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Turning back home or brain circulation? Between Brain Drain
and Brain Gain. A contribution to the debate on Brain Gain
Policies in Albania.

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I Dbuemi

Lamtumirë vendet e mija,
qe po zhduken dalë kadalë,
gjemon deti, ushton duhija,
lkundet barka valë mbi valë.

Neser nadjë kur mbi ne,
rrezja e diellit ka me ra,
kush e din sa uj e dhe',
mu prej teje ka me m'da.

Tjera fusha e tjera zalle
kam me pa, e tjera dete,
kam me ndie, po, tjera valle,
tjera gjuhë n'tjera gjytete.

Gjergj Fishta¹

¹ Gjergj Fishta (1871–1940) was a well-known Albanian poet from Zadrima, the same region where I was born. 'I Dbuemi' (here in a shortened version) is a poem from 'Mrizi i Zanave', a lyrical collection consisting mainly of patriotic verses. Fishta wrote in Geg dialect, the northern Albanian spoken dialect.

The gone one
Farewell my places,
that slowly fade away,
sea thunder, eco of utopia,
boat moves over the waves.
Tomorrow morning when the sun shines over us,
who knows how much water and earth we will be separating us.
Other fields and places, other seas I will see,
other dances in other languages and cities, I will hear.

Abstract

The present master's thesis is an examination of the phenomenon of brain drain in Albania. The study investigated the range of programmes and initiatives designed to facilitate the return of highly qualified migrants to the country. The research involved interviews with Albanians living in Austria, Italy and Denmark and an expert interview. The study revealed that the participants still have a strong connection with Albania. They also expressed gratitude for the transnational experience, which provided them with better educational opportunities, employment prospects and cultural and intellectual enrichment. Many participants doubt the effectiveness of the Albanian brain gain strategies, because they see corruption in Albania's political climate. For the moment, a return to Albania is also impossible for them due to a combination of factors, including medical, employment and educational opportunities. The interviewees considered brain circulation to be an effective way of engaging the diaspora with Albania. Final statement: Albania needs to implement more effective and long-term brain gain strategies to address brain drain and engage its diaspora for national development. Until this happens, the debate between brain drain and brain gain will continue.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit untersucht das Phänomen der Abwanderung hochqualifizierter Fachkräfte (Brain Drain) in Albanien. Die Studie analysierte die Bandbreite von Programmen und Initiativen, die darauf abzielen, hochqualifizierte Migranten zur Rückkehr in ihr Heimatland zu bewegen. Die Forschung umfasste Interviews mit Albanern, die in Österreich, Italien und Dänemark leben, sowie ein Experteninterview. Die Studie zeigte, dass die Teilnehmer immer noch eine starke Verbindung zu Albanien haben. Sie äußerten auch Dankbarkeit für die transnationale Erfahrung, die ihnen bessere Bildungsmöglichkeiten, Beschäftigungsaussichten sowie kulturelle und intellektuelle Bereicherung geboten hat. Viele Teilnehmer zweifelten an der Wirksamkeit der albanischen Strategien zur Gewinnung von Talenten (Brain Gain), da sie Korruption im politischen Klima Albaniens beobachteten. Momentan ist eine Rückkehr nach Albanien auch aufgrund einer Kombination von Faktoren, einschließlich medizinischer, beruflicher und bildungsbezogener Möglichkeiten, für sie unmöglich. Die Befragten betrachteten Brain Circulation als eine effektive Möglichkeit, die Diaspora mit Albanien zu verbinden. Abschließende Feststellung: Albanien muss effektivere und langfristige Strategien zur Anwerbung von Talenten umsetzen, um der Abwanderung von Fachkräften entgegenzuwirken und seine Diaspora für die nationale Entwicklung einzubeziehen. Bis dies geschieht, wird die Debatte zwischen Brain Drain und Brain Gain weitergehen.

Keywords: Albania, brain drain, brain gain, brain circulation, transnationalism, diaspora engagement policies

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1. Introduction

The focus of my master's thesis is the phenomenon of brain drain in Albania. The primary subject under consideration is the brain gain policies of the Albanian government. The present study examines the measures, initiatives, programmes and laws that have been implemented, or are currently being implemented, with a view to encouraging highly qualified migrants to return to the country.

In 2006, the government of Albania signed a Brain Gain Programme with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the stated aim of enabling highly qualified migrants to return to the country.² The programme was conceived with the objective of instigating a process of transformation within the nation; this transformation process, as posited by Zeneli, former manager of the Brain Gain Programme, is predicated on the establishment of a process for highly qualified migrants to return.³ The objective of this initiative is to promote policies that will ensure the financial and intellectual contributions of the Albanian diaspora, both old and new.⁴

In 2018, the Albanian government initiated the *Punë të mbarë* ⁵ (Good Work) initiative with the objective of encouraging students and highly qualified professionals to pursue employment opportunities within Albanian institutions.⁶ Another significant initiative that emerged in this context was *Gati për Shqipërinë* ⁷ (Ready for Albania), which came into being in 2021. The objective of this initiative is to attract highly qualified professionals and students who have successfully completed their studies outside of Albania and who wish to participate in government work. Through these initiatives, the Albanian government sought to encourage these students and professionals to work in Albanian institutions.

² Group 484 Centre for Migration and Vladimir Petronijevic, BRAIN GAIN POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, ed. by Tanja Pavlov, (Group 484 Centre for Migration), 2013, <http://www.crpm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/From-Brain-Gain-Policies-to-Practices-.pdf>.

