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# Children & Migration in Albania

**Latest trends and protection  
measures available**



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**Dr. Zana Vathi and Dr. Iva Zajmi**

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# Acknowledgements

This report was the outcome of the work of a team of researchers: Dr Zana Vathi (lead researcher), Dr Iva Zajmi (researcher) and 4 local researchers: Ana Majko (Tirana and Fier), Enkeleda Sako (Fier), Celstina Mucollari (Lezha and Shkoder), and Nertila Lera (Korce). The project was commissioned by Terre des hommes in Albania with the financial support of USAID, the Austrian Development Agency and Terre des hommes Foundation in Lausanne. It was coordinated by the Office of Terre des hommes in Albania, more specifically by Enkelejda Kallçiu, Orinda Gjoni and Renata Kapidani. Jezerca Tigani and Blerta Spahiu from Terre des hommes in Albania gave valuable feedback in the process of reviewing. Maria Antonia Di Maio contributed with major editorial review of the research report. Due thanks go to all stakeholders who accepted to be interviewed and thus contributed significantly to the research and to this report. A list of respondents is provided in Annex 2. The authors' special gratitude goes to migrants and their families, who generously shared their views and experiences throughout the field work.

# Acronyms

<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FRONTEX</b>	EU Agency for Cooperation at the External Borders
<b>IGO</b>	Intergovernmental organizations
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-governmental Organizations
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Sciences
<b>MoFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>MoIA</b>	Ministry of Internal Affairs
<b>MoSWY</b>	Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
<b>NAPM</b>	National Action Plan for Migration
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organizations
<b>NSDI</b>	National Strategy for Development and Integration
<b>NSM</b>	National Strategy for Migration
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>SAA</b>	Stabilization and Association Agreement
<b>SIRAC</b>	Strategy on Integration of Returned Albanian Citizens 2010-15
<b>SSS</b>	State Social Service
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UNCRC</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

# Key terms and definitions

For the purpose of this report, the following definitions are adopted.

A **Child** is any person under the age of 18 years<sup>1</sup>.

**Adolescence** is defined as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19<sup>2</sup>.

**Youth** are those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years<sup>3</sup>.

**Children on the move** shall be understood as those children who have left their place of habitual residence and are either on the way towards a new destination, or have already reached such a destination<sup>4</sup>. According to the above-definition, a child can move across State borders, or within a country. S/he can be on the move alone, with parents or other family members, with other adults and/or children, previously known or unknown to the child.

**“Unaccompanied minors”** means third-country nationals or stateless persons below the age of 18, who arrive on the territory of the [EU] Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person; it includes minors who are left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the Member States<sup>5</sup>.

**Separated children** are under 18 years of age, outside their country of origin and separated from both parents or their previous legal, or customary primary caregiver<sup>6</sup>.

A **trafficked child** is any person under eighteen who is recruited, transported, transferred, harbored or received for the purpose of exploitation, either within or outside a country, even if no element of coercion, deception, abuse of authority or any other form of abuse is used<sup>7</sup>.

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1 Art.1 UNCRC

2 WHO definition ([http://www.who.int/maternal\\_child\\_adolescent/topics/adolescence/dev/en/](http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/adolescence/dev/en/))

3 UN standard definition (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>)

4 Definition adopted by Terre des hommes, 2011.

5 Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted, Chapter 1, Article (2) (i);:32004L0083:en:HTML

6 Separated Children in Europe Programme (‘SCEP’), Statement of Good Practice, 4th Revised Edition, 2009. This definition – largely adopted by the General Comment No 5, recognizes that some children may appear ‘accompanied’ but in practice the accompanying adult may be either unable or unsuitable to assume responsibility for their care.

7 SCEP/Save the Children, Position Paper on Preventing and Responding to Trafficking of Children in Europe, 2007. This definition is largely based on Article 3 of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000).

**Child protection** refers to protecting children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation<sup>8</sup>.

A **refugee** is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations, 1989

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR definition, <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>

# Executive Summary

Albania and its population have been significantly affected by migration since the early 1990s. A predominant trend has been that of Albanian citizens emigrating primarily towards wealthier countries in Europe, but also to North America and Australia. Albeit the main waves were recorded in the 1990s and in the 2000s, emigration from Albania continues nowadays, making Albania the country originating one of the highest migration flows in Europe. Emigration, however, is not the only form of movement affecting Albania. Immigration trends to the country are intensifying, albeit to a smaller extent than to other countries in Europe. Return migration – i.e. the return of both long- and short-term migrants – is another migration flow of high importance; whereas the most overlooked aspect of movements affecting Albania is internal migration, which has a significant impact on individuals concerned, their families, as well as institutions expected to assist them.

Despite the limited data on migration in Albania, this phenomenon has an undoubted impact on its population, including children. Thus, Terre des hommes in Albania decided to conduct research in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data about contemporary migration trends in the country, about challenges and opportunities arising from them, and about current responses undertaken by national and local institutions. The research combined two main components: an analysis of the available literature on current migration trends, issues and responses; and interviews and focus groups with migrants, their families and other key informants at national and local level, in five municipalities of Albania considerably affected by migration over the past decades (Tirana, Shkodra, Lezha, Fier and Korca). Among the main limitations, the study did not succeed in including immigrant population among the interviewees; further, due to the limited time-frame – which would hinder safe and meaningful participation – children were not consulted directly; and finally, due to the very limited information available regarding child migration, the findings mainly focus on adult and families affected by migration, albeit through their lenses the situation of children affected is depicted in a multifaceted fashion.

For a long time, emigration from Albania has been mostly irregular. Although over the past decades large numbers of Albanian citizens have succeeded in integrating in other countries, opportunities for regular migration have been still limited. With the liberalization of the visa regime in 2010, patterns and trends of migration from Albania have changed. Its citizens can move within the Schengen area for 90 days and thus leave the country regularly. However, since this possibility is not associated to the opportunity to take up employment abroad, a large number of Albanian nationals applied for international protection based on economic grounds in the Schengen area (and also in UK) as a way to secure their long-term stay in those countries. Most of them have had their application rejected. While being less risky in terms of travel, this new way to emigrate poses serious challenges to the individuals, families and children concerned. Research at local level found that – while showing a smaller ‘shock’ upon return compared to long-term migrants – Albanian asylum seekers were in an even more precarious situation than before departure: generally, they had to sell all their assets in order to afford the travel, and did not have the opportunity to gain financially or professionally while abroad. At the same time, children were mostly able to quickly integrate into the new country, and suffered also psychologically upon return to Albania.

Compared to other Western Balkan countries that have faced massive inflows of migrants and asylum seekers between 2015 and 2016, Albania has been affected to a limited extent by the so-called 'migrant and refugee crisis'. However, the even limited number of individuals and families reaching the country has exposed the substantial unpreparedness of the system. Immigration trends and management in Albania deserve further analysis, especially regarding the extent to which the human rights of the individuals concerned are fulfilled, and the capacity of the institutions in charge. The research showed also a noticeable immigration flow concerning individuals entering and staying regularly in Albania, mostly for work, family unity, and for volunteering in religious activities. This aspect of migration in Albania seems to be unproblematic.

Return migration to Albania concerns long-term migrants (often coming back due to the economic crisis in the host country), asylum seekers who returned or were returned after a negative decision on their application, and seasonal migrants. The situation and expectations of returned migrants vary based – among other factors – upon the type of migration they were involved in. Generally, long-term migrants are willing to invest their savings in real estate property or in the business sector. They have gained new professional skills and wish to be employed according to their qualifications. Unfortunately, they often experience considerable frustration, as the support they receive at local level is very limited. This situation often prompts them to attempt migration again.

The needs of asylum seekers whose application was rejected are generally more acute and relate to the basics – they need support for housing and for affording essential goods and services, such as health care. In both groups above, however, one of the main obstacles to reintegration is represented by the situation experienced by children. Having reached a considerable level of integration in the host country (even when their stay abroad was relatively short), children feel estranged in their country of origin, and are able and willing to maintain ties and connections with the host country. Despite the efforts deployed by teachers and personnel, these children face considerable difficulties in integrating back into school, as well as within the community and broader society.

Internal migration affected all municipalities covered in this study, albeit to a different extent and according to slightly different patterns. Internal migrants include individuals and families generally moving from rural to urban areas in the hope to afford higher living standards and to access a broader range of opportunities for themselves and for their children (mostly concerning employment, education and health). Internal migration within Albania is also made of long - and short-term returned migrants, who wish to settle in a different city or area of the country upon return, in the hope to re-start their life there on more favorable grounds. Unfortunately, internal migrant adults and children are not regarded as in need of assistance and protection, although they face several obstacles in accessing services, mostly due to administrative barriers. The most vulnerable among internal migrants are those with a low level of education and a very poor socio-economic background, particularly individuals and families belonging to ethnic minorities discriminated-against in the country.

Local-level research confirmed the general trends regarding migration from, to and through Albania outlined at national level. However, the geographical position of each municipality, the socio-cultural differences and the existing local economies appear to affect the types and intensity of movements. Being the capital city and by far the most populous one, Tirana receives the largest number of internal migrants. It also attracts a considerable share of regular immigration to the country. However, a large number of immigrants from a variety of countries

settled in Fier to work in the local oil industry. In Lezha, emigration to European Union countries (primarily Italy) seems to be the prevailing trend, while the municipality was apparently not affected by the inflows of asylum seekers and irregularly entering migrants. Conversely, Korca and Shkodra were both affected, with Korca being mainly an entry point into the country, and Shkodra an exit point for those aiming to reach the European Union.

The migration management and its interaction with the social and child protection systems in Albania appear characterized by an overall lack of coordination among institutions, combined with a lack of financial and human resources (both in terms of number and relevant skills of professional). Despite the multi-faceted aspects of migration highlighted in this report, assistance and protection offered to individuals, families and children affected by migration appears to be still based on a narrow definition of 'vulnerable groups', with a consequent exclusion of those mostly in need of support. In the face of the prevalence of emigration from Albania, the Government's efforts to cooperate with the main destination countries of Albanian citizens are still limited in terms of broadening regular employment opportunities.

Upon return, migrants lack adequate assistance and protection, including support to housing, employment, business start-up, and access to health. Conversely, albeit in need to be enhanced and integrated into a broader functional protection system, efforts to support to school inclusion of returned children appeared to be considerable, especially at local level. Overall, however, migrants expressed a lack of trust in institutions and in their capacity to effectively help them and their families.

Having focused for a long time on emigration and trafficking in human beings, Albania lacks a comprehensive legal and policy framework on immigration. While sharing the gaps with the broader migration management system in terms of financial and human resources as well as inter-institutional coordination, the management of irregularly entering migrants and refugees raises acute concerns. These regard, in particular, the capacity and standards of care and accommodation of asylum-seeking families and children, and the resort to, and conditions of detention of migrants who do not apply for asylum.

The need to reform the policy and institutional framework concerning migration management and the provision of social and child protection to migrants emerged clearly from the research, at both national and local level. In order to achieve that aim, it is recommended in particular to:

- *Improve migration infrastructure and management.* A comprehensive, long-term migration policy should be developed and implemented in Albania. Such policy should focus as a priority on expanding legal opportunities for emigration for work and professional training.
- *Treat service provision and its budgeting at central level as a priority.* In order for Albania to realize its migration and social protection objectives, service provision for migrants on the ground, and human and material resources for this purpose, should be made a priority within its national budget.
- *Consider internal migration an important form of migration with relevance for policy-making.* Internal migrants should be recognized as a vulnerable group in need of assistance in Albania. Administrative barriers hampering access to services should be removed as an urgent measure.

- *Provide appropriate support to assist returned migrants in the reintegration process.* Migrants returning from abroad should be supported in accessing housing and employment opportunities, education and health care. An inventory of the skills gained by them in emigration process could be done as a basis to support employment and business startup. Measures to encourage the establishment of new businesses by returned migrants could also include exemption from taxes for the first months or provision of premises to work.
- *Considerably improve the treatment of irregularly entering migrants and asylum seekers.* Also in light of a potential increase in the numbers of these migrants, the whole set of procedures to deal with this at-risk group of adults, children and families should be subjected to a detailed scrutiny and considerably revised, in order for Albania to comply with basic human rights standards set out in international as well as national laws.
- *Involve all institutions providing social services to migrants at the local level in the elaboration of standard operating procedures* clearly defining what happens when, and identifying the institutions responsible to act upon each stage of the action, and the related interaction of the migration and social service structures. Revising the mandate of these institutions, in order to optimize service-delivery and to avoid overlapping.

# 1. Introduction

Albania and its population have been significantly affected by migration since the country's liberation from dictatorship in 1990 and the shift to market economy and to a democratic State. Alike the whole Southeast Europe ('SEE'), Albania experienced a sharp increase in the intensity of population movements, which contributed to a complex range of different migration types and trends in the entire region and beyond. A predominant trend is emigration of Albanian citizens primarily towards other European countries, but also further afield, such as North America and Australia.

Although the main waves of emigration were recorded in the 1990s and the 2000s, emigration from Albania continues nowadays. Following the liberalisation of visa requirements in 2010, Albanian citizens can move freely within the Schengen area<sup>10</sup>, albeit they are not entitled to work in those countries. The right to work in other countries is subject to bilateral agreements for employment between the Albanian Government and other countries' Governments. Nonetheless, a high wave of emigration of Albanian citizens was recorded in 2015.

Despite the return of migrants to Albania (particularly from Greece), which started to take place in mid- to late-2000s as a consequence of the economic crisis affecting the whole Europe<sup>11</sup>, the number of Albanian citizens currently abroad is estimated to be 1.4-1.5 million, making Albania the country of origin of one of the largest migration flows in Europe.

As the findings of this report show (section 4), poverty, unemployment and high dissatisfaction with the social protection system pushed many of the disadvantaged families to move towards wealthier EU countries. According to UNHCR<sup>12</sup>, the estimated number of Albanian citizens who emigrated to the Schengen Area between 2012 and 2015 is 62,520. Most of these individuals applied for asylum in the European Union: UNHCR reports that in 2015, Albanians were the largest single national group seeking asylum in Germany after Syrians (54,762 persons)<sup>13</sup>. This phenomenon involves individuals moving to the Schengen area taking the opportunity of the visa liberalization regime, and applying for asylum on the basis of lack of employment opportunities and poor economic conditions<sup>14</sup>. As it is analysed in section 4, local communities and local institutions on the ground are witnessing a high number of individuals, including separated and unaccompanied children, as well as young people and families, who are being returned to Albania after their asylum application was rejected in one of the EU countries.

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10 Schengen Area, founded by the Schengen Agreement (1985), signifies a zone where 26 different European States signatory to the Agreement have abolished all internal borders in lieu of a single external border. These are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Liechtenstein (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AI33020>).

11 [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return\\_migration\\_and\\_reintegration\\_in\\_albania\\_2013\\_.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return_migration_and_reintegration_in_albania_2013_.pdf)

12 <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/unhcrstats/576408cd7/unhcr-global-trends-2015.html>

13 <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/unhcrstats/576408cd7/unhcr-global-trends-2015.html>

14 <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-kosovo-top-german-2015-asylum-seekers-list-01-07-2016>

Emigration is not the only form of migration affecting Albania – traditionally, as well as more recently. Albania is a middle-income country, which has undergone significant economic challenges and transformations since the beginning of the 1990s. Partly as a result of economic improvements, immigration trends in Albania are intensifying. These trends thus relate to Albania’s own migration history and to its socio-economic profile, while being affected by other migratory movements in the region and at the global level. For example, even though to a smaller extent than other countries in Europe and in the Western Balkans, Albania has been affected by the refugee flows from Syria, Lybia, Afghanistan and other war-torn countries. This report will therefore also explore the dynamics of these flows and their impact on Albania’s political debates, policy-making and service provision.

Another strong migration flow that is of high importance is return migration. The trends of returns are very much in line with the emigration patterns of the 1990s and the 2000s. The highest number of returnees to Albania in the late 2000s came back from Greece due to the economic crisis in that country, which was host to the largest Albanian migrant community in Europe. Return migration has intensified over the past years, with a total of 133,544 adult migrants returning to Albania during the period 2009-2013<sup>15</sup>. This intensification is also related to the emergence of the trend highlighted above regarding increasing numbers of Albanian citizens seeking asylum in Western European countries. Data collection and analysis of return migration to Albania are very recent, thus consistent statistics that show the characteristics of returnees are largely missing. Furthermore, while 33.7% of these migrants returned with their partner and children, there is an absence of data on the exact number of under-18-year-old returnees<sup>16</sup>. Children entering Albania as part of return migration are recorded sporadically by different institutions, depending on their focus: for example, according to the data from the Ministry of Health, during 2012-2014, a total of 12,444 emigrant children were returned to Albania (respectively 3,484 in 2012, 5,020 in 2013 and 3,940 in 2014), and they were recorded as part of the national programme of vaccination<sup>17</sup>. The lack of systematic inclusion of children in statistics appears to be a major obstacle for sound policy-making on migration and for the design of effective measures to protect children affected by migration in Albania.

