

CONTEXT ANALYSIS – ELBASAN, ALBANIA

Political, economic and social background of the country\local area and general current challenges

Since the end of the last conflict in the region in 1999, Western Balkans has faced a lot of challenges. These challenges have a geopolitical, security, economic and social nature and relates to both the local and the national political level.

On the regional and national level, economic and social challenges have to do mostly with the current economic situation that the region is facing after the economic and financial crisis, which has badly hit the entire region. The six western Balkans countries have inherited poor economies and are currently lacking reforms and brave privatisation processes, lack incentives for [attracting] foreign direct investments and of trust in the judiciary system.

On the other hand, local political challenges are more related to the political systems in the countries per se, as well as deficient democracies and ruling political oligarchies in almost all the countries in the Western Balkan regions.¹

The emigration of Albanians is regulated by the 2003 Labor Migration Act, which amended the 1995 Migration Act. It legally defines the government's responsibilities with regard to migration and emigrants: information, assistance, the facilitation of their integration into the receiving countries' labor market, social and human services systems, and the promotion of the return of migrants' social, human, and financial capital². In a wider sense, Albania's current migration policies are aimed at discouraging real and potential emigration flows by creating employment opportunities. One path to accomplishing this is creating new jobs in the country. Another is extending channels of legal migration through signing seasonal employment agreements with neighbouring countries, especially Greece (1996) and Italy (1997), and other EU states. Along these lines, Albania signed with Germany an Agreement on Language and Vocational Training of young people through employment. This agreement, signed in 1991, is still not in force because of the

¹ <http://www.balkananalysis.com/blog/2016/03/25/challenges-and-opportunities-for-albania-and-the-balkans-interview-with-edith-harxhi/>.

² <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/albania-looking-beyond-borders>.

failure of the Albanian beneficiaries to return to the country after completing their training in Germany.

As a reflection of the economic crisis, individuals were no longer able to maintain their migration projects in Italy and particularly Greece (Maroukis, Gemi 2013). Qualitative studies suggest that at the beginning of the economic crisis, Albanians in Greece attempted to stay on, but increasingly were unable to do so. They have returned to Albania, but plan to re-emigrate as soon as the opportunity arises.³

The socio-economic groups with relatively loose work contracts (e.g.: temporary contracts and self employed) and the low and medium skilled workers have borne much of the brunt of the recession so far.

Moreover, a considerable increase in unemployment is registered among craft workers and those previously employed in elementary occupations, largely working in services. Women are less affected than men, given that the crisis hit first and foremost sectors where male employment is relatively high (e.g.: car industry, construction)⁴.

Migration and refugee situation and measures taken by the government, NGOs and other organizations

Basic facts on migration, asylum seekers and refugees

Since 2009, an increasing trend of returns has been noted, while most returns have occurred in 2012 and 2013 (53.4 percent). Returnees are dominated by voluntary returns (94%) occurred in Greece, 70.8% followed by and Italy 23.7% and other countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, etc. 42.5% of Albanian migrants have returned to Albania along with other family members. About 77% of them are accompanied by spouse, while 19% are accompanied by adult children and 35% are accompanied by minors. Data show that only 26.5% of returnees have contacted the Migration Counters to receive support (1,314 persons). From this percentage, the majority of returnees received direct assistance from the Counsellors of employment (58% of cases) and mediation (in 42% of cases) in other public or private services.

³ Migration in Albania, may, 2014, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC & INSTAT, 39.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/pages/publication16040_en.pdf.

During the period 2010-2015, a total of 235 migrants returned from emigration were registered in the Regional Employment Directorate of Elbasan.

During the last year, a total of 15 migrants returned from emigration and 10 children as returnees were registered from municipality and DAR Librazhd. These statistics regards the ones that are presented in the official services of municipality but the informal figures goes to a considerable number of 75 migrants and 45 children.

In Municipality of Peqin are identified 55 families who have returned from emigration (Germany) and in Municipality of Gramsh there are about 40 families, and 120 young people who have returned.

For Cerrik Municipality, over this period about 100 families emigrated around this state to build a new life and among them were young people who had completed 9 years of education or secondary education.

Policies and actions on the national and local level

Migration policy of the Republic of Albania consists of emigration and immigration policies embodied in the migration framework developed and adopted for this purpose and is in line with the EU migration policy and framework. The National Strategy on Development and Strategy 2007-2013 represents the key strategic framework for policies and reforms undertaken by the Albanian government and includes the Government's vision on migration which is broadly tackled in the National Strategy on Migration. This vision consists in ensuring a comprehensive migration policy based on the establishment and functioning of a national management system for migration.

