

Migrants as Agents of Development: Albanian Return Migrants and Micro-enterprise

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Abstract

The West assumes that most East European immigrants intend to settle, but many aim to return to their home country and invest what they have earned. Many Albanian emigrants have already done so. They save a high proportion of their earnings and use their savings to establish micro- and small businesses. In the 1990s repatriated savings and informal credit (some from migrants) each provided more investment in small businesses than banks. Migrants return with new skills and ideas, and contacts with future suppliers. Typically, they establish one- or two person businesses that employ family or other relatives, and draw on resources in their kin network. Returned migrants deliver cost-effective development and protect themselves from corruption better than aid agencies or foreign investors. Their potential should be utilised by integrating policies on migration and development, and channelling foreign aid through returning migrants.

There are fundamental differences between Eastern and Western Europe in perceptions of economic, or work, migration. Immigration policy in the latter rests primarily on the misconception that migrants seek to leave their home countries and move to richer countries *to settle*, in order to 'make a better life'. As a result, increasingly severe restrictions have been placed on the movement of East Europeans, which has led to much migration taking place illegally in conditions of great hardship, and to the employment of these illegal migrants in the black economy in the West. Yet what many East Europeans seek to do is quite different. They are pursuing a form of migration that in the Balkans is a well-established tradition. Their aim, in spite of the prejudices and obstacles they face, is to go abroad for a few years to work to save money, which they can invest in their home countries.

Perhaps nowhere in Europe is this strategy more evident than in Albania,¹ which, in proportion to its population, has the highest number of emigrants. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, for many Albanians who lost their jobs with the collapse of communism, and the cohorts that have entered the labour market since, emigration is the only means of finding work. Many wish to return after a few years, and, with their savings, create livelihoods for themselves. Some have already done so. This study looks at the development of micro-enterprise by Albanian work migrants who have returned, predominantly to rural areas. The creation of larger enterprises, which are most often found in towns is not included, and needs another study. The data were obtained while conducting ethnographic research in villages in southern Albania between 1996 and 2004. They were obtained from informal conversations, in Albanian, and from observations of small enterprises as they developed. I asked most male informants if they had worked abroad. Some of them, or members of their families (usually their wives), told me about their migration history. I have also had conversations in Greece, about both Albanians and former Greek migrants, and with returned migrants elsewhere in southern Europe. The Albanian experience is by no means unique.

The new work migration

As soon as the Albanian borders were opened it might be said there was implicit official approval for migration in search of work. The then first secretary of the Albanian Party of Labour, Ramiz Alia, in a speech at the end of 1990, said 'Now every citizen has a passport, nobody raises objections to seeking work outside the country' (*Zëri i Popullit*, 27 December 1990, cited in translation in *ABSEES*, 1991: 2). The Albanian economy was in such a poor state by then that many were eager to go. They were aware that Greeks, Italians, Kosovars and others from the former Yugoslavia had worked as *Gastarbeiter* in Northern Europe from the 1960s onwards, and had returned home better off. Many Albanians sought to do the same. They saw the capitalist West not just as the world of luxury and glitter they saw on television, but as a place where large factories employed many workers. They were convinced that employers would hire them because they were willing to work hard. They thought Westerners were only unemployed because they did not want to work. The latest wave of work migration is also seen as a continuation of the long tradition of periodic and seasonal work migration in the Ottoman Empire, in which many Albanians, and others, participated, and later, work migration to America, that lasted until the Second World War. This migration was known as '*kurbet*', and the same term is still used for work migration.

Survey evidence in Albania has consistently shown that a majority of migrants intend to go abroad

in order to work for a few years, or even just a few months. Far fewer expect to leave permanently (International Organization for Migration, 1995, cit. Sanfey and Papapanagos, 1998: 4; DeSoto, et al., 2002: 43; Uruçi and Gedeshi, 2003: 29). A survey of Albanians in Greece and Italy also found that more intended to return than did not, though the difference was smaller.² Many, while they are working abroad, return to Albania intermittently, then, after a period of residence, migrate again (Kule et al., 2002: 233; DeSoto et al., 2002: xiii). Movement, in both directions is constant, so it cannot be quantified with any accuracy. Estimates of the number of Albanians living in neighbouring countries, and of Albanian citizens absent on particular dates, put their number at as many as half a million at any one time (Pulaj, 2002), but there are no reliable data on either returns or back and forth movement.

