



COMPREHENDING ALBANIAN
MIGRATION TO GERMANY
IN THE PERIOD 2014 – 2016
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Comprehending Albanian migration to Germany in the period 2014 - 2016
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Comprehending Albanian migration to Germany in the period 2014-2016

PREFACE

Albania does not belong to the so-called “Western Balkan-route” of war-refugees and other asylum-seekers. Even after the closing of that territorial migration-transit corridor Albania didn’t emerge as an alternative route for migrants from Middle East or Africa although the possibility of illegal entering in Albanian territory in the border-crossing zone is still valid.

But, especially since 2015 Albania has become obviously in the focus of international attention as one of the “Balkan-origin-countries” of legal and illegal emigration to Western Europe and especially to Germany.

That time almost 40 percent of all registered asylum seekers in Germany came from the Balkans, where by Albania and Kosovo hold the second and the third place after the migrants from Syria.

Only 2.6 percent of asylum applications from Albanian migrants, predominantly young people in the age group between 18 and 35, were accepted as “justified” by German immigration institutions.

Balkan exodus has been primarily poverty-driven migration and not the case of seeking asylum because of war and ethnical expulsion or persecution due to someone’s origin or status.

The European Union and also Germany categorized in 2015 the Balkan countries Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro as “safe countries of origin”, as they did in November 2014 referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia.

Obvious reasons for Albanian citizens to leave their country are high unemployment, low income which in many cases is lower than the social benefits in Germany, the lack of trust in state institutions which are perceived to be corrupt and inefficient, the real or subjectively felt lack of job-perspectives, especially among young academics, and especially unrealistic and excessive expectations according to benefits in Western Europe, primarily in Germany.

The challenge of “poverty migration” from the Balkan region to Western Europe and Germany has become meanwhile also an important issue of the so-called “Berlin-process” and was strongly debated in the summits of Vienna 2015 and Paris 2016.

In Albania for the time being no thorough investigation has been carried out on the determinants of that impressive outflow.

The following study, elaborated by a high professional scientist team of the “Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) / ShtetiWeb” supported by the Tirana-office of the Hanns-Seidel-Foundation (HSF), aims at fill in this apparent gap.

The study investigates in a paramount and comprehensive level the external pull factors and internal push-factors of the Albanian case of emigration wave to Germany and contributes therefore by its “lesson-learnt” to some improvement of understanding of the phenomenon and better tool of solving the situation.

The contents of the following study as part of the CDI-HSS “Berlin Process-Series-working papers” provides some scientific illumination and analysis of the Albanian generally migrant-profile, analysis of the Albanian migrant experiences in the destiny-country Germany and also

analysis of the perspectives of Albanian migrants after their return in the origin-country after having been rejected their asylum application, because they are regarded mainly as only “job-seekers”, expecting and wishing better living conditions.

The study is finally completed by some institutional and legal framework context on the re-integration topic and by special conclusions and policy recommendations.

The study took place from April until October 2016 and the draft publication was presented by some joint CDI-HSF “round-table” discussion in Tirana on 16th of December 2016 to some public audience and to media, which were very interested in the topic.

The elaboration of this Study fully corresponds to the intention and function of the project activities of the Hanns-Seidel-Office in Tirana, which has been established in 1992 and which will celebrate in the year 2017 its 25th anniversary.

Among some wide range of multi-sectoral seminars, workshops and conferences according to current socio-political matters and topics of the central, regional and local administration as well as referring to the sector of “Justice and Home Affairs” HSF in Albania from the very beginning was intending to react on this special European challenge of Albanian migration.

This approach was not only conducted by dealing with the migration-consequences, operationalized by HSF-seminars with german experts for the Albanian border police units, but also conducted by coping with the migration-causes.

Apart from border police measures HSF in cooperation with local NGO and local scientific “think-tanks” like CDI / ShtetiWeb contributed to joint efforts to create living conditions which should make the remain of staying in Albania more attractive to particularly the young generation.

Pointing out future prospects in order to avoid a further exodus must be combined by providing specific educational measures with the aim of increasing professional and social competences of state- and civil-officials. Special attention in this respect is paid to the professionalizing of the Albanian youth – the “future-generation”. Changing the attitude and mind-set according to this challenging matter is along term process which needs patience, strength, transposition-capacity of lessons-learnt and continuity of project work, as done by Hanns-Seidel-Foundation-Office in Tirana in the past, now and intended in future time.

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Regional Director for Southeastern Europe
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FOREWORD:

The Berlin Process, EU Integration and Migration

The importance of Western Balkan countries in the EU Migration policy, and more specifically in guarding the external borders of EU became apparent in summer 2015 after the statement of Austria's foreign minister Sebastian Kurz: *"If we do not have functional border controls at the external borders of the European Union, the whole idea of a European Union without borders inside is in danger"*. The discovery of a lorry containing the corpses of 50 dead refugees on an Austrian motorway in August 2015 jolted the European politics and brought the migration component into the Vienna Summit. Migration became a mainstream EU policy, and the EU cooperation, a sine-qua-non condition for its success.

EU High Representative Federica Mogherini made it clear the need for collaboration in Vienna summit: *"I know that I can count – we can count – not only on our Member States, but also on our friends in the Balkans to share this responsibility and solidarity."*

Following the actuality, the challenges posed by migration pressures for the countries of the region, and the implications of the "Balkans route", were the main topics of the Vienna Summit. The principles of commitment to a European migration policy, based on criteria of solidarity and equity and the need to help the Balkan countries to manage the situation were the basis of discussion.

The Heads of States and Governments from EU and Western Balkans participating in the Summit agreed that, for a common challenge, a common response was needed.

Today migration from third countries, from candidate and applicant for candidate and even from member states (like in the case of UK) has become a very hot topic impacting the election results in many EU member states. Migration is a topic that is here to stay for the years to come.

The Berlin Process Series: a contribution of civil society in regional integration

This Working Paper aims to investigate and provide a robust and thorough understanding of the recent migration outflow originating from Albania during 2014 - 2015, the push and pull factors that caused it, their experience abroad and the profiles and perspectives of the returnees. The study took place from April 2016 until October 2016 and included desk review, media monitoring, interviews and field visits.

The Berlin Process Series started in November 2015 in Tirana as an initiative of the Cooperation and Development Institute/Shtetiweb supported by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Hanns Seidel Stiftung, and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (see: <http://cdinstitute.eu/web/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ANGLISHT.pdf>). It is conceived as a part of a wider contribution of Western Balkans Civil Society in the Berlin Process.

In July 2016, CDI published the first Working Paper on Migration Component "Albania in the Western Balkans Route: August 2015 - June 2016" (<http://cdinstitute.eu/web/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-06-23-Albania-in-the-Western-Balkans-migration-route-v.2-1.pdf>).

A complete library on the Berlin Process and selected themes of Western Balkans 6 integration, can be consulted at the Observatory of Regional Integration, at <http://shtetiweb.org/studime-dhe-analiza-4/>

This Working Paper is supported by Hanns Seidel Stiftung.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The migration wave of 2014 and 2015 strikes by its “normalcy”. If in the previous migration waves, leaving Albania to claim asylum abroad was very dangerous, today this endeavor is planned as an almost “normal” trip. The costs are at least 10 times lower than before, and the preparation time is an average of two to three days.

The trigger to the decision to leave the country is difficult to pinpoint with accuracy: it is a combination of factors most of them having to do with socio-economic conditions, (and the odd one about physical security). But the underlying cause remains the search for an enabling environment that would offer to them the chances to prepare a better future for them and their children.

Germany was selected because of its comparative advantage regarding the pull factors: an organized welcoming system, and generous pecuniary benefits while waiting for an asylum request to be processed. A most interesting feature is its reputation of being the country that offers the best life prospects and is serious and structured about it. Italy and Greece were relatively “easier” to reach but those countries did not offer the kind of “future” that Germany provides.

The after-shock effect of the 2008 financial crisis was the trigger that “materialized” the decision to emigrate. The common push factors (economic problems, poverty, housing, and unemployment) constitute the heavy tendency of the search for a better life. In addition, the decrease in remittances, the slowing down of the economic activity, and the return of tens of thousands of emigrants from Greece and Italy helped the migratory pressure reach the tipping point.

Partial information from traditional media and biased information from social media, peer pressure and word-of-mouth provided the wrong impression to the would-be migrants, and raised their expectancies. Human traffickers – even if incomparably much less than before – played their role. It must be noted that visa-free movement was the key factor that undermined the business model of the human traffickers.

Financial allocations of the host country and in-kind support (food, housing, health care) were a very important pull factor. It allowed the asylum seekers to get the cash (needed to pay back the debts they contracted to finance their travel) and to enjoy from relatively good living conditions, in some cases better than those they left back in Albania. The Syrian inflow put an end to this relative comforting waiting time.

Albanian diaspora played a facilitating role by creating a “bridge” and offering a first contact point in Germany outside of the official system. Overcoming the language barrier, they provided a valuable source of information to migrants regarding life in Germany, employment opportunities, advice, etc. Basically, they offered a valuable alternative information channel to migrants, adapted to migrants’ profile.

The migrants were unprepared to stay in Germany, being it either for work or study. The ones that we interviewed did not bring with them any diploma, certificates or any other official document that could certify their qualifications or skills. No job-search was conducted before migrating, not even a promise of employment was obtained. It was striking the ignorance with regards to local laws or to the German institutional context. They did not have any knowledge of German language either.

The above staggering level of unpreparedness and high expectancies are the main reason why a “bad” experience was reported regarding the waiting periods in camps. This experience got worse after the Syrian influx. The camp context, the strict procedures they had to obey, the impossibility to

find a job, and the reality found once in their dream land was quite different than the expected. The positive side of this experience is that they now are transmitting the right message to their Albanian compatriots about asylum request in Germany.

During their stay, the main benefits they drew, except the material ones, were to see by themselves and experience how the German system works. Very few adults attended the German language courses, had an employment experience or got to know the locals. The positive side is – again – their awareness about “how things work in Germany”, and how Albania should be.

In general, they liked the regularity of the German system but disliked the efforts they had to do to be a part of it. However, the longer they stayed in contact with the locals, the more involved in the system they got. Back in Albania they have an invaluable benchmark to hold the Albanian administration accountable for.

After their return, they continued life as before. Except for a few who sold everything before leaving to Germany (house included) almost nothing did change for them. They made no contact with Albanian authorities to report their return or inquire about available reintegration measures. School officials have reported difficulties with re-integrating children in the school curricula. Many – especially the young ones – are now registered to German language courses, VET trainings or are using their contacts in Germany to look for jobs. For those ones, Schengen expulsion period is being put to profit to better prepare for the next time they plan to go to Germany.

