

RETURN MIGRATION IN ALBANIA: THE PROFILES OF RETURNEES.

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1. Introduction

Return migration depends on the changes of different aspects: i) the motivations for migrating (push factors); ii) the individual migrant (i.e. the individual has worked and saved while living abroad and is now thinking about setting up a business in the country of origin); iii) the family context (i.e. family reunification is impossible and the individual migrant decides to return in the country of origin). These factors are often considered to influence voluntary return (Danaj, 2006). But return experiences can also be caused by negative migratory outcomes: the impossibility to obtain regular status in destination countries, forced return, or deportation due to readmission agreements or return practices in the country of origin (IOM, 2006).

In the literature there is wide consensus about the importance of facilitating re-integration experiences. King (2000) argues that reintegration experiences concerns both objective and subjective factors. Objective factors can be identified through different indicators, such as: the amount of returnees who find a job after returning in the country of origin, returnees who access vocational training opportunities, those who start their own business. The subjective factors include: returnees perceptions of return, their adjustment experiences in the country of origin, and their outlook on temporary or permanent stay in Albania.

Since the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Albania has been a mass emigration country. According to INSTAT, 864.485 Albanians left the country between 1989 and 2005, which represents almost 28% of the total population. Recently, return migration has emerged as a central issue in Albania, especially after the Greek economic crisis (one of the most important destination countries of Albanian emigrants) and the improvement of the socio-economic and political situation of the country. In fact, INSTAT data demonstrate that returns have been on the rise every year since 2001, and in particular after 2008. This paper constitutes one of our first attempts to get a deeper understanding about returnees' profiles distinguishing the main reasons that motivated their return to inform migration policies in Albania. In this sense, the exploitation of the 2013 Survey on

Return Migration and Reintegration is a unique opportunity to rely on large-scale quantitative data on the subject.

2. Background: migration in Albania

Since the fall of the communist regime, Albania has experienced massive emigration flows. According to INSTAT estimations, more than half of the labour force of the country population lives abroad. Although Albanians decided to migrate to several countries around the world such as USA, Canada, Australia and other European countries, Greece and Italy are considered to be the biggest two recipients of Albanian migration (Piracha & Vadean, 2010).

Piperno (2002) identifies three migration flows, each of them characterised by different features and motivational aspects. Before the fall of the Hoxha regime, emigration was forbidden and Albanian emigration virtually did not exist. During the spring of 1991, after the collapse of the totalitarian regime, the first migration flow started, mainly caused by political and economic instability. In that period, migration reached the peak and it was estimated that about 300.000 of Albanians reached Italy and Greece.

In 1997, after the collapse of the pyramid scheme, the second migratory wave took place. The scheme was born as an alternative to the banking sector which was underdeveloped and many Albanians decided to invest all their savings. The fall of this scheme affected about one third of Albanian population. This migration flow had a feature of “constraint” and it can be defined as “forced migration”. After the severe socio-economic crisis and the civil unrest of 1997, Fato Nano’s government decided to put in place an important program of stabilisation and a reform in order to restart the economy. Despite this reforming program, emigration continued at the average of around 5.000 departures per month.

The third migratory wave has been called the “invisible flow” (IOM, 2008) and was a result of the economic instability and the lack of security of the Albanian context, especially during the Kosovo’s crisis. The beginning of the new millennium brought a new pattern of emigration since Albanians changed their image of Europe. In fact, destination countries of migrants switched from neighbouring countries to United Kingdom, USA and Canada, countries characterized by stronger economies and better possibilities for legal migration and/or regularization.

3. Theoretical framework

Undoubtedly, there is a vast body of international migration theories that has approached the subject from different disciplines¹. Here we explain only some of them, focusing our attention on how such theoretical frameworks have treated and interpreted return migration. Even if return migration is just one stage of a more complex migration story, it is not always seen as the absolute final step of the process. Some of these theories have read migrant's return to their country of origin as a positive, successful event, while others have considered it negative, as a clear sign of failure. But we state that interpreting return migration in such absolute terms, failure or success, denies the extremely complex and heterogeneous nature of both the event (return) and its protagonists (returnees).

