



Wage and Labour Conditions of Shoe and Garment Workers in Albania

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Research Paper

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
1. OVERVIEW OF THE GARMENT AND SHOES SECTOR	5
1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE INDUSTRY AND GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD.....	6
1.2 ECONOMIC INDICATORS OF THE INDUSTRY REALTED TO GDP AND EXPORTS OF ALBANIA.....	7
1.3 GOVERNMENT PROMOTION OF INVESTMENTS IN THE GARMENT/SHOE INDUSTRY	8
1.4 THE MAIN EXPORT DESTINATIONS OF GARMENTS AND SHOES PRODUCED IN ALBANIA.....	9
1.5 EXPORTS BY GROUPS OF GOODS	10
1.6 EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATIONS AND UNION TRADES.....	10
1.7 EMPLOYMENT AND COMPOSITION OF WORKFORCE	12
1.8 INFORMALITY IN THE TEXTILE AND SHOES INDUSTRY.....	13
1.8 THE GENDER, AGE AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE WORKFORCE IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY	13
1.9 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE GARMENT / SHOE INDUSTRY – RELOCATION	14
1.10 GENDER ISSUES IN THE TEXTILE AND SHOES INDUSTRY IN ALBANIA	15
2. LEGAL PROVISIONS AND GENERAL WAGE PRACTICE IN THE SECTOR	17
2.1 STATISTICS ON NET WAGES 2014	17
2.2 LEGAL MINIMUM WAGE AND ITS ADJUSTMENTS, MANDATORY CONTRIBUTIONS, LEAVE	17
2.3 OVERTIME	18
2.4 NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE SETTING MECHANISM.....	20
2.5 LABOUR INSPECTIONS AND OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES.....	22
2.6 POVERTY IN ALBANIA THROUGH INSTAT.....	23
2.7 BARRIERS TO ORGANIZING.....	24
2.8 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS (CBAs)	24
2.9 INFORMAL WORK	25
2.10 LABOR SHORTAGE IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY	26
FIELD RESEARCH	27
GENERAL INFORMATION.....	27
WORKING HOURS AND LEAVE	27
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY	28
WAGES.....	28
COSTS OF DECENT LIVING.....	29
LABOUR CONTRACTS.....	29
RECOMMENDATIONS	32
IMPORTING COUNTRIES	33
TRADE UNIONS	33
REFERENCES.....	35

Acronyms

AIC	Albanian Investment Council
AIDA	Albanian Investment Development Agency
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CTUA	Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania
EFI	Economic Freedom Index
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ILO	International Labour Organization
INSTAT	Albanian Institute of Statistics
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
MEDTTE	Ministry of Economic Development, Trade, Tourism and Entrepreneurship
MSWY	Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
NRG	National Registration Centre
The package	Incentives Package for the Industry of Inward Processing Regime
TUTLCI	Trade Union of the Textile, Leather and Clothing Industry
UTUAW	Union of Trade Unions of Albanian Workers
WBG	World Bank Group

Introduction

Albania is a small European country with a population of 2.8 million people according to the 2011 Census. It is located in Southeastern Europe, bordering Greece to the south, Macedonia to the east and Kosovo and Montenegro to the north. Its coastline of 476 kilometers extends along the Adriatic and Ionian seas. Seventy percent of the country is mountainous. In 1991, Albania emerged from nearly 50 years of harsh communist rule with widespread poverty and a nearly devastated economy (World Bank Group, WBG, 2015). At the time, Albania was the most isolated country in Europe with virtually no ties or cooperation with any other nation and dependent solely on its own crippled industry and agriculture (WBG, 2015).

According to the Economic Freedom Index (EFI, 2015) Albania's economy has benefited substantially from increased openness and flexibility over the past decade. Although the state continues to control key enterprises, particularly in the energy sector, the economy is mostly in private hands. Beneficial structural reforms have included bank privatization, implementation of competitive flat tax rates, and modernization of the regulatory environment. Although Foreign

Quick facts about Albania:

Population: (2.8 Million)
Male: 50.53 %;
Female: 49.6 %
GDP (PPP) \$31.6 billion
2.1 % Growth
2.3 % 5 years compound
annual growth
\$ 11377 per capita
Unemployment rate: 16.1 %
Inflation (CPI): 1.9 %
FDI inflow: \$1.1 billion

Source: *Economic Freedom Index (EFI, 2015)*

Direct Investment (FDI) has increased in recent years, overall levels still remain among the lowest in the region (EFI, 2015). Deeper institutional reforms to reduce labor market regulations and increase the efficiency of the judiciary, which remains subject to political interference, are critical to further success. Corruption continues to undermine the prospects for long-term economic development. Expansionary public spending has led to budget deficits and rising public debt, now over 70 percent of GDP (EFI, 2015).

In 2014 Albania became a European Union (EU) candidate country on condition that it makes further progress in reforming the judiciary and law enforcement to combat deeply rooted corruption and organized crime, especially human trafficking, fraudulent documents, and money laundering. The EU is demanding reforms in the judiciary and law enforcement agencies to combat deeply rooted corruption and organized crime. Judges sometimes face threats and physical violence. Protection of intellectual and real property rights is weak, particularly for land tenure (EFI, 2015).

The entrepreneurial regulatory framework has become fairly streamlined, and starting a business takes less than the world averages of seven procedures and 30 days. Minimum capital requirements are modest. Despite some reform, labor market rules remain relatively rigid. Government subsidies and price controls distort domestic prices for electricity, water, agricultural products, and railroad transportation (EFI, 2015).

1. Overview of the garment and shoes sector

Albania has a small textile and shoe industry that relies on low-labor cost assembly operations and competes with lower-cost Asian producers who are also becoming more productive (WBG, 2015). Exports were dominated by footwear and garment clothing in 24.3 % in 2007 and after 2008 the share of textile and clothing in the Albanian export basket was 15.7% (WBG, 2015). According to the Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA, 2015) the textile, garment and shoe sectors are today important parts of the manufacturing industry in Albania and play a crucial role in the economic and social welfare of the country, becoming the second and third after minerals in the export share of the country. Moreover, the textile and clothing industries represented mainly from the production of garments and a small production of textile and wool materials use part of the existing facilities, cheap labor costs and workers' experience (Ministry of Economic Development, Trade, Tourism and Entrepreneurship, MEDTTE, 2014). This industry is managed by joint stock companies mainly from neighboring countries with which Albania has close economic ties, such as: Italy, Germany, Greece etc. Business partners from neighboring countries brought modern technology in the operation of the market. The value of exports of Albania from the shoes industry for the year 2014 was 306 million EUR and 305 million EUR, for the garment industry, while the number of employees had already reached approximately 28 000 (MEDTTE, 2014). Leather and shoes industry is represented mainly by inward processing companies so-called Fasons that work with the purchaser material. These sectors represent 34% of total exports and 45% of the workforce in the processing industry (Albanian Investment Development Agency, AIDA, 2015).

The shoes and garments industries have developed easily in Albania due to advantages such as flexibility of large and/or small orders, skilled labor force, deliveries at short distance and relatively low transportation costs within the European Union countries. In addition, labor costs are significantly lower due to the fact that Albania has the lowest minimum wage compared to other countries in the region, followed by Kosovo; multiple language skills of workers due to extensive immigration and influence of neighboring countries such as Italy and Greece. Finally,

the sector is strongly supported by facilitating policies initiated by the government, aimed at creating easiness in the work of factories operating in this area. According to the Chamber of Façons of Albania (CFA, 2014) 1335 production units of the Façon sector are registered in the National Registration Centre. Moreover, the average age of the employees in this sector is 31 years old, and 95 % of employees are women compared to 5% men.

