasing, respectively from 2013 - 2017:

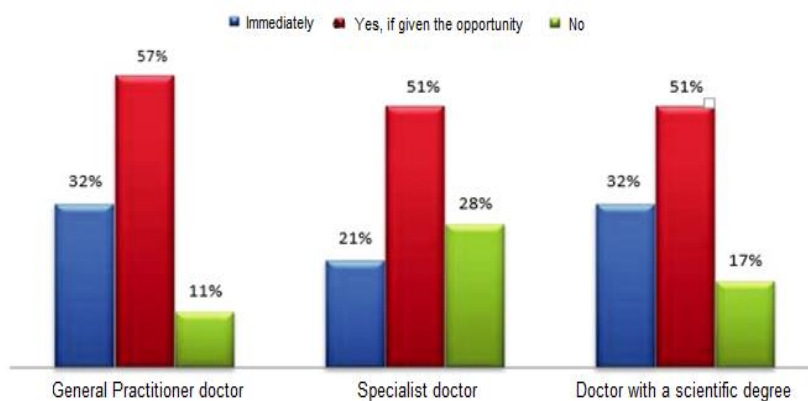
- In 2013, 76 general practitioners were provided with this Certificate
- In 2014, 128 general practitioners were provided with this Certificate
- In 2015, 124 general practitioners and 19 specialized doctors (a total of 143 doctors) were provided with this Certificate;
- In 2016, 165 general practitioners and 43 specialist doctors (in total 208 doctors) were provided with this Certificate;

- In 2017, 175 general practitioners and 32 specialist doctors (in total 207 doctors) were provided with this Certificate.

This Certificate is issued only for abroad (Canameti, 2017 e 2018). The data show that the number of doctors seeking a certificate to leave Albania each year is the same (or greater) than the number of doctors who graduate each year from the Medical University, which is 150. Number of Albanian doctors graduated in Albanian universities and currently working in Germany, according to the German Chamber of Doctors, is 5214. Such a number indicates the high percentage of Albanian doctors who aspire to Germany and their need to have a structured commitment (Figure 3).

As a result of mass migration and other factors, Albania has the lowest doctor coverage rate for the population, at 1.2 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, such a thing will strongly affect the performance of the academic level in Albania, but also the quality of the health care system. Albania, not only now, but for years is paying a high price for emigration. Many people, especially in rural areas, have a lot of difficulties due to the lack of health service in their areas. However, the lack of health specialists in recent years has also affected regional hospitals and university canters.

Figure 3 – Doctors leaving Albania, according to the profiling level, years 2013-2016.



Source: President of the Order of Doctors, 2017

3.2. Students to Germany

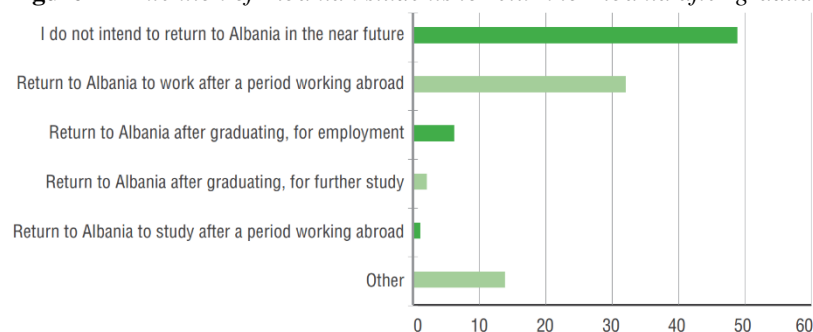
According to Gëdeshi and King (2018), the second hypothesis they put forward is \ EU university, it would be easier for Albanian students to find a job and integrate

into the host country. The survey conducted with 303 Albanian students abroad, mainly in Italy, Germany, France, Netherlands and United Kingdom, showed that 70% considered university studies as the first step to living abroad and 24.4% answered “maybe”. Only 5.6%³ confirmed that they had started studying abroad not as an opportunity to live there.

According to this study, every year, the youth and financial elite of Albania, leave the country irreversibly and the costs they leave behind are millions of euros. According to recent studies, countries attracting graduates from poor countries are supplied with educated human resources for free. This form of migration has become a major concern for the future of Albania.

The trend of Albanian students choosing to study abroad has been increasing recently. Most of them are addressed to European universities. Data published by EUROSTAT showed that European Union countries have issued 2360 new residence permits for Albanian students. Compared to a year ago this number has increased by 17%. The number of students seeking to study abroad has increased year after year. In 2014, the European Union granted students 1,627 residence permits issued for the first time. Since then their number has been increasing, especially in the last two years. In 2017 the number of permits issued to Albanian students was 2025. As for employees, Germany is the main destination for Albanians emigrating for study. During 2018, 781 residence permits were issued, about 46% more than a year ago. A year ago, 535 residence permits were issued for this reason. After Germany, Italy has the highest number of residence permits for educational reasons. According to EUROSTAT figures, 526 permits have been issued to Albanians, compared to 337 issued a year ago (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – *Intention of Albanian students to return to Albania after graduation, by %*



Source: CESS - Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 2017.

³ <https://www.monitor.al/shqiperise-ka-ikur-truri-2/>

Will the students return? Their removal affects both the demographic composition by accelerating the aging of the population in the country, as well as the removal of the “brain”, as they represent the potential for a skilled workforce in the country.

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of different countries, we conclude that the reasons for labour migration are different from one country to another, but what should be emphasized is that the economic, professional, political and personal factors are almost the same for all countries that have gone through or are going through the brain drain phenomenon. In conclusion, the phenomenon of immigration has long been a matter of concern. We think that deep preventive measures should be taken through the policies that the Albanian government should take urgently. Social policies should promote employment in the country in order to increase living standards, and the quality of public services, especially employment, education, health and other important sectors. If political commitments remain at these negligible levels, emigration will not only continue, but will have dangerous dimensions for the demographic situation in the country, also worrying in the disintegration of the family nucleus and social destabilization in the country from leaving of intellectuals, specialists and the workforce in general, pointing to the negative impacts in recent years.

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SUMMARY

Migration of Albanians in the Last Ten Years The Evolution and Changes of Immigration Path

Emigration is a term known in Albania for centuries. However, the emigration of Albanians, since the '90s, when a significant part of Albanian citizens emigrated, despite education, is experiencing a large increase in recent years.

Migration is a phenomenon that has affected almost all Albanians. Statistics show that most Albanians want to leave Albania in order to create a better life abroad. In the last 5 years we have seen a large increase in the departure of academics, for example mainly doctors and nurses. Lack of job satisfaction, opportunities for further professional education, career development, poor working conditions, political pressure, exposure to verbal and physical violence, are factors that have simulated the departure of people from Albania. This paper uses a scientific approach to understand the challenges and unresolved issues of migration in Albania, presenting a vivid picture of the situation in the past and present.

In the first part of this paper, we will explain the phenomenon of migration of Albanians from 2010 until today. In the second part, we will explain the phenomenon of the departure of the elite of society or as it has been defined differently by many researchers, the "brain of society". In the synthesis of this analysis, we will reach the conclusions on what are the

factors that push Albanians to leave their country and migrate to the most developed countries in the world. The methodology used gives us the opportunity to have a deeper understanding of the current situation, in terms of reasoning, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of people, as key actors. This paper aims to provide an analysis of the reasons that lead Albanian citizens to leave their country and migrate to others.

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