



**International Conference
on Labour Migration and Industrial Citizenship**
Albanians on the Move - Citizenship, Identity and Development

CONFERENCE REPORT

13 - 14 November, 2015
Tirana

UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK TIRANA
Tirana, Albania

REPORT by Dr Erka Caro

1. Purpose of the Conference

The purpose of the international Conference 'Labour Migration and Industrial Citizenship: Albanians on the move, identity, development and citizenship' was to present the main results, achievements and the activities of several research projects on labour migration and industrial citizenship and highlight some of the key recommendations to the main stakeholders. Primarily, it was based on the conclusions that came out from the first year of the project "*Industrial Citizenship and Migration from the Western Balkans: Migration from Albania and Kosovo towards Greece, Germany and Switzerland*" (ICM) a Regional Research Promotion Programme project, managed by the University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

A hundred and twenty high-level participants attended the conference; among them well known academics, representatives of governmental bodies, diplomats, NGOs, trade union representatives, international organizations, academic institutions and students. Representatives from national and international institutions, to be noted, were: IOM Albania, Swiss Contact Albania, Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, INSTAT, UNCHR, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Albanian Institute of Sociology, the Albanian Institute for International Studies, Open Society Foundation Albania, Business Women Network, GIZ Albania, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italian Embassy in Albania, Trade Unionists etc.

2. Opening of the Conference

The Conference opened with welcoming addresses by the Rector of the University of New York Tirana, Prof. Fatos Tarifa, by the coordinator of the ICM research project Dr. Erka Caro and by the representative from the University of Fribourg and the RRPP, Dr Magdalena Solska.

3. Conference Organization

The conference lasted two days, on 13th and 14th of November, 2015. The first day of the conference was organized in a form of a plenary session where the issue of '**Labour Migration and Industrial Citizenship: Identity and Development**'

was discussed, from three different perspectives and in three different consecutive panels. During the first panel, governmental officials and diplomats addressed the audience. The speakers at the first panel were (1) Mr. Valon Murati, Minister of Diaspora, Kosovo; (2) Dr. Elona Gjebrea, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Albania and (3).H.E. Helmut Hoffmann, Ambassador of Germany to Albania. All of the three panellists gave an overview of the contributions, they and their institutions had made in the areas of migration, diaspora, return of migration, and the recent phenomenon, asylum seekers from Albania and Kosovo, as well as the new waves of migration. The speakers expressed their support for the results achieved and the project outputs.

This first panel was followed by the keynote speeches:

a) **Prof. Nathan Lillie**, Professor of Social Policy, at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, also a mentor of the ICM project. Prof. Lillie talked about the possibilities of labour migrants becoming industrial citizens and the risk to remain *Homo Economicus*; in other words, to comply with market norms and fulfil their target income aims. According to Prof. Lillie, globalization leaves workers, especially migrant workers, dependent on their personal market capacities to realize their citizenship rights. Therefore they often choose “the right not to have rights” setting apart their industrial citizenship, while acquiring what is known as citizenship at work or market citizenship. Prof. Lillie explained that Industrial Citizenship is the right to have labour rights, which at the same time is challenged by market norms and power relationship between workers and employers (which for migrant workers seem to be more difficult to pursue). He argued that migrant workers tend to accept substandard conditions of employment, mainly out of necessity but also, as a strategy to prove themselves to the host society. Being better at work is regarded as empowerment, while they (migrants) see themselves as more flexible, as better workers, cheaper labour force, and complying better to employers’ requirements and labour market needs.