1.1 Structure of the industry and Geographical spread

According to Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT, 2014) there were 748 manufactures of garments and 190 manufactures of leather and related products registered and active in 2014. While according to the report prepared by the Chamber of Façons of Albania (CFA, 2014) 1335 production units of the Façon sectors producing garment and shoes are registered in the National Registration Centre.

Table 1: The garment and shoes enterprises distributed through the regions

Albanian Regions	No of factories	
	Garment production	Shoes Production
Berat	38	
Dibër	4	0
Durrës	128	44
Elbasan	25	
Fier	67	12
Gjirokastrë	21	
Korçë	73	
Kukës	5	
Lezhë	24	9
Shkodër	33	17
Tiranë	286	87
Vlorë	44	10
Total	748	190

Source: INSTAT (2014) the register of enterprises 2014

In Albania there is a mix of foreign owned, locally owned and combined companies (with shares from Albanians and foreign subjects). Typically the foreign owned are mostly Italian and those combined have also shares from Albanian and Italian physical persons. The table below shows a breakdown of factories in the garment and shoes industry divided between male and female owners (administrators).

Table 2: The garment and shoes enterprises divided by owners: female and male

No of factories	No. of factories	
	Garment enterprises	Shoes enterprises
Total	561	138
Female owned	315	57
Male owned	246	81

Source: INSTAT (2014), the Register of Enterprises 2014

In Albania garments and shoes industry are mainly working in the Façon sector of the industry. The term “Façon industry” is used in Albania to refer to the *inward processing industries of textile, garments and footwear manufacturing*. The partial or fully finished products are almost exported to other countries and not sold in the country. These products represent the major portion of the country’s exports. The size of workplaces might differ from a region to the other within the country. The size varies from 1000 employees to 30 (CFA, 2014). There are no official data about the exact breakdown of factories according to their sizes.

According to unofficial data (testimonies from workers interviewed and other sources of information) shoes and garment work is distributed even in homes where not only adult’s works but also children are involved and they have to fulfill a certain quota/norm predetermined by the factory. According to the report of International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC, 2007) children are employed in much higher numbers in home-based operations. They usually help parents, mainly mothers who receive work through intermediaries who distribute works for people at home. ITUC (2007) says that it would be easy to blame the Albanian companies for exploiting adult and child workers, but those really responsible for these Medieval working conditions are the big international buyers that impose indecent prices on their suppliers. At Filanto Company, for example, a pair of shoes bought from the factory in Tirana costs 4 Euros and is resold for between 22 and 30 Euros in the shops of Italy (ITUC, 2007).

1.2 Economic indicators of the industry related to GDP and exports of Albania

The textile and shoes industries has been very important for our country, in terms of trade, GDP and employment and have contributed significantly in our economy. The textile and shoes industries provide opportunities for export diversification and expansion of manufactured exports because of the low labour cost advantages. Below in the tables is presented the contribution of garment / shoe production to the national economy, in GDP and exports, comparing the GDP contributions of the garment/ shoe industry between 2010 and 2014.

Table 3. Shoes Industry in Albania in EUR

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total exports shoes in EUR	181,465,742	216,401,304	212,058,631	241,596,713	306,230,551
Total exports in EUR	1,153,912,064	1,406,404,234	213,030	1,759,982,250	1,826,850,041
The ratio of the shoes industry with the other exports	16%	15%	99544%	14%	17%
Total GDP in EUR	8,854,604,177	9,290,172,164	9,520,078,495	9,646,819,908	10,003,924,491
The report of the shoes industry with the GDP	2.0%	2.3%	2.2%	2.5%	3.1%

Source: INSTAT 2015

Table 4 – Garment Industry in Albania in EUR

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total exports garment in EUR	214,152,158	239,460,423	230,679,803	252,947,902	305,783,227
Total Exports (EUR 1€=140 leke)	1,153,912,064	1,406,404,234	1,521,642,857	1,759,982,250	1,826,850,041
The report of the garment industry with the other exports	19%	17%	15%	14%	17%
Total GDP in EUR	8,854,604,177	9,290,172,164	9,520,078,495	9,646,819,908	10,003,924,491
The report of the Apparel industry with the GDP	2.4%	2.6%	2.4%	2.6%	3.1%

Source: INSTAT 2015

1.3 Government promotion of investments in the garment/shoe industry

In terms of investment Albania has understood the value and importance of Foreign Direct Investments and its contribution to the economic and social development of the country bringing with them capital transfer, technologies and skills (Nene & Zoto, 2013). The trade policy in Albania is guided by the principles of the World Trade Organization, of which the country is part since September 8, 2000. According to MEDTTE (2014) after joining the WTO, all trade policies in Albania are based on i) a strategic document, which is the report of Albania's membership in this organization and ii) the Uruguay Agreements. As of July 2007 Albania is also part of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) together with other Western Balkans countries. According to this agreement within CEFTA countries all goods are traded without customs duties, with the exception of some agricultural products originating from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (MEDTTE, 2015). This agreement has provided exports of industrial products originating from Albania without customs tariffs and no quotas in all CEFTAs countries.

In the front of domestic policies the Albanian government launched a special Incentives Package for the Industry of Inward Processing Regime also referred to as “Façon industry”. According to MDTTE (2014) this package takes into account the declining performance of this sector year after year and the considerable decline in exports from 47.72% in 2009 to 29.45% in 2014 (INSTAT, 2013). The positive incentives from Albanian Government has done so by consulting exclusively with entrepreneurs in the garment and shoes industry, thus excluding other stakeholders and not taking into consideration working conditions and workers’ rights in the labour market. In itself the package is a set of facilitating measures on garment and footwear producers as an effort to give a boost to this sector, which has been the traditional priority exporter for Albania and one of the key industries to employ a large number of people in the past two decades, despite the negative impacts from the Eurozone crisis in the past few years (MDTTE, 2014). The package aims to increase the level of exports from 405 million EUR during the first year of the package to 900 million EUR at the end of the third year and an increasing number of employees from 28000 (first year of the use of the package) to 100000 employees in the sector by the end of the third year (Incentives Package for the Industry of Inward Processing Regime, (The Package, 2014). It includes a series of measures that offer garment and shoes producers state facilities for a symbolic rent of only 1 Euro, accelerate VAT refunds to 30 days and lift a series of customs barriers. According to the government, the 5% extra on the income tax will be returned to the garment and shoes producers in support of employment incentives by paying social security and health insurance for new employees for a certain period (MDTTE, 2014).

1.4 The main export destinations of garments and shoes produced in Albania

Based on information from INSTAT (2015) the main export destinations are Italy followed by Spain and Germany, Greece, Kosovo and USA. This is also reported by the ACF (2014) which explains that the main exports destinations for the Façon sector who mainly cover garment and shoes industry are Italy with 82, 5%, Greece with 7.9%, Germany with 7.3% and other countries such as Spain, France etc. Albania exports garment and shoes but it also imports for such products citizens use.

