

# **Career Pathways in Albania**

**Study conducted from May - December 2007 in Durrës and Shkodër**

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## **1 Introduction and aim of the study**

Swisscontact (SC) has been supporting vocational education and training in Albania since 1993 through different projects, among others through supporting and providing employment oriented short courses in the frame of the ISDO project. The impact of these courses was continuously monitored through tracer interviews with a number of randomly selected participants six months after completion of the courses.

One of the objectives of the present AlbVET program is the diversification of the course portfolio for different user groups at various qualification levels. SC was therefore interested to learn more about typical career pathways in Albania, in order to support decision making on the development of appropriate potential new training products. In addition, the labour market relevance of training programs is a crucial dimension for training quality.

This paper presents the results of a study conducted in the regions around Durrës and Shkodër in central and northern Albania, from May till December 2007. The aim of the study is to get an insight into career pathways in Albania through case studies, with the objective to identify common elements, which might be typical for a career pathway in Albania.

Even a considerable number of persons in the frame of 3 different samples were participating in the study and many interesting conclusions and findings could be drawn, one has to consider that the study gives only an insight, which still might defer depending on the particular circumstances. The very turbulent recent history with a “continuous transition” in Albania during the last two decades would not allow drawing general conclusions relevant for all people in Albania.

## **2 Methodology**

Through case studies, SC expected to gain insight into typical career pathways of individuals. Out of these individual case studies, general elements shall be extracted, which are the most relevant factors influencing “typical” career pathways of the samples, with a particular focus on pathways to entrepreneurship.

### **21 Definition and selection of the samples**

In order to get a more comprehensive picture, three different samples were chosen:

- Sample 1: A school class in the city of Shkodra, which completed compulsory schooling (class 8) 10 years ago (1995/96), and their pathways until today;
- Sample 2: A number of fairly successful small and medium entrepreneurs in Durrës, partly among those, who participated in the on-the-job trainings of the Durrës Vocational School, and their pathways into entrepreneurship;
- Sample 3: A randomly selected group of participants of ISDO courses of the early days of the project, and their pathways after completion of the course until today.

After completion of the list of the 3 samples, all participants were contacted to evaluate their interest and willingness to participate in this study. Due to the lack of an address system, high migration and other reasons, it was in some cases quite difficult to find their actual contact address.

### **22 Elaboration of guidelines for semi-structured interviews**

The tool of semi-structured interviews was chosen in order to evaluate which factors/incidences influence the individual career pathways (i.e. drop in, drop out and remain in the labour market) of the participants. The basic guidelines for conducting the interviews - following structured questions along assumed factors/elements - were elaborated in an internal workshop by the project team (annex).

Semi-structured interviews provided also the possibility to assess factors which were not assumed in advance, thus allowing to assess the particularities of each individual career pathway.

### **23 Interviews and data collection**

All interviews were held in Albanian language with consecutive translation into English language. The whole interview was registered on a tape recorder, with a portrait photo of each interviewee.

The duration of one interview was maximum two hours. The interview techniques were discussed during the internal workshop.

### **24 Transcriptions of the interviews and elaboration of standardized case studies (portraits)**

Each interview was transcribed in English language according to the defined guidelines. After identifying the main relevant factors for each of the three samples, standardized case studies or “portraits” of the interviewees were elaborated for each sample, which may also be used as stand-alone product.

## **25 Evaluation of data and identification of common elements/factors**

With the project aim to identify typical career pathways in Albania, all collected data (interviews, transcriptions and portraits) of the 3 samples were evaluated to extract and identify the key common elements and factors influencing the career pathways of the samples.

### **3 Sample 1: School class in Shkodra**

#### **31 Selection of the school class**

The school class chosen was the only class finishing the elementary school 10 years ago (1995/96), from which a complete list of pupils was available. According to the information provided by the Education Directory in Shkodra, the Albanian law foresees to burn all school class books after 8 years. Therefore, a real selection according to criteria was not possible.

#### **32 Description of sample 1**

- 25 former pupils of a school class in Shkodra finishing elementary school in 1996 (14 women, 11 men)

##### **Current working situation:**

- 3 are unemployed: 2 men, 1 woman
- 17 are employed: 7 men, 10 women
- 4 have their own business
- 1 still studying

*Comment:* Only 3 of 25 former pupils (12%) of the sample are unemployed today, even the official unemployment rate in Shkodra is around 19% and the unofficial more realistic rate is much higher.

##### **Education:**

###### **Women**

- 11 high school, university, university degree
- 3 high school, university, stopped/still at university

###### **Men**

- 4 high school, university, university degree
- 1 high school, abroad, back to AL in family business, started university
- 1 high school, family business, started university
- 1 high school
- 3 high school, stopped high school, professional education/course (2 abroad)
- 1 elementary school

*Comment:* The education pathways of the women are more similar than the education pathways of the men. Whereas all women finished high school and started university, men also started mostly high school and finished it, but they followed afterwards more diverse education and career pathways.

### 33 Main factors influencing the career pathways until today

#### Family

In most cases, **parents decide** - according to their situation and the economical conditions - if their children go to high school and to the university or if their children have to stop the education to earn money. In many cases, the **professions of the parents or their educational level** influence the decision, in which direction they see the future for their children.