However, probably the most overlooked aspect of migration, and the related effect it has on migrants and their families, is internal migration. Possibly because Albania’s conditionality package for EU accession is focused on emigration, as the findings in section 3 show, this aspect is not treated as a priority by relevant policy-makers. However, as this research uncovered, this type of migration is significant in impacting services. Moreover, it is indeed related to policy alignment with the EU, as the way internal migration is handled in Albania is directly linked with another major issue in the negotiations for EU accession: the conditions expected to be met by the social protection system. The impact that these new trends have on policy and practice is discussed in this report, based on the interviews with policy-makers, service providers and migrants themselves.

Despite the relevance and complexity of migration affecting Albania, the country currently lacks a formally-adopted comprehensive migration strategy. Albania has made relevant progress to address migration issues by including them in several national sector-specific strategies for the period 2014-20, such as social protection and inclusion, employment, business and

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15 [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return\\_migration\\_and\\_reintegration\\_in\\_albania\\_2013\\_.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return_migration_and_reintegration_in_albania_2013_.pdf)

16 [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return\\_migration\\_and\\_reintegration\\_in\\_albania\\_2013\\_.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return_migration_and_reintegration_in_albania_2013_.pdf)

17 [http://www.albania.iom.int/publications/reports/Profili\\_i\\_zgjeruar\\_i\\_migracionit\\_ENG\\_web.pdf](http://www.albania.iom.int/publications/reports/Profili_i_zgjeruar_i_migracionit_ENG_web.pdf)

development, integrated border management, and the fight against trafficking in human beings. However, significant efforts are still required in order to consistently and appropriately address the issue in its multi-faceted nature, and to provide protection and full access to fundamental rights to migrants and their families.

In light of the limited data regarding migration trends in Albania, and on the impact it has on its population – from migrants and their families, through to national and local institutions –, Tdh in Albania decided to conduct research in order to collect qualitative and quantitative data about contemporary migration trends in Albania, about challenges as well as opportunities arising from migration, and about current responses by local and national institutions in charge of managing migration and of assisting and protecting individuals affected by it, particularly children. Unlike several available publications on the topic that have put the emphasis on emigration, the current report assesses the rapidly transforming migratory profile of Albania, and pays due attention to internal migration and immigration.

This report is made up of four main sections. After introducing the key topics analysed in the report (Section 1) and outlining the main aspects of the methodology followed for this study (Section 2), Section 3 of the report reviews the issues related to migration that are mostly debated upon today in Albania at the national level: the increasing number of Albanian citizens who apply for asylum in Western Europe on the grounds of economic reasons; and the influx of irregularly entering migrants and refugees into Albania. These two topics are analysed in relation to the potential risks and opportunities for the migrants involved, and to the capacity of institutions in charge to manage migration and to assist and protect migrants concerned, in the broader picture of the relevant existing legal and policy frameworks.

An innovative aspect of this report is the close attention that it pays to the situation on the ground. Following on the national level perspectives, the report then moves on to discuss the local dimensions, looking at five urban areas situated in different regions in Albania: Tirana (Albania's capital); Shkodra and Lezha (two prominent cities in the North); and Korca and Fier (two large cities in the South). In Section 4, details on the functioning of the social services and the challenges faced by migrants and service providers are analysed in view of the national level policy making. Municipality-specific information are enclosed in Annex 3.

The last part of the report consists of a set of key conclusions and recommendations for policy makers and for organizations working in the field in Albania.

## 2. Methodology

This study aimed to provide a situational analysis of contemporary migration trends and dynamics in Albania and the impact these have on its population, particularly on children, through combining data at national and local level. More specifically, the research aimed to:

- Provide an overview of the reasons for migration, as well as of the migratory journeys and the treatment by the authorities experienced by children and families;
- Provide a profile of migrants in 5 municipalities of Albania (Tirana, Lezha, Shkodra, Korca and Fier), analyzing the challenges and opportunities for migrant children and families;
- Gain a comprehensive understanding of the institutional plans and services at the central and local level for Albanian and foreign-national children and families that have experienced different kinds of migration;
- Provide recommendations on the key areas that policy-making at national and local level should focus on.

Research for this report consisted of two main components: 1- an analysis of the available literature on current trends, as well as institutional responses, implemented in the framework of the existing legal and policy framework on migration and child protection in Albania; and 2- interviews with migrants and close family members and other key informants at local and national level.

The **literature review** encompassed available reports and other documents relating to migration in Albanian, English or other languages accessible by the research team, particularly those focusing on the types of migration which appear to significantly affect children. Documents in Albanian, English or other languages accessible by the research team in relation to the social protection and child protection systems have also been reviewed. The analysis included both published and internal documents accessed through fieldwork and provided by various institutions and organizations operating in Albania.

This study is primarily based on qualitative methods, namely **interviews, focus groups discussions, observations**, and field-notes on observations during fieldwork. Research took place at two main levels: national and local. Research at national level was carried out in Tirana (capital city); however, the data analysis process was based on a comparative case study methodology. As a result, each municipality was treated as a case study and detailed analysis is provided on each of the five municipalities included in this research. Alongside these case studies, a comparative analysis took place combining the data from research in each municipality and comparing the situation at national and local level.

Fieldwork took place in five municipalities in Albania: Shkodra, Lezha, Tirana, Fier and Korca. In each municipality, 10 interviews with migrants and/or close relatives of migrants, and 10 interviews with key informants were planned (for a total of 100 interviews – 50 with each group). Additionally, 15 interviews were scheduled in Tirana with key informants working at national and international level. In each municipality, 2 focus groups were planned: one with migrants and one with key informants.

In each municipality, the sample was composed of adults who were: migrants involved in one or more types of migration affecting the country; relatives of migrants; key informants. Relatives and family members of migrants were of interest for the purpose of this study, because their inclusion would provide with a broader perspective on the reasons for migration and its consequences on the entire family. This group included: migrants' partners, children, parents, and relatives who looked after the children left behind in Albania while parents worked abroad. More data on the sample characteristics are provided in Annex 3.

The group of key informants was made of officials working on migration, social protection and social welfare for families and children. Additionally, representatives of prominent international governmental and non-governmental organizations based in Tirana were also interviewed. The analysis of national patterns provided in this report is mostly based on interviews with policy-makers and practitioners and refers to the main strategies and programmes that are in place and, when appropriate, their transformation under the current circumstances.

**Table 1. Sample details**

Municipality	Migrants		Family members		Key informants	Total
	F	M	F	M		
Shkodra	6	9	10	2	11	38
Lezha	3	11	5	8	9	36
Tirana	-	-	-	-	15	15
1) national						
2) local	5	5	12	11	8	41
Fier	6	4	3	8	8	29
Korca	9	1	14	21	9	54
Total (participants)	29	30	44	50	60	213
	59		94			

As for **procedures and timeline**, field work was carried out between 30<sup>th</sup> of May and 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2016 by the two main researchers (30 May-4 June), and by the local researchers in each of the municipalities (until late-June 2016). Interviews were realised via face-to-face meetings as well as by e-mail. Face-to-face interviews lasted approximately one hour and were mostly recorded as notes, except for a number of interviews in Shkodra and Lezha, which were fully recorded and transcribed. Focus groups were realised with 5-7 people each, combining migrants of different groups, relatives of migrants, as well as representatives of State institutions and NGOs.

All interviews and focus groups were conducted ensuring the principles of confidentiality and anonymity. All interviewees were presented an information sheet and a consent form, and key informants were asked whether they would like to be identified in the report or rather preferred that their statements remained confidential.

Both the study and the present report bring some **limitations**. Interviews and focus groups were conducted according to the plans. However, in Fier only one focus group took place, while in Tirana and Lezha less interviews with key informants were conducted compared to the number anticipated. This limitation was largely compensated by a higher number of interviews carried out at national level.

For the purpose of this study, all forms of migration were researched; however, due to its qualitative methodology and the short-term nature of fieldwork, the different forms of migration were not equally represented in the sample interviewed. In particular, although the research team aimed to include in this study non-Albanian migrants, all migrants and relatives interviewed were Albanian citizens. Data on non-Albanian migrants were collected through interviews with key informants only.

Due to the limited time available, it was decided not to involve children directly in the research, as the time constraints would not allow to plan for safe and meaningful child participation throughout the field work. However, Terre des hommes and its partners have been regularly and extensively involving children affected by migration in the framework of other researches on similar topics, as well as in other project-related activities. Thus the present research also draws on the information directly provided by children in the framework of other contexts.

However, due to the methodology applied, and to the very limited information available regarding child migration in Albania, this report is mostly focused on the situation of adults and families migrating from, to and within the country, the challenges they face, and the measures in place to assist and protect them and their children. To follow up on this study, Terre des hommes intends to embark on and to advocate for further child-centred research on the situation of children on the move in Albania.

# 3. Migration & social protection: Recent national developments & responses

Despite being a country seriously affected by migration, and although the phenomenon has been addressed by earlier migration strategies and action plans, Albania lacks clear and systematic data on migration. The finalisation of the system of addresses and the creation of a register of emigrants, which are expected to be completed by 2017, could partially address this gap<sup>18</sup>. The institution in charge of collecting and releasing data on migration at national level is the Ministry of Internal Affairs ('MoIA'), while INSTAT – the Albanian Institute of Statistics - regularly compiles data relying on the work of its regional offices located in the main cities, which have as their primary focus the collection of data.

Given that Albanian emigrants have not been systematically registered when leaving the country, and because there have been few incentives to register their departure at the local authorities, the use of "indirect methods" has still been the main way to produce an estimate of the individuals who have emigrated during the past decades<sup>19</sup>. Systematic data collection is missing, particularly regarding the mobility of Albanian citizens – primarily labour migrants – towards neighboring and other countries.

At the same time, the number and the situation of returned migrants is not systematically explored in the country. The impact that such returns have on the local labour market is not sufficiently analyzed, nor is the situation regarding returned migrants' employability looked at properly in relation to their decision to re-emigrate.

The above-situation considerably limits the possibility to design sound, evidence-based policies on migration in Albania.

The interviews with policy makers and specialists at national level revealed that the issues related to migration that are mostly debated upon today are the following ones: the increasing number of Albanians who apply for asylum in Western Europe on the grounds of economic reasons; and the influx of refugees into Albania (and related emergency plan). Therefore, this chapter focuses primarily on the two above-topics, which are analysed in relation to the potential risks and opportunities for the migrants involved. It also scrutinizes the capacity of, and challenges for the existing institutions in charge to manage migration and to assist and protect migrants concerned, in the broader picture of the reforms required by the EU accession process.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Ms Ermira Galanxhi, Director of Social Statistics, INSTAT

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return\\_migration\\_and\\_reintegration\\_in\\_albania\\_2013.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/255982/return_migration_and_reintegration_in_albania_2013.pdf)

### Box 3.1.: Laws and policies concerning migration and social protection in Albania

Migration laws and policies are among the newest and most rapidly changing ones within the Albanian legal and policy framework. Until the 1990s, emigration was considered a crime. Immigration was highly controlled and allowed to a limited number of people that endorsed the official political views. Internal migration was also highly restricted. Confronted by one of the most explosive migration scenarios in Europe, since the beginning of the 1990s Albania developed these laws and policies as a response to the high migration flows, but also in relation to the expectations, conditions and pressures from other countries and the EU where Albanian citizens have been moving to. Migration laws and policies have also been subjected to frequent revisions in order to comply with the international and the EU standards. IGOs and INGOs have played an important role in shaping and implementing migration policies in Albania – and to some extent they still do so at present.

Albania has included clear provisions on migration and protection of migrants' rights in its supreme law and in several deriving legal documents. The Albanian Constitution<sup>20</sup> predicts, among others, the duty of the Albanian State to protect the rights and interests of the Albanian citizens abroad (Article 8), the non-discrimination and protection of foreign residents (Article 16), the freedom to choose one's own residence (Article 39), and the right of foreigner citizens to housing (Article 40). The imperative to protect children in migration contexts derives from article 54, which foresees special protection of children, young persons and women from exploitation and abuse.

The main national law regulating **emigration** is Law 9668/2006<sup>21</sup> (as revised by Law Nr.10389 of 3.3.2011) *On emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes*. The purpose of this law is the care, protection and preservation of the national identity of Albanian citizens, maintaining and strengthening ties with their country while they are employed outside the Republic of Albania. It provides the right of Albanian citizens to work abroad in compliance with the national laws and with the laws of the destination country. The right to employment is provided through bilateral agreements negotiated and signed by the MoSWY. The law also envisages the possibility to find employment abroad through private employment agencies, licensed by the MoSWY. The application of this law calls for clear sublegal acts based on the cooperation between the MoSWY, the Mol and the MoFA. However, to date, these acts have been enacted to a very limited extent.

With the settlement of and the growth of Albanian communities abroad, other laws were adopted, in order to regulate the extension of services to be provided by the Albanian State to these communities. Based on the Law no. 23/2015 *On the Albanian Foreign Service*, the Albanian diplomatic and consular services are expected to protect the legal interests and rights of Albanian emigrants. Vast literature on Albanian migration has shown that these services have been largely ineffective in the past (see Vullnetari 2007 for a review). The role of the consular services has been more effective when it comes to immediate services for Albanian migrants. Supported by the Law 10129/2009 *On the Civil Status*

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.gjykataelarte.gov.al/web/kushtetuta\\_e\\_republikes\\_se\\_shqiperise\\_1298.pdf](http://www.gjykataelarte.gov.al/web/kushtetuta_e_republikes_se_shqiperise_1298.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.pp.gov.al/web/ligj\\_per\\_emigrimin\\_36.pdf](http://www.pp.gov.al/web/ligj_per_emigrimin_36.pdf)

(revised)<sup>22</sup>, the Albanian Consulates issue certificates and passports for Albanian citizens in seven posts abroad<sup>23</sup> including Italy, Greece, the U.K. and the U.S.A. According to the same law, the MoFA and the Institute of Diaspora are obliged to support the teaching of Albanian language and culture to children of Albanian origin living abroad.

Further, according to the Law 10389/2011, the MoSWY shall support emigrants who return to Albania through offering social assistance and facilitating access to reintegration support services in the country. These migrants have the right to social and economic protection, the right to family union, and are exempt from duties and taxes at the national border. They are also entitled to free job orientation and vocational training, education and housing. The status of emigrant is granted to returned migrants by the MoSWY after at least one year of stay abroad.

The Law 9861/2008 *On State Border Control* and the Law 108/2013 *On Foreigners* are the two main laws regulating the **immigration** of foreign citizens in Albania. The Law on *Border Control*<sup>24</sup> predicts the procedures for border crossing, the roles and duties of the Border Police, the procedures to be followed with emigrants and migrants irregularly entering or staying, including asylum seekers, victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children. The more recent *Law on Foreigners*<sup>25</sup> envisages the conditions for entry, residence, return, the rights and duties of foreign citizens, as well as the competent authorities for immigration in Albania. The Law 121/2014 *On Asylum in the Republic of Albania*<sup>26</sup> provides the conditions and procedures for granting and withdrawing asylum, the rights and duties of asylum-seekers, refugees and persons under temporary and complementary protection, right to family reunification, access to services and integration of refugees in Albania. Furthermore, the Law 8389/1998 *On Albanian Citizenship* regulates the gaining of Albanian citizenship (Article 6) through birth, naturalisation after 5 years of continuous lawful residence in Albania (specified in Article 9), and adoption by Albanian citizens.

The new law Nr. 121/2016 *for the services of social care in the Republic of Albania* extends the assistance provided to both Albanian and foreign citizens, beyond cash-based assistance granted in the past. In particular, this law now envisages a range of new services, including: para-social services; services in community centers; residential services (including shelters); social services in emergency situations; alternative care for children without parental care; online and phone-counselling and other specialized services. The law directly mentions among the beneficiaries of the above-services foreign citizens, stateless persons and refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

Regarding the **protection of children** in migration contexts, the Law 10347/2010 *On Protection of the Rights of the Child* is a framework law predicting respect for the rights of children and structures responsible for their enforcement. The law predicts the rights to life, to name and nationality, to be with parents and to family unity, to safe return, to

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.vendime.al/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/LIGJ-Nr.-10-129-dat%C3%AB-11.5.2009-P%C3%8BR-GJENDJEN-CIVILE.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Figure stated in the meeting with the General Director of Consular Service Mr. Gazmend Barbullushi.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.infocip.org/al/?p=6833>

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.punetebrendshme.gov.al/files/documents\\_files/13-11-14-04-05-08ligji\\_per\\_te\\_Huajt.pdf](http://www.punetebrendshme.gov.al/files/documents_files/13-11-14-04-05-08ligji_per_te_Huajt.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.parlament.al/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2015/10/ligj\\_nr\\_121\\_dt\\_18\\_9\\_2014\\_19228\\_11.pdf](https://www.parlament.al/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2015/10/ligj_nr_121_dt_18_9_2014_19228_11.pdf)

freedom of expression, to education, to leisure, adequate living and health care, protection from violence, exploitation, from use of drugs, from trafficking and armed conflicts, from torture and arrest, the right to alternative care.

More specific legal provisions on child protection are contained in the Inter-ministerial Order of the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth, the Minister of Education and Sport, Minister of Health, and Minister of Interior, on the Mainstreaming of Efforts on Child Protection (nr 10 of 25.2.2015) and in the Action Plan on Children 2012-15, which covers the following areas: governance that takes into account child protection; quality services for child protection; child-friendly services; and participation of children in decision making. Furthermore, the National Agenda for Children's Rights 2016-2020, which was in the drafting phase at the time of the research, will focus on eliminating violence against children, establishing child-friendly services and child rights governance.

