

The actual and potential migration of students from Albania: a putative Brain Drain?

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Abbreviations

CESS	Center for Economic and Social Studies
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
EU	European Union
INSTAT	Albanian National Institute of Statistics
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MASR	Ministria e Arsimit, Sportit dhe Rinisë
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
UK	The United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States of America
WB	The World Bank
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy

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1. Introduction

Albania has been described as an ideal laboratory for the study of migration.¹ We endorse this statement and justify it on several grounds.² First, the scale of the outflow in recent decades, since the country opened up to the outside world in the early 1990s, has been, in relative terms, massive; estimates range from 1.2 to 1.6 million for the total 'stock' of Albanian emigrants living abroad in recent years. Second, the suddenness of this exodus, since 1990, gives it a unique character developing from a *tabula rasa* of banned emigration for the previous four and half decades of the communist era. Third, the emigration has affected all strata of Albanian society, from elites to the poorest and most marginalised groups, and has drawn people from all regions of the country. Fourth, the migration, after three decades, is still ongoing, albeit with a changed character – less a migration of poverty, desperation and protest, as it was in the 1990s, and more, nowadays, a structural feature of Albanian society and demography, especially amongst the younger, more highly educated sections of the population.³

One aspect of Albania's intense and diverse experience of emigration has received less attention: the movement of students to follow their higher education abroad. Despite the existence of public universities in all of the country's major towns (Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Durrës, Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra), as well as a recent expansion of private and franchised institutions, mainly concentrated in Tirana, Albania has one of the highest rates of 'exporting' its students in Europe. It is the purpose of this report to explore this phenomenon; both to unpack its main characteristics (reasons, destinations, courses of study, selectivity of the students etc.), and to tease out the social, economic and policy implications of this movement. Based on findings from a series of primary surveys, we detail the features of this student migration and probe students' future plans. In particular we ask whether they intend to return to Albania after the completion of their studies, and to the extent that many do not, we suggest that this 'loss' of students and graduates abroad constitutes a putative brain drain to add to the 'scientific diaspora' of PhD-holders which we have already documents in a previous study.⁴

The present report is structured as follows. In the next section we synthesise some of the key literature on the phenomenon of international student migration – a relatively new and fast-growing component of overall global migration. We comment on the definition and measurement of student migration, briefly note the evolving geography of these flows at a global level, and propose some conceptual frames for understanding why students move abroad. Section 3 draws on this conceptual overview by focusing on key questions pertaining to the Albanian situation. The ten specific questions listed are the framework for the remainder of the report, following section 4 which describes the methods of the research – large-N surveys of Albanian students abroad and of those currently studying in Albania at high school and university, and interviews and focus groups with key informants in Albania. Section 5, by far the longest part

1- King, R. (2005) Albania as a laboratory for the study of migration and development, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 7(2): 133-155.

2- King, R. (2003) Across the sea and over the mountains: documenting Albanian migration, *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 119(3): 283-309; Barjaba, K., King, R. (2005) Introducing and theorising Albanian migration, in King, R., Mai, N., Schwandner-Sievers, S. eds. *The New Albanian Migration*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1-28.

of the report, contains the main results of our enquiries into students currently studying abroad. We look at historical patterns of study abroad, based largely on secondary sources, and then, based on our own survey data, successively at reasons for studying abroad, socio-economic selectivity of students, countries of study, academic experiences, the actual and perceived benefits of study abroad, and future plans and attitudes towards return. Section 6 switches attention to the surveys we carried out on Albanian students currently studying in Albania, either at high school (pre-university) or at Albanian universities. Here some of the questions and analysis carried out in section 5 are repeated, to find out attitudes towards studying and working abroad, preferred countries, and possible thoughts about returning to Albania for those who plan to do further studies abroad. Section 7 interprets the results in light of our notion of a putative brain drain, and section 8 concludes and presents some policy considerations.

2. Student migration

As a form of migration, international student migration has received limited scholarly recognition in the otherwise vast literature on migration until surprisingly recently.⁵ One of the reasons for this was probably that mobile students were not seen as a ‘problem’ – unlike refugees, so-called ‘illegal’ or ‘irregular’ migrants, and some categories of labour migrants who had difficulty ‘integrating’ into host societies, often because of racist and cultural barriers erected by those societies. Students, on the other hand, were (and are) seen as ‘desirable’ migrants who move to enrich their personal human capital, after which they would then either return to their home countries or, if they remained in their chosen host country, would contribute to the high-skilled labour market there.

The literature on international student migration (often abbreviated nowadays to ‘ISM’) has grown rapidly since around 2000. A landmark book published in 2002 called international students ‘the new strangers’ and demonstrated that they, too, faced challenges of integration when living abroad.⁶ Other book-length studies have since multiplied,⁷ and there have been several edited collections published as special issues of well-known journals.⁸ None of this literature pays any attention to the Albanian case.

In general terms, the existing literature studies ISM through two main approaches: a statistical-geographical one, which focuses on global patterns, mapping and quantifying the main flows in different parts of the world; and a more sociological

5- To illustrate this, the following three widely cited textbooks, all published in the 1990s, fail to pay attention to the migration of students. See **Castles, S., Miller, M.J.** (1993) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Basingstoke: Macmillan; **Cohen, R.**, ed. (1995) *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; **Boyle, P., Halfacree, K., Robinson, V.** (1998) *Exploring Contemporary Migration*. London: Longman.

6- **Murphy-Lejeune, E.** (2002) *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*. London: Routledge.

7- See for example: **de Wit, H., Agarwal, P., Said, M.E., Sehoole, M.T., Sirozi, M.**, eds. (2008) *The Dynamics of International Student Circulation in a Global Context*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers; **Gürüz, K.** (2008) *Higher Education and International Student Mobility in the Global Knowledge Economy*. Albany: State University of New York Press; **Brooks, R., Waters, J.** (2011) *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalisation of Higher Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; **Bilecen, B.**, (2014) *International Student Mobility and Transnational Friendships*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; **Van Mol, C.** (2014) *Intra-European Student Mobility in International Higher Education Circuits: Europe on the Move*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

8- See for instance: **King, R., Raghuram, P.**, eds (2013) International student migration, *Population, Space and Place*, 19(2); **Bilecen, B., Van Mol, C.**, eds (2017) International academic mobility and inequalities, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8); **Riaño, Y., Van Mol, C., Raghuram, P.**, eds (2018) New directions in studying policies of international student mobility and migration, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16(3).

and ethnographic perspective, focusing on students' motivations, perceptions, experiences and identities, often contrasting the societies and education systems of the countries of origin and destination.

In what follows, we summarise some of the key issues pertaining to the literature on ISM as a rather new research field, keeping an eye on their relevance to the Albanian situation, the main focus of our study.

2.1 Definitions and available statistics

Defining international student migration and quantifying its scale are both not as straightforward as might be supposed. Firstly, there is uncertainty over the most appropriate term: international student *migration* or international student *mobility*? Conveniently, ISM can stand for both. 'Migration' implies a longer-term stay in the host country, perhaps for good, whereas 'mobility' conveys a sense of temporariness, followed by a return to the country of origin or an onward move to a new destination. Both situations apply to ISM; but there are some distinctions which are conventionally made.⁹ Long-distance, inter-continental moves by students, for instance from China to the United States, or from India to Australia, are often seen as *student migration*; whereas shorter-distance moves, for instance between European countries, are seen more as *student mobility* and are generally labelled as such.

Another relevant distinction concerns length of stay. Here an important divide is drawn between so-called *credit mobility*, whereby the student moves abroad for just part of their degree – typically one semester or an academic year – and then returns to finish their degree in their home country; and so-called *degree mobility*, when the student moves for an entire degree programme, lasting 3–4 years for a bachelor's or doctoral degree, or 1–2 years for a master's degree. Credit mobility, as defined above, can unambiguously be regarded as student mobility because of its short duration and imminent, more or less mandatory, return; whereas degree mobility is more akin to a true migration, especially if it is followed by the student staying on in the country of study to develop their career and subsequent life. This latter trajectory, where students become *de facto* immigrants, is sometimes referred to as 'status switching' from a student visa to something more long-term, and is common in countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia which use the recruitment of the 'brightest and best' international students to boost their own skilled labour markets.¹⁰

The Albanian students who are the focus of this study are somewhat intermediate between the above categorisations of mobile persons versus migrants. They are mostly heading for European countries such as Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom, so they are relatively short-distance movers. Yet, they are moving for entire degree programmes and many aspire to stay abroad after graduation,

9- King, R., Findlay, A. (2012) Student migration. In Martiniello, M., Rath, R., eds. *An Introduction to International Migration Studies: European Perspectives*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 259–280.

10- Hazen, H.D., Alberts, H.C. (2006) Visitors or immigrants? International students in the United States. *Population, Space and Place*, 12(3): 201–216; Robertson, S. (2011) Student switchers and the regulation of residency: the interface of the individual and Australia's immigration regime, *Population, Space and Place*, 17(2): 103–115.

given the low rates of pay and limited job openings for graduates in Albania. We therefore opt for the label 'migrants' to describe them, even if they do not see themselves as such, reserving this term for the mass of lower-skilled labour migrants who exist in many European countries.

Compiling internationally comparable data on ISM is a challenging exercise because of the varying ways that international students are recorded in different countries. The OECD's *Education at a Glance*¹¹ is probably the most accessible statistical series for comparable data, but these statistics are only as reliable as the recording systems of the countries involved. Generally the OECD data refer only to degree mobility (as defined above) and exclude credit-mobile visiting and exchange students, but one can never be sure of this. More problematic is the difference between countries (the majority) which record international students by their citizenship (hence they are 'foreign students') and those which record them by their country of habitual residence or prior education ('international students'). Without going into excessive detail, several complications can arise from these different measurement criteria. For instance, in countries where citizenship acquisition has traditionally been difficult because of *ius sanguinis* rules, such as Germany or Switzerland, second-generation students with foreign-born parents may be classified as foreign students (e.g. second-generation Turks in Germany). Or, to give a different example, where the criterion of 'normal residence' is used, the children of expat families who come 'home' to study from abroad may have the same nationality as the country they move to study in, yet be classified as international students.

These problems are unlikely to be a big issue for most Albanian students abroad, who will be classed as Albanian on both criteria – citizenship and prior residence. However, three circumstances can complicate the situation. One is where students onward-migrate, doing a first degree in one country followed by a postgraduate in another. In this case, the country of prior education and residence is not the same as the student's citizenship. It is not uncommon for Albanian students to do their bachelor degree in one country where living costs and fees are low (e.g. Turkey or Bulgaria) and then to move to another country for a master degree, perhaps with a scholarship or bursary. The second situation, particularly relevant in Italy, where there are many Albanian migrants and students, concerns the difference between those who move from Albania specifically to pursue higher education in Italy, and those who, having been taken to Italy as young children when their parents migrated there, come into the Italian university system from Italian secondary and high schools (and, moreover, may have acquired Italian nationality). The third complication consists of Albanian migrants (again, commonly in Italy) who, having worked in Italy for some time, decide to enrol at an Italian university to recover from the fact that their Albanian higher education qualifications are not recognised in the host country.

11- OECD, *Education at a Glance*. Paris: OECD, various years.

2.2 Global trends: a brief overview

International student migration is one of the fastest-growing components of global migration. Numbers have risen from 2 million in 2000 to more than 5 million in 2018. Globally, there are certain fairly entrenched patterns of movement. OECD countries host 85 percent of all foreign students, two-thirds of whom are from non-OECD countries, so there is a marked South-North orientation in the global pattern. Three countries (USA, UK and China) host 42 percent of international students, and eight countries (adding Australia, Canada, France, Russia and Germany) host 74 percent. Whilst the pattern of host or receiving countries remains relatively stable, the pattern of sending countries displays a mixture of stability and change. China and India top the league of sending countries, by virtue of their world-leading population totals, with other Asian countries, South Korea and Japan, following behind. After these, the ranking of sending countries is more volatile from one year to the next, including large European countries (Germany, France) as well as large, fast-developing countries such as Turkey, Morocco, Brazil and Mexico. There is some mirror-patterning between flows of students and overall migration flows, which reflect a maxim of migration – that migrants tend to go to countries where there are already from the same nationality.¹²

According to Börjesson,¹³ global patterns of student migration are structured in relation to three main principles and patterns. One is geographical proximity. Students wanting to study abroad will choose, other things being equal, destinations which are relatively close in order to minimise travel costs and cultural differences. Albanians' preference for countries in Europe supports this principle. Second, students generally move from lesser- to more-developed countries (from non-OECD to OECD countries, as stated above) in order to access higher quality and more prestigious higher education systems. Once again, the Albanian experience supports this principle: Albanian universities are perceived as inferior compared to those in Western Europe. Thirdly, international students are seen to move along channels of previous colonial relations, including language. Students from the former British, French and Portuguese colonies continue to move to universities in the former colonial powers; likewise Spanish-speaking Latin American students to Spain. This principle applies less to Albania except insofar as there was a quasi-colonial relationship with Fascist Italy, and the Italian language became widely spoken as a result of the influence of Italian television and culture during and after the communist era.

12- **Dreher, A., Poutvaara, P.** (2005) Student Flows and Migration: An Empirical Analysis. Konstanz: CESifo Working Paper 1490. Not surprisingly, being a small country of fewer than 3 million people, Albania does not feature in the higher rankings of sending and receiving countries for ISM, although it might do so if the exodus figures were indexed against overall population, or against the size of the university-age population. Such calculations are rarely made and it is beyond the scope of this paper to do so. Likewise, another potentially useful metric, the 'net stock' of ISM, which is the balance between the number of a country's students who are studying abroad and the number of international students it hosts, could be another index of the ISM status of a country as a net exporter or importer of international students. And this net stock figure could also be indexed by its relation to total or tertiary-education-age population for each country concerned.

13- **Börjesson, M.**, (2017) The global space of international students in 2010, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8): 1256-1275.

2.3 Frameworks for conceptualising international student migration

There are certain features which are unique to student migration when compared to other forms of migration. First, most students migrate not to work or to seek asylum or refuge, but to improve their human capital. Second, their movement is defined rather closely by age and life-stage: tertiary education commencing at the end of high school, typically around 18–20 years of age, and continuing into the mid or late 20s for those who pursue higher degrees abroad. Thirdly, students are generally seen as ‘desirable’ migrants and their mobility is encouraged; indeed those who are in receipt of grants and bursaries are paid to move, so that some or all of the costs of their migration and stay in the host country are covered.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to regard international students as a uniform category. A more critical perspective on ISM seeks to de-homogenise international students in various ways.¹⁴ International students assume different roles during their study-abroad migration: not only students but, many of them, also workers, parents, carers, activists and so on – just like students who do not go abroad, but perhaps in more challenging conditions.¹⁵ Some of these co-existing roles may happen naturally; in other cases they may arise either planned in advance or unexpectedly, by *force majeure*. For instance, getting a student visa might be a pragmatic strategy to enter a country where the main motivation is not study but something else – to work, obtain refugee status, or raise a family.¹⁶

Attempts to view ISM more theoretically follow several lines of argument, which also interconnect and overlap. The following are the main frameworks which have been applied.¹⁷

Globalisation, internationalisation and marketisation of higher education

The globalisation and increasing interconnectedness of economies, societies and cultures extends into higher education and academic life. The internationalisation of higher education is both a context for, and is also driven by, student mobility between countries and institutions in various parts of the world. Alongside the physical movement of students are other globalising educational initiatives such as international research networks, curriculum harmonisation, online courses, branch campuses in different countries, bilateral and multilateral student and staff exchange schemes, and the dominance of English as the global academic

14- **Madge, C., Raghuram, P., Noxolo, P.** (2015) Conceptualising international education: from international student to international study, *Progress in Human Geography*, 39(6): 681–701.

15- **King, R., Raghuram, P.** (2013) International student migration: mapping the field and new research agendas, *Population, Space and Place*, 19(2): 127–137.

16- Lulle, A., Buzinska, L. (2017) Between ‘a student abroad’ and ‘being from Latvia’: inequalities of access, prestige, and foreign-earned cultural capital, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8): 1362–1378.

17- Much of what follows draws on **King, Findlay**, Student migration, 262–267.

language. De Wit draws attention to the rise of market forces in global higher education with attendant technological developments of e-learning and the international trade in higher education services.¹⁸ A combination of international cooperation and competition between countries' education ministries and universities gives rise to a stratified market for international higher education in which the top universities compete to recruit the best students from around the world and thereby exercise 'soft power' in the global political arena. Widely circulated systems of university rankings contribute to this competitive edge which now characterises the global higher education landscape. Students are keenly aware of these rankings and seem only too happy to play along in this 'game' of inter-university competition and stratification, topped by the so-called 'world-class' institutions.¹⁹ In this way supply and demand are brought together, accounting for ISM as an interplay between the business ambitions of higher education institutions (supply side) and the motivations and actions of international students and their families (demand side).²⁰ Behind this equation lie, in most cases, careful calculations about university investment and marketing on the supply side, and students' human capital cost-benefit calculations on the demand side – related mainly to anticipated future earnings in a global high-skilled graduate labour market.

Students as part of high-skilled migration

Although the link between student migration and the more established literature on highly skilled migrants appears obvious, in practice the connections have not been widely explored. The literature on highly skilled migration makes only passing reference to students, possibly because they are thought of as not yet possessing high levels of skill and professional training, given that a graduate status is one of the main criteria for defining the highly skilled. In this line of thinking international students are a kind of proto-high-skilled category, on the route to high-skilled status and therefore soon to be subject to the career-enhancing migratory trajectories that highly skilled migrants follow, moving to places where their talents are most in need and therefore best rewarded. A closer link, however, has been established between international student migration and the broader mobility of talent, scientific knowledge and academic staff.²¹ Raghuram has recently proposed the notion of global knowledge theory to understand international students not just as physically mobile bodies but as key agents in constituting new global spaces of learning.²²

18- **De Wit, H.** (2008) The internationalization of higher education in a global context. In **De Wit, H., Agarwal, P., Said, M.E., Sehoole, M.T., Sirozi, M.**, eds. *The Dynamics of International Student Circulation in a Global Context*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 1-14.

19- **Findlay, A.M., King, R., Smith, F.M., Geddes, A., Skeldon, R.** (2012) World class? An investigation into globalisation, difference and international student mobility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(1): 118-131.

20- **Findlay, A.M.** (2010) An assessment of supply and demand-side theorization of international student migration, *International Migration*, 49(2): 162-190.

21- See for instance **Ackers, L., Gill, B.** (2008) *Moving People and Knowledge: Scientific Mobility in an Enlarging European Union*. Cheltenham: **Edward Elgar; Byram, M., Dervin, F.** eds. (2008) *Students, Staff and Academic Mobility in Higher Education*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing; **Solimano, A.**, ed. (2008) *The International Mobility of Talent*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

22- **Raghuram, P.** (2013) Theorising the spaces of international migration, *Population, Space and Place*, 19(2): 138-154.

The framing of ISM as part of skilled, academic and scientific migration leads, in turn, to two contrasting global settings. One is the phenomenon of 'brain exchange' or 'brain circulation' amongst highly developed countries, including the richer EU countries (plus Norway and Switzerland), North America, Australia and New Zealand. Student migration amongst this set of wealthy nations can be seen as a training experience for future managers and professionals destined for careers in global corporations, international organisations, diplomatic services etc., building not only on academic and scientific skills but also on intercultural awareness and the learning of languages.

