

## **Internal migration in Albania: a critical overview**

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### **Introduction**

The third post-communist decade is upon us and Albania is still riding the transition horse on the road to Europe. Yet there is also good news. At the dawn of this new decade (December 2010) it was announced that Albanian citizens – or at least most of those still left in the country after massive emigration – could finally travel to Western Europe (re: the Schengen area) without needing a visa. This was followed a year later with another milestone: for the first time in its short history as an independent state Albania is finally no longer a (predominantly) rural society. Or so the 2011 preliminary census results would want us to believe. According to these just over half the population (53.7 per cent) now lives in urban areas (INSTAT 2011, 16).<sup>1</sup> Both of these transformations are considered by many optimists in Albania as products of the country's 'modernisation' paving the way for the country's EU accession. As numerous events are underway to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence from the Ottoman Empire (November 2012), there is excitement amongst politicians and ordinary citizens about an anticipated EU candidate status around the same time, ironically marking the opposite process as some powers will increasingly be handed over to Brussels.

Migration has been a key component of these two tempestuous decades of post-communist transformations. There is now a burgeoning literature documenting and analysing international migration and its associated features and effects. In contrast, internal movements have received very limited attention in academic writings and policy-

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary here to briefly reflect on the meaning of urbanisation in Albania, as a very complex process with certain specificities. There is no dispute that there is an increase of population living in urban areas, resulting primarily from rural-urban migration. Yet, how urban are these migrants' lifestyles and their living conditions? A closer examination of the economy and infrastructure of a number of urban – especially peri-urban – areas, reveals that the distinction between rural and urban in the classical sense is rather blurred. Three aspects can be singled out at this point: first, in many urban areas inhabitants sustain themselves through a mixture of rural and urban income-generating sources, combining, for example, wage work for young men in construction with grazing the family cows as several older women do. Second, and related to the first, rural income generating activities are not only performed locally but also in rural areas of origin as in-migrants are in fact trans-local migrants who live between their village of origin where they produce from their agricultural plot, and the city of destination where they then trade this produce (Vullnetari 2012). Finally, the physical infrastructure in many peri-urban areas and even peripheral zones within more established cities is sometimes worse than in villages with streets full of potholes but clogged up by cars, with open sewage pipes and limited drinking water supplies. Indeed, some sociologists speak of 'urban ruralisation' rather than of a clear urbanisation process (Dervishi 2001).

making so far. On the one hand this contrast reflects the intensity and specific characteristics of Albanian international migration, quite unique in a way (King, Uruçi and Vullnetari 2011). On the other hand, it also mirrors the priorities of those funding research. International migration is important to host country governments – by far the largest funders of such research – who need the cheap labour it provides but are concerned about ‘problems’ of integration. This emigration is also important to the Albanian government acting as it does like a ‘safety valve’ to deflect unemployment pressures, while supplying it with much-needed foreign currency – through remittances – to cover its trade deficit. Yet this neglect of internal migration has been noted in the migration and development discourses worldwide, prompting calls to turn attention once more to these ‘forgotten migrants’ (Laczko 2008). The present chapter is thus a contribution to address this imbalance, by providing a critical overview of the key debates and issues linked to internal migration in Albania over the last 20 or so years.

The chapter is organised as follows: after this introduction, I provide a brief history of Albania’s internal migration followed by an analysis of the key factors that triggered and sustained this movement. Next comes an outline of figures and migratory patterns. A discussion then follows, of the key impacts this migration has had on the country and migrants themselves. The final section concludes.

### **A brief history of internal migration in Albania**

As the theme of this book emphasises, contemporary events in Albanian society are best understood against the historical background shaping them. The same holds true for migration – whether internal or international. Literature suggests that Albanians were relatively mobile within and outside the Ottoman Empire. While the boundaries between internal and international migrations during this time were rather blurred, the emergence of the new Albanian state put an end to such ambiguity. Internal migration was now a movement within the territory of Albania only. The limited literature we have of the time suggests that these movements continued with little or no administrative restrictions, nonetheless, including towards expanding towns (Tirta 1999).

Yet, with the communists’ ascendance to power after the Second World War came also the planned economy and a system that regulated practically all aspects of life. Internal movements too became part of this practice, the consequences of which would be felt beyond the communist years. While international migration was banned and considered as high treason against the fatherland, internal – especially rural to urban –

movements were subject to strict controls and regulations. Thus, two phases of internal relocation can be distinguished. The first, corresponding roughly to 1945–1965, was characterised by large-scale internal movements, albeit centrally regulated, and a high degree of urbanisation. The vast majority of these movements were designed to supply much-needed labour to industrialisation projects around the country. While many of these projects took place in existing towns, others triggered the construction of new urban centres. Thus, during the years 1945–1989, some 43 new towns were built around the country, half of which were related to metal extraction and energy resources (Bërxfholi 2000; Rugg 1994, 63). These towns such as Bulqizë, Laç, Kurbnesh and Ballsh absorbed a large proportion of rural-urban migration until 1989; but they became important expulsion centres after 1990, when the industries they survived on, closed down.