The Neoclassical Theory holds a negative view of return migration, which is directly linked to the failure of the migration experience. This means that migrants who return to their country of origin do so because they were not able to reach an optimal financial situation during their stay abroad. There are two key concepts behind this particularly pessimistic interpretation (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969; Constant & Massey, 2002). The first regards the only reason conceived for leaving the country: to obtain higher earnings maximising the benefits of migration. The second, instead, is a mixture of the length and the goal of the experience, namely, migration is a permanent move, a definitive settlement, in which return is only an option when objectives have not been achieved.

The New Economics of Labour Migration contrasts, almost completely, the statements of neoclassicals. For this theory, the return of a migrant is the positive outcome of his experience abroad (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999; Constant & Massey, 2002). Migrants go back home because they succeed in the host country and fulfilled their expectations. Therefore, migration is just a temporal move that ends when migrants achieved their goals: increasing and diversifying household resources.

These views imply different understandings of migrants' sense of belonging to their country of origin. The second approach gives some space to the attachment to the home country in return decisions; while the first does not consider it, migrants are only interested in maximising their earnings, independently of their sense of belonging. But there is something that both approaches have in common: return migration is the last step, that is, the outcome that marks the end of a migrant experience.

According to Transnationalism, people that move abroad and, at some point, return home are part of a well-fed system of transnational identities, activities and

¹ For a more detailed explanation of return migration theories please refer to Cassarino (2004).

linkages that start to be built even before leaving the country of origin and are maintained and sustained both during the migration experience and after return (Portes et al. 1999). This is why, unlike the first two approaches, for transnationalists “once a migrant, always a migrant”. Within this framework, migrants start preparing their return once they have drawn together sufficient resources and think that they will find the expected conditions at home.

Cassarino (2004), in his conceptual approach to return migrants, argues that the success of returnees in their origin countries depends on their levels of return preparation. Such levels are the results of their capacity to mobilise tangible and intangible resources acquired during their experience abroad, and their readiness and willingness to return. Author’s statements add another important dimension to the heterogeneous profile of returnees: they not only differ according to their human, social and financial capital, according to their motivations and experiences before, during and after migrating, they also differ by their levels of readiness and willingness to return, and their capacity to mobilise resources.

4. Data and methods

The empirical analyses are based on the 2013 Survey on Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania conducted by the Albanian National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with a nationally representative sample size of 2.000 returnees. The national-level survey was designed to achieve a deeper understanding about return migration after the economic crisis of 2009, considering that return migration in Albania has grown significantly after this year.

The survey’s sampling frame was based on the 2011 Housing and Population Census, to gather a representative sample for the whole country of returnee population in Albania for the 2009-2013 period. Respondents were drawn from the 2009-2013 return migrant population aged 18 years and over across the 12 prefectures in Albania. The Survey on Return Migration and Reintegration defines an immigrant as an individual who returned (permanently or temporarily) to Albania, after living in another country for at least one year. The dataset includes information about three migratory stages: the situation of before leaving Albania, the experience abroad and post-return conditions. According to INSTAT and IOM (2014), 133.544 individuals above 18 years old have returned to Albania between 2009 and 2013: 98.414 males and 35.130 females.

The focus of the analyses was on the main three return reasons declared by respondents: lost the job in the host country, family problems and feeling nostalgia. The most frequent answer was the loss of employment in the country of

emigration, followed by emotional non-economic reasons (nostalgia) and family problems. We obtained a sample size of 894 return migrants: 593 lose their jobs, 194 felt nostalgia for Albania, and 107 had to solve family issues. This confirms that problematic reasons for returning prevailed among opportunity reasons.

We use multinomial logistic regressions to predict one's type of returnee. We report the relative risk ratios representing the odds of having return to Albania for: (1) family problems versus employment loss, and (2) feeling nostalgia versus employment loss. We examine the effects of several background variables in the analyses that are expected to be associated with the reasons for return migration (Table 1). The first set of predictors captures prior migration experiences: whether respondents before leaving the country (1) declared to have had a bad financial situation (0=no and 1=yes), (2) were already married (0=no and 1=yes), and (3) had children (0=no and 1=yes).

Table 1 – Descriptive measures of the variables used in the analyses of the main reason for returning to Albania (n=894).

