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The Determinants of the Employment Status of Return Migrants in Albania

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Abstract

Return migration may be associated with the addition of new human capital, entrepreneurial skills and investment funds in the country of origin. The size of these stimuli will likely depend upon the characteristics of the return migrants and the motivation for their return. This paper presents an analysis of the determinants of the probability of Albanian return migrants being in employment. This study examines the role of the socio-demographic characteristics of returning migrants; their experience while abroad and the motivations for their return. The results suggest that being male, holding a university degree, being unemployed before returning and receiving training while abroad increase the probability of finding a job after the return. The higher probability of returnees being in employment or self-employment indicates that the overall benefits to the economy of return migrants may be much larger than previously thought. Facilitating or accelerating the social integration and employability of return migrants to Albania could encourage more emigrants to return and provide a further boost to its economy.

Keywords: return migration; integration; labour market; employment.

Introduction

Emigration has been one of the main reasons for the decline of population over the last two decades in Albania. INSTAT (2019, Figure 1) estimates that in the period 2011-2018, about 356,000 Albanians left the country. However, return migration has emerged as a major issue in Albania following the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The GFC which depressed Western European labour markets was associated with a significant increase in the number of return migrants. Greece has been the destination for more than two-thirds of Albanian emigrants and the ensuing Greek economic crisis gave a further boost to return migration. INSTAT and IOM (2014) data demonstrate that about 140,000 Albanians returned to Albania in the period 2001-2011. The share of returnees in the labour force increased from 10.5% to 15.9% between 2011 and 2014, causing an increase in the labour force of almost 65,000 individuals or 4.8% (Hausmann and Nedelkoska, 2018). However, little is known about the determinants of the impact of these returnees on employment in the Albanian economy and the following analysis addresses this gap in knowledge.

Return migration may be associated with the addition of new human capital, entrepreneurial skills and investment funds in the country of origin. Economic theory postulates that the size of these stimuli will depend upon the characteristics of the return migrants and the motivation for their return (Cassarino, 2004; Gashi and Adnett, 2015, Thaís and Biscione, 2016; Naudé, et al., 2017;

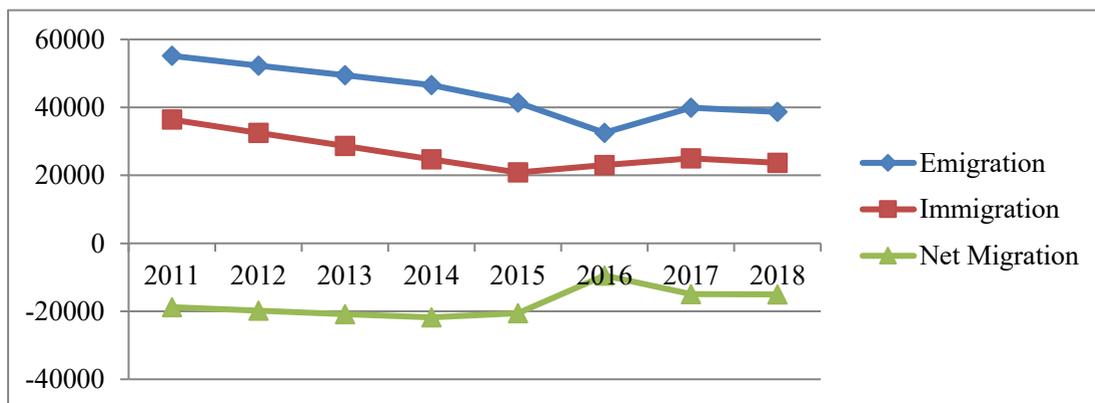
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Hausmann and Nedelkoska, 2018). Permanent returnees are more likely to stimulate the home economy than those returning temporarily, whilst those returning to retire will provide a smaller direct stimulus to the country of origin's labour market than younger returnees.