**Parents try to control every step of their children.** They don't seem to trust in the individual and they don't want to let their children make their own experiences. As there is a low level of trust in institutions and in the society, parents try to take care of their children as long as possible. The experiences during the communist system, the semi-anarchy period in the 1990s and the strong traditional family and clan structures might all influence this **lack of trust in institutions.**

At the other hand, the young persons have a **high responsibility towards their families.** They are grateful and they feel proud when they manage to contribute to the family income. For many of them - especially for the men - it is normal to stay with their parents and take care of them when they get older, even if they plan to create their own families.

The influence and connections of the family or the relatives and their relation network is also **crucial for finding a job** after having finished the education (see below).

Parents have also in general a big influence on their children **in terms of choosing or "accepting" a job.** They expect from their children to find a so-called "good" job from the beginning of their professional career and not just any job they can find (or they expect that a good job is offered to them...). So it may happen that parents overestimate their children and expect them to wait for a better job opportunity.

#### Gender

Being asked if their career would have been different if they were a woman/man, only a few mentioned - all of them women - that they would have been "more free" to follow their professional interests. The majority however didn't see any difference. A more in depth analysis of the effective pathways showed however a considerable difference between men and women in the sample 1:

**All women attended high school and started university.** When they wanted however to leave Shkodra to study in another city, most of them were not allowed and they had to choose a branch at the university in Shkodra. In that way, they could get a **university diploma without leaving the family.**

A few women went abroad to follow a foreign education. None of them however left to work and to earn money.

Today most of the women are in a good job position and they are thinking of creating their own families. The fact that they are working does not interfere with their wish to have children. Some women after finishing university left Shkodra to the capital. Most women in sample 1 are **professionally emancipated but privately they are still in the traditional roles.**

**Men are less emancipated** and don't take over responsibilities for raising and educating children as well as for the household. In many cases, the broader family (mostly parents) fills this "gap" within the married couple; they look after the children and do the housework when their daughter/daughter in law is working. In some cases it is of course also a financial question that both are working.

Except one, all interviewed **men started the high school** as well. Some of them had to stop because their family **expected them to start working** to earn money or even to go abroad. Men who wanted to study in another city were mostly allowed to leave; **they were more free to move**.

In general the men in the sample 1 have followed more different education and/or career pathways than the women.

### **Personality**

In general, persons **living independent from their parents** seem to have a **higher degree of self-responsibility** and to have **more ideas regarding their own professional and private future**. They realize more that they have to take life in their hands instead of waiting for something to be offered to them.

Persons still living - and in some cases also working - with their parents, show in most cases a lower level of self-responsibility, but a high responsibility towards their families. They contribute to the well being of the bigger family and think less about their private plans. And if they do, this is not a reason for them to think about leaving their parents. This was stressed mostly by men, some of them still don't know "what they want to become in life".

Another important aspect within the personality factor is the **self-confidence**. Persons living independent from their families turned out to be more convinced and confident to realize their life plans. They showed also a higher **level of initiative and persistence to finding a job**, even if they also profited from their personal network. Some of them mentioned that they didn't feel well to still depend financially from their parents, and that they wanted to earn their own money.

### **Geographic location**

As Shkodra is a bigger city and regional economic and education centre with high schools and universities, persons from the sample 1 didn't need to leave home and their family to follow a higher education. The **easy access to education** might be a main reason, why the big majority of the sample 1 went to university.

On the other hand **Shkodra cannot offer a big labour market with job opportunities for all persons finishing university**. On the contrary, the high unemployment rate even strengthens this tendency to follow as long as possible education. The big labour market with more job opportunities in Tirana is not close enough; and persons who would like to work in the capital often lack the personal network in Tirana, which is still a crucial factor to find a job.

### **Personal relations and corruption**

Some persons mentioned that they did formal applications and they had to pass through a selection procedure to find a job. But in most cases, the additional help or support of another person was also decisive. The influence of the family or relatives and their relation network is still **crucial for finding a job** after having finished the education. Even the **access to a high school or to a specific faculty** at university depended in different cases on the relations a person had.

At the universities, corruption is still a widespread practice. Family members, relatives and friends of students **"help to convince"/influence professors**, to let them pass the exams. In some cases, also **money was paid**.

### **Education**

For the persons from sample 1, a **high education was important to get employed**. A university degree seem to be a door opener for many jobs, particularly for jobs in state institutions (which is still one of the main employer in Shkodra), even the job

has in many cases no direct relation with the specific education. Professional schools however have a low reputation or even don't exist for many professions.

Persons **without a high education** had much more difficulties to get employed. Those who work have mostly their **own business** or they are working in the family business.

### **Image/reputation of education**

Going to the high school and attending university is among the interviewed school class the "normal" education pathway. There is still a strong perception that a **university degree is required to have a successful professional career**. In addition, people consider a university degree important for a **good social status and position**.

**Professional education and professional schools have however in general still a low reputation**. Thus, attending a professional school is in most cases not even taken into consideration.