The second global scenario is the well-known 'brain drain' of students and graduates from poorer countries to richer ones. This is seen as pernicious because the cost of upbringing (feeding, clothing, educating and socialising) the student up to the moment of departure is borne by the poor country, whilst the richer country benefits from this early investment in the production of brainpower, which is then trained further and 'lost' to the country of origin in the event – which often happens – of non-return. Even within the set of advanced countries there are often signs of structural imbalance in student flows, for instance from academically weak or overcrowded university systems to those which are regarded as higher quality and more meritocratic. Very few students move from developed to less-developed countries for their university education. Albania's student migration is largely a one-way traffic out of Albania; few students choose to come to Albania from abroad for their university degrees.

Student migration as social-class reproduction

Several authors have argued that internationally mobile students represent a privileged migratory elite – actually, an elite within an elite, given that, in most countries, university study is a minority trajectory for the socio-economically better-off families.²³ Not just for the students, but also for their parents and wider families, higher education means confirmation of their social status, and enhancement of prestige if the younger members are able to study abroad at what are regarded as 'good' or even 'world-class' universities, typically in North America or Western Europe.

In certain countries, including potentially Albania, the combination of family status, political connections, and study abroad to an advanced level, could be the pathway to a job in the government or a post as a university lecturer.

23- See for instance **Waters, J.** (2006) Geographies of cultural capital: education, international migration and family strategies between Hong Kong and Canada, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31(2): 217-237; **Waters, J.** (2012) Geographies of international education: mobilities and the reproduction of social (dis)advantage, *Geography Compass*, 6(3): 123-136; **King, R., Findlay, A.M., Ahrens, J., Dunne, M.** (2011) Reproducing advantage: the perspective of English school-leavers on studying abroad, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9(2): 161-181.

However, if international students are from more humble family backgrounds, a return migration to a good job might not be so easy; for these students, it is more rational to pursue their careers abroad. This may still boost the prestige of the family, and also its material wellbeing if their offspring's foreign income allows remittances to be sent.

Student migration and youth mobility culture

Much more than was the case for past generations, nowadays students' geographical horizons stretch beyond their own national frontiers. This is particularly the case for Albania and other former Eastern bloc countries where travel abroad was only a dream before the early 1990s. Present-day youth culture embraces mobility as part of everyday life, and travel abroad, for study, work, leisure or exploration, has become more or less a rite of passage. In his landmark book *Sociology beyond Society*, John Urry argued that, especially in Western countries, mobility has become the defining characteristic of contemporary societies.²⁴ He and other authors subsequently proselitised the 'mobilities turn' in social science, focusing on corporeal and other mobilities (of media, culture, knowledge, imaginaries etc.) as intrinsic to the current era of 'post'- or 'late-modernity'.²⁵ Urry and his co-writers said surprisingly little about students as exemplars of the mobility paradigm, but there is no doubt that, for this age group of young adults, an opportunity to study abroad is an appealing part of both their academic profile and their life-stage maturation.

Another relevant concept which runs parallel to that of a culture of youth mobility is the thesis of 'individualisation',²⁶ whereby young people construct their personal, individualised biographies which are different from the traditional expectations of what young people should do, where they should be, and how they should behave. Between leaving school on the one hand, and starting work, building a career and settling down with a partner and having children, on the other hand, is an ever-expanding phase of further and higher education, self-development and personal discovery which in many contemporary societies can last a decade or more – from late teens to late 20s and beyond. During this period a person's 'normal' biography can be enriched by studying, travelling and working abroad so that it becomes more 'individualised' and stands out from the crowd. What can be called 'mobility capital'²⁷ can be added to the human, social and cultural capitals which are built up through studying abroad to advance an individual's personal, social and career development.

24- Urry, J. (2000) *Sociology beyond Society: Mobilities for the Twenty- First Century*. London: Routledge.

25- See Urry, J. (2007) *Mobilities*, Cambridge: Polity Press; also Cresswell, T. (2006) *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. London: Routledge; Sheller, M., Urry, J. (2006) The new mobilities paradigm, *Environment and Planning A*, 38(2): 207-226.

26- Beck, U., Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Individualization*. London: Sage.

27- Murphy-Lejeune, Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe, 51-52.

3. Researching Albanian student migration: key questions

How do the key themes in the literature on student migration translate into the Albanian context? This section constitutes the bridge between the foregoing overview of the field and the rest of the report – initially the next section on survey methodology and the succeeding sections on survey findings and their interpretation. The main questions that arise concerning student migration out of Albania are tenfold.

1. What is the history of Albanian student migration?
2. How can we account for the large scale of student migration from Albania, relative to its population?
3. What are the main reasons students give for deciding to study abroad?
4. Is the study abroad option open to all young people in Albania or is it circumscribed by social and economic selectivity?
5. Which countries do Albanian students choose to study in, and have these destination patterns changed over time?
6. Which subjects and programmes of study do Albanian students opt for, and what are the reasons for the academic choices they make?
7. How do they evaluate their experience of studying abroad, both under the academic heading and as regards their wider social and cultural experiences? What do they perceive as the main benefits of their decision to study abroad, especially in relation to future careers?
8. What are their future plans: stay abroad, return to Albania, or move on elsewhere? How do they rationalise the choices between these options? What do these results mean for the future development of Albania?
9. What is the likely potential student migration from Albania? How do current students and high-school pupils in Albania view their plans to continue their studies abroad?
10. What are the policy implications of our findings on Albanian student migration?

4. Methodology: three surveys and follow-up interviews

Methodologically, the study is based on a literature review and on quantitative and qualitative techniques, which are combined or triangulated. Quantitative techniques consist of three surveys: an online survey with Albanian students who study abroad; a survey with Albanian students who study in public and private universities in Albania; and a survey with senior high-school students in some general and vocational training schools, both public and private ones, in Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan and Korça. The quantitative data from the three surveys were processed via SPSS. The qualitative data consist of interviews and focus-group discussions with Albanian students abroad, high-school students, teachers, and senior officials of schools and universities. We also utilised the UNESCO database

related to the mobility of international students,²⁸ which allowed for comparing Albania to other Western Balkan countries and beyond. The study uses also statistical data from the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY).

4.1. Survey of Albanian students studying abroad

The first survey covered Albanian students who have left Albania to attend undergraduate or postgraduate taught courses abroad. Some 651 Albanian students studying abroad responded on-line to this survey. A major difficulty for the research was to obtain e-mail contact details. We had some contacts from previous CESS projects²⁹ and we also used social networks (LinkedIn, Facebook). After establishing initial contact, a copy of the online survey and a cover letter were sent up to three times to the student to present the scope of the study and request their participation. If the responses were positive, we asked the respondent to pass the survey on to friends and acquaintances who were studying abroad. Almost 71 percent of the students contacted responded to the survey and less than one percent refused, on the grounds that the survey asked for personal information, whereas 28 percent did not respond at all. On the downside of this method, it does not enable a statistically representative distribution of the survey proportionate to the number of Albanian students by the country in which they study. On the other hand, 651 responses to an online survey to a scattered and largely unknown population is quite an impressive number.

The student questionnaire included 35 questions or groups of questions, helping with the collection of quantitative data on the social and demographic background of the students (age, gender, education, parental employment), current position (field and level of study, method of financing studies, place of study, etc.), factors contributing to the decision to study abroad, experience in the host country, and expectations to return home after completing the studies.³⁰

4.2. Survey of Albanian university students studying in Albania

The second survey relates to Albanian students who study in public and private universities in Albania. The data were collected by a team of CESS during the period April–May 2019. The survey was carried out in three phases. In phase one, based on INSTAT data, we calculated the number of respondents to be surveyed for each university campus, relying on the number of students for the academic

28- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>)

29- Gëdeshi I., King R. (2018) Research Study on Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with Albanian Scientific Diaspora. Tirana: UNDP.

30- The student questionnaire was adapted from previous versions used to explore the phenomenon of UK “Erasmus” students studying abroad, and UK and Indian students studying abroad for full degree programmes (at bachelor, master or doctoral level). See King R., Ruiz-Gelices E. (2003) International student migration and the European “Year Abroad”: effects on European identity and subsequent migration behaviour, *International Journal of Population Geography*, 9(3): 229–252; King R., Sondhi G. (2018) International student migration: a comparison of UK and Indian students’ motivations for studying abroad, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16(2): 176–191.

year 2018 –19.³¹ In phase two, we determined the distribution of surveys for each of the institutions in the public and private university sectors. In phase three, we calculated the distribution of surveys by faculty for each university. Surveys were administered with students in different years of their course of study. On the basis of such distribution, the research team, having obtained permission from senior officials of universities/faculties and professors, would enter during seminar hours and distribute the survey following a certain pattern (for example one for every 4 or 5 students). Before starting with the survey process, students were explained what the purpose of the survey was and were guaranteed that their anonymity would be preserved. The survey could be filled out in about 8 to 10 minutes. The research team collected 1,650 completed survey questionnaires with Albanian students in major university campuses in the country (Tirana, Durrës, Shkodra, Elbasan, Korça, Vlora and Gjirokastra).

The survey with students in Albania had 31 questions or groups of questions, which helped to collect quantitative social-demographic information (age, gender, education and employment of their parents), field of study and funding sources for their study, intention to emigrate (drivers, country of preference, period and availability of financial resources to emigrate, information on the desired country, etc.), and expectations of return.

4.3. Survey of Albanian high-school students

The third survey was arranged with senior students of general and vocational high schools, public and private, in Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan and Korça. Before starting with the survey, a permit was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY) and discussions were held with the Regional Education Department. In addition, preliminary talks were held with school principals, who helped in the survey administration process. The research team selected randomly the senior classes for the surveys and conducted them during class. The goal of the survey was explained and respondents were assured of anonymity. The survey was then distributed randomly (for example, one survey for every two or three students), with the team waiting until the survey was completed. On average, the survey took 10–12 minutes to fill out. The research team collected 450 filled-out questionnaires.

The survey with senior high-school students consisted of 29 questions or groups of questions. The questions collected quantitative information related to the social-demographic status (age, gender, place of birth, parents' employment, previous migratory experience), desire to continue studies at a university abroad (reasons, desired country, field of study, funding possibilities, knowing the language of and acquiring information about the country), and the desire to return upon completion of studies.

31- **INSTAT**: Students enrolled by Faculty and Programmes, academic year 2018–2019, in Public Education <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/tregu-i-pun%C3%ABs-dhe-arsimi/arsimi/#tab2>

4.4. Interviews and focus groups

In addition to quantitative techniques, 21 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives of Albanian students abroad. Some of the interviews were via Skype, others were conducted face-to-face with the students when they were visiting their family in Albania during their holidays.

In addition, four focus groups and 12 interviews were carried out with senior high school students in selected general high schools and in vocational training schools across the country. Interviews and focus groups were made in the presence of a teacher or senior official of the school. Other interviews were with school principals and parents of senior high school students.

Where possible and feasible, the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. All the names cited in the reported interviews or focus groups are fictitious, and standard procedures were applied to help preserve the confidentiality of the participants.

5. Albanian students abroad: a putative brain drain?

5.1. Reasons for moving in historical perspective

Historically, the Albanian intellectual and scientific elites have been formed abroad. Almost all the representatives of the Albanian *Rilindja* or 'National Awakening' (1848–1912) had completed their secondary or tertiary education abroad in various countries including Turkey, Romania, Greece, Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, etc. Natalie Clayer, who has studied the history of Albania during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, writes that overall Albanian muslim youngsters studied mostly in Istanbul and less in Europe. Orthodox youngsters would study in Istanbul, Bucharest, Athens and in some other European countries. Catholics, meantime, would study in Austria-Hungary and Italy.³²

After the declaration of independence in 1912 and until the establishment of higher education institutions in Albania, the country's young people studied in universities and higher education institutions abroad. From the beginnings of the Albanian state to date, we divide the period in three stages, each having its own peculiar characteristics with regard to flows and geographic distribution of students, sources of financing, areas of study, and return to the home country.

From the creation of the modern Albanian state (1912–1939)

From the creation of the modern Albanian state until before the start of World War II, Albania had a largely backward economy and notable deficiencies in human

32- Clayer N., Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe. Editions Karthala, Paris 2007.

capital. According to official sources of the time, in 1927, illiteracy was widespread, estimated at 85–93 percent, varying only slightly by prefecture. Albania counted 446 persons who had completed university education, or around 0.05 percent of its total population.³³ In the meantime, the government had awarded around 156 scholarships for Albanian youngsters to study in universities and higher education institutions in Italy, Austria, France, England, Germany, the US and in some Balkan countries (Greece, Romania, Turkey). Around 570 additional students, mainly from well-off families, studied with private sources of financing.³⁴ Meanwhile, in 1938, some 422 students were studying law, medicine, economy, engineering, pharmacy, dentistry, etc. abroad.³⁵ Thus, until before WWII, most Albanian professionals had been studying abroad, mainly in Western European universities. Most of them, upon the completion of their studies, returned to Albania and contributed to its progress and development.

During the socialist period (1945–1990)

After WWII, the socialist system that was established in Albania considered the development of education as very important, which would help the country depart from its century-long backwardness, especially with regard to preparing engineers, doctors, economists, agronomers, veterinaries, geologists, architects, etc. This was achieved by a combined approach: sending Albanian students abroad, and gradually establishing higher education institutions and universities in Albania. Thus, during the period 1945–1961, some 1044 students and specialists (in addition to 832 officers and junior military personnel), funded by state scholarships, went to study in the former Soviet Union and other socialist countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania).³⁶ After Albania's severed relations with the former Soviet Union, hundreds of Albanian students and specialists, mainly technicians, studied and were trained in China, a phase that lasted until the end of the 1970s.³⁷

In the mid-1970s, amidst a technical-scientific revolution that had swept advanced economies around the globe, and with relations with China worsening, the then leader of Albania, Enver Hoxha, asked to send Albanian students to France. Interestingly, in a conversation he had with Paul Milliez, a renowned French doctor, he asked him to intercede with the French Government to accept a number of Albanian students and specialists. The request, according to Milliez, was received with enthusiasm by the foreign minister, but was turned down several weeks later on the intercession of the French interior minister with the pretext that "Albanians are dangerous" and that they could contaminate other

33- The population of Albania in 1927 counted 828,593 residents. The educational structure of the population showed that 7.3 percent had completed primary education, 0.2 percent secondary (high school) education. For more information, see **Selenica T.** (1928), *Shqipëria më 1927*, Shtypshkronja "Tirana", Tiranë (Eng: Albania in 1927).

34- **Selenica T.** (1928), *Shqipëria më 1927*, Shtypshkronja "Tirana", Tiranë.

35- **Mëhilli S.**, *Tirana 1920–1944*, Tiranë, 2014.

36- **Kambo E.**, *Shkolla shqiptare në vitet (1960–1970)*. (Eng: Albanian education) Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike (Centre for Albanology Studies) Instituti i Historisë. Tiranë, 2014, pp. 412; **Pearson O.**, *Albania in the twentieth century. A history*. Vol. III, 2006, pp.552.

37- **Kreka A.**, *Marrëdhëniet Shqipëri – Kinë gjatë viteve 1960 – 1978*. (Eng: Relations between Albania and China) Doctoral Thesis on History Sciences. University of Tirana, Faculty of History, Tirana 2015.

French students with their ideas.³⁸ However, during the period 1975–1990, more than 200 students and around 300 specialists from the fields of natural sciences, technical sciences and social sciences – mainly doctors, engineers, geologists, physicists, mathematicians, biologists, experts of informatics, agronomers, veterinaries, linguists, etc. – studied or followed specialised training in universities, scientific institutions or laboratories in France, Italy, Austria, Romania, Sweden, Greece, etc.³⁹ The studies or specialisations were financed by the Government of Albania, through bilateral agreements, and by international organisations. Some of the students and specialists who were studying in these countries completed also their PhD studies, mainly in France (75 per cent of PhDs during these years were completed in this country).⁴⁰

The breakdown by field of study of Albanian students in Western European countries during the period 1976–1986, for which we have some data,⁴¹ reveals two aspects (Table 1). The first shows the priorities of the Albanian economy, such as industry and agriculture. Within the industry sector, some branches are more notable, such as metallurgy, oil extraction and geology, mechanical and chemical industries, as well as preparation for the development of new branches such as electronics and cybernetics. Second, this structure shows also the ideological character of the system. The table does not have any studies on, for example, economics or social sciences. Those in the group of ‘Education’ studied French, German, Arabic, Ancient Greek and Latin. Among those in the group of ‘Arts and humanities’ there are also musicians.

38- **Hoxha E.** Ne ushqejmë ndjenja të sinqerta për popullin francez. (Eng: We have sincere feelings toward the French people. From a conversation with the chair of Franco-Albanian Friendship Association, prof. Paul Milliez, 29 December 1977; Vol 63, p. 183. **Milliez P.**, On brade. *La Nouvelle Critique*, No 109, Decembre 1977. Professor Paul Milliez writes with a sense of irony that “if there were an infection, this would be in the opposite sense”.

39- According to an interview with Ms Eriketa Kambo, historian.

40- **Gëdeshi I., King R.** (2018) Research Study on Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with Albanian Scientific Diaspora. Tirana: UNDP; **Gëdeshi I., Black R.** (2006) From Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Mobilising Albania’s Skilled Diaspora, A policy paper for the Government of Albania. UNDP, Tirana. **Ditter J-G., Gëdeshi I.** (1997) Conditions économiques et émigration des élites intellectuelles en Albanie, (French), in *Cahiers d’Etudes sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien*, CERI, n° 23, janvier-juin.

41- We would like to thank Ms Eriketa Kambo, a historian, for providing us with archive documents about Albanians studying abroad.

Table 1. Main fields of study for Albanian students in Western European countries (1973–1986)

No	Main subject of study	In percent
1	Education	30.1
2	Arts and humanities	7
3	Social sciences, journalism and information	0
4	Business, management and law	0
5	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	5.6
6	Information and communications technology	4.9
7	Engineering, production and construction	41.3
8	Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	11.2
9	Health and welfare	0
10	Services	0
	Total	100

Source: Archive documents.

The second approach was the creation of higher education institutions, starting with the University of Tirana (1957) and some other universities, peaking in 1972 with the establishment of the Academy of Sciences. In 1989, around 4,300 students completed higher education that year in Albania, compared to 690 in 1960. Moreover, the number of students who were currently studying in Albanian universities rose to 27,000 in 1990, from around 7,000 in 1960.⁴² In 1989, in Albania, 137,316 individuals had completed tertiary education,⁴³ representing 4.3 per cent of the population. At the beginning of the post-socialist transition, compared to other countries with similar income per capita, the Albanian population had more years of education.⁴⁴

42- **Ministry of Economy, Department of Statistics**, Statistical Yearbook of Albania, 1991. Tirana.

