

ALBANIA- EMIGRATION, DEPOPULATION AND SOLUTIONS

**Understanding root causes
and offering recommendations**

*Desire and planning to emigrate from Albania remains high,
requiring immediate attention by policy makers in addressing
push factors as pull factors become stronger.*



ALBANIAN INSTITUTE FOR
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



December 2023



ALBANIAN INSTITUTE FOR
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



Albania- Emigration, depopulation and solutions

Lead Author: Andi Balla

Statistical Expert: Ledia Canga

This publication of the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) is produced in the framework of the project “Migration, Depopulation and Instability- the silent approaching crisis” supported by Hanns Seidel- Stiftung (HSS)

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A. INTRODUCTION

In the past 30 years of post-communist Albania, massive emigration and the resulting demographic changes have become one of the top socio-economic issues facing Albanian society. While there has been growing public concern and media attention on the matter in recent years, there appears to be relatively little attention by policy-makers on taking direct action to address this complex and difficult issue. To help remedy the situation, this report aims to provide concrete recommendations based on an updated picture provided by a national survey on the desire and planning to emigrate among Albania's resident population in 2023. These results show the desire to emigrate remains very high, with two in three residents of Albania in studying and working age saying they would consider leaving the country. More worryingly, about 13% of the same active resident population is very likely to leave the country in the near future, which means a strong emigration trend will continue. The push factors appear to be a desire for a better life and lack of faith that things will get better in Albania in terms of employment opportunities as well as issues that have to do with the quality of the governance, such as corruption and the social safety net. To provide concrete recommendations on addressing this complex and difficult issue, the report uses expert input¹ and research from local and international sources on migration to analyze the results from a survey of residents of Albania.

1. AIIS Expert Roundtable on Migration held in Tirana on 2 October 2023 with several of Albania's key migration and economy experts.

B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Background:

Since the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Albanians have had an exceptionally high per-capita emigration rate.² And with migration being the most volatile and least predictable of the three major demographic forces, the other two being fertility and mortality³ – Albania’s demographics are acutely sensitive to further migration. Of the more than 4.5 million people holding Albanian citizenship through birth today, only 2.7 million are currently residents of Albania. With spikes in the turbulent 1991-1992 period and the unrest of 1997,⁴ emigration remained high until the 2008 global financial crisis, seeing a small reversal as top host countries like Greece and Italy went through economic woes. Emigration from Albania continued to increase in the 2012 to 2022 decade, with one in seven to one in five Albanians leaving the country during that time.⁵ The numbers are backed by opinion surveys that show Albania has among the highest percentage of the labor force

2. According to an INSTAT study, the total number of people who had left Albania as of 2020 was 1,684,135 individuals since 1990, with a net of 350,000 leaving in the 2011-2019 period. See: <https://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=151279>

3. Teitelbaum, M. S. (2014). Political demography: Powerful forces between disciplinary stools. *International Area Studies Review*, 17(2), 99-119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2233865914534428>

4. Gëdeshi, Ilir, “Emigrimi i Elites Intellektuale nga Shqipëria gjatë Periudhës së Tranzicionit” (*Emigration of Albania’s Intellectual Elite during the Transition Period.*) 1999, 40. Luarasi.

5. See: “600,000 have left Albania since 2011” *Monitor* magazine. <https://www.monitor.al/nga-shqiperia-jane-larguar-600-mije-persona-qe-nga-2011-sipas-te-dhenave-indirekte-te-instat/>

that is willing to emigrate for a better life.⁶

Albania's demographic profile has also been hit hard by a related subject: declining birth rates. In 1990, Albania had a birth rate of three children per woman.⁷ In 2019, it had gone down to 1.4.⁸ Migration is a major contributor to the decline in birth rates, since people of reproductive age are more likely to emigrate. Albania is keenly experiencing the impact of this substantial demographic shift, with a rapidly aging society, challenges for businesses in securing a workforce, and entire rural regions being depopulated. Consequently, this issue has become a prominent topic in current public and media discussions.

Unfortunately, Albania's continued high emigration is not currently ebbing. The trend is instead continuing fueled by a trifecta of economic and social hits: a massive earthquake in 2019, the disruption of the 2020-2022 pandemic and the 2022-2023 global inflation and economic crisis. Due to continued significant migration, projections from international institutions suggest that Albania's population could dwindle to 2.1 million by the close of the century, marking a 50 percent decline from its peak of 3.3 million in 1990. Migration remains a persistent force, depleting the nation of its crucial human capital. From energetic, unskilled youth to seasoned professionals, individuals ranging from recent high school graduates to middle-aged laborers are joining the exodus alongside highly skilled medical professionals, engineers and IT experts. They seek opportunities in countries offering higher wages and improved living conditions. The repercussions of this migration are twofold: immediate consequences include

6. "Albania ranks second globally for willingness to emigrate" See: <https://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=132809>. Accessed 1 May 2023.

7. Gjonca, Arjan. 2001. Communism, health, and lifestyle : the paradox of mortality transition in Albania, 1950-1990. p. 158; Bloomsbury Academic

8. "Birth rate, crude (per 1000 people) - Albania - World Bank Data." See: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.CBRT.IN?locations=AL>.

the depopulation of villages and towns, while long-term effects encompass severe strains on the pension system, widespread shortages in medical capacities and subtler implications that dampen the potential for democratic and free-market development.

There are no easy solutions to stopping emigration from Albania. But there are some actions that key Albanian policy makers and other actors can take to provide tangible benefits to people most likely to emigrate, addressing push factors. Such actions could include the lowering of the cost of living by removing taxes on basic goods and acting to increase competition and productiveness of the economy while lowering corruption and improving governance in order to rapidly increase wages and improve the quality of local employment opportunities. More long-term actions involve overhauling the social safety system – including tangible quality healthcare and education systems available to all.

II. Key points from 2023 survey:

To better understand the root causes of this renewed emigration trend, the Albanian Institute for International Studies, with the financial support of Hanns Seidel Foundation, conducted a national survey in April 2023. Its findings show that a considerable part of Albania's university- and working-age resident population continues to have a desire to leave the country in pursuit of better opportunities abroad, with a steady stream of people making firm plans and preparations to leave the country either temporarily or permanently. Here are some key findings from the survey.

- More than one in ten respondents (13%) are preparing to leave Albania within a year.
- More than two in three residents of Albania (70%) would consider leaving the country if given the chance to do so.

- On intention to return, 32% responded they would leave permanently if they emigrated.
- Half of the resident respondents that were former migrants who had returned said they were inclined to leave the country again.
- 54% envisioned themselves living outside of Albania in the next five years, an unrealistic but worrying number that reflects the overall desire to emigrate.
- Pull factors from wealthier countries are an important factor as only 12% of respondents said their life in Albania was “bad.” 52% viewed it as “neither good nor bad,” followed by 24% who considered it “good.”
- The top three concerns highlighted were unemployment (24%), corruption (24%) and poor governance (19%). Other concerns included the quality of education and healthcare and the lack of political alternatives.
- A worryingly high number said they would consider irregular migration (21%), with expressed openness to considering an asylum application, with 14% open to using very dangerous methods to get to countries where a visa is required.
- Regular migration opportunities are growing, but remain limited. Only a small percentage (7%) had applied and received work permits in the past. Another group had had their applications rejected (10%).
- The resident population is worried about the consequences of emigration from Albania, including the depletion of the domestic workforce (47%), a lack of rotation in political elites (19%), and a loss of national identity (18%) as well as lackcare for the elderly (8%).
- Looking at the reversed phenomenon, Albanians seem

lukewarm about immigration from other countries to Albania. Some viewed it as a positive (10%). Others considered it neither good nor bad (42%). A significant percentage regarded it as a negative phenomenon (36%).