³ Group 484 Centre for Migration and Vladimir Petronijevic, BRAIN GAIN POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, p.11

⁴ Ibid., p.11

⁵ Republic of Albania, Kryeministria, Platforma e Punësimit Të Studentëve Të Ekselencës, accessed 28. August 2025. <https://kryeministria.al/newsroom/373-studente-ekselente-ne-administrate-fitues-te-platformes-pune-te-mbare/>.

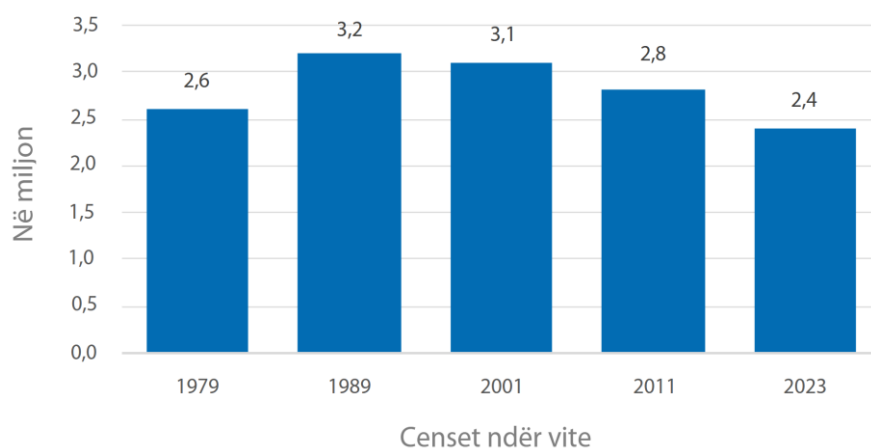
⁶ Renis Meta, Shqipëria në rënie të lirë demografike: rezultatet e Censit dhe rrjedhja e trurit. Euro Speak Albania, 2024, accessed 10. Juni 2025. <https://www.eurospeak.al/news/ekonomia/shqiperia-ne-renie-te-lire-demografike/>.

⁷ Agjencia Kombëtare e Shqipërisë së Informacionit, Platforma Gati për Shqipërinë, accessed 27 August 2025. <https://gatipershqiperine.al/>.

*Strategjia Kombëtare e Diasporës Shqiptare 2021-2025*⁸ (Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021-2025) is a comprehensive plan that aims to establish a framework for diaspora engagement; this framework is designed to be consistent with EU guidelines. The strategy is intended to support Albanian communities and enable joint engagement by state institutions with the diaspora and also seeks to influence state policy and encourage dialogue with host countries regarding the Albanian diaspora.⁹ According to the National Diaspora Strategy, talented Albanians living abroad are encouraged to pursue careers in Albania; it offers scholarships for further studies and exchange programmes abroad, on the condition that participants subsequently return to Albania and this investment in young academics creates opportunities for them to return, according to the strategy.¹⁰

But, why Albania? Albania, in particular, has experienced an accelerated exodus of highly qualified professionals. Also, according to the 2023¹¹ census, the population was 2,412,113 inhabitants, indicating a decrease of 13.8% since 2011.

Figure 1. Population by Census (in millions, 1979-2023).



Source: INSTAT, *Population and Housing Census 2023*.¹²

⁸ Republic of Albania, Council of Ministers and Pandeli Majko, *Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025*, 2021, <https://akd.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/STRATEGJIA-KOMBETARE-E-DIASPORES-2021-2025-ENG.pdf>

⁹ Republic of Albania, *Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025*

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ INSTAT, *Albanian Institute of Statistics, Population and Housing Census 2023, Main Results*, 2024, accessed 30 September 2025, <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13626/cens-2023-census-botim.pdf>, p.16

¹² Ibid., p.16

As the Fig.1 shows, since 1990, the population of Albania has been in decline. Between 2001 and 2011, it is estimated that around 500,000 people emigrated from Albania every year.¹³ As demonstrated by the population pyramid in the census, the demographic profile of the country is characterised by a significant emigration rate of individuals between the ages of 15 and 45, with an estimated annual emigration figure of 50,000 individuals.¹⁴

Regarding the consequences for the labour market and economic development, Albania is positioned second in Europe in 2023 in terms of the most negative effects of brain drain and ninth worldwide.¹⁵ Albania is also part of the Western Balkans (WB6: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia); when considered in the context of a global comparison, it is evident that the WB6 countries are among those most affected by brain drain.¹⁶

Considering the current political situation, including the war in Ukraine and the rise of right-wing populism in Europe, the Western Balkans are a significant region for the implementation of EU enlargement policy. Given this context and actual political background, it is important to examine the significance of brain gain policies for the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans and specifically, for Albania. The European Commission¹⁷ has also highlighted the significant potential of the human capital present within the Albanian diaspora, emphasising its status as a previously untapped resource for the nation. Consequently, the European Union recommended the formulation of strategies and measures to encourage the circulation of skilled workers from the diaspora.¹⁸

A review of literature on the topic reveals an extensive focus on countries that benefit from brain drain and the development of their brain gain policies. There is a need for

¹³ INSTAT, Population and Housing Census 2023, p.16

¹⁴ Nikolla Pulla, Rezultatet e Censit 2023 dhe 'rrjedhja e trurit' në rritje në Shqipëri – një trajtim pa efektshmëri?, Euro Speak Albania, 2024, accessed 27 August 2025.
<https://www.eurospeak.al/news/sondazhe/rezultatet-censi-rrjedhja-e-trurit/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marjan Icoski, Toward a New Youth Brain-Drain Paradigm in the Western Balkans, Policy Paper, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), 2022, p.3

¹⁷ European Commission, Report Communication on EU Enlargement Policy: Report on Albania 2021, Strasbourg: Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2021) 289 final. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2021_en, p. 99

¹⁸ Ibid., p.99

further research regarding developing countries, such as Albania, which are affected by a high level of emigration of highly qualified workers.