Unlike the early post-war years, a policy of rural retention and minimal urbanisation was pursued from the early 1960s onwards. This was largely achieved through the application of a set of administrative restrictions, forming what Sjöberg (1994) calls an ‘anti-migratory system’. Many of these simply involved ‘legal prohibition on migration’ and included, among others: permission to change domicile (to leave one’s domicile), or *leje e shpërnguljes* and dwelling permission or *pasaportizim*.<sup>2</sup> They were aimed primarily at rural-urban migration, and were especially prohibitive of settlements in the capital Tirana. Nevertheless, some migration outside the prescribed parameters did take place. For example, some migrants moved to the adjoining rural areas of the ‘forbidden’ cities, while marriage with urban dwellers was used in other cases to circumvent the rules (Sjöberg 1992).<sup>3</sup>

Tirana, more than any other city, was the focus of internal moves; it was the most desirable destination for a considerable number of Albanians, especially young people, yet out of reach for most of them. As a major industrial, politico-administrative, educational and cultural centre, its periphery attracted what Sjöberg (1992) calls ‘diverted migration’. In other words, migratory flows heading for Tirana experienced a deflection to the rural periphery adjoining it. Since most would-be migrants were not able to obtain permission to move their residence to Tirana proper, they managed to migrate to one of the rural

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<sup>2</sup> *Pasaportizim* derives its name from the use of domestic passport/ identity cards or *letërnjoftim* as the main pillar in the process of internal movement. All citizens were required to have these passports with them at all times. For more details see Sjöberg (1994).

<sup>3</sup> A popular rhyme in the Albanian parlance of the south at the time was: ‘burrin sa një këndes/ shtëpinë sa një qymes/ vetëm në qytet të vdes.’ (Small like a cockerel my husband may be / small like a hen-house my house may be / as long as I can live and die in the city).

cooperatives or state agricultural enterprises close to the city. These ‘diverted in-migrants’ in turn contributed to the formation of densely populated ‘extra-urban settlements’ (Sjöberg 1992, 13), a prelude to post-communist patterns as we shall see shortly. Following this restrictive policy for settlement in the capital, Tirana’s share of the country’s population actually *declined* after the 1960s. A few years before the communist regime collapsed, the spectacular growth of the city that was to follow was almost unimaginable, even for attentive scholars such as Carter. He wrote: ‘[T]he idea of a Tirana-Durrësi urban agglomeration emerging in the near or more distant future seems remote’ (Carter 1986, 281). By 2005 precisely this area housed nearly a third of Albania’s total population (Doka 2005, 100) and by 2012 this share had risen to even half.

The ideology behind policy-making on internal migration during this period was also reflected in the terminology that was employed in the official and academic discourse on such matters. The term ‘mechanical movement’ or ‘*lëvizje mekanike*’ was used to present this migration as the opposite of a natural process, and therefore, something that needed to be controlled (e.g. see Misja and Vejsiu 1990).

Migration was effectively legalised as a human right soon after the collapse of the totalitarian regime. Article 22 of the Law on Amendments to the Constitutional Provisions in 1993 enshrined the right of every Albanian citizen to choose their place of residence and move freely within the state’s territory, and emigrate abroad. However, by that date massive spontaneous emigration and internal migration had already started.

## **Post-communist internal movements**

### ***Key influencing factors and timing***

The large-scale internal migration and the chaotic urbanisation process that Albania experienced in the post-communist years is shaped by a number of direct factors, the most important of which were as follows. First, the abysmal state of living conditions in villages by the end of the 1980s was a sure push factor for people to flee from the villages and look for better life opportunities elsewhere, whether internally or abroad. Given that most of the country’s population lived in rural areas, there was larger-scale out-migration from here towards the cities, especially as those from the cities emigrated more often abroad. Second, urban life has been traditionally considered in Albania as superior to that in the villages not only because of its better socio-economic opportunities, but also because of its urban lifestyle offering more time and opportunity for leisure and pleasure, and less conservatism and gendered oppression. Throughout the communist years Tirana stood out as the

pinnacle of urbanity within Albania, its urban life often featuring as a model of ‘socialist modernity’ in movies made for public consumption and broadcast by the state-controlled TV. Third, after four decades of controlled mobility, Albanians were finally free to move and decide for themselves where to work and make a living. They surely took advantage of this freedom in spectacular ways. Fourth, once it was clear that the regime was on the brink of collapse, a widespread disregard for law and order ensued, as the pent-up frustration at decades of close surveillance and for many – oppression – exploded on a massive scale. At the same time, and my fifth point, it soon became obvious that the state’s ability to enforce the law and restore order was also rapidly dissolving. Finally, the privatisation in 1992 of what had been until then public property was the final nail in the coffin of socialism signalling the turning point of large-scale moves.

The privatisation of agricultural land marked the end of the cooperatives, a sure sign in rural areas that the regime had practically come to an end. This apprehension was reflected in the way that everything public, such as irrigation systems, orchards, vineyards, warehouses and even harvest in the field – until then all belonging to the cooperative and hence considered as common property – was stolen or brutally destroyed. The resulting chaos meant that the privatisation had to be speeded up to distribute amongst the population what could be saved. Nonetheless, destruction of what continued to remain public went on. The parallel privatisation process in urban areas gave the chance to urban dwellers to own their own dwelling by purchasing it at a symbolic price. Until then these flats – often built using the unpaid ‘volunteer’ labour during after-work hours of their future dwellers – had been rented from the state for a nominal sum. More ambiguous was the question of land that was administered through agricultural state enterprises (*ndërmarrje bujqësore*) and which did not officially belong to its members but to the state. This land was distributed on a usufruct basis for a 15 year period or longer (Felstehousen 1999). To complicate matters further, initially the privatisation process dealt with distribution of land and other immovable property by excluding claims of former owners, who had been disposed without due compensation by the communist regime following the latter’s post-war ascendance to power.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the 1990s were thus characterised by large-scale internal movements, land grabbing in urban and peri-urban areas followed by squatter settlements, especially in the

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<sup>4</sup> However, most land distribution in the north of the country was executed along lines of ownership preceding the land confiscation and collectivisation. Yet, this did not prevent disputes which at times led to honour killings and blood-feuds, triggering some internal and mostly international forced migration.