Figure 1. Number of emigrants, immigrants and net migration, 2011-2017⁴



Source: *Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), 2019*

Thaís and Biscione (2016) argue that return migration depends on the interaction between the motivation for migrating (as a push factor); the characteristics of the individual migrant, i.e. whether they have worked and saved while living abroad and are now thinking about setting-up a business in the home country; and the family context, i.e. whether family reunification is possible. These factors determine the probability of voluntary return. However, the inability to secure permanent resident status in destination countries or deportation due to illegal entry or expiration of visa can lead to forced return. Whether return migration is voluntary or forced there is likely to be a need for reintegrating returnees into the home labour market. David (2017) argues that, although not of the same order, the reintegration problems that await return migrants are comparable to the integration issues of immigrants. The environment to which migrants return differs from the one they left behind. Hence, migrants need to readjust to their home countries' context which may be costly. They need to find a job or start a business which can be difficult as a result of lack of information considering the regulations and practices in place and the absence of social capital that could provide access to the extended internal labour markets of firms (David, 2017).

In this paper the investigation focuses on the determinants of return migrants in Albania being in employment. The analysis is organized as follows. Initially a review of theory and previous studies of returnees is undertaken to provide a guide for formulating the model utilised in the empirical analysis presented in this paper. The data from which the dependent and explanatory variables are derived are explained in section 3, whereas the methodology adopted to analyse that data is explained and justified in section 4. The results of the analysis are presented in the fifth section and the final section summarises the key findings and explores their implications for policy.

Return Migration: a brief literature review

Return migration was once referred to as “the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration” (King, 2000, p.7) since most research on migration has focused on immigration and

⁴ The number of return migrants (roughly estimated: the total number of immigrants – the total number of foreigners with a residence permit in Albania) was 131,067 in the period 2011 to 2017 almost equates to the number (140,000) in the period 2001 to 2011.



integration from the perspective of the host country. Return migration has been considered to be less problematic because when they return home it is where they really belong. In most cases the decision to return is much more complex than the preceding decision to emigrate (King, 2000). The conventional economic theory of the supply of labour sees the probability of an individual being in employment as the product of two interrelated processes. Initially, an individual decides whether to participate and if so, she then seeks to find an acceptable match in the labour market. A range of individual characteristics and labour market conditions will determine the outcome of these processes. The former determines an individual's optimal combination of desired market work, home production and leisure, the conventional determinants of which include gender, age, educational attainment, family circumstances and measures of social and cultural capital (Cahuc et al., 2014). For return migrants, these determinants will also include the extent of human capital accumulated abroad and the motivation for and nature of their return.

There are several studies examining the employment and economic integration of return migrants, these studies suggest that there is variation in the labour market success of return migrants. Given that large-scale return migration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Albania it is yet to be established whether emigrants acquired employment skills useful on their return (Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou, 2005). Studies analysing the demographic characteristics of the returnees such as Koikkalainen et. al. (2016), Aker and Görmüş (2018), Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018) find that younger returnees were more likely to be employed in high-paying jobs and had lower unemployment rates than their peers in the national labour market.

Aker and Görmüş (2018) discuss the economic integration of return migrants in Turkey and argue that the returnees face more employment challenges than non-migrants. Their results suggest that holding a university degree facilitates the employment of returnees. Barcevicus (2016) analyses whether previous experience is recognised and useful for the success of return migrants in Lithuania. Focusing on high-skilled returnees this study finds that the experience gained abroad helps returnees to integrate into the labour market, however there are cases when employers are sceptical about the quality and relevance of the skills and knowledge gained abroad. Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018) analyse the consequences of the recent wave of return migration from Greece to Albania and find that most migrants returned to the district of their birth where they disproportionately engaged in entrepreneurship or self-employment. Those active in the agricultural sector seem to pull non-migrants out of non-participation, unemployment and subsistence agriculture and push them into commercial farming.