Now the big difference with their first migration experience is that they know what to expect and how to prepare. However, the challenge for both Albanian and German administration is to reach, inform, help prepare and accompany them in their migration endeavor. It would be insufficient to limit the public efforts in only producing information about rules and procedures of legal migration and making it available through the official channels.

Coming from half a century communist regime and evolving since 25 years in an ever-reforming context, Albanians are weary of the administration. It has been historically seen by them as source of problems and not as a mechanism at their disposal. Authorities should consider unorthodox ways of reaching the target groups such as social media, former migrants, locally rooted NGOs and tailor the message in a way that is understood by common people.

This time it must be different for the migration endeavor to be positive for the migrants, for Albania and for Germany. The returnees must be considered allies and partners in transmitting the right message and providing the good example to follow.

This type of migration flux is expected to continue. Albanian economic structure would not be able to provide the needed labor demand. The foreseen economic growth and the current composition of industrial and services sectors, the size of population living in rural areas, the preponderance of micro-enterprises (nine out of ten registered companies in Albania have up to four employees), can not provide the traction power needed in the labor market.

Albanians will continue to move abroad. The objective of policy-makers should not be to stop it, but to regulate and manage. To mitigate its negative impact in Albania (brain drain, emigration of qualified manpower), and in Germany (overburden of asylum system), this fact should be acknowledged and appropriate measures drafted. The most urgent and important is proper information in Albania about the right way to find a job, or study abroad. On the policy level, it would be less costly and more productive to consider them as job seekers and / or students and not as “migrants”.

This shift toward “regularization and normalization” of movement of people would require rethinking the approach by shifting the onus from migration management to active labor market measures. After all, the regularized Western Balkans (except Albania) labor migration to Germany has historically been an important component of the German labor market until 1990s. Properly managed it has been beneficial to the sending and host countries.

I. BACKGROUND

Migration Statistics. In 2014 and early 2015 there was a spike in the number of emigrants and asylum seekers from Albania reaching Germany. In particular, the number of young adults in this flow was high. Eurostat data indicate that 53,805 Albanians submitted an application for asylum in Germany in 2015, of which 24,390 or about 45% belong 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)¹.

After the inclusion of Albania in the list of safe countries of origin in Germany in 2015, the step up of repatriation and forced returns, the implementation of large information campaigns, and increased efforts of Albania authorities to stem the flow, the movement calmed down to a trickle. Out of 23,300 final decisions that the German authorities made on Albanian asylum seekers in 2015, only 55 positive decisions were made. Upon rejection, in 2015 about 16,000 asylum seekers returned to Albania following the order to leave (Eurostat, 2016²), and many more have returned during 2016. Data are not exhaustive due to the difficulties of the Albanian authorities to register all forced returnees.

Push and pull factors. An analysis of trends and push and pull factors of the asylum applicants from the Western Balkans carried out by the European Asylum Support Office (2015)³ concludes that Albanian asylum applications are dominated by family applications. Applicants are in general young adult women and men - often their families accompanying them. Recognizing Germany as the main destination country, the report provides evidence that a significant percentage has stayed there for more than six months. Although anecdotal evidence exists that the economic conditions constitute the main reason behind this recent migration flow, no thorough investigation has been carried out on the push and pull factors that caused this impressive outflow.

While the “easy” income generation activity by simply going to Germany with a tourist visa and logging an asylum request is not possible any more due to the change of law, the prospects of the youngsters in Albania regarding decent jobs, sustainable employment, and income, quality and market-oriented education, affordable health care services, etc., have not changed much since they first left. This situation makes the returned Albanian youngsters keep alive their plan to go back to Germany. Although re-migration cases exist, there is no data available yet.

Current economic trends. In 2015 Albanians experienced lower welfare levels and more poverty, while no major changes are expected in the actual year⁴. According to the Bank of Albania, in 2015 the number of borrowing households has increased compared to 2014. The scope of household borrowing is used to finance consumption debt owed to neighborhood shops (39%), for business (15%) or house/apartment renovation or purchase (24%). More than 61% of household borrowing comes from informal (non-bank) sources.

In the Financial Stability Report (2016), the Bank of Albania reports that Albanian households have worsened their solvency in the second half of 2015 (33% of borrowing households). 43% of households claim to have difficulties in paying their loans because of a lower income, while 41% because of higher living costs. With regards to the expectations for solvency in 2016, around 77% do not expect any changes. In the first six months of 2016, the outstanding loans fell and the structure shifted toward formal borrowing, but the borrowing for consumption increased to 42%⁵.

There is no noticeable change with the situation of past years.

¹ See Table 1.

² http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_eirtn&lang=en

³ https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/Asylum-Applicants-from-the-Western-Balkans_Update_r.pdf

⁴ Raporti i Stabilitetit Financiar për Gjashtëmujorin e Dytë të Vitit 2015, Bank of Albania, 2016

⁵ Raporti i Stabilitetit Financiar për Gjashtëmujorin e Parë të Vitit 2016, Bank of Albania, 2016

II. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

II.1. Purpose and objectives of the current study

This qualitative study aims to shed light on this social phenomenon in order to allow for a deeper understanding of why and how Albanian migrated in such numbers in 2014 and 2015. The goal of this study is to investigate and provide a robust and thorough understanding of the recent migration outflow, the push and pull factors that caused it, their experience abroad and the profiles and perspectives of the returnees. Even though different institutions have been focused on providing statistics on the recent migration flow from Albania, and its characteristics, to the best of our knowledge there is no assessment carried out on the determinants of these migration flows, the experiences of migrants abroad and their intentions for the near future, especially focusing on the German experience. This study intends to fill in this gap all by remaining an exploratory research, needed as a first step towards a deeper understanding of the research problem.

The specific objectives of this endeavor are to:

- properly understand the social and economic context in which the migrants were living, working and undertaking their daily activities before leaving, and explore their relevance on the making of the decision to migrate;
- properly understand the main pull and push factors that influenced their decision to go to Germany, the information that was available to them, the role of social networks, migration costs and funding;
- properly understand their experience in camps and social housing in Germany, their living conditions, networks accessed, education and skills acquired and including in-depth analysis of lessons learned;
- properly understand their experience in Albania after return, identify systemic influences that trigger their intentions to re-migrate and explore on the ways they intend to use in order to re-migrate.

In the light of the findings, the study aims to propose recommendations on how this second potential re-migration can be efficiently managed, rendered legal, properly planned and worthy for the migrant, the country of origin and the host country.

II.2. Methodological Approach

The research team decided to use the interview as a means of qualitative data collection. A set of detailed questions was prepared for returnees that had migrated to Germany in the last two years and were considering returning there again. Another set of questions addressed relevant stakeholders/officials covering current (best) practices and potential future policies. The sample of individuals that was selected for interviews was acquainted through social media in a first stage and through snowballing technique later. The selection of returned youngsters in the first stage used their intention to re-migrate as a first filter, and from the pool of potential participants the team made the second stage selection based on their age, region, urban/rural location, gender, family status, and employment status.

The research team rigorously conducted the interviews and analyzed the data in order to best address all research questions. The aimed result was to provide a thorough, clear and representative picture on the recent migration phenomenon to Germany, focusing on the profile and the actual experience of returnees in Albania. While the team was limited in the selection of a range of methods for the conduction of research, it made use of the expertise of researchers from social, political, and economic sciences in order to achieve a deeper understanding from different perspectives, to enhance confidence in the ensuring findings and provide appropriate policy recommendations.

III. MIGRANT PROFILE: LEAVING ALBANIA THE FIRST TIME

In a snapshot, the main push factors highlighted by the participants were: (i) economic problems; (ii) housing conditions; and (iii) unemployment and better career prospects. They were followed by conflicts with other families (*revenge/gjakmarrja*); search for better life prospects; getting away from discrimination (in that case the interviewee was from Roma community), and even search for adventure. There was never only one factor that determined their decision to migrate - always there were a multitude of them.

III.1. Demographic and social profile

Most of the interviewees were young men⁶, aged 20 - 34. Some of the interviewees had migrated with their families, them being girlfriend / fiancé(e) / wives or children. When emigrated with partner, the interviewees - mostly men - shared the views of their (female) partners as well. The participants live in Tirana, Durres, Vlora, Shkoder and Fier. The time they spent in Germany is highly variable with a minimum of 2.5 months that went up to 2.5 years. However, most of them had stayed there for an average period of one year, a finding that is in line with that of the European Asylum Support Office (2015). Those who have stayed for extended periods are of considerable representation in our sample. Prior to the time of interview the majority of the returnees has been back since more than 9 months, i.e. they have returned from Germany before January 2016.

Young male migrants left either alone or with friends. Stable couples (either engaged or in a long relationship) left with their partners. Family heads migrated together with their family members. This characteristic of the recent migration outflow is also confirmed by previous studies (European Asylum Support Office, 2015).

At this point, one of the features that appear is the “normalcy” of such an endeavor. Basically, the decision to migrate and log an asylum request is taken in the family fora. Differently from previous waves, it is not only the males that go, but the whole family, including wife and children, that joins him.

III.2. Education and skills before leaving

The interviewees had different levels of education and we were not able to discern a pattern. Most of the interviewees had high school diploma at the time of migration. Few of them had none or elementary/primary education only. Two had completed masters' studies, whilst three were university students who quit their studies in search of a better career. Those who had started or completed the university degree had some knowledge of foreign languages before leaving, mainly English and Italian, although none of them could speak any German. Those who knew English claimed to have occasionally assisted the German authorities with translation during their stay in the camps.

The level of education was not a strategic conditional variable in our sample as regards the decision to emigrate. They all had in common the goal to have better life prospects, notwithstanding their education level or array of skills. They all believed Germany offered this chance to them.

⁶ only three of them were females

III.3. Professional situation and career prospects

Only two of the interviewees have been unemployed before leaving, while others had some history of employment, although with certain on-the-job / out-of-job periods. The main problems they raised regarding their employment prior to migrating were low paid jobs, insecurity of the job duration, payments at irregular intervals, jobs out of their skills and expertise areas, frequent job changes, lack of employment contracts and the resulting absent social insurance payments. Those who had a university degree or professional education were working in fields other than of their specialization, such as waiters or lorry drivers. Others reported to have worked in their own or in their family's small businesses. Despite the fact that many had had a job before leaving, they all listed the employment conditions as one of the main push factors.

Even if our sample is not statistically representative, it is interesting to note that - beside unemployment - the search for better employment conditions and career prospects are a very important parameter impacting the decision to emigrate for two reasons:

- there are many qualified professionals that are leaving the country. This tendency will deepen further as the more qualified they are, the easier it will be for them to emigrate. While moving abroad towards a better job is beneficial for them (and the welcoming country) this represents a loss of human potential for Albania;
- this flux - i.e. moving abroad in search for better jobs and career options - falls more into the free movement of persons than in the asylum-seeker circuits. It is a parameter that needs to be taken into account when Albania will - eventually start the negotiations for Chapter 2 "Freedom of Movement for Workers".