Tirana-Durrës conurbation, and a frightening contraction of common spaces, as the ‘private’ was mercilessly unleashing its revenge on the public. This is how Felstehausen (1999, 13) describes the process of a typical squatter settlement claim in peri-urban Tirana: ‘The head of a family locates an unoccupied piece of land (men were the only ones observed to engage in land claims). The interested party asks existing neighbors if they have any objection to having a new family mark out a house plot. If there are no objections or serious warnings about conflicts, the new claimant “places the stones,” a ceremony marking the four lot corners, usually with white rocks. This ritual is conducted in the presence of witnesses. By placing the stones, the new claimant has established a personal and family right to a homestead – a place to live. Customary rules give some protection to new citizens of the community. [...] Hundreds of unauthorized claims like these are created every month. It is unclear how they will be ultimately resolved’ (see also World Bank 2007a; also Bardhoshi 2011 who confirms that engaging in land claims is a male thing).

Census and ALSMS data<sup>5</sup> also confirm the immediate post-communist restructuring years of 1991–1993 as one of the two peaks of intensity for internal movements, along with the years following the financial pyramids’ collapse of 1997 (Carletto et al. 2004, 7). In between and after that, internal movements continued, but at a more steady pace, although population registers records for Kamëz municipality (2008) tell a different story. The impressive growth of this area in the 1990s was precisely between 1992 and 1999 as the figures show: from 6,000 in 1989; to 9,600 in 1992; to 48,000 in 1995; to 60,000 by 1999.<sup>6</sup> The national statistics office suggests that the start of the second post-communist decade (2000–2001) signalled a decrease of internal migration overall, including towards coastal areas (INSTAT 2004). According to ALSMS data this decline started as early as 1999 and was rather sharp, although not uniform as Tirana continued to gain in-migrants especially after this turning point (World Bank 2007b, 39).

### ***Motives to move***

Extant literature on internal migration reveals a combination of economic, social and cultural reasons for such moves. Thus, according to Carletto et al. (2004, 7), in almost three-quarters of the post-1990 internal moves, migration of households was attributed to factors such as starting a new job, looking for a better job, or having insufficient land. Yet,

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<sup>5</sup> Albanian Standards Living Measurement Survey.

<sup>6</sup> The discrepancy may be due to the different data sources and collection methodologies, as I discuss a little later.

more detailed ethnographic research has revealed the equally strong family character of this migration, which is often of a permanent nature (Cila 2006, 14; Çaro 2011; Vullnetari 2012). This is also reflected in the gendering of these migration streams, which according to the census figures are biased in favour of women. A higher share of women does not necessarily mean family migration, as patterns in countries such as the Philippines or Ukraine show, where women are in the majority independent migrants. In the Albanian context we note two key trends: on the one hand female migration as part of the family whereby men move first although women are involved in all stages of the migration process and are often its initiators. This is particularly the case for migration from northern Albania as Çaro (2011) discovered in her research amongst such migrants living in Tirana's peri-urban area of Bathore. For other migration streams to Tirana, such as those from the south, young women often migrate on their own, first as students and then to work in the various expanding service industries of the capital. Parents and other siblings may follow later, but this is not always the case. My own research amongst rural migrants from the south-east revealed that young migrant women chose to move to Tirana because of its emancipatory potential, in contrast to the conservative and oppressive village life (Vullnetari 2012). In such cases gendered social factors rather than economics were at the heart of the decision-making process.

Accessing better education and healthcare have been key factors from the early 1990s and continue to motivate more recent migrants as well, as rural areas and small urban peripheries continue to suffer from dilapidated social and physical infrastructure (Çaro 2011; Tomini and Hagen-Zanker 2009). Hosting the vast majority of the country's educational and health institutions, the capital's attraction cannot be disputed. The situation is perpetuated further as rural areas are depleted through the flight of the skilled, who seek better work and life opportunities in cities instead. Tirana acts as a strong magnet also for businesses who re-locate here to take advantage of the population concentration, as well as the various structural facilities often not available in other places (Tirana Regional Council 2005). Its population serves not only as a crucial pool of skilled and readily available labour, but also as a much-needed mass of consumers (Doka 2005). Such re-location is affected by return migration as migrants who return with capital from abroad often end up investing in Tirana and other bigger cities, away from their origin areas (Kilic 2007; Vullnetari 2012).

## Internal migration in figures

Data on internal migration in Albania derive from three main sources: population censuses carried out by the national statistics office INSTAT; population registers held at the local commune or municipality (now within the institutional framework of the Ministry of Interior); and the set of Albanian Living Standards Measurement Surveys (ALSMS) conducted by INSTAT with the support of the World Bank. Before analysing the data available, a few words need saying about these sources of information. First, the census data. The two most relevant censuses for our discussion here were those of 1989 and 2001, which recorded population *present* at the time of enumeration by usual place of residence (Lerch & Wanner 2008). However, as with all censuses, they only give a snapshot of the demographic situation at a particular point in time. Furthermore, censuses have a tendency to under-record certain groups, for example mobile populations such as the Roma (are the Roma still a mobile population?), irregular immigrants, those not officially registered as internal movers, or internal movers who have emigrated abroad (see also Agorastakis and Sidiropoulos 2007).