Similarly to the legal framework on migration, Albania is further developing its child protection legal framework, which will envisage some provisions specifically concerning children on the move or otherwise affected by migration. The Law 10347/2010 *On the Protection of Children's Rights* is being revised and is expected to also cover the rights and procedures for children returning from migration, to address the situation of children working on the street and related potential exploitation. This new law should be more inclusive, since it should apply to Albanian national children (within or outside Albania), as well as to foreign and stateless children.<sup>27</sup>

Within the current legal framework, there are specific provisions concerning unaccompanied children - unlike other groups of child migrants. These children are mentioned in the Law on Foreigners and in the Law on Asylum, albeit these laws refer to unaccompanied children entering Albania, and do not mention Albanian national unaccompanied children returning to the country. The *Law on Border*, which is implemented through two by-laws<sup>28</sup>, envisages the procedure for identifying and assisting unaccompanied children from Albania in border situations. This law envisages some protection measures and safeguards for this specific group of children, such as the use of detention as last resort measure, family tracing, identification, and referral to competent authorities. Moreover, according to article 36, the police performs scrutiny checks when they suspect a child is escaping parental custody or when the child is unaccompanied. Article 16 of the Law 121/2014 on Asylum specifies that unaccompanied children entering Albania as asylum seekers should be appointed a legal guardian and that their application should be given high priority. Finally, the law on emigration predicts that child migrants shall be returned in a safe way.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ms Ina Verzivoli, National Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights, referring to the Draft-Law on the rights and protection of the child.

<sup>28</sup> Internal Order of General Director of State no. 643 dated 17.12.2013 "On taking measures for readmission in Albania of unaccompanied minors, verification and start of investigation if the parents or legal guardians do not meet the legal obligations"; Joint Instruction of the General Director of the State and State Social Service no. 332/3 dated 07.03.2014 "On measures for reception and social treatment of unaccompanied minors returnees/readmitted from other countries"

<sup>29</sup> Article 24 of the Emigration Law.

## 3.1. Emigration

There are various forms of emigration from Albania. For a long time emigration has been mostly irregular<sup>30</sup>; only a few migrants have had the opportunity to migrate legally for purposes of study, for work or for family reunification. Although over the past decades large number of the emigrants have managed to integrate in the new countries of residence, particularly in Italy<sup>31</sup>, opportunities for regular migration available to Albanian citizens are still limited.

The liberalisation of the visa regime in 2010 has changed the patterns and dynamics of emigration, since Albanian citizens have now full access to movements in the EU Schengen Area for up to 90 days without needing a visa<sup>32</sup>. This right of movement however is not associated with the possibility to take up employment in the EU. Nonetheless, emigration is now heavily based on this type of movement and proliferates in various forms, including primarily the attempt to seek international protection based on economic reasons - and, in a few cases, based on claims of blood feud -, trafficking, and transit migration towards other countries that are not part of the Schengen area- such as the UK.

Massive emigration, taking advantage of the freedom of movement, as well as massive returns from the host countries, are recorded in Albania since the liberalisation of visas. These waves have been particularly intense since 2015. In particular, asylum claims on economic grounds filed by Albanian nationals in EU countries became a frequently debated-upon topic among both migrants themselves and officials. Due to its recent and dynamic nature there are limited official data, however, sources from the MoSWY and UNHCR<sup>33</sup> maintain that 68,500 Albanians have emigrated this way throughout the year 2015. This new form of migration is apparently very high on the agenda of Albanian policy-makers, since it relates to the visa liberalisation process, which is part of the country's EU accession procedures.

### Box 3.2.: Figures on returnees from failed asylum claims

This type of return intensified at the end of 2015 and at the beginning of 2016. According to data from the Border and Migration Police, the number of Albanian citizens returned from European countries in the second semester of 2015 was 20,776, and in the first semester of 2016 this number was 7,544. Out of the 20,776 returned in 2015, 1,169 were female (of whom 20 children) and 11,916 were male (of whom 127 children). Out of the 7,544 persons returned voluntarily in 2016, 5,802 were adults and 1,742 were children. Only in January 2016, 2,807 Albanian citizens were returned, out of whom 1,224 were returned voluntarily and 1,583 were subjected to forced return from the EU Schengen area.

Through seeking asylum on economic grounds, many families take the chance to try and gain the refugee status in Germany and other wealthy EU countries. Compared to the 1990s, when people risked their lives during the travel, this way of migrating does not present considerable

<sup>30</sup> Russell King, "Across the sea and over the mountains: Documenting Albanian migration", in *Scottish Geographical Journal* Vol. 119, Iss. 3, 2003,

<sup>31</sup> Zana Vathi, *Migrating and Settling in a Mobile World. Albanian Migrants and their Children in Europe, 2015* (<http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-13024-8>)

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/117555.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/117555.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/unhcrstats/576408cd7/unhcr-global-trends-2015.html>

risks to the life and safety of those involved. However, officials at governmental level<sup>34</sup> speak about the role of smugglers in facilitating it, albeit little evidence is available to support this argument.

## 3.2. Immigration

By the time of writing of this report, Albania was not significantly affected by the inflow of refugees in Europe and in the Western Balkans, which exponentially increased in the region since the beginning of 2015 until early 2016. This could be partly due to the socio-economic conditions in the country, which are regarded as not particularly appealing, as well as to changes in the dynamics and diversions of flows in the region - primarily the rise in national migration-control responses along the Western Balkans into the EU, and the EU-Turkey agreement. Compared to other Western Balkan countries that have faced massive inflows as well as high number of asylum applications, in Albania these flows have mostly taken the form of route diversions. However, representatives of the Directory of Migration report that in the past five years, irregular immigration is becoming a topic of concern for authorities at national level<sup>35</sup>.

In general, three main different situations concerning migrant and refugee population entering Albania could be recognized. Some individuals enter the country and apply for asylum therein. Another group of people cross the border and remain in the territory of Albania or transit without reporting to the authorities. Finally, some migrants or refugees enter Albania but do not submit an asylum claim and are apprehended by the authorities and put in detention centres for irregularly staying migrants.

### Box 3.3: Refugees flows in Albania in figures<sup>36</sup>

According to the MoIA, during the year 2015 the recorded number of migrants and refugees entering Albania was 2.047 (lower than the number of foreign nationals recorded officially for the same period in 2014, when the total was 2.618). In the period July-December 2015, the number of migrants that attempted to transit through Albania was 88, with the highest number recorded in December (73). The majority of those crossing the border illegally in the period January-December 2015 came from Syria (1.354), followed by Eritrea (171), Somalia (118), as well as from Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the year 2016, 274 asylum requests were submitted to the relevant Albanian Authorities. Out of these, 11 individuals were granted the refugee status, while 10 individuals received subsidiary protection<sup>37</sup>. As of October 3rd, 2016, the overall number of migrants detected while entering irregularly in Albania was 691<sup>38</sup>. Migrants and refugees from 12 different countries were registered in Albania: 45 from Morocco; 19 from Syria; 14 from Somalia; 12 from Pakistan; 13 from

<sup>34</sup> interview with Ms Elona Gjebrea, Ministry of Internal Affairs. More generally, according to several representatives from State authorities and IGOs interviewed as part of this research, due to the lack of information on asylum systems and the real chances to be granted international protection, individuals and families embarking in this kind of travels risk to become prey of traffickers and exploiters along the route.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Ms Esmeralda Toska, Directory of Migration

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Ms Enkelelda Toska, Directory of Migration, Ministry of Internal Affairs

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Alma Mele, Directorate of Asylum, Ministry of Internal Affairs

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-facing-flow-of-refugees-as-transit-country-09-30-2016>

Afghanistan; 5 from Algeria; 2 from Palestine; 2 from Iran; 1 from Iraq; 3 from Eritrea; 2 from Lybia; and 1 from Mali<sup>39</sup>.

Based on the above figures, it is difficult to identify specific trends in migratory inflows, as well as to predict possible future trends affecting Albania. However, it is believed that the number of irregularly entering refugees and migrants is much higher than the figures officially provided, and that the largest majority of them goes undetected<sup>40</sup>.

At political level, the pressure that such flows exert on Albania is manifold. In the short term, Albanian authorities are required by some EU Member States to stop and divert these flows before they reach Western Europe, based on the argumentation that organized criminal networks may reactivate through the Adriatic sea route<sup>41</sup>. At the domestic level, these inflows create pressure on the infrastructure and services for immigration, which are still underdeveloped.

### 3.3. Institutional response, coordination and capacity

The main **institutions responsible for managing migration** at national level in Albania are: the Ministry of Interior (Mol); the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth ('MoSWY'); and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ('MoFA').

*The Mol* controls the General Directorate of Border and Migration Police, the Directorate of Asylum, and the National Coordinator for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons. The Border and Migration Police is a particularly relevant institution, as it holds a number of tasks, including; to control visa procedures; to decide on entry and stay; to issue residence permits; to oversee voluntary and forced return; to readmit and refer migrants; and to identify and assists unaccompanied children, victims of trafficking, asylum seekers and stateless persons. The institution of Border and Migration Police consists of a general directorate and 7 regional directorates. The Border Police is also responsible for the overall application of the Strategy on Integrated Border Management (2014-2020).

Due to the prevalence of trafficking in persons from and within Albania, the MoIA has created the position of the National Coordinator against Trafficking in Persons. Within this Office, there are two directorates: the Anti-trafficking Department and the Asylum Department. A specific department of the MoIA – the General Directorate of Civil Registry – deals with the registration of the population in the civil registry, including the children born abroad to Albanian parents.

*The MoSWY* controls the State Social Service ('SSS'), the Directorate of Migration and the National Employment Service. It is responsible for employment of Albanian citizens in the country and abroad, and for supporting the reintegration and employment of readmitted Albanians. It also issues work permits to foreign citizens, signs agreements on employment and

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Ms. Alma Mele, Directory for Asylum

<sup>40</sup> Interview with IOM

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/italy-to-help-albania-in-securing-borders-03-15-2016>

social protection and manages the migration policy. The Migration Directorate is implementing the National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2014-2020), which follows the Strategy for Reintegration of Albanian Returned migrants ('SIRAC') 2012-2015.

*The MoF* is responsible for the visa policy and for ensuring respect and promotion of the rights of foreigners in Albania, for the negotiation of migration agreements with other countries, for protecting the rights of the Albanian emigrants, for organizing the Albanian Diaspora, and for the safe repatriation of Albanian citizens, including unaccompanied and separated children. It controls the consular service and the National Institute of Diaspora (NID).

The administrative and legal/judicial support is provided to Albanian migrants and asylum seekers by the Albanian Consular Representatives. These institutions are part of and directed by the MoFA. The law for the functioning of the consular representatives predicts several duties of these institutions, including: support towards Albanian citizens abroad in cases of difficulty, catastrophe or violent political developments (Article 4); legal representation (Article 6); protection of the inheritance and proprietary interests (Article 8); processing of applications for visas and citizenship (Article 9-10); updating the civil registry in cases of births, marriages and deaths (Article 11); and the translation, certification and legalisation of documents issued by Albanian authorities (Article 12-15). Of particular relevance to this report is the role of the Albanian consulates to issue certificates of civil registry of Albanian citizens abroad. As analyzed in section 4, the registration of children of Albanian migrants is currently one of the most serious issues for children of returned migrants.

Following the adoption of SIRAC, other institutions have become involved in migration management. These are:

- The Ministry of Finance – it is involved in the reintegration of returnees by implementing tax exemptions and managing the voluntary retirement schemes;
- The Ministry of Agriculture – primarily dealing with the situation of returnees who find employment or invest in the agricultural sector;
- The Ministry of Education and Sport ('MoES') – involved in the preparation of programs to support the children of returned migrants.

The **institutional framework relating to child protection** is composed by the National Council for the Protection of Children's Rights, the State Agency of Children's Rights and the Child Protection Units at local level. As the findings in section 3 and 4 show, child protection institutions are new and their activities are still developing, while there is a degree of uncertainty regarding their jurisdiction on migration issues.

The key **policies** related to migration are contained in the following governmental strategies: *On Employment and Skills* (2014-20), *On the Reintegration of Albanian Returnees* (2010-15), *On Migration Policy* (2005-15), *On integrated Border Management* (2014-20), *On Fighting Trafficking of Human Beings* (2014-17) and in the *Action Plan on Children* (2005-10).

The most recent National Strategy on Migration ('NSM') and National Action Plan for Migration ('NAPM') covered the 2005-2010 period. The National Strategy for Development and Integration ('NSDI') 2007-2013, adopted by the Albanian Government, stated that "the vision of [the] strategy is to ensure a full policy on migration, moving from a policy that primarily has reacted to fight illegal flows toward a policy based on the establishment and functioning of a national system of migration management".

The main aims of the most recent migration policies adopted in Albania were to reduce irregular emigration, to manage immigration flows, to create opportunities for regular emigration, to guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms of migrants, and to transform migration into a development tool for Albania.

Further, in order to protect and support the employment of Albanian citizens abroad, the Albanian Government has signed employment agreements with several countries (with Qatar in 2014, Italy in 2008 and Germany in 2012). Agreements on social protection of migrants have been signed with Hungary (2014) and Belgium (2014), but are still missing with Greece and Italy. Considering that Greece and Italy are among the main receiving countries of Albanian immigrants in Europe and in the world, the absence of agreements with these countries is particularly critical for migrants' rights – for both those residing there, and the many who have returned and are unable to comprehensively transfer their social insurance contributions to Albania - as it is explained in section 4 of this report.

Non-discrimination of Albanian workers in the EU is predicted in the Stabilization and Association Agreement ('SAA', 2006). According to Article 46 and 47 of the SAA<sup>42</sup>, Albanian nationals legally employed in the EU countries shall not be discriminated in terms of access to employment, pay and other working conditions. The spouses and family members of migrants shall have the same access to the labor market. These rights are not provided to seasonal workers or to those working under bilateral agreements between governments.

Return migration and the status of returned migrants were originally regulated in the NSM, in the NAPM and more recently in the new NSDI<sup>43</sup>. These documents put the emphasis on the return and readmission of deportees and the return and engagement of the highly skilled migrants. More detailed provisions on returnees were included in the SIRAC 2010-15, which mainly highlighted the lack of clear provisions for the voluntary return or the categories not included in the previous two acts, and regulated the procedures to be applied to these returnees. It also predicts duties and activities for several institutions, such as MoFA and Albanian consular representatives, which are expected to facilitate the return of migrants and their families to Albania by disseminating information prior to their return. MoFA also coordinates the delivery and display of billboards and other materials in the border crossing points for the same group of returnees. The SSS is also expected to get involved in the process of reintegration by offering psychological help to the returnees. Its main role concerning separated and unaccompanied children consists in tracing the child's family and following up on his/her return and reintegration.

### *3.3.1. Managing the new migrant and refugee flows*

Having focused for a long time on emigration and trafficking, Albania lacks a comprehensive legal and policy framework on immigration, as it will be analysed more in details in section 4.

The forefront institution in charge of **identifying** migrants and refugees in Albania is the Border Police. This is the entity that receives the asylum applications and screens them. If migrants do not apply for asylum, they are returned to Greece automatically and if return is implemented

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<sup>42</sup> [http://www.dogana.gov.al/sites/default/files/Marrevshja\\_e\\_Stabilizim-Asocijimit.pdf](http://www.dogana.gov.al/sites/default/files/Marrevshja_e_Stabilizim-Asocijimit.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.adriapol.al/resources/National-Strategy-for-Development-and-Integration.pdf>

within 24 hours, no procedure is initiated by Albanian authorities. If the Border Police identifies such cases further away from the border, the authorities activate the administrative procedures envisaged by the law<sup>44</sup>.

According to some stakeholders interviewed, the existing infrastructure lacks adequate human resources – both in numbers, and in terms of specialisations required to handle the very diverse needs of these migrants. Actually, the first concern that emerged from interviews is that the Border Police is under high pressure, which may lead to inaccuracies in the screening process. With the increase of flows in the past few years and the change of their demographic features (more women and children), only one additional staff at national level has been added to cope with the higher and more complex workload of this institution.

Thus, several IGOs have focused their work with the Border Police on assisting at the two main border points of entry and exit, whereas NGOs have been supporting identification, immediate assistance and referral in Korca and Gjirokastra (two Southern border towns).

A major issue in assisting and protecting migrants and refugees entering Albania concerns the **reception**. There are two main spots in which the services for refugees are concentrated: the centre for the reception of those applying for asylum in Babru, and the administrative detention centre for those irregularly entering Albania and not willing to submit an asylum application in Karec. The asylum centre in Babru has a capacity of 100-150 people, which authorities maintain is not sufficient for the however small number of refugees entering Albania. The centre has been operational for 10 years, but its capacity has been an irrelevant issue in view of the very low numbers until recently. Access to social services for refugees accommodated in Babru and the very few ones accommodated elsewhere is reported to be good by both State and IGOs representatives in Tirana.