A considerable number of migrants who have worked abroad at some time since 1990 have already returned and resumed residence in Albania. Field evidence, suggests that in southern Albania as many as a quarter of the men of working age are returned migrants. The available survey evidence is limited, but it indicates that this is not an overestimate. Of the 40% of a regionally representative sample of wage-earners between the ages of 16 and 64 in 1999 for whom data were complete, about a third had spent substantial time working outside Albania (De-Coulon and Piracha, 2002: 9). At least 10% of the men in the 20-39 age group enumerated in the 2001 population census had been resident outside Albania on that date the previous year (Instituti i Statistikës, 2004: 91). Some men have worked abroad almost continuously for years on end, but many tend to give up after a few years, and some had spent only a few weeks outside Albania, usually in the early 1990s. Most men went alone, rather fewer were accompanied by their wives, fewer still by their families.

Most of the former emigrants I spoke to had been in Greece, some in Italy, and a few in other countries, including the UK. Returnees from Italy were slightly under-represented, but otherwise this roughly corresponds to the chronology of Albanian emigration. The countries which received the first waves of emigrants are those from which most have so far returned. Few of these have given up migrating because they were forcibly expelled from other countries. Such migrants often emigrate again at the earliest opportunity.³ In what follows returnees are defined as those who have returned of their own accord, and are unlikely to migrate again unless they need more money to sustain their projects in Albania.

While a decision to migrate may be taken by individuals, especially in the case of unmarried young men, it is often made in consultation with family, and becomes part of a family strategy. At any one time, one or more family members, not always the same ones, may be working abroad but they remain part of the family in Albania (Tusha, 2000: 43; Saltmarshe, 2001: 77; UNDP, 2003: 51). There are many Albanians abroad, young men in particular, who fall into this category. That they leave in the largest numbers is not surprising; the unemployment rate for the 16 to 34 age group (including women) is 60% (Economic Commission for Europe, 2002: 5). According to estimates based on the 1998 census of agriculture, almost half of the young men under 35 who were not the head of a household had done less than half a year's work on the family holding in the preceding year because they were working abroad (Instituti i Statistikës, 2000: 85). Similarly, preliminary results of the 2001 population census show that half of all young men between the ages of 25 and 35 were abroad at the time of the census (Pulaj, 2002).

Most emigrants maintain strong links with Albanian society. They make frequent, and expensive, telephone calls to their families (Nicholson, 2002b: 440). Young men marry women in Albania and,

though some new wives accompany their husband abroad, many move to the house of their husband's parents, as is the custom, and begin to make their joint home there. Many migrants return every few months and bring money to their families in person (Misja, 1998: 22; Gedeshi, 2001: 4-5). Some take leave from their jobs to return home at peak seasons to help with heavy work, such as the wheat harvest. Young men return to do their military service. At holiday times, especially at New Year and in August, large numbers visit their families in Albania.⁴ Work migrants maintain, or extend, their houses in Albania, or build new ones (Nicholson, 2001: 39), even when whole families are abroad. Land is left in the care of relatives, rented out, or left fallow. Only rarely do emigrants sell their land.

Earning and saving

According to survey evidence in the mid-1990s, over half of migrants' earnings were sent back to Albania, and of that, just over half was used for consumption (Kule, et al., 2002: 235). Many migrants contribute to the maintenance of their families in Albania, and are often the major source of the cash income that keeps them out of poverty (DeSoto et al., 2002: 90, 99). They also give valuable assistance in kind by allowing relatives and neighbours, to use resources they leave behind, such as a house, land, vehicles or household equipment. Some of these are used for small-scale income generating activities, and though the effect may be small, they raise the standard of living of individual families, and in aggregate contribute to the overall benefits of migration.

The remainder of the money sent to Albania is saved or invested. According to some estimates work migrants save up to half of often very low earnings (Gedeshi, 2001: 14). Many are target savers (Puri and Ritzema, 1999: 18), who intend to invest their savings in specific projects in Albania. Some decide before they leave precisely how they are going to use the money, and may have several aims to be achieved in succession. The migrants are aware that costs are much lower in Albania than in neighbouring countries, so their savings increase in value when they are repatriated. The costs of migrating are an investment of a small sum so that the migrant can earn enough to make bigger investments possible (Nicholson, 2002a: 4). Work migration is economic risk-taking, if of an unconventional kind.