Independent Variables	Lost job in the host country	Family problems	Nostalgia
<i>Prior migration experiences</i>			
Bad financial situation	60.1	52.9	28.5
Married	46.9	55.1	56.3
Had children	29.1	33.2	51.3
<i>Transnational ties and relations</i>			
Sent goods (frequently)	15.3	20.0	13.5
Maintained contacts (frequently)	79.7	88.1	75.0
Visited Albania (frequently)	35.3	49.0	46.8
<i>Post-return experiences</i>			
Change in marital status	10.6	9.7	6.1
Economic investment	5.1	1.3	6.6
Intention to stay	36.4	30.2	46.2
Return to place of birth or residence	86.2	93.9	90.9
<i>Other</i>			
Female	18.4	38.4	43.3
Age at return (mean)	34.1	35.8	44.6
Greece (last destination country)	82.2	60.3	44.1
Length of stay (mean)	6.0	5.0	5.0

Source: own elaboration, Survey on Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania 2013.

The second set of predictors pertains to transnational ties and relations. For economic ties with Albania, we included the variable (1) sent goods to the country of origin during the last twelve months in destination country (1=frequently, 2=sporadically, or 3=never). The last two variables of this set regard social ties,

respectively: (1) frequency of contacts, and (2) frequency of visits, again distinguishing among three categories (1=frequently, 2=sporadically, or 3=never).

The final set of explanatory variables refers to post-return experiences. Four dummy variables (0 = no, 1 = yes) indicate (1) a change in their marital status, (2) an economic investment, (3) their intention to stay permanently in Albania, and (4) if migrants return to their place of birth or residence. We also control for the effect of age at return, gender, last country of emigration, and length of stay. Table 1 provides an overview of selected descriptive measures for 2009-2013 returnees by the three main reasons for returning.

5. Some characteristics of recent return migration in Albania

According to INSTAT's indirect estimations, between 2001 and 2011, about 481.000 Albanians left the country and 243.000 of them were males. On the return side, 2011 Census data revealed that 139.827 Albanians returned to the country in this period and, as expected, most of them were males. Those who decide to return home were relatively young and part of the working age population (INSTAT & IOM, 2014).

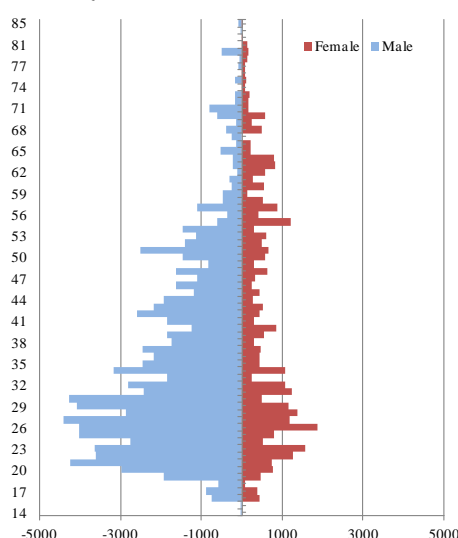
From our own elaborations on data drawn from the Survey on Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania of 2013, we found that more than half of individuals returned to Albania between 2012 and 2013. Most part of returnees, independently of the year of return, came from Greece. The share of returnees from Italy increased since 2011 and represented more than 30% of returnees' last country of destination in 2013.

As shown in Figure 1, most part of returnees came back to Albania at early stages of their lifecycles, when they are relatively young. In fact, the most common age group of return is 25-29 years old, and there is a low percentage of returnees of retirement age despite the common assumption that migrants work abroad until this age and then decide to spend the rest of their lives in Albania. According to gender, men are overrepresented compared to women (73.7% vs. 26.3%), and they are more likely to move for employment reasons while women are more likely to move for family reasons. Some of them returned to Albania in a permanent way, but for many it was just temporary (Maroukis & Gemi, 2013). In other words, return migration can be considered as a kind of circular migration and the lack of reintegration opportunities in Albania may act as a push factor for the re-emigration of returnees (INSTAT & IOM, 2014).