Table 5: Exports vs. Imports with the most important countries (in million ALL)

	Exports						Imports				
	Garment and shoes						Garment and shoes				
Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014

Italy	46164	53937	53445	59567	71555		27458	31073	28631	31466	34615
Greece							3206	3188	2261	2345	2344
Spain	719	772	1267	1094	1099						
Kosovo	54	97	36	79	93						
Kina	0	0	7	0	0		6292	6868	6397	6954	7794
Germany	3243	3700	2819	3375	3908		1496	1592	1640	1675	2049
Turkey							4389	5003	6048	7854	10258

Source: INSTAT, 2014

According to a source from the custom office in Albania garment and shoes industry is producing its own brands and international brands such as: Bata, Zara, Tods, Premigi, Mitto by Caterina Firenze, Berttoni, Liu Jo, etc.

1.5 Exports by groups of goods

According to publication “Foreign Trade in Goods 2010-2014”, published by INSTAT (2015) the products that dominated exports for the 5 years period (2010-2014) were active processing exports of textile products and footwear. For 2014 the most exported product groups were: “Mineral Products” with 33.6 %, “Footwear” with 16.9 %, “Textile and textile manufacture” with 16.7 % and “Base metals and base metal manufacture” with 14.2 % of exports. In 2014 exports to the EU countries occupied 77.4 % of exports increasing by 4.8 %, compared with previous year; while exports to CEFTA countries (Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Moldova) occupied 11.6 % of exports increasing by 12.3 %, compared to the previous year. Weight of imports from Italy has continued to grow over the last five years, reaching 29.8 % in 2014 from 28.2 % of total imports in 2010. While imports from Greece have decreased from 13.1 % in 2010 in 9.4 % in 2014.

Table 6. Exports by groups of goods(in million ALL)

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Textile and textile art	55646	64106	62093	69.367	85.936	45919
Leather and leather manufactures	2567	2926	2773	3195	3076	44164

Source: INSTAT 2015

Table 7. Exports by groups of goods (in %)

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Textile and textile art	34.4	32.6	29.1	28.2	33.6	18.9
Leather and leather manufactures	1.6	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.2	18.2

Source: INSTAT 2015

1.6 Employers’ associations and union trades

Both shoes and garment industry employers are represented by different organizations such as: Konfindustria, Business Albania, The Chamber of the Albanian Façons, The Albanian Chamber

of Commerce and Industry and other chambers of commerce such as American Chamber of Commerce etc. These organizations, acted as negotiators with the Government of Albania established after the Parliamentary Elections of June 2013, to compile a package of good incentives for the business of textile and apparel industry in Albania. According to International Labour Organization (2008) the industry is covered by the Trade Union of the Textile, Leather and Clothing Industry, which is part of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania. There are 83 trade unions established and operating in Albania. Most of them operate under the umbrella of the two confederations, whereas the rest operate independently.

The two biggest and most influential confederations are: the Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania (KSSH), and the Union of Independent Trade Unions of Albania (BSPSH), which are represented with 5 members in the National Labour Council (Doçi, 2013). The two biggest confederations represent about 90% of the members of trade unions in Albania. KSSH and BSPSH are represented in 12 regions and are mainly operational in the sectors of education and science, administration staff, -pensioners, industry, agriculture, the food industry, public health, transportation, oil, construction, textiles, craftsmanship, trade, metallurgy and chemistry and telecommunications (Doçi, 2013). According to ILO (2015) social dialogue has made significant progress in recent years. After a period of problematic operations, the National Labour Council (NLC) returned to normality and regular meetings have been held to address important topics on the social- economic agenda. ILO has assisted and contributed toward strengthening the role of NLC as the highest tripartite body of Social Dialogue in the country. Business Council (KASH) has become a member of the NLC, and this is expected to further increase the profile of this tripartite body (ILO, 2015).

According to the Union of Trade Unions of Albanian Workers (BSPSH) and the Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania (KSSH) workers in these sectors face harsh working conditions as only a few factories respect and fulfill the obligations set out in the Albanian Labour Code. However, they say that there are some positive examples from some textile and shoes employees who try to fulfill good working conditions for the employees. It is obvious in Albania that trade unions prefer to work with public employees rather than private one. Interviews conducted with workers from several shoes and textile factories confirmed the fact that trade unions have good relations with management staff of factories. They even allegedly receive “gifts” to not create any problem for the factory. In addition, none of the workers interviewed was part of any trade union, or even knew how to become active with them or approach their members.

In order to protect workers' rights the many changes of the Labour Code of Albania approved by a law in December 5, 2015. The New Labor Code with changes incorporated will enter into force by the end of June 2016. The changes in the New Labor Code are prepared in the light of Albania's commitments to fulfill European Commission obligations for *acquis communautaire*.

1.7 Employment and composition of workforce

In both shoes and leather industry around 13406 employees are working in Tirana region, followed by around 8038 in Durres region, Shkoder 2646 employees, Lezhe 1876, Fier 1815, Vlore 1106 employees (ACF, 2014). Moreover, (ACF, 2014) explains that there are 1335 production units of the Façon sectors registered in the National Registration Centre (NRG). Moreover according to CFA (2015) the average age of the employees in this sector is 31 years old and 95 % of employees are women compared to 5 % men. However, it was not possible to receive official data from the Institute of Statistics in Albania about the number of people both men and women working in the shoes and garment industry, due to the sensitive nature of the data.

Table 8: Number of employees in shoes factories.

Albanian regions	no of employees
Shkoder	2646
Diber	
Tirane	13408
Elbasan	
Durres	8038
Korce	319
Gjirokaster	
Vlore	1106
Fier	1815
Berat	480
Kukes	
Lezhe	1876
Total	29688

Source: The Albanian Chamber of Façons

Table 9: Number of employees in garment factories

Albanian regions	No of employees
Shkoder	3364
Diber	
Tirane	12529
Elbasan	783
Durres	10159
Korce	3766
Gjirokaster	
Vlore	1585
Fier	1422

Berat	3339
Kukes	
Lezhe	
Total	36947

Source: The Albanian Chamber of Façons

1.8 Informality in the textile and shoes industry

Informal and/or grey economy is one of the most understudied sectors with a significant lack of data and reliable sources in Albania. The government declares that the degree of economic informality is over 50%, according to the working document of the Albanian Investment Council (2015). A previous study from Boka and Torluccio (2013) has calculated that the informal economy during 1996-2012, depending on the method used, can be estimated at average between 13.6% and 38% of the GDP. Informality is a widespread phenomenon, especially in rural areas where government control is less frequent. However, in an attempt to curb informal economy, the government in September 2015 started a nationwide operation and controls to small, medium and large businesses in order to check for infringements. As a result many of the businesses started registering their unregistered workers. The interviews conducted with workers of garment and shoes factories confirmed that the employers started paying their obligation for social and health insurance massively before and during the government operation and controls in businesses started in September 2015. They claimed that if before there were many people who were not registered and subsequently not insured, now the number has decreased significantly. According to calculations from INSTAT data informal economy from 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 accounted for 28.2%, 30.2%, 34.7, and 32.7% of the total GDP respectively. Although the overall percentage of the informal economy in relation to the GDP has decreased in the period from 1996 to 2013 it is still a significant percentage, which means that informal employment still remains a challenge in Albania (Boka &Torluccio, 2013). Uncontrolled is as well the alleged job that the workers are taking home.