The second source, the population registers, records *resident* population at the commune and municipality level, by place of *legal* residence (Lerch & Wanner 2008). The data are reported monthly to INSTAT. However, their accuracy and reliability have been questioned by various analysts. First, the systems have been, until very recently, largely manual and thus very slow to respond to rapid population changes due to migration. But also the pace of population change has been extremely rapid. In a report of the Korçë Regional Council (2005, 15), for instance, the authors emphasise that: '[D]ue to its high rate of internal and foreign migrations, it has been difficult to keep accurate official data on the present-day population in the communes and municipalities.' A similar evaluation is given by Tirana's regional authorities: '[T]he city of Tirana [...] is growing and changing by the day. It is a real challenge to keep up with Tirana's pace of economic and social changes and it is even more difficult to capture this transformation in the form of coherent and reliable data' (Tirana Regional Council 2005, 32). Moreover, it is in the individual commune or municipality's interest not to quantify the extent of the population loss, for fear of losing resources such as fiscal transfers and being downgraded (Arrehag, Sjöberg and Sjöblom 2005; World Bank 2007a, 9). Thus, in contrast to the census, this method's tendency is to inflate numbers. This can be seen, for instance, when comparing INSTAT's (2011) reported figure of 4.2 million residents in the country for 2010 according to population registers, with the number of 2.8 million recorded by the 2011 census. Another



example refers to Tirana district, which had 750,000 inhabitants according to the 2003 population registers, but only 520,000 were recorded in the 2001 census (Tirana Regional Council 2005, 19). Thus, INSTAT-produced data need to be cautiously used and critically assessed (for more on this, see World Bank 2007a, 9–10; also Agorastakis and Sidiropoulos 2007).

The third source of data has been the set of ALSMS from 2002, 2005 and 2008 and the follow-up wave panels of 2003 and 2004. Using a sophisticated (but very long) module on migration, these results have generated a number of studies, some of which are discussed in this chapter.

The significance of internal movements is apparent from several angles, not least numbers. However, as discussed earlier, figures differ according to sources used, units measured, and time-period. Table 1 is composed from census, ALSMS and population registers data for *migrant stocks*, broadly covering the first post-communist decade. As the table shows, the closer we zoom in on a geographical or administrative unit, the higher the figure is.

Table 1: Estimates of Albanian internal migrants according to various sources, 1989–2005

<i>Year/period</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>% total</i>
1989–2001	182,639	Inter-regional <sup>7</sup>	Census	5.7
1989–2001	252,735	Inter-prefecture	Census	
1989–2001	295,870	Inter-district	Census*	
1989–2001	355,230	Inter-district	Census	
1992–2001	1,356,750	Inter-commune/municipality	Population registers	
1990–2005	450,000	Non-specific	2002 & 2005 ALSMS	20

*Source:* 1989 and 2001 censuses in INSTAT (2004, 12–13), Carletto et al. (2004, Table 8); population registers in Bërxfholi, Doka and Asche (2003, 68); 2002 and 2005 ALSMS in World Bank (2007b, 33)

\* According to data computation by Agorastakis and Siridopoulos (2007, 474).

Analysing ALSMS data for 2002 and 2005, a World Bank team reported that nearly 20 per cent of Albania's population had moved internally between 1990 and 2005, and if

<sup>7</sup> INSTAT defines three regions: central/west (Prefectures of Tirana, Durrës, Lezhë, Fier and Elbasan); north-east (Prefectures of Shkodër, Kukës and Dibër); south-east (Prefectures of Berat, Gjirokastër, Korçë and Vlorë). This is different from the ALSMS division.

movers since birth were counted this figure would rise to a third of the total. The peak of moves around 1997–1998 following the collapse of the pyramid investment schemes saw a *flow* of nearly 40,000 migrants per year, but these then decreased after that by about half to an average of 20,000 per year (World Bank 2007b, 33–34).

The vast majority of these internal migrants have relocated to Tirana, which together with Durrës have experienced what is considered as explosive population growth. Estimates of those living in the Tirana-Durrës Metropolitan area<sup>8</sup> vary between 850,000 inhabitants and 1 million – or 75 per cent of the country’s urban population – by mid-2000s (World Bank 2007a, 5). Within this area, Tirana is by far the most important where, according to ALSMS data, a third of all internal migrants between 1990 and 2005 moved to. Intensity increased between 2002 and 2004 with four out of every 10 migrants moving to the capital (World Bank 2007b, 34). Official (census) records for the population of Tirana district suggest a population increase from 368,000 in 1989 to 520,000 in 2001 (INSTAT 2002). However, unofficial sources estimated that the district contained 800,000 people by 2002 already (De Soto et al. 2002, 113), and had approached the 1 million mark by 2005 (Lulo 2005). The confusion over the extent of the increase is because many recent in-migrants are not registered, so their precise numbers are unknown. Zooming in on a smaller scale and looking at the municipality of Tirana only, the 2001 census figures show just how dramatic the population increase was – of more than 40 per cent – from 238,057 residents in 1989 to 343,078 in 2001 (World Bank 2007a, 5). The intensity seems to have decreased in the last decade or so, if we assume that the 2011 preliminary census figures are correct: the increase has fallen by half and the total population of the municipality is now 421,286 residents (INSTAT 2011, 20).<sup>9</sup>

## **Migratory patterns**

Patterns of internal migration over the last two decades display a complex typology, which nevertheless has many similar features with moves in earlier decades, although those were rather restricted. The most noted of these features is the direction of internal moves: from rural to urban areas, from the highlands to the valleys, and from the north and south towards the coastal west. The intensity of such moves, however, as well as accompanying challenges, are very much unique to the post-communist decades. Similarly unique in

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<sup>8</sup> Consisting of the four districts of Tirana, Durrës, Kavajë and Krujë.

