

ALBANIAN DEMOGRAPHY AND ITS RELATION WITH MIGRATION

Murat ATEŞ

*Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Namik Kemal University, Tekirdag, Turkey.
murates@nku.edu.tr*

Abstract

In 1990's, great economic transformation efforts to switch to liberal market economy had been experienced in former communist countries. This transformation process had also influenced the direction of economic policies and reformation of social policies. The collapse of central authoritarian regimes in East Europe and former Soviet Union provided freedom for migration of the erstwhile citizens from these countries to abroad.

Albania, in the countries of Balkans, is an important country, which had experienced a social and economic transformation in a short while. The migration of Albanian citizens to abroad was restricted with laws and sanctions. The domino effect of this transformation also directly affected Albania. As in the case of East Germany, in the summer of 1990 thousands of Albanians invaded Western embassies in Tirana and were given exile in various European countries. By scaling the walls of the embassy compounds and accessing foreign sovereign territory, albeit within their own country, Albanians were taking the first symbolic step towards asserting their blocked right to emigrate. Albanian government led by the cautious reformer Ramiz Alia, since Hoxha's death in 1985, overcomes this crisis by liberalizing of passports.

Albania, with its characteristic demographic properties, is an important field of study for researchers. According to the latest census in 2011, there are various factors affecting demographic process. Especially, latest census shows that migration plays an important role in this process. It is impossible to consider demography without migration factor. Population distribution, urban-rural structure, population growth rate and economic statistics are closely related to migration. In this study, both the demographic structure of Albania with regard to statistical data and migration will be discussed with different aspects.

Keywords: *Albanian Demography, Migration, Census, Population Growth*

Introduction

The Republic of Albania is situated in the South-East region of Europe, South-West of the Balkan Peninsula. It shares international boundaries with Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro. It is bordered by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas on its west. The territory of Albania is 28 748 km² and its population is 2,831,741 (INSTAT, 2011). In 2000 the current administrative structure was adopted which consists of 12 prefectures, 36 districts, 309 communes, 65 municipalities and 3020 villages (INSTAT, 2002: 14).

Albania was ruled by a communist regime for many years. Under Enver Hoxha, leader of the Albanian Party of Labor from 1941 until his death in 1985, Albania experienced one of the most oppressive and isolated communist regimes in the world. Economic and political contacts with other countries, even communist ones, decreased to a minimum as Albania broke first with the Soviet bloc in 1961, and then with China in 1977. Free movement of population was a non-existent concept: attempted emigration was regarded as an act of treason, punished by death or lengthy imprisonment, and internal mobility was also tightly controlled. A high-voltage fence, with frequent sentry-posts, ran the entire length of the land border with Greece and the former Yugoslavia. The militarization of the Albanian landscape was completed by 600,000 mushroom-shaped concrete bunkers scattered throughout the territory. Most of the population was fixed in rural areas providing labor for collectivized agriculture; the towns were centers of basic services or industry. Everywhere walls were covered in slogans exalting and exhorting self-reliance (King and Vullnetari, 2003). Ramiz Alia, who took the lead upon death of Enver Hoxha in 1985, had a slightly softer sense of rule. Although Albania was not included in the Soviet Bloc, it was affected by collapse process of socialist countries in this bloc as of 1989. Starting in the 1990s, this process had a domino effect, and included Albania among the countries undergoing a transition period. Albania became one of the countries that experienced the period of transition to free market economy and democratization.

The entire social and economic structure of the country has been influenced by this process continuing for the last 20 years. Demography of Albania has also witnessed very lively and active changes. The process of transition to an open market economy has involved economic hardship and political unrest, and has been accompanied by intense, large-scale geographical mobility in the form of internal and international migration (INSTAT, 2004). The single most important background context for Albanian migration was the collapse of the communist or state-socialist regimes in Eastern Europe after 1989. The dismantling of the Iron Curtain was widely anticipated to be a precursor of a mass migration, given that emigration had been denied for so long, and reflecting the obvious economic divide between East and West (Layard et al., 1992).