Few cases of families with children are reported among the refugees recently entering Albania, mostly Syrian nationals. The Directory for Asylum reported that in Babru there were only 11 children with families. All children attended nurseries or schools depending on their age and were closely assisted by the Staff of the above-Directory. Migrants applying for asylum benefit from financial assistance of 7,000 Albanian Lek per month, a health card to access State-run services, and free accommodation upon granting of the refugee status by the Albanian State. The conditions in the Babru centre are considered in line with international standards by governmental officials, including those for children. The Ombudsman deemed the conditions to be much better when compared to the centre in Karec, since in Babru children have access to education and mothers benefit from vocational training courses<sup>45</sup>.

There are also families that move on from the reception centre in Babru towards more independent accommodation, renting flats. For these refugee families' access to services appears to be overall reasonable. However, refugee children face discrimination, as their lack of documentation prevents them from accessing education. Moreover, as the Ombudsman reported, some asylum seekers found it difficult to be hired for a job, as Albanian employers prefer native candidates.

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Ms Enkeleda Toska, Directory of Migration, Ministry of Internal Affairs

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Mr. Igli Totozani, Albania's Ombudsman

Little is spoken about those with most acute needs - migrants whose refugee status has been refused. There is one legal expert in the Babru centre tasked to assist them, but support should be improved to make sure that migrants do not become vulnerable upon notification of the refusal decision.

The situation is more concerning as it regards the administrative **detention** centre in Karec. This is the only centre operating for migrants entering Albania irregularly who do not express their wish to submit an asylum application. The Karec centre has a capacity of 100 beds, and the latest influxes have led to an accommodation crisis. Moreover, according to the Ombudsman of Albania<sup>46</sup>, the centre lacks psychologists, social workers, and accessible resources in languages spoken by migrants. Among other problem reported by interviewees, the airing time is limited to 2 hours, there is no TV and the food menu does not respect the religious identity of the refugees. Because of the dire situation, it is reported that there are many cases of migrants who have left the centre of Karec without reporting to the authorities. There is, therefore, an urgent need to look for alternatives to detention, especially for children.

Irregular migrants are allowed to stay only one month in Albania – a time during which the whole procedure takes place. In case they do not apply for asylum, Albanian authorities return them through readmission agreements. Currently, all migrants entering irregularly are being placed in detention, and there are very few, if any, other accommodation alternatives, primarily due to lack of financial resources.

A crucial issue impacting on the potential integration of migrants and refugees relates to **documentation**. Identity cards with a microchip are needed for all those who are granted the refugee status. However, ID cards and travel documents are being produced in small quantity. A naturalisation procedure is envisaged by the law (Law 8389/1998 *On Albanian Citizenship*), but it takes up to five years. In any case, refugees are not in the position to trigger the procedure, because it requires the original documents from the country of origin, which they cannot obtain.

### *3.3.2. Assisting returnees*

The topic of the return of (long-term) economic migrants was very salient in the Government's agenda in the period 2010-2015, and it was addressed explicitly and extensively in the National Strategy for the Re-integration of the Returned migrants 2010-15 and its respective Action Plan (MoSWY 2010). According to the provisions envisaged in the above strategy and plan, migrants returning to Albania could address the Migration Counters<sup>47</sup>, which are desks established at the Labor Offices in each region, with the aim to provide orientation and to facilitate returned migrants' access to services for social assistance, housing, vocational training, employment, starting a business, and also to legal assistance regarding administrative and civil procedures they are involved in. According to data reported by the Directory of Migration at the MoSWY, from 2011 to 2015, 4,957 Albanian citizens have approached the migration counters. They have been provided with the following services: advise for employment - 2,752 citizens; professional orientation - 804 persons; information on health care services - 1,056 contacts; information on social assistance - 598 persons; information on establishing a business - 142 persons. 73% of

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Mr. Igli Totozani, Albania's Ombudsman

<sup>47</sup> Albanian: Sportelet e Migracionit

the migrants addressing the migration counters had returned from Greece, 21% from Italy, 2.8% from other EU countries, and 1.7% from non-EU countries. The research, however, did not elicit information concerning the outcomes of the services provided to the individuals approaching the migration counters.

In recent years, assistance provided to returnees has been provided mostly to Albanian citizens who applied for asylum in EU countries and whose application was rejected. The vast majority of them returned voluntarily (or voluntarily complied with a return order) after their application was rejected. Others were deported by the authorities of the receiving country. Other returnees were recognized as victims of trafficking, who are normally returned in the framework of dedicated transnational cooperation systems among different countries.

The strategy for the re-integration of the returnees expired in 2015, and there is not a new one in progress to date. Officials at the Mol<sup>48</sup> stated that transnational cooperation will be one of the main points to be addressed by the new National Strategy of Migration currently under planning, together with institutional cooperation, clearer division of tasks between different governmental institutions, and the tackling of root causes of unsafe migration, primarily unemployment.

### *3.3.3. Social assistance measures in place*

Despite several measures in place, interviews with various policy makers at national level reveal that the lack of links between migration and social protection and the poor infrastructures hamper the effectiveness of the response to migration by national and local institutions in Albania. Officials from various Ministries reported that a coordinating unit for migration management is needed, in order to avoid fragmented responses and duplication of roles. Some interviewees suggested to establish a Ministry of Migration and Diaspora. In general, there is a disjuncture between the provisions in the laws and regulations, which envisage services of minimum standards for migrants, and the actual enjoyment of such services by those concerned in practice.

Several policy makers at national level said that they feel they do not receive enough information about the situation on the ground, including on the services provided to migrants by private organizations. Given the weak infrastructure for research within the Government, the capacity of international organization in this field is regarded as a great asset. This is even more important when considering that, unlike the fragmented work of the governmental institutions in Albania, IGOs and NGOs have a more holistic focus on social issues, and therefore the potential to propose more comprehensive policies.

The SSS in Albania is a subordinate institution of the MoSWY, and has 28 local branches. As it is the case with social protection systems elsewhere<sup>49</sup>, the law predicts access to the social assistance for migrants that have a regular status in Albania, while in the case of irregularly staying migrants, the assistance available is much more limited, mainly focusing on some of the

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<sup>48</sup> interview with Ms Elona Gjebrea, vice Minister of IA

<sup>49</sup> Peggy Levitt, Charlotte Lloyd, Armin Mueller and Jocelyn Viterna, "Global Social Protection: Setting the Agenda", in RSCAS 2015/78 ([http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2682423](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2682423))

fundamental needs and rights. A closer look at the provisions in place and the interviews with officials from relevant ministries showed that the most systematic and elaborated provisions within the social protection system are envisaged for specific groups of migrants, namely victims of trafficking identified as such, recognized refugees and unaccompanied children.

For example, unaccompanied children are automatically part of the social protection system and procedures to assist and protect them are part of the legal obligations for both central and local institutions. In contrast, a migrant family returning from abroad needs to approach the migration counters on their initiative, in order to address some of their needs. The distinction between the services guaranteed to certain groups of migrants and those that need to be activated by migrants on their own initiative is evident throughout the different sets of rights that migrants should enjoy in Albania.

The situation of **identified victims of trafficking** is a specific one in terms of service provision and access to assistance and protection. While trafficked persons are entitled to the status of vulnerable people, they need to identify themselves as victims of trafficking and to approach the social services. Therefore, support and services for victims of trafficking is offered, in practice, only to those who solicit them. Evidence from this research shows that, considering the stigma associated with trafficking in Albania, a number of victims of trafficking may remain outside of the social assistance system.<sup>50</sup>

Besides the disjuncture between law and policy on the one hand, and service provision in practice on the other hand (also due to the insufficient inter-institutional coordination), there is an overall **lack of adequate human and material resources** across the institutions in charge to identify, assist and protect migrants in Albania. Government officials interviewed in the framework of this research explain this situation on the basis of lack of funding. In particular, the Border Police seems not to be equipped with sufficient and adequately trained human resources that would be required to appropriately deal with children on the move in the country, and with migrants more generally.

The increased (although light) intensity of refugee flows towards Albania contributed to uncover the overall unpreparedness of the system of immigration management in Albania, which is such that even an increase up to a few dozens of arrivals per day may cause serious problems for the authorities concerned, and potentially lead to major human rights infringement for the migrants affected. The situation will become even more difficult considering the rapid changes of the demographics of these flows – initially dominated by single men and later made of more vulnerable groups, such as women and children – reported by IGOs in Albania.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with trafficking specialists in the MoIA

### 3.3.4. Child protection for children affected by migration

Since the law links social assistance to belonging to a “vulnerable group” in Albania, only certain groups of migrant children benefit from assistance and protection services that meet their specific situation and needs.<sup>51</sup> These groups include neglected children, children in street situation, and sexually abused and exploited children. However, in a country with fast changing migratory profile, this predefinition may **exclude many categories of migrants and children in need**. Overall, the approach at national level is that children returning from migration are not recognised as a group at risk.

In relation to this, officials reported difficulties in the actual implementation of the principle of ‘the **best interests of the child**’.<sup>52</sup> While there are legal provisions on this, making it part of the procedures of many institutions has proved challenging. There is very little interpretation of the principle, not least due to difficulties to understand this concept from a cultural and socio-economic point of view in the context of Albania. There is thus a significant lack of clarity in the everyday-work.

With cases of vulnerable children, despite the good will to respect child rights principles and obligations. Notwithstanding the improvements in Albania’s legal infrastructure, the interpretation and application of this principle remains inconsistent; for example, Law 121/2014 *On Asylum* Article 17 predicts that ‘the best interest of the child’ is the predominant stance that should be taken, but it only refers to the UNCRC for interpretation.

Another important gap is the lack of a clear **referral system and standard operating procedures** regulating the identification, referral and assistance of children affected by migration. Most importantly, the course of interaction of the migration and social service structures is unclear. The system for the protection of children is viewed as inconsistent and in need of revision by the high-levels officials, even though there is an infrastructure in place, as regulated by Law 10347/2010 *On the Protection of Children’s Rights*. An important finding is that even when the services that are available refer to migrants, they are indeed available to families, not to children. Moreover, there are no specific programmes for the families returning from migration, except for the ‘mainstream’ programmes with a focus on strengthening the family.

The issue of coordination becomes much more serious when we consider the cases of **return of unaccompanied and separated children**. There are good practices in place according to representatives of MoI, and these are legally based on a specific Order on unaccompanied children, prepared jointly by the National State Social Service and the State Police (2014). The order is thought to need revision, mainly because the MoFA is not included in the procedures set up, and therefore Albanian embassies and consulates are not part of them. Indeed, representatives of the MoI stated that even though there are protocols that regulate the return of migrants, and in particular of child migrants, these are not always implemented. Allegedly, destination countries do not always collaborate and do not give advance notice to Albanian authorities on the migrants they are sending back. Consequently, Albanian authorities are not able to organize the appropriate reception and activate services available in a timely manner.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Ms Denada Seferi, MoSWY

<sup>52</sup> Interview with trafficking specialists, MoIA

<sup>53</sup> interview with Ms Esmeralda Toska, Directory of Border Police, MoIA

**Statelessness** is one of the major issues that affect children in the context of migration in Albania. This is closely linked to the issue of **registration** of children. According to IGOs representatives<sup>54</sup>, in Albania statelessness is a *de facto* situation, but not necessarily a policy focus of the Government. For example, the Roma and Egyptian communities are at risk of statelessness as they are not registered in the civil registry. A group at particular risk are the children of Albanian parents who return from Greece. These children have not been registered in Greece and neither in Albania and this leads to statelessness.

The red tape with statelessness to register children is one of the major impediments: the civil registry clerks cannot formally refuse to register these children as that would be against the law, but there is a number of procedural aspects required which make the process complicated for families in practice. The issue of birth registration is thought to have strong links with the social class children and families belong to, with children from the middle class being more likely to be registered at birth, compared to the poorest and less educated groups of the population. This is most likely going to lead to stratification within the returned migrants' population in the long run.

The lack of registration has strong consequences for access to resources and education for the children, and therefore, experiencing issues of registration early in life could lead to marginalisation of a number of children also during their adulthood. Yet the full extent of this problem is still unknown and the range of consequences on the lives of children concerned is not yet adequately explored.

The National Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights revealed that there are **no statistics** at this agency on migrant children and services offered to them, in spite of the fact that the local child protection units in border areas have helped children that have returned from migration to register in schools and to access health and other services.

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<sup>54</sup> interview with UNHCR specialists in Tirana

# 4. Situation on the ground:

## The local level

This section presents the main findings concerning migration from, to and through Albania emerging from the local-level research carried out as part of this study. While a comparative overview of the different trends and issues is presented here, additional information regarding the specific findings per each of the five municipalities covered by field-research is enclosed in Annex 3.

### 4.1. Emigration

Since early 1990s, all cities included in this study have experienced various forms of emigration. Although a clear-cut division did not emerge from the data collected as part of the local-level research, as a general trend, Albanian citizens from Tirana and from prominent cities in the North and South (Shkodra and Korca) have migrated to wealthier EU countries, other North-Western countries and Australia. Migrants from the lesser prominent areas and villages have migrated to neighbouring countries, primarily Greece, and a significant number of them have engaged in seasonal and circular migration. Emigration has been largely driven by economic reasons; other reasons include family reunification and health reasons.

For a long time, the largest part of these migratory movements has taken place irregularly. Migrants recall the costs of these forms of migration for them and their children:

*We migrated twice, both times irregularly and have paid large amounts of money. The first trip we took on a rubber boat has been a very bitter and unforgettable experience, not only for us but especially for the children. Even today after many years my daughters have a travelling phobia, when travelling both on ferries and airplanes; they are terrified by the idea of travelling because of the overwhelming fear they experienced when we tried to migrate. [...] I feel guilty for what I have caused to my children; my wife and I are very conscious about this [...]. The second time the trip was safer because we had visas, which we had secured through irregular means (male, Shkodra).*

Local-level research confirmed the national trend, according to which irregular migration of Albanian citizens is decreasing. Potential migrants are now in a better position to pursue regular migration that enhances their chances for safety and for a better future.

Actually, the liberalisation of visas in 2010 opened up the opportunity also for the most disadvantaged families to attempt migration to wealthier West European countries. Previously, cross-border migration from urban areas in Albania was selective, involving individuals and

families who had the financial means to afford the travel<sup>55</sup>. Conversely, this new wave of emigration also involved more disadvantaged groups of the population from urban and suburban areas, and a high number of internal migrants – primarily those who had moved to Tirana, and to a lesser extent to Shkodra and Korca. According to the representatives of the Labour Office in Shkodra:

*The reasons for migrating have to do with the living conditions in Albania, and the difference between the minimum wage and the living costs in Albania; the high living costs put people in difficult conditions, not only those who are unemployed but also the employed ones. Once the living standards rise, migration trends will change too. The Government is trying to increase the minimal living wage and the amount of the benefits, but there is still a lot to do.*

The visa liberalisation has also facilitated seasonal migration to Greece. As an interviewee narrated:

*I emigrated to Greece 10 years ago. I went over the mountain, on feet. Later, after the liberalization of visas, I went with my passport to Greece and Italy to my relatives. I did seasonal jobs, mainly in agriculture. [...] I left to find a job, because in Albania I could not find one and I was living in difficult economic conditions. [...] for me it is even more difficult because I am a woman on my own, don't have a husband, so I have everything on my shoulders (female, 46, Fier).*

Migrants' narratives point to the mediation of smugglers in the movement, whereby they are referred to as "the persons who deal with these things" (female, 32, Shkodra). Migrants interviewed mentioned to have paid high amounts of money to smugglers. A specialist of Civil Emergencies in Lezha maintained that this phenomenon has affected mostly the rural areas in their region, and very little the city, especially when compared to other cities in Albania, such as Kukes or Vlora. According to him, rural areas were the target of smugglers and other similar organizations, which guaranteed their immigration and settlement in the receiving countries:

*The most vulnerable families are those from the remote rural areas, which in many cases fall prey of exploitation and irregular migration, and in some cases they also fall prey of cheating from the side of smugglers. And their emigration is accompanied by the loss of everything, all their possessions and properties they have in Albania. So upon return they have lost everything and need all the basics to start a new life here, starting with accommodation, jobs, social assistance, etc.*

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<sup>55</sup> The New Albanian Migration, Publisher: Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, pp.1-28

Evidence from Shkodra shows that migrants have attempted to migrate abroad more than once. Indeed, most asylum seekers were returned to Albania within few months, after Albania was proclaimed a safe country of origin by Germany and other EU countries<sup>56</sup> (2015). They did not have the means to travel to Germany and to other EU countries, thus they had to borrow money and to sell some of their belongings. A woman from Korca explained:

*When we left [for Germany] we had difficulties here in Albania, because we borrowed money and left because poverty makes you do many things! Because I don't want my children to suffer like that. None helped me, but we were hearing stories of people leaving and we thought we should try, too. A bit aimlessly really... (female, 36, Korca).*

The trips towards richer European countries are long and involve several days of travelling, as many migrants report that they mainly use the cheaper means of transport, such as busses, lorries and ferries. This means that young children are submitted to days of travelling in often rather uncomfortable conditions. However, the economic problems that families face lead many of them to attempt migration in order to improve their situation. Therefore, the free visa regime has established a more favorable situation for what is perceived as legal migration to seek asylum. Even though - as mentioned above - this is considered as regular migration, migrants speak about the psychological impact it had on them:

*I left for Germany in 2013 together with my 12 year old daughter. I left for a better life for me and my daughter, because I wanted my daughter to grow up not lacking anything. [...] when we arrived in Germany, they put us in a camp together with emigrants from all over the world. The conditions were difficult. We slept in tents. I was so worried about my daughter and I would not sleep all night because I was afraid that someone could harass her because I had heard scary stories. It was really difficult because it was only the two of us, two females alone in the first few months (female, 46, Fier).*

In general, migration and the most recent trend of seeking international protection on economic grounds appear to be a family project in most cases. The majority of migrants have emigrated with their family members, mainly with their husband or wife and with their children, or (in the case of single persons) with their sisters or parents. Some of the migrants interviewed have migrated from a smaller city to Tirana and then abroad, pointing to the links of internal migration with international migration in Albania<sup>57</sup>.