We also found a particular territorial redistribution of returnees in Albania. Figure 2 displays the percentage distribution of returnees' prefecture of return during the period 2009-2013 together with the ratio of returnees living in the

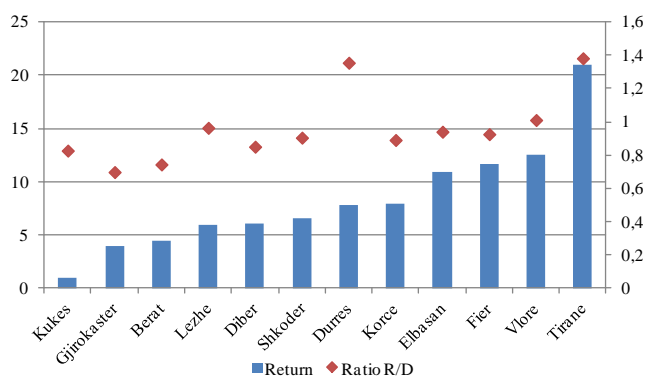
prefecture after their return to Albania to returnees leaving the prefecture where they lived prior departure. Despite the majority of returnees have settled in their place of birth or their place of usual residence, there are significant differences between prefectures because not all of them are equally affected by return migration. In fact, Tirana, Durres and Vlore are the only prefectures that experienced an increase in terms of the proportion of migrants settled there after their return.

Figure 1 – Age and sex structure of returnees.



Source: own elaboration, Survey on Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania 2013.

Figure 2 – Percentage distribution of returnees’ prefecture of return and return-departure ratios.



Source: own elaboration, Survey on Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania 2013.

6. Profiling returnees by reasons for returning

Table 2 shows the relative risk ratios from the multinomial logistic regression model and their statistical significance. This model calculates the relative risk that a migrant will return to Albania due to economic problems (loss job) versus emotional or non economic problems (nostalgia or family issues), after controlling by the influence of explanatory variables. The baseline category of the dependent variable contains those who declared that the main reason for returning was having lost their job in the last destination country.

Based on these results, we can observe a clear gender effect. The odds ratio of returning for family reasons relative to have lost the job in the host country is 3.15 times higher for females if compared to males, and it is even higher (3.72) when comparing those who felt nostalgia with those who lost their job. This finding might be related to the gendered nature of Albanian migration, in which women tend to play the role of the trailing wife within family migration decisions (Cooke, 2008 & 2013). In fact, the Albania Extended Migration profile 2012-2014 (Minister of Internal Affairs, 2015) identified family members of economic emigrants as the second most numerous group of the Albanian Diaspora.

Prior migration experiences diversely influence returning reasons. Compared to returnees who were already married before migrating, those who were not married are two times as likely (2.08) to return for feeling nostalgia (relative to returning for losing their job); and had a relative risk 12% lower to return for family problems. The odds ratio of returning for nostalgia relative to have lost the job is 23% lower for those who do not had children before migrating compared to those who had them, and 46% higher if their main reason for returning was related to family problems.

In line with the transnational theory (Portes et al. 1999) and Cassarino's approach (2004), one of the main conclusions we can draw from this model is that transnational ties and relations are among the most important determinants of return decisions in Albania. As shown in Table 2, the odds ratio for those who sent goods frequently to Albania during the last year of stay in the last destination country vs. those who did not is 2.3 times higher for returning for family problems relative to returning for having lost the job, and almost 2 times higher for the nostalgic group. Moreover, relative risks of returning for nostalgia or family problems relative to have lost the job is almost 2.5 higher and 1.5 higher (respectively) for those who maintained frequent contacts with the country of origin compared to those who did not. Finally, the relative chances of returning for nostalgia or family problems relative to have lost the job is around 20% higher for those who frequently visited Albania compared to those who did not, and 48% lower for those who visited the country sporadically.

These results confirm Transnationalism hypothesis of migrants' maintenance of links with their networks in origin countries. But, due to data limitations, we were not able to test if the strength of such relationships is due to a conscious plan of returnees to prepare their process of reintegration at home.

Return motivations are also shaped by post-return conditions. Returnees who do not plan to stay in Albania have higher odds (1.5) of returning for family reasons relative to those who, instead, are planning to settle permanently in the country. While the relative risks of returning for nostalgia are around 10% lower for the leavers. The odds ratio of returning for "nostalgia" relative to have lost the job is around 40% lower for those who did not invest in Albania compared to those who did it, and 3.8 times higher for those who return for family problems.

Compared to returnees who settled in a different place, those who chose to return to the place of birth or residence where they lived before leaving Albania are almost three times as likely (2.95) to return for family problems.