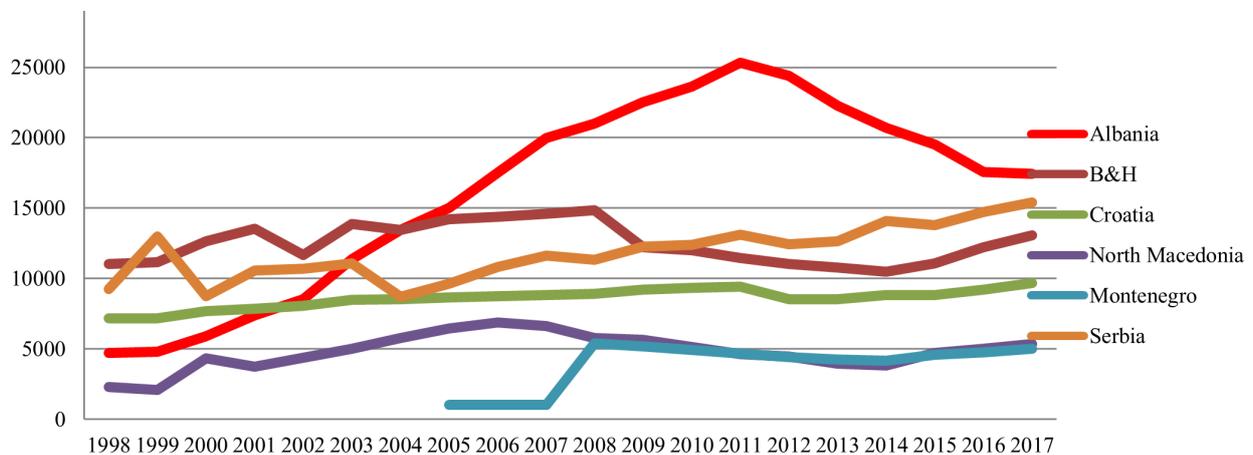
43- **INSTAT**, Migration in Albania. Population and Housing Census 2001. Tirana 2004.

44- **World Bank** (2010) *Albania, the New Growth Agenda: A Country Economic Memorandum*. Washington DC: World Bank Report No.53599-AL.

After the beginning of the post-socialist transition

This migration of Albanian young people for study purposes increased notably at the early years of the post-socialist transition. In the early 2000s, it was estimated that between 2,000 and 4,000 young people left the country each year to study abroad, mainly in Italy and Greece.⁴⁵ According to UNESCO estimates, the number of Albanian students abroad in tertiary educational institutions has increased. Thus, in 1998 there were 4,711 Albanian students abroad whereas in 2011 this figure jumped to 25,309 students, to then fall again to 17,448 students in 2017.⁴⁶ Such figures place Albania at the top of the Western Balkan countries (Figure 1), though by size of population it is ranked fourth, and by income per capita, it is the second lowest, above Kosovo (Table 2). In the meantime, these data show the number of Albanian students abroad, from the mid-2000s until 2013, rose more rapidly than in other Western Balkan countries (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Tertiary students from Western Balkan countries studying abroad



Source: UNESCO (2017) *Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students*.

<http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

Besides the overall number of students that study abroad, another important indicator is the relative index of student mobility (number of students enrolled abroad vis-à-vis those enrolled in the country), which allows us to compare Albania, in relative terms, with other countries irrespective of the size of their population. Thus, China and India, due to their population size, have a large number of students abroad, in 2017 estimated by UNESCO at 928,090 and 332,033 students, respectively. When referring to the mobility, however, in that year it was as low as 2.1 for China and 0.99 for India.

Based on this index, Kritz and Douglas (2018) rank Albania among top 10 countries

45- Tafaj M., Politikat "Brain Gain", 2005; Nazarko M., Programi Fellowship, Fondacioni Soros, Tiranë 2005.

46- The causes for such a notable decline in the number of Albanian students abroad are unclear. According to interviews conducted with high school principals in some cities across Albania, the number of senior high students who continue to study abroad has been on the rise.

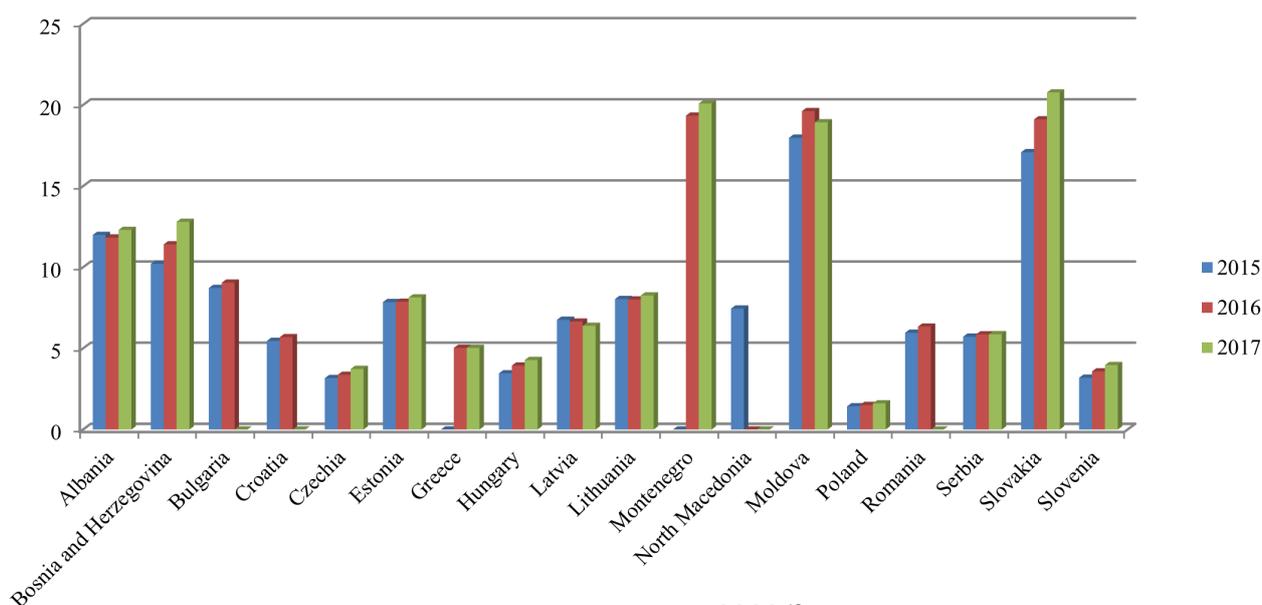
in the world (sixth in 2003, fourth in 2008 and eighth in 2012).⁴⁷ Figure 2, which is based on UNESCO data, shows the ranking of Albania compared to other South-East European (SEE) and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries for the period 2015–17.

Table 2. Population, migration and GNI per capita in the Western Balkan countries

Country	Population (million)	Migration (stock of emigrants)	Migrants as % of population	GNI/capita
Serbia	7.1	1.30	18.0	5,820
Croatia	4.2	0.88	20.9	12,990
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3.8	1.70	44.5	4,760
Albania	2.9	1.26	43.6	4,450
North Macedonia	2.1	0.63	30.2	5,150
Kosovo	1.8	0.55	30.3	3,990
Montenegro	0.6	0.28	45.4	7,320

Source: World Bank (2016) *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016*. Washington DC: World Bank.

Figure 2. Mobility index for SEE and CEE countries



Source: UNESCO, 2020⁴⁸

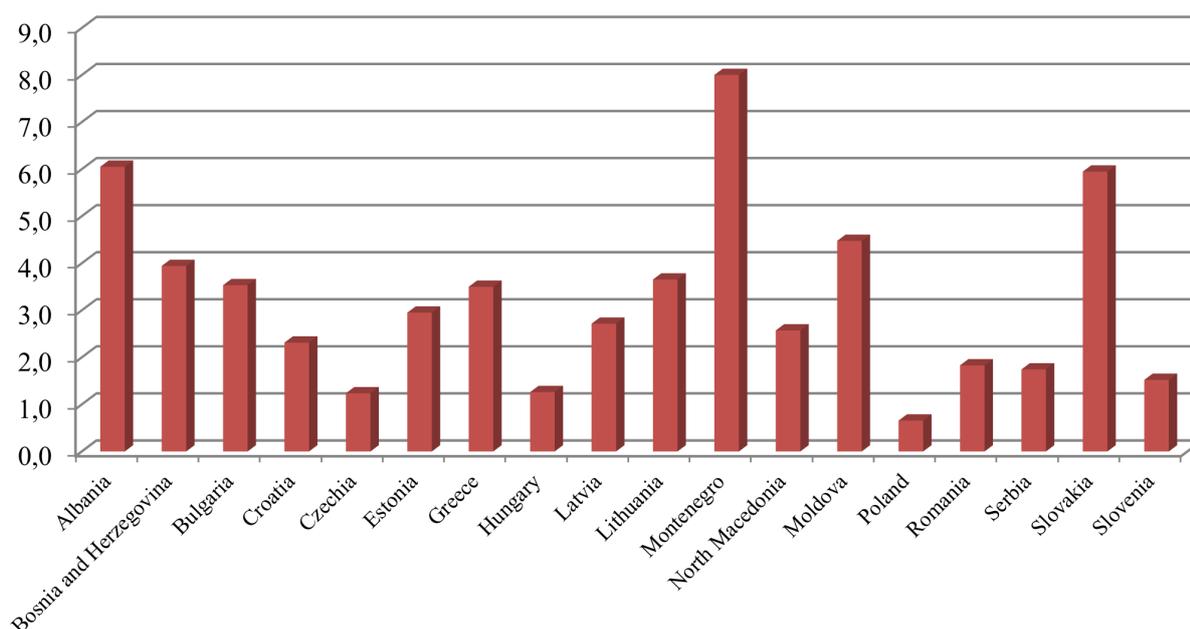
47- **Kritz M. M. and Douglas T. G.** (2018) International Student Mobility. Sending Country Determinants and Policies, in the book Czaika M edited by., High Skilled Migration. Drivers and Policies. Oxford University Press.

48- http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=EDULIT_DS&popupcustomise=true&lang=en. Data extracted on 19 Mar 2020 14:03 UTC (GMT) from UIS.Stat

The Figure shows that Montenegro, Moldova and Slovakia score higher than Albania, which has a similar index to Bosnia and Herzegovina. These countries (except Albania) have higher student mobility toward more advanced countries of the former federations in which they were a member. Thus, in 2017, around 66 percent of international students from Bosnia and Herzegovina went to Serbia or Croatia. Almost 58 percent of those from Montenegro went to study in Serbia. Meanwhile, 69 percent of international students from Slovakia went to study in the Czech Republic, and 64 percent of international students from Moldova went to study in Romania or in the Russian Federation.⁴⁹ The main drivers to this trend are old historical connections, shared cultural values, geographic proximity, identical or similar language, and higher quality of university education in the host countries.

Another relative indicator, which may be used to compare Albania to other countries, is the number of international students in relation to the number of the population. Again, Albania is undoubtedly one of the top countries (namely second) in the SEE and CEE regions, as noted Figure 3.

Figure 3. Number of international students per 1000 residents in 2017



Source: UNESCO, 2020.

Studying abroad in advanced OECD countries is probably a good strategy for Albania as it enhances both quantitatively and qualitatively the human capital of the country. Investments for this human capital increase come from families and individuals, the Government of Albania and other international resources (foundations, universities and governments of host countries). These investments are important, since people equipped with a high level of human capital constitute one of the major factors, probably the key one, in promoting the economic growth

and development of a country.⁵⁰ In our study, however, we will pose, step by step, a series of questions, which we will try to answer. The most important one pertains to whether such investments, amounting to hundreds of millions of euros per year, return to the home country, in the form of returned human capital, or remain in the host country because students choose not to return.

5.2 Why do Albanian students want to study abroad?

The question then arises: how is it that, compared to other Western Balkan or Central and Eastern European countries, such a large number of students from a small and poor country like Albania can study abroad in advanced OECD countries? Based on quantitative and qualitative data, we will analyse first certain hypotheses discussed at the global level and will then focus on our own hypothesis.

Kritz and Douglas (2018), when analysing the migration of students from developing countries in Africa, concluded that the mobility index is high in countries that have low tertiary capacities and limited study options.⁵¹ In the case of Albania, this conclusion may not be generalised. The supply of places for university studies within the country has been increasing fast. According to data from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), the number of students in Albanian universities surged from 27,359 in 1990 to 40,267 in 2000, to 134,877 in 2010 and 139,043 in 2018.⁵² This rapid increase in the number of students (by more than three times during 2000–2010) was due to the combined effect of the expansion of capacity in public universities and the establishment of many new private universities.⁵³ As a result, the hypothesis of a low tertiary supply of capacity does not hold true in the case of Albania. In the meantime, according to our survey data, only 6.9 percent of respondents say that they would have studied in Albania if their favourite university offered a place to study.⁵⁴ Also, the desired field of study is not a push factor since only 7.6 percent of Albanian students say they would study in the home country for that reason.⁵⁵ Many students, before going to study abroad, had applied and earned the right to study in Albanian universities. This is what Artan, who studies in France, confirms:

Before enrolling in the Sorbonne, I had already been admitted in the university and field of study I wanted, in Albania.

50- Lucas R. E., On the Mechanics of Economic Development, Journal of Monetary Economics, N. 22, pp. 3–42, 1998.

51- Kritz M. M. and Douglas T. G. (2018) International Student Mobility. Sending Country Determinants and Policies, in the book Czaika M edited by, High Skilled Migration. Drivers and Policies. Oxford University Press.

52- Gërmenji, E. and Miho, L. (2011) Migration of the skilled from Albania: brain drain or brain gain? Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies, Volume 13, Number 3: 339–357; INSTAT, Vjetari Statistikor (Eng: Annual Statistics), 2010–2014, Tiranë 2015; INSTAT, Shqipëria në shifra (Eng: Albania in figures), 2018. Tiranë 2019.

53- In 2013/2014, Albania numbered 14 private universities and 31.000 students, from 4 universities and 1.700 students in 2005/2006. For more information, see: INSTAT, Albania in Figures 2010. Tirana 2010; INSTAT, Albania in Figures 2013. Tirana 2014)

54- Respondents were asked: Would you have studied in Albania if your preferred university had offered you a place? Possible answers were: Yes; No; and Not applicable.

55- Respondents were asked: Were restrictions on the number of places to study your discipline in Albanian universities a factor in encouraging you to consider studying abroad? Possible answers were: Yes; No.

Bashkim, who studies medicine in Turkey, argues:

In Albania, I was admitted for medicine, ranking 47th. Nonetheless, taking into account the situation of education in Albania, I decided to go and study in Turkey. I decided to study at Bilkent, a leader in the field of my studies. Half of the Department hold a PhD from Stanford University.

Meanwhile, the quality of Albanian universities, also due to their rapid expansion, is relatively low. Albania does not appear at all in any of the years since 2004 in the QS World University Ranking. The 'Webometrics Ranking of World Universities', an initiative by a research group in Spain, is the only ranking that mentions Albania. According to this ranking, Albanian universities are the last in the region, starting from place 4979 (Epoka University) to 14,010 (Luigj Gurakuqi University).⁵⁶ One of the factors affecting the quality of university education is the low budget allocation. According to Eurostat data, in 2014, Albania spent 3.3 percent of its GDP on education, whereas other Western Balkan countries were spending 4.0–4.5 per cent, and the average EU-28 standing at 5.3 percent of GDP.⁵⁷ The differentiation in these percentage figures is all the more significant when we recall that Albania has a very low GDP. In the meantime, the emigration of the most dynamic and elite academic staff members has also affected the quality of university education. Studies show that around 40 percent of the university staff members, mainly the younger ones specialised abroad, had emigrated between 1990 and 2008, which reduces training capacities for the younger generations.⁵⁸

While comparing universities in Albania and in the UK, Andra, a master's student, shares her experience:

Universities abroad engage students in an active learning process, through dialogue. The whole process is student-centred, which means that you do not have text books, but each week the student is given a list of study materials and when you go to class the professor explains. In Albania, on the contrary, you have a textbook, and you learn it after the Professor has explained it in class. That is you are one step behind, you are very dependent on the text book and you do not have any alternative questions.

Similarly, Besjan, a student in Germany, says:

Teaching in German universities is totally different from teaching methods in Albania. It does not rely on the approach: tell-learn-recite.

Other students point out that in Albanian universities knowledge is not applied in a practical manner, scientific research is limited and literature is scarce in libraries. As a result, for most Albanian students, a foreign university can offer valuable knowledge and skills which are not provided in Albania. In addition, they will be able to obtain a diploma that is more reputable and may open many doors in the international labour market. This is what Gjergji, a student of biology in Germany, confirms:

56- <http://www.webometrics.info/en/Europe/Albania>

57- EUROSTAT, Key Figures on enlargement countries. 2017 Editions.

58- **Gëdeshi I., King R.** (2018) Research Study on Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with Albanian Scientific Diaspora. Tirana: UNDP; **World Bank** (2010) *Albania, the New Growth Agenda: A Country Economic Memorandum*. Washington DC: World Bank Report No.53599-AL.

The quality of universities in Germany is much higher and I know that with the diploma that I will earn I have greater chances to find a job in Germany or in any other EU country.

We also asked Albanian students in the survey about the factors that determine their decision to study abroad. According to their responses, set out in Table 3, there are two main factors: an international career after the completion of studies abroad (77 percent consider it as 'very important') and completing their studies in an internationally-recognised university (66 percent consider it as 'very important'). While both factors are closely inter-related and condition each other, students put their emphasis most on the international career. In this case, studying in a renowned international university is used as an instrument to migrate and pursue an international career.⁵⁹ Yet, we need to clarify something in this regard. For most Albanian students, studying in the most globally prestigious universities (e.g. Oxford or Cambridge) is a difficult endeavour as the admission quotas are limited, fees are too high and entry policies are very selective. In this case, the perception by Albanian students of good universities is, on the one hand, related to the level of economic and social development of the host country and, on the other, with the high ranking of some world-class universities in these countries. Thus, of the top 10 universities globally, four are located in the UK (World University Ranking 2020).⁶⁰ and this country is perceived by the mass of Albanian students and employers as a country that has a higher-quality tertiary education than other countries.

Besides the factors listed above, there are also some others (Table 3). Another reason is the support of the family (25.2 percent), which is 'very important' for the consensus of financing the studies abroad. Lastly, some students see studying abroad as an expression of their freedom, away from traditional norms, as an opportunity to learn and benefit from the culture and a richer social life, in addition to the high-quality education.⁶¹ Such a thought is affirmed by Ermira, a student of economics in Florence, Italy:

What I thought when I left Albania was simply to get a better education (...) What I thought was to benefit from a higher level of culture, to go to a country that was more developed and has a certain history, has much more vivid contacts, is more open (...).

59- Cf. Findlay, A.M., King, R., Smith, F.M., Geddes, A. and Skeldon, R., 2012. World class? An investigation of globalization, difference and international student mobility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(1), pp. 118-131.

60- <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2020>

61- Danaj E., Gendered experiences of international student migration: the case of Albania. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 2019.

Table 3. Factors determining the decision to study abroad (in percent)

	Very important	Slightly important	Not important	Not applicable
I saw study abroad as an opportunity for a unique adventure	14.9	39.7	34.1	11.2
My family was very keen for me to study in a particular country	25.2	39.1	24.4	11.3
I was determined to attend a world-class university	66.2	26.3	5.5	2.0
I want an international career and this was the first step towards it	77.2	18.0	3.4	1.4
Limited course places at Albanian universities to study my favourite discipline	3.2	11.2	37.1	48.5

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad.

Based on the students' responses, three possible hypotheses could explain the phenomenon of such a strong desire to study abroad. The first is that Albanian parents want to provide a higher quality education for their children compared to the quality in Albania, so that they may become better placed in the Albanian labour market when they return, able to compete for more qualified jobs, which are better paid, more interesting, offer a higher social status and greater opportunities for professional development. Redon, a student in Germany, describes his initial motivation to study abroad:

You leave at first with the idea that abroad you are able to get a better education and then it would be easier for you to find a job in Albania and you will be better professionally.