Comparison of survey evidence of intentions and of actual patterns of investment, as well as increasing evidence of investments and enterprise financed by repatriated savings in Albania, suggests that many fulfil their aims. A survey of Albanian emigrants in Italy in the early-1990s, found that a third of those who saved⁵ intended to use their savings to build a house (Misja, 1998: 91). A further 9% planned to buy a vehicle. While for some this would be their very own 'Benz' (Mercedes), that as well as being a status symbol would give them valued mobility, a great many would buy a commercial vehicle or a car that would have a commercial use (see Nicholson, 2004: 880). Another 8% intended to invest in a hotel, restaurant or café, and 3% in an industrial building or equipment. About 40% intended to put the money in a bank (Misja, 1998: 91). In 1998 a survey of actual behaviour found that almost 40% of the money sent back to Albania by first-time emigrants was being saved or invested (Kule, et al., 2002: 236). The proportion invested in property (7% of the amount saved) was half what would be expected on the basis of Misja's survey, but, allowing for differences in categorisation, the proportions saved (23%) and invested in 'productive activities' (11%, just over a quarter of savings and investment combined) were higher.

These findings refer to migrants making their first trip abroad, are not necessarily representative of

the overall use of savings over a longer period and the eventual use of amounts initially reported as 'saved', by those who went abroad several times. Field observations and comments by returned migrants suggest that spending and investment patterns vary over the course of a migratory career. Some build a new house before making other investments, others establish the basis for a livelihood and only then build or improve a house (Appendix, 2, 4, 8). Savings may also have a succession of uses, one of which is providing informal credit for family or friends (Lawson and Saltmarshe, 2000: 144; Nicholson, 2001: 40). These informal loans provide almost as much capital for small firms as remittances (Kule, et al., 2002: 236) and it is thus likely that some migrants' savings contribute to the development of more than one business.⁶ This is so far little explored in Albania. Differences between predictions and actual behaviour might also indicate that migrants' experience abroad encourages more of them to consider investing in a business in Albania than intended to before they left. This too needs to be investigated.

A greater proportion of investment is undoubtedly put to productive *use* than the amounts spent on self-evidently 'productive' projects. Work premises or a shop are included in some new houses or they are added to an existing house. Domestic items, such as stoves (selling fast food, and in the first guest houses) and kitchen scales and pocket calculators (on market and street stalls) are used in some micro-enterprises. Domestic refrigerators are used for micro-businesses selling cold drinks. Women who produce and sell milk store it overnight in their household refrigerators (Nicholson, 2003: 150). These consumer goods were among the earliest remittances in kind. Other instances of 'non-productive' investments that have enabled the productive use of previously non-productive assets include building or buying a new house or flat to allow a ground floor flat to be converted into a business.

The small enterprises of returned migrants

Micro-enterprises, whether started by migrants or non-migrants, have predominated in Albania since private businesses have been permitted. Single-person businesses make up about 80% of the total and provide almost a quarter of employment (Muent, Pissarides and Sanfey, 2000: 3). In the 18% of businesses with no more than 10 employees, the average number employed is three (*ibid.*). Returned migrants typically invest their savings in small or micro-enterprises, one-person or small family businesses. They provide start-up finance for a new enterprise or finance or equipment to improve the productivity and efficiency of moneymaking activities they or their families already engage in (Nicholson, 2001: 39; Appendix, 6). Many of those who work in these businesses are family or kin, or very close friends. People are usually reluctant to trust non-kin with money, and believe they will not work conscientiously. It is possible to start a micro-enterprise with a small amount of capital, relatively modest personal resources, such as skills or contacts (such as a cousin who has started another business, has a vehicle, or possesses complementary skills) and hard work, in other words the resources work migrants can mobilise.

Migrants' earnings are the source of most investment in agriculture, the largest economic sector (Kodderitzsch, 1999: 6), where they have financed the purchase of livestock, tractors and other machinery. In addition to agricultural work, both on their own holdings and for others for payment, some owners of tractors who also have trailers make part of their living from haulage (Appendix, 1). People with marketable skills go abroad to work to get sufficient resources to turn their skills into a

means of making a living (Appendix, 4). Savings from migration may provide the initial finance to start a business on a small scale, or they may be just an element in a bigger financial package put together from several sources (Nicholson, 2001: 40). In rural areas old state farm or co-operative buildings have provided ready-made and inexpensive, if hardly ideal, premises which have enabled returned migrants and others to start small businesses (Nicholson, forthcoming; Appendix, 3). Those who want to undertake larger projects, or who have done badly paid work abroad, join forces with one or more others, usually relatives (Appendix, 2). By working long hours, using family labour and not employing others, as much as possible of the income is conserved and reinvested so that the business grows. Though it may not be conscious or pre-planned, this strategy keeps the amount of time that needs to be spent working abroad to a minimum (Nicholson, 2004: 881).