III. Key recommendations

- The increased cost of living in the past two years is currently a major push factor. Authorities should act quickly to lower it by removing or lowering taxes on basic goods, including the current 20% VAT on food.
- Act to increase incomes and employment quality through creating more fair competition and productivity of the economy.
- Work to lower corruption and improve governance to attract more direct foreign investment.
- Overhaul the social safety system – including tangible quality healthcare and education systems available to all.
- Increase financial and social safety net support for young families in the form of soft loans for housing and direct monthly payments for each child that is resident of Albania.
- Speed up EU integration and related reforms. These will help with most of the recommendations in this list and will lower emigration in the mid to long term while increasing return migration.
- Change the narrative by providing hope that things can change for the better – including creating opportunities for young people to have a say in the political system and shifting away from current electoral practices that have produced a dominant party system at the expense of a vibrant democracy.

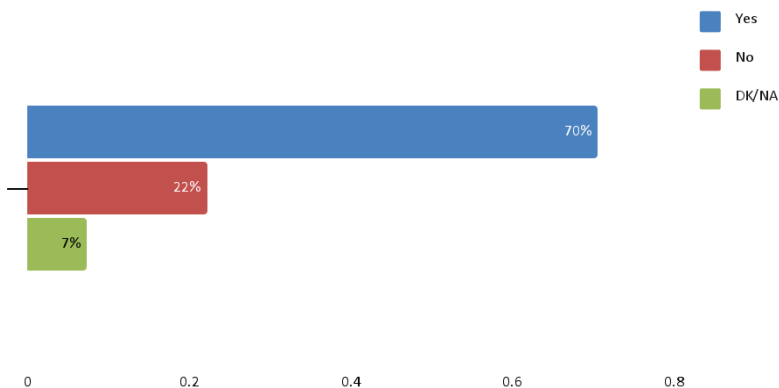
- Better prepare for the inevitable aging of society through systems that account for the fact that the traditional family-based safety net is disintegrating due to emigration.
- Increase education on legal emigration to avoid pitfalls of irregular migration.
- Have a societal discussion about immigration to Albania from other countries to fill the gaps stemming from emigration and demographic decline.

1. FULL SURVEY FINDINGS

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted across Albania in April 2023 with 1,200 respondents to understand the sentiments and trends related to migration. The survey aimed to gather information on people's willingness to emigrate, their reasons for considering emigration, and their preferences for destination countries. The data collected provides insights into the emigration landscape in Albania as well as related factors.

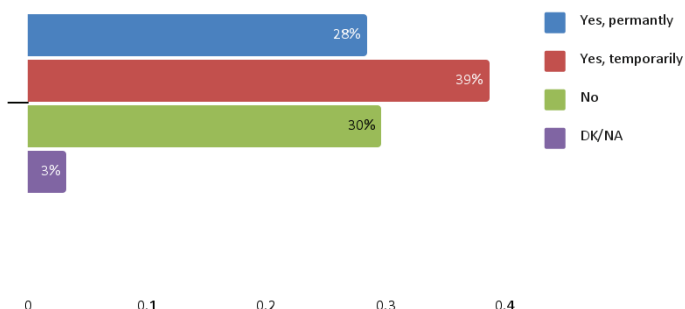
1.1 The desire to emigrate

If you had the opportunity to emigrate from Albania, would you do it?



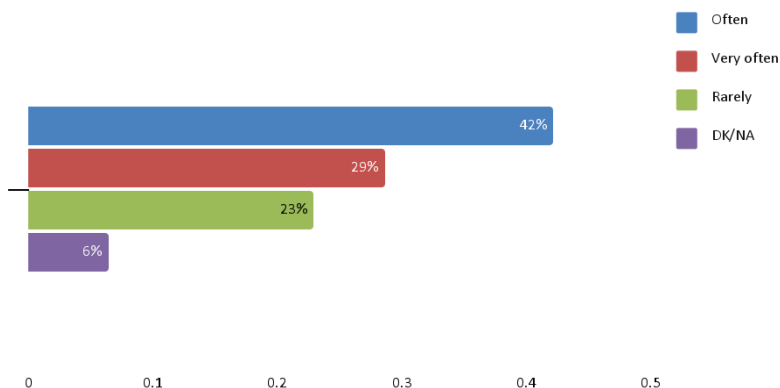
The survey respondents were asked whether they would consider emigrating from Albania if given the opportunity. The majority of respondents, 70%, indicated that they would choose to emigrate, while 22% said they would not, and 7% were unsure or did not provide a response.

During the last 12 months, have you thought of leaving Albania temporarily or permanently?



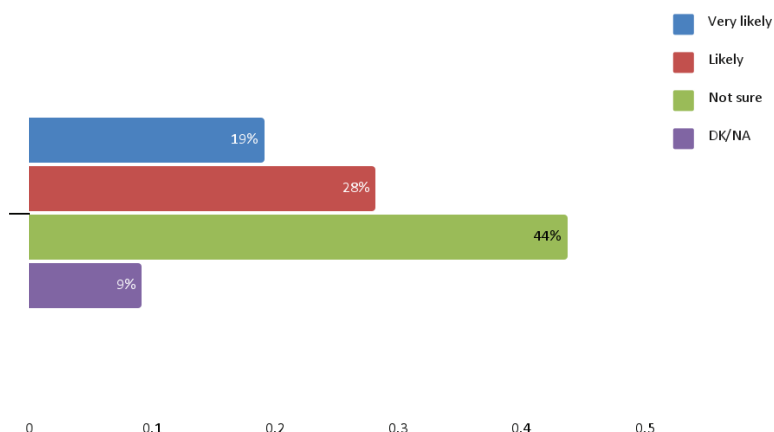
Furthermore, participants were asked whether they had contemplated leaving Albania temporarily or permanently in the past 12 months. The results revealed that 28% had considered leaving forever, 39% had thought about temporary emigration, 30% had not considered emigrating, and 3% did not respond or were uncertain about their intentions.

If yes, during the last 12 months how often have you thought of leaving Albania?



Among those who expressed intentions to emigrate, they were asked about the frequency of such thoughts during the past year. The data showed that 42% had often considered leaving, 29% had thought about it very frequently, 23% had rarely considered it, and 6% did not provide an answer or were unsure.

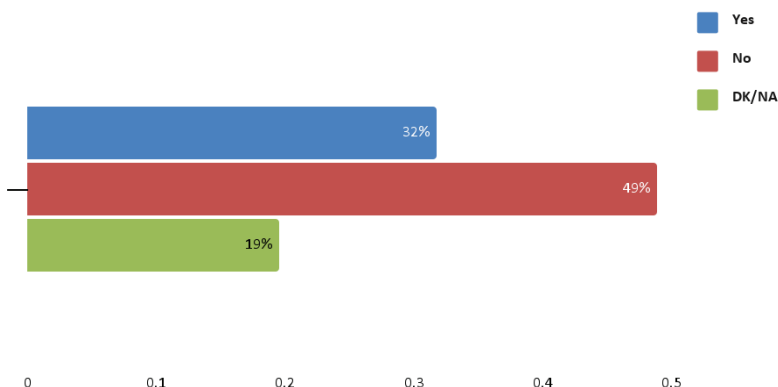
If yes, how likely is it that you will leave Albania this year?