In the previous migration waves to Greece or Italy, "many Albanian households perceived migration, whether temporary or permanent, to be an effective strategy for sustaining and improving their economic livelihoods"⁷ in Albania. This time they consider it as a live move connected more to a better future than to a concrete job. The migrant group that we interviewed was not "dirt poor" but rather along the average citizen.

III.4. Reasons for leaving Albania: push and pull factors

In general, the youngsters think that it is almost impossible to build a new family, without having enough income to provide for decent living and housing expenses. They estimate that this aspiration is not possible in Albania with what they currently earn or plan to do. So they decide to leave the country. Unemployment, job insecurity, occasional jobs or low-income jobs of at least one of the partners push married couples to leave. Living conditions appear strongly as well in their push-factor list. A woman claimed that her family was not living in a proper house because they couldn't afford one.

Albania's economic performance and the decrease in demand for labor at the period of their migration to Germany (2014-2015), were also important determinants of migration even for those who had a profession and / or were running their own businesses. One woman states: "...I was working on my own as a tailor, and at that period I did not have a lot of work; my husband had a pizzeria but he had to close it because the profit was not enough to maintain the children..." (Interview 1-3). She also shared that her husband belongs to the Roma community and they heard that it was easy for them to get asylum in Germany.

Search for better life - and some adventure - was also involved in the making of the decision to leave. "...Since I was a child, it has been my dream to go to Germany and work there as an auto mechanic because Germany is known for the car industry. I knew there would be job opportunities in Germany and this was the motivation to go there..." (Interview 2-1).

⁷ Investing Back Home: Return Migration and Business Ownership in Albania, Talip Kilic & alii, Policy Research Working Paper 4366, The World Bank, 2007

Following the 2008 financial crisis, many Albanian migrants returned from Greece and Italy. A study by INSTAT and IOM (2014) estimated that during 2009 – 2013, circa 133,544 Albanian migrants have returned to Albania, and 53.4% of them have returned during 2012 and 2013. The same study reports that there is some limited evidence to indicate that the lack of re-integration opportunities in Albania may have served as a push factor for the re-emigration of returnees (Filipi et al., 2014) towards other EU countries. Findings from the interviews with returned asylum seekers also indicate that the returned migrants were used to a different lifestyle and mentality. They met difficulties in their reintegration process in the Albanian society, which made of their return not a pleasant experience. Hence, they have found it difficult to imagine a future in Albania, which acted as a push force towards their migration towards Germany, UK or other Nordic countries.

Life safety was another valid strong push factor. *“...The main reason I left for Germany was because of feeling insecure in my country. In 2005, my brother had been involved in a conflict with some other people who did shoot towards my house in the middle of the night. We would have been dead by this time but we were lucky that the bullets didn't get to any of us who were in the house. The person who did shoot towards us was imprisoned for 10 years and now he is out of prison. We still don't feel safe in our own home. Another reason why we left Albania was because of the economic situation...”* (Interview 2-3).

The interviewees also claimed that at the time of migration media had an important effect on their decision. A Google search on “criteria for asylum in Germany” in Albanian⁸ returned about 587,000 results, which is a proxy of the massive coverage of the phenomena from the media. It became a shared discussion and media subject that Germany needed extra-communitarian manpower due to reduction of the number of births. This impression was reinforced by the news that German authorities would provide immediately to the emigrants housing and jobs. The news intrigued them, the confirmation (and misinformation) from social networks amplified it. It must be noted though that all claimed they left in order to get employed there, but had no intention of staying there under social protection schemes.

Concerning the pull factors, there is almost general agreement that it is the socio-economic development level and the high standards of living of the destination country that made it attractive to them: *“...we all know that Germany is one of the most developed country in Europe and every youngster would love to live there and to study there, because in Albania we don't have that kind of future...”* (Interview 1-2). The higher possibility for being employed, better jobs, higher earnings, and - especially for those who had a profession - the opportunities to reach higher and excel in their profession, and better education prospects for their children were the main pull factors, even for those that filed for asylum protection.

The allowance paid by German authorities for living expenses during the asylum period was a very important pull factor. On average the monthly allowance was 140 Euros per adult and 40 Euros per child. Housing, electricity and water bills, as well as medical services were free of charge for the whole family. The promise of this income triggered migration aspirations from a large part of the population for at least two major reasons. First it made migration costs more affordable for a wider population range - they could borrow and then pay back once their received the finance allowances from German government⁹. Second on a longer-term perspective, the income received by German authorities (including housing, schooling and health costs) was way higher than the payment of a minimal wage employment in Albania. The processing of asylum requests in Germany was taking longer than usually due to the large number of asylum applications. But at the end, whatever the decision of the authorities - positive or negative - the income received would have allowed Albanian migrants to afford to live in good conditions, deal with health issues and in some case even save some money. And all of the above did not involve any physical risk.

⁸ google search in google.al with the words: “Kushtet për azil në Gjermani”

⁹ this is a paradoxal situation when the migration policy in the host country indirectly finances the unwanted and illegal migration flux.

Another important pull factor was the role of existing diaspora of Albanian migrants in Germany. The interviewees have provided ample evidence on the information and support they have provided to draw them towards migration. Albanians¹⁰ already established in Germany have shared their experiences and views on German migration, and also promised to would-be-migrants to provide in-kind support, like housing or to make use of their networks to find jobs, if the asylum seekers would be allowed to stay and work.

It must be stated that push and pull factors were not exclusive, but often overlapped and justified together the decision to emigrate. But, the overall impression of the interviewees is that the decision to migrate is often taken based on superficial information, a strong peer effect, a follow-the-flow way of thinking, and loads of hope for a better future. We did not observe any visible trace of us of solid information coming from official channels.

III.5. Information sources

The majority of interviewees claim to have received information about where and how to migrate from their friends, family members or relatives, and in particular from individuals that were already abroad or had previous migration/asylum seeking experience. Their family members and relatives in Germany have been supportive of their decision to leave. These statements support the strong impact of the peer effect.

The decision was made in collaboration with other household members. This appear to be a common feature for families that migrated together, as well as for youngsters that decided to migrate alone or with friends. In the case of youngsters, their families were consulted and did support their decision to leave. One of the interviewees said that his family supported his decision to migrate, as they all thought they would apply for a family reunion once their son/brother would obtain legal permission to stay in Germany and / or get a job. He states: *"...I also heard from other friends that Germany at the time was in need of labor force. My family understood the situation and supported me to leave. Both parents came two months after. I encouraged them because I heard there that it was easier to receive a positive response from the authorities if I was there with the family. They went through a similar situation, but they were not near me, they were in another camp, 6-7 hours away from where I was. They also returned in less than 6 months..."* (Interview 3-2).

Three young males stated that their parents did not support their decision to leave. Nevertheless, they decided to leave together with their friends who did made the same decision. However, their respective families - even if not agreeing with their decision - provided the funding for the travel towards Germany.

Visual and online media has acted not only as a push factor but also as a (biased) information source. One of the interviewees declared that the statement of the Chancellor Merkel during her visit to Tirana in July 2015 saying *"...Germany needs workforce."* (Merkel, 2015), was the most important information at hand when she decided to migrate. The local media had a magnifying effect, as discussions focused on migration towards Germany by not explaining the downsides and consequences of the refusal of asylum. This combination of biased messages or their absence thereof, pushed people to construct their own "migration movie" by picking and choosing the information that befitted to their conviction.

Communication through Facebook, and other internet-based technology was crucially important to obtain information and / or instruction for would-be emigrants, especially for youngsters. It is through Facebook that they will get a first glance - not always the "real one" - of what expects them in Germany. But as mentioned before, this information was most of the time biased, as the Albanian migrants already in Germany wanted to be portrayed as successful in their home country. This explains the surprise of Albanian migrants once they were placed in the camps, or their complete lack of preparation as regards the administrative papers / documents.

¹⁰ includes ethnic Albanians being from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, etc.

The costs of travelling from Albania to Germany were incurred by own/family funding and varied from 170 to 700 Euros per person, depending on the mood of transport. They did receive weekly allowances by the German institutions when staying there. Some of them did pay themselves their return tickets. On average, this migration venture has costed about 1000 Euros per person.

None of our interviewees did ask for information at the specialized official institutions, being them the Migration Counters, or the German Embassy. This is consistent with the low percentage of would-be migrants that use or is familiar with those official sources. The way out of this is either to promote official sources, or / and use the existing channels - family, friends, Facebook, etc. - to deliver the right information.

Information has been acknowledged as one of the main factors impacting migration. In 2016 in Albania started DIMAK (a GIZ-implemented project funded by German Government). This project aims to reach Albanian citizen wanting to emigrate in Germany providing them information about the legal procedures. In addition, the Albanian Government has established the Migration counters (hosted at the Offices of National Labor Services). Private recruiting companies have intensified their communication as well.

III.6. How did they plan their journey?

There was no proper planning. Once the decision was taken, the next most important step was to choose the mean of transport. This was conditioned by the cost and the easiness to go through the borders, avoiding the problematic ones¹¹. As always, the point of reference was previous "successful" cases. Some of the young male respondents said that they just wanted to give it a try like other people did. It is interesting to note that the decision to migrate to Germany was usually made in a very short time. Almost all plans for the journey were made in less than a week, usually in 2 or 3 days. This leaves no time for proper preparation, if only getting different official documents and certificates ranging from civil status to different diplomas, etc., - all needed to start a new life in Germany¹². Only one interviewee who migrated with his family claimed to have planned the whole migration during a period two weeks. *"...I didn't think much whether to go or not, I discussed it with my family and they agreed. And after 2-3 days one from our relatives told us how to go and what to do and we decided to go by bus. I have heard that crossing the border was easier by bus and from the airports it was too difficult because of a lot of controls and requirements... (Interview 1-1)"* All means of transport were used: from the sea through the ferry to Italy and then the train, bus or a van to Germany, to direct flights from Tirana to German airports through air travel. It is important to mention that there was no illegal passing of the borders¹³. The information regarding cheap and secure ways of reaching Germany was shared between the ones who arrived first and those who were planning to go latter. Individuals from the Southern areas of the country did also find ways to travel via Greece, thus avoiding strict police controls and questioning, and also lowering the costs of travel via airplane by using low cost carriers.

None of them reported to have faced any problems during their travel. They went through all regulatory border-crossing points. Once they reached Germany, either their friends were waiting for them and accompanied them to the camps, or they simply followed the flow of other migrants, or they were collected under the supervision of police and sent to camps.

All in all, the journey from Albania to Germany was more or less eventless. None of our interviewees reported problems while travelling. None of them even envisaged to stop in any EU country that they went through.