David (2017) addresses the issue of socio-economic integration of forced return migrants, focusing on the Maghreb countries. The results suggest that forced returnees are more vulnerable to negative labour market outcomes compared to voluntary returnees. She argues that the under-performance of forced returnees in the labour market creates a net loss for the home country and also raises incentives to re-migrate. Sánchez (2016) presents an analysis of return migrants and employment in Mexico. The author argues that while return migration is stimulated by a number of factors; the greatest stimulant is economic hardship in the United States. Including socio-demographic characteristics of returning migrants and tracking their employment and income trends after returning to Mexico, the analysis suggests that the majority of returning migrants have not found it difficult to find employment in their communities or regions, especially where their economic activity is related to agriculture and construction.



Data and Descriptive Statistics

This study is using the 2013 Return Migration and Re-integration Survey⁵ conducted by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) in cooperation with the Office of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). This survey was conducted between September and October 2013 and generated a nationally representative sample of 1,878 individuals. This survey which analyses the main characteristics of return migrants and their reintegration was the first of its kind in Albania. It utilised a three-stage questionnaire covering the situation before leaving in stage 1, stage 2 included information on the experience of living abroad, whereas stage 3 covered their return. The survey was based on the face to face interviews and was conducted with computer-assisted personal interviewing technology. A pilot phase was necessary to optimize the administration of the questionnaire and minimize all the logical and physical errors that the program may contain. The study consisted of a cross-sectional population-based household survey conducted at the national level across each of the 12 prefectures in Albania. A stratified sample designed was used for selecting the individual for sampling. The primary sampling units selected in the first stage were the enumeration areas (EAs), which were small operational areas defined on maps from the 2011 Census enumeration. To control for coverage errors, which may make the sample less representative, the sampling frame must be of an optimum quality during all the stages of selections. In the first stage, the EA must cover all the areas inhabited by the population under study, without omission or duplication. The boundaries of the EA must be clearly defined and subject to easy identification in the field. SAS (Statistical Analysis System) software was used at this stage to systematically select the sample of EAs with the probability proportionate to size within each prefecture. The second stage of selection dealt with household lists from the selected EAs, with the list of households enumerated in the 2011 Census for each sample EA being used. The third stage of selection was the individual selection in the pre-selected household. The sample size for a particular prefecture (urban and rural) was allocated proportionally to the number of migrants in each prefecture.

Analysing the returnees' experience, most Albanian return migrants had previously been in Greece (71%) or Italy (23%), with a mean overseas spell length of around 5.9 years in the last country of residence before their return. Most of these returnees last left Albania between 2005 and 2010 and all of them declared to have been abroad for more than 1 year, with the number of returnees being highest in 2010.

Table 1 describes the characteristics of returnees in Albania. In the 'before emigration' column are the characteristics of the returnees prior to their most recent departure from Albania. The column 'during emigration' includes information on the experience of migrants in their last country of immigration; the characteristics of returnees immediately after their return to Albania are given in the column 'after return'; and the column 'current status' presents information on the situation of returnees at the time of the interview. The data indicate that a large majority of returnees were relatively young and male, although there was a near gender balance in those migrating. The most common age group of returnees is between the age of 25 and 29 whereas, surprisingly, only about 6% of returnees were of retirement age, despite an expectation that most of the returning migrants will work until retirement and then return to the country of origin. However, a high proportion of

⁵ This explanation of the sampling strategy is based upon INSTAT and IOM. (2014) *Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania 2013*. Tirana: Institute of Statistics and International Organization for Migration (p.24 and 25).



those Albanians who emigrated during the 1990s were in their twenties and thirties and are only now approaching retirement age.