Respondents were also asked about the likelihood of leaving Albania within the current year. The findings indicate that 19% believed it was highly likely, 28% considered it possible, 44% were uncertain about the possibility, and 9% did not provide a response or were unsure.

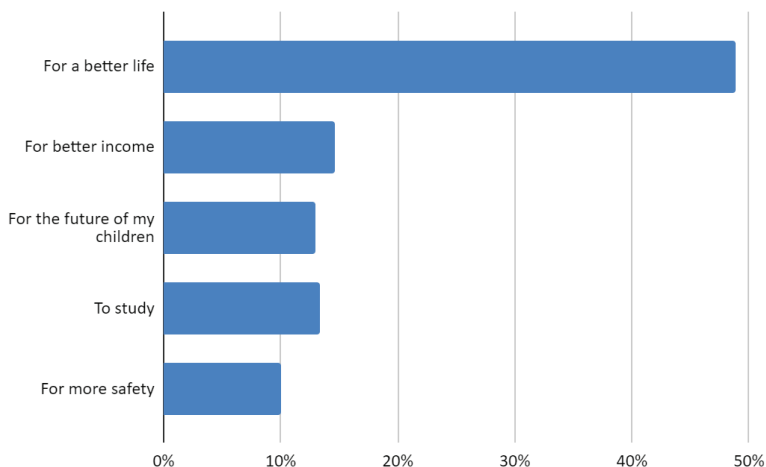
Keeping in mind that 19% of the “yes” group represents 13% of the total sample, this report is predicting that 13% of the active age population is likely to leave Albania in the near future.

Have you decided to permanently emigrate from Albania?



When asked if they had made a definitive decision to emigrate from Albania, 32% responded affirmatively, indicating their intent to leave permanently. However, 49% stated that they had not made such a decision, while 19% did not provide a response or were unsure.

If yes, what are the reasons for your decision to migrate? (more than one option can be selected)

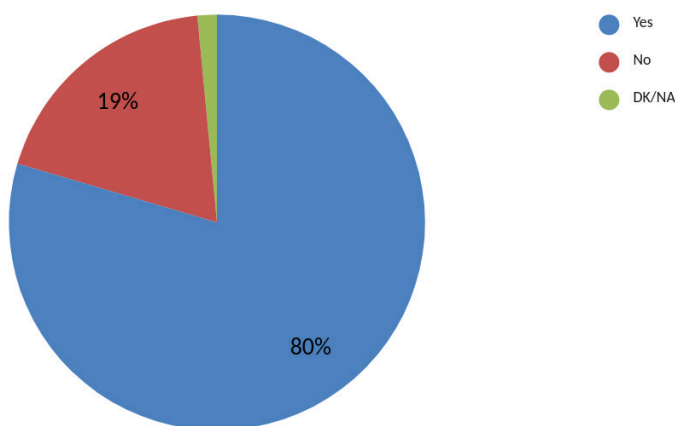


select the reasons motivating their decision. The respondents were allowed to choose multiple options. The most common reasons cited for emigration were the pursuit of a better life (49%), seeking higher wages (15%), securing a better future for their children (13%), pursuing educational opportunities (13%), and seeking increased security (10%). Other reasons mentioned included personal circumstances and aspirations for specific destinations.

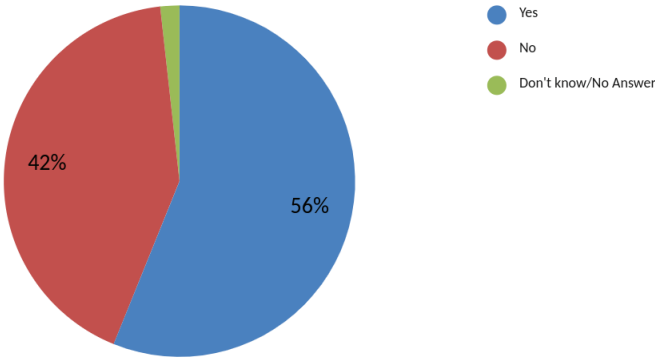
1.2 Family history of emigration

The survey also explored the emigration experiences within respondents' families. A significant majority, 80%, reported having family members who had emigrated, while 19% did not have any emigrant family members and 2% did not respond or were unsure.

Do you have family members who have emigrated abroad

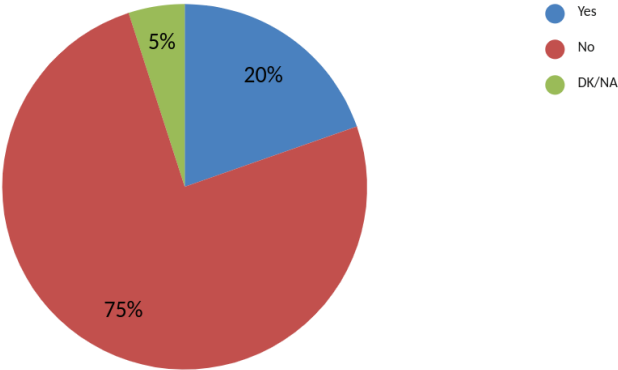


**If yes, have any of your family members emigrated i
the last two years?**



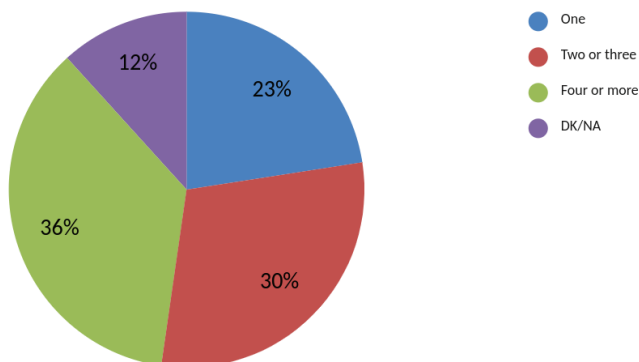
Among those with emigrant family members, 56% reported that at least one family member had emigrated in the past two years, while 42% stated that no family members had emigrated during this period. 2% did not respond or were unsure.

**If yes, has anyone of those who had emigrated
returned to Albania?**



Of those who had family members who emigrated, only 20% reported that any of them had returned to Albania, while 75% indicated that none of them had returned. 5% did not respond or were uncertain about the return status.

If yes, how many people in your family have permanently left the country?



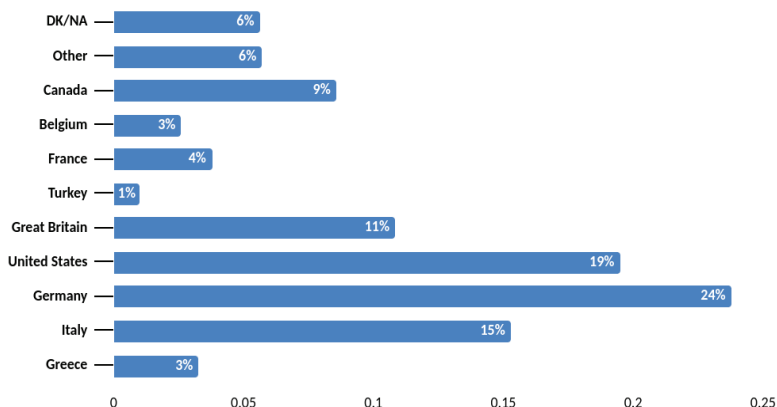
Respondents were asked about the number of family members who had permanently left the country. The results showed that 23% reported one family member leaving, 30% mentioned two or three family members, 36% stated that four or more family members had emigrated, and 12% did not respond or were unsure.