Finally, Albania is my home country, which I left about twenty years ago to study abroad. I personally feel connected to Albania. This naturally motivates me to do some more research on this topic, in order to hopefully offer a modest contribution to the ongoing discussion surrounding brain gain policies in Albania.

1.1 Aim of the research, research question and hypothesis

The central objective of this master's thesis is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of *Brain Drain* in Albania. The principal focus of this study is on the *Brain Gain Policies*, with a particular emphasis on the strategies implemented by the Albanian government for the engagement of the diaspora. The study explores the range of programmes and initiatives that have been designed with the objective of facilitating the return of highly qualified migrants back to the country.

It will be tried to understand this attempt made by the Albanian government, which has, let's say, two main goals: firstly, to reverse the brain drain phenomenon and secondly, to attempt to establish a successful diaspora engagement policy. The study tries to highlight the advantages of circular migration/brain circulation, which helps reduce brain drain by sharing skills, knowledge and experience.

Therefore, the research question is:

How does the Albanian government attempt to manage, implement and develop effective and successful diaspora policies?

What's the impact of brain gain strategies on Albanian scientific diaspora?

The research question is followed by sub-questions:

In what way is political transnationalism manifested in diaspora engagement policies?

How is the transnational experience of Albanian migrants manifested? How strong is the connection between migrants and Albania?

What are the benefits of brain circulation?

The hypothesis under consideration is that existing initiatives are not sufficiently attractive and effective and that Albanian politicians are not interested in actively recruiting highly qualified emigrants or in facilitating their return.

Furthermore, various studies on this topic have identified the following factors as hindering the effective implementation of policies targeting the diaspora: frequent institutional and political change in Albania; an apparent lack of effective communication between the government and the diaspora and corruption in Albania.¹⁹ The scarcity of data on the Albanian scientific diaspora²⁰ also complicates the situation, as various policy analyses have highlighted. In the modern digital age, networks and databases are interesting tools, especially for highly qualified migrants who want to stay in touch with Albania; virtual networks facilitate communication and collaboration among researchers on a global scale.²¹

Additionally, research studies on this topic have shown that embassies and consulates are important in fostering connections between diaspora communities and their countries of origin; these institutions play a vital role in establishing and maintaining networks between diaspora communities and their countries of origin, thereby promoting the movement of talent.²² However, I suppose that Albanian embassies and consulates abroad still do not prioritise fostering connections with the diaspora in their agendas.

1.2 Structure of the study

My thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter will explore the origins and evolution of the terms brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation, as well as related concepts. It will also examine who is considered highly qualified and the categories used to differentiate highly skilled people. Another key aspect of the first chapter is the introduction of the theoretical framework. The theories and approaches

¹⁹ A. Qaisrani, B. Perchinig, J. Jokić-Bornstein, M. Hendow, V. Bilger, and V. Kobzeva, Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans, ECONDIAS Final Report, ICMPD, Vienna, 2023, p. 149

²⁰ Joniada Barjaba, Diaspora Engagement Mapping Albania, Factsheet created under the ECONIDAS project, funded by the European Union (DG Near), implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), 2022, accessed 30 September 2025.

²¹ Mimoza Dushi, Turning Brain Drain into Brain Network and Brain Exchange: A Case Study of Kosovo Albanian Diaspora in the United States, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2024): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2024.2414167>, p.3-4

²² Ibid., p. 14-15

that support this research study are transnationalism, circular migration and diaspora studies. This section aims to explore the meaning of the transnational experience, examine how circular migration functions, explore how diaspora communities are formed and reflect on the role of diaspora in brain gain policies. This text focuses on transnationalism as a form of circular migration, discussing terms like mobility, return and circulation in international and national contexts. The discussion will then move on to explore the meaning of diaspora, the formation of diaspora communities, and the relationship between diaspora and transnationalism. Central topics in this section will also include the role of diaspora as a policy actor and the issue of political transnationalism.

The second chapter will provide a detailed overview of Albania's migration history since 1990. It will provide a detailed description of the available statistics, paying particular attention to the loss of highly qualified individuals. These primary waves of migration will be examined and interpreted within the broader context of the political and economic situation. Further, this chapter will address the formation of the Albanian diaspora, examining the historical development of these communities over time and their characteristic features. Subsequently, the two case studies from Italy and Greece concerning Albanian circulating migrants will emphasise the significance of this form of migration and the benefits the process. Additionally, the following part of this section will analyse the return policies adopted by the Albanian government, paying particular attention to brain gain programmes and initiatives. The main focus of the discussion will be Albanian diaspora engagement policies and how the government has attempted to develop and manage them effectively. Which critiques have been raised about these measures? How effectively have these measures been implemented? What gaps do these strategies leave? The discussion will be based on these questions.