This idea is also highlighted by Elton, another student in Germany:

When you see your friends who have graduated abroad and find a good job upon return to Albania, you feel you would also like to apply to study abroad for a better education (...).

The second hypothesis assumes that, on graduating from a better and/or world-class university, it would be easier for the person to find a job and become integrated into the host country. Interviews with parents show that in many cases sending children to study abroad in advanced OECD countries is seen by them as a long-term life strategy for their children to integrate more easily and progress better in the host countries in terms of standard of living, incomes and career prospects. Arben, a father and former emigrant to Italy, confirmed this thesis. He

now runs a successful services company in Albania. Arben said:

In the early 1990s, like many Albanians, I emigrated illegally to Italy. After some years of hard work, I returned and set up my own business in Albania. Given the current situation, I see my son's future in one of the EU countries. However, I do not want my son to emigrate and live as I did back then. Therefore, I will purchase his migration: I will finance his studies in a good university in the EU, thus creating the premises for easier employment and integration into the host country.

Gent sees the perspective for his children along similar lines:

When I got married, it seemed things were turning out well and we decided to build our life in Albania. But now, we think that our children should build their life abroad. Both my children study in private schools and are learning German, preparing to study in a German university.

The third hypothesis is simply a combination of the first two. Irrespectively of the student's final decision, whether to stay in the host country or return home, the parents may feel happy in either case. Mirlinda, a devoted mother whose son is a student in Germany, says:

Since we sent our son to Germany, our desire is for him to live and work in that country. But, if he prefers to return, he can do so. Albania is always here.

As we will see in section 6 on senior high-school students, for many students the decision as to whether to return or stay in the host country is not clear from the very beginning. The idea evolves over the years, depending on the degree of integration in the host country, the opportunities on offer there, and the difficulties related to the return to the home country. This is what Arjan, a master's student in Germany, states:

When I came to Germany, I was not exactly thinking of staying here. I remember saying I am going back [to Albania]. My dad thought that I should probably stay. Then, as I began to integrate gradually, getting to know more friends, I changed my opinion. Now, I am certain I am staying in Germany.

The desire to migrate is driven by structural factors, which we have dealt with in other studies.⁶² These factors include unemployment, low wages, lack of opportunities for career advancement, high levels of corruption, low quality of health care, poor education, pollution, physical uncertainty, limited social protection, lack of trust in the justice system, dissatisfaction with the political class, etc. Some of these social and economic factors appear at times like push factors to study abroad, at other times as discouraging factors to return to the home country. We will address these factors in other sections of the study. They show that the Albanian society 'produces' the migration impetus in almost all the cycles of university studies (before, during and after university studies).

62- **Gëdeshi, I. and King, R.** (2018) *New Trends in Potential Migration from Albania*. Tirana: F. Ebert Foundation; **Gëdeshi I., King R.** (2018) *Research Study on Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with Albanian Scientific Diaspora*. Tirana: UNDP; **Gëdeshi, I. and King, R.** (2020) *Albanian returned asylum-seekers: re-integration or re-emigration*, IOM.

5.3 Who studies abroad?

Regardless of the great desire to study abroad, about which we will say more presently, not all Albanian young people have the possibility to realise this desire.⁶³ UNESCO's database shows that, in 2017, 12.3 percent of Albanian students studied in OECD countries.⁶⁴ Subsequently, the question arises: of the Albanian students, who is able to study abroad? Generally, those who can afford to study abroad have adequate financial, human and social capital. Edlira, a principal of one of Elbasan's high schools says in her interview:

Intellectual families desire, and make the sacrifice, for their children to obtain a higher-quality education in one of the EU countries. Also families that are well off economically make such an investment. In addition, those families that have social networks abroad also send their children to study abroad.

Others, in the best case, may study in universities and higher education institutions in Albania. Based on the importance of these different types of capital allowing students to study abroad, we will address each of them, starting with financial capital.

Students coming from families that have financial resources

Most of Albanian students studying in advanced OECD countries come from the families of Albania's financial elite. They are mainly the children of professionals (doctors, university professors, engineers, economists, lawyers, architects, politicians, IT experts, employees of international organisations, journalists, directors of Albanian NGOs, etc.), of business persons, company managers, or senior public officials. Table 4, which compares the occupational structure of the parents of Albanian students abroad to those of students in Albania and senior high school students, shows that the group of professionals, business persons and managers is notably higher in the first case than in the other two groups. This is certainly related to higher available income and higher wages in this group, allowing them, therefore, to finance the foreign studies of their children. Arjan, a student in Germany, speaks about his friends and acquaintances:

The parents of my friends are intellectuals. Most of them come from the middle and the upper classes. I don't know any [Albanian] student in Germany whose parents are workers.

Within this group, we may discern some subgroups. For example, the most wealthy families send their children to well-recognised universities in the UK, the US, and to a lesser extent to Switzerland, the Netherlands or France. This requires preliminary investments: good private pre-university schools, private language courses, summer schools abroad, and perhaps also preparatory years or some years of high school in these countries. Our survey data show that 62 percent

63- This is the difference between the *aspiration* to migrate and the *ability* to do so, as pointed out in Carling's landmark paper on Cape Verdean migration. See **Carling, J.** (2012). Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(1), 5-42.

64- http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT_DS&popupcustomise=true&lang=en. Data extracted on 19 Mar 2020 14:03 UTC (GMT) from UIS.Stat

of the parents of those who send their children to the UK are business persons, professionals or senior state officials. Through the education of privileged individuals in well-recognised universities, the rich people, as we will see in other elements of the cycle (return, employment, etc.), replicates and reinforces the social status system already in existence in Albania.

Table 4. Professions of parents of Albanian students abroad, in Albania and of senior high school students (all figures percent)

Profession	Albanian students abroad (N=651)		Students in Albania (N=1650)		Senior high school students (N=450)	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
1 Skilled manual worker	10.5	2.6	17.4	7.3	18.2	11.3
2 Unskilled manual worker	2.5	1.9	5.6	3.5	6.8	2.7
3 Sales agent/representative	2.5	1.4	2.5	2.1	2.2	3.5
4 Administrator/accountant	4.6	6.5	2.8	2.4	3.1	3.8
5 Public administration	14.5	14.2	11.9	8.1	11.0	7.4
6 Professional (teacher, doctor, etc.)	25.3	33.5	12.7	15.4	8.9	17.7
7 Housekeeper/Homemaker	0.2	13.9	0.5	36.5	0.5	23.4
8 Director/Business partner	5.7	1.9			3.6	1.9
9 Manager	3.5	3.4			4.7	2.2
10 Business person	19.0	8.3	20.5	9.5	22.3	6.3
11 Farmer	1.2	0.9	6.5	1.5	1.7	0.3
12 Pensioner	4.8	3.2	3.5	2.3	0.9	0
13 Unemployed	2.5	4.0	8.1	8.3	5.2	12.6
14 Other	3.2	4.2	5.5	1.7	8.3	6.0
15 No answer			2.5	1.5	2.5	1.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: CESS., Surveys with Albanian students abroad, in Albania and senior high school students, 2019.

Another source of financing, as shown from interviews, are long-term savings by families with a prior or current emigration experience. Almost 21 percent of Albanian students abroad are from emigrant families, or where at least one parent (the father) had been an emigrant, mainly in Greece (47 percent) and Italy (25 percent). The average duration of stay in the migration country, in the case of the whole family, was 5.8 years, and in the case of the father 5.1 years.⁶⁵ According to interviews, one of the main emigration objectives was precisely to earn the financial means for a better education for their children. Most of them returned due to the economic crisis.

Indicative of the sacrifices some parents are willing to make, Afërdita, the mother of a student in France, says: "If my savings did not suffice, I would have even sold all my possession, to enable my son to study abroad." Such a sacrifice of Albania families for the future of their children is highlighted also in students' interviews. Eglë, an Albanian student in Italy, says:

Albanians have always made sacrifices for better prospects for their children (...). Albanian families, being somewhat disappointed by life, the economic and social environment in Albania in general, have a higher desire to push their children to migrate abroad. Perhaps, knowing first-hand that it is not easy to start a new life abroad, they invest for the future of their children. In my opinion, it is related to a historical, economic, social and political context. Albanian families make sacrifices.

Lacking sufficient financial resources, some families adopt other strategies. They send their children to study abroad only for the master's. In this case, the study period is shorter and the costs are therefore lower. Endri, a master's student in Germany, explains:

I have friends who completed their bachelor degree in Albania and desire to follow a master's in an EU country. They choose this approach because their families cannot afford to finance five years of schooling abroad, but they would finance two years.

Other families send their children for their bachelor studies in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Poland, Cyprus, etc. where tuition and living costs are lower and then send them for their master's studies in Germany, France, the Netherlands, the UK, or the US where the quality of education is better, but costs are higher. Survey data show that 56 percent of master's students who also have a previous experience of residing in another country belong to this group.

Some Albanian students – mainly in Italy, Turkey, the US, Greece, Belgium, etc. – benefit from bursaries or grants by the governments or universities in the host country. Survey data show that 21 percent of Albanian students benefit bursaries by the Government of Albania or the host institution, which alleviates the parents' financial contribution. In Albania, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth has set up an Excellence Fund to finance studies abroad for students graduating with

65- Respondents were asked: Have either of your parents ever lived outside Albania for six months or longer? Possible answers were: Yes; No. If yes, name of country (if more than one country, list where they have lived the longest) and the length of residence (years).

honours. In addition, for many years the Open Society Foundation for Albania (Soros Foundation) has been the main sponsor of such bursaries for Albanian students abroad.⁶⁶ Almost 41 percent of students we surveyed said that the possibility of a bursary was 'very important' in the process of selecting the university and country of study.⁶⁷ In other countries such as Hungary, Poland, Russia, Cyprus, etc. students are offered bursaries by these countries. Albana, a student in Italy, shares her experience:

In Italy it is a good thing that you may be entitled to a bursary. Albanians may be given a bursary, because compared to Italians, we have lower income.

In the US, students may be given a bursary by the host institution. Donika, the principal of a private vocational training school in Tirana, says:

America is expensive, but bursaries are awarded to the best students. (...) Italy has also many bursaries, but there they are granted depending on family income. You have to provide documents as evidence of family income (...).

Table 5 shows the main sources of financing university studies, with parental support, self financing and bursaries from the Government of Albania or host institutions accounting for around 96 percent of cases.⁶⁸

Table 5. Sources of financing for Albanian students abroad

No	Financing of studies	Number	Percent
1	Self-financing	199	30.6
2	Parental support	288	44.2
3	Grant or bursary from your host institution	138	21.2
4	Bank loan	1	0.2
5	Employer	7	1.1
6	Other	18	2.7
	Total	651	100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

66- **Gërmenji, E. and Miho, L.** (2011) Migration of the skilled from Albania: brain drain or brain gain? *Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies*, Volume 13, Number 3: 339-357.

67- Respondents were asked: Did your current university notify you of bursaries that you could apply for and was this important in your decision of where to study? Possible answers were: No notification; Notification given, but not important; Yes, and the possibility of a bursary was important; Other (*please specify*).

68- Respondents were asked: How are you financing your studies? Respondents could provide more than one answer from the following: self-financing, parental support, grant or bursary from your host institution, bank loan, employer, and other.

In the meantime, many Albanian students, in the absence of adequate financial resources from their families, or to ease somewhat the financial burden of their parents, work part-time in the host country. Table 6 shows that around 46 percent of Albanian students work part-time in the host country.⁶⁹ According to the survey, working students are more common in the US, Germany, Italy and France. In many cases, this prevents them from finishing university studies on time, achieving high performance, or living a rich social life. Mirlinda, an Albanian student in Italy, affirms:

After I finished exams, in the first year, I started to work (...) I was in a shopping centre selling the product online. I did this for eight months and worked seven days a week for 12 hours each day. Therefore, it was not easy to study and successfully sit in the exam. Then I started an internship with a company, which is now my work place. I deal with payments for the firm's clients. I work 45 hours a week, Monday to Friday. (...) Many Albanian students I know in Italy have a job; none of them stays only in the lecture room in the mornings and lives a social life in the evenings. Absolutely not. They work. Many serve as waiters, others wash dishes, whereas other luckier ones find a more decent job. But, generally, all Albanian students here work.

Ditmir, a master's student in informatics, in Germany, shares his experience:

My parents supported me for one year, and then I found a student job, working 20 hours per week. My job allowed me to cover all my monthly expenses.

There are also cases when the students finance their studies entirely on their own. Ermira, a master's student in Germany, relates her experience:

When I left Albania I had only 50 euros in my pocket and a plane ticket that cost 250. I covered the rest of my expenses relying on my own (...). Unfortunately, my family was not in a position to help me. Both of my parents are pensioners, they do not have much to offer. With their income, they could not afford to help me. (...) In Germany, there is a programme for babysitters; you go to a German family to help caring for the kids and they offer the German language course for free. You have to take language classes for one year. During this year, I was paid 250 euros per month and the family provided food, accommodation and language classes. This was the financial support. In the meantime, to continue my studies I needed a bank account in Germany. But, I didn't have one and the host family helped me. They were both academics and they had clearly understood my desire to study, and told me they would help me. They offered their guarantee and I was able to continue master's studies.

⁶⁹ Students were asked: Do you have a part-time job? Possible answers were: None; Fewer than 8 hours a week; 8 to 20 hours a week; and More than 20 hours a week.

Table 6. Part-time employment of Albanian students in the host country

No	Do you have a part-time job?	Number	Percent
1	None	348	53.5
2	Fewer than 8 hours a week	74	11.4
3	8 to 20 hours a week	162	24.9
4	More than 20 hours a week	67	10.3
Total		651	100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

In many cases, finding a job is not only an opportunity to earn some money to cover some of the education and living expenses, but also a chance to establish social connections, to integrate and stay in the host country upon the completion of studies. Arlind, a student of electronics in Munich, Germany, tells about his experience:

It would be good to find a job while a student, as it helps you integrate faster. Later on, it becomes more difficult to find a job, unless you have previous experience. Here, I have noted only a few [German] students work.

Students and families that have human capital

Most students who study abroad come mainly from families that form the intellectual elite in Albania. More than half (55.9) percent of the parents have higher education, which is five times higher than the country's average.⁷⁰ The education level of the parents of students abroad is almost twice higher than the level of parents of students in Albania or of surveyed senior high-school students (Table 7). The education level of the parents is important, because those having tertiary education are more interested for the school performance of their children, encourage them to learn foreign languages, advise them, guide them and support them better in life. They are also more inclined to invest in the education of their children abroad. Eriona, a high-school principal in Tirana, says:

It is a small number of parents, mainly those having university education, who have made up their mind to send their children abroad, the moment they send them to high school. But we are talking about very few of them. They are mainly families that can afford it.

Table 7. University education of parents of Albanian students abroad, in Albania and of senior high-school students

No		Albanian students abroad (N=651)	Students in Albania (N=1650)	Senior high- school students (N=450)
1	Yes, both	55.9	27.6	26.2
2	Yes, father	8.0	11.8	15.1
3	Yes, mother	11.1	8	11.9
4	Neither one	25.0	52.7	45.8
	Total	100	100	100

Source: CEES., Surveys with Albanian students abroad, in Albania and senior high school students, 2019.

In general, the best and most talented students go to study in universities in most advanced OECD countries. They have excellent academic achievements and master one or two foreign languages. Arben, a student in Germany, says:

In many cases, sending the children to study abroad depends also on the parents. If they note that their child does not have the capacity to study abroad, then they better go to a university in Albania. (...) In my class [in high school] students who did not go abroad to study were the ones with lower school performance.

Many of them have studied in private schools in Albania, have attended language classes and some have even participated in summer schools abroad. Endri, who studies electronics in Germany and attended a private vocational school in Albania, says:

In our school, more or less, we were well off economically. But only the best students went abroad.... I do not know of any student with a poor performance going abroad. Perhaps somebody with an average achievement, but no poor-performance student has come to study abroad, I don't know of anyone.

The level of independence, perseverance and sense of initiative is another characteristic of those who study abroad. Shkëlzen, who studies in Germany, says about his friends:

There are also individuals who can afford, have high school performance, but find it difficult to leave the family. They feel more comfortable close to the family, staying in Albania, because in another country you are on your own, you have to cook and do many other things. That is to say you have to get used to doing things without the help of your parents. This requires a somewhat higher responsibility than in Albania.

Vjosa, a mother, shares her experience with her two children:

I have always thought about my children studying at a university abroad when they grew up. But the older daughter did not follow my advice, because she did not grow up with the idea of leaving the country (...). She feels very close to the family. The strong connection with the parents is a factor that keeps her from leaving. Our daughter stayed but our son did not. He has been an independent person since he was a little boy and now he is studying in Germany.

Around 16 percent of surveyed students (3/4 of them girls) say that leaving the family is a factor that concerns them.⁷¹ To overcome this obstacle, some well off families prepare their children in advance by sending them to summer schools abroad during school breaks. In addition to learning to become independent, they also improve their language skills. Other families prefer to send their children to study to countries where they already have relatives as emigrants, to provide some control and care and reduce financial and psychological costs.

Students and families that have social capital

The existence of a network of friends and relatives abroad is important when selecting the country of study, the university, the field of study, living arrangements, preparation of documents, accommodation, finding a part-time job, and care (at least for the first year of studies). This keeps financial, psychological and information costs down. Almost 44 percent of surveyed students say they had contacts with Albanians in the host country before selecting the university. Majlinda, who is seeking to apply to a university in England says:

I have two cousins in England (...). They just finished bachelor studies and will continue their master's in England (...). Being in constant communication with them, I have all the necessary information to apply in a university in England.

Other students have relatives and friends (21 percent) or have been before with their families as emigrants in this country. Ermira, a senior high-school student from Tirana, says:

England is one of the most expensive countries to study and to live (...), but I have relatives there and, hence, I do not need to stay in a dormitory or rent an apartment. I have my relatives to help me; all this helps make me choose England as an alternative, although the cost of living in this country may be expensive.

Others seek psychological support, relatives and friends who may advise or help should the need arise. Jona, a student in Italy, writes in her survey response:

⁷¹ Students were asked: What were the factors that concerned you (before moving) about studying outside Albania? One of the main answer options was 'Difficult to leave parental family'. Possible answers were: Very important; Slightly important; Not important; Not Applicable.

It is not easy at all to leave home at 18 and move overseas. Albanians have a history of migration; all families have some relative living as a migrant abroad. My choice of the country was the presence of family members here. Initially, this factor determined my choice.

This produces a sense of comfort and security for the parents also, especially when it comes to daughters. Klea, a school principal in Korça, says:

Families that can afford may send their kids to study abroad. This is the first condition. However, accommodation is another issue, and support. At least these are issues that came up from conversations we had with family members who were thinking to send their kids to Italy. This was also a condition, a strong one.

As a result, the stock of emigrants determines, to a certain extent, the flow of students to that country. Yet, as we will see in the next section, there are also other determinants, not least because conditions and preferences change. Italy is a typical case: its relative position has been reducing, just like Greece lost its first place years earlier.

This social capital is necessary also for the selection of the university, field of study, application for studies, preparation of documents, and application for scholarship by the host institution. Arbëresha, a school principal in Tirana, says:

From the forms⁷², we see around 40 percent of senior high-school students state a desire to study abroad, but only 10-15 percent actually manage to go. Others do not manage to prepare all the documents on time, because they may not have all the relevant information.

