

MIGRATION OF RETURN

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Abstract

This presentation aims to highlight the main features of the phenomenon of migration, the return, and reintegration of returning migrants. Suitable financial and economic crisis of recent years, made it possible for Albanian migrants to return home to build a normal life. The migration in Albania is a present phenomenon commencing as early as 1990. Although the level of migration has had fluctuations over the past two decades, overall performance tends to grow over time.

Albania has been a massive migration phenomenon from the beginning of the 90s. This important aspect of the democratic regime was virtually unknown before the '90s, when the Albanian society was a closed society.

After the 90s, the main component that shaped democracy was immigration.

It is known that people migrate when their country lacks the resources and opportunities to fulfil their needs and aspirations. This is the situation of emigrants who left for a better life for themselves and their families after a long period of communist transition which resulted in poverty and high unemployment levels.

The term "a better life" includes a wide range of factors that pushed Albanians to flee and is reflected on the lack of homogeneity among immigrants

As mentioned above, suitable financial and economic crisis made it possible that after 2009, there were a considerable number of immigrants who returned to Albania by investing their savings and trying to integrate into social life in the country.

Considering that the phenomenon of returning immigrants is a significant measure, it is necessary to study it, understand the problems of migration, and contributing to efficient approach for reintegration of immigrants into society.

Keywords: Migration, Immigrant, Reintegration.

1. RETURN MIGRATION OVERVIEW

The literature review presented in this chapter provides a synthetic theoretical and evidence-based answer to the following questions: a) why do migrants return and what motivates and influences the return process; b) what are the challenges of re-integration and the factors that

influence successful re-integration; and finally c) what is the response that the country of origin can put in place in order to facilitate re-integration of return migrants?

Since the 1960s, return migration has been subject to contrasting approaches from different disciplines and schools of thought. A variety of empirical inquiries regarding this issue have attempted to explain the manifold factors shaping migrants' patterns of return and reintegration in their country of origin. The definitions of return migration vary also according to the theoretical approaches. Some scholars and practitioners have defined return in terms of time and space, and therefore distinguished between temporary and permanent return (Agunias, 2006). Others, such as IOM (2011) have based their definition on return migration on the form of return (voluntary or involuntary) and time spent abroad (at least a year). In the last two decades, return has been narrowly defined in the current lexicon of governmental and intergovernmental agencies as the "act of leaving the territory of a destination country". In the European Union (EU), for example, this vision of return has been presented as an "integral part" of the instruments geared towards dealing with irregular migration in an effort to protect the integrity of immigration and asylum systems in most of the member states (European Council, 2002; European Commission, 2005).

Reasons for return vary from macro-scale economic or political events to individual migrant perspectives. Russell King (2000) portrays return migration as a process initiated by various factors and leading to a variety of effects. He further states that cause factors can be: a) economic (unemployment/end of contract, more/better jobs, desire to invest savings); b) social (racial hostility/difficulty in integration, homesickness, desire for enhanced status); c) family/life cycle (retirement, parental ties, marriage, children's education); or political (government policy at sending and receiving ends). Depending on the context, some factors may be more relevant than others.

2. FACTORS INFLUENCING RE-INTEGRATION

Beyond the variety of definitions applied, the common factor in all theoretical approaches and definitions used for return migration remains the interest of all those concerned to maximize the potential of return migration to the benefit of the migrant, his/her family and of the community of return. This perspective becomes more evident when examining return migration theories, such as the neo-classical one, the new economics of labour migration' theory, structuralism, transnational's and the social network theory. These theories examine various aspects, such as the motives of the returnee, the perspectives of returnees on the return and the role of the country of origin in the so called "successful return". The latter is often defined by some scholars (e.g Black et al., 2004) as sustainable return. According to them, 'it is helpful to consider three standpoints from which sustainability may be considered. First, return can be seen as sustainable in relation to the situation of each individual returnee, and also in relation to the home society as a whole.

Second, sustainability' for individuals can be considered from the 'subjective' advantage point of the returnees, as well as in terms of the objective measurement of their situation. Third, sustainability can be measured in relation to the physical location of desired location of migrants after return, but also in relation to socio-economic and political-security considerations. The success of reintegration is also often measured through sustainable return.