Table 1. Characteristics of return migrants

Individual characteristics	Before Emigration	During Emigration	After Return	Current Status
Male (%)	72.5			
Last place of residence (rural) in the last country of immigration (%)		46.1		
Mean age (in years)	31.5		37.4	39.3
Marital Status (%)				
Single	45.8			
Married	51.8	90.3	84.5	
Cohabitation	0.6	2.8	4.8	
Divorced	0.2	4.4	8.3	
Widow	1.65	2.4	2.4	
Marital status changed (%)		13.2	8.9	
Education (%)				
No education	1.8	4.5		
Primary school	5.3			
Secondary school	46.3	4.5		
High school	38.2	28		
Vocational school	4.5	18.2		
University studies/master	3.7	37.1		
Doctoral studies (PhD,other)	0.1	5.3		
Other	0.2	2.3		
Level of education changed during migration (%)		7.0		
Employment status (%)				
In permanent employment	11.4	54.6	8.9	13.6
Self-employed	8.4	2.8	16.5	23.0
Unemployed	58.6	27.5	57.9	45.6
Retired	4.1	3.4	7.4	8.1
Housewife	6.8	5.8	7.0	7.1
Student	10.1	4.9	1.9	2.1
Other	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.5

Source: INSTAT and IOM, 2013. Authors' calculations.

In addition, over a quarter of the returnees are planning to live abroad again, suggesting the importance of circular migration. Due to a life-cycle effect, the share of married individuals is higher after migration than before. The data indicate a wide spectrum of educational backgrounds. About 7% of returnees took advantage of their stay abroad to complete higher education, of these, 37% obtained a university/master degree, increasing the percentage of university graduates between the pre- and post-migration periods. The examination of the status of employment before, during and after migration reveals noticeable changes. In particular, the proportion of being in permanent



employment rose from 11.4% to 13.6% between the pre-migration period and post-return. The econometric analyses below will investigate the causes of this increase. Figures in Table 1 also suggest that these migrants were predominantly unemployed people who left Albania seeking better living and working conditions abroad. However, a significant proportion of migrants were employed, self-employed or students prior to migration and left presumably for better job opportunities, better income prospects abroad and/or to join their family. While 93% of returnees did so voluntarily, many migrants returned because they had lost their job just before their return, the percentage unemployed just prior to their return to Albania increased to 41.6% and most of these remained unemployed after their return.

Return Migration and Employment

The purpose of this section is to construct an econometric model of the probability of a returnee being in employment. Following Gubert and Nordman (2008) and Aker and Görmüş (2018), we estimate a probit version of a discrete choice econometric model where the dependent variable is a dummy variable taking the value 1 if the returnee is in employment, and 0 otherwise. Hence the equation can be expressed as:

$$Y_{\text{employment upon return}} = bX + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where $Y_{\text{employment upon return}}$ is a latent variable measuring the pay-off from being in employment after return; X is a vector of independent variables and ε is the error term assumed to be normally distributed. Following the discussion above six groups of independent variables are used (Table 2).

The first group includes demographic characteristics of the returnees such as gender, age and age squared. In the second group, six education dummies reflecting the highest schooling attainment at the time of the survey, namely primary cycle, secondary cycles (secondary and high school), vocational education, university level (till the fourth year of higher education and master degree) and higher degrees includes doctoral studies, the reference category being no schooling. The third group covers the characteristics of the migrant while abroad that are hypothesised to influence the probability of labour market success or failure after the return. Proxies for human capital accumulated abroad, such as whether the migrant worked before their return to Albania or whether he/she received vocational training during migration are also included. In this group, whether the level of education changed during migration is also included as a proxy for skill acquisition. In addition, migration duration is included as a proxy for professional experience gained in the labour market of the host country and for skill acquisition. This group also includes dummy variables for whether returnees were unemployed immediately before migration and before their return to Albania. The fourth group of control variables are included to account for the environment (a dummy variable indicating whether the returnee voluntarily returned or was forced to do so) and timing of the return and controls for labour market experience in the home country. A dummy variable indicating whether the returnees plan to re-migrate is also introduced. This variable is likely to lower the probability of being in employment in Albania if returnees consider their return temporary. The last group of independent variables refers to post-return experiences. Two dummies controlling for the effect of location after return have been included (back to place of birth and back to place of residence before emigrating, the reference being different location). The expectation is that those returning to their previous location in Albania, *ceteris paribus*, will have better access to the local labour market and be more likely to find employment. In addition, given previous research findings two destination country dummies are considered, namely if migrants have emigrated to



Greece or Italy. These variables are expected to capture differential opportunities for skill acquisition in different destination countries.