The third chapter will analyse the findings from the interviews on brain gain initiatives and their impact on the scientific diaspora. It will explore whether the diaspora recognises these strategies and what their opinion is on the government's attempts to engage with them. The interviews will also explore the benefits that transnational experience brings to migrants. The analysis will present the scientific diaspora's current opinion on issues of return and brain circulation, and its implications for the future. The expert interview findings will also be introduced here, with the aim to analyse and discuss key elements of the answers, provided by the expert and the diaspora.

2. Methodology

The methodology that will be employed in this study is outlined as follows. The objective of this study will be to determine the extent of migration among highly qualified Albanians. To this scope, an analysis of relevant Albanian immigration statistics will be conducted. Official documentation on initiatives and programmes, in parallel with legislation on diaspora engagement, constitutes the primary source for examining government strategies. Secondary sources are also consulted for further information on the topic.

Furthermore, the research study will also carry out Problem Centred Interviews (PCI) with Albanian individuals and one Expert Interview. These will be used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the brain drain phenomenon and brain gain policies in Albania. PCIs are conducted with members of the Albanian scientific diaspora residing in Austria, Italy and Denmark. The present interviews are designed to examine the impact of various government programmes and initiatives on this Albanian diaspora group.

The problem centred interview (PCI), as defined by Andreas Witzel²³, is a method of interview that focuses on the subjective perceptions and experiences of the interviewees on a specific set of problems; a distinctive feature of the PCI is its use of an open interview style, in which the interviewer is free to express their thoughts and observations; furthermore, the dialogue is structured around a series of questions. The PCI interview begins with a narrative introduction, the interviewee is then invited to tell a story and after that, the interviewers ask questions to check understanding and point out gaps in the interviewee's memory.²⁴

PCI is based on Grounded Theory, developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser²⁵ and has three basic positions²⁶: *problem centring*: the focus here is on a socially relevant problem and how knowledge or learning is organised; the interviewer uses prior knowledge to understand the interviewee's explanations and ask questions focused on the problem; *object orientation*: emphasises the flexibility of the method in

²³ Andreas Witzel, Das problemzentrierte Interview, Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung, Forum: Qualitative Social Research 1 (1), 2000, Art. 22. DOI:10.1007/978-3-8349-9441-7_29., p.1-13

²⁴ Jana Rick, Problemzentrierte Interviews Online und Offline: Eine Methodische Reflexion, Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung 24, no. 2 (2023): Art. 6. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-24.2.3977>

²⁵ Witzel, Das problemzentrierte Interview, p. 2

²⁶ Ibid., p.3-4

relation to the object under investigation; *process orientation*: refers to the entire research process and in particular, to pre-interpretation. Rick²⁷, in her research study on 'Problem Centred Interviews Online and Offline', came to the result that problem centred interviews can be successfully transferred to an online format; active listening is a strategy used in PCI that is challenging online due to technical settings, but not impossible and key PCI tools, such as tape recording and postscripts, have been successfully transferred to the digital environment.²⁸

As a specific form of guided interview, the expert interview is particularly suitable for gaining practical work-related knowledge. The interviewee *Renis Meta* is an associate lecturer in the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana. The primary aim of the expert interview is to make use of the expertise, experience and insight of the interviewee; the focus is not so much on the interviewee's personal opinion, but rather on their knowledge, skills and status as an expert in a particular field of activity.²⁹

Several factors were considered when deciding which experts to interview; as a rule, the target group is defined as employees of an organisation in a specific role with specific professional experience and knowledge.³⁰ Renis Meta has been involved in the civilian and political life of Albania for a long time. He has participated in youth-led initiatives, research projects and advocacy groups, influencing public policies and discourse in Albania.

Face-to-face interviews were recorded with a special acoustic device and online interviews were recorded directly from the online platform. All interviewees agreed to the recording and transcription of the interviews. The basic rules of transcription were respected.³¹

These interviews are evaluated using qualitative content analysis, a "*classic approach to evaluating text material*"³², also applicable to interview data. The goal, in addition to reducing the material, is the development, modification and questioning of

²⁷ Rick, Problemzentrierte Interviews Online und Offline

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Joachim Behnke, Nathalie Behnke, und Nina Baur, Hrsg. Empirische Methoden der Politikwissenschaft, Paderborn 2006, p. 238.

³⁰ Uwe Flick, Qualitative Sozialforschung, Eine Einführung, Reinbek, Rowohlt 2011, p. 215.

³¹ Uwe Flick, Qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung, p. 379

³² Ibid., p. 409

categories.³³ According to Mayring, quality criteria such as reliability and validity should ensure that the results are comparable with other studies and that the entire process is also comprehensible.³⁴

The process of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring begins with the definition of the material, the selection of interviews or the parts that are relevant to the research question.³⁵ In doing so, the research question has not to be overlooked, but the material should be chosen accordingly. The second step is the analysis of the data collection situation³⁶, this may include how the material was gained, who was involved or present, etc.; the material is then formally characterised and presented.³⁷ In the fourth and final step, the direction of the analysis is determined, which is then further differentiated in a theory-guided manner.³⁸

This is followed by the determination of the analysis technique. Three different approaches can be distinguished here: in structured content analysis, predefined categorization criteria are applied to the text with the aim of developing a coding guide that facilitates the structuring; in order to clarify unclear passages in the text, further material is taken during the explanatory content analysis by collecting explanatory material.³⁹ Finally, in the summary content analysis, the material is paraphrased.⁴⁰ In a first reduction, less relevant text passages are deleted; similarly, in a second reduction, passages with the same meaning are summarised; „this represents a combination of the reduction of material through deletions with a generalisation in the sense of summarising at a higher level of abstraction”.⁴¹

As already mentioned, I will evaluate the interviews using summary qualitative content analysis. With this method, the text is analysed step by step according to Mayring's content-analytical model⁴², presenting here only the final result.