<sup>9</sup> For key readings on Tirana’s development and growth as Albania’s capital, see Aliaj et al. (2003), Carter (1986) and Pojani (2010a).

contemporary patterns is also the link between internal and international migration, considering that international migration was almost non-existent during the communist years.

### ***Facing the sea: spatial and geo-administrative directions***

Let us look at some of these patterns in more detail, starting with the direction of internal moves. First of all there is a clear population shift from the north (especially the north-east), the south-central and south-east towards the western lowlands. More than 90 per cent of total internal migrants moved in this direction between 1989 and 2001. The north contributed the most to this central-westward flow with 60 per cent of its migrants moving in this direction (INSTAT 2004, 12). Top senders were the districts of Kukës, Tropojë, Dibër, and Pukë which by 2001 had lost approximately a third of their 1989 population due to internal migration (Carletto et al. 2004, 8; INSTAT 2004, 19). These are all geographically landlocked mountain areas, with some of the highest unemployment and poverty headcount rates in the country and very few livelihood opportunities available locally (Lundström & Ronnås 2006, 24–25).

Second, within the coastal area of in-migration, the majority of migrants relocate in the Tirana-Durrës conurbation. The census records show that more than two thirds (72 per cent) of inter-censal internal migrants moved to this area (INSTAT 2004, 13). Tirana Prefecture alone hosted more than half of internal migrants. At the district level Tirana recorded a population increase of 36 per cent due to in-migration; Durrës came second with 23 per cent (Carletto et al. 2004, 9; INSTAT 2004, 19; Zezza, Carletto and Davis 2005, 189). Besides these two, the other districts with the highest population increase in absolute numbers were Lushnjë, Fier and Vlorë – in that order, but gains were also recorded for Lezhë. This pattern is in fact a continuation of what had been taking place during the communist years, although at that time migration was almost always ‘diverted’ to rural areas (Borchert 1975; Sjöberg 1992).

Third, while most migrants settled in the coastal areas, ‘twinning’ of sending and host locations can be observed in some cases. For example, 70 per cent of inter-prefecture migrants from Kukës and Dibër moved to Tirana, where they constitute nearly half (47 per cent) of all in-migrants. The vast majority of them have settled in the peri-urban area of Bathore, as we shall see later. Similarly, 30 per cent of migrants from Shkodër (most likely from rural areas) moved to neighbouring Lezhë (INSTAT 2004, 25). This pattern suggests chain migration as a strong influencing factor in increasing migrant communities. Indeed,

ethnographic data confirm that often entire neighbourhoods are reconstituted in host areas according to blood-line relations and wider kin, at times resembling exactly the patterns in their villages of origin (see, e.g. Bardhoshi 2001; also Çaro 2011; Tomini and Hagen-Zanker 2011).

Fourth, besides these country-wide trends, more local and regional shifts are also taking place. They continue to be directed from the remote mountainous hinterland towards the urban and peri-urban areas of their respective region, thus moving over shorter geographical distances. For example, the city of Shkodër has become a major destination for in-migration from its rural hinterland; according to census data more than half of in-migrants in this city came from the district of Malësia e Madhe (INSTAT 2004, 17). A similar pattern can be observed in Gjirokastër in the south, where the majority of the city's population increase is due to in-migration from the adjacent mountainous rural areas and from adjoining rural districts such as Tepelenë and Përmet (Kosta 2005). Similarly, the region of Korçë in the south-east displays such patterns of internal regional and local moves (Doka 2005).

These local moves are important to note as they help present a more complex picture, otherwise brushed over by the broad country-wide trends. They reveal that even within districts that are regarded as sources of out-migration from a country perspective, there are small pockets of in-migration, usually centred around the municipality of the district. For example the Sarandë district is a major sender of migrants, yet the Sarandë municipality (town) is clearly an in-migration zone (Zezza, Carletto and Davis 2005, 188).

### ***Directions according to settlement types***

Looking at settlement type, we can distinguish the following predominant directions:

- *Rural-urban*

Post-communist internal migration has clearly increased Albania's urbanisation, in terms of total population living in urban areas. In the first inter-censal decade nearly 60 per cent of total in-migrants migrated to urban areas (INSTAT 2004). ALSMS data suggest that between 1990 and 2005 rural areas contributed 65 per cent of internal migrants country-wide (World Bank 2007b, 34). Census data show that in the 1989–2001–2011 period the country's urban population increased from 35 to 42 to 54 per cent of the total respectively, primarily due to migration (INSTAT 2002; 2011). In contrast, rural areas have experienced severe population losses, especially in the northern and southern highlands.

- *Urban-urban*

Although less systematically researched, these flows are not negligible. For instance, in 2001, two thirds of in-migrants in the city of Tirana came from other urban centres (Heller et al. 2005, 70). ALSMS data suggest that between 1990 and 2005 nearly a third of internal migrants originated in urban areas a share of whom moved to other urban areas and Tirana (World Bank 2007b, 34). Important senders of these flows were the new towns – such as Bulqizë and Laç – created during the communist years to exploit mineral and energy sources, but which became pools of unemployment when these industries closed down in the early 1990s (UNDP-Albania 2000). Since most of them were located in the mountainous north of the country, they are part of the much larger regional movement from that area towards the coast (Rugg 1994; Tirta 1999).