1.3 Preferred destinations

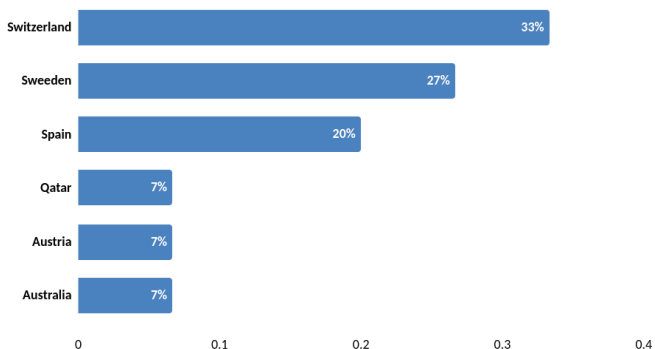
Finally, participants were asked about their preferred destination country if they were to emigrate. The top choices among respondents were Germany (24%), the United States (19%), Italy (15%), the United Kingdom (11%) and Canada (9%). Other destinations with very low numbers included Greece, France, Belgium, Turkey and various other countries.

6% of respondents did not respond or were unsure. Of the top destinations, Germany has recently made it easier to legally work there, leading to increased emigration from Albania, while the United States is a perennial top desirable destination, especially for people who already have family there.

If you were to emigrate, which country would you prefer to go to?



The other cartegory (6% of total):

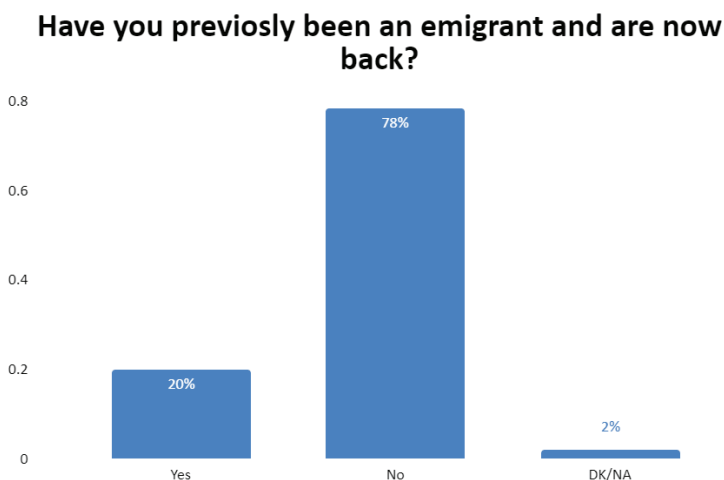


In this section, the survey reveals a significant inclination towards emigration among respondents in Albania. The desire for a better life, improved job prospects, and the pursuit of opportunities for their children were among the primary motivations for considering emigration.

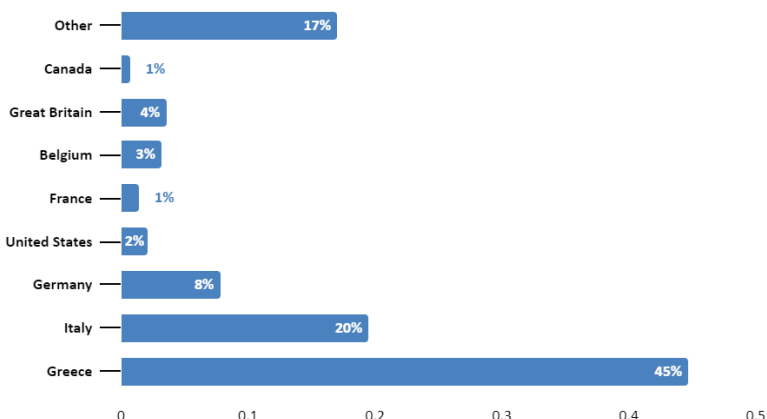
1.4 Cyclical migration

This section of the report provides a concise analysis of additional data from the survey AIIS conducted in Albania, focusing on individuals' emigration experiences, their intentions to emigrate again, their future living arrangements, their evaluation of life in Albania, the major problems facing Albanian society, and the perceived consequences of emigration on the country.

Among the respondents, 20% reported that they had previously been abroad in emigration and returned, while the majority (78%) had not. Those who returned mainly came back from Greece (45%), followed by Italy (20%) and Germany (8%).

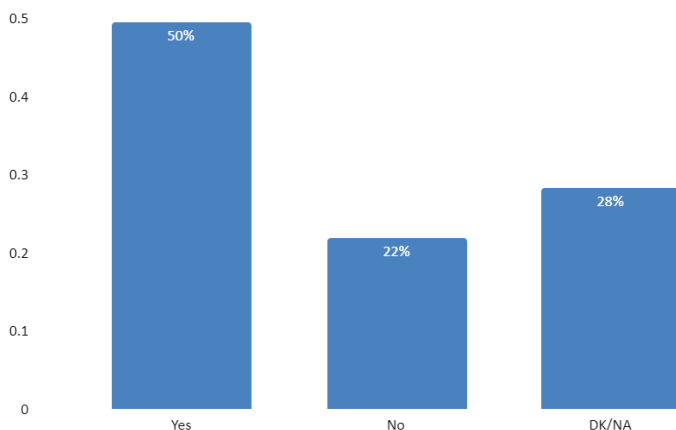


If yes, what country did you return from?

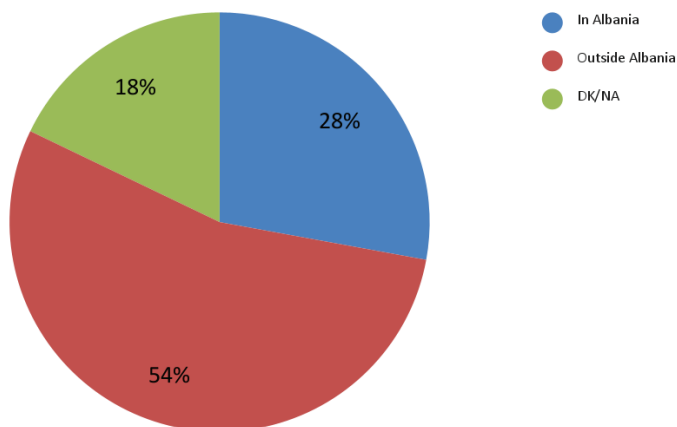


Of those who had returned, 50% expressed that they were considering emigrating again, while 22% stated they were not, and 28% were unsure or did not respond. This indicates a significant portion of individuals who may be inclined to pursue emigration again.

If yes, are you thinking about migrating again?



Where do see yourself living in 5 years?

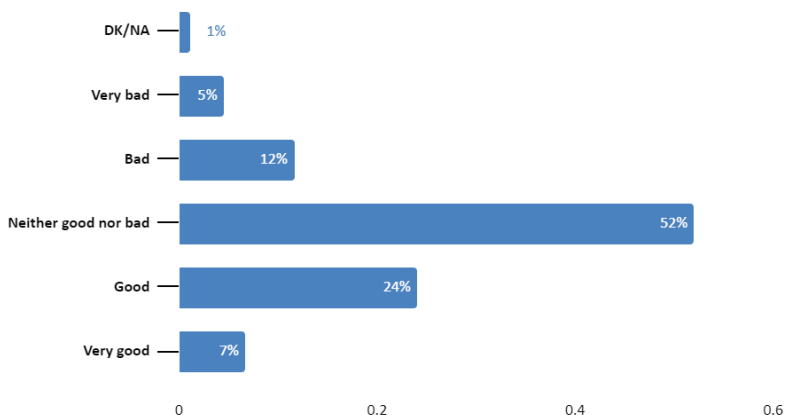


When asked about their future living arrangements, 54% envisioned living outside Albania within the next five years, while 28% saw themselves remaining in Albania. Approximately 18% were uncertain or did not provide a response.

