

## ALBANIAN IMMIGRANTS TO ITALY: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION

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**ABSTRACT:**

*AFTER THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COLLAPSE OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME, THE ALBANIAN PEOPLE EXPERIENCED SOME GREAT MIGRATION WAVES TO ITALY. EACH OF THEM WAS CHARACTERIZED BY EXTREMELY DIFFICULT STARTING CONDITIONS, AS WELL AS BY THE COMPLETE SHOCK AND UNPREPAREDNESS ON THE ITALIAN AUTHORITIES AND POPULATION. THE INTEGRATION PROCESS HAS PASSED THROUGH FAILURES AND CHALLENGES BUT IS TODAY CONSIDERED A MOSTLY SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION STORY. WHICH ARE THE MAIN FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO A RELATIVELY RAPID INTEGRATION AFTER SUCH A DRAMATIC START?*

*THIS PAPER EXAMINES THE DYNAMICS AND CHALLENGES POSED IN THREE DECADES OF MIGRATION FLUXES, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON CULTURAL AND WORKFORCE INTEGRATION, CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVITY, THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN DESCRIBING AND SHAPING THE RELATION BETWEEN MIGRANTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES. INTEGRATION STATISTICS ARE ANALYZED, ESPECIALLY WORKFORCE INTEGRATION, FAMILY REUNIFICATIONS, EDUCATION AND CRIME, IN RELATION TO THE ITALIAN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS. SOME OF THE INTEGRATION FACTORS ARE ALSO CONSIDERED, WITH A SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS DURING THE DIFFERENT MIGRATION FLOWS. ON THEIR PART, ITALIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE UNDERTAKEN SOME IMPORTANT INTEGRATION CAMPAIGNS FOCUSED ON THE LEGALIZATION PROCESS OF THE OCCUPIED ILLEGAL ALIENS AND THE AGREEMENTS WITH THEIR ALBANIAN COUNTERPART REGARDING THE DEPORTATION OF LEGALLY CONVICTED ALBANIAN CITIZENS. THE EXAMINATION OF THESE INTEGRATION FACTORS MAY HELP TO EVALUATE THE BEST PRACTICES TO ACHIEVE THE LESS TRAUMATIC AND MOST SUCCESSFUL COEXISTENCE IN THE EVERCHALLENGING MIGRATION WAVES EUROPE HAS TO DEAL WITH.*

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**KEY WORDS:** IMMIGRATION, CHALLENGES, INTEGRATION, AGREEMENTS

Historically, Italians and Albanians have been part of a shared socio-cultural and economic space. The relevance of such common space has been very discontinuous through centuries. As Della Rocca used to observe: “Albanians are a sort of recurring geopolitical obsession, a presence that periodically intrudes into the Italian imaginary, and then disappears in a lethargy of unpredictable duration.”<sup>2</sup> The last occasion the two Mediterranean people faced each other, begun with the end of the Cold War. After the political and economic collapse of

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<sup>2</sup> Morozzo della Rocca, R., “Roma e Tirana, le convergenze parallele”, in *Limes* 2, 2001

the communist regime, the Albanian people have experienced three mass migration waves to Italy. First, there was the great exodus during 1991, as a consequence of political confrontation and extreme economic deprivation in Albania. Just during March 1991, 25.700 Albanians crossed the Otranto Canal in boats and rafts of every type; During August 1991, 20.000 arrived on the Italian coasts on dramatically overloaded ships. The second mass migration happened in 1997, after the financial pyramids crisis and the civil confrontations. The last wave of massive migration flows from Albania to Italy came as a consequence of the 1999 Kosovo War.

Each of these waves has been characterized by extremely difficult starting conditions, as well as by the complete shock and unpreparedness on the Italian authorities and population. Subsequently, the integration process has passed through failures and challenges, but it is today considered a mostly successful integration story<sup>3</sup>. Which are the factors that contributed to a relatively rapid integration after such a dramatic start?

