

Albania

“I don’t have time to do everything on the land”

Dirina is 38 years old and has three daughters between 7 and 19 years of age. They live in her house in Pojan in southeast Albania, in the largest town within a community (4000 inhabitants) where it is estimated that one-third of the families have a member who has immigrated to Greece. The town is located near the main road to Thessaloniki, which Dirina’s husband Urim used to go to Greece when the border was opened in 1992. Urim returned to Pojan multiple times for the birth of their children. “We did not have help. They did not give us more land for our children, only one plot for two people and one cow. Urim had to go.”

The remittances Urim sent were invested in raising cows on their 8,000 m² of land, a plot they obtained after the distribution of land. Dirina had to stop raising cows for health reasons. Moreover, the revenue from agriculture was not sufficient, so they decided to rent land in 2001. Dirina considered the lack of a market, attractive loans or state assistance and the macho mindset -common amongst men who send remittances- as grave obstacles for agricultural development. “I am a woman and I need to raise my children. I don’t have time to do everything on the land.”

Now the only income which sustains the household comes from migration. In Greece, Urim works in anything that he can find: construction, agriculture or manual labor. He has had a residence permit for two years but it is impossible to apply for family reunification because he does not earn the minimum income required. Urim sends money as he earns it. His work is quite irregular, the summer being the most active season where he is able to send remittances between 500 to 1000 euros. He brings the remittances home himself or he sends them through a friend or brother who he lives with in Greece because bank transfers cost too much.

Urim gives Dirina total freedom to administer the remittances. She spends the money primarily on food, education and health. She considers this additional work and prefers to leave this responsibility to Urim when he is present during some days in the summer or for one month in the winter. Dirina feels that she needs to be more rigid and tough with her children in terms of economizing the family budget because they totally depend on what her husband sends them. “Now status and money are what matters. Everything that is done these days is done with money.”

Dirina has savings because she does not want to ask anyone for help in case her husband loses his job. She hopes to use these savings on a good education for her children. However, what she wants most is to stop being dependent and to be able to leave the country in order to earn money to help her family. Unfortunately, to date she has not managed to qualify to leave the country legally.



Albania is the most dramatic example of post-communist migration. It is estimated that one-fourth of the total Albanian population is abroad. According to World Bank figures, in 2006 remittances to Albania totaled US \$1.36 billion or 14.9% of the country’s GDP. Greece is the primary destination for Albanian migrants. Today Albanian women represent 41% of the total Albanian population there. The majority arrive through family reunification and have found work primarily in domestic service, in response to the growing demand in this sector.”