### **Migration background**

Persons with work or education experience abroad seem to be **more mature and more self-confident**, presumably due to the higher independence from their families and their experiences having been confronted with difficult conditions without their family network abroad. Regarding to their professional career, all of them mentioned that they have learned and developed a **different work mentality and attitude (service-orientation, efficiency)** abroad. Work experience abroad and/or a diploma from a foreign educational institution is in general also **appreciated and valued in the labour market**.

## **4 Sample 2: ISDO courses participants**

### **41 Selection of sample 2**

The participants of sample 2 were randomly selected from the list of all persons, who have finished an ISDO course since these courses were offered.

### **42 Description of sample 2**

- 15 former ISDO courses participants (11 women, 4 men)

#### **Current working situation:**

- 6 are unemployed, all are women
- 8 are employed
- 1 has an own business

#### **Education:**

- 5 have no other professional education than the ISDO course
- 4 have followed a professional school/professional education (2 have also a high school diploma)
- 3 are still at university, 1 has already finished university
- 4 have a high school diploma but didn't go to university

#### **“Practical use” of ISDO course:**

- 2 are working in the profession ISDO
- 1 is working student in the profession ISDO
- 4 have worked occasionally in the profession ISDO
- 8 have never worked in the profession ISDO since they have finished the course.  
All are women.

### 43 Main factors influencing the career pathways until today

The fact, that the sample 2 is more heterogeneous regarding the place of origin makes it more difficult to draw general conclusions and extract clear factors influencing the career pathway. Anyway, there are many common elements and clear tendencies. At the other hand, the average age of the participants of sample 2 and sample 1 is comparable (around 25 years). This might be a reason, why some factors turned out to be similar.

#### Family and personal relations network

As in sample 1, the role of the families and the personal relations network are crucial for the career pathways of the participants of the sample 2. The **parents had a strong influence or even in most cases decided**, if their children learn a profession, if they go to the high school, and if they go to university. The **professions of the parents** or their educational level strongly influenced this decision. The influence of the **family or relatives and their relation network** is also very important for finding a job.

#### Education level

The fact to be qualified and to have good skills is an **important factor to find work**, even if the factor of knowing the right people and coming from the right family seems to be equally important.

During the interviews, it was also interesting to observe, that qualified persons argue more differentiated when they were asked about important factors to find work. It **allowed people to analyze the labour market and to understand how the labour market functions** (professional qualification and personal relations), which increases their chances to find a work. For others, to know the right people was considered most important. It's also interesting, that the support and personal relations to get a job position is fully accepted as "part of the system", and people talk about it openly.

#### Migration background

As in sample 1, the migration background is important in terms of **maturity, life experience, and self-confidence**, linked to individual experiences far from their families and personal network. Again they mentioned that they have developed a different **work mentality, which is appreciated in the Albanian labour market**.

Within the above mentioned factors, there is no major difference among sample 1 and sample 2. The following other factors however influenced the career pathway of the participants of sample 2 in a different way and extend:

#### Gender

**Women having finished the high school and/or a professional education/course** are mostly working and/or still studying. Women **without high school/professional education** are however mostly unemployed and have few possibilities to change their situation. They were less supported by their parents to get an appropriate education, as they are **expected to be married, to have children and to fulfil their role as housewife and mother**. To get married is a clear "break" in their professional career pathway. Some women started working at home but gave up later, because the conditions to work at home are not satisfying and the work for the family requires most of their available time. Women with family and children are **less flexible in terms of time and moving**.

On the other hand, **none of the men of sample 2 is unemployed or without work, independent from the education level**. They all got **support from their parents** to

learn the profession they were interested in, or at least to learn a profession. Parents expect from them to establish a financial base to create afterwards their own family and to support their “broader family”. **They are also more free to do any kind of work and to move to find a job.**

### **Geographic location and access to education**

Another very decisive factor in sample 2, particularly for the women, is the **access to education**: In **smaller places and places without university and other educational institutions**, women in most cases didn't have the possibility to follow a further education. Attending high school or a professional school would have meant to leave home and to stay in another place away from the families. Parents didn't let their daughters leave, because they were afraid something could happen to them.

Particularly, the troubles in 1997 and the fact that life wasn't secure anymore were among the reasons, why especially young women in sample 2 were not allowed to leave home to get any further education. **For the men in sample 2, this factor turned out to be less important.**

### **Personality**

The above mentioned gender related differences have also as consequence, that men of sample 2 have in general **more concrete ideas with regard to professional plans for their future**; they mostly want to open or extend their own business. The professional career opportunities of most women is however much more restricted and strongly influenced by family priorities (to raise the children, to join the husband abroad etc.). This difference becomes even stronger the lower their education level is. Women without any additional education are **not self-confident enough** to work besides their role as wife, mother and housewife. Men without any additional education however have a broader scope and more opportunities, and therefore it is much easier for them to find a job.

The combination of these factors influences the personality of a person in terms of poor self-confidence and only **low initiative and energy to invest in the personal development**. Especially these persons would need to “fight” against the expectations from their environment. It is striking, that none of the married young women seem to be satisfied being full-time mother and housewife. None of them mentioned for example; I enjoy now this period in my life and when my children will be grown up I will again go back to work.