On the other hand, general consensus exists among scholars and practitioners in the area of return migration, in that the successful reintegration has two interrelated dimensions: the first dimension relating to personal success, entailing social and economic security for the migrant as an individual (including family members) in the local community of the country of origin. The second dimension relates to the contribution of return to the economic and social development of the community of return and to the country of origin. Return migration can be a real stimulus to the development of local communities where returnees settle. Migrants may invest their savings on productive activities, utilize their skills and know how gained in migration, and hence can generate employment for their family members and their communities. Migrants may give a new impetus to the labour market development and technology advancement in the countries of origin. However, King R. quoting Ghosh (2000) calls our attention to a useful distinction between the economic welfare of the individual returning migrant or family and the aggregate contribution that return migration makes to the country, region and community of origin. According to him, the number of returnees, duration of absence from the country, destination of the return, social class, and nature of the training received abroad, along with the way the return is organized, may adversely influence reintegration home.

The IOM definition of reintegration calls our attention for assessing the social, economic and the cultural impact of reintegration by looking at the conditions in the country of origin. Cultural reintegration is seen as the process of re-integration of the returnee to the values, way of living, language, moral principles, and traditions of the country of origin's society and economic reintegration, as the reinsertion into the economic system of the country of origin, aiming the use of know-how gained in migration to promote the economic and social development of the country of origin. Social reintegration entails the development of a personal network and on the other hand the development of civil society structures such as associations, etc (IOM, 2011).

Having considered all of the above, the 'three-stage approach' on return migration developed from Jean-Pierre Cassarino (2008) represents a comprehensive conceptual model for analysing return migration and reintegration. This approach views return migration as part of the migration cycle; all stages of the migration cycle influence the willingness and preparedness of the migrant to return, consequently the success of his/her reintegration.

The 'three-stage approach' is therefore structured along three main migratory stages: Stage 1) situation before leaving the country of origin; Stage 2) experience of migration lived in the main country of immigration; Stage 3: return to the country of origin – Post-return conditions. In other words, this approach makes it possible: i) to understand the extent to which the experience

of migration, as well as the social and institutional context at home, have had an impact on patterns of reintegration; ii) to analyse why and how the human, social and financial capital of the interviewee has changed over time; iii) to compare diachronically the various factors which have motivated and shaped the migratory stages.

Cassarinos' model also represents the theoretical approach applied in this study which allows for a better understanding of the migration experience, of the factors which have motivated and shaped the migratory stages, of the social and institutional context at home and their impact on patterns of reintegration. Reintegration of returnees is considered as part of the return cycle even though return itself can be temporary in nature, depending on the migrant decision to settle (or not) back in the country of origin and the respective length of stay upon return. Return preparedness is about having the ability and the opportunity to gather the tangible and intangible resources needed to secure one's return home. Return preparedness, is thus, a policy option for policy-makers both from host and origin countries to adequately respond to return migration flows.

3. RETURN MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF ALBANIA

Although return migration has emerged as part of the modern migration phenomena since the late 1990s, reliable data on the trend of return migration have been largely lacking. In 2004, the Sussex University Center for Migration Research undertook the first research project aimed at defining, measuring and influencing sustainable return in the Western Balkans. The project provided some useful recommendations on how to prepare the reintegration process for returning migrants in these countries that could serve as a useful source for respective governments to build on platforms of successful reintegration policies and programmatic interventions. However, the project could not go as far as to size return migration in these countries.

In an effort to better explore the links between migration, education and training systems and labour markets in 2007, the European Training Foundation undertook a pilot study in Albania. The study revealed that migration will continue to play a role in Albania in the short term, and males would be more prone (46.9%) to migrate than females (40.9%). The majority of potential migrants would also view migration as a process leading to better work opportunities upon their return to Albania. The study also indicated that very few returning migrants (1.6%) were aware of any government support programmes intended to facilitate return. The findings of the ETF survey suggested that return migration is a potential gain that has so far not been fully utilized in Albania and recommended to offer effective reintegration programmes for potential returning migrants, including better reception and advice for investment opportunities and access to business support and credits for entrepreneurship.