In a sense, the post-1990 mass departures do not need a sophisticated causal explanation: they were part and parcel of Albania's abrupt and chaotic

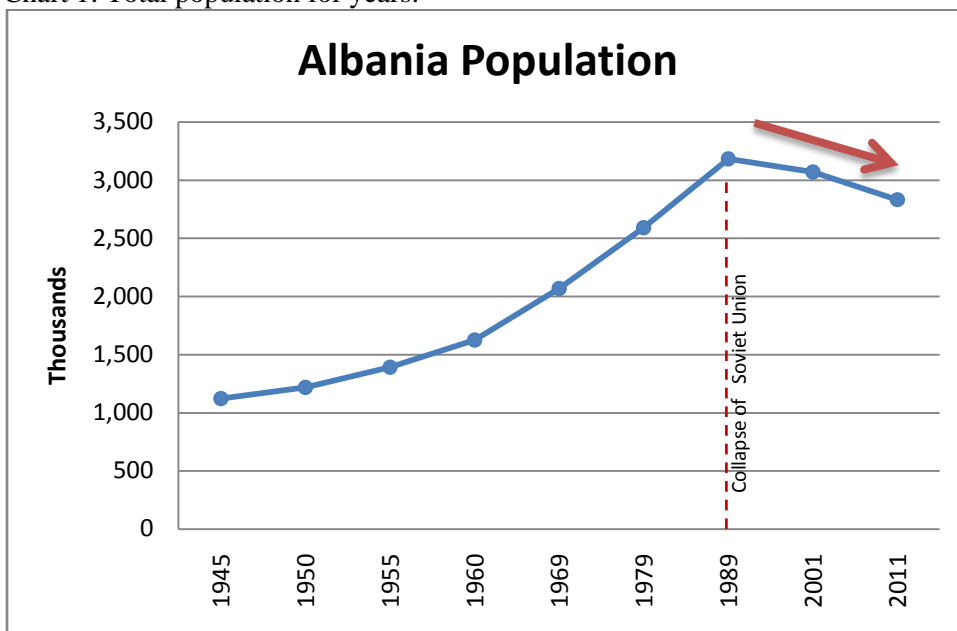
transformation from an introverted and autocratic state socialism to a free-for-all neo-liberal regime in which the old party cliques nevertheless dominated many of the levers of power. Naturally, some of the causes (especially those of an economic, demographic and cultural nature) were laid down during the long decades of communist isolationism. But other triggers occurred as a result of particular political and humanitarian crises during the 1990s (King, 2005).

This study will firstly evaluate the demographic structure of Albania as revealed by population census data of the year 2011, and then assess migration and migration-related processes that have the most important impact on demographic appearance of the country.

Demographic Structure of Albania

The 2011 census in Albania is the 11th in the history of the Albanian censuses. It was conducted in 2011 as in the most of the European countries following UNECE/Eurostat recommendations, in the framework of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme of the United Nations. Based on the preliminary results, the total population of Albania is 2,831,741. According to the 2001 Population and Housing Census, the population of Albania was in 2001 equal to 3,069,275 (INSTAT, 2011).

Chart 1: Total population for years.