Another factor that may influence this dissatisfaction could be the tradition in many Albanian families that the child, often the youngest son, stays with his/her young family with the parents.

**Persons studying/having finished university** have not necessarily more concrete and realistic ideas about their future. It seems that life was for them somehow “easier” up to now. They just followed the possible schools and were **less obliged to take responsibility for their life**. Persons who have a work or education experience abroad seem in general more mature, as already described above.

#### **44 Motivation to follow the ISDO courses**

Asked about the motivation to follow on ISDO course, different groups may be distinguished:

- a) For persons without another professional education, one of the main reasons to attend the course was the opportunity to follow a course nearby to their homes. This was also decisive for the parents to allow their children (or husbands their wives) to attend the course, being still in most cases the key decision makers.
- b) Unemployed persons who attended a high school or a professional school mainly expected a new perspective to find work. Their main motivation was “why not trying it out?”
- c) Persons with professional education and experience in the same profession mainly chose the course to increase and extend their professional knowledge and to get more work practice.
- d) The motivation for two university students to attend the ISDO course was to have an additional option; mostly for finding a part time work besides their studies.

The interest in the particular profession taught during the course is mentioned, but it was in most cases not the main reason to follow the course. There was first the “offer” which attracted them, and only afterwards they decided to attend the course in a particular branch.

#### **45 Some general remarks on the ISDO courses**

The ISDO course was most “successful” when people already had a certain background in the domain/profession and wanted to improve their knowledge, even they would have liked to get some more specialized and in depth knowledge.

For others - who followed no other professional education than the ISDO course - the course served as “impulse” to learn basics about a profession. The duration was however according to most of the interviewed persons too short to have enough skills, knowledge and confidence to start working on the profession. In case they didn't continue immediately after the course with further education or practice, the course had no direct impact on their professional career later.

For two working students, the ISDO course helped them to find a part time job, they have however no longer term ambition in this profession.

Almost all interviewed persons expressed the demand and need for longer and/or follow up courses to get additional professional knowledge. Possible ideas to respond to these demands might contain:

- ⇒ To extend the duration of the courses, maybe with different curricula for beginners and for persons with a professional background/education;
- ⇒ To provide an individual coaching during the course and/or after the finishing of the course, in order to accompany and support the course participants in their further career pathway (problems/questions during the course; motivation support; entry/connections to the labour market to make practical experiences or even to find a job; contact persons for the parents as they still are in many cases key decision makers);
- ⇒ A more in depth selection procedure/analysis of the candidates before starting the course, in order to know more about their background, their motivation and intention, as well as to clarify their expectations towards the course.

## **5 Sample 3: Entrepreneurs in Durrës**

### **51 Selection of sample 3**

SC chose a group of entrepreneurs from fairly successful small and medium businesses in the most requested professions in the region of Durrës. Some of them are already known to SC as they are cooperating with the Durres vocational school.

### **52 Description of sample 3**

- 15 entrepreneurs with a business in the region/city of Durrës (3 women, 12 men)

#### **Current working domain:**

- 2 car mechanic
- 2 dairy
- 2 tailoring
- 2 electrical installation
- 1 plumber
- 2 restaurant
- 2 hairdresser

#### **Education:**

- 12 got a professional education under the communist system
- After 1991
  - 7 are working in the profession learned before
  - 5 started to work in a new profession
- 2 got a professional education after 1991
- 1 did never attend a professional education

## 53 Main factors influencing the career pathways into entrepreneurship

### 1991 – Change of system and development of a private sector

The majority of the participants of sample 3 was educated and got their first working experience during the former system. They all stressed, that the complete change of system in the 90s was a huge challenge for them.

After the collapse of the communist system, many employees in state enterprises lost their jobs and got unemployed. Most of the state enterprises collapsed or they were privatized. People started to work privately and opened their own business. Some continued to work in the domain they worked before, others profited to try and start something new.

The conditions in the remaining state enterprises or state institutions were no longer satisfying, compared to the new opportunities in the private sector. Under communism, the qualification level was strictly organized, only selected persons reached the highest possible level. That's why after 1991 only few specialists were available. In addition, a lot of people - and together with them their professional knowledge - emigrated. At the same time the demand for specialists started to increase: Migrants turned back to Albania; they brought with them money and they wanted to realize and build up what they have learned and seen abroad.

### Personality

Persons who were ***sensitive to realize the changes in the labour market and who were initiative to catch the new opportunities*** found a friendly environment to build up their own business. All entrepreneurs in the sample 3 have proven to be ***flexible to adapt*** to a totally new situation.

All persons in sample 3 mentioned as success factor the ***serious working mentality***. Particularly those with experiences abroad stressed this factor.

After the political changes, people felt confused and didn't know in what and in whom to believe. It was therefore even more important to have a ***high self-confidence with regard to personal and professional skills***. Even if the development of a successful business was for most persons of the sample not a stable and continued process, it was also important to remain ***persistent and not to change or give up once obstacles occurred*** and to resist to temptations that seemed possible.