³³ Uwe Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung*, p. 409

³⁴ See also, Philipp Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 1, no. 2 (2000): Art. 20, accessed 29 November 2025.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215666096_Qualitative_Content_Analysis.

³⁵ Uwe Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, p. 409

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 409

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 409

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 409

³⁹ Philipp Mayring, *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*, in: Flick, Uwe/ Kardorff, Ernst von/ Steinke, Ines (Hg.): *Qualitative Forschung. Ein Handbuch*, Reinbek: Rowohlt 2007, p. 472

⁴⁰ Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, p. 410

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 410

⁴² Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis*

This research study conducted interviews face-to-face and online via platforms such as Zoom and Teams.



3. Definition of Brain Drain concept and Theoretical Framework

3.1 The Brain Drain World

In her research study on Kosovo Albanian Diaspora, the author Dushi discusses how, *„in the era of globalisation and more intense migration patterns, stemming from the concepts of brain drain and brain gain, new concepts such as brain flow, brain circulation, brain exchange, brain network and the new nomads have emerged”*.⁴³

Throughout history, migration has been a consistent worldwide phenomenon. The world is constantly in motion; individuals migrate from one country or continent to another for a variety of reasons, such as better education and job opportunities, or political instability and climate crises. Globalisation and the development of new and improved transport systems also play a significant role in the mobility of people in the contemporary world; globalisation is a process that touches all parts of our world and is viewed as being driven in the main by economic forces.⁴⁴ The issue of brain drain has been a subject of discussion among researchers in various academic disciplines. The outflow of highly skilled individuals and professionals has a negative impact on various sectors, including health, education and services.⁴⁵

3.1.1 Understanding the concept of the Brain Drain

What does brain drain mean? The term ‘brain drain’ was first defined as the phenomenon of professionals or people with a high level of education moving from one

⁴³ Mimoza Dushi, Turning Brain Drain into Brain Network and Brain Exchange: A Case Study of Kosovo Albanian Diaspora in the United States, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2024): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2024.2414167>, p.3

⁴⁴ Maria Kelo and Bernd Wächter, *Brain Drain and Brain Gain: Migration in the European Union after Enlargement*, Academic Cooperation Association, Nuffic, The Hague, 2004, p. 5

⁴⁵ Xhentila, Tataj, and Emrah Akbaş, Brain Drain Toward EU and Its Impact on Labor Market: Albanian Case, *Journal of Anatolia and Balkan Studies (JABS)*, ABAD 4 (8) 2021: 371–384. DOI: 10.32953/abad.960441, p. 372-373

country to another.⁴⁶ The term brain drain was first used to describe the movement of scientists and technologists from the United Kingdom to the United States and Canada in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁷ According to the European Migration Network (EMN) Glossary of terms relating to Asylum and Migration brain drain refers „to the loss suffered by a country as a result of the emigration of a (highly) qualified person”.⁴⁸ The movement of highly skilled individuals from developing countries to developed countries is considered a permanent moving and this phenomenon is believed to have a positive economic impact on the host country, while having at the same time negative effects on the origin country.⁴⁹

The new term ‘brain gain’ emerged in the 1990s as a response to brain drain and consists of the description of policies that address the return of highly skilled emigrants, with the aim of reversing the effects of brain drain in the origin country.⁵⁰ Brain gain, is used to describe the efforts, programmes and initiatives from governments, that aimed at attracting scientific workers to the country and brain gain policies are relevant in two ways⁵¹: for example, they may be relevant to a European Union member state, receiving a third-country national who has been granted a high-level qualification; they may also be relevant to a third-country national returning to their country of origin.⁵² So, the current situation can be summarised as follows: brain drain involves the movement of scientists and other highly skilled individuals to new locations for various

⁴⁶ Simona Milio, Riccardo Lattanzi, Francesca Casadio, Nicola Crosta, Mario Raviglione, Paul Ricci, and Fabio Scano, Brain Drain, Brain Exchange and Brain Circulation: The Case of Italy Viewed from a Global Perspective, Aspen Institute Italia, 2012, p.6

⁴⁷ John Gibson und David McKenzie, Eight Questions about Brain Drain, Journal of Economic Perspectives 25, Nr. 3 (2011): 107–28, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.25.3. p.108-109>.

⁴⁸ European Commission, Asylum and Migration Glossary 2.0: A Tool for Better Comparability. European Migration Network, Luxembourg Publications Office of the European Union, 2012, accessed 3 October. 2025,

https://www.emn.ie/media/EMN_GLOSSARY_Publication_Version_January_20102.pdf, p.28

⁴⁹ Andreas Breinbauer, Brain Drain – Brain Circulation or... What Else Happens or Should Happen to the Brains: Some Aspects of Qualified Person Mobility/Migration, FIW Working Paper No. 4. Vienna: FIW – Research Centre International Economics, 2007, p.2

⁵⁰ Alkida Ndreka, Return Migration Policies Towards a Compressive Approach, Social Studies 15, no. 1 (2021): 33–45, accessed 30 November 2025.