The outcomes of migration for the individuals concerned and their families were mixed. These depended on a complex array of factors, ranging from the migrant's situation before departure through to the policies and practices in the receiving countries. In general, migrants who

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-569008-Safe-countries-of-origin-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Julie Vullnetari, *Albania on the Move : Links between Internal and International Migration*, Amsterdam University Press 2012 (<http://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=419372;keyword=vullnetari>)

travelled to Germany and applied for asylum there recounted very good experiences, particularly in regard to services available to their children, which they would not find in Albania, namely childcare and early education. Some migrants who travelled to Sweden reported having had problems with accommodation and difficult living conditions in camps where they were placed. Overall, despite bettering the economic situation, emigration seems to have had considerable emotional and psychological costs for migrants. Many of them reported that even when they felt secure legally, they did not feel psychologically safe. Some of the negative outcomes ensued also after migrants (were) returned to Albania. Actually, the migration of families led in often cases to an interruption of primary and secondary education for the children. Upon return, some of them were able to catch up with school where they had left. The youngest interviewee in Tirana narrated how he already emigrated twice from Albania to Greece and France. As he explained:

*I emigrated two years ago...for a better future. I left together with my family. I left with my mum and sister; my dad stayed in Albania. I was younger and I was excited that I was going to another country. My mum always spoke about going abroad ... [...] I still attend the secondary school, because when I migrated I left it in the middle... (male, 19, Tirana).*

Conversely, other children did not go back to school upon return<sup>58</sup>. Furthermore, unlike other forms of migration, migrants who sought asylum and had their applications rejected, generally did not gain any skills, firstly because their stay abroad lasted for a short period of time (usually less than one year), and secondly because most of the time these families stayed in camps and were not given the opportunity to work in the host countries.

## 4.2. Immigration

As mentioned in the methodology section, research for this study did not encompass the participation of foreign migrants residing in Albania. Nonetheless, interviews with key informants showed that immigration is not an uncommon phenomenon in Albania. It is much more intense in Tirana, the capital city, when compared to the other four cities covered by this study, and to the rural areas. One interesting aspect that emerged from interviews is the high diversity of the immigrant population. While in many typical countries of immigration there is one or a few dominant immigrant groups, in Albania immigrants come from very different countries of the world.

Immigration can be sector-specific. For example, Fier has a relatively significant high number of immigrants who are employed in the oil industry. Lezha has a significant number of immigrants for religious activities. Inflows linked to the recent 'migrant and refugee crises' were recorded in three cities included in this research: Tirana, Korca as an entry point, and Shkodra as an exit point. These flows included both adult and children seeking international protection. However, the diverse nature of immigration in Albania remains an interesting topic yet to be explored.

<sup>58</sup> Zana Vathi, Veronika Duci, Elona Dhembo, Homeland (Dis)Integrations: Educational Experience, Children and Return Migration to Albania, IOM 2016 (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imig.12230/full>)

### 4.3. Internal migration

This type of migration has had different patterns across the cities covered by this study, both in terms of intensity as well as of the types of internal movements they are affected by. Tirana was the municipality most affected by internal migration and has received migrants from all areas of Albania. Korca and Shkodra have experienced internal migration to a lesser extent, but significantly more than the two medium size towns of Lezha and Fier. In the latter cases, internal migrants have originated mostly from the rural and smaller urban areas in the same regions:

*“I moved to Fier to work because I could not continue seeing my family in the miserable situation in which we were” (19 year old, male, Fier).*

As illustrated above, according to the existing laws and policies – which are reflected in the behavior of national and local authorities - internal migrants are not considered as a vulnerable group of the population. Conversely, they face several obstacles in accessing services and social assistance. The situation is expected to change upon endorsement of the new law on social assistance, which does not link access to social services to the registration in the same municipality or village’s local civil registry. As mentioned earlier, one source of internal migration is return migration. For example, a family from Durres who left Albania for Germany, but had their asylum application rejected there, returned to Albania and tried to settle in Tirana. As the father reported:

After refusal of their asylum applications, migrants who have been returned and decided to settle in Tirana often experienced worse living conditions than the ones they had before. Returned internal migrants who relocated in Tirana also lacked family and social networks in the capital. Generally, they appeared to be even in higher need of assistance and integration support than they were before leaving the country.

While internal migration appears to be primarily driven by economic reasons, in some cases it has been linked to personal factors, which makes it often gender-specific. For example, a migrant from Shkodra who lived in Tirana reported:

*We left Albania because of economic difficulties, so we were hoping to have a better life... I lived for 10 years in Italy with my ex-husband, then we decided to return to Albania and went back to Shkodra where we had many difficulties and ended up divorcing (female, 33, Tirana).*

Indeed, one trend of internal migration is that of divorced women moving from rural areas to main cities, primarily Tirana, in the attempt to re-build their lives and to offer better living conditions and opportunities to their children:

*I am divorced and have been living in Korca for 8 years. I moved from Voskopoja for a better future for my children because there is no [good] school in Voskopoja. Life is difficult in Korca. I rely on the help of my parents and work in the black. I have worked in the fruits sector, in homes as a cleaner and I am currently unemployed. I live in a rented accommodation. The only financial help I receive is from my parents (female, 34, Korca).*

Internal migrants often experience discrimination in the new place where they settle. This seems to be particularly the case for those originating from Northern Albania:

*People in Levan have prejudices towards us and they call us 'highlanders', making us feel unwelcome... (female, 40, Fier).*

Poverty and marginalization of these migrants also reflects on children's welfare:

*We face many economic problems because of unemployment, and this creates difficulties for the children's education. They are going to school but they are not doing well because they don't have books. I do not have enough money to buy them just like other children, and this has affected their progress with the lessons (female, 42, Korca, originally from Tropoja).*

One important issue that complicated the situation of internal migration of children is the lack of registration, which while being a big issue among Roma and Egyptian families, also concerns children of (other) returned migrant families<sup>59</sup>. Lack of registration also prevents institutions to be informed about the presence of these children on the territory where they operate, and to be able to trigger protection measures when required:

*Because many children are not registered, they move very easily from one city to the other, and unfortunately also from one country to the other. And we have very little information on how they move, since they are unregistered and they do not hold IDs, so the border points do not have statistics on this and States do not declare them. [...] The lack of registration is the result of a legal handicap because families may have migrated, or when the children were born there were difficulties to register them...*

<sup>59</sup> Representative of organization 'Woman in Development' (Gruaja ne Zhvillim) Shkodra

## 4.4. Return migration

Return migration across the five cities involved long-term migrants, asylum seekers who returned voluntarily or were subjected to a return decision, migrants who returned from abroad and further migrated internally, and - distinctly for Fier - the return of seasonal migrants.

Most migrants who returned after long-term migration invested in immovable properties, or started new businesses, bringing the know-how they acquired abroad:

*I returned to settle in this city to invest in something. I would like to have my own business, perhaps a creperie or fast food. The reason why I returned is that I would like to give my contribution to the city I was born in [...]<sup>60</sup>.*

However, also qualified migrants did not receive sufficient support to reintegrate and to properly use their new assets and skills. Reportedly, local authorities do not recognize skills and qualifications of the individual migrants, nor do they assist them to find jobs and to start businesses. Moreover, the climate for investments is not favorable:

*I have not had the possibility to invest. My salary is just high enough to pay for the children's schooling, there is nothing left to invest. The savings I had when I was working in Italy I invested in immovable properties – our family house – but I haven't had the courage to invest in business because I have found the environment unsafe [...](male, 52, Lezha).*

After returning from abroad, also children seem to face difficulties in reintegrating, particularly concerning adaptation to school and to community life. Both parents and NGOs reported that migrant children face discrimination, bullying and exclusion in the school setting. The psychological and social assistance available to these children and to their families are deemed insufficient<sup>61</sup>. The whole family hardly feels integrated and stabilized if the children are not. Several migrants who returned were explicit on their intentions to re-migrate in case their children continue to find it hard to adapt to the Albanian lifestyle.

In turn, the needs of migrants returning because of a failed asylum application were generally more acute and multifaceted. They needed housing, economic aid, jobs, support education for the children and to access health care.

At the same time though, compared to migrants who have been abroad for longer periods of time, those returning after a failed asylum procedure tend to be less culturally shocked. As one of the interviewees put it:

<sup>60</sup> focus group with migrants in Lezha

<sup>61</sup> Zana Vathi, Veronika Duci, Elona Dhembo, Homeland (Dis)Integrations: Educational Experience, Children and Return Migration to Albania, IOM 2016 (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imig.12230/full>)

*There wasn't much of a difference (upon return) because we knew what was waiting here for us. We still have major difficulties to deal with our daily economic problems...*  
(male, 42, Tirana).

Nonetheless, there was an emotional pain as the dream of settling in the country where they have migrated was shattered by the rejection of their asylum application.

A migrant brought to light yet another dimension – that of exploitation that they face upon return by the new business owners in Albania who work in black to increase their profits:

*My experience of working in Albania has been terrible. I have always worked as a worker in supermarkets or as a waiter or bar tender in bars and restaurants. I have never received a salary higher than 15,000 Albanian Leka month and have always worked long hours and no holidays* (male, 25, Lezha).

Differently from adult migrants, children returning upon failed asylum claims showed a greater tendency and ability to integrate in the host country, even though their stay there was limited to a relatively short period of time. These children experienced challenges integrating back in the community when the family returned:

*The schools and extra-curricular activities offered by the German State are very good and help children integrate quickly. They learned the language very quickly and felt equal to other children. They suffered a lot the moment of departure from Germany. The two last weeks when we were preparing to return we had to tell them and they cried continuously because they did not want to come back to Albania.*

Difficulties with reintegrating within the community are voiced also by seasonal migrants. The circular movements allowed them to provide for the basic means of survival to their families, but these migrants experience psychological problems related to adaptation, and generally shared a lack of optimism for the future. Those returning to live in villages face stagnation when trying to make use of their piece of land. According to a migrant (male, 35) who returned from Greece, he tried to find a job in Baltez with no results, and then tried to cultivate his piece of land, but he lacks working instruments and machineries, and the State offered no help when he asked for it:

*I started migrating to Greece 10 years ago. I go every year to Kavala for seasonal work, mainly in the harvesting of kiwi fruit. I live in Baltez [a district of Fier] where I have my own place, which is more of a hut, and we live in very difficult conditions. Every time I come back to Baltez from Greece it seems as if everything is getting worse. Living here is getting more and more difficult; the lack of employment opportunities makes me feel hopeless...* (male, 51, Fier).

Another trend which was also reported by migrants in Korca is the return of the elderly persons. Most of these elderly persons returning from migration had a house and personal ties that supported them when they returned. Generally, they did not wish to go back to the country of emigration. Conversely, re-migration seems to be a major aspiration or an actual plan of younger returnees. A migrant who returned after his asylum application in Germany was rejected said:

*I am not looking for a job in Albania. I am aiming to go back to Germany through a work contract I have secured. During my stay in Germany I managed to master the German language... I haven't had the opportunity to invest in Albania, but even if I had had, I would hesitate because Albania in my opinion is not a safe country for business (male, 31).*

The intention or contemplation to re-migrate is an important factor for the maintenance of transnational ties with the countries migrants have returned from. This is the case of both adult migrants and that of the children. Migrants keep in touch with their employers, friends, landlords. Some of those who applied for asylum and had their application rejected also kept in contact with lawyers, hoping to finally find a way to get residence permits in the country where they had migrated. Others were in contact with the social workers who assisted them and their children throughout the asylum procedure. Children engaged in Facebook communication, or continued to watch the TV programs of the country where the families had migrated, and the better languages skills that they acquired compared to their parents helped them maintaining those ties.

#### 4.5. Migration, social and child protection

Interviews with key informants from State institutions confirmed that there is a system of orientation for migrants at the local Labour Offices that advises migrants on economic aid benefits, employment, housing and vocational training opportunities. Vocational training and health services are provided free of charge to citizens who are registered as migrants at the local Migration Counter. However, no support is provided to those migrants who intend to start a business (such as micro-credits). The existing programs for professional training are limited in number, as it emerged across the research sites. These problems were again associated to the lack of specific assistance and protection measures for migrants:

*I would say there are problems [in terms of policies and programs for migrants]; migrants should be considered as a category that requires a specific focus. Other countries have a Ministry of Migration, and a Migration Office. In Albania, the effect of migration have started to become evident in the past few years, and because of that, a better planning and treatment of their needs is needed. These policies should be accompanied by a specific budget<sup>62</sup>.*

<sup>62</sup> representative of the Regional Directory of Education, Lezha

Indeed, interviews with migrants and key informants brought to light several dysfunctional aspects of the social protection system as a whole, which prevent its effective working and the trickling down of the potential positive effects to families and children. These issues relate to: the transparency and credibility of the institutions; the level of integration of services; and access to services.

At central level, existing strategies predict joint efforts of agencies from the central and local level to assist migrant families, but in the regions **no coordination** takes place. Agencies act in isolation, and this isolation makes their work not very efficient. For example, the activities of the Vocational Training Center aimed to facilitate the integration in the labor market of the young trainees are not linked to those implemented by the Labour Office. The Child Protection Units are not linked to the Social Services and do not cooperate regularly with them. Key informants expressed confusion and a sense of helplessness, due to the lack of clear provisions on the type of services available and the professionals who should perform different activities in order to make these services accessible in practice:

*There are many difficulties. Policies should be planned on the basis of assessments in the community and at municipality level. On paper some things are written clearly but when you go to the community the situation is turned upside down. We need to focus more on the local level where the families live and to decide there on their needs, and to also define policies there so that we can support such needs. [...] According to the laws, services are predicted but in practice we lack specific services, and structures to handle specific cases. We do have some roles and duties defined in law, but not specifically: for example, what we mean by case management and what steps should be followed?<sup>63</sup>*

Currently, the role of the Social Service Office is limited to distributing social allowances to poor families and to persons with disabilities. They do not have the means to travel and visit families with special needs, nor do they have dedicated autonomous funds for assisting them. The Child Protection Units are often composed of one person who does not have authority over the other State services to trigger assistance to a child and family in need. They do not have own funds and rely on the development projects implemented by NGOs to fulfill their mandate.

The main problem is that there are major logistic and staffing issues; so we are obliged to work on our own, and we do not have a particular mandate for the returned children and families. Even the family visits, we conduct them using our own cars<sup>64</sup>.

A large number of families with unemployed members have **difficulties in accessing social assistance** because if they possess a piece of land distributed by the commune, they do not qualify for social assistance, even though they do not have the necessary means to live. Furthermore, social assistance is limited to families registered in a given district, therefore families from other areas and not registered in the civil register cannot access it. Some positive steps are being taken in this regard, according to key informants:

<sup>63</sup> Valbona Buzi, Regional Social Services, Fier

<sup>64</sup> focus group with key informants Fier

*Currently families that come from rural areas do not benefit from the social protection schemes. From September [2016] onwards they will be selected through the new system of applications for social assistance, and all families will be assessed through a point-based system. This system has already been piloted, and in this system the fact that you have a piece of land is irrelevant. All types of income will be taken into account, and a decision will be made accordingly<sup>65</sup>.*

Special instruments to support and integrate families in difficulty are necessary. Access is especially difficult for families living in extreme poverty:

*The very poor families have no idea that the services exist, and so they do not come to apply for assistance. They do not have information on the services and professional courses. Usually the child protection unit gets the information on the returned families from the schools or sometimes from the links it has with the community [...].<sup>66</sup>*

Returned emigrants expressed this **lack of knowledge and trust** towards institutions that could potentially assist them:

*I don't think I would go to State institutions and ask for help because I think it is a waste of time and that they would not offer any solution or help. I believe State institutions have not changed since the time I was here before migrating, and since they didn't help me then I think they won't help me today either (male, 31, Shkodra).*

*I am registered at the job seekers office, but I have no hope that I will find a job through them. My wife does not work. As things are in Albania you have almost no alternatives... so I work in construction when I find work, to secure the bread for survival... I have no social security payments because I am still registered in Durres (male, 39, Tirana).*

Another trend highlighted by this research concerns the informal employment of vulnerable female returned migrants in the domestic sector. Mothers reported that a part-time, flexible employment is most suitable for them, because they would otherwise be unable to look after their children (given also the absence of suitable childcare). While this is a useful source of employment for them, caution should be shown towards informality and lack of social security payments, as well as the potential exploitation in this sector<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> focus group with key informants Fier

<sup>66</sup> Valbona Buzi, Regional Social Services, Fier

<sup>67</sup> Julie Vullnetari, *Albania on the Move: Links between Internal and International Migration*, Amsterdam University Press 2012

Access to **housing** is also very difficult. Migrants are not provided with dedicated support in relation to their housing needs. They are dealt with based on the general criteria set out by the local government units. There is no extra budget to provide for housing to migrants.

