

## Returning and Re-Emigrating Gendered Trajectories of (Re)Integration from Greece

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### Abstract

The aim of this research paper is three fold: (1) to shed some light on the struggles Albanian return migrants are facing in their psycho-social, cultural and labor market reintegration in the origin country, looking as well to the gendered trajectories of return and re-emigration(2) to highlight their gendered strategies in transferring back in their home country their financial, social and human capital;(3) to better understand the dynamic paths of their migration trajectories and finally (4) to push policy makers to put with high priority the returnees reintegration plan into the policy agenda. We base our analyze on 42 life stories of Albanian migrants, from which, 12 interviews with return migrants from Greece, 30 migrants that are actually in Greece (from which 50% have at least made an 1 attempt to return in Albania and 5 are circular migrants).The study found that: many Albanian migrants return to Albania to stay either temporary or permanently with the idea of investing in home country, though not all of them who return stay in Albania. Returnees and at a greater degree women, face lot struggles and difficulties in their psycho-social, cultural and economic reintegration upon their return, which make them mentally and psychologically vulnerable. Women experienced a sense of disempowerment, reconfiguration and re-traditionalisation of gender relationships upon their return. Labor market integration seem more problematic especially for returned women who faced a gendered gap in labor force participation<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, despite migrant willingness to invest their financial and social remittances in Albania by bringing new ideas in the labor market trend, they experience a sense of disillusion. Therefore, having no support system back home, remaining jobless and in many cases failing in their investment endeavors, make returnees consider further re-emigration as a surviving strategy. This study suggest that it is time for policy makers to compile with high priority and with a gender lens analysis a new National Migration Strategy and Return Reintegration strategy, while developing concrete and coherent measures upon returnees successful reintegration in the home country. This policy research brings at the policy agenda an holistic and multidisciplinary approach to returnee reintegration through better multi- level/stakeholder collaboration and dialogue.

**Key words:** *return migrants, reintegration policies, gender, human, social and economic capital*

### Introduction

#### Contextualizing Albanian migration

Albania is considered a country of massive emigration and by the end of last decade it was estimated that one million people or one quarter of the country's total population emigrated abroad mainly (Çaro at al. 2012) representing the largest outflow rate in relative to its population size (Castaldo et al,2005). Albanian migration was primarily constructed as a "male project" or a "male -led phenomenon", with men being the first to migrate and women coming latter as followers, unproductive and isolated dependents through family reunification( Zlotnik, 2003;Morokvasic, 1983), assuming in this way a "gender –blindness" in the pattern of migration ( King and Zontini, 2000). The majority of Albanians migrated mostly in

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<sup>1</sup> Gender gap refers to different opportunities and salary differences in labor market for men and women.

Greece (600,000) and Italy (250,000) (reference). Albanian migration is considered a unique case study for the fact that it has experienced quite a massive migration concentration within a short period of time. King sees Albanian as a 'laboratory for the study of migration and development' (King, 2005), while Carletto et al. use the term 'country on the move' (Vullnetari, 2012). Contemporary Albanian migration is divided into three stages: The first stage correspond to 1990-1993, which correspond with the massive exodus of Albanian after the collapse of communist regime. Such wave of migration was triggered mainly due to loss of jobs, unemployment, poverty and isolation of communist regime. The second episode has been the period of 97, triggered by the collapse of pyramid schemes in Albania. The third episode was triggered by the Kosovo's crises of 1999-2000(Vullnetari, 2012). Though not yet labeled as a fourth wave of migration, the recent figures of Albanian migrants seeking asylum in the EU Member States in 2015 is estimated to be around 65 935 , the fifth after Syrians, Afghanistan, Iraqi and Albanian from Kosovo ( Eurostat, 2015). During May 2015, Albanian was the main country of origin among asylum applications in Germany with 4,743 first-time requests (Eurostat, 2015) .