¹¹ for example, Croatian border was deemed as problematic, so it was duly avoided

¹² it would be interesting to obtain information on the official documents that Albanian migrants presented to German authorities. This will be a good indicator, not only of their degree of preparation for migration, but of their mindset regarding the importance of procedures in general.

¹³ since the establishment of free movement, Albanians that have a valid passport do not need a visa to visit Schengen countries

III.7. Was there any plan once in Germany

Much of the previous migration from Albania, particularly the flow to neighboring Greece, has traditionally been temporary in nature, whether seasonal or circular¹⁴. This time they moved to Germany to settle. All the interviewees did plan Germany as the end and only destination, and so discarded any alternative on other countries they travelled through. Once in Germany, after contacting the German officials and filing their asylum request they did not have a real plan rather than wait-and-see. Those who chose to apply for asylum were registered through an interviewing process (with Albanian-German interpreters as none of the interviewees had German language knowledge) and were placed in the camp.

It was clearly stated by the interviewees that they never planned, never intended nor expected to stay in the camp. They saw it as an intermediary step before they'd be moved towards proper accommodation - as their fellow Albanians that migrated earlier told them - and employment. In most of the cases, the search for employment was explicitly given to the camp authorities as the main driver of their migration. In their mental map they were sure that Germany will welcome them and the quickest and easiest way would be through the procedure of asylum request. So, they simply stated - during their asylum request procedure - the need for them to get a job.

Although the only plan initially was to apply for asylum, after filing and being provided with basic amenities and legal residence (during the period of asylum procedure) they thought that employment could be an opportunity to be active, get to know Germany and also provide additional income. Some of them contacted and were assisted in their job hunt by Albanian migrants legally living in Germany. The absence of knowledge of German language, of the German administrative system and labour market rules, the lack of information on how to legally live and work in Germany (notwithstanding the brochures distributed to them in the camps) prevails during their exposé of this period.

It is striking their ignorance of German employment rules. For example they were not aware that it is not important to find a willing employer that offers you a job, but the employer has to make sure no German or European Union citizen is able and willing to fill that vacancy. One of the interviewees claimed: *"...I had a cousin in Germany who offered to be my guarantor and offered a job. On the same day, I had a positive response, only 10 hours later, the police came and deported me..."* (Interview 3-1).

After facing the reality in camps and in migrant houses where they were assigned in Germany, the evolving of the situation there including the massive inflow of Syrian refugees, some of the young respondents said they started to plan moving to Sweden or Norway¹⁵.

¹⁴ Investing Back Home: Return Migration and Business Ownership in Albania, Talip Kilic & alii, Policy Research Working Paper 4366, The World Bank, 2007

¹⁵ those interviewees were notified by the German administration on the refusal of their asylum application and were deported to Albania before trying their luck in Nordic countries.

IV. WHAT DID THEY DO IN GERMANY

Their location and individual experience with accommodation in Germany is quite heterogeneous, but none liked the camp. The individuals we interviewed have been in very different regions, such as Stuttgart, Rothenburg, Ladenburg, Bad Urach, Lübbenau, Chorweiler, Albstadt, Frankfurt, Babenhausen, München, Dresden, Hamburg, Berlin, Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Essen, etc.

IV.1. The Camp experience was not something to remember

Chronologically it is quite usual in their experiences to have stayed initially in refugee camps, for periods varying from a few days to one month. There they were interviewed about the purpose of the visit, reasons why they left Albania, their background and their qualifications, and were equipped with the relevant administrative documents. Once the administrative procedure of registering and interviewing was completed, the waiting period started.

In their view, conditions in the camps were not bad, but they felt there was more of a physiological burden. The new way of living especially the proximity with other asylum seekers, the mélange of different cultures and nationalities, the frequent change of camps and other sorts of restrictions / limitations related to it, new social networks, the different background and mentalities of people around them, the language barrier and communication limitations, weighted heavily on their psyche. *we stayed in the same place as the poorest people of the poorest countries. It was a shocking experience for us*" (Interview 6-1).

Two of the interviewees reported to have lived in overcrowded camps where general conditions and the hygiene were extremely bad, and the situation very insecure. One of the interviewees (3-3) confessed that he had to wait for about a month for clean bed sheets. If they were lucky, they were allowed to share the camp room and toilets with their friends or other families. *"...In Karlsruhe it was like in the movies. We were living with so many people, there were killings¹⁶, people were all the time debating and fighting, stealing one another, clothes, things, socks. I remember once a person was thrown out of the window and died in front of my feet¹⁷. There are many Albanian guys in prison because of the situations in camps. But this was in Badenberg, other camps have been better. When two asylum seekers would fight, the security did not interfere at all."* (Interview 3-3).

Later on, most of them were accommodated in apartments, where they manage their everyday living by themselves. Some of the interviewees had to move several times from one camp to another before being moved to an apartment. *"...all of this transfer was associated with the fear of insecurity: where will we end up?!..."* (Interview 4-2).

They also reported to have been given a weekly allowance of about 30-35 Euros during their stay in the camps. The respective German municipality would pay them a monthly allowance for food and vouchers for each family member for clothing, which they found appropriate. They were not allowed to work and they knew it.

This way of living as described above, has been mentioned in many returnee accounts, other than those interviewed for the current research. What appears clearly is that Albanians were completely unprepared for what was expecting them once in Germany. Instead of state aids, a house and a job, they found themselves in crowded camps together with other nationalities, not knowing the language

¹⁶ we could not verify independently this statement

¹⁷ idem

and with no plan for the next steps. The positive side of this experience is that this group of migrants has no problem telling the truth about the real “welcoming” situation to their Albanian fellow.

IV.2. Their daily activity

During the period of their stay in Germany, their most frequent daily activities included language courses and sport activities. They would also go around with friends, visit the city, walk in the parks, play football, visit different places, go to internet cafe, moved around especially to food stores to buy the necessities etc. Nevertheless, they declared to have spent most of the time doing nothing. One of the interviewees said: “...*Most of the time I stayed in the apartment. I only went out to take my daughter to school and twice per week I would attend the German language course. I was out only to do the shopping and walking with the kids...*” (Interview 1-3).

It is interesting to note that while the adults were not enthusiastic in attending the German language courses that were made available to them by the camp administration or the municipalities, their children enrolled happily in the schooling system. Although not all the interviewees attended language courses, those who did, report that this experience was very useful to them. The ones who didn't enroll, now regret it.

Some of them did also look for jobs, although they knew they were not allowed to work. They got in touch mainly with Albanians being established in Germany, or locals that would be willing to help. Some of them have even been successful in working, but for short periods. One of them was paid for providing translation from English in the camp. Another one said he was engaged from time to time to post service delivery, and another was working near the camp as an auto mechanic for a short period. The latter said he quit because the salary was not enough: he was paid about 900 Euros per month while staying at the camp and because - and mostly - of the lack of documents. So continuing working was not worth the risk. One of the interviewees stated that most of the jobs were taken by Syrians because they were ready to work for lower salaries, which even created several conflicts.

The staying period in the camps did not bring any additional value neither in wealth, nor in life experience for most of our interviewees. The ones that benefited the most were the children - they all went to school and learned German very quickly. In many cases they even obtained very good results. Rarely the Albanian migrants managed to get employed mostly in menial tasks, on ad-hoc or short term jobs but this was the exception.

IV.3. Education and skills acquired

The main tangible benefit for those who stayed for extended periods in Germany was learning the language, but not all of them attended language courses. The young and motivated did better in language courses; others only attended them for a few times and then gave up. The reasons for not attending or giving up vary. With the hindsight some stated that at the time they were not aware of the importance - which they regret now. In other cases the language courses were so populated that they felt they'd better skip it.

Those who had the chance to engage in any job benefited not only from additional income and social inclusion but also in terms of acquisition of new/improved skills. A wrestling professional who migrated to pursue a carrier in wrestling there stated that “...*First, they put me into test to meet certain competition standards. I met the standards and within days I was able to compete locally and regionally in Germany. But, I could not make it to compete in national competitions. In every competition I received a certain payment. I continued wrestling in Germany and received wrestling diploma/ certificates, I also won top placement (2-4) in Hannover.*” (Interview 4-1).

With the notable exception of children, the time they spent in Germany did not increase their educational capital and / or employment potential. In rare cases, and due almost exclusively to

personal initiative, certain individuals broke the rules and engaged in productive activities. This allowed them to mix with the population and know better German culture, way of life and German people. This was a real added value for them.

IV.4. Networks accessed

Networking was quite limited during the period the asylum seekers spent in Germany. Those staying in camps only had access to in-camp officials and administrative services. They had plenty of time to meet, discuss and share lifetime experiences with individuals from different non-EU nationalities but they had almost no contact with the German citizen.

“...I found out what I wanted when I left the camp. Only then I found the values and the country for which I was looking for” (Interview 6-1). Their networking opportunities increased as they left the camps, however its success depended on the migrants’ will and ability to engage with local culture. Some of the interviewees continued to live in their “Albanian bubble”: they had no contact at all with the locals, nor did they try to. Besides everyday chores, they used their time to communicate with their families left behind and people in the same circumstances, relatives and friends most often Albanians. Places and buildings where asylum seekers used to live were separate from those where the locals used to, so physical distance was a factor. All the interviewees agreed that knowledge of the German language was the most important barrier to engage in social relations.

Those who participated in German language courses created certain non-formal networks with Germans or other foreigners. Being in the same class and working together towards a shared goal helped them overcome cultural and language barriers. In some statements, it appeared that one of the reasons of this very low level of communication and social networking was due to the perceived boundaries put in place by locals. The interviewees talked about being felt different: *“.../I felt discriminated. I would go to a shop and the shop security would identify and follow as if I was a thief. Then, I went to Stuttgart. There the security shop officers were from Kosovo, so it was easier because they would help us with translation, or get the paper which would allow us to get clothes from the Red Cross.”* (Interview 3-3).

However, there were cases when some Albanians extended their social networks beyond language courses. That only happened outside the camps. Once out, they got to communicate with locals, and they were very satisfied with the help they could get from them. They claim that the more they interacted with Germans, the more respectful each one would be towards the other.

One of the interviewees¹⁸ managed to get in touch with similar professionals in the city where he lived and also to officially compete at different levels. He was very active while staying in Germany by exercising his sporting skills and afforded living on his own expenses. He managed to gain basic language skills of German, that allowed him to communicate enough and exercise the above activities, but he had to return to Albania because of the lack of possibility to have permission to work and stay, and the probability to get an expulsion from the country.

Language barriers and the impossibility to be active outside the camp, limited the networking of Albanian migrants. The cultural distance with host country did not facilitate the initial contacts. However it must be noted that once the initial inhibition has been dealt with, mutual respect was established. When they engaged with German citizen, Albania migrants generally met with helpful individuals.