One of the most pressing issues that migrants mentioned as paramount for their level of (dis)satisfaction in Albania is the poor situation of **health services**. These concerns give also rise to transnational migration (or plans to undertake such movements) in case any health problems arise, especially if this concerns the children. According to the law, free health care has to be provided to all persons with a health care insurance, and to unemployed individuals possessing a health card. Therefore, returning from abroad with no job should not exclude migrants from access to health care services in the country. However, as the quote below shows, migrants engage in transnational social protection practices utilizing the services in the countries where they had migrated:

*As for the hospitals, when my parents had health issues I sent them to Italy where my siblings and I have migrated because we do not trust hospitals here (male, 38, Lezha).*

As an elderly returnee pointed:

*“Hospitals give us bad quality medications! And the doctors in Korca tell us to go to Tirana or to Greece. Not even 200 Euro pension would be enough in Korca, we get 14000<sup>68</sup> Albanian Lek” (female, Korca, 63).*

Health problems among the elderly returnees, and their limited capacity to afford existing services, are generating further migration to pursue family reunification with their sons who are abroad:

*We face harsh living conditions. I go to hospitals, but there aren't adequate medications. [...] Being a pensioner, I have asked help from institutions and from the Greek Consulate to complete the documentation for family reunification with my children (female, 60, Korca).*

Elderly returned migrants found it hard to have a decent livelihood in Albania because of the very low pensions they received, which did not match the increasing living costs in Albania.

Returned migrants experienced huge difficulties in finding a **job**, and this applies also to those with higher education or qualifications:

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<sup>68</sup> 14000 Albanian Lek is approximately 103 Euro

*I have encountered many difficulties to find a job in Albania; in Albania if you do not have relatives that can help you, nobody appreciates your qualifications and merits. I have not been even asked to send a CV; they have simply told me there is no place for me (female, 28, Lezhe).*

Furthermore, the support available for returned migrants to **start up a business** is very limited. In the year 2015, many of the businesses started by returned migrants were closed down, reportedly because of high taxes and austerity measures taken by the Government. The willingness of return migrants to invest was nevertheless rather high:

*I hope we can return to the USA to live there and try to give the children a better life, a better education, and that they can have better services. But first I am trying to do something for my country, and I am trying to figure out the possibilities for business here. I don't want to make a hasty decision to return to the USA before convincing myself that there is no more space for investing here (male, 45, Shkodra).*

Key informants interviewed maintained that **children** are treated with priority from Albanian institutions. In principle, Albanian children returning from abroad and children of foreign migrants in Albania are granted access to school and health care on an non-discriminatory basis. However, this does not match with what migrants shared throughout interviews. A returned migrant summarized her experience with services in Albania post-return:

*Long story put short, the City Council is indifferent, the employment offices are accessible but they do not resolve anything, the schools lack orientation on the treatment the returned children need, the hospitals are really far from the services they are supposed to offer, communication in general is very weak! (female, 34, Tirana).*

Although education is the most universal and equally distributed service, parents and children thought that the quality of education, social integration and entertainment of children in schools was unsatisfactory. Teachers stressed that an enormous amount of work is needed to support children who returned from migration.<sup>69</sup>

An interesting trend that became evident in Lezha concerns the situation of adolescents who returned from emigration abroad. A father who returned from Italy said:

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with teacher at Ismail Qemali School, Korca

*Both children returned with us and they speak good Albanian. They go to school here in Lezha but they are not happy with the conditions that the school offers them. They are unhappy in general; they feel insecure and are stressed and fearful about their future in Albania. They are planning to leave again and to attend university abroad, and if not able, at least in Tirana. [...] For us it is better here in Albania. My daughter is planning to go to study in Italy because she feels home every time we go there... (male, 52, Lezha).*

Childcare for working parents was reported as particularly poor by migrants across the cities covered by the research. The poor quality of state-run childcare facilities was sometimes overcome by returned migrants by resorting to private nurseries and pre-schools, which according to them provide a better service:

*The safety in schools and nurseries and what is offered to my children here leaves much to be desired especially if we compare it with the services and protection that Germany offers to children. Our State does not protect our children, if we don't protect them and look after them as parents (male, 47, Lezha).*

Some returned migrants mentioned the distance and the complicated logistics to reach nurseries and pre-schools in the areas where they live. A mother said:

*My daughter's nursery is in Levan and I need to take her there every day by car. She stays there only 4 hours, because this is the schedule of the nursery. The limited time of nursery is a problem because I cannot start working as children have nowhere to stay. The school is also far from the village; 30 minutes by car to take the children there. We also lack a surgery in the village... (25, female, Fier).*

*The situation in Korca is difficult; I don't know what to do. Children ask for many things. We went to Germany for the children, but they returned us. Spring is coming but we have no money, nothing. This organization came and they brought a Christmas tree and sport shoes for the children, and they wanted to take pictures. But my children don't have to eat! We do not have the basic things of survival. We first need a house and a job (Roma and Egyptian female, 36).*

Apart from the social assistance offered by the State and the support provided by NGOs, which overall do not seem to cover migrants' needs, informal protection plays a crucial role in alleviating the problems that migrant families face. The solidarity between community members is still strong and they can rely on help from the other families to meet basic needs - such as clothing, food and housing - for short periods of time after they return from migration.

Key informants maintained that the differentiation of the needs of different migrant groups is a must in order to design effective policies. They also stressed that prevention rather than reaction from the side of the institutions would be an adequate strategy to protect migrants effectively:<sup>70</sup>

*What is needed is jobs, micro-credit for business, better coordination between different parts of the local and State administration, [...] so that the whole dynamic of migration is known in advance, not wait for the phenomenon to take place...<sup>70</sup>*

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with a teacher at the Ismail Qemali School, Korca

# 5. Conclusions

Migration remains a significant and impactful phenomenon in Albania. Over the past five years, significant changes have been observed regarding different aspects of migration from, within and to the country.

Albania continues to experience various forms of **emigration**. While opportunities for legal entry into wealthier European countries have significantly increased with the lifting up of visa requirement in , the possibility for Albanian citizens to regularly stay and work in those countries remain scarce. This situation still leads many adults, families and children to resort to dangerous ways to migrate, and/or to hold on to the unlikely opportunity to be granted international protection in the destination countries. Children are subjected to trips in semi-legal conditions in order for the family to reach West European countries. In other more problematic cases, adolescents are encouraged to travel alone, or are left behind by their parents in West European countries, in the hope that will secure them residence permits there, which leads to conditions of vulnerability and instances of trafficking.

Moreover, the relatively short stay and inevitable return after an unsuccessful migration attempt appears to pose serious material and psychological burdens on migrants and their children; these costs are more visible upon return to Albania. In turn, while Roma and Egyptian children who emigrate from Albania for the purpose of street work have been the focus of some research to date<sup>71</sup>, they remain a vulnerable category with acute needs for support.

Data from this report showed that **immigration** is intensifying in Albania; firstly, through regular migration of skilled and highly skilled migrants and those involved in religious activities, and secondly, as part of refugee flows and irregular immigration. Regular immigration involves mainly single adults and to a certain extent families. This aspect appeared as mostly unproblematic in the research conducted for this report.

On the other hand, Albania has been affected by the recent 'migration and refugee crisis'. The magnitude of these movements is relatively low compared to the flows in the region. However, the needs of these individuals are exposing the lack of a coherent system of immigration management in Albania. The implementation of procedures for these groups of migrants resulted inadequate and often led to an infringement of their fundamental rights. Children of various ages were part of these flows; they entered Albania as part of vulnerable families, or as separated or unaccompanied. Families and children who enter irregularly and do not apply for asylum find themselves in the most precarious situation, fact which points to one of the weakest aspects of Albania's migration infrastructure.

One of the main findings of the local-level research is that **internal migration** is by far the most significant form of migration affecting the population in Albania, and at the same time it is the most overlooked one by policy makers. The most vulnerable internal migrants are those with a low level of education and low socio-economic background. Roma and Egyptian families and

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<sup>71</sup> Zana Vathi, *Migrating and Settling in a Mobile World. Albanian Migrants and their Children in Europe*, 2015

children also emerged as a specific vulnerable group, due to the fact that they often belong to the poorest families in the country, as well as to the discrimination that they still experience in their daily lives. Internal migration of women-heads of households, primarily towards the capital Tirana, or from the villages towards the main urban areas of their region, emerged as a significant component of internal migration. Migrants returning from abroad are also engaged in this type of migration, and in the case of returned asylum seekers, internal migration is prompted by, and in turn leads to increased vulnerability, in light of the very limited employment opportunities available to them in Tirana and other cities.

Even though Albania does not explicitly prevent its citizens from migrating internally as it used to do in the past, the fact that internal migrants cannot access social services in the areas where they wish to live without prior registration there, leads to a sort of 'irregular internal migration'. Considering the dire state of the agricultural sector in Albania, but also the arbitrary law on land redistribution of the early 1990s, many Albanian citizens originating from rural areas are tied to a piece of land that they cannot comprehensively invest on to sustain their lives, or do not wish to do so, but they are still disadvantaged when it comes to their migration to urban areas. The implementation of the new law on social assistance is of paramount importance for addressing the many issues that this category of migrants and their children face.

Data from this research show that **return migration** has been a prominent form of migration in the past years (mostly 2010-2015). It is important to distinguish between returned long-term economic migrants and those returning after a failed asylum application. The main differences concern, firstly, the socio-economic profile – failed asylum seekers generally have a very low education and scarce financial resources. Secondly, having spent significant more time abroad, returned long-term migrants generally experience a stronger cultural shock upon return, which significantly hinders their ability to reintegrate. On the other hand though, failed asylum seekers return to an even poorer livelihood compared to the situation before migrating, due to the investment of their capital to pay for their family's trip abroad. Unlike long-term migrants, they did not have the possibility to gain new professional skills abroad. As a result, returned long-term migrants have different expectations towards institutions and different priorities: they wish to invest the resources and capacities gained in several years abroad, and for their children to benefit from significant reintegration support in the school and community. Failed asylum seekers, conversely, seem to focus on very basic forms of support (survival income, accommodation, any type of employment).

Alongside these trends at national level, the geographical positioning of **each municipality**, the socio-cultural differences and the existing local economies appear to affect the types of movements, the intensity of migrants' flows and the working of the system of social protection in each municipality. For example, Tirana has experienced significant internal migration since the early 1990s. The oil industry in Fier has attracted a high number of migrants, which originate from a variety of countries, including Canada. The large agricultural sector in Fier also gives some of the returned migrants the possibility to engage in informal work in the field. Lezha appears to have developed a stronger system of private and informal social services in rural areas. In terms of refugee flows, Korca is an entry point, Tirana with its existing infrastructure is the centre of the processing of asylum claims, and of detention of irregularly staying migrants, whereas Shkodra is an exit point for those refugees aiming to reach more developed EU countries after crossing Albania. These and further differences alone call for a tailoring of the services for migrants at local level that suit their day-to-day needs.

**Children** appear to be largely affected by all the above-forms of migration, although specific data on their situation were collected to a limited extent for the purpose of this report. Research findings show that the procedure and service provision for them is not always adequate and well-coordinated on the ground, despite the fact that they are entitled to services according to the existing laws in Albania. At the same time, children often become the only or main contact point between the migrant family and the social services, due to the overall lack of consideration of migration as a factor that causes vulnerability among migrants and their families.

Like adults, children fall into different groups of migrants from, within and to Albania: returned long- or short-term migrants abroad; separated and unaccompanied Albanian or foreign citizens; children who migrate internally, mainly with their families, some of which are returned migrants too; and children who returned – alone or with their families – after a failed asylum application. While all these children do share common rights, their specific needs also vary in practice. For example, children of returned long-term migrants needed to integrate in Albania as their experience with Albania was either very limited or indeed almost non-existent for those born abroad. They have acute psychological needs, not least because they largely lack language skills. The integration in the education system is hard and complicated by the differences between the Albanian system of education and those of the countries where they lived before. The children of returned asylum seeking families suffer disruption because of the sudden uprooting and return to Albania just after having been integrated in the countries where their families sought asylum. This experience of migration disrupts their schooling in both countries, as well as their social and emotional ties, and exposes the significant differences between the services and opportunities for children and young persons in Albania when compared to some wealthier European countries.

The findings of this report speak about three main general patterns of the working of the **social protection system for migrants** in Albania: a mismatch between the priorities at national level and the situation and day-to-day issues at local level; reaction to, rather than prevention of risky forms of migration and their harmful outcomes; and the fact that while policies and programmes are being developed mostly in compliance with international standards, their concrete implementation remains problematic.

The migration management and social protection systems in Albania are characterised by an overall lack of sufficient coordination among institutions, combined with a lack of human and financial resources. Besides the limited human resources deployed, their capacity to effectively assist migrant adults, families and children appears limited, due to the very limited training opportunities available to professionals involved.

The assistance and protection offered to migrants in Albania appears to be based on a narrow definition of 'vulnerable groups' and a consequent exclusion of those in extreme need of help. When it comes to children in particular, unaccompanied Albanian children returning from abroad seem to be the only group of children on the move more clearly recognized as in need of dedicated protection measures. In fact, migrants do not constitute a special category to be treated with priority in Albania. Migrants have the same access to services as all other citizens, but as mentioned in this report, such access is very limited in practice, due to mistrust in institutions as well as administrative obstacles. Migrants speak about social protection offered from the state mostly in terms of what they lack.

The policy framework regarding the relation between migration and social protection seems to have been mostly driven by requirements and priorities set at the international level for the country – primarily as part of the EU accession process. Not necessarily, though, the above priorities reflect the most urgent needs of migrants, their families and communities, and of local authorities working to assist them. Furthermore, current laws and policies do not seem to have fully kept pace with the latest developments in terms of migration trends – as the (albeit limited) recent migrants and refugees’ inflow demonstrated.

In turn, there is a strong evidence on migrants’ reliance on informal social protection strategies; that is, support from their families, friends and broader networks they reactivate or create as part of their migration or return process. Cultural values of solidarity, compassion and the still communitarian culture help when it comes to services and overall support towards individuals, families and children affected by migration. The assistance and protection provided by NGOs are filling the gaps of public social protection at local level, particularly in some of the areas analysed.

Providing protection and assistance to migrants and in particular to children affected by migration in Albania is a multidimensional matter. The situation is different for emigrants, internal migrants and immigrants. The rights of emigrants are highly contingent on the receiving States’ legislation and public discourse. Those of immigrants are affected by the general principle that guides social protection of migrants globally, that full access to social protection is offered to those who have regular legal status in Albania. The rights of internal migrants are part of the broader framework of social protection for Albanian citizens, although those in extreme need fall through the gaps of this system, due to significant issues of access to services. The service provision is then subject to the significant limited human and material resources on the ground.

While building up a fully functional and coherent system to protect migrant adults and children is a huge and challenging task - as many wealthier countries currently struggling with this task demonstrate – some urgent measures should be prioritized in Albania. These include, in particular: strengthening transnational cooperation with countries where most of Albanian citizens migrate to; clarifying the procedures for refugees, migrants irregularly entering and staying, as well as Albanian nationals that are repatriated, especially children; clarifying the chain of action from the national level to the ground; and supporting local institutions with increased resources, so that they can deliver services according to the law.

An important point that emerged from the study is the need for families and citizens to ask for services, rather than the State providing services to those in need for support. This is of particular importance for children’s status and their rights. Lacking legal and political agency, children cannot approach social services directly, and this means that they are subjected to actions taken by their parents or other adult carers. Therefore, access to services and outreach should improve to firstly offer services to all citizens that need them, and secondly, to prevent marginalisation of children.

Finally, it appeared very clearly from this research that combating poverty and providing decent living conditions to every individual in Albania is an imperative need. This should be combined with measures to combat discrimination against the most vulnerable strata of the population, particularly ethnic minorities and internal migrants.

# 6. Recommendations

At national level, the legal, policy and institutional framework concerning migration management should be improved in a number of areas. In particular, it is recommended to:

- *Improve migration infrastructure and management.* A comprehensive, long-term migration policy should be developed and implemented in Albania. Such policy should focus as a priority on expanding legal opportunities for emigration for work and professional training. In particular, the Labor Offices and MoSWY in increased partnership with foreign Governments and employment agencies should identify working force needs in the European market and promote legal emigration through investment in training and professional skills of perspective migrants in Albania. At the same time, this policy should be informed and further contribute to a better system of data collection and management regarding all forms of migration in the country.
- *Treat service provision and its budgeting at central level as a priority.* The research findings showed that services at local level are not budgeted for at central level, but are rather relying on donors' funding. In order for Albania to realize its migration and social protection objectives, service provision for migrants on the ground and human and material resources for this purpose should be made a priority within its national budget.
- *Elaborate on law implementation.* The legal framework on migration has massively improved over the past years in Albania, but it lacks by-laws and more specific acts needed for the actual use of the law at local level and by practitioners.
- *Improve child protection laws, procedures, and institutions, and give them mandate to treat cases of migrant children.* The National Agency for Child Protection must take a leadership role in the coordination of the system of protection and assistance of children. The National Council must take the lead for the building of a child protection system and for the government coordination. In addition, the government needs to create budgets for migrant children's education support and inclusion especially for emigrant families and other families in need.