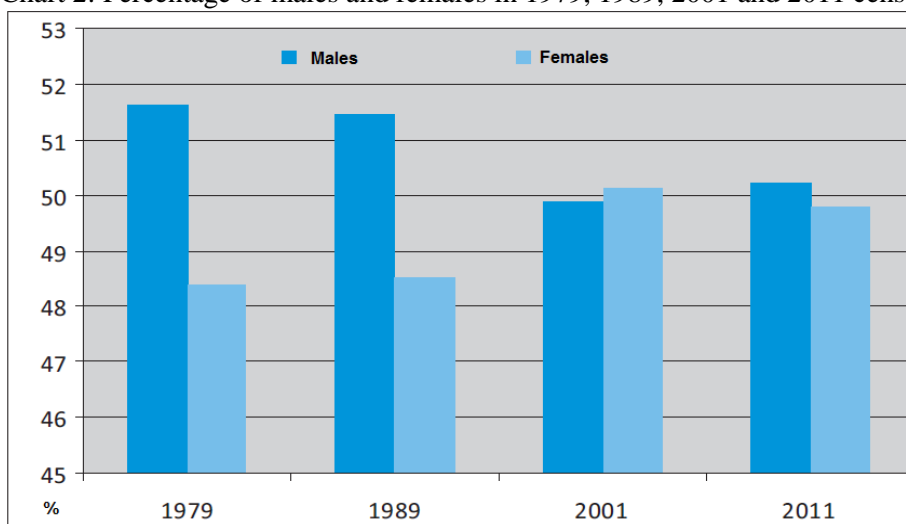


Sources: Sjöberg 1991, INSTAT 2002, INSTAT 2011

Population census data in the Chart 1 shows that Albanian population continuously increased until 1989. Until 1990, Albania's population growth was the fastest in Europe; The Country's population increased from 1.2 million in 1950 to 3.2 million in 1989. The growth rate peaked at more than 3 per cent annually during the late 1950s and early 1960s; by 1990 the rate had fallen to 2 per cent (King, 2005). It is seen that the above-mentioned increase was replaced by a decrease in population according to the population censuses conducted after 1989. Even though rate of natural increase of population was high, Albanian population decreased by 3.6% between 1989 and 2001, and by 7.7% between 2001 and 2011 as per the population censuses conducted in these years. Large scale emigration and fertility decline are supposed to be the main causes of the observed population decrease.

Chart 2 shows gender distribution in the population. Columns in the Chart 2 demonstrate that the difference between female and male population ratios largely decreased and female population ratio took the lead for the first time in the 2001 population census.

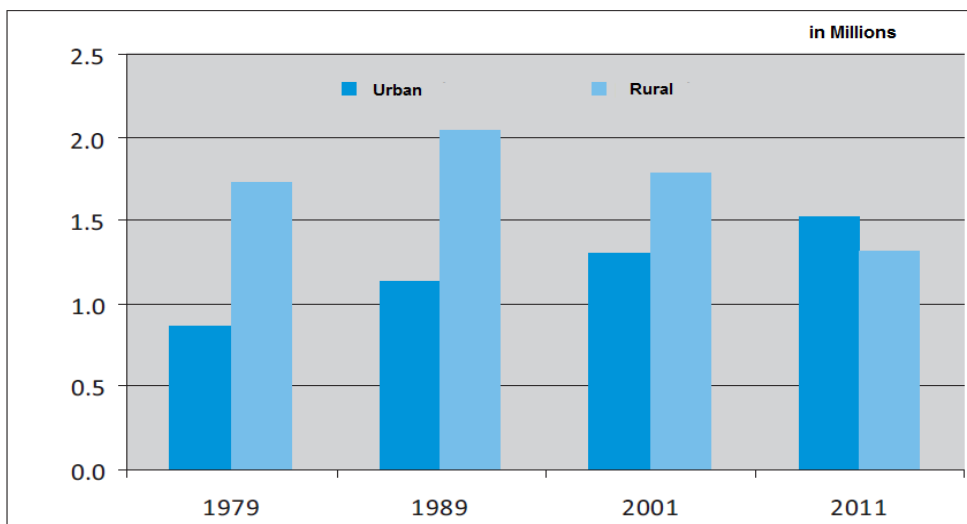
Chart 2: Percentage of males and females in 1979, 1989, 2001 and 2011 censuses.



Source: INSTAT, 2011

It goes without saying that this situation was mostly caused by the fact that international migration became free in the transition period, and mostly the male population was engaged in the said migration process at the first stage. According to preliminary data of the 2011 population census, 1,421,810 men and 1,409,931 women live in the country. Accordingly, it is seen that female and male population ratios are very close to one another though male population is slightly more in the country.

Chart 3: Urban and rural population.



Source: INSTAT, 2011

For the first time in the history of population censuses in Albania, the population in urban areas is larger than the population of rural areas (see Chart 3). According to 2011 census preliminary results, 53.7% of the population lives in urban areas and 46.3% in rural areas (INSTAT, 2011). Rural and urban division of the Albanian population took its present form in the transition period as of 1990. In 1989 Two-thirds of the population was kept in rural areas in order to provide labor for state-run farms. The cities, where out-of-date heavy industry was sited, grew only slowly and by natural population increase, not by rural-urban migration which was strictly controlled. Population increase emerging in big cities, the capital Tirana being in the first place, through internal migrations taking place in the period as of 1990 gave shape to distribution of rural and urban population in the country.