IV.5. Social services accessed

On top of free housing, food coupons or food allowance, free access to public utilities and free clothes, all the asylum seekers were supported by the German government with free access to the German health service, including stomatology, psychological and social services. They also got for free the

¹⁸ the professional wrestler

right to be informed and to receive legal assistance. Those who needed special treatments, such as pregnancies or permanent / acute diseases did receive the appropriate and free of charge services.

BOX 1:

....While my wife and I were preparing some documents, we met by chance a German lady. We became friends and she chose to help us. Particularly, she created a whole file of piled up documents so that I could find a job. She did a find an electrician job from an international company that was operating locally. She was trying to find a loophole of the law that could allow an asylum seeker to be eligible for an employment contract. At that time (October 2015) that there was this new law that prohibited asylum seekers to get an employment contract and employment permission or visa. The lady managed to get a scholarship (about 250€/month) promised by Deutsche Post for me, and agreed with the electric company for 1 week of working and one week of studying, with the condition to leave the social assistance status. She had managed to get even a modern house at a low price for him. They promised a salary of €1,000/month for the first 6 months and then a possible promotion to assistant electrician position with €2,500/month and later up to €4,000/month for a permanent contract. At the beginning the local municipal authorities seem to have accepted such an agreement, but later they said this cannot be done for Albanians. Had you had another nationality, you would have been able to get this agreement. Nevertheless, I feel indebted to the lady that helped me. (Interview 4-2).

All the interviewees were aware of these benefits, and they all lauded their quality. Sometimes they mentioned the long waiting time to receive health services but were aware efforts of the health officials to deal with the work charge. Less severe health cases were put in waiting lists because of the large number of people in the camps and the low number of nurses.

An un-intended benefit of their stay in Germany is the comparative angle they obtained on the public services. During the interviews they often compared the Albanian public sector with the German one.

IV.6. Meet the Germans

The general impression on the interactions with public officials, language teachers, social workers, officers and assistants, as well as everyday interaction with German people was positive. Most of the interviewees claim that local officials and people were polite, helpful, supportive and friendly; they felt respected and appreciated the help and assistance received. The more contact they got the more they were satisfied by the interaction with the German officials. Inversely, the more they remained in their Albanian environment, the less satisfied they were.

Some of the interviewees complained about conditions and the way they were treated in the camps. A few other interviewees have also claimed that although in general their experience was positive, there were officials that looked askance on them and their families. There was some reporting on misbehavior of public officials of other nationalities. When asked to elaborate further, no details came out. It is our understanding that the perceived behavior of those camp officials can be explained by the strict enforcement of the procedural rules.

It must be noted a certain miscommunication with authorities, regarding even extremely important issues such as their resident status in Germany. Even after so many months in Germany, the Albanian migrants still weren't clear of the procedures that would allow them to live and work there in a legal way, or they discovered it in the very last moment before receiving the order to leave the country.

Some of the interviewees, who returned after the negative decision on the asylum application was delivered, claim that they had to leave since they couldn't find a job in the meantime. Others said they did find a job and were ready to start when they received the negative decision on their asylum application. Six of them are sure they got expulsion from 6 to 30 months; most of them had been given 2 years of expulsion. A few are not clear whether they did have any expulsion¹⁹.

IV.7. What they did like in Germany

The high living standards, being able to plan ahead, and the rule of law – all initial push factors because of which they left - were listed as the main things they liked in Germany. They all thought that in Germany they might gain a much better perspective for their future, something they stated they are missing in Albania. In general, they also appreciated the behaviour of the public officials, the discipline, the clear and strict rules and procedures, physical security and social peace, the social protection, the low levels or no racial or ethnic discrimination, the cities, the clean and quiet environment, the quality of public services, the work culture - as observed or experienced, the way German people greeted them in the street and the way they communicated to them, the solidarity of some locals and willingness to help.

There were a few things they disliked, mostly related with the time they spent in the camps. The most important one was the fact that they spent all day in vain, isolated, and were not allowed to work. They were frustrated by the difficulties that they had to go through to get a work visa even in cases when they could find a job or when their skills / profession was in demand in the local labour market. In their perception it didn't make sense not to be properly employed when there was a willing employer to offer them a job. Going through the administrative and procedural steps looked almost impossible to them. Hence their perception that it is unbelievably difficult to ever get work permission in Germany. The fact that by announcing asylum protection as their reason to be in Germany it made their employment impossible, did not register with them at the time. They also mentioned occasional distrust, from locals or some public officials.

By spending time in Germany, Albanian migrants got a different perspective of how the state and state services should work. An efficient and fair system is what they seem to have liked and appreciate the most. But, when faced with the obligation to follow the rules and fit into it, they showed signs of non-compliance and resistance. However, for the individuals that had the opportunity to continue with the insertion in the German context, this resistance disappeared. On hindsight they all praise the German efficiency, but keep complain about the number and complexity of procedures to follow to fit into the system.

IV.8. Lessons learned

All interviewees agreed that choosing the asylum was wrong, and that they should have been better informed before leaving Albania. Now for them is clear that, it is very difficult to stay illegally in Germany. *"...I thought that being offered a job staying in Germany wouldn't have been a problem. But after being ordered to leave, I realized that requesting asylum was the worst choice that I could have done"* (Interview 6-1). With hindsight they know that besides respecting migration laws and procedures, they have to acquire job skills and be good in their professions before looking for migration opportunities. Despite work permission, work visa or permission to stay, they also listed knowledge of German language as a key barrier to search for a job/work visa.

Among the interviewees, those who were employed and/or economically better off, regret the way they left for Germany. However, they think that this experience has helped them to appreciate what they have in Albania. They left for better working conditions, to make some money to buy a house/property and return, but did not intend to stay there forever. *"This was not the right way. This experience was not for me, because Albania is better than what I experienced. I did not go there to stay. I was not*

¹⁹ about half of the interviewees did not get a Schengen expulsion

someone who is in need for social assistance. I was there to find better working conditions. Overall, the experience was good, but I would never go as an asylum seeker.” (Interview 4-3).

The returnee group is invaluable as a source and vector of information that debunks the myths of Eldorado Germany. First, as a first hand source they have the credibility of having been there. Second, they are an efficient and vector of information because of the word-of-mouth characteristics of information gathering of Albanians. This people can be “used” to reach would-be-migrants that are outside the radar of official channels i.e. DIMAK, Employment Counters, or private companies.

An element that came up and is worth mentioning, was the information distortion caused by different migration systems in EU member states. The first wave of Albanian migrants went mostly to Greece and Italy. In both those countries it was possible to live, work, profit from public services, and register kids to school, etc., by being registered as asylum seeker. The procedure could last years and the Albanian migrants would have a “normal” life, even if not regularized. Moreover, and this is important, they could regularize their situation - eventually - even after their asylum request was refused. This is the experience many Albanians that emigrated in Greece and Italy got and used as a benchmark when emigrating in Germany. Except that the German system has two crucial differences: (i) the asylum request takes much less time to be processed, and (ii) there is no chance not to be deported once your request has been denied. The Albanians learned it the hard way.

V. THE RETURN IN ALBANIA

Returning to Albania followed the same pattern as departure: it was quick decision but this time handed by German authorities. In Albania they found same context as before, and that's why they want to return ...to Germany.

V.1. The bitter return. For some..

The migrants / refused asylum seekers that we interviewed had been in Albania for four to 12 months prior to the interview. A majority of the returnees are back since more than 9 months now, i.e. they have returned from Germany before January 2016. The large majority of individuals that we interviewed mostly returned only after receiving a negative result on their asylum application. The clear communication from German authorities on the consequences of not respecting this decision helped them make up their mind.

For some of them, German authorities organized their return. They had to go back to the camp and then be deported to Albania. Others returned by their own means right after receiving the negative decision. The reason why they did not wait to be deported²⁰ is because they were told that German police would force them to leave at any hour - day or night - had they not left by the indicated date.

Those that returned as a result of a negative decision on their asylum claim, were the most determined to stay. They would have never chosen to return had they had a choice. Nevertheless, the few ones that got expelled regret not respecting the three-month permission to stay as they acknowledge that this penalizes any future application to legally return to Germany. Nevertheless, they are willing to explore opportunities to legally return to Germany to work. All those interviewees expressed their intention to migrate again.

A second group, obviously in better economic conditions, decided to return before any decision was taken on their further asylum application. They stated that they came back because they couldn't stand the conditions and life at the camps. When comparing the living conditions in camps with those in Albania, they decided that it was not worthy. They can be classified as having had a satisfactory employment and financial situation. They did not intend to live on social assistance and they aspired to work there. When they realized that this was impossible, they decided to return to Albania. These individuals also paid for their return and organized the return trip themselves. This group was the one that spent less time in Germany compared to other interviewees.

V.2. Re-entering the system in Albania

A quarter of the participants have had no contact at all with any public institution²¹ in Albania since their return. They just behave as they never left the Albania and did log an asylum request in an EU country. However they have been at least once at the German Embassy in Tirana upon return. They claimed that they visited the Embassy to submit paperwork, or get information about any mobility limitations they could have had following the refusal of asylum request and the order to leave.

Two of the participants claimed to have been to the Local Employment Office (LEO) in the town where they live. One of them was registered in January 2016 and has never heard from the Employment Office since then, whilst the other one was not even registered by the LEO. He was told that it was impossible to find a job for him because he had no education and no profession. No

²⁰ ...and spare the return ticket cost

²¹ other than school system

special follow up was offered to any of them. Those who were attending studies returned to school/university as no penalties were in force for those who interrupted the study to migrate.

The migration of children, and their reintegration in the schooling system after their return, is a real problem. According to the Director of High School “Jordan Misja” in Shkodra, in the 1st semester of 2014, more than 10% of the students left with their families. Since then around one-half of them have returned. A renewed tendency to leave has been noticed during the period September – October 2016. In six cases parents have asked for permissions of long absence for their children. Their goal is to migrate but given that they are unsure about their possibility to stay, they want to keep their options open. In many cases, after their return parents request the recognition of the schooling years/credits that they have obtained abroad²².

The detachment and non-communication with official institutions and / or administration is a constant feature of our migrant group. Notwithstanding if they are in Germany or in Albania, they find it difficult to relate to administration and communicate with them. This behaviour makes it extremely difficult their inclusion in the system - in Germany or Albania - notwithstanding the quality of services of the system.

Hence, the administration should carefully assess their way to engage with this group. A more proactive approach, the use of community structures and other cultural-specific factors can definitely help to spread the information and establish a dynamic of cooperation of the individual with the administration.

V.3. Doing the same as before, ...but better informed

Since their return, some interviewees have found a job, others did return to their previous ones occupations. Nevertheless they still report having the same employment problems they had before leaving, low wages, job insecurity, seasonality and long working hours, and unemployment. Some other young participants have returned to school: those who attend university studies are sometimes also working part-time. Others are unemployed and looking for jobs.