Table 2. Summary of variables used in the empirical analyses

Variable name	Variable definition	Expected sign	Mean	Std. Dev.
Employment upon return	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent is in employment upon return, 0 otherwise		0.36	0.48
Male	Dummy variable equal to 1 if respondent is male, 0 if respondent is female	+	0.72	0.45
Age	Age of the respondent (15 to 65)	+	35.7	11.77
Age squared	The square age of the respondent	-	1415.35	933.36
Primary	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent's highest level of completed education was primary schooling, 0 otherwise	-	0.51	0.22
Secondary	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent's highest level of completed education was secondary and high school, 0 otherwise	+	0.38	0.35
Vocational	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent's highest level of completed education was vocational education, 0 otherwise	+	0.04	0.23
University studies/master	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent's highest level of completed education was university level (till the fourth year of higher education and master degree), 0 otherwise	+	0.04	0.24
Post University studies	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent's highest level of completed education was doctoral studies, 0 otherwise	+	0.00	0.06
Was unemployed before migration	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent was unemployed before migration, 0 otherwise	-	0.59	0.49
Trained during migration	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent received vocational training during migration, 0 otherwise	+	0.47	0.49



Table 2. Continued.

Education changed during migration	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent received formal education during migration, 0 otherwise	+	0.07	0.25
Duration of the last migration (in years)	Number of years of the respondent in the last country of emigration	+	5.93	5.21
Was unemployed before return	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent was unemployed immediately before return to Albania, 0 otherwise	+	0.41	0.49
Imposed / forced by circumstances	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent was forced to return to Albania, 0 otherwise	-	0.07	0.26
Time elapsed since return (in years)	Years since return to Albania	+	2.09	1.34
Plans to re-migrate	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent plans to re-migrate, 0 otherwise	-	0.31	0.46
Back to place of birth	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent returned back to place of birth, 0 otherwise	+	0.59	0.49
Back to place of residence	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent returned back to the place of residence before emigrating, 0 otherwise	+	0.85	0.36
Greece	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent emigrated to Greece, 0 otherwise	+	0.71	0.45
Italy	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent emigrated to Italy, 0 otherwise	+	0.23	0.42

Results

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of the determinants of returnees being in employment. The results indicate that being male increased the probability of being in employment by 20.6%, or male returnees were 181.1% more likely to be in employment compared to female returnees. Age has a non-linear relationship to being in employment with the probability increasing up to the age of 30 and decreasing afterwards. The probability of returnees being in employment increased with the level of completed education: returnees with completed undergraduate and masters/doctoral studies were 25.6 percentage points and 34.5 percentage points more likely to be in employment after return compared with the reference category of no-education. These results are in line with previous findings of Barcevicus (2016) in the case of Lithuania and Aker and Görmüş (2018) for Turkey. If the returnee was unemployed before migration lowered the probability of being in employment after return by 16.2 percentage points; however, being unemployed before return increased the probability of finding a job after return by 13.7 percentage points. The latter finding



might indicate that becoming unemployed in the host country places greater pressure on these returnees to find a job in their home country before or on returning. The INSTAT and IOM report (2014) underlines that unemployment in the host country and better employment opportunities in Albania are among the reasons for return. Analysing the characteristics of returnees whilst abroad, the results indicate that those returnees who were trained while abroad were 23.7 percentage points more likely to find a job after return, indicating an employment ‘brain gain’. Completing a higher level of education while abroad was not significantly associated with a higher probability of being in employment on return.