### Education and professional skills

The majority of the entrepreneurs have a professional education and it was an ***important base for them to start*** and to follow their own career. They are all aware of the ***importance of a continuous further education*** and they try to keep in touch with the newest technologies and professional knowledge. They are eager to be informed about new equipment. Almost all entrepreneurs in the sample 3 proved to be ***creative to find different ways to teach themselves*** (personal network, catalogues, professional literature) or to get regularly updated in courses and seminars even abroad, as there were and are still only few education possibilities inside Albania.

In addition to the personal education and qualification, most entrepreneurs mentioned that their business depends also much on the ***qualification of the staff***. At the same time they complained about the difficulties they have to find qualified staff.

### Migration background

The majority of the entrepreneurs of the sample had the opportunity to learn and to make working experiences abroad. All of them stressed the importance of the migra-

tion background with regard to **improve their professional knowledge and their working mentality**. Persons, who were working abroad for a certain period of time, had **better chances to find a job** when they returned to Albania. Employers got to know about the hard working conditions abroad or even experienced them by their own. They were also interested in the professional knowledge these persons could bring into the enterprise or business. Many of the entrepreneurs kept good relations with their former employers and enterprises abroad and **continue to exchange professional knowledge** with them.

### **Personal relations and family**

As in the other samples, almost all persons in sample 3 profited from their personal relations and network in different steps of their career pathway; **to find a job, to get support in opening the own business etc.** In addition, for an entrepreneur, knowing more people means also having more clients.

Many of the entrepreneurs in the sample also prefer **working together with members of their own families**, as they have more trust in them and they know their personal background.

### **State regulations and bureaucracy**

Another factor becoming more important for an entrepreneur of today in Albania is the increasing state regulations and bureaucracy. During the 90s, the state was weak and there were only few rules and laws to be respected when somebody opened his/her own business. Today, the state tries to set **rules and a framework with fiscal and other obligations**. Many entrepreneurs complained about this fact and in many cases they don't respect some of the new rules and laws.

### **Growing competition in the market**

As mentioned, during the "pioneer phase" after the change of system, a lot was possible. Nowadays the **market is in many fields saturated and there is a high competition**. One of the main challenges for the majority of the entrepreneurs of the sample is therefore to keep the standard of a well running business. It is again crucial for an entrepreneur to **rationally observe the changes and new perspectives** of the market and to be **flexible to adapt the services/offers**, e.g. through specialization and diversification. Almost all mentioned the need to develop new strategies to survive in the market and to fight against the growing concurrence.

## **6 Conclusions**

### **61 Comparison between the samples**

Comparing the school class in Shkodra and the ISDO participants, there are some important differences particularly among the women:

In the school class from Shkodra almost all women have finished a university degree and are working independently from their family status and obligations. It is obvious, that having access to educational institutions in the home town is crucial for the professional career of a young woman. This goes in most cases hand in hand with a higher self-confidence, professional emancipation and a general life satisfaction. On the other hand, many female ISDO participants are from smaller places without higher education institutions. They were mostly not allowed to continue their education and today, they face much more problems to find a job. They have less concrete ideas about their own future. In general these women are personally and professionally less satisfied.

Being a woman, having parents with a low educational background, living in a small village without institutions of further education and having no further education after elementary school, turned out to be most difficult "profile" to enter the labour market.

Unlike the ISDO participants and the Shkodra school class, most of the participants of the interviewed entrepreneurs got their basic education and first working experiences under the communist system. Many started to built up an own business after 1991, which was running quite well during the first years, if a person was innovative, willing to learn and flexible to adapt to the changing situation. Today many of them are challenged by the growing competition and a state which is getting more organized, setting regulations and frame conditions. Their main task is to consolidate their business in a more competitive and demanding market. Nowadays it seems more difficult to be successful without a solid educational base and continued specific further education to be up to date. Entrepreneurs face other frame conditions and other elements and factors become decisive to be successful.

### **62 Final remarks**

Even though the individual career pathways of the interviewed persons within the three samples are quite diverse, some general factors can be identified, which played a decisive role for most of them.

These "typical" factors influencing career pathways in Albania might not be so different from other countries in the region or even in Western Europe (family, society/mentality, gender, education background and professional skills, place of origin, personality), although the emphasis and extend might defer depending on the particular context. There are however some important elements, which turned out to be particular for Albania:

1. The importance and the high influence of the family and of the personal relations network: Each of the interviewed persons mentioned several times the big influence and support of the family, friends or relatives during their career pathway. The family interest is in many cases still considered as "higher value" than the individual life plan or skills and potentials of a person. One reason for this might be the traditional society and family structures. Furthermore, there is a widespread deep mistrust in all institutions, due to the bad experiences during the communist system and the troubles in the 90s with a semi-anarchic situation, where the state institutions almost collapsed. All this leads to the fact, that people finally trust in and rely most on their extended family network.

2. Even if efforts are made to improve the situation of the professional education system, professional education still has a low reputation. Most of the interviewed persons considered the quality of the professional schools and institutions as low. To attend a professional school is still not attractive enough, because people don't consider it as option with good perspectives for the future. In many jobs, people get only employed if they have a high school and/or university degree. In addition, for many professions a specific education on secondary level does still not exist and there are no possibilities to follow a further education after having finished a professional school.