New skills and business contacts

When they go abroad, migrants tend to be deskilled because, whatever their experience or qualifications, many do jobs which do not use them. Survey from Greece in the 1990s showed that 31% of illegal immigrants in unskilled jobs were educated beyond primary level (Lianos, et al., 1997: 473). However, taken as a whole, those who return to Albania are more skilled than when they left. Many have acquired useful skills, or experience (Kule, et al., 2002: 234). In the early years it was common for returned migrants to replicate the enterprise they had worked in (Appendix, 5). This was how many fast food outlets (including the only one in my material entirely owned and run by a woman returned migrant), selling souvlaki and pizza, originated (Nicholson, 2001: 40). The migrants who worked in patisseries in Greece, then returned and set up their own businesses in Albania are well known cases, because they have featured in the Greek media. Many of those who already had skills, including many in the building trade and agriculture, have learnt new techniques. Some of those who have learnt how to grow vegetables under plastic, have begun to do it on their own land, and more take it up each year.⁷ They have also introduced new equipment. *Kurbet* has always been a source of modernisation and new ideas (see Elezi, 2002: 71; Appendix, 3). Its importance in the development of a society that was as closed as Albania in the recent past cannot be overestimated.

Besides accumulating savings and learning new skills, some returned migrants have also used their stays abroad to make contacts with potential suppliers, and make links to information sources, so that they could start, and gradually expand, small manufacturing businesses of their own (Nicholson, 2002a: 5; Appendix, 7). A carpenter (Appendix, 3) gets some of his materials from Greece, where he bought his machines and got ideas for his business. Workshops producing aluminium doors, windows and blinds have been set up by men who had done that kind of work in Greece, which is also the source of their raw materials, and there are some small paper processing factories.

Savings from migration as a factor in investment

In Albania it is widely thought that those who have worked abroad have a better chance of starting or expanding a business than those who have not, and this is borne out by field observations (Kule, et al., 2002: 237-238; c.f. Lawson and Saltmarsh, 2000: 144). In comparable cases it is likely to take the former less time to accumulate sufficient capital to make investments than it would if they worked in

Albania (Appendix, 6). It is not known what proportion of the migrants who return to Albania start some sort of economic activity. Studies in countries with a longer history of migration found in those cases that it was anything between 10% and 50% (Dustmann and Kirchkamp, 2002: 354, 355n; McCormick and Wahba, 2001: 171). According to a recent survey in Albania, 10% of the self-employed and the managers in the sample used savings accumulated abroad to set up a business (De-Coulon and Piracha, 2002: 16), and they were more likely to be self-employed than those who had not migrated (*ibid.*: 11). The latest phase of work migration from Albania is still relatively recent; so the true extent of investment by returned migrants may not become clear until more migrants have had time to accumulate savings.

Hitherto, the literature on emigrants' contributions to the economies of their home countries has predominantly considered remittances, precisely defined, that is money sent by migrants resident abroad, implicitly those who will not return, in fulfilment of obligations to those who did not leave, or as a form of charity. The same term is also used rather imprecisely, usually in the context of the macro-economy, to refer to the money repatriated by migrants as a source of foreign currency, but it is amalgamated with remittances narrowly defined, and thus the specific contribution of return migrants to development is made invisible. If the contributions made by returnees and prospective returnees, were distinguished from simple remittances, the nature of the very specific and important role in the development of their countries of origin played by the repatriated savings of returned migrants would become clear. Then its potential could be promoted to still further advantage.

What cannot be disputed is that the economic contribution made by migrants' savings is already considerable. By the end of the 1990s it was found that they accounted for 17% of investment in Albanian firms, not including the smallest micro-enterprises, which was almost three times as much as the amount obtained from financial institutions (Kule, et al., 2002: 236). This was consistent with earlier surveys (*ibid.*). During the 1990s credit ceilings in Albanian banks were set at levels insufficient to meet the demands in the private sector (Jarvis, 2000: 3), and small entrepreneurs complained it was difficult to obtain finance. Besides, many people are less reluctant to take risks with savings than to get into debt, and many are unwilling to pay what they consider to be high rates of interest. Survey evidence suggests that 60% of respondents avoid borrowing for this reason (Muent, Pissarides and Sanfey, 2000: 14). A gradual increase in credit sources, including the recent appearance of agencies offering micro-credit and an expansion of bank lending, may change this, but in the short term it seems likely they will supplement, rather than replace, migration as a means of obtaining capital.