1.6 Life in Albania perceptions

Participants were also asked to evaluate their life in Albania. The responses varied, with 52% stating that their life was neither good nor bad, 24% considering it good, 12% perceiving it as bad, and 5% describing it as very bad. A small percentage (7%) regarded their life in Albania as very good.

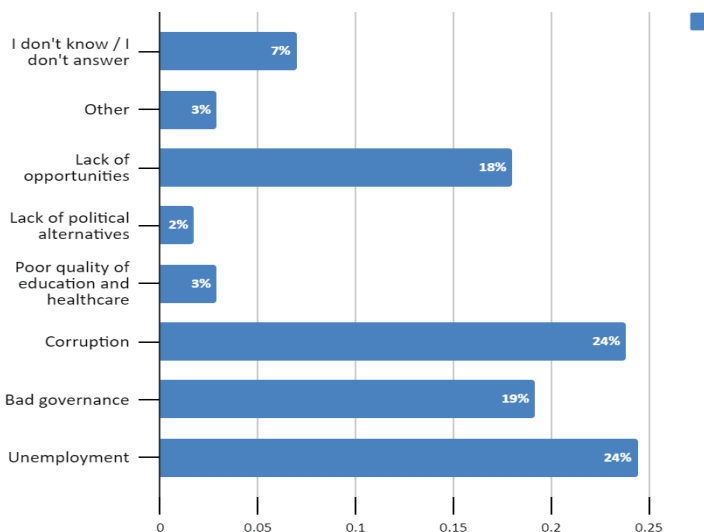
How do you see your current life in Albania?



1.7 Issues facing Albanian society

The survey sought to identify the major problems facing Albanian society. The most frequently selected issues were unemployment (24%), corruption (24%) and poor governance (19%). These challenges highlight areas that require attention and improvement for the betterment of Albanian society.

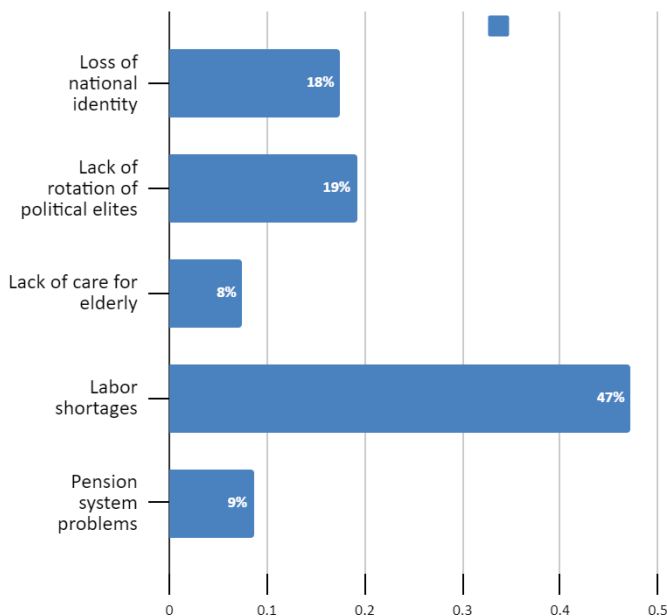
In your opinion, what are the biggest problems facing Albanian society today? Choose the three most important factors.



1.8 Effects of migration on society

Additionally, respondents were asked about the likely consequences of emigration in Albania. The perceived outcomes included a lack of workforce (47%), a loss of care for the elderly (8%), a lack of rotation in political elites (19%), and a loss of national identity (18%). These findings underscore potential societal implications resulting from emigration and inform discussions on addressing these concerns.

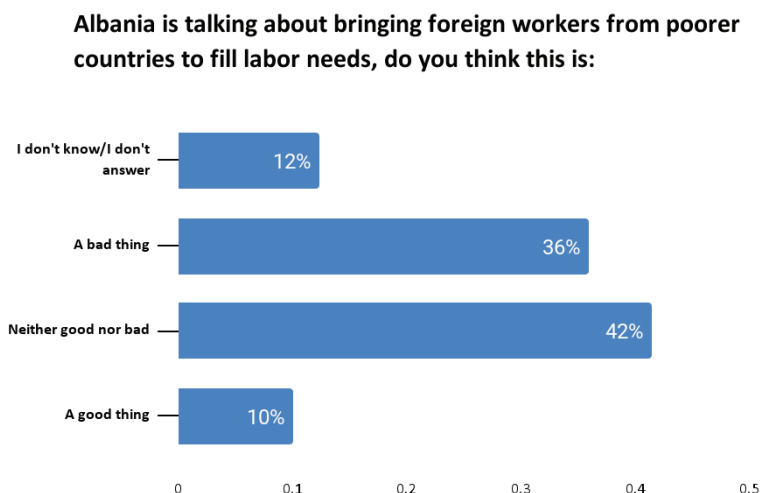
In your opinion, what are/will be the effects of emigration on Albania?



To sum up, the data reveals that a significant portion of individuals who had previously returned from emigration are considering leaving Albania again. The majority of respondents envision living outside Albania in the future. Evaluations of life in Albania varied, with the most selected problems being unemployment, poor governance, and corruption. The consequences of emigration identified by the respondents include a potential loss of workforce and social impacts such as a decline in care for the elderly and a loss of national identity. These insights provide valuable information for policymakers and stakeholders to address the challenges and consequences associated with emigration in Albania.

1.9 Immigration to Albania

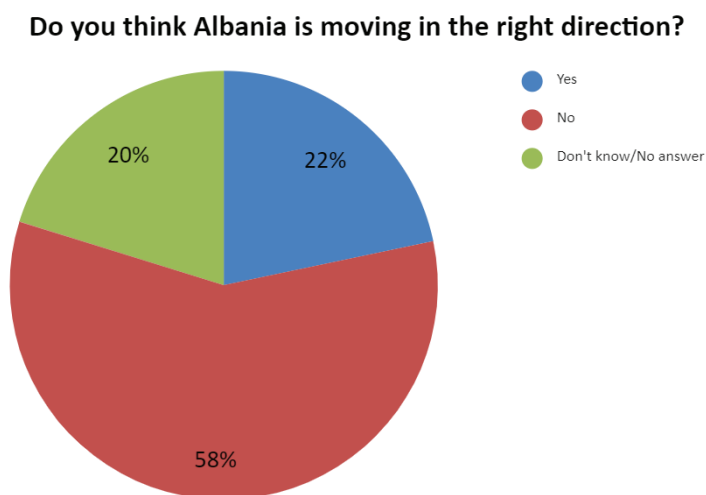
The 2023 survey asked for the first time about attitudes on immigration to Albania – foreign workers and refugees settling in the country temporarily or permanently. This is a recent phenomenon, as Albania's weak economy and bureaucratic barriers had made it an unattractive place for foreigners to settle in the past. However, Albania's government has made it easier to bring foreign workers to Albania as the country struggles with labor shortages that stem from emigration of Albanians and the demographic challenges described previously in this report.



Regarding the influx of foreign workers from poorer countries to Albania, opinions varied. Some participants viewed it as a positive development (10%), seeing potential benefits in cultural exchange and economic opportunities.

Others considered it neither good nor bad (42%), indicating a neutral stance on the issue. However, a significant percentage regarded it as a negative phenomenon (36%), expressing concerns about competition for jobs and strain on local resources. A portion of respondents remained unsure or did not provide a response (12%).