3. Migration background and its appreciation by the labour market: Albania was completely closed and isolated during the communist system. No influence from abroad entered the country and almost no exchange happened. That's why people during the 1990s - besides their very bad economic situation - were eager to go abroad and leave Albania in order to make experiences in other countries.

Two other striking factors not evaluated in depth in the framework of this study might be worth to be further assessed and studied:

Almost none of the interviewed persons - maybe with the exception of some entrepreneurs - followed a real and serious career planning. Looking at their professional pathways, they were in most cases reacting to pressures, circumstances and context changes, rather than planning pro-actively their future and preparing themselves to enter the labour market. This might be closely linked to the big and often abrupt changes during the last two decades in Albania, where values, systems, rules, expectations and priorities are under a continuous change process.

Furthermore, there is almost a complete lack of a comprehensive and adequate information system on the education possibilities and opportunities in Albania.

Last but not least, SC and its project team would like to thank all persons and institutions, which contributed to the realization of this study. Particular words of thanks go to all persons, who shared their "life stories" with the project team during the very interesting and enriching interviews.

## **Annexes:**

- Interview guidelines
- Portraits of three of the interviewed persons (one from each sample)

## **Annex 1: Career Pathways in Albania - Interview guidelines**

### **I Introduction**

Present shortly the organization, the aim of the interview / the study

### **II Start of the interview**

Name, surname

Date of birth

Actual work situation / work position

Professions of the other family members (father, mother, sisters, brothers...)

Actual private situation: married (-> profession of husband / wife), children, house...

### **III Factors and possible questions**

#### **Education**

- Which schools / professional education did you attend?
- Did you get additional working skills outside the regular school / regular professional education?

#### **Life planning / career planning**

- Why did you attend this particular school? Why did you study your branch?
- What do you want to achieve in life?
- What is important for you in your life?

#### **Labour market**

- How did you find your job?
- Why do you think you didn't/don't find a job?
- Are there many opportunities/open positions in your profession?
- What do you think you can do to find a job?
- Which skills / factors / personal attributes do you think are important to get a job?

#### **Personal relations (friends, relatives...)**

- Did other persons help you to enter a school / an education?
- Did other persons help you to find a job or to get promoted?

#### **Ways of information**

- How did you inform yourself / get the information about education possibilities?
- How do you inform yourself / get the information about job possibilities?  
(be always responsive to general answers of the interviewee: from where did she/he get the information ...)

#### **Corruption**

- Did you have to do to someone a favour (or even pay money) to get access to a school or to get a job?

### **Coincidence / luck**

- When do you think you have been fortunate in your professional career?

### **Travel experiences**

- Have you lived outside your hometown? What did you do there? What did you learn there?
- Have you been outside Albania? What did you do there? What did you learn there?

### **Migration**

- When did you leave Albania? Why did you leave Albania? Why did you go to ...(country)?
- Coming back to Albania, did your experience abroad help you? How?

### **Gender**

- If you were a man / woman, would you have chosen another school and professional education? Why? Would your life look different today?

### **Historical context, political changes**

- Do you think that your career is influenced by historical or political events? By which ones? How?

### **Personality** (self-consciousness, level of self-reflexion, ability / skills, initiative, flexibility, interest, curiosity, creativity...)

- Are you satisfied with your actual situation?
- Do you like your job?
- Do you think you do a good job?
- What profession/job would you prefer to the actual one?
- What other jobs do you think you could do, you would be good in?
- What did you want to learn, to become?
- Do you think you can influence your professional situation? How?
- Would you say that you invest enough in yourself to achieve what you want?
- Would you say that you are a person who is fighting to get what you want?
- Looking back to your career, what did you undertake when you were confronted with a problem / with an obstacle / with an open question?

### **Decision makers**

- Who took the important decisions in your life? What do you think, what are these important decisions?
- Do you think that your family background was important to follow your education / to get a job?
- Looking back on your professional career; what/who has helped you most to find a job? Which were the biggest obstacles and problems?

### **Important turning points**

- Looking back on your professional career; what would you say was most important for your actual working situation? Which incidence / element / factor influenced your professional development most?

(Maybe to be reflected during the interview and confront the person)

**Where do you think have you learned, what is most important for your work today?** (in school, in the family, from friends, on the job, abroad ...)

### **“Hidden guidelines” for the interviewer: perception of the interviewee**

- How the person perceives his / her career?
- How the person perceives him / herself and his / her situation?
- How the person perceives his / her possibilities?
- How the person perceives the labour market?