Table 1: Usually resident population by prefecture and sex

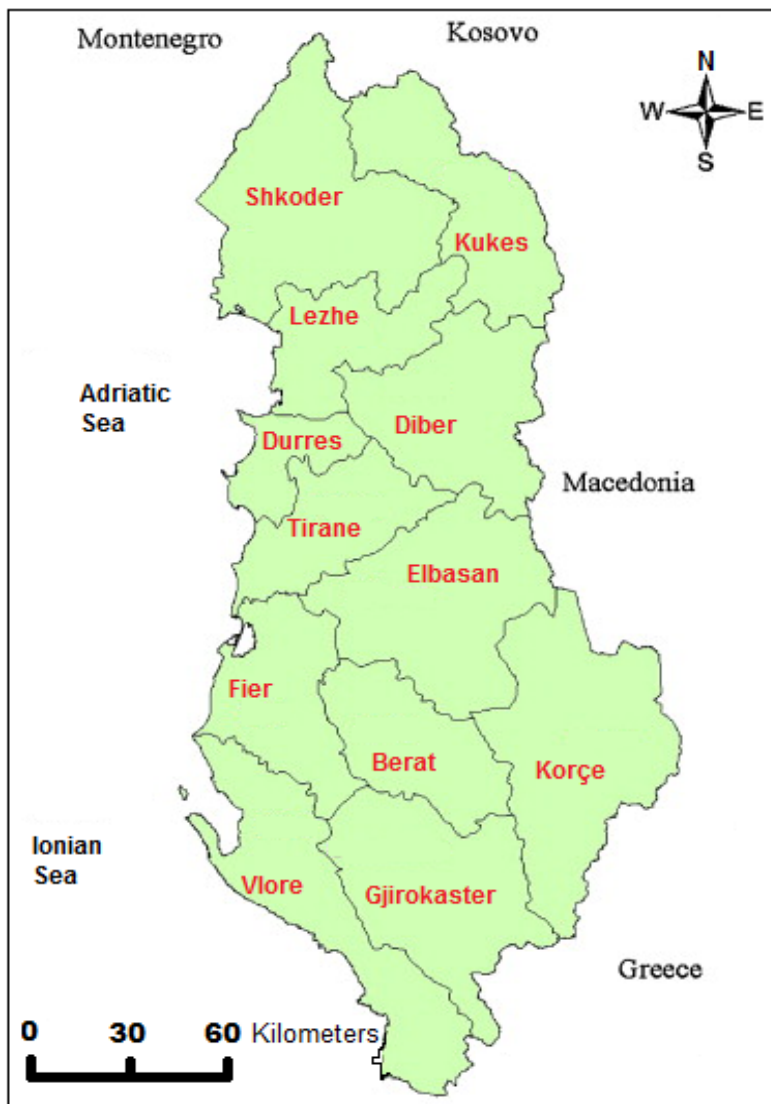
Prefecture	Persons		Males		Females	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Total	3,069,275	2,831,741	1,530,443	1,421,810	1,538,832	1,409,931
Berat	193,020	140,964	97,381	71,120	95,639	69,844
Diber	189,854	136,630	95,168	69,302	94,686	67,328
Durres	245,179	265,330	120,185	133,697	124,994	131,633
Elbasan	362,736	296,082	183,663	149,175	179,073	146,907

IBAC 2012 vol.2

Fier	382,544	310,989	191,592	157,739	190,952	153,250
Gjirokastrë	112,831	75,172	56,865	38,194	55,966	36,978
Korçë	265,182	220,438	133,712	111,627	131,470	108,811
Kukës	111,393	85,239	55,742	43,016	55,651	42,223
Lezhë	159,182	135,609	77,986	67,807	81,196	67,802
Shkoder	256,473	217,375	126,369	108,178	130,104	109,197
Tirane	597,899	763,634	296,096	379,044	301,803	384,590
Vlorë	192,982	184,279	95,684	92,911	97,298	91,368

Source: INSTAT, 2011

Today, approximately one fifth of the Albanian population lives in Tirana, the capital city of the country. Neighboring Tirana, Fier, Elbasan and Durres that are other three large settlements of the country contain more than half of the Albanian population together with Tirana (see Table 1 and Map 1). Considering such data together, it can be said that there is an unbalanced population distribution in the country. According to preliminary data of the 2011 population census, the number of people per square kilometer in Albania is 98.5, but this number reaches 10,533 in Tirana, which has the densest population in the country. Leskoviku situated in Korçë County is the most sparsely populated settlement of the country with 1.8 people per square kilometer (INSTAT, 2011).