- *Rural-rural*

According to INSTAT (2004, 15), around 40 per cent of internal migrants who moved from one prefecture to another in the intercensal period settled in rural areas. Almost half of these rural in-migrants relocated to the rural area of the Tirana prefecture, mostly in the informal peri-urban settlements. High levels of such migration are also noted for Durrës and Fier in terms of absolute numbers. With the exception of Durrës, Elbasan, Gjirokastër and Vlorë, in all other prefectures the share of rural in-migrants is higher than that of urban in-migrants. The trend and share were confirmed by ALSMS data as continuing well into 2005 (World Bank 2007b, 34).

Analysing data from the 2002 and 2005 ALSMS the World Bank team report an interesting change not only in the yearly fluctuation of internal flows, as noted in the previous section, but also in the direction of these flows. The critical turning point seems to be the year 1999, which witnessed a number of changes, the most important of which is the rise of Tirana as the most preferred destination. Before that, most rural migrants relocated either to rural areas or to other urban areas, not Tirana. Half of internal migrants by 1999 preferred to settle in other urban areas. After this year, both rural-rural and rural-urban migration more generally experienced a sharp decrease to only about 2,000 migrants per year, leaving Tirana as the absolute dominant destination, where a third of internal migrants settle (World Bank 2007, 34). This interesting dynamic is surely closely linked to the economic situation as well as to the various political shocks and social instabilities that the country went through during the best part of the 1990s, of which the

collapse of the pyramid investments schemes and the near civil war that followed are probably the most significant. It is arguably also closely affected by international migration, as I discuss next.

### ***Internal and international migration linkages***

While the focus of this chapter is internal migration, the analysis would be incomplete without considering emigration as well. This is particularly crucial in the Albanian context, where both migration types are closely linked and used as parts of complex livelihood strategies by many individuals and families (King 2005; Vullnetari 2012). Emigration affects internal migration in a number of ways. First, remittances from abroad have been crucial in financing an internal move of the residual family in Albania (Çaro 2011; King, Mai and Dalipaj 2003; Vullnetari 2012). For many youth in rural areas, especially in the North, it can be said that the road to Tirana has for a long time passed through Athens' Omonia Square,<sup>10</sup> or by boat across the Adriatic Sea (King, Mai and Dalipaj 2003; King and Vullnetari 2003). Second, an internal host location is often used as a stepping stone towards an international move. Such sequence may see first an internal move away from the remoteness of village life in northern or southern Albania to a place in coastal/central Albania, which then acts as a platform both for a better life for the family as a whole, and for the emigration of some of its younger members abroad (King, Mai and Dalipaj 2003; Hagen-Zanker and Azzarri 2010). Third, an internal host location – often an urban area – becomes the place of settlement for international migrants upon their return from abroad. Fourth, internal and international migration combine in complex ways to affect development in areas of origin and destination within Albania. I will turn to this aspect shortly. Finally, individual trajectories may overlap with family and household trajectories: at the same time as their individual family member(s) are moving abroad, many Albanian families from the rural North and South pursue a parallel, internal migratory strategy to secure their long-term future in Albania (King, Mai and Dalipaj 2003; Vullnetari 2012). At other times, several members of the same family will pursue parallel migration paths abroad in different countries.

In terms of sequences of internal migration, literature provides several examples of a complex set of moves. Besides the direct moves from rural areas to the cities, there is also a process of step-wise migration going on. Particularly interesting in this pattern are smaller

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<sup>10</sup> This square in Athens was used as an informal labour market where Albanian migrants waited to be picked up by Greek employers for – often casual and manual – jobs.

towns that act as stepping stones to the final destinations. Becker (2005, 83–87), for instance, shows how the town of Bajram Curri in the north has become an important transit place for many villagers from its surrounding hinterland, who aim to ultimately settle in the Tirana-Durrës area. This may not be the final destination, as settling in this conurbation may open up opportunities for another move, this time abroad. Analysing data from the 1989 and 2001 censuses, Agorastakis and Sidiropoulos (2007, 480) argue that internal mobility appears to have become more apparent towards the time (the late 1990s) when large-scale international migration flows started to decline. Linked to this will have been the financial capital that international migrants sent from abroad, which was in turn used to enable an internal move, as noted earlier.

### **Characteristics of internal migrants**

Census data<sup>11</sup> reveal three key characteristics of internal migration, at least for the first post-communist decade. First, migrants are young – almost 46 per cent of inter-prefecture migrants being younger than 30 years by 2001. Second, there is an internal ‘brain drain’ as migrants are more highly educated than the population they leave behind, and some strands equally if not more educated than non-migrant populations in their host locations. Third, there is a feminisation of internal migration in terms of numbers, as more than half (54 per cent) of migrants are women. The same three trends are also confirmed to have been relevant until 2005 according to ALSMS data (World Bank 2007b, 39).