BOX 2

Yes, I have plans to go again in Germany because going to Germany has been my dream since I was a child. The reasons why I want to leave are again because of the economic situations. I have a part-time job and my monthly wage is 120 Euros. I haven't planned my trip specifically but I am planning to leave around March/April 2017 because at that time I would be done also with the courses.

I am planning to go again in Germany in order to work there in my profession. If it happens that I find any education courses while I am there, I am open to this opportunity as well. However, the main reason why I want to go to Germany is to work. I haven't taken any actions yet about my trip because I still have time to think about that. (Interview 2-1)

Despite the employment conditions, the unemployment status and their living conditions in Albania, some of them are attending German language courses and/or vocation courses that would enable them not only to develop labour market skills, but also to get certificates that would facilitate their legal return to Germany for employment purposes.

²² while the Ministry of Education has instructed the educational institutions to facilitate the re-integration of child-returnees in the Albanian schooling system, there are cases - such as for example for children being born abroad - where it becomes very difficult especially for the subjects relating to Albanian language.

Basically on their return they continued to do whatever they were doing before they left, being it work, study or unemployed. Nevertheless the German experience served as a wake-up call - now they know that if they are good enough to learn the language and / or be skilled in selected professions, Germany gives them a chance. Learning the language and/or enrolling in VET is extremely useful to get this target group involved in meaningful and gainful activities, as much as providing them with a goal in life.

V.4. Planning to re-emigrate, but following the right procedure

Only one of the participants in our interviews claimed that he has no desire to return to EU. The others stated that they would like to leave Albania²³ as soon as their Schengen expulsion period is over. Most of them would like to return to Germany. They plan to go with a work contract and be accompanied by their family members.

The push factors and the reasons to re-emigrate are the same as the ones that lead to their first migration decision not long ago. They want a better life for themselves and for their children, the possibility to get a better income to overcome the financial difficulties they are facing in Albania, to have better employment opportunities and better working conditions. One of the interviewees said: *"Nothing works here²⁴. Life is not safe. There is corruption. The wage is not sufficient for a single person, let alone when you have a family..."* (Interview 3-3). In addition, they are pessimistic about their and country's future, and also mentioned high levels of corruption, nepotism, and discrimination. Social problems and life safety are also important push factors.

Regarding the pull factors, some of the participants are using their networks and friends they made in Germany to look for job opportunities. The ones that managed to get an employment offer before they returned, are using it to engage in the legal migration procedure. Others are making no plans currently because they have to wait for the expulsion period to be terminated or for the language / VET courses to be completed. Many are also saving money to pay for their trip. One of the heads of households interviewed also claimed that his two sons were now in Italy trying to find employment and finance their next family migration towards Germany.

It is our opinion that push factors remain the same. Pull factors are the same too, but much clearer, better defined and above all, understood. The returnee would-be emigrants are more knowledgeable about the country they want to go, and this affects directly the way they and their families are preparing for the next trip. This information situation would be an ideal target goal for the whole population of those that want to emigrate.

V.5. Still having problems with the information, ... but much less than before

Almost half of the interviewees had no updated information on legal migration to Germany since they returned; they only know what was shared with them during their stay in Germany. That information is quite erratic and not precise. They know that for a fact but stated that they would search for adequate information once they have everything in place and were ready to leave. The other group of participants that claim to possess some updated information on legal migration have also quite limited and fragmented information. The ones who are planning to return soon declared to have more information than the others about migration opportunities and the procedures to follow.

Most of them know that to go in Germany for work they need to apply for and have a job contract before leaving and that the procedure had to be completed at the German Embassy in Tirana. Some of them have also mentioned family reunion, attending studies or getting married to a German citizen, but these are considered as difficult ways. One of the participants also mentioned another way of applying through some organizations, which may help in finding short-term job contracts.

²³ Germany, England, Iceland, USA, France, Sweden are among potential destinations.

²⁴ ...in Albania

Those are private service companies where one needs to pay in return to the filling of application forms and promises of getting a job.

In general the information on how to re-emigrate was quite scarce and non-adequate. The rule according to which it is not sufficient to get a job offer, but one must make sure that no other German national can fill it, before applying to emigrate, was not clear. The need to provide clear and adapted information in acceptable ways to this target group is paramount to ensure a legal approach and avoid black market agents.

V.6. Illegal migration is still there

There is a general agreement among the interviewees on the fact that they do not want to illegally migrate towards Germany or to apply for asylum, although they do want to leave the country. They claimed they would like to go there legally. However, there were a few participants who shared that they would try illegally if they are not successful in making it via work visas, especially if the employment and economic situation in Albania worsen.

There was an interesting trend in the answers: individuals who consider illegal migration also are in contact with other would-be migrants that are also interested in using illegal networks. *“Yes, I would do also illegal migration if I could. If I would find a job under the table I would go to Germany right now. Most of my friends want to go to Germany and if they can’t legally they would go illegally. Maybe there are 50 people that I know that could do illegal migration...”* (Interview 2-2).

The positive side is the fact that legal migration is the first option for those wanted to go back to Germany. Their challenge is to make it work, and to do this they have to be better prepared for the German labour market as well as to know much better the migration procedures. Illegal migration remains on the table as second best, especially for those that are in contact with similar cases and illegal migration networks²⁵.

V.7. Do they know the conditions and procedure for legal migration?

There are only three ways to obtain legal residence in Germany: (i) by obtaining the Blue Card: provided the applicant has a job contract, the requested qualifications and knowledge of German language; (ii) for studying provided the applicant has a high school diploma and knowledge of German language, and (iii) since January 2016, the German labor market is open for non-qualified workers provided they have an employment contract, for an initial permit to up to two years, renewable.

With regards to preconditions and procedure for legal migration, our findings indicate that a considerable proportion of the interviewees know the general terms of migration to Germany or any other European country, but they do not know prerequisites and specific procedures about legal migration. A few of them are aware of the webpage *“Make it to Germany”* and might also mention some of the professions that are in demand in the German labor market. A few others share some broad knowledge on how other people have legally migrated to Germany. A small part of the participants are not aware at all about the migration procedures, apart stating the need of German labor market for manpower.

Providing information about the German labor market and the way to reach it is paramount for an efficient procedure of legal migration. On top of allowing candidates to get properly prepared, it undercuts the efforts of migration mafia and other illegal networks to profit from the despair and ignorance of would-be migrants. It is of paramount importance for authorities - in Albania and

²⁵ there were 34,000 asylum requests from Albania for the period January - October 2016. Only 10 were accepted mostly because the applicant was married with an existing asylum refugee. 69 received subsidiary protection because at the Albanian detention conditions were not up to EU standards (only Fieri prison facility is certified as of now); and (iii) 65 received national protection against mostly blood-feud *“gjakmarrja”*. Source: German Embassy, Tirana

Germany - to understand that there is a whole part of would-be-migrants that does not appear in their radar. Those individuals use informal networks to obtain information, have no or very little access to internet, have low degree of education and are not used to deal with administration. Furthermore, a high proportion lives in rural areas and cannot afford to travel to the main cities to obtain available information. This target group does not fit in the profile of what Germany is looking for. However, this does not mean that they will not try to go there. These are the ones that are the easiest prey of miss-information campaign or of human traffickers, and that have the most to lose. New and innovative ways must be implemented to inform those individuals about their rights and opportunities.

VI. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT ON RE-INTEGRATION

Migration is a characterizing feature of Albanians throughout their history. Artificially stopped during the period of the Communist regime between 1944 – 1991, it has emerged defining the demography of the country and, very often its relations with the neighbors. In the framework of the integration of Albania in the EU, the subsequent visa-free movement and latter on, the free movement of persons, migration is certain to become one of the benchmarks conditioning the advancement pace in the integration road. This fact becomes even more important in the current geo-political developments affecting also the European Union.

VI.1. One third of Albanian population has left the country since 1991

In the last decade of the twentieth century, 1991-2000, a massive increase of Albanian emigration has been recorded related to two main factors: the collapse of communist regime and massive emigration toward Italy and Greece; and the crisis of March 1997 due to the collapse of financial pyramidal schemes. According the latest data circa 1.5-2 million Albanians²⁶ are abroad, mainly in: (i) 0.5-0.6 million in Greece; (ii) 0.5-0.6 million in Italy, and; (iii) 0.1 million in USA etc.

Based on Albania extended migration profile 2012-2014, published by Ministry of Internal Affairs December 2015, there were 1.4-1.5 million of emigrants in 2011, or 33% of the entire country population (INSTAT, 2011).

VI.2. The return phenomenon

The typology of Albanian emigrants returned during 2012-2016 consists of four forms: (i) voluntary return of economic emigrants; (ii) return of economic emigrants because of the crisis in the host countries, Italy, Greece; (iii) returns of minors, and, (iv) forced returns.

The forced return is a consequence of the increased forced returns of the irregular emigrants from Albania toward EU countries (mostly in Germany, Belgium, France, etc.) reflecting the “asylum seeking” phenomena. This development is a result of the fulfillment of Albanian government obligations in the framework of the EU integration. In this framework, a Readmission Agreement between the European Community and the Albanian Government has been signed in 14 April 2005 and entered into force on 1 May 2006 for Albanian citizens and on 1 May 2008 for third-countr

VI.3. Institutional context

In terms of institutional framework regarding the return and reintegration of Albanian citizens, the list of institutional responsible and involved is the following:

1. Ministry of Interior is the first actor that works in front office in the process of returning. It runs the database of border-crossing entries of returned Albanian citizens through the General Directorate of Border and Migration (European Commission, 2016) part of the State Police of the Republic of Albania. Inside this Directorate, the key Department is the Department of Migration²⁷;
2. Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth is responsible for the reintegration of returned people in terms of social and employment policies. The main Department responsible inside the MSWY

²⁶ <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/ciddata/ciddata.html>

²⁷ Duties and responsibilities of Ministry of Interior are defined in article 30 of the law no. 9668, date 18.12.2016: “For emigration of Albanian citizens for employment motifs”

is the Directorate for Employment Policy and Migration²⁸;

3. National Employment Service (NES). In NES the main Directorate responsible for migration issue is the Directorate for Employment Service and Migration. At regional and local level of National Employment Service, there is one person responsible in charge of Migration Counter - a focal point at local level that: (i) collects detailed information on returned Albanian citizens, (ii) assesses their needs, provide them information according their needs, and to address them to the institutions offering relevant services, such as to health, education, employment and so forth;
4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs²⁹;
5. Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Work, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Economy, and Ministry of Finance are also involved each for issues falling within their scope.