It describes the modalities for accountability and monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan that consists of concrete measures for each institution involved.

The legal basis for return and readmission is an integral part of the migration law in Albania. The national readmission legislation consists of: Constitution of the Republic of Albania No 84 of 21.10.1998, published in the Official Gazette No 28, page 1073, publication date: 07.12.1998; Law No 9749 of 04.05.2007 "On State Police", published in the Official Gazette No 73, page 2171, publication date: 19.06.2007, entry into force on 04.07.2007 and Law No 9959 of 17.07.2008 "On foreigners", published in the Official Gazette No 124, page 5479, publication date: 01.08.2008, entry into force on 1.12.2008.

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In general, reintegration measures envisaged in the NAPM do not fully address the reintegration needs of returned Albanian citizens, because of the lack of a well-defined information mechanism concerning public services available and continuous referral. Besides, measures are often generalized and focus on employment promotion and vocational training, but people needs entail more than that.

In reference to the reintegration services for vulnerable categories (victims of trafficking and unaccompanied minors), all legal and institutional instruments related to the referral mechanisms are in place in entry BCPs to receive unaccompanied minors. In accordance with Law 9668/2006, it is required to strengthen the inter-institutional cooperation concerning returned Albanian citizens, particularly for smooth functioning of the referral system and mutual exchange of information between the Migration Counters and all the other institutions such as MoI, MES, MPWT, METE, MoH, etc. and their subordinate institutions to offer support services that facilitate the reintegration of returnees.⁵

Main actors / stakeholders dealing with migration

Since 2010, the Government of Albania has made continuous efforts to develop and implement a policy framework on return migration and reintegration. The Reintegration Strategy for Returning Albanian Citizens (2010-2015) and its Action Plan was approved in 2010. The overall aim of the strategy is to ensure a sustainable return for Albanian migrants through support to the reintegration process in the country, despite the form of return, voluntary or involuntary. The strategy also foresees that provision of specific services should be provided to certain vulnerable categories of returnees, in compliance with other existing policy provisions (such as the Anti-Trafficking Strategy), legal provisions (such as for those for victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors, Roma, migrants with economic problems, etc.) or through tailor-made projects/programmes designed by and implemented with the support of different donors (Qeveria Shqiptare, 2010).

The core element of the reintegration mechanism is to be found in the Migration Counters located at 36 regional and local employment offices throughout the country, which assess the reintegration needs of returning migrants and refer them to existing public services, such as health, education

⁵ Strategy on Reintegration of Returned Albanian citizens, 2010-2015, 6-16.

employment and so forth. The establishment of such mechanism illustrates the efforts of the country to consolidate institutions that deliver services and social support and to increase the overall access of the population to public services. The registration at Migration Counters is conducted on a voluntary basis

An interview is conducted by the Migration Specialist at the Counter to assess the needs of returnees, in particular immediate needs so as to be able to refer the returnees to other available public services. Returnees expect Migration Counters to deliver a wide range of public services which is not possible because of the various components that reintegration entails, that requires the intervention of various service providers (e.g.: employment services, health services, education services, etc.). It is also important to highlight that in terms of employment services, Migration Counters largely fail to assist returnees in rural areas. According to national statistics, returnees in rural areas are considered to have employment simply because their family owns a plot of land. Once they are considered as self-employed in agriculture, they cannot claim unemployment benefits or economic assistance.⁶

At the local level, through the partnership of NGO TVO - Municipalities of Elbasan and Librazhd and the financial support of German program in Albania GIZ, on August 2017, an initiative in increasing social has been undertaken. This initiative concerned educational and professional integration for at least 500 returnees and 2000 youngsters as school students - among them, 40% returnees from emigration. Among the main aims: increasing school attendance, reducing school drop, offering culture and educational assistance for further integration into the education and vocational system and promoting the social inclusion of returnees with a special focus on young people through the enhancement of their personal, interpersonal, creative and social skills.