The Greek economic downturn coming as a result of economic crises affected Albanian migrants, who by 2013 were assumed to be 47 per cent (INSTAT 2014 p.9; Caro, 2016). However, the burden of the crisis has clearly produced different impacts on Albanian migrants and especially in relation to men and women's lives. Unemployment's rates for migrant men remained much higher than that of migrant women's and that because Albanian men were employed mostly in the construction sector, heavily influenced by the crises, whereas Albanian women were employed mostly in domestic sector, which was affected less from the crises. Left without a job in the host country, men were amongst the first to consider return migration in the origin country. At least in our study the major decision for returning in the migrant couples was that husband lost the job in the host country and the wife followed them again upon their return in the origin country. Albanian 2011 Census data revealed that a substantial number of Albanians residing in Greece, around 139.827 migrant workers have been returned to Albania in the time period 2001-2011 and the majority were males. Amongst the most prominent reason for returning was lack of employment in the destination country. The surprising facts is that in the time period 2009-2013, a total of 133.544 Albanian migrants of the age group 18 years old and above have returned to Albania, of whom 73.7 per cent were males and 26.3 per cent respectively were females (INSTAT 2014, p.9). Albania Strategy on Return Migrants and Reintegration, which has recently expired in December 2015, draws attention to the potential of return migrants and emphasize the involvement of various institutions in the reintegration process of return migrants.

The focus of our analysis are Albanian migrants who have been return as a result of the crises, those who have re-emigrated again in Greece and the ones who are making attempts to further migrate in other countries. We base our analyze on 42 life stories of Albanian migrants, from which, 12 interviews with return migrants from Greece, 30 migrants that are actually in Greece (from which 50% have at least made an 1 attempt to return in Albania and 5 are circular migrants). Duration of the interviews varied from 35 minutes to four hours after which they were transcript and analysed through MAXQDA- data analysis program. The interviews were transcribed preserving the original language, further the transcriptions were analysed using the qualitative data software MAXQDA.

## Findings

### 1.Sense of power and bravery

Migration and return migration patterns are highly gendered and remarkably diverse for women and men. While in one hand, migration served as an empowerment story for many Albanian migrant women, in terms of changing oppressive gender relations and power dynamics within the household, more liberal gender division of labor within home, providing new opportunities, emancipation, more autonomy and social mobility through economic independence, on the other hand, Albanian men experienced a challenge to their traditional role and a threat to the masculinities performed back home were men are still men. It implies a fear of manliness men, which are now becoming voiceless and powerless as their women are gaining access to waged employment, which on the other hand implies they are gaining independence and becoming more powerful (Dushi,2015; Xhaho and Caro, forthcoming). On the other hand, research on return migration has pinpoint

the fact that while migrant women experience an empowerment in their gender roles with men being threatened upon migration in the host country, the return migration change again the situation in favor of men who experience a re-gained sense of control, while women losing it. These are the experiences of two women who have been returned from Greece, following their husband (Khalid, 2011). In this rhetoric, one of the interviewee said: *"I had the idea I was more brave in Greece rather than in Albania. I could move upward there but not here"* (Dafina, 42, returnee, entrepreneur). Another returned migrant admitted: *"If you are still a housewife, you don't have any opportunity to display your gained knowledge from Greece. I don't know how I could afford staying closed home like that. I am very pessimist"* (Anda, 33, Housewife, return migrant).

Our study found that at least 5 out of 6<sup>1</sup> women have been returned in order to follow their husbands who lost the job due to the crises. In the light of such situation, we found that the decision to return was not completely women's independent choice. They were constrained to follow their husband for the sake of not separating the family, showing again for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time<sup>2</sup> their role as passive followers. However, not all our migrant women decided to follow their husband upon return. The story of Meri, 30, who works as an esthetic in Greece, shows her decision to stay in Greece, while her jobless husband moved in Albania with his family.

*"I wanted something more. I wanted to be independent from the first moment I came in Greece. There is nothing else better than being independent. The Greek men treat their wives differently, with respect. For the majority of Greek husbands, the wife is not the servant as it is in Albania. At least, in the country where I was raised, the wife was the servant for the majority. The wife was supposed to be exploited. ...Only when women stand by its own, she is the master of herself. She has always been in subordinate position compared to male. She has neither values, nor she feels accomplished...she can not move forward. I.. woman should stand on her own feet. It is only than she feels free. I want to move forward, to live alone, not be deepened by anyone, which means to achieve everything by myself, starting from zero. I feel I have better opportunities [here] to do a better life...I don't turn my head back any more. I have my new friendship here and in Albania I don't know anyone. I have my job here and I can't do anything in Albania"*

Her life story shows how migration changed her attitudes, making more aware about her rights and gender role expectations of women and men and the same time compare it to the Greek norms. It shows again her strength, empowerment and a sense of "enlighten", in terms of independence and gender equity.