Some outsiders, notably in migrants' host countries, tend to be sceptical of the likelihood of success of businesses started by migrants who return to poor countries (e.g. NIDI, 2001: 7), though without comparing them with small businesses elsewhere; in the West too they have quite high failure rates. In Albania some manage to make a reasonable living, and even build their business into something bigger. Others give up after a time, but observations over several years suggest that a remarkable number keep going by sheer tenacity. Many do hard and often tedious work for long hours for modest rewards (Nicholson, 2001: 41), but regard it as preferable to the alternatives available to them. It is better than being a migrant, and they get satisfaction from working for themselves and not for others (Nicholson, 2002a: 5), a sentiment that is often expressed in Albania. Nor is it necessarily synonymous with failure if a business becomes inactive. Some of those who started small enterprises have moved on to other ways of making a living that without their business experience might have been out of their

reach. A few have used a small business venture as a means of consolidating their capital for another use, including bigger businesses.

Migration and development

Albanians often refer to Greece (with not a little irony) as a country that benefited from emigration, and it was indeed a factor in raising levels of development (Glytsos, 1990, cit. McCormick and Wahba, 2000: 530). The resources migrants inject into a developing economy are greater than those it is ever likely to receive from aid (c.f. Horst and van Hear, 2002: 34). The combined value of remittances and repatriated savings to the Albanian economy in 2001 was estimated to be US\$542.6 million, or 23.4% of GDP (IMF, 2003: 12). Between 1994 and 1999 it was estimated on the basis of IMF and World Bank data, that of all the world's developing economies, Albania had the sixth highest ratio of remittances to GDP, and the fourteenth highest amount per head (\$662) (Gammeltoft, 2002: 10).

Return migrants invest their own money in projects whose outcomes affect them personally, so they have a direct stake in what they are doing. If they fail, they suffer the consequences, and they are therefore highly motivated not to. They are prepared to start businesses and create jobs in places bigger investors would not consider. The Albanian economy is better able to absorb such small investment at present than, say, foreign direct investment (Hana & Telo, 2004: 27). Return migrants do not have overheads. In other respects too they are less costly than conventional development aid; there are no problems of aid dependency and phasing out at the end of projects. Small family businesses are able to protect themselves against corruption more effectively than foreign investors and big international organisations (Nicholson, 2002c). In Albania that is an important consideration. They are also resilient in the face of uncertainty and instability. Some observers assumed that much economic activity ceased during the armed rebellion of 1997, following the collapse of the pyramid savings schemes (e.g. Kodderitzsch, 1999: 1), but many micro-enterprises continued to function in this period (Nicholson, 1999a: 546; Lawson and Saltmarshe, 2001: 144).

The resilience of micro-enterprises may help to explain why recovery was so rapid (Nicholson, 1999a: 562-565), and those events had only limited effect on economic variables (Jarvis, 2000: 20, 23). A further explanation is that many of those who had lost savings went abroad again to earn money to make up for the loss. Projects for which the savings were to be used were delayed but not necessarily abandoned. The events of 1997 were an interruption, but less catastrophic than had been feared. Research elsewhere has found that stays abroad must be long enough for the migrant to acquire substantial savings (Dustmann, 1996: 238; McCormick and Wahba, 2001: 175, 176), learn skills and make contacts (Nicholson, 2004: 886) if they are to be effective. This experience demonstrates that in the unpredictable situations in which many returnees operate it is also important that the option of a further period of migration is available should it be needed. If possibilities for work migration are closed down, it can have serious economic consequences (see Chirwa, 1997).⁸ A paint factory (Appendix, 7) has been able to flourish, in part, because its owners are ethnic Vlachs, who, unlike ethnic Albanians, can obtain Greek visas without difficulty. Migrants are more willing to take the chance of returning to Albania and giving up migrating when they know they can do another spell of work abroad if necessary (Nicholson, 2002b: 442; c.f. Saltmarshe, 2001: 135),⁹ though in practice few are likely to do so (Appendix, 2, 4).

