



Weekly Briefing

Albania social briefing:

To leave or not to leave – this is the question!

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Introduction

As Shakespearean as it may sound, this is the main dilemma for thousands of (young) Albanians nowadays. In mid-November a 23-year-old girl from a small city in Northern Albania ended her life in a state of severe depression due to her family's extreme poverty and inability to find a job. Adela, an engineering graduate, vainly wandered through many interviews as she never received a positive response for a job. Her unemployed parents were plunged into debts in order to give their daughter an education. A university degree in their perception was translated into employment; employment, in income, and more income in debt repayments. Her family and friends mentioned that in her disappointment and frustration she had expressed that she wanted to leave the country at the first opportunity, however, tragedy hit first. This young girl could no longer cope with a reality that overwhelmed her, so she chose suicide.

This case unfortunately is not isolated, yet it is the extreme symptom of two major social torments – insecurity for the near future and faded hope.

Migration in the past years – from bad to worse

In many in Albania believe that leaving the country is the most painful of protests. Some months prior, the Deputy Prime Minister publicly admitted what has been feared for a long time: since 2013 more than 500,000 Albanians left the country in search for a better life. This is one of the highest numbers ever witnessed in post-communist era and in such a short time span. The ones who left are mainly newly created families, experienced professionals mostly belonging to the middle class and young and educated people in the age of 18 to 29. Specialists agree that young people leaving Albania come as the result of poor education and unemployment. According to INSTAT official data, the latest youth unemployment rate stood at 22.2% in the first three quarters of 2019.

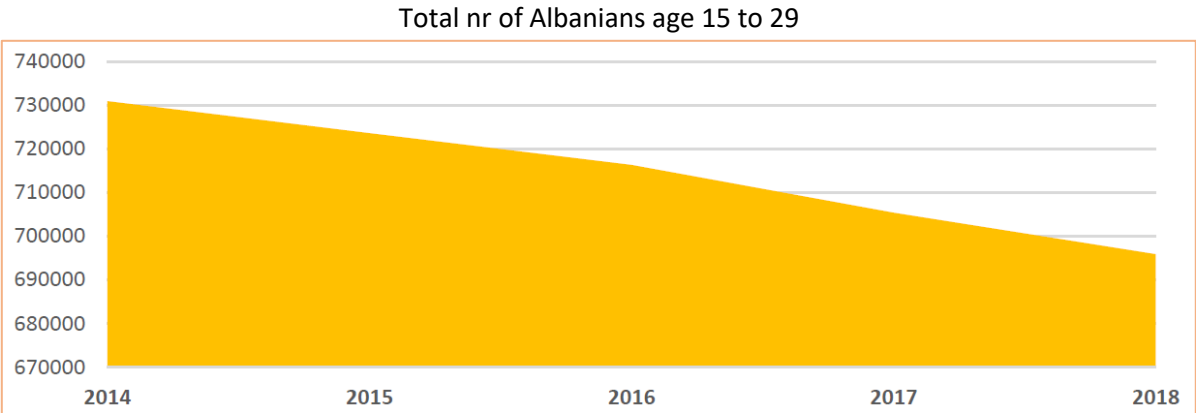
The desire of Albanians to leave the country has not stopped, but has revived again in 2019. According to data from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) for January-July, asylum applications from Albania in one of the European Union countries totaled about 14,000, a significant increase of 24% compared to the same period last year. About 90% of these applications are first timers and there are those who do not give up and try again.ⁱ

A number of reports by national institutions and international organizations demonstrate with high concern that the population in Albania is aging at a very fast pace and that the country

is in danger of returning from the state with the youngest population in Europe to the oldest one very soon.

Although the reports cite a number of factors such as a decrease in the number of births per family or migration, there are other factors that should not be overlooked are the lack of proper services in the community, or the few opportunities to get a proper education and the opportunity to earn a decent salary.

In a population of 2.9 million with less than 1/3 of it being under the age of 30 years old, national data demonstrate a reality as the graph below indicates, yet this is an estimation of INSTAT on the Annual Average Population, the real numbers will be displayed after the next census in 2020.



Source: Albanian National Youth Network, Report CRCAⁱⁱ

The reasons

A recent Gallup report revealed that 79% of young Albanians want to leave their country permanently - with this figure Albania ranks first in the world for youth immigration.ⁱⁱⁱ The two main motives remain unemployment and education. Another study from FES foundation conducted in South-East Europe notes that the wave of youth emigration has begun to decline in many Southeast European countries, but remains high in the Balkan region and especially in Albania where 285,000 Albanians plan to flee the country in the coming years and the majority of them belong to the younger generation.^{iv}

On the why Albanians want to leave the country the top of the list poor economic conditions, unemployment and slim prospect for a decent future.