Lastly, the peer-group network of the potential student is also important, as it exerts direct or indirect pressure on the decision-making. Shpëtimi, a student in Austria, tells us about his story: 'I saw many of my friends were getting ready to study abroad, so I decided to do the same (...).' Lorena, a school principal in Tirana, confirms this: 'Many of the students who go abroad exercise some influence on each other (...).'

5.4. Countries of study

According to UNESCO's database, Albanian students are present in over 30 countries, but the top ten countries of their choice to study are: Italy, Greece, Turkey, Germany, the US, France, Austria, Romania, the UK, and Bulgaria (Table 8). In 2017, almost 85 percent of the stock of Albanian international students were studying in an EU country.

⁷²- Before the school ends, senior high-school students are asked to fill in a form. Among others, the form has a section asking the students who wish to study abroad, whether they want the high-school diploma printed in advance.

Table 8. Albanian students by host country in 2017

No	Country	Number	Percent
1	Italy	10,364	59.4
2	Greece	1,206	6.9
3	Turkey	989	5.7
4	Germany	886	5.1
5	US	824	4.7
6	France	550	3.2
7	Austria	364	2.1
8	Romania	294	1.7
9	UK	272	1.6
10	Bulgaria	242	1.4
11	Other Countries	1,457	8.4
	Total	17,448	100

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Global Flow of Tertiary Level Students (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>).

The top countries of preference for Albanian students in 2017, with a notable difference, were the two closest EU neighbours: Italy (59.4 percent) and Greece (6.9 percent). Geographic proximity and cultural similarities, the large stock of Albanian migrants and favourable policies for students are among the factors that explain the large concentration of Albanian international students in Italy and Greece. This is what Pandora, a school principal in Korça, points out:

Greece is the top country of preference for students from Korça. It is in our vicinity and people find it easier to come and go to Greece.

However, compared to a few years earlier, the absolute and relative share of these two countries has shrunk. Thus, based on UNESCO figures, the number of Albanian students in 2017 compared to 2016 fell by 26.1 percent and 3.4 percent for Greece and Italy respectively.

Meanwhile, the number of Albanian students in Germany has increased rapidly in recent years. According to UNESCO, in 2017 (the last year for which UNESCO data

are available), 886 Albanian students were studying in German universities. In 2018–19, however, the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science reports 2,190 Albanian students in Germany.⁷³ Endri, a student who has been in Germany for years, says:

The number of Albanian students has been on the rise. When I arrived here, there were only a handful of Albanian students, (...) whereas now I see more and more of them, numbers are increasing. Especially now, with the waiver of the preparatory year for Albanian students, because our school was not recognised before (...). Now, it has become easier for Albanians.

Advanced economic and social development, good employment opportunities for persons holding tertiary education and skilled persons, the high level of tertiary education, low university fees, and the existence of a rapidly increasing Albanian community,⁷⁴ are some of the underlying factors explaining the shift of the destination preferences from Italy to Germany. This perception of Germany as a very advanced country providing good social support was enhanced especially after the global economic crisis (2008) and the refugee crisis (2015). During 2013–18 almost 83,000 Albanians applied for asylum in Germany (to later return).⁷⁵ Arben, a student in Germany shares his reasons for this preference:

Germany is one of the favourites because its universities offer top-quality education at almost no fee. For six months I pay 150 euros, whereas in France you would have to pay up to 2,000 euros per semester. In addition, Germany for the moment is the leader of the European Union and offers better employment opportunities. (...) Germany, I would say, has become now the number one country of preference for Albanians to study.

This desire of Albanian students to study in Germany is reflected also in learning German. Many primary and secondary school students in Albania have started to learn German either at school or in private courses. Pranvera, an experienced teacher in a private high school in Korça, says:

Compared to 3–4 years ago, the preference to study in Germany is higher. Italian has been overtaken by German. In our school we used to offer English and Italian. But now Italian is less and less in demand; Italian classes have only a few students, whereas almost all first-year students have taken German.

According to data from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY), the number of students in pre-university education that study German at school (as first or second foreign language) was 12,678 in 2019, up from 6,400 in 2012. In the meantime, 2,200 students are learning German in the university system⁷⁶ and over 20,000 young people are studying German through private courses.⁷⁷

Many others bachelor students in Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, etc. prefer to continue their master's studies in Germany. As a result, the flow

73- GIZ., **Programme Migration & Diaspora**, Albanian Students in Germany.

74- At the end of 2015, there were 59,000 migrants from Albania in Germany (for more information see: **Kölker K. N.**, Migration Networks between Germany and the Countries of Origin - Republic of Albania and Republic of Kosovo, PowerPoint Presentation, Tirana March 2017.)

75- **Gëdeshi I., and King R.**, (2020) Albanian returned asylum-seekers: re-integration or re-emigration? IOM, Tirana.

76- Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, August 2020.

77- Interview with Ms. Alketa Kuka, Head of the Language Department, Goethe Institute, Tirana.

of international students is shifting toward Germany, the main reason being the better chances of employment in this country after graduation.

5.5. Academic experience abroad

Fields of study

Albanian students study diverse subjects when they are abroad as international students. Table 9, which is based on the ICSED 2012 classification, shows their chosen fields of study. Around 28 percent are studying “business, administration, and law”, a little more than 18 percent are studying “engineering, production, and construction”, 18 percent are studying “information and communication technology”, 14.5 percent “social sciences, journalism, and information”, around 11 per cent “natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics”, and around 6 percent are studying “health and welfare”. Other subdivisions, from almost 11 groups of disciplines, are negligible (Table 9).

Table 9. Main fields of study for Albanian students abroad

No	Main subject of study	Number	In percent
1	Education	2	0.3
2	Arts and humanities	15	2.3
3	Social sciences, journalism and information	93	14.5
4	Business, management and law	180	27.9
5	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	72	11.2
6	Information and communications technology	116	18.0
7	Engineering, production and construction	118	18.4
8	Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	1	0.1
9	Health and welfare	41	6.4
10	Services	1	0.1
11	Unknown	4	0.8
	Total	643	100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

Compared to the mid-2000s, for which period we have only partial data, the structure of the field of study has changed for the Albanian students. According to a survey with 704 Albanian students abroad conducted by AlbStudent, a student association, in the period November 2005 to June 2006, around 28 percent of them studied economics, around 26 percent social sciences, 12 per cent law, and only 18 percent were studying engineering, informatics and natural sciences.⁷⁸ In our survey, as Table 10 shows (with slightly adjusted categories), they stand respectively at 24.2 percent economics, 14.5 percent social sciences, 3.7 percent law, and 47.6 percent engineering, informatics and natural sciences. Thus, over a span of 15 years, the pattern has shifted from social sciences and law toward engineering, informatics and natural sciences.

Table 10. Change in the fields of study for Albanian students abroad, 2005–2019 (in %)

Field of study	AlbStudent survey 2005/2006	CESS survey 2019	Change
Economics	27.6	24.2	- 3.4
Social sciences	26	14.5	-11.5
Law	12	3.7	- 8.3
Engineering, informatics and natural sciences	18	47.6	+ 29.6

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019;

We also note that there is a change in fields of study also between Albanian students studying in Albania and those studying in advanced OECD countries.⁷⁹ Table 11 shows that in Albania a little more than half (51.7 per cent) of students study education, arts, humanities, social sciences, and business and law, whilst just over one quarter (26.7 per cent) study natural sciences, computer sciences and engineering. In the meantime, the percentages are more or less inverted for Albanian students studying abroad: fewer fall in the first group (45 percent) and more are studying in the fields of the second group (47.6 percent). The group 'Health and welfare', as we will see in the next section, is a special case: most of the students under this group in Albania study to be nurses, whereas abroad they prefer general medicine.

78- For further information, see: <https://www.forumishqiptar.com/threads/73998-Student%C3%ABt-shqiptar%C3%AB-jasht%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-pavendosur-p%C3%ABr-t%C2%92u-kthyer>

79- **INSTAT.**, Shqipëria në shifra (Eng: Albania in figures), 2018. Tiranë 2019.

Table 11. Main fields of study for Albanian students abroad and in Albania

No	Main subject of study	Abroad (in %)	In Albania (in %)
1	Education	0.3	7.2
2	Arts and humanities	2.3	10.3
3	Social sciences, journalism and information	14.5	10.1
4	Business, management and law	27.9	24.1
5	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	11.2	5.1
6	Information and communications technology	18.0	7.2
7	Engineering, production and construction	18.4	14.4
8	Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	0.1	3.6
9	Health and welfare	6.4	14.9
10	Services	0.1	3.1
11	Unknown	0.8	0.0
Total		100	100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019; INSTAT., Albania in figures 2018. Tirana 2019.

Looking at the change in the structure of the fields of study for Albanian students studying in Albania or abroad, during a 15-year period, the natural question arises: Why do Albanian students who study abroad prefer increasingly more informatics, natural sciences and medicine?

Interviews with Albanian students provide a clear answer. Choosing a field of study is determined by labour market demand in the host country. This is what Endrit, a student of informatics in Germany, confirms:

Choosing the field of study is conditioned by employment opportunities. (...) Of all Albanian students that I have known here (...) most of them study exact sciences; economics and medicine also have considerable numbers (...); the number of those studying electronics, informatics and mathematics is also to be taken into account. In Munich, I do not know of any Albanian student studying in the field of social sciences. (...) In their selection, they are driven by the fact that if you graduate in economics or informatics, it is easier to find a job; if you graduate in mathematics, you will also be able to find a job. That is the idea. If, on the other hand, you study social sciences, you do not know what the future has in store.

Often, this phenomenon is also driven by the policies of the host country. Shpëtim, another student in Germany explains:

Those who study technical subjects, like informatics, find it easier to get a job. But, if you study social sciences, finding a job gets more difficult. When you apply for a work visa in Germany, there are some requirements; when you focus on informatics you need to have a salary amounting to at least 33,000 euros per year in order to be given the permit, but when you graduate in business this threshold is set at 51,000 euros.

Social capital and social life

Albanian students abroad generally have rich social and cognitive capital,⁸⁰ which we will see from two aspects, in relation to the home country and to the host country. Close connections with the home country are maintained through means of mass communication (Skype, WhatsApp, telephone, e-mail) with close family, relatives and friends. According to the survey, almost 97 percent of students regularly communicate with e-mail or via other web channels with friends in Albania. Almost 47 percent have spoken on average to 1–5 friends during a week, 33 percent to 6–10, 15 percent to 11–20, and 2 percent to over 20 friends.⁸¹ Such communication is necessary for maintaining and strengthening the connections, to help each other out and to coordinate action, especially in the case of returning to the home country. Jora, a student in Italy, tells us about the relationships with her friends in the home country:

Besides relations with my family, I try to keep in touch also with my friends. I want to be present also with them in major events for them and should I ever need to return to Albania or do something there, I need to have my contacts there. I try to read articles or listen to Albanian music and some broadcast programmes that relate to my interests. Fortunately I have my sister still in Albania who keeps me posted with the most recent updates. I also have my cousins, who inform me about everything (...).

Another means of maintaining connections are visits to the home country now

80- Social capital refers to the 'institutions, relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development' (Grootaert and van Bastelae 2002). Most social scientists categorise social capital as 'horizontal' or 'structural' social capital, and 'vertical' or 'cognitive' social capital. Cognitive social capital refers to very intangible values, norms, and attitudes that govern behaviour. Structural social capital refers to formal or informal associations or networks that facilitate collective action.

81- Students were asked: Other than your family, state the number of friends in Albania you contacted last week by e-mail or on the web?

and again. According to the survey, almost 93 percent of Albanian students visit Albania during the first year (mainly during the winter break or the summer holidays). This percentage drops only slightly to 86 percent in the last year of studies. The average number of visits during the first year is 2 for the first year and 1.6 in the last year.⁸² This average number of visits varies depending on the financial situation of the families, distance, integration in the host country, academic obligations, emotional connections with the home country, etc. The difference in the average number of visits to the home country per student between the first and the last year suggests an increasing level of integration in the host country, or an increasing self-reliance and diminishing need to rely on the emotional connections to family members that comes with time spent away and developing maturity into adulthood.

Through this regular communication, visits to the home country, use of internet and watching Albanian TV broadcasts, Albanian students are well informed on political, economic and social events in Albania. Besart, a student in Germany, says:

I am informed about what happens in Albania (...). I read the news regularly and learn everything from the internet (...). When in Albania, I read almost nothing about what is going on, but here in Germany I find half an hour to an hour to read 2-3 pages of news.

Arlind, another student in Germany, says:

I learn about what happens in Albania through friends or Albanian TV stations. I talk to my friends usually via Skype (...). They tell me about the latest in Albania. I heard about the events and the protests of the students⁸³ through social media networks; it was all over the place. Then when I talked to my friends, they told me the reason why they started and their demands.

These regular contacts have a mutual effect. On the one hand, they collect detailed information about what happens in Albania; on the other, they transfer their new concepts and ideas to the home country.

In addition to maintaining and developing further their relations with friends in the home country, Albanian students have also developed their social capital in the host country. According to the survey, besides with Albanian students (40.7 percent), they also hang out with many other students from the host country (64 percent) in universities, in campuses, and in culture and sports activities (Table 12). Genci, a PhD student in a well-known university in the UK, shares his experience:

On the [university] campuses (...) life is extremely rich; initially you feel overwhelmed, thinking you cannot attend all these activities. There are many things you are not able to attend, because there is a lot to study, as well. (...) Students are from different nationalities and it is interesting

82- Students were asked: How often did you return to Albania during your first year and during last year (if not a first-year student).

83- At the beginning of December 2018, students held protests in Tirana and other cities, asking for the fulfilment of some economic requests, improvement of conditions in auditoriums and improvement of the content of the education process.

to see everyone bringing their own culture to the blend. Unlike in Albania, discussion here focuses around ideas, information, about a theory someone may have read, someone else plays the piano, etc. This renders the cultural exchange among the students even more emotional, because you learn many new things and you are encouraged to discuss.

Ndriçimi, a bachelor student in Germany speaks about his circle of friends:

All my friends are foreigners. They are mostly from Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and Latin America, because they are the ones enrolled in international programmes. I also have German friends, but not as many as and not as close as with foreigners.

This new social capital is important, because it helps them to integrate better in the host country and acquire new behaviours, concepts and ideas about life and society, which they transfer through means of mass communication or visits in person to the home country – a classic example of ‘social remittances’, to use the term first coined by Levitt (1998).⁸⁴ Gjergj, a student in Germany, shares his experience:

At the university [in Germany] I hang out mostly with an Austrian and two Germans, who are extremely smart (...). We also talk about social concerns and we all share our opinions about them. For example, we talk about social systems, the gap between the rich and the poor, how to narrow such distinctions, etc. (...). About certain issues, they have clearer ideas, for example on environment protection, because they live in more advanced societies and have been fighting for years for these issues. In Albania, we are still in our first steps and we need to work toward solving them. (...) When I come to Albania, these ideas are reflected also in my daily discussions with my friends. (...) About the student protests in Albania, we were informed from conversations with friends. In the meantime, friends of mine in Germany have written many essays in social media networks in support of this student protest, notably on the idea of its independence from political parties’ influence.

Table 12. Socialisation of Albanian students abroad

Social aspects of the period abroad	Yes	No
I mainly socialise with people from my host country	63.7	36.4
Most of my friends are from my home country	40.7	59.3
I tend to socialise mainly with other foreign students (i.e. not Albanian or host country)	63.0	37.0

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

84- Levitt, P., 1998. ‘Social remittances: migration driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion. *International Migration Review* 32(4), 926-948.

On the whole, Albanian students abroad possess a rich cognitive social capital in the host country, but a poor structural social capital in terms of memberships of and affiliations to associations, institutions and networks. According to the interviews, their participation in associations and networks of Albanian students is low. Entela, a student in Germany, says:

Albanians are a bit disorganised, I would say. When they leave Albania, they may be advised not to hang out with other Albanians. I would not say we are organised into something formal, we just know one other. In my city here, there is no association of students and national events; for example, the National Flag Day is organised by Albanians of Kosovo, not by Albanians from Albania.

A survey realised by the CESS with 229 PhD students in different EU countries and in the US revealed that only 15 per cent participated in Albanian associations.⁸⁵ A number of reasons might explain such a low participation rate: the lack of tradition in establishing associations and organisations, the wide dispersion of students in many countries and university sites, frequent mobility and short duration of stay, etc.

The grouping of Albanian students studying abroad into organisations and networks and a close cooperation with those in Albania is important also for the role that they could play in future developments in Albania. Emphasising the economic aspect, Ermira, a student in Germany, writes in her survey response:

We need more cooperation between students abroad and those in Albania. I believe that if, in the future, Albanian professionals return and work together with those in Albania, then Albanians would no longer need to emigrate.

Albanian diplomatic missions could also play an important role for the organisation of Albanian students abroad, especially with regard to maintaining connections with the home country. Albanian embassies, especially in those countries with a high concentration of Albanian students, may help in strengthening such links. Thus far, this role has been modest. Agron, who studies in a well-known university in an EU country, says:

The Albanian embassy maintains no contact at all with us. They are disinterested. Three or four years ago, they were once here for an activity, and I know of nothing else.

This would require, first of all, creating and updating regularly a database of Albanian students in the respective country, and the existence of supplementary human and financial resources. Student representatives could be invited to various activities on the occasion of national events, and to working meetings and consultations to inform them about economic, political, and social developments in Albania. In addition, representatives of Albanian diplomatic missions or of other Albanian institutions could go to university campuses and inform the students on employment and internship opportunities in Albania.

85- CESS data bank with Albanian PhD students

In the host country, many students have a lively social life, especially in the cultural, scientific and sports aspects. Petrit, a master's student at the University of Munich, says:

Here, there are many cultural activities, quite unlike in Albania. Many activities are organised by the students themselves. There are social activities, student groups organise integration activities (...) Even theatre shows and sports activities are more developed than in Albania.

While opportunities may abound, not all students may live a rich social life, however. Social life in the host country is poor for those students who also have to work and do not have adequate financial resources. Andra, a student in Italy, says:

I lived my life in Italy working all day and studying all night. Hence, on the one hand, I did not live a full university life, which was the first driver to leave Albania, to leave everything and come here. On the other, I lived the life of a worker in Italy.

Under these circumstances, many students underline the distinction between social life in the host country and in Albania. Arbër, a student in Germany, says:

During the week I come back late and I do not have much time for a social life. But, on weekends, I hang out with my friends. Whereas in Albania I have my close friends and, in certain social aspects, it is better there compared to Germany.

5.6 Benefits of studying abroad

In our survey, we asked students also about the benefits of studying abroad. Most of them, as shown in Table 13, appreciate most the enhancement of professional and academic knowledge, beyond what could be obtained in the home country. This is one of the major objectives of students. Arben, who has been studying for several years in Germany, says:

I applied for mathematical economics in eight universities and decided to choose LMU in Munich, because it was one of the most reputable universities in Germany (...) I thought that if I want to have a clear perspective and be capable and competent in my discipline in the future, then I will have to choose the best university.

The level of benefit from the academic and professional aspect varies, depending on the host country and the quality of university institutions. Thus, students studying in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland are those who appreciate enhancing academic and professional knowledge more than average. Luljeta, who has started her studies in the UK, shares her impressions:

I have not finished my first year yet, and I am already happy with the quality of lectures and academic knowledge.