<https://www.sociology.al/sites/default/files/Vol%2015%20No%201%20%2851%29%202021.pdf#page=35>, p.37-38

⁵¹ European Commission, Asylum and Migration Glossary 2.0, p. 28

⁵² Ibid., p. 28

reasons, driven by their own decisions. On the other hand, brain gain involves deliberate efforts by institutions to attract them to specific countries.⁵³

Another emerging concept is that of 'brain overflow'⁵⁴, which is defined as a situation in which a country's labour market is unable to absorb all its qualified citizens, resulting in an excess of highly qualified people; brain overflow basically refers to a situation in which highly skilled people must leave their country due to a lack of job opportunities, resulting in a surplus of talent. Furthermore, the phenomenon of highly skilled workers moving into less skilled jobs and not working in their profession is known as 'brain waste'.⁵⁵ Migrants' skills and qualifications are often not recognised, limiting their potential.⁵⁶

The 'brain exchange' concept refers to the movement of highly qualified people between developed countries.⁵⁷ Brain exchange⁵⁸ essentially involves the exchange of knowledge through mobility, new forms of communication, technology and the globalisation of markets. In the current era of globalisation, where communication and technology have facilitated collaboration between people, brain exchange establishes a new phenomenon: 'brain network' ⁵⁹ that makes it easier for professionals to interact worldwide with each other.

Traditionally brain drain was described in the literature as a simple movement of highly skilled people from one country to another. However, in the recent years the phenomenon has become more complex and dynamic and now this dynamic process involves individuals studying and working abroad and then investing in their home country.⁶⁰ This is known as 'brain flow'⁶¹ and incorporates the processes of brain circulation and brain exchange. The next part of this work will describe brain circulation in close details.

⁵³ Bohdan Jałowicki und Grzegorz Jerzy Gorzelak, Brain Drain, Brain Gain, and Mobility: Theories and Prospective Methods, Higher Education in Europe 29, Nr. 3 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1080/0379772042000331589>, p. 299

⁵⁴ Breinbauer, Brain Drain - Brain Circulation or..., p. 3

⁵⁵ Milio et al., Brain Drain, Brain Exchange and Brain Circulation, p.8-9

⁵⁶ European Commission, Asylum and Migration Glossary 2.0, p.29

⁵⁷ Breinbauer, Brain Drain - Brain Circulation or..., p.2

⁵⁸ Dushi, Turning Brain Drain into Brain Network and Brain Exchange , p.3

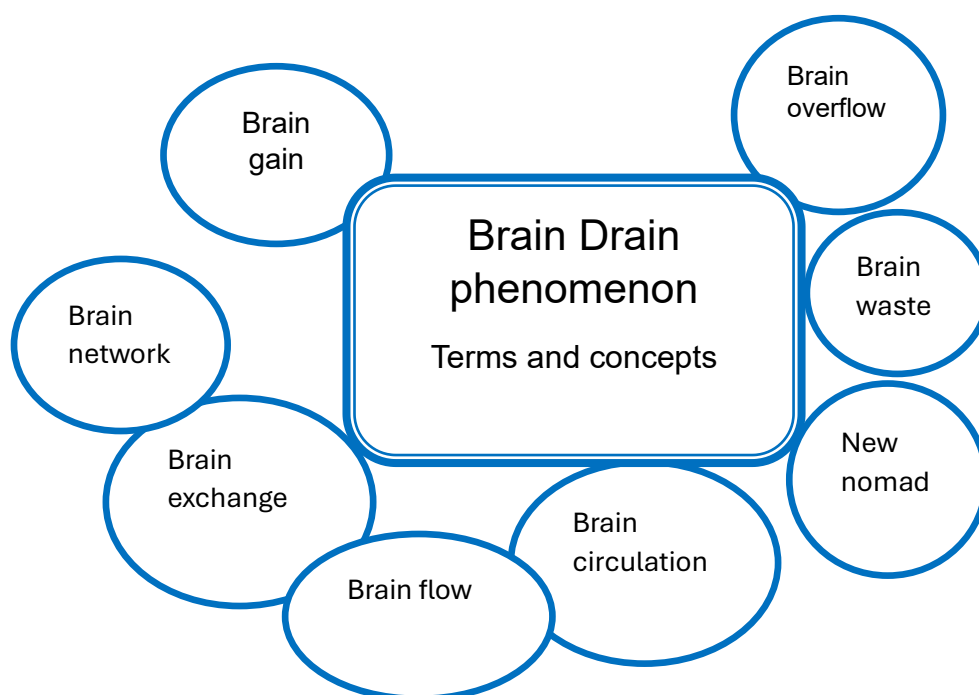
⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 3-4

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 3-4

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 3

Latest literature also mentions a newer concept/phenomenon: the 'new nomad'.⁶² This new term is used to describe a very mobile and flexible young, highly qualified individual, mainly between the ages of 25 and 29, who migrate between multiple regions, in search of the best job opportunities and salaries.⁶³

Figure 2. Summary of Brain Drain Concepts and Terms.