1.8 The gender, age and ethnic composition of the workforce in the garment industry

Unofficial data has calculated that the average age of workers in the garment and shoe industry is 31 years old while the number of women is overwhelming reaching a 95% versus 5% men (CFA, 2015). Data gathered from interviews with workers revealed that the majority of works/jobs that women perform in the industry are seamstresses, cutters, ironers and processors, often also packers,

while men usually operate heavy machinery, they work with transportation of products and in the storage area. Albania is a country that produces immigrants, especially in countries such as Italy and Greece or other, from the other side due to low wages it is not a country that has high immigration levels from other countries. Therefore, despite the lack of official data, there is a general sense that there are little to no immigrants working in the garment and shoe industry. The same feeling was also created while interviewing workers from the selected factories. According to all of them there are no migrant workers in their factories.

1.9 Strengths and weaknesses of the garment / shoe industry – relocation

According to the Albanian Business and Development Investment Strategy 2014-2020 Albanian domestic market is comparatively small, and most of the investors would be interested in export-oriented investments. The country's favorable location, good infrastructure and cheap labour are important elements that meet the needs of this type of investor, especially those that want to export to European markets (MDTTE, 2014). Since Albania still offers low labour costs, compared to other countries in the region, many types of investors would be interested to benefit from this advantage, in particular in the inward processing textile and leather industry. Albania has already been successful in attracting such types of investment in the past, which have become success stories and have provided the majority of the country's exports in the past decade. These types of investors will continue to be promoted aggressively by the government in the future according to the Albanian Business and Development Investment Strategy 2014-2020.

Moreover, in Tonucci and Partners (2014) textile and garments manufacturers are the largest employers in the manufacturing sector. Building upon a strong post-war tradition of garments production, since the privatization in 1990s many local firms have created a strong reputation for themselves. At the same time, foreign companies have substantially increased their share of the sector's output particularly within the export-processing regime (Tonucci and Partners 2014). Many foreign firms have been operating in Albania for more than a decade and many of them continue to increase the scope of their operations and hire more staff. Export and import figures, which have both increased in recent years, are closely related to a re-export regime that sees imports of semi-final products subsequently re-exported after several operations in Albania.

The main advantages of investing in Albania in the garments sector include: a skilled, adaptable and flexible workforce that is available across the country, has experience in the sector, is able to adopt new technologies and meet international quality standards and can meet short delivery times;

lower direct and total labor costs than most comparable countries; lower costs of transportation due to the geographic position of Albania, with easy access to Italy, Greece and the Balkan markets; and no VAT or custom duties for 100% fashion producers under the re-export scheme (Tonucci and Partners, 2015). According to the same analysis from Tonucci and Partners (2014) Albania is one of the leading shoes producers and leather processors. Exports of Albanian footwear have doubled in the last few years. Albania is the second largest European exporter of shoes to Italy, while Italy, by far, is the leading exporter of shoes in the world. Albania enjoys an ideal location to export to Italy, Europe and Balkans (Tonucci and Partners, 2015). Foreign investors in Albania are also increasingly exporting to non-European countries.

1.10 Gender issues in the textile and shoes industry in Albania

According to women and girls we meet in our field work and the interviews we did to write this paper a number of gender issues appear in textile and shoes industry. Women employed in this sector are the ones with a lot of economic and social problems. Almost all women interviewed said that if their families would not face this or that problem they will never accept to work in such places, for very little money and in these very hard conditions. Fear, debt, vulnerability, lack of confidence, unsafe working conditions, difficulties in finding other jobs, isolation, lack of support network and cultural pressures from family or community were also highlighted during the field work. In addition, women in a mere voice told as that they face sexual harassment and gender-related discrimination in these types of factories. Cases of accidents and abuses in the working place often goes without public scrutiny, since daily politics and public scoops remain the main subject of social debates. Very few reactions on these condition are dedicated to civil society organizations such as Gender Alliance for Development Centre (2014) since 2011, or some journalist such as, Shameti, journalist at one of the most popular periodics in Albania at his article “When slavery is called employment” argue that fasson business at its core is a disguised form of slavery, although various political actors, describe it as a generator of employment, growth and

progress¹. Moreover, he explains that this industry should not be encouraged by political forces. Working conditions, schedules, workers' rights, health care, holidays, weekends, vacation, lunch breaks and freedom to organize and to demand greater rights. On the other hand, workers are not fully conscious about their rights, also as a result of the non functioning relationship between them and trade unions. In these conditions, it is the responsibility of civil society organizations which work for human rights in general and women rights in labor market specifically to raise these problems in the public sphere and at the policy-making level.

Gender Pay Gap has changed significantly in the decades preceding 2015. Only 10 years ago the Gender Pay Gap was close to 36% (favoring men). This percentage almost halved in 2008 when Gender Pay Gap decreased to 18%. According to estimations the Gender Pay Gap in 2012 was 17% (however pay gap in rural areas is significantly higher). Recent data has concluded that in 2015 gender pay gap had decreased to 10%.

Albania's HDI value for 2012 is 0.749—in the high human development category—positioning the country at 70 out of 187 countries and territories. Between 1985 and 2012, Albania's HDI value increased from 0.651 to 0.749, an increase of 15 percent or average annual increase of about 0.5 percent. The rank of Albania's HDI for 2011 based on data available in 2012 and methods used in 2012 was— 69 out of 187 countries. In the 2011 HDR, Albania was ranked 70 out of 187 countries. However, it is misleading to compare values and rankings with those of previously published reports, because the underlying data and methods have changed. Table A reviews Albania's progress in each of the HDI indicators. Between 1980 and 2012, Albania's life expectancy at birth increased by 7.4 years, mean years of schooling increased by 3.6 years and expected years of schooling decreased by 0.6 years. Albania's GNI per capita increased by about 85 percent between 1985 and 2012.

¹ <http://www.gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/2014/03/25/kur-skllaveria-quhet-punesim/>

2. Legal provisions and general wage practice in the sector

The minimum gross wage in Albania is 22,000 ALL (starting from 01.07.2011), approx. 157 Euro (if 1 Euro = 140 ALL). The basic minimum monthly salary is paid for 8 working hours per day or 40 per week. According to INSTAT data, the average wage (public and private sector) is 36,075 ALL (approx. 257 Euro, if 1 Euro = 140 ALL).

2.1 Statistics on net wages 2014

Official statistics do not provide data for the garment and shoes industry separately. According to INSTAT (2014) the net average wage in the manufacturing industry is 30460 ALL/month (218 EUR if 1 EUR= 140 ALL). This means that gross salary is 35000 ALL (250 EUR if 1 EUR – 140 ALL). The net average wage in the country overall is 38418 leke/month (INSTAT, 2015). Obviously, wages in the manufacturing industry are lower than the state average. This comes as a result of the industry not being properly controlled by the state and respective institutions. As far as employers pay minimum wage they are alright with state obligations. Also, most of the workers in this industry are women. This appears to be the only possibility for them to work. We have to bear in mind that these industries are located in informal areas where to find a job for a woman is too difficult. Worker unions are not active in protecting the rights of workers according to their wages. Minimum gross wage for this industry is 22000 ALL or equal to the minimum wage the Albanian law allows for workers. We do not have official data for the wages in this sector due to lack of data from the public institutions such as The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) and/or Institute of Statistics.

2.2 Legal minimum wage and its adjustments, mandatory contributions, leave

The minimum wage is the lowest wage required to be implemented by each employer, local or foreign. The minimum wage is determined by the Council of Ministers upon the proposal of the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth. The minimum monthly salary nationwide is 22 000 gross.