Although the above findings are valid on a country scale, there are some differences to note for migrant groups originating in various parts of the country. For example, the younger ages are more pronounced amongst those moving from the north, reflected also in the figures of the population registers in areas with a high concentration of such migrants such as Kamëz. Here, more than a third of the population was under 15 years old by 2007 while the average age was 27 years (Kamëz Municipality 2008, 15). In these migrant streams from the north, there is also a gender balance in shares of men and women, which together with a large share of children suggests a typical family migration. This family character of migration is confirmed by ethnographic research amongst northern migrants living in peri-urban Tirana (Cila 2006; Çaro 2011), as well as quantitative data (2005 ALSMS; see Hagen-Zanker and Azzarri 2010). In slight contrast, those moving from the south and the south-east are slightly older than this first group (although younger than the

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<sup>11</sup> This section is based on INSTAT (2004) unless otherwise referenced.

populations they leave behind). Women by far outnumber men suggesting thus strands of independent female migration, alongside family moves. Indeed, as shown earlier, my own research on internal migration from the rural south-east to Tirana and Korçë emphasised the significance and importance of such independent migration of young women, particularly to Tirana (Vullnetari 2012). Higher shares of women than men for southern migrants may also result from higher shares of men from the south having emigrated and living abroad, while their residual families move internally.

Furthermore, we note the higher levels of education amongst all internal migrants compared to the populations they leave behind in their respective areas of origin. Comparing the two groups of migrants suggests that those from the south and south-east have higher education levels than those originating in the north and north-east. This would be expected given the respective age difference, as noted earlier, but also the difference in socio-economic conditions of the two regions as is widely known. On a country level, this data suggests a flight of the higher educated and skilled from rural to urban areas, from the periphery to the coastal/centre, where Tirana is the biggest beneficiary of all. Ethnographic research amongst internal migrant communities confirms this internal 'brain drain', which negatively impacts – especially rural – areas of origin (Vullnetari 2012).

### **Internal migration and key development trends**

There are a number of issues that are closely linked to how internal migration interacts with processes of social and economic development in Albania, whether on their own or through the mediation of international migration. In this last section of the chapter I focus on two key aspects, selected here because of their perceived prominence in the relevant literature.

### ***Challenges of urbanisation and population distribution***

One of the key impacts of internal movements in Albania is urbanisation. Indeed, as we noted earlier, just over half of the country's population now lives in urban areas, just enough to make it qualify for an 'urban country' status. However, a number of remarks are in order at this point. Firstly, urbanisation has been increased not only by the obvious rural-urban migration, but also through the more indirect route of rural-rural movements. That is to say that some host rural areas have been upgraded to urban status due to their increased population size and density, as well as their economic structure being dominated by urban activities. The classic example is that of the Kamzë municipality which gained



urban status in 1996, reflecting its rapid population growth from around 6,000 inhabitants in 1989 to nearly 50,000 by 1996. As rural (and other) migrants are generally in the young working and reproductive ages, urban population growth is also affected by higher fertility of in-coming migrants (see e.g. Hagen-Zanker and Azzarri 2010).

A second remark is that urbanisation is clearly a spatially concentrated phenomenon, characterised by a skewed population distribution around the Tirana-Durrës magnet, but also along the littoral more generally. By 2001 nearly half (47 per cent) of Albania's urban population lived in the five biggest municipalities (with more than 75,000 people) with 23 per cent of the urban population residing in Tirana alone (World Bank 2007a, 7).

Third and connected to the second is that while the Tirana-Durrës Metropolitan area and other coastal zones in general have experienced significant *population densities*, several rural areas of origin have been depleted beyond sustainability (see e.g. migrants' stories in Çaro 2011). For example, the preliminary results of the latest census reveal that Tirana municipality has a population density of nearly 11,000 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, significantly much higher than the country's average of around 100 and beyond comparison with the Leskovik municipality (south-east) which has the lowest density at just below 2 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. This affects the provision of social and health care as well as cost-effectiveness of other structural investments, perpetuating the cycle of deterioration.

This population concentration has not been accompanied, let alone guided, by forward looking policy action. Most policy documents produced at the national or local level often look like reviews of past trends and current situations, rather than forward thinking and long-term visionary plans that they ought to be. As a result, *social services and public infrastructure have been put under severe strain* making residents' life an everyday struggle. Examples abound with regards to overpopulation of public schools in the city, and only few schools in peri-urban areas; dire lack of public health centres outside key city centres; traffic congestion especially inside the Tirana ring-road, which is often grid-locked throughout the day; inadequate public transport services especially for peri-urban areas; neglect of solid waste management and of public green spaces; and very high air and noise pollution (see also Pojani 2011). The problems are compounded in Tirana, but other major urban areas face similar challenges, albeit on a much smaller scale.

### ***Migration, poverty and gendered social change***

Shifting our attention now from the macro- and meso-level to the more micro-level, this last part of the chapter discusses the impact of internal migration on migrants and their

families, a much debated issue in the Albanian context. Most literature seems to find positive outcomes, although with some qualifying caveats. For example, in her study of rural migrants in Bathore, Cila (2006) found that in general migrants' livelihoods had improved after migration. Using a livelihoods framework to assess change in well-being and collecting data through her own survey, she found that although incomes were higher than prior to migration, so were living expenses. Furthermore, incomes were more precarious and volatile too. Positive outcomes were noted in terms of number of years of education and increased knowledge, albeit with some gender differences that disadvantaged women. More uncertain was the evaluation of migrants' health status, which although reported fine in general, problems related to inadequate sanitary conditions, travel distances to hospitals and under-the-table payments persisted. Deda and Tsenkova (2006) were less optimistic as their findings showed that despite higher incomes, peri-urban households often still lived in poverty due to increased expenses for public services such as electricity connection, sewage and garbage disposal. Analysing ALSMS data Zezza, Carletto and Davis (2005) in fact talk about a re-location of poverty from the rural north to peri-urban Tirana. Similarly pessimistic is the picture presented by Hagen-Zanker and Azzarri (2010) who, analysing the 2005 ALSMS data, compare migrants in peri-urban Tirana with rural non-migrants. They suggest that although migrants' incomes have increased, this is not necessarily accompanied by an improvement in living conditions, as living expenses are now also higher, while employment is unstable in casual jobs of the informal economy. Indeed, Kamëz municipality (2008, 14) reports a 50 per cent unemployment rate in the greater Kamëz area (including Bathore and other peri-urban areas), a rate which is much higher than the national average and even higher than some rural areas. Women are less likely to be formally employed than their rural counterparts, although it must be acknowledged that almost all employment of rural women is in the agricultural family plot – hardly emancipating work. Time is a crucial factor in increasing well-being, as those who have settled are more likely to have better jobs and living conditions, compared to recent arrivals who are poorer and live in more precarious situations.