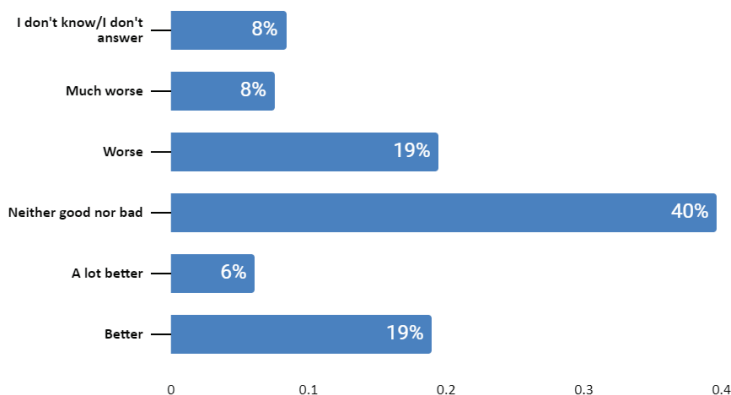
1.10 Looking to the future



When asked about the direction of Albania, participants had diverse perspectives. Some believed that the country is moving in the right direction (22%), pointing to progress in various aspects such as governance, infrastructure, and opportunities for development. However, the majority disagreed (58%), expressing dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, including issues like corruption, economic challenges and political atmosphere. A portion of respondents remained unsure or did not provide a response (20%).

Participants were also asked about their view of their future in Albania. Responses varied, with some perceiving their future as better (19%) or much better (6%), highlighting personal optimism and hopes for improvement. However, a significant portion held a neutral stance, considering their future neither good nor bad (40%). Others regarded it as worse (19%) or much worse (8%), expressing concerns about economic prospects, quality of life, and opportunities. Some participants remained unsure or did not respond (8%).

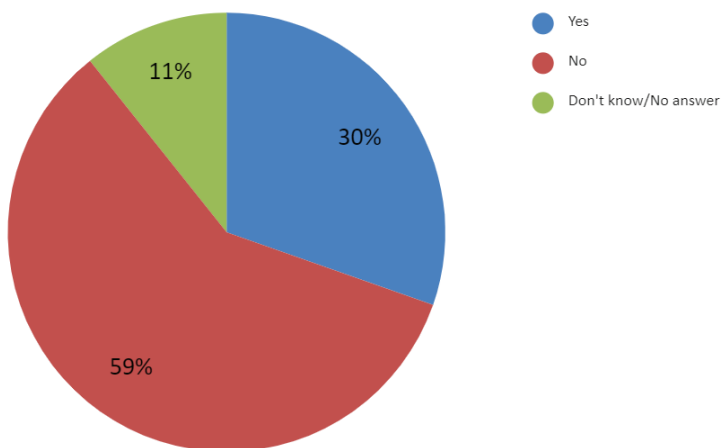
How do you see your future in Albania?



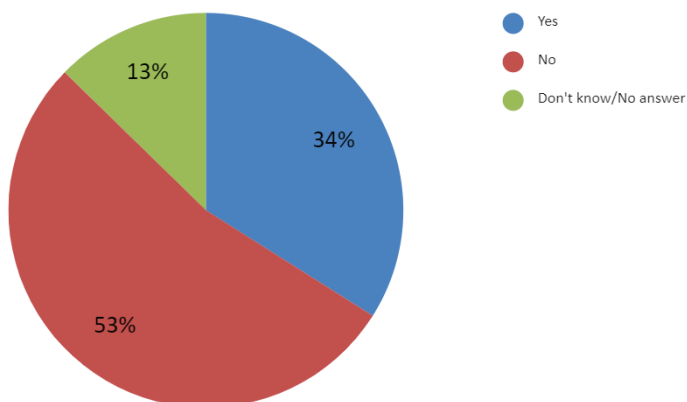
Regarding their children's education, participants expressed diverse preferences. Some would like their children to study in Albania (30%), emphasizing the value of local education and cultural preservation. However, a majority preferred their children to study abroad (59%), citing perceived better opportunities, quality of education, and exposure to international experiences. Some respondents remained unsure or did not provide a response (11%).

When asked about their preference for their children to grow up in Albania, opinions varied. A portion expressed a desire for their children to stay in Albania (34%), emphasizing the importance of cultural heritage, family bonds and contributing to the country's development. However, a majority preferred their children to live elsewhere (53%), citing concerns about limited opportunities and a desire for a better quality of life. Some participants remained unsure or did not provide a response (13%).

Would you like your children to study in Albania?



Would you like your children to stay and live in Albania?



These findings highlight the diverse perspectives among respondents, reflecting a range of opinions and aspirations for the future. The data underscores the importance of understanding people's perceptions, concerns, and aspirations in developing strategies to address emigration trends and foster a positive environment for growth and development in Albania. Policymakers and stakeholders can consider these insights to shape policies and initiatives that address the concerns raised and work towards creating a more favorable environment for individuals to envision a prosperous future in Albania.

1.11 Asylum and irregular emigration:

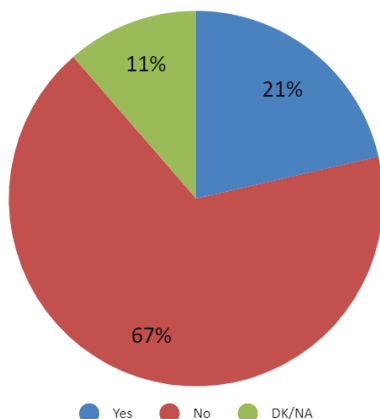
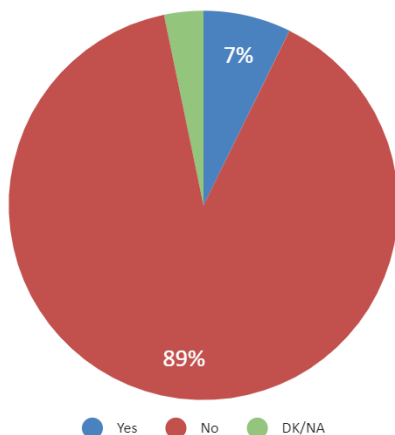
This section of the report provides an overview of the additional data collected from the survey conducted in Albania, focusing on aspects related to asylum applications, intentions to apply for asylum and attempts at irregular migration.

When asked about asylum applications outside Albania, a small percentage of respondents (7%) indicated that they had

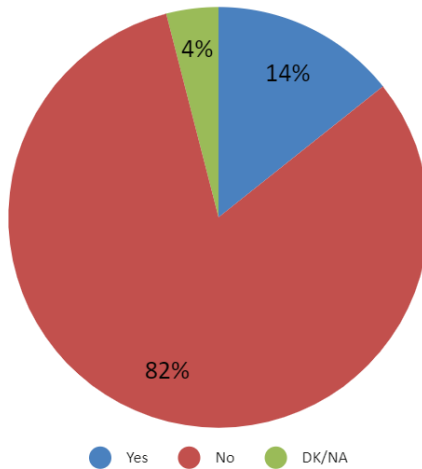
applied for asylum at some point. The majority, however, stated that they had not (89%), while a portion remained unsure or did not provide a response (3%).

Participants were also asked if they would consider applying for asylum. In response, 21% expressed openness to considering an asylum application, while the majority (67%) stated that they would not consider it. Some respondents remained unsure or did not respond (11%).

Have you ever applied for asylum abroad?



Would you try using a dinghy or lorry to sneak into the UK?