This salary is given for 174 hours per month carried out during normal working time² and includes social insurance. According to the law on social insurance in the Republic of Albania changed in 2014:

The contribution is estimated and paid on the gross salary, within the limits of the minimum wage at the national level and maximum wage.

Table 10: Mandatory Social Insurance Contributions

Pension + diseases + maternity + Accidents and occupational diseases + Unemployment insurance	24.5 %	15 % paid by employer and 9.5 % paid by the employee
Health insurance	3.4 %	1.7 % paid by employer and 1.7 % paid by employee
Total	27,9 %	16.7% and the employee 11.2%

Days off are regulated through the Labor Code of the Republic of Albania.

2.3 Overtime

The Labour Code is the main legal instrument regulating employment relationships in Albania. It sets the minimum standards for employment conditions which must be followed by all employers and employees. With regard to working time (eg, daily and weekly working time, night work and shifts, overtime and rest periods), the code provides the following rules.

Daily working hours

Under Article 78 of the code, the normal daily working hours must not exceed eight hours. The 'daily working hours' are the period of time for effective work performed every day, from 00:00 hours until 24:00 of the same day (excluding rest). The daily rest should consist of at least 11 consecutive hours within the same day (or, if necessary, across two days).

Night work

Under Article 80 of the code, any working hour performed between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am is considered to be night work. The same article provides that the duration of night work and work

²See more at: <http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/lajm/lang/sq/id/1029/Pagat-Minimale-ne-Shqiperi--Rajon-dhe-Europe-#sthash.GfhxphAS.dpuf>

performed one day before or after such night work shall not exceed a limit of eight consecutive hours. In any case, night work must be followed immediately by daily rest.

Weekly working hours

Under Article 82 of the code, the 'normal weekly working hours' (defined as the working hours performed from 0:00 Monday until 0:00 of the following Sunday) must not exceed 40 hours.

Overtime

Under Article 88 of the code, 'overtime hours' are defined as "every working hour which is performed during a day or a week, beyond the normal weekly and/or daily working hours" (ie, beyond eight hours a day or 40 hours a week).

According to Article 89, if required by circumstances, an employer may ask its employees to perform overtime hours, but must also take into account the employees' personal and family circumstances.

Nevertheless, according to Article 90, the employer may not demand the performance of overtime hours by any employee who has already performed 50 hours of work in any given week. Such limit may be exceeded only by a decision of the Council of Ministers or on authorization of the Work Inspectorate in the case of *force majeure* or work that must be performed for the common good.

Shift remuneration

Under Article 81 of the code, any working hour performed between 7:00pm and 10:00pm entitles the employee to remuneration of at least 20% more than the base salary for such hours. Any working hour performed between 10:00pm and 6:00am entitles the employee to remuneration of at least 50% more than the base salary for such hours.

Working during holidays

Article 85 of the code provides that normal weekly rest hours must be at least 36 hours, of which 24 are uninterrupted hours. The weekly holiday includes Sunday and is not remunerated. The Council of Ministers may lay down exceptions for specific cases.

Under Article 86, employees should not work during public holidays. Moreover, employees are entitled to be remunerated for public holidays. When a public holiday falls on the day of a weekly

holiday, the weekly rest is postponed on the Monday. The Council of Ministers may lay down exceptions for specific cases.

Under Article 87, if an employee works during the weekly or public holidays, he or she must receive at least 25% additional salary (on top of the base salary for such hours) or rest equal to 125% of the hours worked during the weekly or public holiday. Such remuneration should be given within one week before or after the hours worked during the weekly public holiday.

Overtime during holidays

Under Article 91 of the code, if an employee works overtime during a day or a week, the employee must receive at least 25% additional salary (on top of the base salary for such hours) or rest equal to 125% of the overtime hours. Such remuneration should be given within two months of the day on which the overtime is performed.

If the employee works overtime during a weekly or public holiday, the employee must receive at least 50% additional salary (on top of the base salary for such hours) or rest equal to 150% of the hours worked during the weekly or public holiday (unless collective labour agreements provide otherwise).

Unfortunately and due to our investigations none of the Overtime provisions in the Labour code are not been calculated properly to the employee monthly salary. As well the employee do not have clear ideas about these Labour Code provisions.

2.4 National minimum wage setting mechanism

Minimum wage is set by the government through Decision of the Council of Ministers both for the private and public sector. The latest change in the minimum wage amount was made through a Decision of the Council of Ministers from July 2013 which set it to 22 000 leke (157 EUR). According to the Law on Competencies for Wage and Reward Provisions the Council of Ministers with a proposal from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the Ministry of Finance, approves minimum monthly wage at the national level, which is obligatory and should be implemented by every employer, domestic or foreign. Minimum wage has changed almost every year in the last 10 years (as can be seen from the table above). According to a roundtable organized by International Labour Organization (ILO) office in Tirana several recommendations are put forward related to minimum wage provisions. Some of the recommendations include:

1. Re-launch and promote the tripartite wage-fixing process in Albania, notably on the minimum wage fixing and within the existing National Labour Council and the tripartite Wage Committee in the context of existing laws and provisions.
2. The role of the minimum wage as a wage floor should be improved to protect the most vulnerable workers. This should lead to a more regular adjustment of the minimum wage to take into account the changing social and economic circumstances such as price increases, evolving living standards, and economic growth and productivity.
3. Bipartite wage negotiations between employers' and workers' representatives at enterprise but possibly also at other levels (of the sector, local, and national) should be strengthened in order to have a wage fixing process also taking into account diversified conditions and interests at local level.

Furthermore, the ILO-Report on Decent Work Country Programme Document 2012-2015 calls for attention to the following: “Despite regular adjustments to the minimum wage, the prevalence of poverty in Albania highlights the need for it to play a more active role to protect the most vulnerable workers. Given this, the social partners have regularly urged the government to establish the subsistence minimum, so that minimum wages take into account changing social and economic circumstances such as price increases, evolving living standards and economic growth and productivity.

Moreover and in compliance with the requirements of ILO Convention No. 131, which has been ratified by Albania in 2004, the Government, through the Council of Ministers, sets the official minimum wage for both the public and private sector. Despite regular adjustments to the minimum wage, the prevalence of poverty in Albania highlights the need for the trade unions to play a more active role to protect the most vulnerable workers. Given this, social partners have regularly urged the government to establish the subsistence minimum, so that the minimum wage takes into account changing social and economic circumstances such as price increases, evolving living standards and economic growth and productivity (ILO, 2015).

As mentioned above Albania has an official minimum wage but does not have a minimum living standard. For the first time this year the Ombudsman of Albania³ initiated a dialogue on living standard with different state and non-state stakeholders urging the government to establish a minimum standard of living. In our opinion once this value is calculated will bring considerable changes in many aspects and fields of life in Albania including the existence of the garment and shoes industry itself.

2.5 Labour inspections and occupational diseases

The State Labour Inspectorate is the body within the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in charge of inspecting and oversight of labour issues in the country, set up in 1995. The SLI is composed of three General Directorates: the Inspecting Directorate, the Occupational Safety and Health Directorate and the Internal Services Directorate. Since 2006, the SLI has been operating as an autonomous institution.