Analyzing the main demographic characteristics of Albanian citizens legally residing in Italy as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, we record:

- a substantial balance between genders: women represent 48.6% and men 51.4%, in line with the number of legally resident non-EU citizens, among which the female gender represents 48.5 %;
- an average age slightly lower than that recorded on the total of non-EU citizens (32 years, compared to the 33 years recorded for the overall non-EU population)<sup>4</sup>.

The Albanian community has showed a great attachment to Italy, detectable by indicators such as the strong motivation to reunite families, to raise children in Italy, to invest for their future in the receiving country. As for the reasons of permit requests, 52% of Albanians hold a residence permit for work, while family reunifications amount to 42.5%. The rapid turnaround compared to the past appears evident if we consider that only in 2000 the holders of a residence permit for family reunification were just 30%. The incidence of married people is significantly higher than the average of the total number of immigrants (8 percentage points more). Also this indicator, together with the others already analyzed, suggests an advanced "familiarization" process<sup>5</sup>.

Italy found itself unprepared, given its being a very recent host country to immigrants. The changing labor market and the end of the Iron Curtain had prompted the passage of a broader law in 1990 (Law 39/1990, known as the 'Martelli law'), which provided for annual planning of migratory flows, norms regarding the rights and obligations of foreigners in Italy, their stay and work conditions and other matters regarding family reunion, and social integration. Asylum – which had not yet seriously affected Italy – was also addressed<sup>6</sup>. At the time, Albania was still a closed country. Immigration became a significant issue in the 90's –

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<sup>3</sup> Pittau F., Ricci A., Urso G., "Gli Albanesi in Italia: un caso di best practice di integrazione e sviluppo", in *REMHU: migrazioni e desenvolvimento*, v. 17 n. 33, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Ministero del Lavoro e delle politiche sociali, *La comunità Albanese in Italia. Rapporto annuale sulla presenza degli immigrati*, 2017, 9

<sup>5</sup> Mai, N. *Albanian Migration to Italy. Toward differential Circularisation?* Metoikos Project, RSCAS Publications, 2010, 22

<sup>6</sup> Legge 28 Febbraio 1990. "Conversione in legge, con modificazioni del DL 30.12.1989 n.416 recante norme urgenti in materia di asilo politico, di ingresso e soggiorno dei cittadini extracomunitari e di regolarizzazione dei cittadini extracomunitari ed apolidi presenti nel territorio dello Stato. Disposizioni in materia d'asilo", *Gazzetta Ufficiale del 28 Febbraio 1990, n.49*

in no small part because of flows from Albania – leading to Law 40/1998<sup>7</sup> (the so-called Turco-Napolitano law or Testo Unico), issued by the centre-left government. This law, passed during a period when Albania was the spotlight country for immigration to Italy, created a three-pillar immigration policy, subsequently upheld by the centre-right coalition, based on: a) fighting illegal migration - bilateral agreements and criminal penalties b) regulating legal migration - a quota system (an annual ceiling); c) integrating resident foreigners - a national immigration fund. The government was required to publish three-year planning documents for immigration. Entry to Italy was allowed within the national quotas and with either a job offer (invitation from an employer), or ‘sponsored job-seekers’ (guaranteed by a legal resident). In 2002, the 1998 immigration law was revised. Law 189/2002 (known as the Bossi-Fini Law) imposed further restrictions on entry and tightened the conditions for stay; integration measures were left intact. The management of foreign labour flows in Italy centers on the quota system, which establishes a ceiling for annual entries for labour purposes.

Tab.1 Entrance quotas for the Albanian workforce<sup>8</sup>

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Quotas	3000	3000	6000	6000	3000	1000	3000	3000	4500	4500

The improvement in the control of irregular migration is due to Albanian policies as well: with the institutional strengthening, it has ensured more effective support for the Italian migration policy, so effectively that it is often taken as an example for the application of readmission agreements (dating back to 1997) and the fight against labor traffickers.