In 2008, the IOM Tirana study “Identification of the areas most affected by emigration and return migration in Albania: profiling of returning migrants”, elaborated the first profile of returning migrants in Albania. The study found that return migration in Albania has many features and it includes both voluntary and involuntary dimensions, therefore and experiences of return are considered along a continuum ranging from positive to negative ones. The study revealed that that 66 per cent of those who faced unemployment in destination countries stated that they would consider permanent return, if there was secure employment in Albania. Other important conditions for permanent return would be for family reasons (23%) and acceptable living conditions (14%). The unemployment and lack of institutional support in destination countries were identified as strong predictors of permanent return. The study focused also on the issue of re-integration difficulties and services; 60 per cent of the participants described integration as difficult, while 24% found the opposite. The study also attempted to identify the prevalence of assistance received prior to or following return. An overwhelming 83% of the sample stated that they did not receive any form of assistance upon return. Additionally, the study looked at the type of assistance received and variations across forms of return (i.e. voluntary, regular, forced, etc.). It showed that the primary forms of assistance across all forms of return were, transportation of belongings, receiving support in job-seeking efforts, facilitating social reintegration, and professional training. When return was voluntary and assisted by non-governmental and international organizations, the primary source of support was in re-integration, primarily assistance in educational and vocational arenas. The survey also found that the majority of responses (55%) indicate that employment opportunities should be allocated to enable smooth return and reintegration processes. Financial incentives (25%) were also perceived as important, as well as professional training programs (6%). These findings reflect the primary reasons that lead to migration in the first place, which tend to be economic and occupational in nature.

Other relevant sources regarding the dimension of return migration in Albania are provided a recent study conducted by Eda Gemi in 2013 entitled “Albanian irregular migration to Greece: a new typology of crisis”. As the title clearly suggests, recent return migration flows in this study were seen from the irregularity point of view and the chosen case-study was Greece. Quoting the sources of the Hellenic Ministry of Interior, Gemi notes that around 130,000 to 140,000 Albanian migrant workers lost their permission of stay in Greece because of the financial crisis, as they were not able to secure the required number of social security stamps (the so called IkA). Nevertheless, she points out “it is extremely difficult to assess whether all of them settled in Albania, eventually returned again to Greece or migrated to other countries with more robust economies (EIIAMEP, 2013). The 2011 Population Census provided a clearer overview of return migration in between 2001 and 2011. An INSTAT publication on “Migration in Albania” issued in 2014 argued that returns have been on the rise every year, in particular after 2008 (INSTAT, 2011). Registered returnees are mostly males (around 2/3 of the total) and the most common age is 30-34 years. Considering the number of returnees by country, census data showed that the increase in returns is largely caused by Albanians coming back from Greece, followed by those

coming back from Italy. Returns from other countries, such as the UK, USA, Germany and Turkey are to a lesser extent. As far as return reasons go, they are related to work and family concerns, which are the two dominant factors for both men and women.

Having analysed the specific studies and surveys on return migration in Albania over the last years, one concludes that a systematic study on return migration, including all the three-stages of return (Cassarino, 2004) is needed in order to better profile the return migrants and to shape tailor-made services for a smooth and sustainable return. In addition, the dynamic of return migration from Greece requires a more in-depth analysis so as to better understand the impact of the crisis on the mobility of Albanian labour migrants.

3. REINTEGRATION PATHS IN ALBANIA

As of 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 (Albanian Government, 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 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. Yet, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the institutionalization of reintegration support to returnees has achieved its aim. In an effort to profile the returnees and assess their needs, Grazhdani (2013) provides an analysis of the Migration Counters based on statistics collected over a two-year period: July 2010, which is when the units started operating, and July 2012. A profile of returnees was, therefore, elaborated indicating that the majority of returns were from Greece (86%). The majority of returnees have returned with their families (74%) and 79.1% of them intended to stay long-term in Albania. The main reasons for return included lack of employment in the destination country (88%), followed by lack of documentation and the desire to invest at home (SHkP, 2013). A total of 1.752 returnees were registered as unemployed job seekers in 2012 against 912 that were registered in 2011, and at least 15 % of returnees were granted economic assistance. The majority of returned emigrants had some work experience in sectors

such as construction, agriculture, services, domestic services, tourism, mechanic and electrical services, etc. As a result, they sought employment in these very same sectors, as they felt they had sufficient knowledge and skills.

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 the returnee, in particular immediate needs so as to be able to refer the returnee 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 require the intervention of various service providers (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. Neither can they benefit from other job brokering services, unless they state they are no longer living in rural areas. As part of career guidance services, returnees are also referred to vocational training (16% of the returnees for 2012). A good part of returnees require support to access health services (32.29 % during 2012) and often turn to Migration Counters to get registered as unemployed job seekers in order to secure free access to health services. Other referral services with a more visible impact on community and country development are the orientation to business start-up and growth (3% of returnees during 2012).

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