Table 3. Probit results (marginal effects)⁶

VARIABLES	Employment	
Demographic characteristics		
Male	0.206***	(0.027)
Age	0.059***	(0.008)
Age squared	-0.001***	(0.000)
Education [ref. is none]		
Primary	-0.025	(0.104)
Secondary	0.160**	(0.074)
Vocational	0.218**	(0.105)
University studies/master	0.256***	(0.098)
Post University studies	0.345*	(0.182)
Was unemployed before migration	-0.162***	(0.027)
Characteristics while abroad		
Trained during migration	0.237***	(0.043)
Education changed during migration	0.025	(0.076)
Duration of the last migration (in years)	0.007***	(0.003)
Was unemployed before return	0.137***	(0.000)
Conditions of return		
Imposed / forced by circumstances	-0.106**	(0.042)
Time elapsed since return (in years)	0.049***	(0.009)
Plans to re-migrate	-0.190***	(0.025)
Back to place of birth	-0.027	(0.026)
Back to place of residence	-0.044	(0.036)
Destination country [ref. Other]		
Greece	0.029	(0.057)
Italy	-0.05	(0.058)
Observations		1,791
Standard errors in parentheses		
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		

Migration duration was expected to positively influence the probability of being in employment since the assumption is that the longer the time spent abroad the greater the opportunity for skill acquisition. However, this effect is not strong with the results indicating that a one-year increase in the time spent abroad increased the probability of being in employment by just 0.07%. If the returnees were deported or forced by circumstances to return to Albania they were 11% less

⁶ The estat gof, table group(10) command was used for estimating the Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test statistic to demonstrate the suitability or goodness-of-fit of the logistic model. The test results (Hosmer-Lemeshow chi2(8) = 11.04; Prob > chi2 = 0.1992) suggests that the model is a good fit.



likely to be in employment, in line with the findings of David (2017) for the Maghreb countries. If the time elapsed since return increases by one year the probability of being in employment increased by 4.9%. Planning to re-migrate is negatively correlated to the probability of being in employment, which is as expected since re-migration is not compatible with a desire to integrate into the home country's labour market. Other control variables, such as the destination country and returning back to the place of birth or to place of former residence were not significantly associated with the probability of being in employment. This last group of control variables had previously been found to be significant and positive where returnees were engaged in entrepreneurship and self-employment (Hausmann and Nedelkoska, 2018).

Conclusion

This paper explores the effect of demographic and socio-economic factors on the probability of return migrants in Albania being in employment. The data indicate that although there was a near gender balance in those migrating, a large majority of returnees were male and relatively young. Albanian migrants were predominantly previously unemployed people who left seeking better living and working conditions abroad. However, a significant proportion of migrants were employed, self-employed or students prior to migration and left presumably for better job opportunities, better income prospects abroad and/or to join their family. The investigation of the probability of being in employment after return found that males were significantly more likely to be in employment than females. Those returnees with higher educational attainments were also significantly more likely to be in employment whilst those returnees who were unemployed before their migration were less likely to be in employment after their return, however, being unemployed before return increased the probability of finding a job after return. This latter finding suggests that some migrants returned because they lost their job in the host country and viewed as more favourable the employment opportunities in Albania.

Analysing the characteristics of returnees while abroad, the results indicate that those returnees who were trained abroad were more likely to find a job after the return. If the returnees were required or forced by circumstances to return to Albania they were less likely to be in employment. This indicates that facilitating or accelerating the social integration and employability of return migrants in Albania, such as speedy certification of skills acquired abroad and reintegration programmes organised by labour market agencies, could encourage more migrants to return to their home country. Albania could benefit far more from international migration by supporting return migration and improving economic integration of return migrants by also creating job databanks to inform expatriates about job opportunities in Albania and encouraging them to stay in contact with their migrant communities. However, researchers should be cautious in proposing policy recommendations since McKenzie and Yang (2014) in their review of research found little evidence that any of the implemented policies targeting return migrants had significantly affected either the size or the economic impact of return migration.

Governments in the major labour-exporting countries have predominantly focused on foreign direct investment to increase the economic development of the country, but returning migrants also provide a potential resource of know-how and capital. Comparing their status before migration with that after their return, Zulfiu Alili et al. (2018) found that returnees were three times more likely to be entrepreneurs. This finding, when combined with the results presented above, indicates that the overall benefits of return migrants to the economy may be much larger than previously thought.



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