Research on the Albanian population in Italy<sup>9</sup> shows how strong the weight of the negative image that the Albanian migrant has been attributed by the media. From 1991 until mid 2000s, the aversion to the foreigner was stereotyped and stigmatized in order to make the entire immigration a reality to be monitored, with the consequence of criminalizing, or at least, framing entire communities negatively, and making it more difficult for them to successfully integrate.

Faced with the dramatic mass immigration images, Italians reacted in different ways. For the sociologist Rando Devole, "the Italians were caught unprepared, because the majority of them had not set themselves the problems connected with the presence of (different) immigrants in their society; few actually met them, if not occasionally"<sup>10</sup>.

The Italians would follow the events on television; they discovered the phenomenon through the newspapers. The media have the faculty to present us facts, people, events, of which we often have not had a direct experience in our life, and it is normal that if they continue to show something that we do not know by always associating it with negative facts, we will automatically tend to have a negative conception of that. Their informative and communicative action provides a significant contribution to the construction of contemporary reality. For

<sup>7</sup> Legge 6 marzo 1998, "Disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero.", *Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 59 del 12 marzo 1998 - Supplemento Ordinario n. 40*

<sup>8</sup> Data elaborated from "Dossier Statistico Immigrazione Caritas/Migrantes – Progetto Interreg – Cards Aquifalc.

<sup>9</sup> Pittau, Franco; Reggio, Marco, *Il caso Albania: immigrazione a due tempi*, p. 227-239; Palomba, Rossella; Righi, Alessandra. *Quel giorno che gli albanesi invasero l'Italia: gli atteggiamenti dell'opinione pubblica e della stampa italiana sulla questione delle migrazioni dall'Albania*; Devole, Rando. *Albania: fenomeni sociali e rappresentazioni*; Jamieson, Alison; Silj, Alessandro. *Migration and criminality: the case of Albanians in Italy*; DAL LAGO, Alessandro. *Non-persone: l'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*; Silj, Alessandro. *Albanese = criminale. Analisi critica di uno stereotipo*, p. 247-261; King, Russell; Mai, Nicola. *Of myths and mirrors: interpretations of Albanian migration to Italy*, p. 161-199

<sup>10</sup> Devole R., *Albania: fenomeni sociali e rappresentazioni*, 1996, 44

example, when an Italian reads in the newspaper about a crime committed by an Albanian, and he has Albanian friends, he will never argue that the Albanians are all delinquents. However, as long as the knowledge of the "different" occurs only through the mass media, the risk is to generalize, to cultivate completely absurd stereotypes. Without a second thought, the media has increased the alarmist tone by warning the Italian public opinion about other Albanian exoduses and thus starting a stigma campaign. Immigration was described as a very strong and violent threatening phenomenon. Alarmist titles such as the “La Repubblica”: “An Albanian invasion, the desperates of the sea come back”<sup>11</sup>, contributed to create the idea of criminal and violent Albanians. A sort of media myth has been created whereby the Albanian was considered a risk to public order, a risk to public health (because they brought diseases) and a risk for public morality (the exploitation of prostitution). It took only a few months and the Italian media managed to create the stereotype of violent and criminal Albanian in the collective imagination.



Pic.1 The first page of the national newspaper “Corriere della Sera”, March 8<sup>th</sup> 1991, “10.000 refugees assault”. The main commentary reads “Oh, Mother: Albanians are coming!” with a related prayer against the “invasion”.

Until mid 2000s, both immigrants and local populations would experience a very strange coexistence, described by King and May as the “Albanian assimilation paradox”: The Albanian post communist xenophilia and anticipatory assimilation crush into widespread albanophobia among Italians<sup>12</sup>. Albanian immigrants are representative of the quite peculiar Albanian identity regarding openness, laicism and a desire to blend with the host society. According to an UNDP survey, more than 90 percent of Albanians consider religious tolerance to be a fundamental value, and confirm that the state does not have to interfere with the religious belief of the individual<sup>13</sup>, so they tend to escape the “Muslim immigrant” stereotype and the self-ghettoization tendency.