## **2.Psycho-social & cultural re-integration**

Many migrants feel they are abandoned by the "old" friends and sometimes they feel alienated even by their cousins. A circular migrant said " I faced difficulties understanding Albania language in school. I tried to adapt to Albanian friends so they helped me a lot" ( Jonida, 22, circular student). There is a need for them to be socially reintegrated in the new life. In fact, many other return migrants have experienced the feelings of outsider twice: once when they were in Greece and again when they returned in Albania. Migrants thoughts and fears on return migration are interchanged with many factors that affects their ambiguity on whether they should return or should re-emigrate. Another migrant in Greece said "If I return in Albania after 20 years in Greece I am emigrant in my home country. You don't know anyone, all your friendship that you had.. you are like an owl" (Naim, 50, decorator in Greec). The return decision has been for some migrants a very difficult and painful transitory process. Inability to adapt to such major changes can lead sometimes to nervous breakdown, as Liljana , one of our interviews admits. Women experiencing more emotional problems or at least emphasizing such psychological problems more often than their husbands.

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<sup>1</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> women was single and in pension

<sup>2</sup> The first time relate to women's migration in Greece in order to reunite with their husbands, who came before, mainly through illegal ways.

*You should know the situation, the people as it is quite difficult to be integrated. Here I feel being a migrant in my country. Though now many things have been changed...people have not changed.. they seems even worse. It jus their outer facade that have been changed. I couldn't manage to overcome my nervous breakdown without medications. The return is terrible. If you decide to go, just go and never return( Bela,38,returnee, entrepreneur of a hairdresser salon)*

Cultural reintegration is seen as the process of reintegration of the returnee to the values, way of living, language, moral principles, and traditions of the country of origin's society. Many migrants have left Albania in 90s and now after return they experience enormous challenges in adapting to the new post-communist transformations. They find themselves struggling in inventing new surviving strategies such as relying in their family networks.

### **3. Labor Market Reintegration Dilemmas of Returnees**

The study found that for many return migrants or the ones who want to return the most concerning issue have to do with their labor market integration. From the interviews of our migrants we understood that at least none of them have profited and received any direct support from the Migration services centers. The major needs concerning them were in regard to job placement support and no future perspective in Albania. Their major concerns were : What kind of job they will do? How to utilize the gained skills? Do the gained skills match with the labor market demands? (Elezi,2015).

*When you first migrate to Greece, you have big ambitious, I will move up and find something better , a job and a wage but while you return, considering what you left in Greece you are not sure any more. It was very difficult I have to a find a job here .. may be open a business(Bela,38, returnee entrepreneur)*

*My perspective is to definitely return but we need to integrate here.. I am integrated but I am as a parasite here. I feel people need to be integrated with a job they can do better , and not finding something that you don't know how to do(Pandeli, 59,circular migrant, cheese processor in Greece)*

Though, for some return migrants opening a business is seen as a process of reintegration, for others that's not the case as they are challenged by incompatible labor market trends and regimes. In terms of gender differences women are as well more predisposed to be affected by incompatible gender norms in the labor market. For example Anisa , a 37 years old women who worked with her husband in a bar in Greece, found it almost impossible to work again with her husband in a bar they both decided to open in Albania, upon their return. Though, the gender norms made it quite acceptable for women to work in bars in Greece, this was not the case of Albanian patriarchal mentality, were women are supposed to work in domains which are compatible with traditional gender role expectation (Caro at al., forthcoming; Xhaho, 2013; Caro at al 2012)).Left without an employment choice she decided to separate from her husband and her daughter for working again in Greece.