b) **Prof. Russell King**, Professor of Geography, at University of Sussex, UK. In his key note speech, Prof. King talked about the migration-development nexus based on global generalisations, and specific perspectives from Albania. He put the emphasis on the link between underdevelopment, development and migration. In his speech, he addressed few current and important issues such as: does underdevelopment cause migration; does migration lead to further underdevelopment or does it lead to development; and does development lead to less or further migration. Prof. King carried on talking about

migration in the neoliberal era in which migration is often regarded as a triple-win scenario. He emphasised the limitations of regarding migration as a win-win situation, underlining the problems of this approach and possible adjustments. He elaborated the main dimensions of migration activities which trigger development, such as remittances, return migration and the involvement of diaspora, pointing to the need to reconceptualise these dimensions in the neoliberal era. Further on, Prof. King put his speech in perspective of the Albanian example and exploring the role of migration in the development of the country, while analysing the link between development, underdevelopment and migration. He concluded that migration in the Albanian case has been a '*response to underdevelopment while regarded as an effective solution to poverty and a rational strategy for survival and achieving modest prosperity*'. Prof. King talked also about the downsides of migration for the sending country. Migration has a human cost as brain drain, exploitation and stigmatization; irregular status, as well as an impact to the older generation left behind. The great migration scale has dramatic outcomes for the demographics of the country, but it also results in a high dependency of the country on remittances, limited human capital return and failure to manage return because of structural flaws. Prof. King ended his speech by discussing the new migration trends and their effects in the light of the global economic crisis. He concluded that the Albanian migrants in Europe were flexible and adaptable in time of crisis. They may move, partially or completely, back into the informal economy in order to survive. The crisis did reveal their precarious position and their lack of power in terms of defending their rights. They are individualists for the most part, and disinclined to join trade unions and associations. For those who do return, there are challenges of reintegration, social and economic, as well as issues evolving around identity. At the end of his speech, Prof. King linked his observations to the ICM project results and outcomes, emphasising that the ICM research project is an important tool to understand better the above-mentioned issues.

c) **Dr Ajay Bailey**, Assistant Professor in Population Studies, at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Dr Bailey in his key note speech discussed the topic of qualitative research and the complexity of studying migration. Migration is becoming a more complex phenomenon and the mosaic of migrants keeps changing. We can notice onward migration. EU countries need skilled and semi-skilled workforce, and while they are receiving new population, the sending areas are being depopulated. According to Dr Bailey, these new trends and developments need innovative methods to understand and deal with them. He recommended alternative methodological tools such as: visualizing migration aspirations, participatory methods bringing forward empowering dialogue, photo elicitation and discussion, and using "skilled biographies". Moreover, according to Dr Bailey, one needs to go beyond the migrant when studying migration. When analysing, we need to take into consideration also the host society, employers' and co-workers' perspectives in order to understand the process of integration. Finally, Dr Bailey talked about the need to go towards a more scientifically rigorous and locally embedded qualitative research

(d) **Dr Marc Hill**, Assistant Professor in Migration and Educational Studies, at the University of Innsbruck, Austria discussed the need for new theoretical perspectives taking into account the everyday life of the youth. They can provide us with a glimpse onto their life realities, clearly distancing themselves from discourses on marginalization. He emphasized that the new theoretical perspective needs to break with the customary discourses on marginalization and step back in order to take a critical view of the negative images related to migrants and migration, a view oriented to society as a whole. For that reason, Dr Hill argues that marginalization discourse needs to be read from the standpoint of a post-migration perspective, emphasising the modes of a narrative employed by disadvantaged youth from a migration background. The concept of post-migration takes its departure from the experiences of migration. Youth from migration families democratize urban society as they demand a more conscious way of dealing with religious freedom, bring along other languages and initiate trans-national discourses. Migration disturbs and confuses the "indigenous" native society and brings new experiences of migration into play. This can also be seen in the emergence of new urban neighbourhoods and the growth of cities spurred by migration processes. For this reason, the post-migration conclusion based on Dr Hill's empirical study 'After the Parallel Society' states '*Youth from migrant families democratize and urbanize urban society!*'.

Following the key note speeches, the audience had the opportunity to hear the stories and experiences of two migrants, Mr. Faton Topalli and Mr. Lulzim Voca. They shared, with the audience, their migration experiences and trajectory, their difficulties but also successes.