Companies falling under the jurisdiction of the Inspectorate are obliged to self-declare their fulfillment of health and hygiene regulations in their respective premises. The SSI is responsible for the monitoring and control of exposure to toxic substances, radiation, noise, vibration, extreme temperatures, and of occupational accidents and diseases. Interviews with workers revealed that they are heavily exposed to most of the above mentioned elements. In addition, Labour Inspectors may, in particular cases, also directly impact on the employment relationship, finalizing individual labour contracts and adjusting contract provisions in individual labour contracts. The SLI also grants permits for starting any economic activity, which implies an initial verification and assessment of the premises plans, including: equipment, devices and number of workplaces. A

³ The Ombudsman protects the rights, freedoms and lawful interests of any person from unlawful or improper public administration. Any individual or group of individuals including minor children can turn him. He/She is supposed to be above the government. In Albania we have one Ombudsperson chosen by the Parliament every 5 year and a Antidiscrimination commissioner chosen every 5 year by the Parliament. The ombudsman person in charge received support by the Danish government. Under these funds he organized many activities during December 2015. One of the activities was the public debate on the minimum living standard.

lack of organizational culture has impacted the labour inspection tools, not really using preventive measures, but rather reactive ones.

2.6 Poverty in Albania through INSTAT

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis and the overall macroeconomic situation associated with low growth rates since 2008, poverty in Albania has increased (INSTAT, 2015). The fraction of the population whose real per capita monthly consumption is below Lek 4891 (in 2002 prices) increased from 12.5 % in 2008 to 14.3 % in 2012. In the previous years, poverty fell from 25.4 % in 2002 to 17.9 % in 2005 and 12.5 % in 2008 (Figure 1 and Table 1). This means that roughly 64,402 people in addition to 350,6-36 poor people in 2008 fell into poverty. Extremely poor population, defined as those with difficulty meeting basic nutritional needs, increased from 1.2 % in 2008, to 2.3 % in 2012. Extreme poverty decreased from 5.0 % in 2002, to 3.3 % in 2005 and to 1.2 % in 2008. In 2012, extreme poverty has increased for both urban (2.2 %) and rural areas (INSTAT, 2015). Poverty gap has fallen from 3.9 % in 2005 to 2.4 % in 2008. Severity of poverty slightly increased from 0.7 % in 2008 to 1.0 % in 2012. In Coastal areas, which have the largest increase in poverty, 17.7 % of the population is poor compared to 12.7 % in 2008. Tirana has also experienced a considerable increase in poverty. Compared to 2008, the percentage of the population considered as poor, increased from 8.8 % in 2008 to 12.1 % in 2012. The Central areas have broadly remained in a similar situation. Poverty has slightly increased from 10.7 % in 2008 to 12.6 % in 2012.

Poverty does not appear to be solely a rural phenomenon anymore. Instead, poverty has mainly shifted to the urban areas, while rural population in poverty declined by about 0.3 %, urban population in poverty increased by about 44.0 %.

Table 11. Poverty measures by regions

Prefecture	Headcount	Depth	Severity
Berat	12.3	2.3	0.7
Dibër	12.7	2.3	0.7
Durrës	16.5	3.6	1.3
Elbasan	11.3	2.3	0.7
Fier	17.1	3.4	1
Gjirokaštër	10.6	2.3	1
Korçë	12.4	2.5	0.7
Kukës	22.5	3.8	0.9
Lezhë	18.4	4.7	1.7
Shkodër	15.4	3.7	1.6

Tiranë	13.9	2.7	0.8
Vlorë	11.1	2.4	0.8
Total	14.3	3	1

Source: INSTAT 2015

2.7 Barriers to organizing

During the communist era, the national trade union organization (read: Bashkimet Profesionale të Shqipërisë, BPSH) was a dependent structure of the ruling Communist party. Its primary task was not the representation of workers' interests against the state as the monopsony employer, but the mobilization of the workers for the “construction” of socialism, the class warfare and the fulfillment of the Plans; BPSH was an executing authority (Dragoshi&Pappa, 2015). As a result, social dialogue in its genuine form was an alien practice at the work place or sectoral level in the country in contrast to its development in Western Europe as a bottom-up approach.

Article 15 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania stipulates that: “Workers have the right to unite freely in labor organizations for the defense of their work-related interests.” This constitutional right is regulated through the provisions in the Law No.7961, date 12.07.1995 "Labor Code of the Republic of Albania" (amended). The law establishes the requirement of a minimum 20 members to establish a trade union (Article 177). Two or more trade union organizations have the right to voluntarily unite to form federations, whereas confederations can be formed by the voluntary union of two or more federations (Article 176).

According to Dragoshi and Pappa (2015) to date, there are 83 TUs established and operating in Albania. About 90% of trade union membership is embraced by the two main trade union confederations at the national level, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania (Konfederata e Sindikatave Shqiptare KSSH) with 110 000 reported members, and the Union of Independent Trade Unions of Albania (Bashkimi I Sindikatave te Pavarura te Shqiperise BSPSH) with 84 000 reported members KSSH and BSPSH operate at the national and regional level. Under the umbrellas’ of KSSH and BSPSH there are respectively 12 and 11 federations, respectively.

2.8 Collective bargaining agreements (CBAs)

In many cases, employers’ representatives have stated that trade unions are unable to meet the representation criteria due to their internal problems. Internal weaknesses and their absence in many factories have produced poor results in terms of fulfilling the decent work objectives in this sector. Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are stipulated in ILO

conventions 87 and 98 ratified by Albania and also affirmed in the Labour Code. Despite this legal basis, enterprises are still very hostile towards trade unions that attempt to strengthen their own position and perceive the latter as an obstacle for freely managing their relationship with workers. For instance, since this sector is based on imported raw materials, employers fear the possibility of potential alliances between domestic trade unions and those abroad which would strengthen and consolidate the domestic players. Employers also try to avoid collective agreements as the latter guarantee better. Collective bargaining can negotiate all employment terms and conditions, providing that these provisions are not less favorable for the employees than the provisions defined in the existing laws and secondary legislation. Usually, collective bargaining takes place between the employer and one or more trade unions of the company (i.e. employer) (Kalo, 2014).

2.9 Informal work

As mentioned in previous sections the informal economy occupies a large share of Albania's labour market. Even though there are no reliable and official statistics in all industries its presence in Albania is largely known and widespread, more so in the shoes and garment industries. Informal work is most common in rural areas due to less control from government bodies/institutions. In addition, informal work is most common during the summer months when students (high school or university) finish school and are temporarily employed in the shoes and garment factories. This trend was also confirmed during the interviews with workers from the selected factories. Regarding differences in wages between those legally registered and those not registered, interviews with workers provided us with a general idea on the difference whereby some of the unregistered workers (especially younger ones and those who have just started working) receive between 14 000 lek/month and 18 000 lek/month. On the other hand registered workers usually tend to earn between 22 000 lek/month and 24 000 lek/month, falling within the limits of the official minimum wage. One phenomenon that used to be common especially prior to the operation against informality (starting in September 2015) was the request of workers themselves to not be insured and registered. Because the salary would be higher without insurances some of the workers in desperate need for cash choose not to be insured in order to receive a slightly higher salary.