*Now take some pictures of the interviewee!*

*Note some personal remarks after each interview (place and time where the interview was made, ambiance during the interview, appearance of the interviewee, “vibes”, was there something particular, where did she/he insist, when was she/he in doubt, when was she/he hesitating, when do you think she/he was not fully open/frank...)*

Swisscontact, Christine Providoli/Shkodra, 3 June 2007

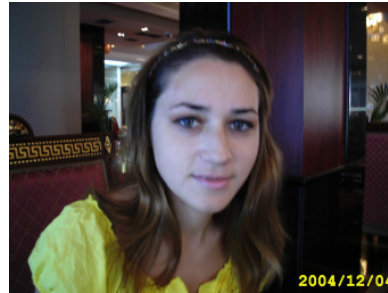
## **Annex 2: Portraits of each sample**

- Sample 1: School class in Shkodra - Mirsada Boshnjaku
- Sample 2: ISDO courses participants - Zamira Nezha
- Sample 3: Entrepreneurs in Durrës - Arben Puhumi

## You must have a good profile and you must know the right people

Mirsada Boshnjaku, 21.11.1981  
Teacher for English language  
Single, living with her family in Tirana

Father: railway engineer  
Mother: attorney  
Brother: Student of French language at the University of Tirana



### **Education:**

Elementary school  
High school  
Studies of teacher at the University of Shkodra

### **Why did you study teacher?**

After I finished the elementary school my parents managed to get my admission to the best-known high school, with the help of the school director. Normally you have to go to the high school in the quarter you live. During high school, English was my preferred topic and I always wanted to study English in Tirana. My other dream was to study law. My parents didn't let me go to Tirana. I have never been separated from my family and here in Shkodra it is very difficult for a girl to live in another city far away from the family. So I did the test to be admitted at the faculty of English language at the University of Shkodra, but I didn't pass. I was very disappointed and I wanted to give up everything. My parents however insisted and with the support of a friend of my father I could register at the teacher faculty. After three months, I got the permission to enter the English faculty but I didn't want anymore to change. This was a big mistake in my life.

### **Have you been outside Albania?**

During University I followed a course for Italian language. This enabled me to be part of a group of students, which were invited by the University of Florence and the Italian association for invalid and handicapped children. We participated at a seminar organized by them. I stayed there for 1 month, but I had never in mind to stay in Italy or in any other place. I was used to stay with my family and I am afraid of the difficulties other people have abroad.

### **After you finished the education, how did you find a job?**

After I finished the university, my family and I moved to Tirana because my brother was starting his studies there. My parents wanted to be near him. Also for me, it was easier to find a job in Tirana. I sent my documents to the Regional Education Directory (DAR), but for that year I missed the final date for applications. My mother met the director of DAR and after 3 months I could start to work as a non-permanent teacher for English language. After one year I got a position in another primary school and which I think is now a permanent position. Through a friend of my mother I found another part time position in a private school. In addition, I make translations in English and Italian for the attorneys, where my mother works.

### **What is most important to find a job?**

You must have a good profile and you must know the right people. I have the chance to teach English without being graduated in English language. This is also because people who finished English language faculty are often hired by banks, associations and governmental institutions. They are not interested to teach because the salary is too low.

### **Did your professional career depend on the help of other people?**

My parents always decided what I should do. With their decision to live in Tirana they helped me a lot.

### **Are you satisfied with your actual situation?**

Today my family fully trusts in me, because I am more mature than I was as a teenager. And I am happy to live in Tirana. Here you have better job possibilities than in Shkodra.

**What are your plans for the future?**

I want to study another branch, law or business administration. But for the latest, I am afraid of the exams in mathematics. To tell the truth, I always wanted to be a ballerina, but the mentality in Shkodra made it impossible.

# I was learning only by observing the hairdressers

Zamira Nezha, 07.08.1982

Hairdresser, actually not working

Widow, 1 daughter, both are living with her parents

Father: officer, after communism farmer

Mother: house wife

2 brothers: both are working in Greece



## Education

Elementary school

Tailoring course

Hairdresser course ISDO

## Why did you attend the ISDO course?

I finished the elementary school in Ciflig (small village in Lushnje) in 1997. My parents didn't want to send me to a high school outside the village, because it was not safe at that time. They preferred me to stay at home near them. After three years, I was registered in a tailoring course here in Lushnje. My parents were convinced that tailoring is a good profession for me. They paid 30'000 Leke for this course, which was not cheap at that time. After I finished the course I tried to sew some clothes only for myself, but I wasn't satisfied. I realized that tailor was not the right profession for me. In the same year, I got to know through television about a hairdresser course in Lushnje. I was happy and I wanted to attend it. I started the course and began to make plans for my future. At that time, I was already engaged. My husband was living in Tirana. He lived in a house with a nice courtyard and I had the idea to open my own business there later.

## After you finished the education, how did you find a job?

After I finished the course I went to live with my fiancé in Tirana. He was living there with his mother. But only staying at home with my mother in law without working made me sad, as my husband was working all day long in a construction enterprise as a bricklayer. I started to look for a job in the newspapers and I found an interesting announcement for a hairdresser. I went to this salon and I had to show how I work. The owner liked the job I did and she hired me. I was working only

for two months there, and then I opened my own business. I had some basic equipment which I bought from the money that my husband gave to me and from what I earned in during my first job. I didn't have to pay taxes, because the salon was not registered. It was on the territory, which my husband bought to build a house for us later, so only the territory is registered. My first clients were our neighbours. They came regularly, which means that they were satisfied with my work and so was I.