While an overlap among different groups of children and adults involved in migration from, to and within Albania emerged from this study, it became evident at the same time that different groups of migrants and children are not equally visible and in focus of the work of the institutions in charge to assist and protect them. In order to ensure that all forms of migration are recognized in practice and that due attention is paid to all individuals concerned, it is recommended to:

- *Consider internal migration an important form of migration with relevance for policy-making.* Evidence captured in this report shows that internal migrants have difficulties in accessing services, such as social assistance, housing, employment, and that they do not enjoy a special status recognizing their marginalized position. Internal migrants should be recognized as a vulnerable group in need of assistance in Albania.

- *Provide appropriate support to assist returned migrants in the reintegration process.* Migrants that have spent many years abroad and return to Albania face major difficulties, especially with accessing housing and employment opportunities. An inventory of the skills gained by them in emigration process could be done as a basis to support employment and business start up. Measures to encourage the establishment of new businesses by returned migrants could also include exemption from taxes for the first months or provision of premises to work.
- *Considerably improve the treatment of irregularly entering migrants and asylum seekers.* The research showed that the treatment of irregularly staying migrants and asylum seekers does not comply with basic human rights standards in Albania. Also in light of a potential increase in the numbers of these migrants, the whole set of procedures to deal with this at-risk group of adults, children and families should be subjected to a detailed scrutiny and considerably revised.

Further priority measures to be adopted at national level include:

- *Addressing as a high priority the issue of registration and documentation of children, especially those who experience return migration or repatriation.* Documentation is an issue of paramount importance because that prevents the implementation of overall provisions on children and families. Documentation for children returned from migration and others that come from other countries will require strong coordinated action at local, national and transnational level.

In order to effectively deliver services to the migrant families and children on the ground, a series of gaps need to be addressed at the local level as well. As a priority, it is recommended to:

- *Involve all institutions providing social services to migrants in the elaboration of standard operating procedures* clearly defining what happens when, and identifying the institutions responsible to act upon each stage of the action, and the related interaction of the migration and social service structures. Based on the new set of procedures, the identification and referral of potential cases needing assistance and protection should start as early as at the border. The Border and Migration Police should register the readmitted and the voluntarily returned citizens as migrants, and should refer their data to the Migration Counter in the municipality of destination of the persons concerned.
- *Improve the human and financial resources of Migration Counters.* The Migration Counters should be provided with Staff and funds to be enabled to autonomously provide support to their target groups. These institutions should have a proactive role in reaching out to individuals and families entitled to receive their support, based on recognized good practices in the area. Migration Counters should equally serve to internal migrants.
- *Offer support for living expenses.* Local Government should offer social assistance and housing in accordance with the full needs of the residents. Access to this support must be available to all.

- *Offer assistance to employment and self-employment.* The Migration Counters should file a register of skills of the migrants and a profile of jobs they are suitable for. The Labor office should mediate with the business community and the private employment agencies in order to find jobs that are decent and in conformity with the migrant's potential and skills. Employment of migrants should be a priority for the Labor Offices.
- *Information on professional training programmes available should be disseminated as widely as possible.* Employment opportunities for young people and persons in need should be increased. The working capacities of young people should be strengthened through orientation on vocational training and high level education, and through promoting the teaching of foreign languages in order to increase their labour mobility.

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## Annex 2 - List of respondents<sup>72</sup>

### National Level Respondents

Ms Elona Gjebrea, National Anti-trafficking Coordinator and Vice Minister, Ministry of Interior  
 Ms. Alma Mele, Director of Asylum at the Ministry of Interior;  
 Mrs. Enkeleda Toska, Director of Border and Migration Police at the General Directorate of Police;

### Representative of an Anti-trafficking Institution

Ms Deneda Seferi, Director in the Directorate of Social Care and Integrated Services, MoSWY  
 Ms Silva Banushi, Representative of the Migration and Social Protection Office, MoSWY  
 Ms. Ina Verzivolli, Director of the Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights, MoSWY  
 Igli Totozani, Ombudsman  
 Mrs. Emira Galanxhi, Representative of INSTAT  
 Marie Verney, UNHCR Director

<sup>72</sup> The list of the respondents provided herewith is incomplete, as some interviewees from local-level institutions preferred not to have their names explicitly mentioned in the research report.

### **Tirana Respondents**

Specialist at the Tirana Labor Office;  
Child Protection Worker, Unit 7 in Tirana.  
Representative of the Border and Migration Police of Tirana Region  
The Director of Naim Frasheri Elementary School in Tirana;  
Teacher at elementary school in Tirana  
Representative of SHKEJ NGO (the National Association of Education for Life)  
Representative of ARSIS organization

### **Shkodra Respondents**

Representative of the Labor Office  
Representative of the Regional Directorate of Social Services  
Representative of the Public Health Directorate  
The Child Rights Worker in the Prefecture  
The Child Protection Worker in the Municipality  
Representative of the Migration Office and the Border Police  
Child psychologist specialist in the Border and Migration Police  
Representative of the domestic violence sector in the Police  
Representative of the Vocational Training Center  
Representative of the Woman to Woman NGO  
Representative of the ACLI NGO  
Representative of the The Woman for Development NGO

### **Lezha Respondents**

Two representatives of the Regional Directorate of Social Services  
Representative of the Regional Directorate of Education  
Representative of the Labor Office  
Representative of the "Integration of North Roma" NGO  
Representative of the Observatory of the Children's Rights  
The Child Protection Worker in the Municipality  
Representative of the Saint Mary Center  
Representative of the Cultural Centre for the Lezha Children  
Representative of the Civil Emergencies Office in the Lezha Prefecture

### **Fier Respondents**

The Child Protection Unit in Fier Municipality,  
Representative of the Regional Directorate of Social Services  
Representative of the Border and Migration Police,  
Representative of the Domestic Violence Section in the Fier Municipality,  
Representative of the "Way of Light" Association  
Representative of the Public Vocational Training Center  
Representative of the Psychosocial Service at School  
Representative of the Labour office in Fier.

### **Korca Respondents**

Judicial police officer from border and migration police;  
Representative of the border and migration police  
The Director of Ismail Qemali high School;  
A nurse and a paediatrician of the primary health center

Two lawyers offering services to vulnerable families;  
 Representative of the World Vision in Korca, NGO  
 Representative of the Emanuel Mission NGO  
 Embroidery CBO “Qendistaret”

Migrant Respondents						
Municipality	Migrants		Family members		Key Informants	Total
	F	M	F	M		
Shkodra	6	9	10	2	11	38
Lezha	3	11	5	8	9	36
Tirana	-	-	-	-	15	15
3) national	5	5	12	11	8	41
4) local						
Fier	6	4	3	8	8	29
Korca	9	1	14	21	9	54
Total (participants)	29	30	44	50	60	213
	59		94			

## Annex 3 – Municipality-specific findings

### Tirana

Interviewee	Migrants		Other key-informants	
	10		7	
Migrants' gender	Male		Female	
	5		5	
Type of migration	Internal		Cross-border	
	2		8	
Marital status	Married	Divorced	Single	
	6	1	3	
Education	Primary	Secondary	Higher	
	4	3	3	

The demographics of migrants interviewed in Tirana (albeit a small and non-representative sample) suggest that migration affects people with various demographic features and socio-economic backgrounds.

**Emigration.** Since early 1990s, emigration from Tirana towards wealthier countries in the North Western Europe and beyond has been a prevailing trend. In 2015, a new wave of emigration was noted, the one affecting Albanian citizens seeking asylum abroad based on economic grounds, particularly to Germany and France. These migrants are generally unemployed, with a low level of education. Some of them have experienced internal migration, but reported that they did not feel integrated in Tirana. Their living conditions were very poor, which – coupled with a low access to services, or lack of appropriate ones (particularly health services) - pushed them to migrate abroad in the hope to find a better way to support their living.

**Immigration.** Immigration to Tirana involves foreign citizens legally entering and staying in Albania, and migrants who enter the country irregularly, including asylum seekers. A large number of foreigners stay in Tirana for work, business, to follow family members and for other purposes. The number of foreign citizens with a labor permit in Tirana increased in the past five years. According to the Migration Office at the MoSWY, the figures have increased from 1,608 in 2010, to 1,711 in 2015. Tirana hosts also the main venues for the accommodation and processing of cases of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in Albania.

**Internal Migration.** Internal migration is related to movements from suburban to urban areas of Tirana, and from smaller towns to the capital city. Tirana is the city in Albania that recorded the fastest growth over the past 25 years. From 250,000 inhabitants in 1990, currently more than one million people live in Tirana. Those with higher socio-economic capacities and education level normally live in the center of the city, whereas individuals and families with lower education and resources tend to live in the suburban areas (now part of the “New Tirana”).

**Return migration.** Out of the eight cases of emigration included in the research sample, six were cases of asylum seekers who went to Germany, France and Italy, and who were returned after their application was rejected by the authorities in those countries. The two other emigrants had returned voluntarily from Greece and France respectively, because of the economic crisis in the destination countries, which narrowed job opportunities available to them. Migration Counters established at the Labor Offices in the Tirana region have interviewed and referred to other services approximately 2,300 Albanian citizens from 2011 to 2015. These citizens were voluntarily returned or readmitted from Greece (73%), Italy (21%), other EU countries (2,8%), and other non-EU countries (1.7%).<sup>73</sup>

**Migration and social protection.** Compared to other cities and towns in Albania, Tirana has more services available to children, young people, disadvantaged families and ethnic minorities. In Tirana there is a higher number of schools and nurseries, hospitals and health care institutions, child protection units, vocational trainings centers, and daily shelters for children and young people. Some of these services are run by NGOs that work in partnership with the Government to offer specialized and high-standard assistance to people in need.

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<sup>73</sup> Report of Monitoring of the Action Plan of the Strategy for Reintegration of the Albanian citizens 2010-2015

## Korca

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Migrants</b>		<b>Other key-informants</b>
	10		10
<b>Migrants' gender</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>
	1		9
<b>Type of migration</b>	<b>Internal</b>		<b>Cross-border</b>
	2		8
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Divorced</b>	<b>Single</b>
	8	/	2
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Higher</b>
	3	6	1

Korca displays characteristics that are similar to other cities in terms of migration profile, but its bordering position with Greece adds a specific dimension of emigration from Albania to this country. Its prominence in the South-East of Albania made Korca a target of internal migrants as well. More recently, Korca also received refugees and other migrants who crossed the border in Kapshticato enter Albania.

**Emigration.** Greece is a very common destination for people from Korca because of the proximity and the easy means of transportation available (car and bus). Some of the interviewees have emigrated more than once to countries such as the USA and Canada. Individuals belonging to ethnic minorities and/or from very poor families went to Germany and applied for asylum. Turkey also featured as a recent country of destination for migration from Korca. Representatives of a local NGO were aware of about 200 individuals who emigrated abroad for the purpose of employment, 170 who did so for seasonal work, 40 for personal reasons, and 5 for studying<sup>74</sup>. Some migrants – particularly families belonging to the Roma and Egyptian minorities - allegedly travel to Greece for seasonal work and for begging. School teachers spoke about the frequent drop out and returns of their pupils: in one of the city schools 40 pupils left, and 25 returned within the 2015-16 academic year alone<sup>75</sup>.

**Immigration.** Data show an interesting diversity within the immigrant population in Korca, encompassing citizens from over 18 different countries across 3 continents. These data reflect the diversification of the population among Albanian cities, and point to the need to adjust services according to the different groups therein. According to data provided by the Border Police of Korca, 84 foreign citizens were issued a residence permit in 2015, on the basis of: family reunification (20), work (50), study (12), and to volunteer in religious associations (2). Foreign nationals residing in Korca were: 22 from Greece, 4 from Germany, 2 from France, 2 from UK, 5 from Uganda, 14 from Turkey, 1 from Ukraine, 3 from Italy, 4 from Kosovo, 6 from The Netherlands, 3 from Romania, 1 from Syria, 1 from the USA, 1 from Macedonia, 2 from Serbia, 1 from Nigeria, 1 from Moldova, and 3 from Sudan.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with representative of the NGO "Qendistari".

<sup>75</sup> Interview with teacher at Ismail Qemali School

Representatives of the Prosecutor's office reported that the dynamics of immigration in Korca are intensifying, but they do not have systematic data and statistics. However, they confirmed the presence of both Albanian and foreign unaccompanied children crossing the border near Korca. This was in line with the reports from the Regional Directorate of Border and Migration Police of Korca, whose representatives affirmed that migrants in the municipality are typically young people from the same region, and who also confirmed the increasing presence of foreign-origin children in the past few years, with those from war-affected countries being the most vulnerable. The same institution however reported that they do not have statistics on migration<sup>76</sup>.

**Internal migration.** Being one of the largest cities in Albania and a prominent border city in the South-East, Korca has been receiving internal migrants since early 1990s. Statistics on internal migration are sporadic and mostly scattered. Some figures produced by a local NGO in Korca recorded 12 families involved in internal migration, and 5 children coming alone to Korca for begging<sup>77</sup>. Internal migrants from rural areas expressed appreciation for the education opportunities available to their children in the city. Other migrants though, particularly those who were from Northern areas of the country, reported having been discriminated against because of their geographic background, by both the community and the local institutions in Korca.

**Return migration.** Return migration in Korca involves migrants who returned from long-term migration abroad, rejected asylum-seekers, and migrants who returned to settle in Korca while originating from other, less prosperous areas in Albania. According to a local NGO, 150 migrants returned regularly in 2015, whereas during the same year, the number of citizens returning to Korca following a return decision due to their irregular status abroad was of 265<sup>78</sup>. Most of them returned from Germany after their asylum application was rejected. Some migrants are returning and making investments in Korca, starting up their own business. These migrants bring expertise and know-how that has the potential to develop the business sector and to improve the level of services provided in the area. For example, a returned migrant (female, 36) from Thessaloniki has invested in a restaurant capitalizing on her skills gained in Greece. Another returnee from Greece (male, 39) has invested in a parking place.

**Migration and social protection.** Interviews with migrants showed that public services are insufficient and poorly funded in Korca. Only one of the interviewed migrants had been given social assistance, and none of them had been supported with housing. None of the interviewed migrants found employment with the mediation of the Labor Office. Many returned migrants in their middle or old age spoke about unsatisfactory health care in Korca, which indeed appears to be a recurring issue in migrants' narratives generally. They rely on assistance from their sons living abroad for the provision of the medicaments and to pay for their treatments. The procedure to obtain pensions issued by the social insurance scheme was reported to be lengthy and difficult for migrants returning to Korca after several years abroad. They faced significant problems in transferring the social insurance paid abroad to the Albanian scheme.

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Kleandra Vebillari, Directory for Migration and Borders Korca

<sup>77</sup> Interview with representative of the NGO "Qendistari"

<sup>78</sup> Interview with representative of the NGO "Qendistari"

In Korca there is also a network of NGOs that offer services to children (mainly support to school integration), families, women, and specifically to migrants. Data from the Ministry of Science and Education say that 36 Albanian children were (re-)integrated in school in the Korca Region during 2015. However, returned migrants reported that their children faced difficulties in integrating in the school and in the social life in Albania.

**Fier**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Migrants</b>		<b>Other key-informants</b>	
	<b>10</b>		<b>8</b>	
<b>Migrants' gender</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<b>4</b>		<b>6</b>	
<b>Type of migration</b>	<b>Internal</b>		<b>Cross-border</b>	
	<b>3</b>		<b>7</b>	
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Divorced</b>	<b>Single</b>	
	<b>8</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Higher</b>	
	<b>9</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>1</b>	

The migration patterns in Fier show a few recurring features: the very poor conditions of Roma and Egyptian communities among push-factors; the intense seasonal migration to Greece; migrants' employment heavily based on agriculture; and lack of coordination of services on the ground, despite the high level of awareness of key informants concerning migrants' situation and needs.

**Emigration.** Emigration has been a steady trend since the early 1990s in Fier. Many people emigrated abroad, mostly to Greece and – to a lower extent - to Italy and other countries. Generally, these migrants have a very low level of education and no specialized professional skills. Long-term emigration to Greece, which has been prevailing during the past two decades, is being recently replaced by shorter-term, seasonal emigration: as a result of the visa liberalization with the Schengen countries, many Albanian citizens from Fier emigrated to Greece for temporary work of 90 days once or twice a year, in order to provide a revenue for their family. These seasonal workers are mostly heads of households, adult men, but also women, some of whom had emigrated to Greece previously for longer periods of time, and have family or friends there who help them find short term jobs. For some families revenues from these temporary jobs represent their main income.

Emigration appears to also be the choice of many the internal migrants who had difficulties to integrate in Fier. According to migrants' interviews, there is a difficulty to access services of assistance and employment in the villages. Agriculture is backward and very few people work their land and live from it. Villages lack adequate roads and water supplies; moreover, there are no opportunities to access loans to buy working machines, seeds and other primary substances needed to work in the agricultural sector. Representatives of the local Child Protection Unit stated that the relatively high emigration rate in the region of Fier is related to the noticeable

share of population belonging to the Roma and Egyptian ethnic minorities. In their views, the strong discrimination suffered by these communities pushes them to migrate, in order to find a more welcoming place where to live<sup>79</sup>.