2.10 Labor shortage in the garment industry

According to Rama (2014) while female employees comprise 40.2% of the total number of employees in Albania, only four economic sectors led by manufacturing (59.4%) have a female majority. Participation and lack thereof in the labour market has varied from year to year. For instance since 2007 employment rate has decreased from 50.3% (2007) to the lowest levels of these last 7 years 44.1 and 44.3 in 2013 and 2014 respectively (INSTAT, 2014). Divided by men and women the figures for 2014 are 51.4% employment rate for men and 37.6% for women. On the other hand, unemployment has seen a steady increase since 2007. Since 2007 unemployment has increased from 13.4% to 17.5%. Unemployment is significantly higher among young people reaching up to 35% for the 15-29 age group (females). Divided between men and women unemployment figures are: 19.2% for men and 15.2% for women as of 2014 (INSTAT, 2014).

During interviews with workers from selected factories (and two extended interviews with two of the workers) we reached the conclusion that women do not have many alternatives in the labour market. This is mainly due to lack of a proper education. One of the interviewees said that she has been working in the shoes factory for a long time but that her university diploma in Public Administration would help her enter a different path. But most of the women working in the factory do not have any other alternatives. Usually the only alternatives for them are moving from one shoes or garment factory to another, which means very small variations in wages and conducting similar if not identical work.

Field research

General Information

For the sake of this study have been interviewed a total of 52 workers in 4 different shoes factories across Albania representing a wide range of age groups and coming from diverse personal and educational backgrounds, living conditions and different sets of problems. Their salaries ranged from the lowest 14 000 ALL to the highest 35 000 ALL. Only one out of 52 interviewees was a man, with the overwhelming majority being women, which also reflects the ratio of women and men in Albanian shoes and textile factories. As women occupy over 90% of the job positions, they were also asked who takes care of the children and how they find a work-life balance. A considerable number of women interviewed were the only ones to provide for the family, making it extremely difficult to meet basic needs.

Working hours and leave

Specifics of working hours and other modalities varied from factory to factory, however the connecting thread is that overtime is usually not paid and most of the time holidays and vacations are not paid, which clearly contradicts the Labour Code. In one of the factories, workers had to produce a daily collective quota of 50-600 pairs of shoes per day, while their work is calculated per pair depending on the pre-determined plan. In another larger factory workers had to fill in a daily quota of 700-800 pairs of shoes per day with an 80 pairs of shoes per hour.

While Sunday as a rule is a day off, Saturdays are always normal working days and are paid not as overtime but as normal weekdays, even though the Labour Code foresees differently. One of the problematic aspects of working hours is the commute that workers have to undertake everyday to get to and from the factory. In most of the factories targeted workers have to travel a minimum of 1 hour to get to the factory and back home, in some extreme cases it extends to 2 hours or more, which extends the amount of time workers spend at work, while leaving little time to take care of their families. Some women reported that their working day starts at 6 AM and ends at 6 PM a total 12 hours including commuting. Another problematic aspect of the work in these factories is taking a leave for emergency cases or due to health reasons. The majority of workers told interviewers that taking a leave is practically impossible and in some extreme cases it can cost a worker his/her job, despite the severity of the reason. Taking a day off depends also on the type of work performed. If a worker's job position is irreplaceable it is nearly impossible for her/him to

take a day off, regardless of the reasons. Women interviewed expressed deep satisfaction with this situation as often it makes it impossible for them to deal with personal, family, health problems. One of the confusions noticed by interviewers related to how working hours are calculated. Workers gave vastly different accounts of what they believed was the proper way to calculate their working hours. Some of the options are listed below:

- 120 lek/hour, 1000 pairs/day
- Depending on the quota/norms
- 8 hours of work are equal to 1 000 lek
- 100 lek/hour

Occupational health and safety

All the factories where workers were interviewed presented a number of safety concerns and problems. The most common complain was the lack of heating and cooling systems, which makes it too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter to work properly. Also, strong smell of chemical substance and worker's direct contact with these substances often causes physical problems such as headaches, stomachaches, allergies, neck problems, skin problems etc. Even though factories should have doctors in their premises, most workers report they come once in a while and in case a worker gets sick or is hurt during work they are taken to the hospital, where often they are asked not to report that the injuries were made while working.

Workers expressed a number of other concerns related to their working conditions such as loud noises and lack of running water during the summer, machineries are old and difficult to operate, there is no ventilation system etc. Most of them reported that there are frequent controls from Employment Office and Health Officials but they are usually given gifts and go away without checking the situation. Most of the workers that are not insured are forced to hide in a separate room until the control bodies leave the factory.

Wages

Women occupy over 90% of positions in shoes and textile factories in Albania. According to interviewed workers women work mostly in sewing machines, cleaning, stitching, cutting and men in pressing and fitting. Men employed in these factories generally operate heavy machinery or work in the storage area. Women reported that men are paid higher salaries with the justification

that their work is more difficult and they are stronger than women. When workers take a day off or when a product is damaged these are all deducted from their salaries.

Costs of decent living

While salaries of workers interviewed are extremely low, close to or a little higher than the official minimum wage, in order to secure decent living conditions for a family of four, interviewees' responses ranged from 400 to 600 Euros. These figures represent interviewees' perceptions of decent living income for a family of four. Expenses include the following items:

- a) Food
- b) Housing
- c) Basic monthly services (bills)
- d) Hygiene products
- e) Transport
- f) Education for children
- g) Clothing
- h) Vacations
- i) Savings

Labour contracts

While the majority of workers interviewed had signed a contract with management, they usually do not receive a copy of the contract and/or are not allowed to read the terms of reference. In extreme cases complains have harsh consequences of workers being immediately fired. The unwritten rule is that concerns, problems or complaints for different aspects of the work are resolved personally with the immediate superior, there are no organized efforts with other workers due to fears of repercussions.

Trade unions are overwhelmingly viewed with suspicion by workers in shoes factories. Their representatives are perceived either as corrupt or inefficient, in the sense that they do not function properly, there are no meetings and other activities. The majority of workers asked were not part of a trade union and they had no real knowledge on the work and objectives of trade unions in Albania. The most common perception and reported fact is that representatives of trade unions 'accept bribes' from factories in order 'not to cause disturbances'.

Profile 1- ‘‘All we ask for is a little dignity in our work’’

There are four people in Ana’s family. Her husband, whom she met at the age of 15 through an arranged marriage by her family, and her two children. The oldest is a boy in fifth grade (10 years old) and the youngest another boy still in kindergarten. In this family of four Ana is the only one who works at a shoes factory, for a meager salary of less than 150 Euros per month, being thus the only source of revenues for the family. She has been working in the factory for the last eight months. This is her first job ever. Before it was her husband who provided for the family, by working in construction. When his employment started fluctuating from one company to the other and short-term contracts, she had no choice left but to start looking for employment herself. Due to a blood feud in her family (common in some parts of northern Albanian families) her husband was forced to stop working at once for fear of being eventually killed. She fears for the life of her two boys as well and always tries to be careful when walking outside her home.

Ana’s sister, who works at the factory too, helped her get a job at the factory, operating a heavy machine that stitches the front part of the shoe. 8 hours a day, 6 days a week she has to stand in order to complete her assignments. Even though she is not paid extra, they ask her to perform other duties as well. Two are the most dreadful aspects of the work according to her:

- 1- She regrets that managers do not treat their employees as equal human beings. They are more often than not abusing them verbally and psychologically (by calling the women names: whore, stupid, I hope you get cancer to name just a few). This demeans their status to less than humans and makes them work uncomfortably, enduring harsh criticism and cursing throughout the day.
- 2- The salary is not enough for one person to get by, imagine a family of four, with children that have needs and often desires as they grow up. If this salary is your only means of survival than you are well below the minimum living standard. She would never chose voluntarily to work in an environment that is filled with hostility; lack of respect for human rights and that pays ridiculous salaries. But this is her only chance of survival. She feels compelled to hate the job she does and at the same time walk for more than an hour and stand for an additional eight hours to later not have any energy left.