Source: Author's illustration

To summarise, the brain drain concept is comprised of three⁶⁴ phases: firstly, there is the initial phase, which is defined as migration of skilled professionals from their countries of origin to more developed nations; secondly, there is the phase of brain drain and beginning remigration. Finally, the third phase is that of brain circulation as a form of integration in the globalised world.⁶⁵

It can be concluded that the term brain drain has evolved and developed over time, with other and new concepts being added to the description of this phenomenon. The concept of brain gain was first established as a response to the issue of brain drain. A range of other terms, including for example brain flow, brain exchange, brain

⁶² Dushi, Turning Brain Drain into Brain Network and Brain Exchange, p. 3

⁶³ Ibid., p.3

⁶⁴ Breinbauer, Brain Drain - Brain Circulation or..., p.3

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.3

circulation, brain waste, new nomads, is also associated with the concept of brain drain. These concepts have contributed to the development of the terminology and history of the brain drain phenomenon.

3.1.2 Brain Circulation: circulating skills, ideas and experiences

‘Brain circulation’ is the term used to describe the movement of highly skilled people between countries, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experiences.⁶⁶ The phenomenon of brain circulation emphasises the positive effects of shared skills between the home and destination country and is seen as a temporary form of circulating migration.⁶⁷ The issues arising from brain drain in the country of origin can be reduced by facilitating brain circulation and the developing countries have the potential to benefit significantly from the skills, expertise, and experience of their migrants.⁶⁸

Skills, ideas and experience during the brain circulation process exchange has benefitted both the home and destination countries, as well as to the migrants themselves.⁶⁹ The concept of brain circulation highlights the perspective that the mobility of talent can be a reciprocally advantageous process for both the home and the destination countries.⁷⁰ The evolution of brain circulation has come from the processes of brain drain and brain gain; the expanding movement of human talents in and between different countries of the world, world has led to brain circulation, replacing the two terms (brain drain/brain gain).⁷¹

The circulation of skills and knowledge are beneficial factors for all actors involved in this process and can also develop additional economic opportunities.⁷² The phenomenon of brain circulation has been driven by several key factors and developments, including globalisation, the emergence of dual citizenship, the absence

⁶⁶ Furkan Metin, Brain Circulation Situation of Türkiye, *Yükseköğretim Dergisi* 15, no. 1 (2025): 169–181. <https://doi.org/10.53478/yuksekogretim.1407019>, p.169

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.169

⁶⁸ European Commission, *Asylum and Migration Glossary* 2.0, p.27

⁶⁹ Metin, Brain Circulation Situation of Türkiye, p.169

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.169.

⁷¹ Rasa Daugeliene and Rita Marcinkeviciene, Brain Circulation: Theoretical Considerations, *Inzinerine Ekonomika-Engineering Economics* 3 (2009), ISSN 1392–2785, p. 50

⁷² Ibid., p. 50-51

of movement barriers and the potential for boundaryless career opportunities.⁷³ Additionally, increased international mobility and new professional opportunities in a global context have been identified as contributing factors to the intensification of the brain circulation process.⁷⁴

In conclusion, it can be said that brain circulation involves highly skilled individuals moving between countries to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience. This temporary form of migration highlights the benefits of shared skills. It can minimise the issues associated with brain drain in the country of origin. It also enables developing countries to benefit from the skills, knowledge and experience of their migrants, including returnees and diaspora members. The process of brain circulation is also beneficial to destination countries and migrants themselves. The concept of brain circulation has evolved from the terms brain drain and brain gain, replacing them.

3.1.3 Who is the highly skilled migrant?

The following question must be posed: to whom does brain drain refer? Who is the highly skilled migrant? In this context it is important to identify who falls under this category and who can be considered a highly skilled migrant. This, and other related questions to the topic, will be now introduced.

A particular challenge is identifying highly skilled people, due to differences between countries' education systems and qualifications' recognition.⁷⁵ In general, it can be stated that highly skilled people are those who have successfully completed either the primary or secondary stages of tertiary education.⁷⁶ The highly skilled migrants are also considered as voluntary migrants, as far as their skills and qualifications are in demand and they are usually legal immigrants and permanent migrants.⁷⁷ The view that highly skilled people are always permanent migrants is changing, as migration patterns evolve.⁷⁸ The literature also refers to highly skilled people by other descriptions as for

⁷³ Daugeliene und Marcinkeviciene, Brain Circulation: Theoretical Considerations, p. 50-51

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.50-51

⁷⁵ Milio et.al., Brain Drain, Brain Exchange and Brain Circulation, p.7

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.7

⁷⁷ Kelo and Wächter, Brain Drain and Brain Gain, p.16

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 16

example: „‘qualified’ or ‘highly qualified personnel’, ‘human resources in science and technology (HRST)’, ‘scientists and engineers’, or simply ‘brains’”.⁷⁹

There is no approved definition of the highly skilled individuals, because countries and organisations treat them differently in their statistics and descriptions; the determination of who is considered highly skilled, presents a challenge due to the various educational systems worldwide.⁸⁰ With Bologna Process, has for example European Union tried to make this process easier, by harmonizing qualifications and standardising them.⁸¹

In conclusion, in other words can be said, is that highly skilled migrants are regarded as voluntary, legal immigrants and sometimes permanent migrants. They are defined as individuals who have successfully completed either the primary or secondary stages of tertiary education.

3.1.4 Categories of highly skilled persons

Highly skilled persons can be classified into many categories. Figure 3 illustrates the various categories of highly skilled individuals and provides a description of each category. These categories comprise highly skilled people with a first or second-stage tertiary education and these individuals can be professionals, managers, skilled technicians, academic researchers or students, for example.⁸²

Figure 3. Categories and Description of Highly Skilled Persons.