### **4.Entrepreneurship and investment pathways**

Our study found that many Albanian migrants return in Albania to stay permanently with the idea of investing in home country. Both, women and men were most likely to see the perspective of entrepreneurship as the most common solution of economic reintegration. At least around 8 out of 11 returned migrant tried to open a small business. Moreover, around 15 out of 32 migrants in Greece tried to open a business in Albania. The study shows that many return migrants want to invest in Albania, either through financial capital but even their human capital such as skills and knowledge they have taken in the host countries marketplace. Studies have shown that the likelihood of being involved in one's own business is highest among migrants who return considering the emotional/social ties with the home country. Return migrants are considered more skillful and knowledge in terms of modern technology and work ethic, making them a real asset for investment in their home country. The same time the networks that such migrants have created abroad and their capacities to hold relationships across cultures and borders make the full in terms of social capital (Fetahu 2015; Kopliku 2015; Chaloff, 2008) and increase the chances of setting up transnational economic partnerships. Since 2005 almost 2/3 of small business

owners in Albania have a migration history and 70% considered their foreign experience as useful for their business (IMF, 2006). Strategies to navigate in the labor market are: gained skills, economic capital, family networks, prior business plan, adapting Greek culture, market studying (Caro, 2016).

However they experience lots of difficulties when trying to invest their financial capital in their home country. Some of them claim that they have money, but they do not have idea were to invest. Many of them have been living and working abroad for many years, which make their labor market integration a difficult process. Despite the home country ties and their emotional connection to Albania, with what we call "patriotic tourism", they are faced with many integration dilemmas and ambiguity of everyday life and work issues. Considering that the first wave of Albanian, returnees come with the idea to invest and bring some host -country-style in their business but, soon they realize that their master plan have failed, either because they had no previous information on possible investment sectors, step by step orientation or any other kind of support, facility and service tailored particularly to migrant investment in the home country. However, though they bring back elements of host country labor market they do not have any experience and training in investments and business plan management, beside the many problems they experience with institutional and administrative issues for setting their business. The cases below illustrate the ambiguity of migrants were to invest, regardless their eagerness to come back and invest : "We were discussing of opening or own business here, but we need money. Because all my savings were expended for bricks and mortar" (Alda, return migrants and entrepreneur of a bakery shop in Tirana and grill house shop in Himara). Marjola (54, domestic worker) returned from Greece with her partner, with an idea to open a business. Even though they constructed the building and brought all the modern swing machines from Greece and new model ideas (financial & human capital), they were obligated to close it shortly because they could not afford it due to high taxes. Naim, is one of the migrants in Greece who as many other migrants have failed in his attempt to continue the business he opened years ago in Albania. Unfortunately, due to problems he faced with the management of his retail shop, he decided to re-emigrate again in Greece.

### **Re-emigration**

Though the role of returnees in the development of the country is widely confirmed, their potential gains are not so far utilized in the right way, nor are they provided with adequate reintegration programs. Studies on return migration have shown that there is a high percentage of return migrants who have intentions to re-emigrate again either because they have failed to meet their financial goals or (ETF, 2007) or because they are not satisfied with the services offered ( INSTAT, 2014).

The same time studies have been shown than return migrants from Albania are more likely than non-migrants to be self-employed, that is a strong indicator for them to invest in a new enterprise (Naude, Siegel & March, 2015). The vast majority of return migrants have the tendency and would like to spend their remittances by business investment, though there is not any concrete study to measure the significance and success rate of business in which return migrants have invested their savings (ETF, 2007). However, the likelihood to start up an enterprise depends and can be enhanced by state policies. The recent figures, provided by the last Albanian CENSUS reveal the fact that the investment rate of returnees in Albania was only 8 per cent, focusing primarily in the retail trade, hotels and restaurant industry and agriculture. The main reason for not investing for around of 81.2 % of returnees from Greece a according to the survey conducted by INSTAT was lack of insufficient capital to start up a business. The fact that returnees relied mostly in their savings almost (99 per cent), and just few of them around 15 per cent on bank loans (INSTAT 2014, p.10), might be an indicator for the necessity of economic reintegration of returnees and special financial incentive packages, for the ones willing to invest. Further on, given the fact that almost 61.5%, from the ones who have invested had encountered problems in their business management, in forms of unfair competition, insufficient capital, administrative constrains and managerial challenges (p.46) highlights again the importance of measures that need to be taken to overcome such obstacles.