Although minimum wage in Albania is 22 000 lek/month she never receives more than 20 000 lek/month. At the same time she is full of debts she cannot repay. Her oldest son needed a heart operation, which she paid for with borrowed money that they have not been able to repay. Due to inability to pay electricity bills she has signed an 8-year contract with the electricity company to pay 2500 lek/month every month in addition to the monthly sum. With electricity paid little is left for food and other needs. When she was younger she dreamt of becoming a nurse, but a very patriarchic father did not allow her to go to high school (girls should not get out of the house to go to school). She has transmitted this passion to her youngest children who wants to become a dentist when he grows up. to help other people.

Profile 2: ‘If I were not tied to the wage that I get from this job and the time it takes from my everyday life I would go out there and be part of those who protest for better living conditions’

There are 6 people in Blerina’s family, of who only 3 work and are a source of financial revenues for the family. The most difficult part was when the family had 9 members (her parents and 7 brothers and sisters) and only Blerina’s father was working for a salary of 40 000 leke (Less than 300 Euros) to support a family of nine. Needless to say it was extremely difficult to afford even basic needs.

Blerina and her family immigrated from Kukes in 1994 and settled in Durres. They followed the same pattern as many other people from northern Albania, settling in Tirana and Durres mainly, looking for better living conditions and job opportunities. The common feature of most women who settled in the city was the lack of a proper education either due to a patriarchal family or simply lack of opportunities; they had attended mainly secondary school and some also high school. Going to university was prohibited by other male members of the family. Blerina and her sisters were always stigmatized for their desire to attend university. Every time she would come back home late due to lectures and seminars people would be judgmental. However, her father, himself a professor in elementary school, would always push his daughters to study and he was the one to give them strength to handle harassments and financial obstacles. When Blerina was 14 years old she had a gland in her mouth, which made it difficult for her to eat and speak. As the gland had to be removed she underwent surgery, which cost her family 5000 Eur. For this reason her mother’s salary is used to pay back the loan, while her salary is used to pay for utilities and her father’s salary to pay for ailments, transport, clothing and education. Luckily her younger sister was eligible for a state scholarship of 9 000 lek/month. Despite the difficulties and hardships while growing up her sisters and herself worked in the garment factory during high school and later on during university to cover at least their tuition fees and not become a burden to the family. As a result and similar to almost every Albanian family they used to pile debts and borrow money to pay bills and buy food. With the employment of her mother the income sufficed to buy utilities as well. Blerina is studying Public Administration (BA), while working at the same time. She is passionate about voluntary work and has volunteered in Durres for 5 years but due to her other commitments she has to stop, although the friendships created through her community work will continue to be part of her life. In a way they help her feel less bad about her work.

She started working in the factory since high school and also continued during university to pay the tuition fees. On a positive note, she is optimistic about the future because she still believes that her studies will open a new path for her, contrary to some of the women who work there. Most of them are stuck there thinking there is no other option. A normal day in Blerina’s life: She wakes up at 5:00 am, drinks a coffee, and helps her mother with chores around the house. Afterward she goes to work where she stays until 5:30 pm and takes care of her sisters after work, checking their homework and other things.

Recommendations

In order to change the trends in textile and clothing workers' conditions in Albania, a number of measures have been suggested, to be taken at different levels of responsibility, as well as possibly structuring and making more consistent the various initiatives, and even incorporating enterprise-led actions in this context. The Albanian government is primarily responsible for ensuring compliance with international human rights laws, including labor rights. However, international clothing and footwear brands have a responsibility to promote respect for workers' rights throughout their supply chains, including both direct suppliers and subcontractor factories.

National authorities

- Public authorities should guarantee the implementation of laws, and binding conventions for workers' rights, including the protection of union leaders from persecution.
- Moreover, they could guarantee respect for workers' and internationally recognized rights.
- The working contracts should be object of verifications and in case of accidents, entitles victims and their families to compensation. This implies more checks by public authorities, concretely by the Inspectorate of Labour, on safety and social rights compliance.

International brands and retailers

- International brands should set up adequate corporate human-rights due-diligence procedures when dealing with contractors in developing countries. A key element to perform due diligence is auditing. Not only should audits be accurately performed, but serious legal sanctions should be applied to audit firms and certification bodies which have provided false safety assurances in respect of factories in which fires and other serious health and safety accidents and fatalities subsequently occur. Audits should represent a full assessment of the situation, rather than a simple checklist. This implies a change from traditional social compliance auditing to a process of cooperation between brand and supplier, in which all problems are disclosed in a transparent way.
- Not only safety, but workers' health too – paying particular attention to the gender dimension of the problem – could be included in such audits.
- Transparency is also recommended for audit reports of factories where safety incidents have taken place or where non-compliance with health and safety standards has been documented, in order to disclose this information to all stakeholders.

- Brands could adopt purchasing practices which stimulate the upgrading of factory buildings to safety standards.

Importing countries

According to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, "States should set out clearly the expectation that all business enterprises domiciled in their territory and/or jurisdiction respect human rights throughout their operations". A possible interpretation of this principle could lead a State to introduce legislation holding companies domiciled in its territory responsible for human rights violations throughout their supply chain. More generally, the possibility of transforming UN and OECD principles and guidelines into binding rules has been suggested. Importing countries may also use their political and economic power to exercise pressure on producing countries.

Trade Unions

The International Labor Organization says giving workers a greater voice is crucial in improving factory safety but this is not the case of Albania through union trades.

Labour Unions in Albania although organized in big confederations are weak and not trustable.

Some important actions are mentioned above:

The problems of **employees' interest representation for labour rights** in general and for safety and health matters in shoes and textile companies remains largely unsolved. Therefore employees of a company with more than 50 employees should establish a council of workers, with a five year mandate according to the law. While when a company has more than 20 and less than 50 employees, the functions of the council of workers is conducted by a representative, who is elected through secret voting of employees. The institutionalization of Workers Councils is considered an important tool to overcome the apathy of trade unions to feed into social dialogue at the workplace. Based on interviews with women workers we understood that they never heard about the existence of such councils in their companies and from the other side the trade unions are almost nonexistent. Therefore we highly recommend the establishment of workers councils according to the law as soon as possible at least in the textile and shoes companies with more than 50 employees.

Fostering the establishment of Tripartite PLUS forums as a means to address decent work deficits but also to endorse the strengthening of bipartite relationship between the two sides of the industry (Draggoshi and Pappa, 2015).

Contrary to the experience of other European countries, in the case of Albania, the classical mode of bi-partism has shown to be difficult to be implemented. In this context, aside from the fact that “employees” and “employers” remain the “real actors” of the economy, incorporating a variety of representative bodies in the social dialogue framework represents a fresh opportunity to address decent work deficits and the employment challenge at large whilst also endorsing the strengthening of bipartite social dialogue among social partners.

The existing legislative framework for ensuring labour rights in Albania needs to be enforced. All the stakeholders should take immediate act especially TUs, to stop the exploitation of workers; The Government should undertake intensive actions, in cooperation with the TUs, to tackle the high level of informal employment (that has resulted in many life casualties in the mining sector);

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