While reading through the comments by students in the survey,⁸⁶ three elements stand out in relation to enhancing academic and professional knowledge, in addition to the quality of professors and university infrastructure. First, there is the dialogue and free discussion of ideas and concepts, which promotes a better acquisition of knowledge. Nora, a student in Germany, writes:

Individuality and critical thinking are respected, motivating you to freely express yourself and critically reflect on all aspects (even on the opinions of professors and their scientific research studies).

Second, there is a close connection between theory and practice. Third, meritocracy and appreciation of work are often highlighted. Eriselda, who studies in the US, says:

I often have to remind my relatives that the US is not a heavenly place, as assumed by many Albanians. I always tell them that to achieve something, you have to work hard, but the difference, which makes me want to study in the US, is that my work is appreciated there, unlike the appreciation pattern in Albania.

Table 13. Students' assessment of benefits from studying abroad

	Extremely valuable	Valuable	Some-what valuable	Not valuable at all
Enhancing my academic and professional knowledge	90.2	8.9	0.9	0
Importance for my overall career perspective	84.3	13.8	1.8	0
Importance for my potential for developing an international career	80.1	17.7	2.2	0
Importance for my plans to live permanently abroad	39.4	36.8	19.3	4.5
Language skills	66.5	24.7	7.9	0.9
Knowledge about and understanding of another country	60.5	31.3	7.1	1.1
Personal maturity and development	86.3	12.7	0.9	0
New ways of thinking in relation to my own country	58.8	31.6	7.8	1.7

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

86- The survey features also open-ended questions. Students were asked: Any other comments you wish to make about your experience?

In addition, significant benefits from the period of studying abroad are related also to the personal maturity and development of the student, reported by 86 percent of respondents as 'extremely valuable'. Often, these benefits are even greater than the university diploma itself. Based on his experience, Landi, a student in Sweden, underlines:

It is a life experience, more than a diploma, irrespective of how reputable the latter may be.

In the meantime Ana, a student in Germany, says:

My experience thus far in Germany has changed me as an individual; it has changed the way I perceive life and daily situations. I have matured, I have developed as a person, and I have set clear goals about what I want to take and give to the surrounding environment and beyond. It has given me opportunities and has opened doors I did not believe were possible. Most importantly, it has given me independence, appreciation and self-confidence.

Studying abroad in a good and reputable university is part of a long-term strategy and opens new perspectives for the students' professional career, especially in the case of an international career. At least, this is what the surveyed students consistently affirm. Improving language skills is another important outcome of studying abroad, rated by two-thirds of the surveyed students as 'extremely valuable', and by another quarter as 'valuable'.

As a result, 96 percent of Albanian students say they are either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the experience of studying abroad (Table 14). In their interviews they point out that Albanian universities should enter into twinning with EU universities to enable student exchanges for a semester or research on various topics.

Table 14. In retrospect, and all things considered, how satisfied are you with your experience of studying abroad?

How satisfied are you with your experience of studying abroad	In percent
Very satisfied	62.5
Satisfied	33.6
Neutral	3.4
Dissatisfied	0.2
Very dissatisfied	0.3
Total	100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

5.7. Future plans and attitudes towards return

We asked Albanian students whether they saw studying abroad as a first step towards living abroad longer-term, after graduating. According to the survey, 70 percent said 'Yes', 25 percent 'Maybe' and only 5 percent 'No'.

The intention of Albanian students studying abroad clearly relates to the lack of a desire to return to the home country, and indicates a putative brain drain. We detailed further their survey responses with another question. This was: 'Regarding your intention to return to Albania, which of the following most closely matches your expectations?' To this question, 50.5 percent of students say that they do not intend to return to Albania in the future, 30.1 percent say they will return after a period of working abroad, 12.8 percent have other plans and 1.2 percent say they will return for further study after a period of work abroad (Table 15). Only 4.6 percent say they will return to work in the home country and 0.8 per cent say they will return for further studies. The aggregation of the survey data effectively reveals that 94.6 percent of Albanian students studying abroad do not intend to return to Albania in the near future (Table 15). This phenomenon will inevitably have social and economic consequences in the long run in Albania.

Table 15. Regarding your intention to return to Albania, which of the following statements most closely matches your expectations?

No	Intention to return to Albania	Number	Percent
1	I do not intend to return to Albania in the foreseeable future	327	50.5
2	Return to Albania after graduating, to look for employment	30	4.6
3	Return to Albania after graduating, for further study	5	0.8
4	Return to Albania after a period spent working abroad	195	30.1
5	Return to Albania to study, after a period of working abroad	8	1.2
6	Other plans	83	12.8
Total		648	100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

The above responses from the student survey state the intentions of Albanian students with regard to their future. There are many reasons preventing these intentions from becoming reality, because they are conditioned by labour market opportunities, restrictive policies in host countries, changes in respondents' personal situation, family conditions, etc. This is what Mimoza, a student of economics in Italy, affirms:

There are only a few students who want to return to Albania. Yet, students have returned... This depends on circumstances. Voluntarily, only a few return, in terribly small numbers.

These results are in line with new migration trends out of Albania, according to which it is mostly well-educated and qualified youth who desire to migrate, and who are least likely to return.⁸⁷

These figures of potential brain drain are notably higher compared to a survey carried out by CESS with 835 Albanian students in OECD countries in 2000. According to that survey, 54.5 percent of students desired to not return to Albania upon the completion of their university studies.⁸⁸ Another survey, this one by AlbStudent in 2005–2006, showed that 25.7 percent of students desired to return to Albania, 12.2 percent desired to live between Albania and another country, 10.5 percent desired to migrate, whereas around 52 percent were undetermined.⁸⁹ As a result, the indications are that the potential migration of Albanian students abroad is nowadays notably higher than the available data from 2000 and 2006/7.

Such quantitative data related to future brain drain are not isolated and are in line with findings from interviews and focus groups. Endri, a student of natural sciences in Germany, shares his perspective:

I have Albanian friends here and I can say that 90 percent of them want to stay in Germany. I would say that it is easier for students of technical subjects, sciences and informatics to find a job. For those studying social sciences, it is a little more difficult (...). There are also incentives by the German state to attract technical people, i.e. they are more focused on informatics and engineering, compared to social sciences.

Irrespective of the intention of not returning to Albania, not all students necessarily desire to stay in the country where they are studying. For many, especially those studying currently in Italy or in 'Eastern' European countries, the intention is to move on to more developed EU countries or the US, which offer more opportunities of employment and a professional career, higher income, better living conditions and a more secure perspective. Edlira, a student of economics in Siena, Italy, says:

In this city, employment opportunities are limited. In other cities, perhaps the situation is different, but I do not know. I will try to find something here (...). Other Albanians take any job just to stay in Italy or in another EU country. I have heard of very few cases of return to Albania. They mostly go to Germany or England (...). Spain is offering many good opportunities

87- **Gëdeshi, I. and King, R.** (2018) *New Trends in Potential Migration from Albania*. Tirana: F. Ebert Foundation.

88- **Gëdeshi, I. and Black, R.** (2006) *From Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Mobilising Albania's Skilled Diaspora*, A policy paper for the Government of Albania. UNDP, Tirana.

89- For further information, see: <https://www.forumshqiptar.com/threads/73998-Student%C3%ABt-shqiptar%C3%AB-jasht%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-pavendosur-p%C3%ABr-t%C2%92u-kthyer>

now, and many are going there. I have heard that Italian citizens are also relocating to Spain, due to cheaper living costs compared to other EU countries.

Survey data confirm the findings from interviews. Of the total surveyed students in Italy, who say they do not intend to return to Albania, 37 per cent desire to stay in the host country and 63 per cent say they want to go to Germany, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, or another EU country. After graduation, students in Turkey desire to go mainly to Germany, Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, the US and other EU countries. Table 16 shows, based on survey results, 15 main host countries for 92 per cent of Albanian students and shows the main countries they desire to go to, besides the host country, after the completion of their studies.

Table 16. Main countries where Albanian students currently abroad desire to migrate (in %)

Country	Host country	EU	Germany	Italy	UK	France	Netherlands	Switzerland	Austria	Belgium	Spain	Scandinavian countries	Canada	USA	Other	Total
Germany	79.6	4.8		0.8		0.8	2.4	4.8				1.6		4.9		100
Italy	36.9	17.8	10.7		5.9	2.4	4.8	3.6	1.2	3.6	1.2	4.8	1.2	3.6	2.4	100
Turkey	11.6	20.3	18.8	1.4	2.9	1.4	1.4	8.7	1.4	1.4		10.1	7.2	8.7	4.3	100
France	66.7	10.3	2.6	2.6	2.6			7.7			2.6		5.1			100
Netherlands	60	20			13.3									3.3	3.3	100
USA	86.9	4.3			8.7											100
England	84.2	5.3	5.3											5.3		100
Bulgaria	0	23.5	11.8				5.9	11.8				11.8		35.3		100
Austria	66.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7			6.7								100
Belgium	50	8.3	8.3			16.7								16.7		100
Romania	0	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	2	12.5							12.5		100
Poland	14.3	28.6			14.3	14.3						28.6				100
Greece	14.3	42.8			28.6	14.3										100
Czech Rep.	50		25		12.5									12.5		100
Sweden	85.7							14.3								100
Total	53.1	12.8	6.5	1.1	4.3	2.2	2.2	4.8	0.4	0.9	0.4	3.7	1.7	5.8		100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian students abroad, 2019.

The table shows clearly that Germany and the US are the top countries where Albanian students desire to onward-migrate to. Other favourite countries are the UK, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries and Switzerland. Other students say 'EU' in their responses, but they imply the most advanced EU countries. If such trends continue in the future, Germany will be the top EU country where young Albanian human capital will be concentrated. There are two factors contributing to this: first, the number of students going to Germany in recent years has been rapidly increasing, and moreover the percentage of those wanting to stay in this country is high (around 80 per cent). Second, a large number of students from other countries (Italy, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Czech Republic, etc.) desire to migrate to Germany after completing their studies.

The desire to stay abroad or onward-migrate upon the completion of studies does not reduce the desire of Albanian students to contribute to the development of Albania in the future. In many interviews, they say they feel obliged toward the home country and that they desire to serve Albania. Majlinda, a student in Italy, says:

I still long for my home country. Someday, although I would rather not return to live there for good, I would like to do something for my country.

Others say they would return after some years of experience in EU countries or in the US. This is what Agron, a student in Germany, says:

After some years of working abroad, I want to return to Albania and try to change something in my home country. (...) I have read a lot and I think that it is a moral obligation of every person to contribute, even modestly, in a positive way to his or her own country.

Other students emphasise that the contribution to the home country is not only an obligation, but also a satisfaction. Ervin, who is finishing his PhD in social sciences in the UK, says:

Albania has its own advantages. First, I have there a certain social capital, I have friends and acquaintances. Also, Albania still has an interesting thing, which many European countries have lost, in relation to social-political sciences. In Albania, you are able to see the impact of your work if you engage in a certain policy. In the UK, the machinery is so big, and so bureaucratic that you are totally detached from the impact of your work.

Obstacles to return

The challenge of finding employment is the first economic factor that prevents the return of students to Albania. Pranvera, a student in Italy, says:

Nepotism is very present in Albania, it is flagrant. To find a job, you need to know someone who knows someone. I have many friends in Albania and I may say that, of them, only 10 percent have managed to find a job due to their own merits and qualifications. The others were helped by somebody of influence.

Under these conditions, the incapability of accessing a professional career on the basis of skills and qualifications is a widespread phenomenon. Edlira, who has just finished her master's studies in Hungary, feels unsure about her future, and desires to continue her PhD studies abroad.

Here [in Albania], even if you manage to find a job without the help of somebody important, somebody in a political party or public institution, you have to do the work of several other persons, because many of them are incapable of performing their duties.

Low wages are another demotivating factor for many students who wish to return. Some of them, like Egest, who is completing his studies in a university in Switzerland, say that 'low wages do not pay back the investment made for our education'. Many others say that the low pay does not allow them to create an independent living. This is what Edmond, a student in Germany, says:

In Albania, the salaries are very low. If you want to work in Albania, your salary does not permit you to live on your own, cover your living costs. (...) It is not enough just for daily living costs, let alone to go somewhere on holiday abroad.

Job security is another element. Alban, a student in Germany, says:

In Albania, you may have a job today, but tomorrow, after elections, governments change and you lose your job. Here, your job is safe. If you have a contract, it is difficult to terminate it, unless you commit some serious error."

Who desires to return?

Although they are relatively few, the next question concerns the students who plan to return to Albania. According to survey data, in general those students who want to return are those whose parents run a business or are high state officials. In this case, the possibility of finding a job or advancing in their professional career in Albania is a safe bet. Anisa, a student in Italy, says:

Most of the students want to stay. Only a few want to return. It is mostly those who have a secured job in Albania, they say they want to return because they know what awaits them. This is how things work in Albania, to know someone. Return is conditioned by employment. This is also true in the case of students, I think.

Other students may have more personal reasons to return to the home country. Thus, their family conditions are an important factor preventing the person staying on in the host country. Dritan, who is studying for his PhD at one of the top UK universities, said:

Until now, I have tried to avoid the dilemma: whether to stay or return. But the main reason, in my case, to return to Albania is my family, my parents. I would rather not leave them alone; this is important.

5.8 Consequences

One of the main brain drain flows from Albania is the elite of the country's students abroad – the 'brightest and best' – who do not return. The social and economic consequences of this phenomenon are clearly evident: every year, qualified human and financial resources, the youth and financial elite of Albania, leaves the country irreversibly (financially in the form of study fees), a cost which amounts to tens of millions of euros. This form of migration has become of great concern for the future of Albania. Erinda, an interviewee who obtained her PhD in France, said:

Through brain drain, the Albanian state is losing its own investment. This is one of the largest losses currently for Albania.

If we were to calculate the financial cost of university studies abroad for Albanian students, it is relatively high. The structure of such costs consists of university fees, textbooks, rented accommodation or dormitory payment, daily living expenses (food, transport, clothes, communication, leisure), health insurance and residence documents, and visits to the home country. These costs, depending also on the various components, varies from one country to another, as well as within the same country. According to interviews with Albanian students the average cost (in euros per month) amounts to 650 in Greece, 750 in Italy, 850 in Germany, around 2,000 in the Netherlands, and more than 2,000 in the UK. Taking the average annual cost for all students at 8,000 euros per year, we may conclude that in 2017, around 140 million euros (17,448 students x 8,000 euros/student/year) were channelled out of Albania to fund the studies of Albanian students abroad.⁹⁰

A study funded by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) related to the financial implications of the emigration of Albanian young people estimated the cost of preparing a person in Albania with primary education amounted to be 6,041 euros, secondary education at 9,267 euros, and tertiary education at 18,283 euros.⁹¹ As a result, public and family expenses for the preparation of an Albanian student abroad averages around 37,267 euros (9,267 for secondary education in Albania plus 28,000 for university studies abroad). Assuming that around 4,000 students finish their university studies each year and that 94 percent of them do not wish to return to Albania, then the potential financial loss for the country amounts to around 140 million euros per year. This is certainly an impoverishing process for Albania.

In the meantime, the financial cost for the country could be reduced and offset by remittances, if this somewhat new diaspora that is established cooperates with the home country by sending back a proportion of their eventual earnings and by bringing in their know-how. In this case, the emigration of students abroad, instead of impoverishing the home country, could eventually lead it to a measure of prosperity. There are differing views on the implications of brain drain. It is not by chance that some of the most fanatical opponents of brain

90- This figure is only an estimate and should be treated with caution. Some of the students work in the host country or have a scholarship from host institutions. Others may find accommodation with their relatives in the host country. The exact calculation of university studies does not fall within the scope of this study.

91- Westminster Foundation for Democracy, (2020) Cost of Youth Emigration

drain in the world have changed their opinion. For example, Bhagwati, who in the 1970s demanded the taxation of host countries in order to compensate the losses from brain drain for the countries of origin,⁹² wrote in 1994 that the developing countries have changed their mind by hoping to benefit from the skills/talents of their citizens abroad.⁹³ In the case of Albania, the dual question to pose is: does the new scientific diaspora established over the last three decades, which is also rapidly growing, send financial remittances to their family members, and do graduates cooperate with academic and scientific institutions and production organisations in the home country?

We did not pose this question in our surveys and interviews with students who are currently living abroad, largely because for them it regards future and not current behaviour. But, a study sponsored by the UNDP in 2018 with a highly qualified segment of the Albanian scientific diaspora, with individuals who have completed their PhD studies abroad, showed that, despite the desire for international collaboration, only 22 percent of them actually did cooperate, and only sporadically, with universities and scientific institutions in Albania.⁹⁴

When looking at the impact of remittances, there are two aspects worth noting. The first is that emigrants who have completed tertiary education have higher income, but there are no aggregate statistical data to indicate that they send more remittances. Two large-scale surveys on remittances realised by CESS in 2009/10 and 2010/11 show that emigrants having tertiary education actually send less remittances to their families back home.⁹⁵ The results are explained by the fact that in many cases their families (mainly parents) in Albania are in good economic conditions and they do not, therefore, need remittances. This is what Anila, who has studied medicine and currently lives in the Netherlands, underlines:

I did not send remittances, in the form of cash, because my parents and my sisters did not need that. I did, however, send them gifts and other stuff. Of course, should the need arise, I would send money also.

The second aspect is related to the use of remittances in Albania. Almost all studies show that remittances in Albania are used primarily for consumption and that their impact on economic growth is minor.⁹⁶

92- **Bhagwati J., Martin P.**, *Taxing the Brain Drain: A Proposal*, Amsterdam, North Holland, 1976.

93- **Bhagwati J., Rao M.**, *Vive les etudiants etrangeres. Courier International*, n 204, 29 septembre – 5 octobre 1994.

94- **Gëdeshi I., King R.** (2018) *Research Study on Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with Albanian Scientific Diaspora*. Tirana: UNDP.

95- **Gëdeshi I.**, *Global Crisis and Migration – Monitoring a Key Transmission Channel for the Albanian Economy*, IOM, UNDP, WB, Tirana, 2011; **de Zwager, N., Gressmann, W., Gëdeshi, I.**, *Market Analysis: Albania – Maximising the Development-Impact of Migration-related Financial Flows and Investment to Albania*, Vienna, August 2010.

96- **Gëdeshi I., King R.** (2018) *Research Study on Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with Albanian Scientific Diaspora*. Tirana: UNDP; **de Zwager N., Gedeshi I., Germeñji E., Nikas C.** (2005) *Competing for Remittances*. Tirana: International Organization for Migration; **European Training Foundation** (2007) *The Contribution of Human Resources Development to Migration Policy in Albania*. Turin: ETF.

6. Albanian university and high-school students in Albania

Albanian students abroad, although very numerous, represent only around 17% of the Albanian student population.⁹⁷ The rest studies in Albanian public and private universities. What are the plans of the majority of Albanian students studying in Albania? After completing university studies, do they wish to emigrate or do they wish to stay in Albania? If they wish to emigrate, which are the push factors and where do they wish to go? Is this short or long-term emigration? Finally, what do we need to do in order for the Albanian youth to see its future in Albania? As specified in our earlier section 4 on Methods, we carried out a survey with Albanian students currently enrolled in Albanian universities (n=1,650); for details of this survey, refer back to section 4.2.

In order to have a broader scope, we included in our study also another segment of the Albanian youth, senior high-school students, who may be further divided into three subgroups: those who wish to study abroad, those who wish to study in Albania, and those who wish to study both in Albania (first) and abroad (later), including those who wish to emigrate for work reasons. This survey (n=450) was earlier described in section 4.3.