Economic conditions

For many young Albanians, life in their home country is very difficult and as a result a tremendous number of them have turned to other countries to secure livelihoods (mostly EU countries). Usually in Albania, as in the case portrayed in the introduction, families are often

indebted in order for their children to pursue higher education. At the moment that one has obtained the degree it is expected for him/her to repay this debt by find a job, so the family and financial pressure on these young graduates is extremely high.

Unemployment

The latest data report that after finishing a higher education in Albania, only one out of three college graduates will find a job in the timespan of one year. This means that for the rest low-paid transition jobs are left – mostly waiters, call-centers employees, interns or else. The frustration of not finding a decent job is visible everywhere, in social media, in comments, in headlines and is becoming an issue by threatening the very mental health of this unfortunate young people. The problem persists especially when it is calculated that in the past six years, the main reason of half a million Albanians fleeing the country was unemployment; so, in the national perspective the levels of unemployment should be lower than some years ago (because of so many Albanians now are working abroad), yet unemployment rate went from 23.5% in 2015 to 22.2% in 2019.

Slim prospect for the future

Last but not least, there is no perspective. It is very difficult to deprive young generations from hopes and dreams for a better future; indeed, the very essence of a country's optimism is its youth. The Albanian never-ending transition besides crippling the past and the present is also poisoning the future. The general morale is critical and evident – stagnation, sadness, hopelessness and despair – everything contrary to what youth represents and is all about.

The latest trend is that of young and educated Albanians eagerness to emigrate. Struggling to make ends meet, this generation is fleeing the country. The worse indicator however is not the already dreadful fact that young Albanians want to leave in a massive scale, but it is the fact that they wish not to come back home, ever. This is a trend also of the past decades, where the returning rates of migrants has been extremely low.

The social consequences of this youth wave of departures

Almost all experts agree that the situation is serious: Albania is aging at a fast pace. From the country with the youngest population in Europe, Albania's average age has increased from 27 to 35.4 years old. The consequences are obvious: reducing births rated, reducing number of children per woman from 2.7 to less than 1.6, and expanding pensions and social protection requirements has created its own problems in health care or social care. According to the Institute of Statistics, the number of births in the third quarter of 2019 decreased by 5.7% compared to the third quarter of 2018. The highest number of births was in the district of Tirana with 2,157 babies, while the lowest number was recorded in Gjirokastra county, with 111

births.^v There are commentaries on some extreme expectations having at their center disappearing of Albanian cities if this emigration pace will continue.

There is another immediate risk, the increase of young people leaving due to interconnected online platforms. Social media has connected people all around the world. The majority of these users belong to the younger generation, in fact many of them are born in the internet era.

In Albania the ones who left and the ones who stayed keep in touch via numerous social platforms. For the ones who are still in their homeland, the new life of their friends in another country is appealing and becomes the new priority in the wish list. As deceiving and exaggerated the social media can be, they still play an important role on how one perceives the world. The desire and later the will to leave the country are also triggered by their peers living abroad who sometimes flaunt a life that perhaps they don't really have, by creating so a chain of events that can only perpetuate.

Conclusions

Young people strong desiring to leave the country, qualified workers seeking to work abroad, parents who remain lonely in old age - emigration is hitting Albania's society hard. For many years, the young age of the population has been regarded by scholars as Albania's greatest hope for rapid economic development. But that hope is fading!

The suicidal case of the girl presented in the introduction might be the extreme representation of a young generation of Albanians trying to survive a harsh reality and, in many cases, wanting escape misery. Too much pressure is placed into them and an entire country's expectations are hanging in the generation that is supposed to lead the country into its future. Perhaps too much is asked from the confused masses of Generation Z, and most importantly, the adults leading the country should focus more on giving this young generation of Albanians more reasons to stay home.

ⁱ 14,000 Albanians apply for asylum in January-July 2019, increase of 24%. Translated from: <https://www.monitor.al/politika-refuzohet-me-ikje-14-mije-shqiptare-aplikuan-per-azil-ne-janar-korrik-rritje-24/>

ⁱⁱ Youth in Albania, CRCA report. Available at: https://www.crca.al/sites/default/files/publications/RAPO%20TI%20TE%20RINJTE%20NE%20SHQIPERIE%202015-2017_1.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Why do young people leave Albania? Available at: <https://oranews.tv/article/pse-largohen-te-rinjte-nga-shqiperia>

^{iv} Albania is emptying. Available at: <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2019/09/27/shqiperia-po-boshatset-40-e-te-rinjve-duan-te-largohen/>

^v Eyes on Germany, why are Albanians leaving? A new wave of emigration shows uncertainty about the future in Albania. Translated from: <https://lapsi.al/2019/09/28/me-syte-nga-gjermania-pse-po-ikin-shqiptaret-dw-nje-vale-te-re-emigrimi-ne-shqiperi-tregon-pasigurine-per-te-ardhmen/>