VI.4. Legal context

The legal basis for return and readmission is an integral part of the migration law in Albania. The national readmission legislation consists of:

- Readmission Agreement between the European Commission and Albania signed on 14 April 2015, and entered into force on 1 May 2006, with the aim to further strengthen effective cooperation in the fight against illegal emigration and to establish clear and simple procedures for the identification and safe return of people who do not meet the requirement for entry or stay in Albania or any EU members states;
- Implementing Protocols to the Readmission Agreement with the countries: Germany, Austria, United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxemburg, Netherland, Denmark, Italy, Check Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Hungarian, and non-EU countries as Switzerland, Norway, Island, on re-acceptance Law No. 108/2013 "On Foreigners";
- Law No. 108/2014 date 31/07/2014 "For the State Police";
- The law No. 108/2013 "For foreigners³⁰" amended by the law No. 75/2016 dated 14.07.2016;
- Law No.9668, dated 18.12.2006, "For emigration of Albanian citizens for employment reasons"; amended by law Nr. 10389, date 3.03.2011;
- Order No. 83, date 6.06.2011 of the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth: "For the form, content and procedures to be entitled of the emigrant status";
- Order No. 84, date 6.06.2011 of the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth: "For the form and content of "the register for emigrants" and the procedures for registration amended;
- In 18.02.2016, Albania adopted the law No. 14/2016, "On the identification and registration of Albanian citizens living abroad".

VI.5. Policies, Strategies and Action Plans

Acknowledging the importance of the phenomenon of returned migrants³¹ in 2010, Albanian Government has approved the Strategy on Reintegration of Returned Albanian citizens 2010-2015. The strategy has foreseen a series of measures to be undertaken for the reintegration³² of Albanian

²⁸ Duties and responsibilities are defined in article 28 of the law no. 9668, date 18.12.2016: "For emigration of Albanian citizens for employment motifs"

²⁹ Duties and responsibilities are defined in article 29 of the law no.9668, date 18.12.2016: "For emigration of Albanian citizens for employment motifs"

³⁰ Article No. 141, amended by article 33. The annual profile of migration is approved by Order of the Ministry of Interior, during the first semester of the following year. The extended profile of migration is prepared in cooperation with the institutions that are responsible for the management of statistical data for migration one time every four year, during the first nine month of the following year and is approved by Decision of the Council of Ministers.

³¹ Return migrants/migration: The movement of persons returning to his/her country of origin or habitual residence usually after spending at least one year in another country. This return may or not may be voluntary. Return migration includes voluntary return or forced return.

³² Reintegration: (i) Re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of his/her country of origin or habitual residence; (ii) Re-integration (cultural): In the context of return migration, re-adoption from the returned migrant of the values, ways of living, language, moral principles, ideology, and traditions of the county of origin's society; (iii) Re-integration (economic)- In the context of return migration, the

nationals from EU member states.

The main objective and measures of this strategy were to: (i) improve the legal framework on reintegration support, and to; (ii) ensure effective structure in Public Institutions to guarantee reintegration support for returned Albanian citizens, and (iii.) integration of Albanian citizens in the economic and social life. But from 2012 till 2015, a new phenomenon has arisen i.e. the asylum-seeking in the EU member States, especially in Germany, Belgium, France, etc.

Due to this reason a process of intensification of return of Albanian emigrants in the period 2012-2015 has been noted. According to INSTAT and IOM Tirana, 133,544 Albanian emigrants above 18 years old have been returned to Albania during 2009-2013. In the table No. 1, the number of Albanian citizens apprehended in EU countries, in the period 2012-2014 is presented.

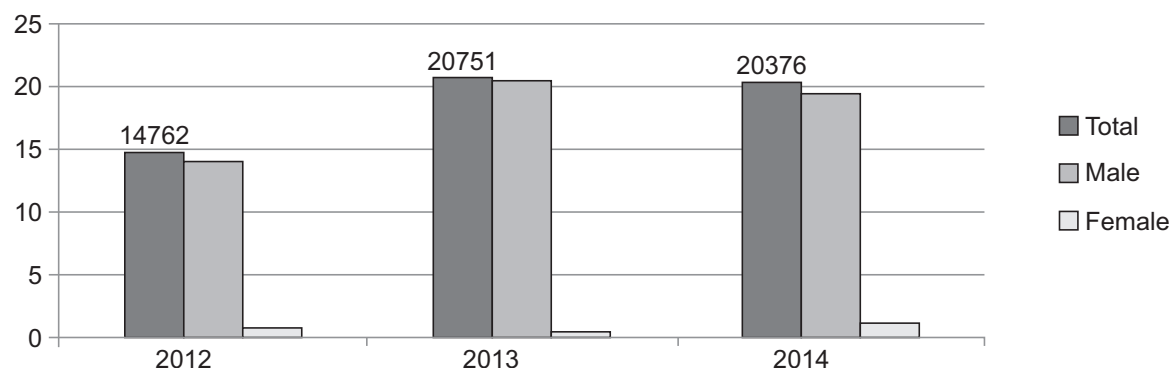
Table 1. Albanian citizens apprehended in EU countries, 2012-2014

Year	2012	2013	2014
Albanian citizens apprehended in EU	18,610	27,035	30,430
Albanian citizens who have been refused entry in EU	13,195	12,980	14,275
Albanian citizens who have been asked to leave EU	16,160	20,725	29,665

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs

According to official data of Ministry of Interior, during 2014, a total of 20,376 Albanian citizens have been returned from EU countries³³. More detailed are presented in the graph no. 1.

Graph 1. Albanian citizens returned 2012-2014 from EU countries



Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2015.

More than 95% of returned Albanian citizens are male (95% in 2012 and 96% in 2014). The intensification of return of Albanian citizens has occurred for different reasons, such as: (i) voluntary return of economic emigrants; (ii) return of emigrants because of the crisis in the host countries; (iii) return of minors where accompanied or not and, (iv) forced return.

During 2014, a total of 1,928 returned operations has taken place, 1510 or 76% from Greece, 73 from France, and the remains from others countries. After the returned back in the country, for being supported for employment and vocational training issues, the returned emigrants can be registered at the network of the employment offices. The figures show that there is a big difference between

process by which a migrant is reinserted into the economic system of his or her country of origin, and be able to earn his or her own living. In terms of development, economic reinsertion also aims at using the know-how which was acquired in the foreign country to promote economic and social development of the country of origin; (iv) Re-integration (social)-In the context of return migration, the reinsertion of a migrant into the social structures of his/her country of origin. This includes the development of a personal network (friends, relatives, neighbors) and the development of civil society structures (associations, self-help groups and other organizations). Source: Return migration and Reintegration in Albania 2013-Instat and IOM

³³ Albania Extended Migration Profile 2012-2014

returned emigrants and the returned emigrants registered in the employment offices during 2012-2015. For example, in 2014 from 20,376 returned only 834 (or 4%) has been registered in the employment offices.

Comments and recommendations in terms of concluded and future strategies for returned and integration as well as irregular emigration has been presented in the Albania 2016 Progress report from European Commission of 9/11/2016.

Albania 2016 EU Progress Report on Legal and Irregular Migration

-The absence since 2000 of a cross-sector national strategy on migration remains an issue of concern. Measures to mainstream migrations issues in several national sector strategies, including: (i) Social protection and inclusion, (ii) employment, business and development. Integrated border management and the fight against human trafficking, produced limited results.

-The strategy on the reintegration of returned Albanian citizens came to end in 2015. Work on a new strategy has not started yet.

-A specific section is included instead in the 2015-2020 national strategy on development and integration approved in May 2016.

Further efforts are needed to ensure that the policy framework on emigration for employment purposes is coherent and implementation is not weakened by contradictory legal provisions

Source: Albanian 2016 Progress report by the European Commission, page 69-70

Recommendations for Re-integration:

- the re-integration policy for returned emigrants need to be better coordinated due to the multitude of actors involved and the unclear role, overlapping responsibilities and resulting ownership;
- The Public Employment Service must change approach and increase the level of support in concrete terms and accompaniment on the ground, and not only with advice and counseling dispensed in the offices;
- Creation of a special fund for the reintegration of the voluntary returned asylum seekers;
- Increasing role of local government. Fiscal alleviation and concrete support for the returned emigrants based on a regional approach, through a better coordination with all actors at regional and local level.

Recommendations for Emigration:

- Increase the transparency of information on emigration and be careful during the message transmission in media, to avoid the increases the expectation of the young people;
- Develop and implement accreditation of Private Agencies for Employment in order to have a quality check and avoid problems that may happen to Albanian citizens.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this qualitative research study indicate that the recent migration wave was characterized by its broad nature and overall inclusiveness, quick decisions, low risk, costs of travel and biased information on legal migration procedures. The findings on the push factors are in line with those coming from other migration studies: Albanians left in search of a better future for them and for their children, for better employment prospects, better social and economic conditions and sometimes also because of physical insecurity.

At the macro level, the economic conditions of would-be migrants deteriorated after the global financial crisis in 2008. The crisis resulted in the return of a considerable number of Albanian emigrants from Greece and Italy, a significant decrease in remittances from abroad, increased poverty rates, higher unemployment rates especially among the youth, and the slowdown of the economic activity.

An interesting finding is that there was no preparation beforehand. None of the interviewees had given enough thought to the decision to go Germany, they didn't speak any German, nor had they taken with them education and qualification certificates/diploma, although work was clearly stated as the main reason for leaving.

The push factors towards Germany included its economic development, the organized welcoming system, cash payments for the waiting period, the miss- or partial understanding of German official speeches and the Albanian diaspora in Germany. The lack of knowledge on the work migration procedures, partial information, biased and word-of-mouth dominated information, a strong peer effect and high expectancies for a successful job search based on the statements that Germany is in need of workforce, positively affected the decision to migrate to Germany,

The experiences while in Germany present a two-fold picture; the stay in camps was generally evaluated as a negative experience, especially with regards to living conditions. It is that time after they left the camps that the returnees remember positively. The main lesson learned during the whole migration endeavor is the need to know the rules and follow them. Furthermore, they now have a higher awareness on how a good system works, which may constitute a benchmark for their everyday life in Albania and expectations from politics and administration,

Most of the returnees have somehow settled in Albania. They have returned to their previous lifestyle, but are attentive on migration opportunities. Being aware of rules and procedures now, the interviewees would like to legally migrate to Germany. They are also taking active action such as learning the language, attending vocational training courses and acquiring relevant information from authorities.

The main push and pull factors identified in this study have been and will remain valid for relatively long periods: the differences in earnings and economic development, the rule of law, labour market performance, the differences in living standards, education quality and hopes for the future. These differences are not easy to overcome and they will continuously feed intentions of Albanian youngsters to migrate towards Germany. However, it is very important to regulate and manage potential migration in order to mitigate its negative impact both in Albania and in Germany.