6.1. Attitudes towards studying and working abroad

The number of Albanian senior high-school students, of both general (gymnasium) and professional studies, owing to lower birth rates and the structural demographic impact of international migration, diminishing the population's reproductive capacity, has been trending downward over the past decade. Thus, according to official data, 34,021 students finished their secondary education in 2019, down from 39,626 in 2015, or 14.1 percent less.⁹⁸ According to our survey, more than two-thirds of them wish to continue university studies, which is also close to but above the trends shown in official statistics.⁹⁹

According to survey findings (Table 17), almost 20 percent of senior high-school students aiming for higher education wish to study abroad, around 41 percent in Albanian universities and the rest, 39 percent, wish to study in part in Albania (Bachelor) and in part abroad (Masters).¹⁰⁰ The economic element certainly plays a key role in these preferences. This is what Ermal, a senior student in a high school in Tirana affirms:

97- Some 139,043 students were studying in Albanian universities for the academic year 2018-2019 (Monitor, 29 August 2020).

98- **INSTAT**, (2020) Graduation Statistics, 2018-2019. Tirana, 15 May 2020.

99- According to INSTAT data, the gross graduation ratio in higher education in Albania was 60.3 percent during the 2018-19 academic year. For more information, see **INSTAT**, (2019) Albania in figures 2018. The higher percentage of our survey students (67 percent) wanting to continue their studies to third-level might be due to two factors: a tendency for respondents to exaggerate their anticipation to continue on to university; and the location of the survey in urban areas.

100- The senior high-schoolers were asked: "Where would you like to study?"

Many wish to study abroad, but only a small share succeed in this. On the one hand, the desire is great, but financial resources are very limited. On the other hand, there is also a lack of information.

Table 17. Desire of senior high-school students to study abroad and in Albania (in %)

Description	Girls	Boys	Total
Wish to study abroad	20.3	18.9	19.8
Wish to study in Albania	37.8	47.3	41.2
Wish to study both abroad and in Albania	41.9	33.8	39
Total	100	100	100

Source: CEES., Survey with Albanian senior high-school students, 2019.

Table 17 shows that there are minor differences (+1.4 percentage points) between girls and boys related to the desire to study abroad. But this difference increases (+8.1 percentage points) for the group that desires to study both in Albania and abroad, compensated by a reverse percentage point difference (9.5) between boys, who are more orientated to study only in Albania, and girls, who are more outward-looking in this respect.

The desire to study abroad is generally present from the first year of the high school (in some interviews even earlier) and is a perception and reflection of young people about the conditions of education and their prospects in Albania. Egla, a high-achieving student in a high school of Tirana, points out in her interview:

The moment I entered the high school, I started to think about the university major, the profile of my studies, and which university I wanted to attend. Considering that universities in Albania do not match my requirements, I immediately started to look beyond Albania, more specifically Germany.

In other instances, this desire is nourished by well-educated parents who aim for a good education for their children and often see their future abroad. Majlinda, a senior high school student in Tirana, recaps the conversations with her parents saying:

Our parents want our best and for them the best for us is to go abroad. My parents tell me that if I go abroad to study, I may well stay abroad after graduation (...).

Table 18 shows the education level of the parents of senior high-school students, clearly demonstrating that the parents of those who state a desire to study 'abroad' or 'both in Albania and abroad' have a higher education level than the average.

Table 18. Education level of the parents of senior high-school students who wish to study in Albania and abroad

Tertiary education level of parents	Total	Desire to study abroad	Desire to study both in Albania and abroad	Desire to study in Albania
Yes, both parents	26.2	39.0	28.1	18.8
Yes, father	15.1	18.7	18.2	10.5
Yes, mother	11.9	15.4	13.2	8.6
Neither	45.8	26.8	39.3	61.3
No answer	0.9	0	1.2	0.8
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: CESS., Survey with Albanian senior high-school students, 2019.

The conversation between parents and their children in relation to studying abroad reveals a cross-generational division of labour and responsibility within the family. Parents take care of the family's financial resources, whereas the children have to take care of excelling at their school performance and learning foreign languages. Almost 35 percent of the senior high-school students who desire to study abroad speak fluently the language of the desired country and around 38 percent say they speak the language to a self-declared 'good' standard. Regarding the financial support by the family, Erli, a high-school student from Korça, says:

During the past two years, I have been discussing extensively with my family, especially about the financial aspect. This is a topic that cannot be neglected. I believe that my parents will cover a good share of my expenses, so there are good chances that I may be able to study abroad. But this is a significant sacrifice for my parents, because they are giving to me all they have. They will try even harder than they would if I were to study in Albania.

But not everyone has such options available. According to the survey data, 24 percent of the senior students say that the family may fund 'entirely' their studies, 64 percent say 'in part' and 11 percent say that this is 'impossible'.¹⁰¹

Table 19 presents the parents' employment status and clearly shows that the occupational status (and hence earnings) of the parents of the senior students who wish to study 'abroad' or 'both in Albania and abroad' is higher than the average. Almost two-thirds of such parents are professionals (doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.), public administration officials, businessmen or businesswomen, managers, directors or business partners.

¹⁰¹- Senior students were asked: Does your family have the resources to finance your studies abroad?

Table 19. Employment level of the parents of senior high-school students who wish to study both in Albania and abroad

Parents' job	Total		Desire to study abroad		Desire to study both in Albania and abroad		Desire to study in Albania	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Skilled manual worker	18.2	11.1	12.2	10.6	17.4	9.5	22.7	12.9
Unskilled manual worker	6.8	2.7	4.1	3.3	4.9	1.7	8.9	3.5
Sales agent/representative	2.2	3.4	1.6	2.4	2.1	2.9	2.7	4.3
Administrator/accountant	3.1	3.9	3.3	7.3	4.1	3.7	1.6	2.3
Public administration official	11.0	7.6	14.6	10.6	11.2	7.4	8.2	6.3
Professional/teacher, doctor, etc.	8.9	17.9	12.2	28.5	12.4	20.7	4.7	10.2
Housekeeper	0.5	23.0	0	13.8	0.4	24.8	0.8	25.8
Director/Business partner	3.6	1.8	7.3	2.4	2.1	1.2	3.1	2.0
Manager	4.7	2.1	4.9	1.6	7.4	2.9	1.9	1.6
Businessman/woman	22.3	6.4	26.0	4.1	20.7	7.9	22.3	6.3
Farmer	1.7	0.3	0	0.0	2.1	0.4	2.3	0.4
Pensioner	0.9	0	0	0.0	1.7	0	0.8	0
Unemployed	5.2	12.6	2.4	8.9	5.8	11.2	6.3	15.6
Other; no answer	10.8	7.2	11.4	6.5	8.0	5.7	13.6	9.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: CEES., Survey with Albanian senior high-school students, 2019.

Other ambitious students, aware of the limited financial resources of their families, try to find alternative ways. Gjergji, a senior high-school student from Tirana, says:

The costs are considerably high for an Albanian family. I am aware of that; therefore, I have to see if I can benefit from 100 percent scholarships. Otherwise, I have no other possibility. With the agencies I have contacted, and in websites I have visited, I have tried to see if there is a possibility for a 100% scholarship.

Table 20 shows the alternative resources for funding the studies.

Table 20. Alternative resources of funding the studies (in %)

No	Alternative resources	In %
1	Self-funding (part-time employment)	49.0
2	Grant from the host institution	6.9
3	I have family members/relatives in the host country	22.9
4	Bank loan	15.5
5	Other	5.7
Total		100

Source: CESS. Survey with Albanian senior high-school students, 2019.

Senior high-school students who wish to study abroad, compared to those who desire to study in Albania, prefer more the fields of computer sciences, informatics, electronics and natural sciences (biology, physics, mathematics). This preference, besides individual inclination, is also related to the perceived likely demand in the labour market of the country where they desire to emigrate, and therefore reflects their anticipated job chances there.

Through the survey, we asked Albanian senior high-school students about the reasons why they wish to study abroad.¹⁰² The three main reasons are the desire for an international career (24.6 percent), finding a better and higher paid job should they have to return to Albania (20.4 percent) and the low quality of Albanian universities (17.7 per cent). Andra, who wishes to study in Turkey, says:

The teaching methodology, in Turkey, where I wish to study, is notably different from that in Albania. This is the main reason: the quality of teaching.

Let us now switch focus on to the Albanian students currently studying in Albanian universities, based on our survey of 1,650 respondents. According to our survey data, 79 percent of the students (average age 22 years old) who study in Albania intend to migrate abroad (Table 21).¹⁰³ The intention to migrate is related to how the students envisage their future. On the one hand, it is a reflection of the real economic, social and political situation in Albania; on the other hand, it reflects the perceived potential opportunities in the host country.

¹⁰²- Senior high-school students were asked: 'Which are the main reasons you want to study abroad?'

¹⁰³- The students were asked: 'Do you intend to emigrate from Albania?'

Table 21. The aim to emigrate from Albania on the part of Albanian university students (in percent)

No	Answer	Total	Male	Female
1	Yes	79.0	78.1	79.4
2	No	9.8	11.9	9.0
3	Don't know	11.2	10	11.6
Total		100,0	100	100

Source: Survey with Albanian students in Albania, 2019

This intention (and its extent) to emigrate from Albania are no surprise to the authors of this study. In another study, published in 2018, we had pointed out that the indicator of potential migration out of Albania, for the segment of persons aged 18–40 years old, was 52 percent, but its curve peaked in the subsegment of persons aged 27–30 years old (71.2 percent) and the desire to emigrate was stronger among those who had completed university studies. In that study, we concluded that potential emigration from Albania was increasingly taking the shape of a brain drain, whose negative consequences will be significant.¹⁰⁴ In brief, the new trends show that the youth and especially educated young people are the ones that desire the most to emigrate out of Albania.

An important aspect of future potential migration is the time frame in which students' intentions and desires to migrate are realised. According to the student survey data, 7 percent of potential migrants desire to emigrate from Albania before completion of their studies, 62 percent immediately after the completion of their university studies, and around 27 percent after having some work experience in Albania. Majlinda, a student in Germany, relates the experience of her sister:

My sister completed her studies in medicine with honours and worked for around two years in a private hospital in Tirana. This time was sufficient for her to attend an intensive German language course, build some experience, and establish connection in Germany. (...) She currently works in a hospital in Germany.

Broken down by time period, 17 percent of students desire to migrate within a year, 69 percent within five years, and 12 percent after five years. If we are to believe these figures, then the bulk of Albanian students aims to migrate from Albania in the short and medium term.

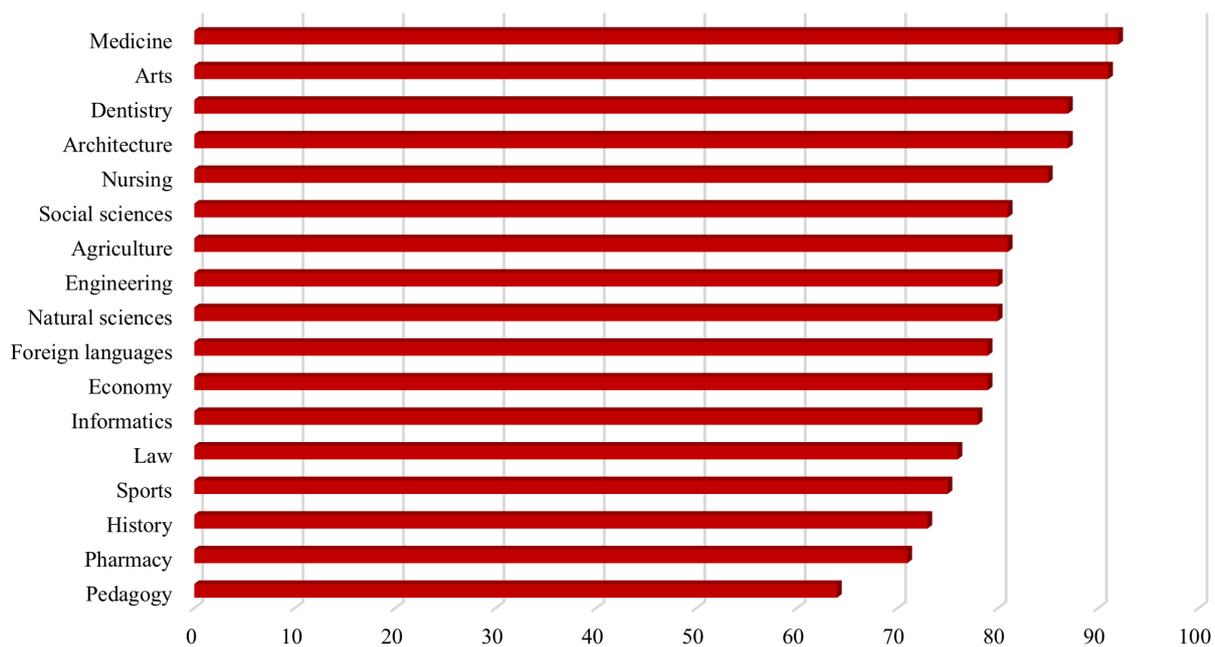
Survey results (Table 21) show a minor difference in the desire to migrate between female students (79.4 percent) and male students (78.1 percent). Historically, Albanian migration has been led by men, whereas women followed at a later

104- Gëdeshi, I. and King, R. (2018) New Trends in Potential Migration from Albania. Tirana: F. Ebert Foundation.

stage, through family reunification or marriage. This indicator of the potential migration being higher among women (+1.3 percentage points) than among men (which is also noted in other studies about youth)¹⁰⁵ is also an indicator of the increasing degree of initiative, emancipation and independence of female students.

The intention to emigrate is higher among some groups of students in certain fields of current studies, such as medicine (91.5 percent), nurses (83 percent), informatics (84.4 percent), and engineering (79.2%), which is explained by more opportunities for employment in the desired migration country (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Intention to migrate by field of study (in percent)



Source: Survey with Albanian students in Albania, 2019

The high trend of potential migration, especially among certain groups of students, is of concern and should attract the attention of the entire society. Such migration may give rise to a shortage of staff in certain professions, which are very much necessary in Albania. To illustrate this point, let us take a simple example from the day-to-day reality. The number of doctors, nurses and midwives per 100,000 residents in Albania, which is much lower compared to the EU average (384 doctors in 2016), or even the Western Balkan region, has been downward. In 2000, Albania had 140 doctors per 100,000 residents, in 2006 it had 120 and in 2018 the number fell to 110 doctors.¹⁰⁶ The same downward trend is recorded among nurses and midwives. The international migration of medical staff, mainly toward Germany, is one of the main factors explaining the decrease in numbers. A survey carried out in 2018 revealed that, over the last five years, around 13 percent of the medical staff had emigrated from Albania and the number of those that emigrate each year is equal to or larger than the number of new doctors graduating from

105- **Cela A., Kamberi G.**, (2019) Rinia Shqiptare [Eng: Albanian youth] 2018/2019. F. Ebert Foundation.

106- Health Budget Brief

the University of Medicine.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, around 8,500 nurses are estimated to have emigrated from Albania during the period 2014–2019.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the distribution of the health-care personnel across the territory of the country – due to internal migration – is uneven. More than half of all doctors in the country are concentrated in Tirana¹⁰⁹ and in many remote districts of the countries there is a complete lack of specialised doctors. The further decline in the number of doctors and nurses, coupled with their uneven distribution across the territory of the country, would not only lead to a worsening of health indicators for the population but also trigger a new wave of internal and international migration. A study by IOM published in 2020 showed that one of the reasons pushing Albanian poor families to seek asylum in EU countries (primarily Germany and France) was the absence of a qualitative health care.¹¹⁰

Almost 34 percent of students surveyed have lived abroad or their parents had been emigrants for at least one year, mainly in Greece and Italy.¹¹¹ Survey data show that the intention to migrate is slightly higher among students who are born or have lived abroad or whose parents have been emigrants (81 percent), whereas among those who have not lived abroad or whose parents (either of them) have not been emigrants is 78 percent. This difference is marginal yet is arguably mildly significant given the large sample size (1,650). It is a kind of compromise outcome of two countervailing tendencies: on the one hand, the obvious network and experience connections of having lived abroad; on the other, the fact that most of the Albanian migrants in the past were drawn not from the professional, educated and skilled classes, but from lower-skilled workers who migrated to Italy and Greece to achieve self-improvement.

A number of different factors and reasons underlie the university students' potential migration; among others, reasons related to the economic situation, education, social conditions, and their perception about the future in Albania.¹¹² Overall, there are three groups of push factors for Albanian students that desire to emigrate from Albania. The first group is related to economic factors, such as improvement of living standards, finding a job, work conditions, looking for an international career, and a better social security system. This is the most important group of push factors and around 65% percent of the students point them out. This shows that the emigration of students is primarily driven by economic factors. The second group (around 17 percent) is related to continuing their studies abroad (master's, specialised studies, etc.). Survey data show that students of the bachelor cycle in Albania have a higher desire to continue their studies abroad than master's students. The third group (around 17 percent) is related to various mainly social factors, such as 'in Albania there is no real prospect', 'I do not like to live in Albania', 'family reunification', 'better health-care services', etc. (Figure 5).

107- **Gjypi SH. A.**, (2018) *Largimi i mjekëve nga Shqipëria*. (Eng: Doctors leaving Albania) Tirana: F. Ebert Foundation.

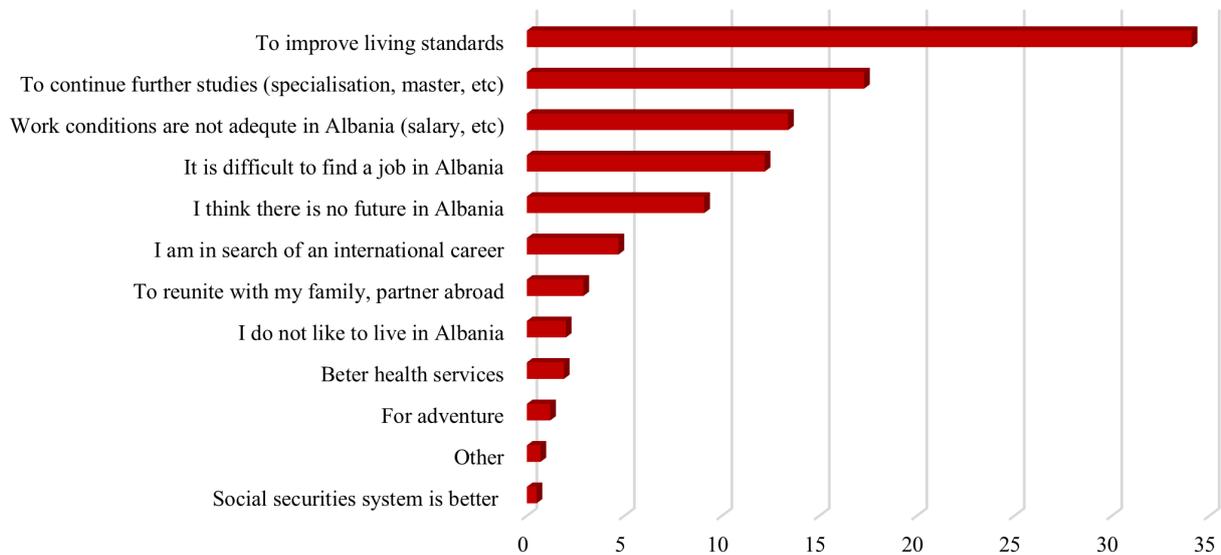
108- <https://citizens-channel.com/2020/07/30/eksodi-i-infermiereve-shqiptare-ne-gjermani-plage-e-hapur-e-sistemit-shendetesor/>

109- **Gjypi SH. A.**, (2018) *Largimi i mjekëve nga Shqipëria*. (Eng: Doctors leaving Albania) Tirana: F. Ebert Foundation.