Map 1: Albanian prefectures

Migration

There is a famous Albanian proverb which states that ‘A man becomes a man out in the world, a woman becomes a woman over the cradle’. The word denoting ‘out in the world’ is “kurbet” which, originating from the Turkish “gurbet”, refers to a journey and sojourn in a foreign land, usually for work. This act of going away and being distant is much embedded in Albanian folklore (there are, for instance, many kurbeti folksongs) and originates in the travel and sojourn of Albanians within the borderless Ottoman Empire (Tirta 1999).

After more than four decades of autarky and isolation in which emigration was regarded as an act of treason and punished by long imprisonment and even death, Albanians' repressed desire to see the outside world exploded in 1991 (King, 2005). Albania continues to have the highest emigration flow in Europe. Approximate and secondary data show that, in 1998, about 15% of the Albanian population lived abroad (Barjaba, 1999). At the same time, the practice of migration in developing countries reflected an average annual migration flow at the beginning of the 90s of about 5-6% of the active population (Layard et al., 1994). Thus the emigration flow of Albanians is about 4-5 times higher than the average rhythms found in contemporary emigration (Barjaba, 2000).

Estimates of Albanians living abroad in 2001 are in the range 600,000-700,000, or about one fifth of the resident population. This is an amazing proportion for a country where international migration is a fairly recent phenomenon. It may even be an underestimate, as King's opening paper in this theme issue shows. Migration is probably the social phenomenon with the most far-reaching implications for the life of Albanians. Remittances account for a major proportion of foreign Exchange earnings and are key to the livelihoods of many families (Zezza et al., 2005).

International migration after the fall of the communist regime unfolded in four main episodes:

- The 'Embassy Migrants', summer 1990: During June–July 1990 around 5,000 Albanians sought refuge in Western embassies in Tirana. Eventually they were allowed to leave for the West. Italy was the main recipient. The Albanian authorities liberalized the issuing of passports and a small-scale exodus continued. Altogether, from the 'embassy invasion' until early 1991, some 20,000 left.
- The Main Mass Exodus, March and August 1991: Chaos leading up to Albania's first democratic elections (won by the Communists) led to the first 'boat-people' exodus to southern Italy in March 1991; 25,000 migrants were accepted and settled in Italy. A second boat exodus took place in August, but most of the 20,000 arrivals were repatriated. The Italian authorities argued that whereas the 'first wave' could be treated as refugees fleeing a tense political situation, the 'second wave' arrived after democratic elections and therefore could not be given refugee status. Meanwhile, a larger-scale but unquantified exodus took place to Greece; and clandestine migration continued to Italy. Altogether during 1991–93 an estimated 300,000 Albanians, one in ten of the population, left the country, the vast majority to Greece and Italy.
- The Pyramid Crisis, Spring 1997: In the early months of 1997, the collapse of a pyramid scheme for the investment of private savings (including many emigrants' remittances) led to a period of political and economic turmoil verging on civil war in some parts of the country. This chaos produced

another boat exodus to Italy in early spring 1997. Initially 10,600 Albanians were accepted by Italy, but further sea-borne migrations were repulsed, sometimes in tragic circumstances, notably on 29 March 1997, when, as a result of a collision between an Italian coastguard vessel and a boatful of Albanian migrants, 87 people, many of them women and children lost their lives. As before, larger but unregistered crossings of the Greek border took place. Albanian communities already established by onward migration in other EU countries, such as France, Germany and Belgium, were augmented by new arrivals and the evolving diasporic network spread to the UK.

- Kosovo Crisis, 1999: Albania played host to 500,000 ethnic-Albanian Kosovan refugees entering through northern Albania; some have used Albania as a transit route to seek asylum in other countries, including the UK. The Kosovan refugee crisis destabilized the already fragile economic and demographic situation, especially in northern Albania, and many northern Albanians mixed themselves in with the Kosovan outward migration to other European asylum destinations (King and Vullnetari, 2003).

In parallel with international migration, post-communist Albania has also witnessed large internal migratory movements, and a rapid process of urbanization. The share of urban population increased between 1989 and 2011 from 35 to 53.7 per cent. Cities such as Tirana grew by over 100 per cent over the same period.