Work migrants, migration policy and development

Migrants who return and invest their savings have indeed set out to create a better life for themselves, but they go abroad to earn the means to make that life back in their home country, not to settle. Albanian work migrants have evolved a strategy for doing this that enables others, as well as themselves, to give up the migrant life and to earn a living at home, or not to leave at all. This strategy, if it were integrated into the formulation of migration policies, has the potential to form a basis for policies more effective than the so-called 'managed migration' currently in fashion, because they would address the fundamental problems that give rise to migration in the first place. In Eastern Europe a high proportion of the workforce without jobs, and new cohorts are added to the labour market each year. It is in the interests of the receiving, as well as the sending, countries to work together with all those who can make a contribution to solving this problem, foremost among them the migrants themselves.

In countries of immigration there is recognition of the value of remittances to sending countries, and an optimistic but vague hope that, '(l)onger term benefits *may* (emphasis added) include the new skills and contacts brought back by returning migrants' (DFID, 2000: 43; see Home Office, 2000: 38). The attitude to the less beneficial effects of Western policies is merely one of damage limitation. Immigration (of skilled people, in this case into the UK) should 'not (be) at the expense of the growth and development of poor countries' (Home Office, 2000: 26) and the West 'need(s) to ensure that policies ... do not worsen (their) skill shortages' or have 'a negative effect' (DFID, 2000: 43). Still other negative effects in sending countries, such as of direct economic costs of the loss of expensively educated, skilled migrants are passed over in silence.

A more constructive approach would recognise that the benefits of migration not only can be, and ought to be, more equally distributed. The present beneficiaries would inevitably continue to serve their own interests, but they should not do so at the expense of others. So far benefits to sending countries have come from the efforts of the migrants themselves, who, on their own initiative, have brought back skills, experience and, above all capital, which they have invested in various kinds of enterprise in their home countries. The developmental benefit of this activity is distinct from sending remittances, which are more often used for consumption, and, so far in individual cases, has made further work migration, and therefore remittances, unnecessary. In the longer term it could be one of the factors that could end the need for remittances and work migration, altogether if more use it was made of its potential.¹⁰

The value of migrants as agents of development should be recognised in regulations for visas and work permits. Besides recruiting to meet their own needs, Western nations should also be required to give preference to applicants who intend to return with capital, or skills (or both) to put to productive use in their home countries. They must also allow short-term migrants to stay long enough to accumulate sufficient resources for meaningful investments, and not just for consumption, which current schemes rarely do (see *Workpermit.com* 2004a). Sending countries should require all this as a condition of permitting systematic labour recruitment by other states. A savings element might also be built in to the scheme, for example, a portion of a migrant's earnings might be held back, to be paid out on his or her return to their home country. Current work migrants say they would have no objection to such an arrangement; it is consistent with many migrants' plans and what many already do. It would

usefully demonstrate to a still sceptical Western public opinion that there was an incentive to return and a safeguard against large-scale 'permanent' immigration (Nicholson, 2002a: 7; c.f. Gibney, 2000: 48).

However, Western governments could go further, and channel some of their development aid through returning migrants. This could be a very efficient way to spend their aid budgets. Elsewhere small amounts of finance given directly to returnees have been found to be effective stimulus to development (Hanlon, 2004). The possibility of qualifying for some form of subsidy, perhaps as a loan that could be converted to credit, should be an integral part of any scheme from the outset. Schemes that have been introduced *post hoc*, and perceived as a device to get rid of unwanted foreigners have not been notably successful. The grant or loan might be made conditional on migrants accumulating savings and given as matching finance for specific investments (Nicholson, 2002a: 7), and the amounts given must be realistic in the context of what a migrant was expected to do. There would, of course, also be sanctions to prevent misuse of funds.

Increasing numbers of people in sending countries who want to migrate only want to leave for a short time. Communications that are much better than in the past, and have made it easier for people to migrate, also enable them to visit and keep in touch with their families and homes. Short-term moves, which in the past were an unrealisable ideal for many migrants, have become more feasible than they once were. A strategy that allows for a succession of short-term migrants runs contrary to many current ideas in receiving countries, with their concerns about 'integration' and enticements to the most desired immigrants, such as the offer of citizenship. Yet a continuous turnover of immigrants who fitted the available niches (the numbers resident at any one time could be regulated) would supply labour force needs in host countries just as well, perhaps better, than a smaller number of long-term migrants. Few people, including migrants, want to stay in the less pleasant, badly paid jobs some migrants do for long. It would be compatible with the wishes of many would-be migrants, and would further the development of sending countries instead of obstructing it through the long-term, even permanent, loss of many of their citizens.