## What is most important to do a good job?

You must always be able to respond to the requests of your client. They have to be satisfied. I did not learn the hair extensions in the course, as this was not part of the programme. So when clients came and asked for it I felt uncomfortable. I went to one of the big salons in Tirana to see how they do it. I stayed there for three weeks. I was learning only by observing the hairdressers. This helped me a lot and I remember that after that experience my clients were very satisfied with what I did.

## Did your professional career depend on the help of other people?

My husband pushed and helped me to open my own business. But it was my idea.

## Are you satisfied with your actual situation?

My business was running very well. When my daughter was born, I couldn't stop working so my mother in law was taking care of her. Everything went fine, but then my husband had an accident at work and he died. From that moment on, my family in law was behaving strange towards me. I

really don't know why. They didn't want me to stay with them any longer. After I stayed the mandatory 40 days in my husband's house I decided to go back to my parents. I didn't take anything with me and my sister in law profited to take over my hairdresser salon. I couldn't stay in Tirana because in our mentality a woman cannot live alone without husband.

Today I'm living with my parents. My daughter gets a state pension from the insurance of her father. Nobody except my parents and my brothers remained close to me. At the moment when my husband died, the contacts and relations to his family were stopped.

**What are your plans for the future?**

I would like to work again, because I feel lonely. I need to talk with people to forget what happened to me. I would like to have my own apartment and to live with my daughter, but at the same time I don't want to leave my parents. I suffered a lot, only my daughter helped me to pass this difficult period. Now I want to do everything for her.

It is not possible for my parents to help me to open a business. I was looking for a job here in the region, but for the moment there is no open position.

## We needed to learn the meaning of “service”

Arben Puhumi, 27.05.1963

Administrator of AG enterprise (garage for BMW and Land Rover)

Married, 3 children

Wife: cashier in the AG enterprise

Father: chef mechanic in different enterprises during communism

Mother: house wife

2 sisters: house wives living in Italy

Brother: employee in the AG enterprise



### Education

Elementary school

High school

Studies of mechanic engineering at the University of Tirana

### Why and how did you become a mechanic engineer?

I felt the obligation to follow the tradition of my family. My father was one of the most reputed mechanics in Durres. I was absolutely sure that I wanted to become a mechanic. Therefore I went to University not only with the idea to have a diploma but also to become a good mechanic. It was my hobby and it has always been my passion. I didn't go to the professional school because they didn't have a good reputation at that time.

### After you finished the education, how did you find a job?

After I finished university I was nominated by the executive comity (institution which was in charge of nominating new cadre among those who had finished university) as an engineer in an animal farm. Then the political changes happened. In 1993, my brother and I went to Italy. I started to work as a simple mechanic in a small garage. I had the chance that the brother in law of my boss was the owner of the concessionaire of BMW Italy. He realized my potential (I mean organization of work, quality of services, and communication with clients), and he hired me in his enterprise.

### Today your business is running well. Was it difficult to get there?

The moment when I was convinced that I had learned enough to build up my own garage I turned back to Albania. This was in 1996. I started again from zero. I opened together with my brother a simple service garage for all kind of cars. At that time many Albanians were eager to have their own car. I remember that you found all type of cars in the market, mainly old used cars coming from abroad. So we knew they would need many services and we made good profit. We brought from Italy all kind of spare parts for different types of cars. After some time, we were able to create a relationship with BMW Bari. I had a passion for these cars. If you study a BMW in detail, you will understand the German punctuality. I attended some specialisation courses in Bari which allowed me to open a BMW branch office here in Durres. In the very beginning of my work with BMW cars, I did not consider it as real business. I wanted to know and understand each detail of BMW to get the maximum of technical knowledge. I was convinced if you invest in your knowledge, money would come for sure and your business would grow.

### Did your professional career depend on the help of other people?

Without friends you can do nothing. I don't remember who finally helped me to get a job when we arrived in Italy in 1993. But it has not been so difficult; otherwise I would remember it in details.

**What is most important to be successful in your profession?**

I consider my enterprise as a “house of clients”, which means I build very good relationships with my clients. I do not only repair defects of the client’s car but I also insure the car wherever the client goes. So I provide to my clients quality and security, offering all services the clients request and need. I can respond to any demand they have. We are up to date with regard to the new technologies and we will continue to improve our performance according to the newest standards. From time to time, BMW Bari organizes seminars with their partners to promote new products and new technologies. I always try participating in those trainings and share the experience with my staff here in Albania. Of course we have competition, but we are the best. I mean not only in providing good quality but you also need to be somehow a psychologist. You need to treat the clients

and guide discussions in different ways, because clients are different. The client is the king and he is always right.

**What are your plans for the future?**

In our sector we are the best, the most professional in the market and so we will continue working and improving our service.

**How far did the recent history of Albania influence your professional career?**

My brother and I have been sensible to the changes after the communism system failed. We went to Italy with the idea to see the capitalism and to learn from it. We wanted to get the best experiences and to bring them back to Albania like a lot of Albanian people did. We needed to go and to stay in Italy only to learn. We needed to understand what real service is. We often mentioned this word in Albania, but we didn’t understand the full meaning of it.