The mid 2000s were characterized by the coincidence of a couple of factors impacting the Albanian immigrants’ path of integration. First of all, there was an Albanian institutional further strengthening, initiated in early 2000s and culminated with the NATO accession and the visa free regime with the EU. Secondly, after the 2001, there was the advent of new immigrant groups in Italy, as well as a rise in Islamophobia. The Albanian people already present in Italian territory, inadvertently found themselves among the beneficiaries of the new stigmatization processes aimed at new immigrant communities. All of a sudden, the Albanian stereotypes and the focus on Albanian criminality disappeared altogether from the newspapers and screens and they begun being depicted under a new light.

<sup>11</sup> Devole, 56

<sup>12</sup> King R. & Mai N., Italophilia meets Albanophobia: paradoxes of asymmetric assimilation and identity processes among Albanian immigrants in *Italy*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 32:1, 2009, 117-138

<sup>13</sup> Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *UNDP, Religious Tolerance in Albania*, 2018, 74

Although there were (and still are) aspects that caused concern, such as the involvement of Albanians in organized crime and illegal trafficking, in the workplace Albanian people enjoyed an excellent reputation. They were considered available, reliable, respectful of the authority and above all willing to accept very strenuous jobs, with ability and firmness, respectful of timetables<sup>14</sup>. Today we can speak of a positive metamorphosis in the perception of Albanian immigrants by Italian society, to which many factors have contributed and, firstly, the capacity of a community to be accepted and the ability of its prominent members to represent it. The emergency, however, is far from over and the aversion to the foreigner, risks making the entire immigration a reality to be monitored with the risk of criminalizing, or at least, to frame entire communities negatively, and making it more difficult to successfully integrate<sup>15</sup>.

The evolving demographic structure of Albanian immigrants in Italy is another indicator of integration and stabilization. Analyzing the main demographic characteristics of Albanian citizens legally residing in Italy on 1 January 2017, there is:

- a substantial balance between genders: women represent 48.6% and men the remaining 51.4%, given in line with the number of legally resident non-EU citizens, among which the female gender represents 48.5%;
- an average age slightly lower than that recorded on the total of non-EU citizens (32 years, compared to the 33 years recorded for the non-EU population as a whole)<sup>16</sup>.

Out of 1,480 marriages celebrated in 2015 in which at least one spouse is of Albanian nationality, a little less than half consists in an Italian husband and an Albanian wife (49.3%), about 30% is related to an Albanian citizen who marries an Italian woman, while a fifth involves both foreign spouses. The incidence of the community is greater between the marriage involving a non-EU husband and an Italian bride: in 14.7% of the cases the groom was Albanian. The distribution by type of couple of the 14,973 marriages involving at least one spouse of non-EU nationality during 2015 was slightly different: the majority of unions still provides for Italian husbands and foreign wives, but with an incidence higher than that recorded in the community in examination (59.5%); one fifth of the wedding regards both foreign spouses, while a similar quota is related to mixed couples in which non-Italian citizenship is the groom<sup>17</sup>. All these gender and age trends show a rapid process of normalization, as the immigration characteristics are rapidly becoming more similar to those of the local population.

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<sup>14</sup> King, R. "Albania as a laboratory for the study of migration and development", p. 133-135

<sup>15</sup> Mai, N. *Albanian Migration to Italy. Toward differential Circularisation?* Metoikos Project, RSCAS Publications, 2010, 14

<sup>16</sup> Ministero del Lavoro e delle politiche sociali, *La comunità Albanese in Italia. Rapporto annuale sulla presenza degli immigrati*, 2017, 21

<sup>17</sup> Bonifazzi c, Sabatino D., "Albanian migration to Italy: what official data and survey results can reveal?" in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29(6), 967-995