Table 2 – Multinomial logistic regression for the main reasons for returning to Albania between 2009 and 2013 (ref=lost job), relative risk ratios

Independent variables	Family problems vs. employment loss	Feeling nostalgia vs. employment loss
<i>Prior migration experiences</i>		
Bad financial situation	1.01	2.69
Not married	0.88**	2.08***
Do not had children	1.46***	0.77***
<i>Transnational ties and relations</i>		
Sent goods (frequently)	2.33***	1.92***
Sent goods (sporadically)	0.91**	1.24***
Sent goods (never) –reference-		
Maintained contacts (frequently)	2.46***	1.44***
Maintained contacts (sporadically)	1.02***	2.20***
Maintained contacts (never) –reference-		
Visited Albania (frequently)	1.24***	1.20***
Visited Albania (sporadically)	0.52***	0.52***
Visited Albania (never) –reference-		
<i>Post-return experiences</i>		
Change in marital status	1.21***	0.93
Economic investment (no)	3.77***	0.59***
Intention to stay (no)	1.53***	0.90***
Return to place of birth or residence	2.95***	1.19***
<i>Other</i>		
Female	3.15***	3.72**
Age at return (mean)	1.03***	1.07

Source: own elaboration, Survey on Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania 2013.

Statistic significance = *: $p < 0.10$; **: $p < 0.05$; ***: $p < 0.01$.

7. Concluding remarks

This paper examines the extent to which the situation lived by returnees before leaving Albania, their migration experiences lived in the last country of immigration, and the conditions lived after their return influence return migration decisions, and addresses the question regarding differences in the reasons for returning. The results clearly suggest that being female, not having children before departure, send goods, maintaining contacts and visit Albania frequently, do not investing after returning, having intentions to leave the country again, and returning to place of birth or residence are positively associated with returning for family problems instead of returning for having lost the job in the country of destination; while it is negatively related to not being married as a pre-migration condition.

Individuals appertaining to the nostalgic group are more likely to being female, not being married and having children before leaving the country, sent goods, maintain contacts and visit Albania frequently, returning to the place of birth or residence, and declaring their intentions to stay and not leaving the country again.

The findings presented in this study reveal that transnational activities, measured by the regular and sustained “traffic” of goods and social contacts between the host and the origin country (Cassarino, 2008; Portes et al., 1999), are among the most important determinants to explain how influential such links can be on shaping return decisions of Albanian migrants. To further analyse the extent to which initial conditions in the country of origin, migration strategies in destination countries, and the intentions to stay or leave the country again influence the reasons for returning, remains an important challenge for future research.

The plurality of returnees experiences observed in their motivation-for-return profiles is a primary element that needs to be taken into account in the management of international migration. Recently, several progresses have been made in order to develop migration policies in Albania. Even if the National Strategy on Migration and its associated Action Plan foresee to provide financial and social support for voluntary returnees, the absence of measures for forced returnees indicates that this group is not yet a government priority.

It is certainly extremely difficult to obtain a 360° vision of return migration. We have tried to contribute to the knowledge of this process analysing returnees’ profiles distinguished by the main reasons that motivated their return. This brings us to a fundamental critique to return migration theories: return seems to be a matter of failure or success. But how we can measure the positive or negative gradient of return, do people who feel nostalgia failed in their migration experiences? We find that return migration is not only about an economic failure in destination countries, such as losing the job, or solving family issues in the country

of origin; it is also about feeling nostalgia for what have been left behind. Thus, an important slide of Albanian migrants remain attached to their country and decide to end their experience abroad basically to go back home.

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SUMMARY

Return migration in Albania: the profiles of returnees.

For many decades, since the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Albania has been a mass emigration country. According to INSTAT, 864.485 Albanians left the country between 1989 and 2005, which represents almost 28% of the total population. Recently, return migration has emerged as a central issue in Albania, especially after the Greek economic crisis (one of the most important destination countries of Albanian emigrants) and the improvement of the socio-economic and political situation of the country. In fact, INSTAT data demonstrate that returns have been on the rise every year since 2001, and in particular after 2008.

This paper provides an overview of return migration in Albania by profiling returnees. Data will be drawn from a national survey undertaken by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2013. This survey represents the first effort to quantify and characterise return migration to Albania over the last years, asking about respondents' situation before and during migration and after their return. The paper shed light on the heterogeneity of returnees' socio-economic and demographic characteristics, and their main return decisions.

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