Migration strategies and actions should address the issue of better and more adapted information on migration opportunities and the official ways of migration, tailored to different segments of youngsters based on their demographic characteristics, capabilities and potentials. Given that there is a gap in the communication between institutions and individuals in Albania, it is necessary to

identify alternative and complementary ways of overcoming the barriers and improve message delivery and the effectiveness of messages to youngsters.

In order to have a better understanding of the asylum laws and migration procedures, harmonization of asylum and residence criteria in the EU member countries could also be an important step.

Albanian government can address the migration problem by properly informing the public on migration opportunities and requirements, adapting and upgrading VET courses according the need of the local and international labour markets, increase collaboration with other VET schools abroad in order to ensure updated skills, and enrich vocational courses with foreign language courses. Such a policy would benefit the individual and the country, independently of the migration decision upon course completion. It will equip them with skills for the global labour market. Special efforts should be paid to rural and mountainous areas regarding their access to information and VET courses.

Any effort of German authorities to contribute to the information, training and other labour market mechanisms is most needed. However, it is our opinion that those efforts can be more efficient if adapted to the local context and culture. Albanian candidates need much more accompanying measures than the standard German job-seekers. Those accompanying measures cost sensibly less if implemented in here than once the would-be migrant has left Albania.

The migration, and especially the migration of young people, has always characterized Albania (with the notable exception of 1944–1990 period under the communist regime). Albanian youngsters move for better studying opportunities, better jobs, better life prospects. The migration wave of 2014 - 2015 superposes this “normal” youth migration feature with the contextual push and pull factors: a difficult socio-economic environment in Albania and a low-risk high-reward opportunity to settle in Germany. The amplitude of the movement was impacted by miss-information and - sometimes - criminal interests.

However, Albanian youth migration should not be seen as only conditioned by better education and employment prospects. Our interviews, and other studies, point out that youth migration has mostly to do with the larger and more important goal of career development and life goals. These people are looking for a future: a better job and / or better study opportunities are parts of the bigger whole. Through “free movement” across borders, Albanian youth (and Western Balkans’s) build up their character, their skill set, and most importantly, their culture of understanding and tolerance of the “other”. It is through these lenses that youth migration from Western Balkans should be seen.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Data on asylum applicants from Albania for the period 2008 - 2015

	Asylum applicants										First time applicant						
	GEO/TIME	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total	EU ³⁴	1,135	2,065	1,925	3,080	7,500	11,065	16,950	67,740	615	1,305	1,075	2,860	6,875	10,555	16,145	65,935
	Germany	75	55	45	85	250	1,295	8,110	54,760	60	50	40	80	230	1,245	7,865	53,805
	Total	1,220	2,120	1,965	3,190	7,760	11,400	17,305	68,740	675	1,350	1,110	2,950	7,115	10,830	16,465	66,780
Less than 14 years	EU	110	250	220	735	1,920	2,920	4,500	18,685	60	210	180	690	1,750	2,765	4,335	18,335
	Germany	10	5	5	15	75	375	2,560	16,025	10	5	5	15	75	365	2,505	15,785
	Total	120	255	225	760	1,980	3,000	4,595	18,955	65	215	185	715	1,810	2,835	4,420	18,570
From 14 to 17 years	EU	60	145	90	315	720	1,065	1,555	4,480	95	100	70	295	665	1,030	1,505	4,390
	Germany	0	0	0	5	30	90	465	3,180	0	0	0	5	25	90	450	3,130
	Total	65	145	95	320	745	1,085	1,590	4,560	100	100	75	305	695	1,050	1,535	4,460
From 18 to 34 years	EU	710	1,290	1,230	1,345	3,380	4,765	7,535	31,220	365	730	575	1,250	3,160	4,600	7,175	30,405
	Germany	50	35	35	45	90	545	3,475	24,775	45	30	35	40	80	530	3,370	24,390
	Total	760	1,325	1,255	1,400	3,500	4,915	7,690	31,675	400	755	600	1,290	3,265	4,720	7,310	30,780
From 35 to 64 years	EU	245	340	350	625	1,410	2,180	3,140	13,125	90	220	220	570	1,235	2,025	2,925	12,575
	Germany	10	10	5	25	55	275	1,580	10,630	5	5	5	20	45	255	1,510	10,350
	Total	270	350	360	650	1,465	2,260	3,220	13,320	105	235	225	585	1,275	2,090	2,990	12,735
65 years or over	EU	10	25	15	40	40	80	95	215	0	25	10	35	40	70	90	215
	Germany	0	0	0	0	0	10	35	155	0	0	0	0	0	10	35	155
	Total	10	25	15	40	40	80	95	215	0	25	10	35	40	70	90	215
Males Total	EU	860	1,500	1,390	1,890	4,425	6,275	9,930	41,105	495	880	700	1,730	4,060	5,640	9,445	40,035
	Germany	60	45	35	55	140	745	4,585	33,005	50	40	30	45	125	715	4,430	32,410
	Total	930	1,540	1,420	1,965	4,600	6,475	10,150	41,735	545	915	725	1,790	4,210	5,805	9,640	40,565
Males less than 14 years	EU	65	135	115	410	1,030	1,545	2,420	9,985	35	115	100	385	945	1,370	2,330	9,820
	Germany	5	5	0	5	45	200	1,345	8,540	5	5	0	5	45	195	1,310	8,420
	Total	70	140	115	425	1,070	1,585	2,470	10,130	35	120	100	400	980	1,405	2,380	9,950

³⁴ 28 countries

Males from 14 to 17 years	EU	45	125	65	245	535	805	1,160	2,900	90	85	50	230	500	765	1,135	2,845
	Germany	0	0	0	5	20	60	275	1,910	0	0	0	5	15	60	265	1,880
	Total	50	125	70	250	560	820	1,180	2,960	95	90	55	235	520	775	1,155	2,895
Males from 18 to 34 years	EU	585	1,000	960	845	1,990	2,635	4,450	20,240	300	525	395	770	1,860	2,380	4,225	19,745
	Germany	45	30	30	30	45	325	2,055	16,100	40	25	25	25	40	315	1,990	15,835
	Total	625	1,025	975	880	2,070	2,730	4,550	20,545	330	545	415	800	1,930	2,460	4,310	19,995
Males from 35 to 64 years	EU	165	220	235	365	830	1,220	1,810	7,870	65	135	135	320	720	1,065	1,665	7,520
	Germany	5	10	5	10	30	160	900	6,395	5	5	0	10	25	145	845	6,210
	Total	185	230	245	380	870	1,275	1,860	7,995	80	145	145	330	750	1,100	1,705	7,620
Males 65 years or over	EU	5	10	5	20	20	35	40	95	0	10	5	20	20	30	35	95
	Germany	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	65	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	65
	Total	5	10	5	20	20	40	40	95	0	10	5	20	20	35	35	95
Females Total	EU	280	565	530	1,190	3,075	4,705	7,005	26,570	125	420	375	1,130	2,800	4,245	6,685	25,835
	Germany	15	10	10	30	115	545	3,520	21,700	10	10	10	30	105	535	3,430	21,340
	Total	290	575	540	1,220	3,160	4,830	7,140	26,935	135	435	385	1,155	2,880	4,355	6,815	26,150
Females less than 14 years	EU	45	115	105	325	885	1,365	2,075	8,655	25	95	80	305	800	1,240	2,000	8,475
	Germany	5	5	5	5	35	175	1,215	7,445	5	5	0	5	35	170	1,190	7,330
	Total	50	115	110	335	915	1,405	2,120	8,775	30	100	85	315	825	1,275	2,040	8,580
Females from 14 to 17 years	EU	15	20	25	70	180	255	395	1,570	5	15	20	70	165	215	365	1,535
	Germany	0	0	0	0	10	30	190	1,265	0	0	0	0	10	30	180	1,245
	Total	15	20	25	70	190	260	405	1,595	5	15	20	70	170	225	375	1,555
Females from 18 to 34 years	EU	130	290	270	505	1,390	2,070	3,085	10,970	65	205	175	480	1,290	1,875	2,950	10,645
	Germany	10	5	10	15	45	220	1,415	8,670	5	5	5	15	40	220	1,375	8,545
	Total	135	295	275	515	1,430	2,125	3,140	11,120	70	210	185	490	1,330	1,915	3,000	10,780
Females from 35 to 64 years	EU	85	120	115	265	580	940	1,330	5,250	25	85	85	250	510	845	1,260	5,050
	Germany	0	0	0	10	25	115	685	4,230	0	0	0	10	20	110	665	4,135
	Total	85	120	115	270	595	965	1,360	5,315	25	90	85	255	525	870	1,285	5,110
Females 65 years or over	EU	5	10	5	20	20	40	60	120	0	10	5	20	20	40	55	120
	Germany	0	0	0	0	0	5	20	90	0	0	0	0	0	5	20	90
	Total	5	10	5	20	20	40	60	120	0	10	5	20	20	40	55	120

Source: EUROSTAT, 2016 http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctize&lang=en

Table 2. Aggregate annual data on the first and final decision of asylum applications of Albanian citizens

	GEO/TIME	First instance decisions on applications										Final decisions on applications									
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015				
Total decisions for Albanian citizens	EU	1,080	1,615	1,290	2,010	4,590	7,320	13,390	41,410	470	585	655	765	2,130	2,175	6,480	28,635				
	Germany	50	60	35	65	115	485	3,005	31,590	25	30	15	40	45	170	1,595	23,265				
	Total	1,130	1,660	1,320	2,070	4,770	7,595	13,690	42,035	525	635	680	805	2,205	2,370	6,715	28,945				
Total positive decisions	EU	145	180	125	250	545	615	1,070	1,085	130	105	140	175	225	340	695	755				
	Germany	10	5	5	15	15	35	75	75	5	15	5	0	5	5	20	55				
	Total	150	180	125	250	545	615	1,085	1,105	135	105	140	180	225	345	695	755				
Geneva Convention status	EU	55	75	45	75	370	245	215	175	85	40	70	60	75	150	240	280				
	Germany	0	5	0	0	0	5	10	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5				
	Total	60	75	45	75	370	245	220	175	85	40	70	60	75	150	240	280				
Humanitarian status	EU	65	70	55	115	120	225	330	485	:	:	15	45	60	105	150	135				
	Germany	5	5	0	0	5	15	25	35	5	15	5	0	0	0	15	35				
	Total	65	70	60	115	120	225	335	500	:	:	15	45	60	110	150	135				
Rejected	EU	940	1,435	1,165	1,760	4,045	6,705	12,320	40,325	340	480	515	590	1,905	1,840	5,785	27,885				
	Germany	40	50	30	55	105	450	2,930	31,515	25	20	10	40	40	170	1,580	23,210				
	Total	980	1,480	1,190	1,815	4,225	6,980	12,610	40,935	385	530	540	625	1,980	2,025	6,020	28,190				

 Source: EUROSTAT, 2016 http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&lang=en

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