For some of migrants return in Albania has been a temporary project as they re-emigrate in the host society again within few months. Studies on return migration have shown that there is a high percentage of return migrants who have intentions to re-emigrate again either because they have failed to meet their financial goals or (ETF, 2007) or because they are not satisfied with the services offered ( INSTAT, 2014). After accumulating enough financial and human capital, Eglja, (54) and her partner who has worked for several years as a wood specialist in Greece, decided to return in Albania and invest their savings in a wood processing factory. They constructed the building and bought all the materials but they failed to manage their business because of the uncomfortable business environment. They have to pay lot of taxes which they could not afford as a new business. So, they left everything and decided to re-emigrate again in Greece. Her cousin as well returned from Greece in the origin city, Divjaka, and invested all the money in building a marble factory, which resulted a total failure. He was then obligated to move again to Greece with his family, but now without any money left in pocket (Eglja, 54 re-emigrant in Greece)

Therefore, not all of them succeed in their endeavor, considering the varieties of challenges they have to face in opening and managing their business. Faced with such constrains and the same failing in their psychological, social and economical reintegration strategies , some of them decide to migrate in another country in order to escape such situation.

### **Lack of state policies on return migrants**

The Ministry of Labour coordinates and implements the National Migration Strategy in Albania and Migration Action plan and Reintegration Strategy for Returning Albanian Citizens (2010-2015) and its Action Plan with other line ministries and dependent institutions which have their responsibilities. The emerging problem is that both strategies have already expired and there is no any other announced strategy yet. The monitoring *results of the National Action Plan implementation on the Migration, and of the National Strategy on the Migration, from European Institute of Tirana (2007)*, emphasize the fact that the strategy needs continues monitoring, as it is not a static document, but rather a dynamic one. Though, there was an explicit link between the development and migration policies, the strategy lack better coordination, institutional capacity and financial resources for implementation (EIT, 2007). Implementation of the NSM was hindered by ongoing institutional uncertainty regarding the coordination and fragility of commitments of various institutions involved in the implementation. The striking fact coming from monitoring result is that out of 15 Ministries and state institutions involved in the strategy implementation and in the action plan, 8 of them were not aware for the existence of such strategic documents, 64% of activities and 53% of planned measures in the strategy were not implemented. Moreover, as concerns to return migrants several measures in the strategy were partly or not implemented at all. For example, measure 8. Broaden the reintegration services, in order to guarantee permanent return. Activity 1. "Drafting and implementation of joint employment programmes with small businesses" was not implemented and 2. "Provision of career guidance, job placement and vocational training" was partially implemented. Moreover, in collaboration with the IOM, the Albania launched the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration (VARRP) to encourage return of asylum seekers. The program offered a variety of services such as advice and information and assistance with travel expenses, schooling fees, job placement and training (IOM website). However, as it will be shown a considerable number of returnees have not profit from such services and the majority of them do not have the idea that such services even exist.

### **Invisibility of Migration Counters**

Though the core element in the Reintegration Strategy for Returning Albanian Citizens (2010-2015) and its Action Plan, were the Migration Counters, located at 36 regional and local employment offices throughout, which offered public services, such as health, education employment. Data from the last study by INSTAT reveal the fact that few returnees were aware that such centers exists (INSTAT 2013, P.19). given that only 26.5 % of the interviewees have contacted such centers to receive support (p.52). Our study found that none of the returnees have had the chance to profit from such services. Moreover, such centers were almost invisible in the rural areas. The problem with returnees who return in their villages is

that they can not claim they are unemployed and profits from such service as they are considered as self-employed in agriculture in case they or their family owns a plot of land (INSTAT, 2014)