Regarding attempting illegal migration to the UK, 14% of participants stated that they would consider trying to reach the UK by boat or truck, while the majority (82%) stated that they would not attempt such a journey. Some participants remained unsure or did not provide a response (4%). These responses are quite concerning, considering how such attempts are both very dangerous and also illegal.

1.12 Regular migration opportunities

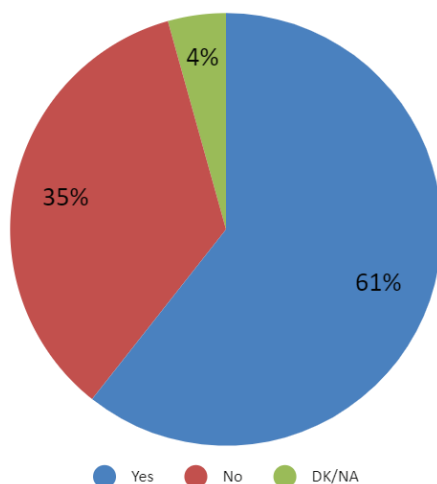
One of the reasons that many think that irregular migration is the only route is that legal migration has been hard for a long time, albeit it is getting easier as host countries, particularly Germany, are opening up their labor markets as they need a growing labor force.

The use of the limited legal migration opportunities for economic migrants such as participation in the U.S. Diversity

Visa Lottery and previous applications for work visas in European or North American countries was also analyzed by the survey.

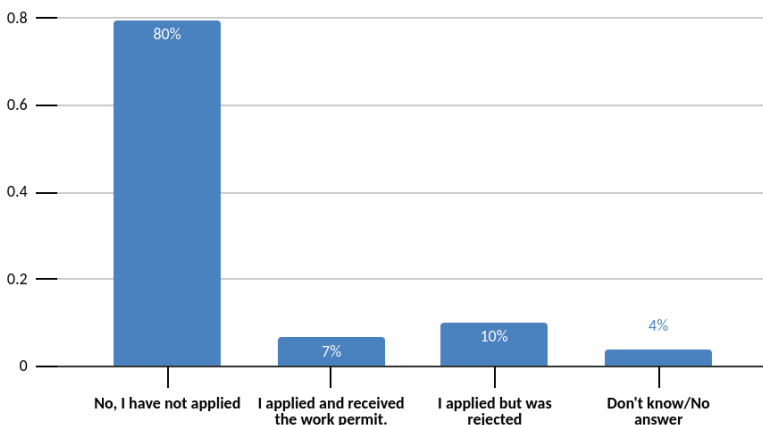
On the legal opportunities, when it came to participation in the US Diversity Visa Lottery, a significant percentage (61%) indicated that they plan to apply for the lottery. However, a portion (35%) stated that they would not apply, while some remained unsure or did not respond (4%). This confirms the general desire for emigration observed in previous questions.

Are you planning to apply for the U.S. diversity visa lottery?



The survey also asked about proper legal emigration channels. Participants were asked about their previous applications for work visas in European or North American countries. The majority (80%) stated that they had not applied for visas or work permits, while a small percentage (7%) had applied and received work permits. Some participants mentioned that their applications had been rejected (10%), and a portion remained unsure or did not provide a response (4%).

Have you ever applied in Albania for a visa/work permit to a European or North American country (excluding the U.S. lottery)?



2. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The findings are based on in-person questionnaires completed with 1,200 people across Albania. This section provides insights into the demographic composition of the survey participants in terms of gender, age, education and employment status. The data indicate a balanced representation of both genders, a significant proportion of young individuals, a range of educational qualifications, and diverse employment statuses. Understanding these demographics is essential for interpreting the survey results and tailoring appropriate strategies and policies that address the specific needs and circumstances of different segments of the population in Albania.

2.1 Gender

Out of the total respondents, 61% identified as women, while 39% identified as men. This distribution indicates a slightly higher participation of women in the survey.

2.2 Age

The survey captured data across various age groups, but there is a clear oversampling of university- and working- age adults. This is also the population that is most likely to emigrate from Albania, so the findings should be interpreted as coming from that population. The largest proportion of respondents fell within the 18-24 age bracket, accounting for 46% of the total. The following age groups were 25-30 (12%), 31-34 (8%), 35-40 (11%), 41-45 (9%), 46-50 (5%), 51-55 (5%), 56-60 (2%), 61-65 (1%), and 65+ (3%).

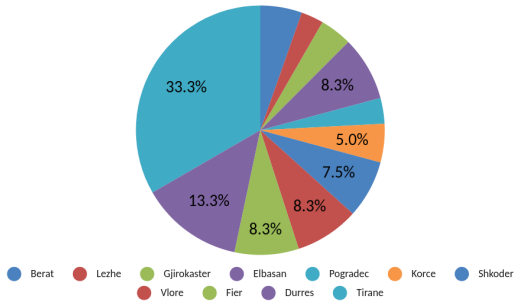
2.3 Education

Participants' education levels varied, with the majority having attained a bachelor's degree (59%) or a master's degree (22%). The distribution of educational qualifications also included respondents with a high school diploma (17%), and a smaller proportion had completed elementary education (1%). A very small percentage of respondents held a PhD (1%) or reported having no education (1%).

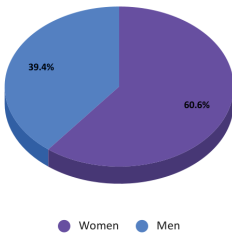
2.4 Employment status

Regarding employment status, the survey captured data from different segments of the workforce. The responses revealed that 31% of the participants were employed, 23% were unemployed, 20% were self-employed, 23% were currently in school, and 3% were retired.

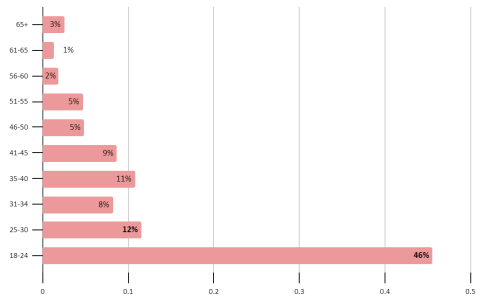
Geographic Distribution



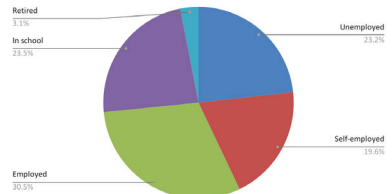
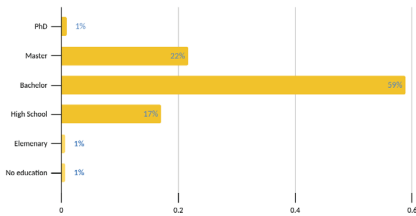
Gender



Age



Education level



3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The ultimate purpose of this report is to inform national and local policy makers as well as domestic and international economic stakeholders, civil society and academia about the general attitudes toward migration in Albania, while providing some insights into what can be done to manage the implications of migration including but not limited to the initiatives that encourage lowering the level of push factors and encouraging return or reintegration for Albanian migrants abroad.

It is crucial to consider the perspectives provided by this latest survey when addressing emigration and designing policies that can provide viable alternatives and opportunities for individuals in Albania. By understanding these factors, policymakers can work towards creating an environment that addresses the aspirations and concerns of the population, fostering a sustainable future for individuals in Albania.

There is limited scope for addressing pull factors, which Albania faces when it comes to its population being attracted by wealthier countries as it sits geographically close to advanced economies that have labor needs that can be filled by working-age Albanians. These countries offer far higher salaries and often a better quality of life and a larger social safety net. As an open market democracy and an aspiring EU member, Albania's policy makers can do little to nothing to address pull factors.

