

FACTSHEET

COMPREHENDING ALBANIAN MIGRATION TO GERMANY: 2014-2016

2016

This Working Paper is prepared by Cooperation and Development Institute and aims to investigate and provide a robust understanding of the recent migration outflow originating from Albania during 2014 - 2015, the push and pull factors that caused it; the experience of Albanian migrants abroad and the profiles and perspectives of the returnees.

The study took place from April until October 2016 and included desk review, media monitoring, in-depth interviews and field visits.

53,805

Albanians submitted an application for asylum in Germany in 2015!



60%



40%

23,300

Final decisions regarding asylum protection taken from German authorities in 2015!

only 55 positive decisions

34,000

Asylum requests in Jan. - Oct. 2016:

**only 10
asylum requests
approved**

**ZERO
working permission
delivered**

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The migration wave of 2014 and 2015 strikes by it “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 before departure is an average of two to three days.

The trigger to the decision to leave the country is a combination of factors most of them having to do with socio-economic conditions, (and the odd one about physical security). The underlying cause remains the search for an enabling environment that would offer to migrants 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 proceeded. 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 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. 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 and biased information from traditional media and 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. But, visa-free movement damaged 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.

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

Migrants were unprepared to settle in Germany, either for work or study. They 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 regarding 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 period 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 they found once in their dream land, was quite different than the expected. The positive side of this experience is that the returnees 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 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, the migrants liked the regularity of the German system but disliked the efforts they had to furnish to be a part of it. However, the longer they stayed in contact with the locals, the more involved in the system they got now. Back in Albania they have an invaluable benchmark to hold the Albanian administration accountable to.

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, neither inquired about available reintegration measures. Schools have reported difficulties with re-integrating children. Many youngsters are now registered to German language courses, VET trainings or are using their contacts in Germany to look for jobs to better prepare for the next time they go to Germany.

Out of 57,300 refused asylum requests in 2015-2016, there were 6,268 repatriations from Germany. Many others have returned voluntarily, but there is no comprehensive data of their reinsertion in the system (employment, social support, schooling, training, etc.).

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Now 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 is insufficient to limit the efforts in only producing information about rules and procedures of legal migration and making this information 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. They have historically seen it 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, etc and tailor the message in a way that is understood by common people.

This time it must be different for the migration endeavor so as to be positive for the migrants, for Albania and for Germany. The returnees must be considered allies and partners in transmitting the right message to their compatriots. Certain cases can be promoted and provide the good example to follow.

This type of migration flux is expected to continue. Albanian economic structure and expected growth rate would not be able to provide the demand needed to significantly lower unemployment rates.

The foreseen economic growth and the current composition of industrial / services sectors, the population living in rural areas, the preponderance of micro-enterprises (90% of registered companies in Albania have up to four employees), can not provide the traction power needed in the labor market.

So, Albanians will continue to emigrate. 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.