Other recent research suggests that migrants address their job precariousness and difficult living conditions by relying on their kinship and friends networks, thus receiving much-needed support (Tomini and Hagen-Zanker 2009). However, financial transfers were more important than goods and services, reflecting the increased individualisation of post-migratory relationships, as well as the change in the economic structure of the

household economy and activities. Migration to urban and peri-urban areas also seems to increase the importance of friends, over more distant kinship relations, although more solid ethnographic research is needed to confirm such trends.

The question than naturally rises: why do migrants keep moving to the cities, despite obvious poverty and unstable jobs? The expectation that things will improve in the future seems to prevail over crushed hopes and desires that village life has to offer (Todaro 1969). Analysis of macro-data suggests that economic growth and poverty reduction are strongly related to urbanisation, making it ‘the best hope of escaping poverty’ in Albania (Pojani 2010b).

More recent in-depth ethnographic research in Kamëz peri-urban areas provides a fuller view of how internal migrants themselves perceive their new life and future in their host locations (Çaro 2011). Despite the various challenges and difficulties, they feel empowered by the migration experience, that their lives have definitely improved and more importantly, that the future will be even better. Such findings may reflect the earlier argument that time is important in delivering positive change, and Çaro’s research has captured migrants’ lives nearly between one and two decades after they settled, and certainly several years later than all previous studies. In fact, one of her findings is length of residence as crucial in the positive outcome of migration. And things do get better for women especially, Çaro finds, despite the various challenges they face in their patriarchal homes and patriarchal environment where they settle in.

## Conclusion

The last 20 years of post-communist transformations have witnessed tremendous social and economic change for Albania and its people, including internal and international migrations of epic proportions. Both migration types reflect inventive and practical responses of Albanian individuals and families to the emerging geography of opportunities after the collapse of the communist regime. They have contributed to a re-distribution of demographic, economic and social resources country-wide in a contrasting process to the centrally planned economy of the communist years. Internal migration has emerged as a key component of this re-constitution, not least through its role in the country’s increased urbanisation. Tirana and its peri-urban areas – especially Bathore – are examples *par excellence* of the rapid and wild, yet necessary urbanisation that has taken place in almost complete policy vacuum country-wide. Understandably then, most research has focused on migration to this area, as well as its associated economic, structural, social and cultural

impacts. Yet, this migration represents only one type of internal movements, given its high homogeneity in terms of areas of migrants' origin (north and north-east). It certainly is *not* representative of *all* internal migration, as diverging results presented in this chapter show. It is thus time to widen the scope of research to other types of internal migrants beyond those living in Kamëz/Bathore. For example, we know very little how their migration and settlement differs (if at all) from those moving to urban areas – e.g. in the dilapidated former industrial complexes – or from those moving to other cities, let alone to rural areas such as in the south.

Moreover, it is important to recognise the role that gender plays in data collection and subsequent analysis. Quantitative surveys – whether those administered through ALSMS teams or by individual researchers – almost always ask the household head for responses concerning the entire household. Generally, and especially in Albania, these are men. For example, 96 per cent of household heads sampled in a 2008 survey in peri-urban Tirana were men (Tomini and Hagen-Zanker 2009). While men's opinions are valid in their own right, they cannot be generalised across the board without some qualification for gender bias, especially when it concerns information on migration motivations or decision-making. The gendered and generational negotiations of power brought by more ethnographic and gender-aware research is all the more valuable in this context (see e.g. Çaro 2011; Vullnetari 2012).

Considering the high rate of international migration and the complex ways in which it has been intertwined with internal moves, as various studies discussed in this chapter have also shown, it is equally imperative that future research brings the analysis of these two migration types together. This is necessary especially to understand developmental impacts of these linked migration types, including on rural areas of origin and vulnerable groups such as older people left behind on their own (see e.g. Vullnetari and King 2006).

Above all, sound research needs to inform policy – whether at national or local level – in order to deal with the challenges that migrants as well as cities and villages are experiencing as a result of such massive population moves, and to better anticipate and plan for the future. Migration is a normal aspect of social change and transformation, and should be taken into consideration as such in planning and development action. In so doing, it is important to listen to migrants' voices in order to understand their reality, and appreciate that behind numbers and figures, beyond the 'ruralisation of urban areas' by

‘çeqen’ or ‘malok’,<sup>12</sup> are fellow human beings with dreams and desires for a better life just like you and me.

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<sup>12</sup> Derogatory words meaning ‘uncouth and tribal highlanders’ used in Albanian public discourse to refer to in-migrants from rural areas, especially from the north.

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