Economic crisis and political changes stimulated large-scale flows of emigrants, particularly to Greece and Italy, but internal movements, which were very limited before 1990, have had, if anything, a greater impact on demographic change at the local and district levels. This mixing of internal and international mobility has produced quite a complex regional typology of migratory change in Albania. It is important to note that the typology of internal migration in post-1990 Albania resembles very closely that of the centrally-planned Albania, at least as regards the direction of movement and to a certain degree the age structure. In both cases, the most significant population flows have been from the mountainous north and south towards the western lowlands, mainly within and around the triangle of Tirana, Durrës and Elbasan. The difference, of course, is that now many more people have been able to settle in these cities themselves, rather than just the rural hinterland – although peripheral squatter settlements have mushroomed since 1990 for those unable to gain a residential foothold within the city. In both cases the majority of those who migrate are people of working age (King and Vullnetari, 2003).

Conclusion

Data of the population census conducted in Albania in 2011 show the present demographic status of the country. However, the current status of Albania is the

result of a period of change that has a cultural background and dates back to many years ago. The 2011 data do not only reflect the most recent status of this demographic change, but also show that this process has not ended, but still continues.

The period of change, which has directly influenced the demographic structure besides economic and political condition of the country, started with collapse of iron curtain in 1990 and fall of communist regimes in the Eastern Europe. This period eliminated bans and barriers imposed by the communist regime. In parallel with that, migration became the most important factor giving shape to demographic structure of Albania, which was a poor country. Today, data reflecting demographic structure of Albania cannot be explained independently of migration.

In Albania, population increase had taken place at ratios much higher than the European average until 1989. However, the said increase was replaced by a decrease as a result of external migrations as of 1990 (even though natural increase of population continued). Population that was approximately 3,182,000 in 1989 declined to 2,831,741 in 2011. Size of external migration can be understood better if one considers that natural increase of population has continued within this period. At the present time, the Albanians living outside the borders of Albania have a very high ratio in comparison to the current Albanian population. What is more, Albania attracts more attention on this topic when compared to other countries going through the period of transition to free market economy following collapse of communism.

Another factor underlying the demographic structure in Albania is internal migrations in the country. In fact, urbanization rate that has rapidly increased in recent years is a result of rural-urban internal migrations. As in many developing countries, internal migrations usually head for big cities having more developed economic and geographical conditions in comparison to the rest of the country. One of the most important results of this process is unbalanced population distribution in the country. Today, population has doubled in Tirana, the biggest city of the country, as a result of internal migrations taking place in this period of change.

Migration is seen to be the most important factor that shapes demographic structure of Albania. Many researchers (Barjaba, 2000; Castaldo et al., 2005; King, 2005; King and Vullnetari, 2003; Zezza et al., 2005) suggest that economic reasons come first among factors triggering the migration. Although Albanian economy has showed some promises in recent years, economic factors causing internal and external migrations have not been completely improved yet. In this case, it is possible to say that migration will continue to be influential in formation of demographics of the country.

References

Barjaba, K., 2000, Contemporary Patterns in Albanian Emigration, SouthEast Europe Review for Labour and Social Affairs (SEER), issue: 02 / 2000, pages: 57-64, on www.ceeol.com (Accessed 25.08.2012).

Castaldo, A., Litchfield, J., Reilly, B., 2005, Migration, a poverty in Albania: What Factors are Associated With an Individual's Predisposition to Migrate? Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans, Volume 7, Number 2, 157-173, Routledge.

INSTAT, 2002, The Population of Albania in 2001. Main Results of the Population and Housing Census, Albanian National Institute of Statistics, Tirana.

INSTAT, 2004, Migration in Albania – 2001 Population and Housing Census, National Institute of Statistics: Tirana.

INSTAT, 2011, Albania Preliminary Results of the Population an Housing Census 2011, www.instat.gov.al (Accessed 25.08.2012).

King, R., Vullnetari, J., 2003, Migration and Development in Albania, Working Paper C5, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex.

King, R., 2005, Albania as a Labratory for the Study of Migration and Development, Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans, Volume 7, Number 2, 133-155, Routledge

Layard, R., O. Blanchard, R. Dornbusch and P. Krugman 1992. East–West Migration: The Alternatives. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Sjöberg, Ö. 1991. Rural Change and Development in Albania. Boulder CO: Westview Press.

Tirta, M. 1999. Migrime të Shqiptarëve. Tirana: Shkenca (Ethnografia Shqiptare 18).

Zeza, A., Carletto, G., Davis, B., 2005, Moving Away From Poverty: a Spatial Analysis of Poverty and Migration in Albania, Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans, Volume 7, Number 2, 175-193, Routledge