110- **Gëdeshi I., King R.**, *Albanian returned asylum-seekers: re-integration or re-emigration?* IOM, 2020

111- Students were asked: "In the past, have you or your parents lived abroad for at least one year?"

112- Respondent students were asked to provide three main reasons for emigrating and then to determine the most important one. Data in Figure 5 are based on the most important reason.

Figure 5. Main push factors to students' emigration (in percent)

Source: Survey with Albanian students in Albania, 2019

6.2. Choice of country

The main countries in which Albanian senior high-school students desire to study, by their share of importance, are Germany (31.1 percent), the US (13.8 percent), Italy (11.4 percent), the UK (10.4 percent), France (7.7 percent), Switzerland (3.7 percent), Turkey (2.9 percent), Greece (2.7 percent), the Netherlands (2.1 percent), and Austria (2.1 percent). Nearly all of the countries where these students desire to study are highly advanced in economic and social aspects. Yet, the selection of the country to study, according to survey data, is conditioned by a combination of a number of factors such as the quality of education (38 percent), the possibility to find a job after the completion of the studies (29 percent), knowing the language of the host country (18 percent), the cost of university studies (7.4 percent), and the existence of social and family networks. In relation to the last factor, Era, a senior high-school student from Elbasan, says:

If my sisters studied say in Italy, perhaps I would choose Italy, because I would have more information about this country. But I will choose the country where I have relatives, because I have a support base.

Quantitative data also show that around 27 percent of those desiring to study 'abroad' and 23 percent of those desiring to study 'both in Albania and abroad' have some family members and relatives in the desired country of studies.

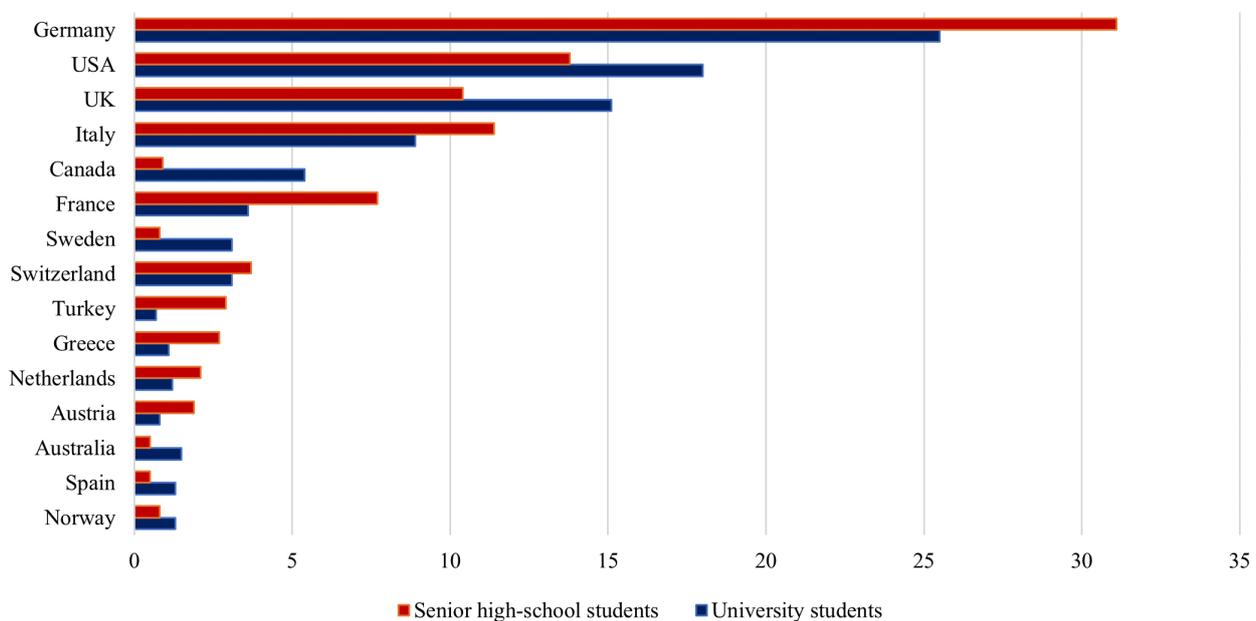
We also asked Albanian university students about their preferred country of emigration for work and/or further study. The top ten countries for the desired emigration are Germany (25.5 percent), the US (18 percent), the UK (15 percent), Italy (8.9 percent), Canada (5.4 percent), France (3.6 percent), Sweden and Switzerland (3.1 percent each), Australia (1.5 percent), and Norway and Spain

(1.3 percent each). Most students aim to emigrate to advanced economies of Western Europe and only one quarter to more distant countries (the US, Canada, Australia), with more job opportunities and higher income.

If we compare the desired countries of senior high-school students and of university students studying in Albania, we find both similarities and differences (Figure 6). High-school students' perspectives are about where to study abroad; university students' thoughts are more long-term, akin to emigrating. Turkey and Greece are desired countries for studying – due to the low costs (Turkey) and proximity (Greece) – but not for emigrating. France, the Netherlands and Austria are preferred for the high quality of their universities, but employment (hence emigration) is more difficult to find. The US, the UK, and to a certain extent Canada, are preferred as countries for studying, but the desire to emigrate to them is higher, due to perceived buoyant employment opportunities and higher income.

Figure 6, despite these differences, shows that the Albanian emigration tends to be concentrated in the future in some of the most advanced economies in Western Union (Germany, the UK) as well as in the US. On the other hand, traditional countries hosting Albanian emigrants such as Greece (and to a certain extent Italy), are losing their share, especially since the global economic crisis. Therefore, a new map of the Albanian emigration is being designed.

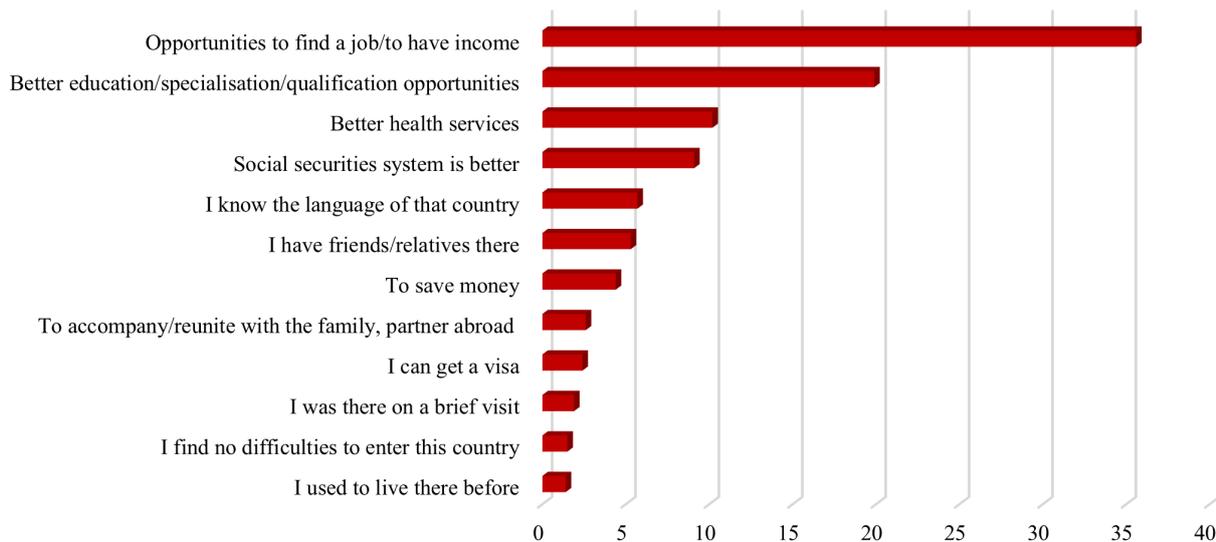
Figure 6. Preferred countries for studying and emigrating for Albanian senior high-school students and university students (in %)



Source: CEES., Survey with Albanian senior high-school students, 2019; Survey with Albanian university students, 2019.

We asked Albanian students also about some of the factors that determine their selection of the desired destination country.¹¹³ Answers show that the countries are selected based on economic, social and education-related factors such as job opportunities and high income (35.6 percent), better education and qualification opportunities (19.9 percent), better health services (10.2 percent) and social protection (9.1 percent), knowing the local language (5.7 percent) and the existence of social (5.3 percent) and family networks (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Reasons for choosing the destination country



Source: Survey with Albanian students in Albania, 2019

To deepen our analysis, students were asked to single out from the set of selected factors the main push factor for emigrating from Albania.¹¹⁴ According to the responses by potential migrants (students), there are two key factors: opportunities for finding a job and high income (61.1 percent), and better education and qualifications opportunities (22.2 percent).

7. Interpreting actual and potential student migration from Albania

What interpretive lessons can be drawn from the evidence considered thus far about *actual* student migration from Albania (the survey results presented in section 5) and *potential* student migration (the survey findings with high-school and university students currently studying in Albania, presented in section 6)? Some hints regarding the magnitude and seriousness of the problem of student out-migration from Albania have already been given; in this brief section we recapitulate, and extend this discussion further.

The first thing to say is that international student migration/mobility is widely regarded as a 'normal' part of our contemporary globalised society, especially in the global North. It helps to ease the friction and imbalances in the global market for high-skilled labour, and fosters intercultural awareness and collaboration. The EU's long-running Erasmus programme for student exchanges, which also extends nowadays to work placements, is a vindication of the idea that ISM is a 'good thing', although thus far Albanian students (unless they are already studying abroad at an Erasmus partner institution) have not been able to benefit from this scheme. From the point of view of the individual student or graduate, ISM is likewise generally experienced as highly beneficial, as this international experience makes for interesting (and challenging) lives and, in many cases, successful and rewarding careers with a multilingual, international and cosmopolitan dimension.

The general principle of student exchange schemes within multilateral or bilateral networks such as Erasmus or other 'year abroad' programmes, is that movements should be balanced and broadly reciprocal. Whilst this does not always happen, because of the popularity or prestige of some countries, cities and universities,¹¹⁵ at a national level the flows are not expected to greatly upset graduate labour markets or national development prospects, and hence there is scant reference to a brain drain.¹¹⁶

The issue with the Albanian experience of student out-migration is that it is far from balanced by incoming students (who are very few), and the relative scale of the loss of embryonic human capital is beyond that experienced by virtually all other European countries. This large-scale export of Albanian students, at all levels of study from bachelor to doctorate, reflects much more than a 'normal' phenomenon of the international circulation of students associated with a 'benign' interpretation of the globalisation of student mobility and higher education. Rather, it reflects the darker side of globalisation, geopolitical change and unequal spatial development between countries. Along with the mass exodus of lower-skilled workers which has characterised Albanian migration since the early 1990s, student and graduate outflows are another symptom of the structural weakness of the Albanian economy and socio-political system. This is evident at two scales: within Albania, and at an international scale.

On the one hand, large-scale student migration reflects the powerful internal disequilibria within Albania, including the spatial inequality between the Tirana-Durrës conurbation and the rest of the country, the limited opportunities for graduates to acquire jobs which are satisfying, decently paid and commensurate with their qualifications, and the entrenched networks of clientelism and 'connections' which it is necessary to be part of in order to acquire one of the few higher-level jobs available. On the other hand, the student outflows are a

115- For instance, within Europe, countries such as the UK, Ireland and Spain are popular destination choices for student exchanges, for linguistic, cultural or climatic reasons, whereas countries such as Finland and Bulgaria have fewer incoming that outgoing students.

116- Especially since the 2008 financial crisis, high rates of unemployment, which hit record highs amongst young graduates of up to 50 percent, have characterised southern EU countries – Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. This resulted in an increased propensity to move to North European countries such as France, Switzerland, Germany and, especially, the UK. As a result, in the southern EU countries, 'brain drain' has now emerged as part of the political, media and scholarly discourse in these countries. See, *inter alia*, Pratsinakis, M., King, R., Leon Himmelstine, C., Mazzilli, C. (2020) A crisis-driven migration? Aspirations and experiences of the post-2008 South European migrants in London, *International Migration*, 58(1): 15-30; Tintori, G. (2015) From manpower export to brain drain? Emigration and Italy, between Past and Present, in A. Mammone, E. Giap Parini and G. Veltri (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Italy: History, Politics, and Society*. London: Routledge, 37-48.

vindication of Albania's peripheral position, not so much geographically as economically and geopolitically, within Europe and the wider global sphere. This includes not only the weak structure of the Albanian economy, over-reliant on consumption funded by foreign-earned income and with a weak productive capacity of its own, but also the low status of Albanian universities *vis à vis* those of other countries.

In simple supply and demand terms, the supply of age-appropriate Albanian students, although now on a downward trend due to declining birth rate, vastly outweighs the demand for qualified and specialised labour within the country as it now stands. To some extent, this is the syndrome of small countries, whose labour markets are 'truncated' at the top-end by a limited need for a large cadre of high-level and specialised professionals. But the reverse can also hold true, whereby 'emigration fever' starves the country of origin of much-needed specialised professionals, such as, in the Albanian case, doctors and other medical personnel. The medical case is but one example of a wider brain drain that affects Albanian young adults across the board, denuding the country of a large share of its trained human capital, and representing a considerable drain on the national budget, which raises and trains these young people for the benefit of other countries.

There are two key issues which need to be interpreted – and, at a policy level, confronted – when analysing Albanian student migration. Both of these play into wider dynamics of Albanian migration writ large, in the past, present, and future. The first is the large scale, relative to the age-appropriate population, of Albanian students' propensity to study abroad – both those who are already there and those who intend to study abroad in the near future. This 'export' of both undergraduate and postgraduate students seems, on the basis of our survey data and the limited availability of comparable secondary statistics, to be greater than that of almost any other country. It is all the more remarkable given the generally low income levels in Albania and the fact that it is not enmeshed in any system of post-colonial relationship which might provide channels of scholarship-funded mobility to the former colonial metropole. Moreover, all Albanian students studying abroad must do so in a language other than their own. Hence, the haemorrhage of university students is added to the worryingly large exodus of Albania's 'scientific diaspora' of PhD-holders whom we have researched in an earlier study.¹¹⁷ The key policy question thus becomes: how can this continuous exodus of talented young people be stemmed, especially given that future-oriented surveys of young Albanians' intentions to leave the country imminently indicate a continuation of the outflows?

The second key issue concerns prospects for return. Although many students and graduates studying and working abroad wish to retain links with Albania, both with their families and the country at large, and both at an emotional and a practical level, in reality their return orientations are governed by pragmatic considerations. As we have seen from some of our interview data, even their parents are resigned to the 'fact' of their non-return, and appreciate that they will be better off abroad, even to the extent that parental and family prestige may be boosted by having

117- **Gëdeshi, I., King, R.** (2018) *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*. Tirana: UNDP.

young family members studying, working and earning abroad.

Hence, the second key policy question arises: what needs to be done not only to reduce the exodus of students and highly qualified manpower, but to get those who have moved abroad to return? The reasons for non-return, given in the various surveys we have conducted, both for this report and for others on the scientific diaspora and potential migration,¹¹⁸ are rather clear and consistent. They include low incomes in Albania, shortage of qualified jobs, poor career prospects, deficient infrastructure, dissatisfaction with the political climate of corruption and favouritism, and an overall sense that 'there is no future in Albania'.

Conclusions and recommendations

Emigration is a process that has involved and engaged, at different intensity levels, all the segments of the society. Yet, in our previous studies,¹¹⁹ similarly to this last one, have shown that migration out of Albania is increasingly taking the form of a brain-drain, whose adverse effects will be increasingly present in the future. As a result of these migration outflows, Albania is losing its most precious capital, the human capital, notably its talented and well-educated young population graduated from universities in Albania and abroad. Deficient in human capital, Albania will find it difficult to compete in international markets and respond to challenges as they arise. In the meantime, the financial cost resulting from the emigration of the Albanian youth elite is very high. As we show, it is a process that impoverishes the country. This phenomenon raises question marks for the future of the country and is an appeal for policymakers to focus on fostering the responsibility for the nation.

A number of social-economic factors underlie the intention or the desire to emigrate. We heard them in our conversations and interviews with university and senior high-school students, parents and teachers, both in Albania and abroad. The actual emigration and the high desire to emigrate of the most educated segment of the Albanian young people are a symptom of the structural weakness of the Albanian economy and of the political – social system.

These trends of the potential emigration – upward since the end of the global economic crisis – will change the geography of the Albanian emigration destinations, to date dominated markedly by neighbouring Italy and Greece. Germany and some advanced Western European countries, as well as the US, will be in the future the main host countries where the Albanian human capital will be concentrated. This shift in the destinations of the Albanian emigration, on the

118- **Gëdeshi, I., King, R.** (2018) New Trends in Potential Migration in Albania. Tirana: F. Ebert Foundation.

119- **King, R., Gëdeshi, I.** (2020) New trends in potential migration from Albania: the migration transition postponed, *Migration and Development*, 9(2): 131-151; **Gëdeshi, I. and King, R.** (2018) New Trends in Potential Migration from Albania. Tirana: F. Ebert Foundation; **Gëdeshi I., King R.** (2018) Research Study on Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with Albanian Scientific Diaspora. Tirana: UNDP.

one hand, may have a positive effect related to financial and social remittances (ideas, mentalities, approaches), enhanced human capital (education, new professions). On the other hand, it will contribute to reducing human potentials in the country.

The first recommendation that may be made, for any government, irrespective of its colour (or colours), is to ensure a clear prospect to the youth of Albania, so as to minimise the number of those that see emigration as 'the only solution'. This would require not only improving the expanding the employment structure and opportunities for doing business in Albania, but also creating an adequate environment for talented and well-educated youth to find a job that gives them satisfaction, is paid commensurate to their qualifications, and create equal opportunities for professional advancement. Moreover, it requires bettered health, education, and social protection services, less corruption, enhanced physical and social security, enriched social-cultural life, and clean environment.

Spending on education (at all levels), as a percentage to GDP, should rise continuously until they are approximated to EU levels. More investments are needed in higher education and scientific research with a view to raising the status and profile of Albanian universities. In addition, Albania needs to foster cooperation with EU and US universities, especially with members of the scientific diaspora.

Albanian graduate, Masters and PhD students studying abroad should be encouraged, through different methods, to prepare their diploma thesis on topics related to Albania. Furthermore, our public and private institutions should have in place practices and conditions for Albanian students' internships. This would foster the connection of Albanian students that study abroad with the home country and would also increase their contribution.

The role of Albanian embassies and consulates, at least in the major countries where Albanian students are studying, should be strengthened. They should organise regular meetings with Albanian students and keep them updated on economic, political and social developments at home, as well as for vacancies in the public administration, universities and scientific institutions.

Students remaining in the host country or emigration of Albanian students are the main channels feeding the growth of the scientific diaspora. Cooperation with the scientific diaspora is a key factor for revitalising universities, scientific institutions, the public administration and businesses in Albania. Such cooperation would minimise the prospective consequences of the brain drain.

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