I do not wish to suggest that the contribution work migrants can make is a magic solution to the problems of economic development in transition economies. However, it is already a tried and tested form of development, and it has the potential to be a bigger part of the solution than it has been so far. A well-known Western politician has suggested, without making specific proposals, that development aid should be given as a 'hand-up' for people who want to help themselves, not as 'hand-outs'.¹¹ Collaborating with work migrants to develop their home countries, instead of spending ever larger sums of money trying vainly to keep them out, would be a very effective way for Western nations to give a 'hand up' to East European economies.

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Notes

1. In this paper the term 'Albanian' refers solely to citizens of the Republic of Albania.
2. Reported migration intentions need to be treated with caution. One would expect responses given in Albania to overstate return intentions and those given abroad to understate them. Misja's survey was carried out early (no date is given) when many people's intentions were still rather fluid. The findings are complicated by a large proportion of don't knows, and a still larger proportion of respondents, especially young people, who stated they intended to move to a third country (Misja, 1998: 45, 46).
3. By no means all those expelled from Greece in the much-publicised mass expulsions in the early 1990s, were illegal migrants. Some were working legally, but were nonetheless summarily expelled without being allowed to inform their employers or collect wages and belongings.
4. The near closure of the Greek border to Albanians in the summer of 2004, on the pretext of ensuring security for the Olympic Games, has drastically reduced the amount of traffic between the two countries. Albanians living in Greece are afraid to return in case they are refused re-entry into Greece. For well over a year Greek border police have been cancelling the valid visas of Albanians who returned home for visits. Ironically, the only option this leaves for those who would normally be able to cross the border legally is to do so illegally.
5. The proportion of migrants who had savings was not given.
6. Some of these small businesses become, in their turn, sources of informal credit. Almost invariably, small shops have a book, in which they keep account of goods bought on credit, so that, indirectly, remittances contribute further to poverty alleviation. Tradespeople, such as plumbers, also allow customers to pay in instalments.
7. The availability of an immigrant labour force had also facilitated the introduction of these new techniques into Greek horticulture (Kasimis, Papadopoulos and Zacopoulou, 2003: 177).
8. During the summer of 2004 the severe limits put on cross border movement to and from Greece have negatively affected businesses which rely on travellers to and from the border for their trade. Albanians who had jobs in Greece have been stranded in Albania, which has reduced the disposable income of their families, and hence the income of small businesses they patronise.
9. When Spain and Portugal joined the European Union there was a substantial return migration of guest workers from Germany (Constant and Massey, 2000: 6).
10. To make this argument is not to ignore the possibility that work migration itself can become self-perpetuating. The point is to consciously work towards a position where neither individuals nor national economies are reliant on the income from it.
11. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in a speech to the Ghanaian parliament, 8 February 2002, said '... If we are going to make faster progress in development ... we need a fundamental conceptual shift in our approach to aid. Not aid as a hand-out but aid as a hand-up, to help people to help themselves.' <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page3451.asp>

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Appendix: migrants' enterprises

1. The tractor

The migration career of this migrant, and the experience of the family he had left behind at home, is typical of many. When I first met his wife, she was alone with her two young sons. Her husband had been in Greece for ten months. Prior to that he had already spent two years working there, travelling back and forth at intervals. He was in Greece legally, he did not have to go over the mountains, but he worked on one of the islands so he could not come home very often. As he provided most of the family's cash income, his wife would sometimes run short of money. The following year, when he came home on holiday he built a wall in front of his house. By that time he had spent a total of three and a half years working in the building trade in several places in Greece. By the next year the wall had a high metal gate, which could be locked, and there was a small Chinese tractor with a trailer, standing outside. He had bought the tractor with savings from his work in Greece, it had cost 4 'million' (i.e. 400 000) Albanian lekë (3 000). He had not gone back to Greece at the end of his holiday, but had started working as a self-employed tractor driver instead. Later he fitted a cab to his tractor so he could work in bad weather, and built a shelter for it inside his gate. During the summer he had plenty of work, but there was less in winter. By midwinter they began to say he would go back to Greece, because they needed money, but 'not yet'. As time went on they said he would go over the mountains when the winter was over, but he was clearly reluctant to leave his young children. By the summer of the following year he had still not gone. By the next year he was getting more work in winter as well as summer, and they were not even talking about his going to Greece.