**Immigration.** Fier has some important oil reserves and a major industry of oil refining, which in the past 5 years has been run by an international firm. Mostly as a result of these activities, the number of foreign citizens staying in Fier with a residence permit has grown from approximately 50 persons in 2010, to 337 in 2016. Out of the total, 227 individuals are staying with a work permit, while the remaining 93 are either following family members or engaged in religious activities. According to their nationality, foreign residents in Fier are divided as it follows: 126 Canadians; 62 Croatians; 15 Hungarians; 49 Italians; 17 Turks; 20 Kosovars; 16 Romanians; and 5 Russians. The employment of these foreign citizens is deemed as highly needed by the Regional Directory of Employment in Fier, since the absence of oil specialists would have been a major cause of unemployment in the region, which heavily depends on this sector.<sup>80</sup>

In 2014, approximately 200 Syrian nationals were apprehended by the police in the Fier area while trying to cross the border on to Montenegro. Indeed, they did not apply for asylum, most likely because they intended to do so in an EU country. Therefore, they were returned as irregular migrants to the latest countries of origin, on the basis of existing bilateral re-admission agreements with Albania. No recent cases of Syrian refugees or migrants were reported in Fier at the time of the interviews. The lack of, or the difficulties to access translators and interpreters for the new migrant and refugee population were confirmed as well in this region.

**Internal Migration.** The three internal migrants included in the research sample described their situation in Fier as a temporary solution of which they were not fully satisfied. They had come to Fier hoping to find an employment and support themselves and their families. Over time, they performed simple jobs such as waiter, car washer, cleaning lady, and were not satisfied with the working conditions, including the pay. Reportedly, other internal migrants who live in Fier were involved in seasonal international migration to improve their family income. Similar to the situation in Korca, the feeling of being discriminated against came up in the narratives of internal migrants interviewed, particularly of those originating from Northern Albania.

**Return migration.** While largely sharing the features of the other cities and towns in Albania, return migration in Fier has a peculiar trait, which is the return of seasonal migrants. The local Child Protection Unit did not provide exact figures on returnees, but indicated that there were approximately 50 returned families in Fier. They also reported that - unlike the clear guidance that instructs schools to focus on the returned migrant pupils - institutions that are part of the local child protection system are not given any explicit mandate to work with returned migrant children.. Meanwhile, the Director of the Unit for the Psycho-social Service in schools quoted substantially high numbers of children returning following failed asylum applications during the 2015-16 academic year - respectively 170 pupils in secondary schools and 31 students in high school returning from Germany, and 53 returning from Greece.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Alma Guma, Child Protection Unit

<sup>80</sup> Fatmira Vruzhaj, Regional Directory of Employment, Fier

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Irma Baci

**Migration and Social Protection.** Evidence from fieldwork demonstrated that the public services have increased their efforts to provide social assistance and (re)integration support to migrant families’ integration in Fier. Contact details of the local Migration Counter and on the services it provides are distributed at the Border Crossing points in the form of leaflets. New specialized units for child protection against domestic violence function at the Municipality of Fier, albeit these are not given any explicit mandate to work with returned migrant children, nor are they involved in any of the procedures concerning reception, voluntary return, repatriation, post-return (re)integration, or assistance in transit of these children<sup>82</sup>. A Regional Vocational Training Center is established by the Ministry of Labor which offers free vocational courses for young people who register, although the numbers are limited.

Access to school for the returned children was reported to work smoothly for Albanian migrating families returning from abroad; children can enroll at the beginning or at any stage of the academic year. Albanian language support classes are offered to children returning from abroad. In 2015, a total of 115 children were returned and reintegrated in schools in Fier. Access to health care is provided as it regards children’s vaccination and primary health services for all family members of migrants. However, support to (re)integration in the local labour market to these families is still insufficient. According to the respondents, local institutions such as the Regional Social Service and the Regional Vocational Training Center need to be given a stronger mandate and more financial means to perform their functions<sup>83</sup>.

There is a functional network of NGOs supporting the families living in extreme poverty, such as the Roma and Egyptian communities and other poorest families. These NGOs support the (re) integration of those families through a combination of interventions, ranging from survival help like food and paying rents for housing, through to registration of children in the civil registry and at school, and to supporting employment of the parents and of young people through microcredits and vocational training. Yet some migrants, especially those living in villages, mentioned the distance and the complicated logistics to reach nurseries as a very relevant barrier for them to engage in work.

**Shkodra**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Migrants</b>		<b>Other key-informants</b>
	15		12
<b>Migrants’ gender</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>
	9		6
<b>Type of migration</b>	<b>Internal</b>		<b>Cross-border</b>
	/		15
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Divorced</b>	<b>Single</b>
	11	/	4
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Higher</b>
	1	8	6

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Alma Guma, Child Protection Unit

<sup>83</sup> Ilir Dano, Director of the Professional Training Centre, Fier

Shkodra emerged as an important case-study for the investigation on migration and social protection, due to its socio-economic position as one of the biggest cities in Albania. It displays all the current key trends of migration in Albania, and interviews in this municipality reflected a high level of awareness of key informants on the way the legal and policy frameworks function in practice concerning migrants in the country.

**Emigration.** Emigration is the most widespread form of migration (or at least the most frequently reported one) in Shkodra. Since the early 1990s, major flows of emigration to Italy and Greece, as well as to other EU countries, were witnessed in the city. Albeit migrants still resort to different forms of irregular migration, over the past years there is apparently more awareness among potential migrants in Shkodra about the risks it carries and the lack of possibilities for integration in the countries of destination, and consequently more and more migrants attempt to use regular ways of migration, albeit opportunities available are still rather limited. Among the legal ways explored, migrants interviewed mentioned study, securing a work contract, seasonal work, marriage, and the USA and Canadian lotteries for residence permits. Few cases of applications for asylum because of blood feuds or domestic violence were reported among interviewees as well. The emigration of separated and unaccompanied children was reported as recurrent by the Border Police. Allegedly, children cross the Albanian border legally in the company of their parents and then continue their trip without them. The Police expressed concerns that these children may become victims of trafficking and of other forms of violence along the route.

**Immigration.** Foreign citizens immigrating to Shkodra are entering for work purposes, for family unity, to volunteer in religious associations, and to seek international protection (namely those from Morocco and Syria). Most of them are adult men. Work permits issued in Shkodra to foreign citizens from 2010 to 2015 were: 112 in 2010, 152 in 2011, 67 in 2012, 63 in 2013, 29 in 2014 and 38 in 2015<sup>84</sup>. At the time of the research, foreigners staying legally in the Shkodra region were in total 1,198 and the majority came to join religious associations as volunteers. In 2014 there have been 94 irregular migrants identified in Shkodra territory and none has applied for asylum. In 2015 there have been 360 irregular migrants in the municipality, out of which 50 have applied for asylum, while in 2016 there have been only 6 cases of irregular migrants identified.

**Internal Migration.** As repeatedly mentioned in this report, there are no available figures regarding internal migrants in Albania, albeit all service providers at local level seem to agree that this group constitutes a large part of the marginalized families with very low revenues and in need of assistance living in the country. This general trend was confirmed in Shkodra, where internal migrants usually come from other poorer cities and from the rural areas in the Shkodra region. Roma and Egyptian families are frequently represented among internal migrants. Indeed, key informants from the NGO sector maintain that even though there is an emphasis on international migrants, the main form of migration in Shkodra is that of families coming from other cities, such as Elbasan, Fushe Kruje, Berat, particularly of Roma and Egyptian families. The Labour Office reported that internal migrants are not part of their mandate, but they emphasized the importance of the new law on job-seekers in Albania, which gives to those originating from rural areas the same entitlement to ask for the services of this office on equal basis with Shkodra residents<sup>85</sup>. Representatives from the Professional Training Office maintained that internal migrants are not part their mandate either, as they are not listed among the vulnerable groups that are prioritized in the Office's work.

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<sup>84</sup> Migration Directory at the Ministry of Labor

<sup>85</sup> interview with the rep. of the Employment and Job Seekers Office in Shkodra

**Return migration.** In Shkodra, there is a large number of Albanian migrants and families returning from emigration after losing their job in the countries of destination as a result of the economic crises. This group makes the largest number of users at the local Migration Counter: according to representatives from this institution, return to Shkodra has been particularly intense starting from 2009. They report that within this period, 299 returned migrants were registered at this Office.<sup>86</sup> The Office for Professional Training reported that returned migrants are considered as a priority group, but low figures of returned migrants featured among this Office's beneficiaries (only 25 in 2014; 15 in 2015; and 5 in 2016).

Migrants families interviewed in Shkodra emphasized the challenges faced by their children to reintegrate upon return. The Office for the protection of minors and family violence- a relevant institution belonging to the Directory of Police - has been involved in cases of returning children, both with their families and as separated or unaccompanied. They mentioned that the large majority of these children originated from rural areas of the Shkodra region.

**Migration and social protection.** Interviews with key informants and migrants exposed that public institutions in Shkodra have few human and financial resources to assist migrants - and to fulfil their duties more broadly. Representatives from NGOs confirmed the lack of human resources among local public service providers, as well as their limited or unsuitable skills, the high turnover of the personnel, and the limited budget available to implement policies.<sup>87</sup>

From the interviewed migrants, only 4 persons have approached the Migration Counter to ask for a job and none of them have got one thanks to this service. Economic aid is very difficult to obtain and none has received housing support from the local Government. Some interviewees have no water or energy supply because they could not pay for the bills after return. All migrants interviewed complained about the poor treatment received in hospitals and other health care centers.

There are noticeable gaps in practice regarding the treatment of foreign migrants. For example, the Border Police claimed that they do not have water, food and premises to host large groups of immigrants to be interviewed, if needed. The church has been providing food for foreign people in some cases. Key informants said that institutions do not have money for interpreters to cover all languages spoken by immigrants. Foreign emigrants staying legally in Shkodra for work or other purposes are granted equal access to services, such as education and health care (they can access the latter only if they are registered in the civil status registry and if they have insurances, and also if they are registered as unemployed persons seeking a job).

Alongside public institutions, several religious organizations linked to the Catholic Church are involved in supporting the social inclusion of vulnerable children and families, including migrant's families.

Discrimination against ethnic minorities, namely Roma and Egyptians, was highlighted as a factor contributing to migration on the one hand, and hindering reintegration of internal and/or returned migrants on the other hand. NGO representatives stressed, in particular, that in the case of children belonging to these minorities, the principle of the best interests of the child is not always respected in decision-making processes affecting them undertaken by the relevant institutions<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>86</sup> interview with the rep. of the Employment and Job Seekers Office in Shkodra

<sup>87</sup> representative of organization 'Woman in Development' (Gruaja ne Zhvillim)

<sup>88</sup> representative of organization 'Woman in Development' (Gruaja ne Zhvillim)

## Lezha

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Migrants</b>		<b>Other key-informants</b>
	14		9
<b>Migrants' gender</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>
	11		3
<b>Type of migration</b>	<b>Internal</b>		<b>Cross-border</b>
	1		13
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Divorced</b>	<b>Single</b>
	8	1	6
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Higher</b>
	N/A	N/A	N/A

Lezha shares similarities with other cities included in this research, primarily with Fier – both of them are medium-size towns located in the Southern part of Albania. Internal migration was less prevalent, and no cases of refugees were recorded. The main issues emerging from the interviews in Lezha concerned the dire state of the local labour market - which reportedly has a direct effect on families' welfare and decision to migrate -, the sector-specific immigration (tourism sector), the impact of the activities performed by the recently established Child Protection Unit, and the significant impact that the religious organizations have in the area.

**Emigration.** The most recurring kind of migration reported in Lezha was emigration to foreign - mostly EU - countries. Italy is a frequent destination, but also Germany and France are targeted by Albanians originating from Lezha. A few people have emigrated to Greece, but are now returning because of the economic crisis, and also because – according to their experience - integration of migrants is much more difficult, timely and costly in Greece than in other EU countries.

Opportunities for legal emigration are virtually inexistent in Lezha. Actually, 13 out of the 14 migrants included in the research sample had migrated abroad, either irregularly (prior to the visa liberalization) or with a visa-free passport but no permit to work abroad. Key informants maintain that the Labour Office and the MoSWY should do more to offer young and qualified people opportunities for legal migration, and that they should help perspective migrants to access vocational trainings in order to increase their professional skills. The Labor Office received three applications from individuals looking for a job abroad since its establishment, which – according to the representative interviewed – the Office “does not know what to do with”.

**Immigration.** According to the Labor Office in Lezha in 2015, 134 foreign citizens have been issued labor permits in Lezha. They were from: Italy (2), Kosovo (6), Macedonia (3), Turkey (2) and Serbia (1). Similar figures concerning labour permits issued to foreign citizens were reported for the previous years: 54 in 2014, 170 in 2013, 34 in 2012, 36 in 2011 and 23 in 2010<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>89</sup> representative of organization ‘Woman in Development’ (Gruaja ne Zhvillim)

Many of these citizens were employed in the tourism industry and services. The above-figures do not include the foreign volunteers staying in Lezha for religious activities. Specialists of the Civil Emergencies Office in Lezha report that there have not been cases of refugees from Syria and other war-affected countries in this municipality.

**Internal Migration.** This form of migration is likely high although no institution is collecting relevant data. In 1990 Lezha had 8,000 inhabitants and in 2016 it has 40,000 inhabitants. This figure is enough to illustrate the dimensions of the significant demographic movements going on in this area. Many people from rural areas and smaller and more isolated centers such as Dukagjin, Kukes, and Tropoje, have moved to Lezha for better living and working opportunities, whereas many inhabitants of Lezha have moved to other bigger cities like Tirana. Among migrants in this category there are also long-term migrants who preferred to move to the capital upon return to Albania:

*We live between Lezha and Tirana. We have rented a flat in Tirana where our son will live when he starts university. In Lezha we have our own house. In Tirana we still have very little contacts with the community... (female, 40)*

**Return migration.** All migrants interviewed in Lezha were Albanian citizens returning from abroad after one or several years. None of the institutions interviewed provided clear figures on this type of migration. The Labor Office reported that there were five returned migrants addressing their Office in 2015 and nine in 2016, but these figures do not represent the real dimensions of the phenomenon. Conditions upon return vary according to the specific situation of the returned migrants. Generally, it proved very difficult for all of them to find a job once back in Lezha, and this applies also to migrants with higher education.

Those who found a job reported that working conditions and remunerations are very low compared to the standard they experienced in the EU countries. Migrants with low qualifications say that they get salaries that are under the minimal official wage (15,000 Albanian Lek per month) and are obliged to work long hours every day.

The situation upon return is thus very difficult, both emotionally and materially. Representatives of the Regional Directory of Education reported a relatively high number of returned children that were re-integrated in schools. Out of 225 children returned, 42 were teenagers attending high school, 179 were children attending secondary schools and 4 were going to nursery. The majority of these children had returned from Germany (162), and also from France (4), Greece (20), Italy (23), 8 Sweden (8), Switzerland (1), Canada (2), and Turkey (1).

**Migration and social protection.** A significant number of services for vulnerable people, including returned migrants, are available in Lezha. However, the possibility to register as a returned migrant is based on the initiative of the individual concerned, and only the persons that have stayed more than one year abroad can be registered as such in Albania. Considering the average short stay of migrants involved in asylum procedures abroad, the one-year threshold may exclude many families and children from assistance. From 2010 to 2015 a Migration Desk has operated at the Labor Office in the Region. Migrants returning from abroad could benefit from free orientation on services, such as employment, vocational training, education, housing

and health care there. However, the Labor Office received very few requests of assistance from this group. According to a representative of this institution, returned migrants mostly approach the Labor Offices when they need an unemployment certificate in order to obtain a health card. Similarly to the experiences of migrants in other cities, returned migrants in Lezha reported that they did not have high expectations towards public institutions. Out of the 14 migrants included in the research sample, only one has asked for a job at the Labor Office, without success.

When it comes to services available to returned children, also in Lezha the best-functioning services appeared to be the ones offered by schools, which are explicitly mandated to support child migrants' (re)integration. According to the Regional Directory of Education in Lezha, during the period 2015-2016, 225 children of returned migrant families were integrated in local schools. Out of them, 162 returned from Germany, 20 from France, 23 from Greece, 8 from Italy, 11 from Sweden, 2 from Switzerland, 2 from Canada and 1 from Turkey.

Assisting the return of unaccompanied children appears to be an important part of the work performed by the Office of the National Social Services in Lezha. According to their representative, in 2015 they assisted 15 cases in the whole prefecture, which includes also two other communes in the Lezha region (Mirdita and Kurbin).

In addition to the State Social Service, a variety of other services are offered in Lezha to women and girls, children of poor families, Roma and Egyptian minorities and to elderly persons by private no-profit organizations. These services deal with provision of help for housing, living, work, and for the education and training of children and young people coming from disadvantaged families. Migrants interviewed as part of the research stated that they were happy with the support they received from private organizations, and that they also relied significantly on the informal protection networks at community level.



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