Another special focus has given to creating an enabling environment for youth, specifically to returnees from Germany in Gramsh; Peqin; Cerrik municipalities, in order to develop their knowledge and skills and widen youth opportunities to succeed in life. Interventions worked parallel at different levels: individual, youth group, family and local/regional structures using an empowerment approach in partnership with local structures to ensure sustainability. This new designed intervention will continue developing the youth social inclusion and capacity building,

⁶ Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania, IOM & INSTAT, 2013, 19-20.

skills development, which will eventually empower and prepare them for inclusion and active participation on the labor market, facilitating employment and self-employment.

A special focus for the integration of the returnees and emigrants entering into Albania is given toward improvement of opportunities to enhance capacity building and skills development, VET and employment of the beneficiaries. In fact, coaching for employment services will allow them to enter in the labour market with enhanced personal skills, while training on the job will give them the necessary professional competencies to find decent jobs and/or foster their entrepreneurship. Such initiatives coming up from the partnership of the public and non-public agencies will act also to enhance their social and interpersonal skills, involving them in socializing and culture activities.

Attitudes and behaviours towards migrants and refugees

We studied 42 life stories of Albanian migrants, from which 12 interviews with return migrants from Greece and 30 migrants that are actually in Greece. Returnees, and especially women, face several struggles and difficulties in their psycho-social, cultural and economic reintegration upon their return, which make them mentally and psychologically vulnerable.⁷

According to the interviews, Albanian emigrants are taught to face with easy and difficult situations. They have been taught to respond when they are call as Jorgo or Pipino. They are taught to not hurt when they insult so without understanding the reason”⁸ They are also called ‘Disappointed returnees’: during the period 2009-2013, for example, a total of 133,544 Albanian citizens aged 18 and over have been returned.⁹ Moreover, "for those who return, there are great challenges for reintegration into society and the economic life of the country. Finally, the returnees usually exhibit identity problems by not knowing where they really belong and often feel at the crossroads between staying and leaving.¹⁰

⁷ Xhaho, A. and Çaro, E. (2016). Returning and Re-Emigrating Gendered Trajectories of (Re)Integration from Greece. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3, 1.

⁸ <http://www.ikub.al/Lajme/1011110061/Article-Te-rikthyerit-pas-vitesh-Ne-atdhe-ndihemi-me-refugjate-se-ne-Greqi.aspx>.

⁹ Emigration shakes the business 08/02/2016 HTTP://WWW.MONITOR.AL/EMIGRACIONI-TRONDIT-BIZNESIN-2/.

¹⁰ Albanians at the crossroads: between leaving, returning and looking for identity and citizenship. Caro, E., 21 November 2015.

Role of cultural organizations and Ngos in the context of migration

In Elbasan there are two or three Albanian NGOs such as Tjeter Vizion NGO, Women forum, ATK, but also the Italian NGO CIES and cultural center for children who adopt performing arts, contemporary theatres or other cultural activities to foster intercultural dialogue. Forum theatres are also performed for high school students of the region and the community around. An example is the experience of Tjeter Vizion, in partnership with Italian NGO CIES, in performing the forum theatre entitled: "I travel alone" which was a national performance involving the 9- years school's students of many schools in Albania in a cultural journey to know the phenomenon of trafficking of human beings. The impact of this national and regional performance was a massive one as the children were involved directly and personally in these cultural activities.

Another interesting practice is represented by the experience of the NGO Women forum in recording the best videos/performances/ theatres/ messages of the high school students against domestic violence in Elbasan region.

Good practices

In September 2017, in partnership with TVO - Elbasan Municipality and funded by the German program in Albania GIZ Albania, one stop information office for returnees to the Elbasan and Librazhd municipalities was open.

Any visitor (returnees and not only) will be able to request information, through reviewing his / her personal data, by completing a counseling form. Information Advisers will inform them and refer him to local institutions and local agencies in case of need for assistance. Among the involved institutions and organizations there are the Regional Employment Directorate for Work (informing and referring cases of returnees and families in need), the Social Services Department of the municipality, for the benefit of economic assistance; the Public Vocational Training Center and those of non-public and private agencies that offer professional courses; the Regional Education Departments for children and youth returnees to create facilitating conditions, educational programs and psycho-social services in case of need; the University "A. Elbasan" to refer to all cases of returnees who require to attend university studies and receive scholarships; the Regional Directory of the Agriculture for referral of returnee families coming from rural areas, who may benefit from the agricultural subsidy schemes and, finally, referrals for information meetings with DIMAK

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Albania on employment, vocational training or education programs in Germany in accordance with the legal procedures and rules that allow informed decision making.

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