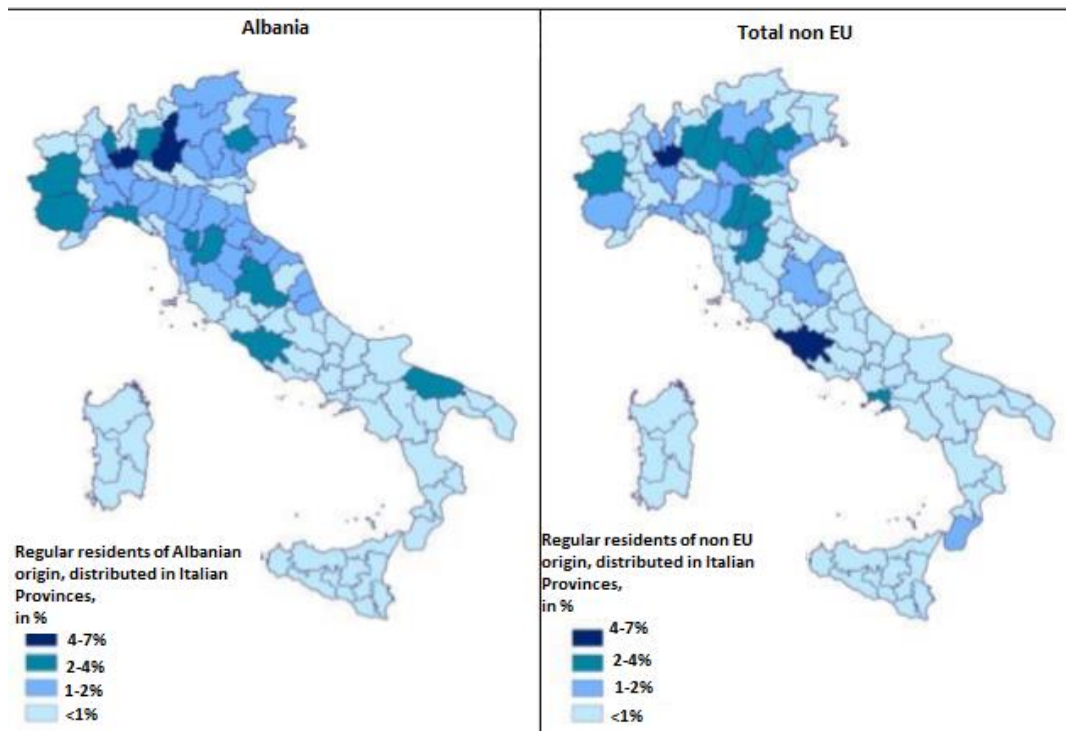


Fig.2 Non-EU citizens regularly present by settlement area and geographical area of origin (% distribution by province). Data as of 1 January 2017, ISTAT data

Research on the Albanian population in Italy shows how strong the weight of the negative image that the Albanian migrant has been attributed by the media. In fact, between the work placement and the social integration of the Albanians there was a diaphragm constituted by the ethnic prejudice against this great community. Although there are still aspects that still cause concern (such as the placement of Albanians in first place for incidence of complaints with 17.1% and their involvement in organized crime and illegal trafficking), in the workplace the Albanian enjoys an excellent reputation: available, reliable, respectful of the authority and above all willing to accept very strenuous jobs, with ability and firmness, respectful of timetables<sup>18</sup>. To a symbolic exclusion in public places, the Albanians seem to have reacted by proposing integration played on the invisibility of their belonging<sup>19</sup>, as a strategy to counter mediation prejudice and criminalization. Today we can therefore speak of a positive metamorphosis in the perception of Albanian immigrants by Italian society, to which many factors have contributed and, first of all, the capacity of a community to be accepted and the ability of its elites to represent it. When the fear of ending up besieged by the newcomers came to an end, the Italians showed themselves to be calmer in the face of the Albanians who, on the whole, managed to show that they knew how to live with the Italians. The emergency, however, is far from over and the aversion to the foreigner, after addressing others (the Romanians, Moroccans, the Roma), risks making the entire immigration a reality to be monitored with the risk of criminalizing, or at least, to frame entire communities negatively, diverting their strength from integration and making it more difficult. The role of the decrease