## **Conclusion**

Although research on Albanian migration has a long been discussed by migration scholars (King and Vullnetari 2003; Carletto, Davis et al. 2006 )few studies attempt to grasp in detail the return migration process and reintegration strategies of returnees, especially from a gender perspective. The contribution of this study was to look at the gendered trajectories or return, reintegration and remigration of Albanian returnees. We found that their migratory trajectories are quite diverse, gendered and dynamic, changing overtime depending on a set of structural and socio-economic factors in the host and origin country. Considering the fluidity of migrant pathways it is almost difficult to talk about permanent or temporary return. Migrant are continually moving back and forth, with a set of values, norms and ideas which are constantly shaped, transformed and challenged through their circulatory movements. The study found that returnees face difficulties in their psycho-social, cultural and economic reintegration upon their return. They experience a sense of alienation from the country of origin and find themselves “outsider “in both countries, which makes them, especially at a greater extend women mentally and psychologically vulnerable. Women experienced a sense of disempowerment, reassuming their traditional identity and gender role expectation, while at some degree felt less brave than in Greece. While experiencing a reconfiguration and re-traditionalisation of gender relationships, they were faced as well with incompatible labor market norms, which made them being excluded due to sexist workplace norms. Moreover, a great deal of literature already exists in the potential gain that returnees can bring for the development of their home countries and this not only in terms of sending remittances but through human, social and financial capital (Gibson and McKenzie, 2012). Similarly, both genders employed distinctive and similar coping mechanisms to deal with reintegration dilemmas. Though the majority of returnees came back with an idea of investing their financial capital in their country of origin and brining the same time their social and human capital, they are now facing lot of struggles. Having no support system back home, remaining jobless and in many cases failing in their investment endeavors, make returnees consider further re-emigration as a surviving strategy. This paper highlights the importance of government's officials in building an integrated policy framework that take in consideration with a gender lens analysis returnees' needs.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### *Holistic gendered approach to reintegration of returnees*

It should be developed a comprehensive multi-dimensional reintegration strategy encompassing social, psychological, economic and political reintegration strategies taking in consideration gender lens policies as women and men have different priorities and needs. Furthermore, language and cultural adaptation training should be taken into consideration by the Ministry of Education and Sports. Such services should be coherent and be advertised and made visible to returnees upon their arrival in their home country. Brochures holding information on reintegration plans should be advertised in corresponding embassies, airport info centre and halls, municipality and other institutional halls, different NGOs, health centers and other respective public and local institutions.

## **Enforce migratory centers**

In terms of return migrants infrastructure, there is a need to establish information centers in the municipalities or to strengthen the capacity of Migration counters. The aim would be to disseminate information and guidance on the reintegration programs, work and business investment opportunities. Migration counters should be transformed and provided continuously with technical and financial resources, considering the Administrative Reforms.

### *Multi level/stakeholder collaboration and dialogue*

International organizations, civil society and the government need to coordinate their efforts in order to create a multidisciplinary approach (Psychological, social, cultural, economical) to reintegrate migrants. It is not the role of the state to provide direct services for returnees, but it has the role to formulate politics that could promote and assist organizations working on return migrants and reintegration as well. Such organization might provide special assistance to returned women as well, who might be in a more vulnerable position.

### *Oriented business development plans- follow up*

Making return migrants familiar with local regulations and legislations for starting a business, along with issues relating to local labour market and business practices. Specific trainings books in business managements plans should be provided by Job offices

### *Two way process in Vocational Educational Qualification*

The National Employment Service should works towards capacity building programs, by offering and promoting Vocational training courses addressing the needs of migrants with different skill levels in local communities and the same time make use of returnee's human capital by placing experienced migrants as trainers for many of the VET courses that are provided to other interested persons.

### *Develop more effective cross-governmental, local and central coordination mechanisms*

Increase institutional communication between the local and central level. It is important that services for returnees should not only be localized in the capital city but distributed accordingly to the distribution of migrants. Therefore, closer collaboration, intensified dialogue and flexibility should be considered between local and central power government

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- [27] [www.iom.al](http://www.iom.al)
- [28] [www.sociale.org](http://www.sociale.org)
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## Appendix 1.

**Table.1 : Migrant Information**

Education	Years in Migration	Sector	Gender	Age groups	Return migrants
6 have primary school	18 have migrated from 91 to 94	14 domestic worker	19 men	20-30- 5 migrants	3 returned in the period 2000-2004,.
5 have secondary school	19 during 97-99	2 construction	23 females	31-40-12 migrants	4 in the period 2005 - 2009
6 have university	5 during 2001-2004	3 hairdresser		41-50-11 migrants	4 other returnees in the period 2010-2014
24 have vocational educational training		2 work in agriculture		51-60-9 migrants	
1 have post graduation		1 graphic designer		61-70-1 migrants	
		1 specialist in factory,			
		2 waiters			
		1 deliver,			
		2 entrepreneur			
		1 seller			
		1 cooker,			
		1 baby sitter			
		11 unemployed			