2. The filling station

Two brothers whose land abuts a main road used their savings from working in Greece (six years in one case, four years in the other, doing agricultural work, mostly illegally) to build their own filling station. They built a small office with concrete blocks and started selling diesel from their sole pump. They made their own sign, and gradually improved the office by putting in windows and painting it white. Inside they have a small bar, a table, chairs and a refrigerator, so they can serve coffee and cold drinks. They did most of the work themselves, as well as staying open day and night. At first I did not see too many vehicles stop, though they always insisted when asked that there were 'plotë' (lots). After

two years, they had erected a canopy, of which they were very proud, with their father's name painted on it and proclaiming they were open '24 ore'. The tree they planted when they started had grown tall and provided shade where they could relax while they waited for customers. More vehicles were stopping to fill up, and neither of the brothers had been back to Greece. A year later they were getting more customers, and the elder brother was fulfilling his plan of building a new house on his adjacent land so he would be near his work.

3. *The carpenter*

A worker from a state farm set up a carpentry workshop in some old state farm buildings he had bought. Then he worked in Greece for six months to buy good quality machinery, and his small business has maintained him and his family ever since. Like other carpenters, as well as making doors and window frames, he now makes fitted kitchen cupboards, previously unknown in Albania, which have been introduced by returning migrants.

4. *The shop*

A man who had worked as a goldsmith 'përpara' ('before', that is, in the communist period) had a more ambitious project. He had taken over the old shop when it was privatised, but sold it (because he needed a better one). When I first met him he was working as a labourer on a World Bank project to rebuild irrigation canals (effectively a make-work scheme, because five years later they were still not in use, and were again falling into disrepair), but he had already worked in Greece for three years. He would walk over the mountains, so he did not have to spend money he needed to realise his own project on getting an expensive visa (c.f. Nicholson, 2002b: 440), and would stay for three or four months at a time, working in construction. He aimed to set up shop selling and making gold jewellery in his village, because he already had the necessary skills and he knew there was enough business. People already knew him, and frequently came to his house, especially on the day of the weekly market, to have jewellery and watches repaired. He spent another two winters working in Greece, then by the summer of 2000 he had built a small, but very solid and secure, shop in front of his house. Like most people, he did a lot of the work himself. He and his wife, who has also learnt the goldsmith's trade, were getting more work all the time. He said that the shop was not quite finished, he would have to go back to Greece one more time to get the rest of the money. By December he had decided not to go back to Greece that year, and he has not gone since.

5. *The cobbler*

One man who learnt new skills had gone over the mountains to Greece in a group and worked there for seven or eight years. He learnt his trade as a cobbler and earned the money to buy equipment (which was not new) to bring back to Albania, where he rents a small shop and earns his living repairing shoes.

6. *The milk traders*

When agriculture was privatised, men started working as merchants by going by train, usually taking a bicycle, to villages along the railway to buy produce to bring back to town to sell. Among these were men from the town of Vlorë, who went to villages in the Myzeqe plain (40 to 50 km from Vlorë) each day to buy milk from producers, then returned to Vlorë to sell it to their customers (see

Nicholson, 1999b). Two of these men worked for about eight years before they had saved enough money to buy a van. Two other men who did the same work were able to buy a van after just three years, when the brother of one of them returned from working in Greece and joined the partnership.

7. The paint factory

An example of a larger enterprise is a paint factory, which was started in 1994, and now provides work for nine people. The two owners, brothers, worked in a factory in Thessaloniki for two years, learnt the trade and made contacts, which they continued to use to source inputs and get information and new ideas as they expanded the business further.

8. The village hall

In a village in which there were no premises suitable for holding large celebrations, such as weddings, a family whose house is centrally located decided to build a small hall in their yard. Two or three brothers in the family worked in Italy. The brother who had inherited the family house, returned from time to time, brought money and on each visit, helped by the other brothers, did some work on the building. While the brothers were in Italy, a sister, who had already cleared the site, saw to the formalities of getting permission for the building and the future business. No building work was done when they were not there because they did not trust other people to work conscientiously in their absence. Some four years after they started, the hall was completed, it was already used for weddings, village families were glad they no longer had to hold their celebrations in another village. The hall was bringing in an income to the family that had built it, and they had started their next project, building a new house.