<sup>18</sup> King, R.; Mai, N. "Of myths and mirrors: interpretations of Albanian migration to Italy", 161-199

<sup>19</sup> Romania, V. *Farsi passare per italiani. Strategie di mimetismo sociale*; King Russell, Mai Nicola. "Italophilia meets Albanophobia: paradoxes of asymmetric assimilation and identity processes among Albanian immigrants in Italy", 117-138

in judicial charges against Albanians can certainly be traced to contributing to the relaxation of the climate. The Albanian migratory pressure during the 1990s meant that Albania had a very high impact on repatriations at the border: 22% on 45,157 rejections in 1998 and over 30% on rejections in the following two years ( 48,437 in 1999 and 42,221 in 2000), making it the first country for migratory pressure in front of Morocco, Romania and Yugoslavia. In 2000, Albania was also the first country in the ranking of foreigners reported, with a high incidence of irregular immigrants, on average 72.2% of the cases<sup>20</sup>. In the three-year period 2000-2001 the complaints presented against Albanian citizens remained at the level of 11-12% and the regular presence, while considerably increasing, did not have a corresponding impact on the penal charges: this trend is an indicator of the evolution that in the meantime he was getting to know the Albanian community, which began with the mass landings and the adventure of the rubber dinghies and continued with a tenacious daily insertion, in the world of work and in other social areas. The overall complaints concerning the Albanians in the seven years included in the period 2000-2006, although the regular reference population has considerably increased, have been numerically lower than those presented during the entire 1990s.

Italy and Albanian are perfect candidates for co-development oriented migration policies. After all, there is a large and stable Albanian community in Italy sending hundreds of millions in remittances annually; there are also extensive commercial and cultural ties, significant development spending, and thousands of Albanian students in Italy. Anyway, Italian migration policy is still developed according to interests and considerations that have nothing to do with impact on the sending country, or on the human resources involved in migration. Policy makers involved in migration policy – from setting national legislation to establishing procedures – are more concerned with controlling short-term legal labor migration than with development impact.

The improvement in the control of irregularity is also due to Albania itself: as it has been strengthened in its structures, it has ensured more effective support for the Italian migration policy, so much so that it is often taken as an example for the application of readmission agreements (dating back to 1997) and the fight against labor traffickers. The trafficking of smugglers has long since diminished, to tell the truth also because in the meantime, having already established a significant number of Albanians in Italy, the pressure has eased.

Albania is one of the European countries that have experienced the highest rate of emigration during the last 20 years, particularly towards Italy. Migration is the most powerful engine of social, economic and cultural change both in the countries of origin and in those of destination; a fundamental "bridge" between the two coasts of the Adriatic. The facilitation of regular flows, together with the success of bilateral cooperation projects, have helped to control a migratory potential that is by no means exhausted, although it remains to be done with regard, on the one hand, to the future scenarios of social and economic integration of migrants Albanians, and on the other of political stability and the socio-economic development of the country. The Albanian case, in fact, with all its peculiarities, confirms the beneficial effect of migration on the development of the country. it should be emphasized that the beneficial impact of migration is not only measured in terms of micro and macro economic growth, but also on investment in human capital, through the acquisition of know-how abroad or through better education for children, these profitable elements for the purposes of socio-cultural development which, although in the medium-long term, could change the appearance of the country.

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<sup>20</sup> Pittau F., Ricci A., Urso G., "Gli Albanesi in Italia: un caso di best practice di integrazione e sviluppo", in *REMHU: migracoes e desenvolvimento*, v. 17 n. 33, 2009, 163

Migration is therefore a tool for developing the country in transition, especially if it is accompanied by targeted policies both in the destination country and, above all, in the country of origin, since "development ultimately depends on the sound domestic economic policies". Immigration, integration and development will continue to be discussed for many years, as it is certain that much remains to be done.



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