The second day of the conference was a sequence of panels and presentations offering a very diverse and thought-provoking issues and themes on migrants' perceptions: The Local Impact On/Of International Migration; Migration Trends in the Balkans; Mobilised Labour and Trade Unions; Return Migration and Reintegration; Diasporas, Social and Financial Remittances; Gender and Migration; Social, Economic, Political Impact of Internal and International Migration. The panels were moderated by well-known scholars in the field, such as Prof. Russell King, Prof. Nathan Lillie, Prof. Maurizio Ambrozini, Associated Prof. Juna Miluka, Dr. Mimoza Dushi, Dr Veronica Duci, Dr Marsela Dauti, Dr Mirela Arqimandriti, and Dr Erka Caro.

4. Conclusions

This conference came at a time when migration had become one of the greatest challenges for today's world, and particularly for the Western Balkans and Europe. During the past few years, migration, especially labour mobility from

Albania and Kosovo toward EU countries has intensified, while new trends of return, circular migration and asylum seekers have emerged, transforming these developing countries from out-migration into immigrant-receiving countries. Notions of identity, belonging, integration and (several forms of) citizenship are challenged by the new and overlapping forms of mobility. There is insufficient research on the status, attitudes and strategies that emigrants from Albania and Kosovo employ to integrate and succeed into the EU labour market.

This conference aimed to contribute to the ongoing debate, by putting together studies that engage with the current transformations of the Western Balkans, the European labour markets, the dynamic meaning of 'migrant(s)' and their changing positionality into the labour market and the host society, also affected by the global economic crisis and associated austerity policies. Given the variety of themes and the developed academic debates, we hoped to have provided a space for fostering academic research in Balkan and Albanian migration studies.

Both bottom-up and top-down approaches employed in this conference are crucial in understanding and analysing a key phenomenon such as migration, thus by bringing these perspectives together, we aim and hope to initiate a constructive dialogue among different actors in Albania.

A conclusion was made that the state should play an important role but is a missing factor up to this day. State intervention should be mainly linked to migrants' working legal status, recognition of the time spent in employment, the ability to combine working years in several countries so they could obtain pensions, social security etc. Particularly following the economic crisis and the increased level of returning migrants, pensions and social security has become an austerity problem that needs addressing.

The conference once again reinforced the importance of the role of migrants in the capital of a country's socio-economic challenges, both valid for Albanian and international migration, as well as the commitment of key stakeholders to a more fruitful cooperation in order to standardize best practices for support of migrants.

The organizing committee of the conference intends to publish the high-quality papers from the conference, in an edited volume and in an international journal special issue. The deadline for submission of the completed papers was extended so the panelists could have the opportunity to revise and structure them in accordance with the comments and suggestions received during the conference.

Moreover, the organizing committee proposed to establish a migration research network among the participants and other interested scholars in order to share knowledge, data, research, and experiences, and assist each other in the analysis and research on migration studies in Albania, Kosovo and in the Western Balkans.

The conference was closed by Prof. Nathan Lillie, the academic mentor of the ICM project, who expressed his satisfaction with the Conference's results and congratulated the organizing committee, the moderators and all the panelists for their cooperation, good work and high quality research presented at the conference. Prof. Lillie also announced a follow up workshop/conference based on the ICM project results, taking place in spring 2016 in Jyväskylä, Finland.

5. Outputs/Publication:

The conference outputs were published with an ISBN number and were delivered to each author and co-author at the conference panels.

The visibility of the conference activities, photos, programme was made by publishing them on ICM website, and at the implementing and mentoring Universities (still in process).

A selection of papers will be published in an international scientific journal.

Part of the conference was recorded and aired on one Albanian TV station, SCAN TV.

Several articles produced by ICM staff have been published in daily Albanian newspapers and online media such as Tirana Observer, Business Magazine Albania, Info Albania, KMA news or are in a process of publication on other portals and printed Albanian, Greek or Swiss media.

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