However, the decision to emigrate is never easy and *policy makers should focus on push factors instead* – what inside Albania is making people want to leave the country. Albania has witnessed a steady outflow of its population in recent years, primarily driven by various push factors that challenge the aspirations and well-being of its citizens. Understanding and addressing these push factors are crucial for developing

comprehensive strategies that can stem the tide of emigration.

This section explores key recommendations to counteract these push factors and foster an environment that encourages individuals to stay and contribute to the growth and prosperity of Albania.

3.1 Lower the cost of living for the resident population

Albania faces a significant challenge in the form of a high cost of living while having very low incomes. The inflation that followed supply chain disruption due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine has made basic goods, especially food, too expensive. This situation is impacting the middle class and the poor significantly, leading to increased emigration.⁹ The tourism boom is further driving up demand for food and services, resulting in price increases in many areas. To address the issue and aid the resident population, the government should consider an immediate temporary or permanent cut of the 20% VAT to a lower tax or zero on basic food items to lower prices, as this would aid in removing the edge on cost of living for many Albanian families. By doing so, the overall burden on citizens would decrease, making daily necessities more affordable and improving the standard of living for the general populace. The costs can be offset by increasing taxes on temporary accommodations and services that are typically aimed at foreign tourists or more affluent residents and are not essential to the daily life of the majority of Albania's general population.

9. *Revista Monitor*. 2023. "2023, kosto vjetore e jetesës është rritur me 9.4% për familjet e varfra shqiptare." (2023, the annual cost of living has increased by 9.4% for poor Albanian families) 27 April 2023. <https://www.monitor.al/2023-kosto-vjetore-e-jeteses-eshte-rritur-me-9-4-per-familjet-e-varfra-shqiptare/>.

3.2 Act to increase incomes through more competition and productivity of the economy

A crucial aspect of stemming emigration is enhancing economic opportunities within Albania. Policymakers should focus on creating an environment that fosters healthy competition and economic productivity in order to rapidly increase local wages, which remain very low by EU standards and are a major push factor as they have not kept up with the large increase in cost of living in recent years. This can be achieved through regulatory reforms, investment in infrastructure and support for innovation. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) should be the focus of government help as they are the engine of the economy. Furthermore the recent increase in taxation on self-employed professionals should be reversed as it is driving many to emigrate at a time when the country can least afford it. Acting on these without delay can help the economy grow rapidly, leading to higher wages and improved job opportunities, thereby reducing the incentive for citizens to seek employment abroad.

3.3 Work to lower corruption and improve governance

As the results of the survey show corruption remains a significant impediment to confidence in Albania. To attract more direct foreign investment and create more quality employment, it is imperative to address issues of corruption and improve governance. Strengthening anti-corruption measures, enhancing transparency and establishing an accountable governance framework will not only attract foreign investment but also instill confidence in the local population, fostering a sense of stability and security – as well as improve hope that things can indeed get better in the future.

3.4 Overhaul the social safety system

A comprehensive overhaul of the social safety system is essential to retain citizens and improve their quality of life. While the government is good at PR on this matter, the reality on the ground has failed to convince the average citizen to have trust in Albania. Tangible improvements in healthcare and education, available to all citizens, can significantly contribute to creating a supportive environment. Adequate healthcare and education systems are foundational elements that empower individuals, providing them with the tools to build a prosperous future within their homeland. This is not something that can be changed overnight, but must be a priority. It is also important that good schools and healthcare facilities are available all over Albania, not just in the capital and a couple of large cities, as depopulation of and migration from other areas are often driven by lack of services.

3.5 Increase support for young families

Recognizing the importance of family stability and size, the government should implement measures to support the creation and enlargement of young families. Rapid rise in home and rent prices, especially in Tirana, are a major concern and an impediment to family creation on top of the increase of cost of living in all other areas.¹⁰ Social housing and soft loans should be more widely available to young families. Moreover, the government should consider direct monthly payments for each child a family has as an incentive to keep the family in Albania

10. SCAN TV. 2022. “Banka e Shqipërisë: Për një vit çmimet në Tiranë u ngritën 39%.” (*BoA: Tirana home prices up 39% in a year*) 14 October 2022. <https://scantv.al/apartamentet-ne-rritje-oferta-kerkesa-e-kostot-cmimet-nuk-ndalen-banka-e-shqiperise-per-nje-vit-cmimet-ne-tirane-u-ngriten-39-pitshmeri-te-njejeta-ne-vijim/>.

by alleviating financial pressures. It might seem expensive, but it is far cheaper in the long run if these future taxpayers stay in the country. Such targeted support fosters an environment where families feel secure and confident in their ability to provide for their children's well-being.

3.6 Speed up EU integration and related reforms

Accelerating the process of EU integration is vital for Albania's economic and political stability. Closer integration not only opens up new opportunities for trade and investment but also instills confidence in the future of the nation. Implementing the necessary reforms to meet EU standards will not only facilitate accession but also contribute to creating a conducive environment for citizens to remain and thrive. Contrary to popular belief, access to the EU labor market will result in higher emigration only for a short period and could contribute to a better quality of life and more pull factors for cyclical migration in the mid to long term. Albania cannot do much to deal with the fact that EU members remain confused about enlargement and have, at times unfairly, held Albania and the rest of the region back from progressing in their EU bids. However, Albania can work to complete the reforms for its own sake, despite the uncertain EU membership outcome.

3.7 Change the narrative and provide hope for change

Creating a positive narrative is essential for retaining the younger generation and inspiring confidence in the political system. Opportunities for political rotation that appeal to the youth, coupled with tangible changes in governance and policy, can reshape the perception of the future. By providing hope for positive change, policy makers can encourage citizens,

particularly the younger generation, to actively participate in shaping the destiny of Albania. As it stands, Albania's political system is built on a patronage-based dominant party system where there is little hope for critical voices to have a say in policy making. This is a contributor to increased emigration and needs to change through electoral reform that allows voters a real say on governance.

3.8 Better prepare for the inevitable aging of society:

Acknowledging the demographic shift towards an aging population, proactive measures are necessary to enhance the social safety net for pensioners. Adequate support for retirees ensures they can age comfortably in their home country while reducing the incentive for their children to emigrate in order to bring remittances home to sustain their parents with living expenses and healthcare costs.

3.9 Increase education on legal emigration to avoid pitfalls of irregular migration

The findings of the survey on willingness to use irregular migration routes are troubling and indicate that there is a lot of need for more education in this area. The best antidote for this for people who are set on leaving the country is to educate them on legal migration routes, which are increasingly available. Legal migration is often circular in nature, so it does far less harm to the migrants and the home country. Emphasizing the deadly dangers and penalties of irregular migration avenues like boats and lorries to get to the UK should also be part of that education, though the trend is ebbing as this report goes to press.

3.10 Have a societal discussion about realistic immigration to Albania from other countries

Immigration from other countries is unlikely to solve Albania's demographic problems due to its lower economic development and most non-European migrants probably seeing the country as a jumping board to wealthier European countries. While some immigration will happen, including from retirees and digital nomads from wealthier countries who are looking for a good climate and cheaper cost of living than in their home countries, the type of massive low-skilled and high-skilled immigration that has been seen in wealthier EU countries is unlikely to happen in Albania. If it does show as a trend, however, it should be done only after having a strong discussion in Albanian society, which is currently very welcoming, but also has very little experience in attracting and integrating a large number of people that are different from the native population.