Categories of highly skilled persons	Description
Corporate transferees	„Persons operating internationally, motivated from career advancement, trainings and are mostly specialist in production, marketing and research for the firm for whom they work.”
Technicians and visiting firemen	„Individuals with specific professional skills. Transfers are related to specific development projects, or in response to management needs.”
Professionals (healthcare or education sector)	„Generally, individuals employed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).”

⁷⁹ Kelo and Wächter, Brain Drain and Brain Gain, p. 16

⁸⁰ Milio et.al., Brain Drain, Brain Exchange and Brain Circulation, p.7

⁸¹ Ibid., p.7

⁸² Ibid., p. 7-8

Project specialists	<i>„Migration is related to specific projects abroad and for limited contract periods.“</i>
Consultant specialists	<i>„Specialists for a wide range of activities - the destinations are global.“</i>
Private career (development and training)	<i>„People seeking opportunities through external labor markets for career advancement, trainings. Usually including, young people in their early career years seeking experiences in foreign locations.“</i>
Businesspeople	<i>„Entrepreneurs or investors based abroad for personal reasons.“</i>
Priests and missionaries	<i>„Religious and “semi-religious” orders send their members abroad for periods of varying durations; these emigrants work principally in the healthcare and education sectors.“</i>
Entertainers, sportspersons and artists	<i>„Internationally mobile group of persons whose stays abroad are often for brief periods. Some of them can settle permanently.“</i>
Academics, researchers and other academic staff	<i>„Exchange of academics and researchers between universities and similar institutions for periods of variable length. These transfers can be for short periods or longer durations (the archetypal brain drain situation).“</i>
Students	<i>„Migrants studying abroad, young people for short and long period of time.“</i>

Source: Author's illustration based on Milio et.al., *Brain Drain, Brain Exchange and Brain Circulation* (2012) ⁸³

In summary, the defining factor in classifying someone as a highly skilled migrant is their level of education; highly skilled people have a tertiary education qualification. The second criterion relates to the professional context in which they are employed in the host country.⁸⁴



3.2 Theoretical framework

Theories play a crucial role in research studies by facilitating an understanding the various approaches employed in the research's composition and the way in which research questions are addressed and discussed. As mentioned, the theoretical approaches chosen for this study are transnationalism, diaspora studies and circular migration. In academic research and policy debates, transnationalism and diaspora are both significant concepts; these academic research studies defined

⁸³ Milio et.al. , *Brain Drain, Brain Exchange and Brain Circulation*, p.7-8

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 7-8

transnationalism as the study of cross-border activities, including sociocultural, political and economic factors that impact individual identity.⁸⁵ The IOM Glossary on Migration⁸⁶ defines diaspora as people who leave their country of origin but remain connected to it. Also, circular migration is important for understanding transnationalism.

Moreover, this section will examine the concepts of political transnationalism and diaspora engagement policies. To understand the Albanian government's aspirations regarding the involvement of the diaspora in the country's political and economic life, it is crucial to understand the significance of these two approaches.

3.2.1 Exploring and understanding Transnationalism: the idea behind

Transnationalism emphasizes the strong social and economic links between migrants' host and origin countries.⁸⁷ Migration is seen as circular, so return migration is not necessarily the end of a successful or failed migration.⁸⁸ Living in more than one country means that migrants regularly interact and exchange ideas across national borders.⁸⁹ These cross-border connections, resulting from transnational migration, require appropriate policy interventions by states and policymakers must consider the impact of their policies beyond national borders.⁹⁰

Migration policies in a transnational context are likely to have an impact outside the intended domestic sphere and the success or failure of these policies will also be determined by external factors.⁹¹ When considering migration policy it is important to

⁸⁵ See also, Faist, *Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of Dance Partners?* and Quayson and Daswani, *Introduction – Diaspora and Transnationalism*

⁸⁶ European Commission, *Asylum and Migration Glossary 2.0*, p.50

⁸⁷ Jean-Pierre Cassarino, *Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited*, in *Managing Migration and Diversity in the Asia Pacific Region and Europe*, ed. Paul de Guchteneire, Matthias Koenig, and Inglis Christing, 1–28, *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 6, No. 2. 2004, ISSN 1817-4574, www.unesco.org/shs/ijms/vol6/issue2/art, p.261

⁸⁸ Cassarino, *Theorising Return Migration*, p. 262

⁸⁹ IOM, *International Dialogue on Migration Intersessional Workshop on: Migration and Transnationalism: Opportunities and Challenges – Background Paper*, 2010, accessed 9 September 2025, https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/microsites/IDM/workshops/migration_and_transnationalism_030910/background_paper_en.pdf, p.1

⁹⁰ IOM, *International Dialogue on Migration Intersessional Workshop*, p. 1

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1

consider the different types of migrants, as they engage in different transnational activities, such as those moving for education, work or retirement.⁹²

The contact to the home country remains intact all the time and return is prepared by visits or periodic remittances.⁹³ Identity and mobility are no longer a one-way concept, but a transnational matter and migrants are able to build up a transnational identity; they can be attached to the homeland as place of birth as to the host country.⁹⁴ Due to this transnational identity and the constant movement between the two countries, migrants are well connected in both countries and are emotionally and socially linked to both.⁹⁵ In transnationalism, the economic, political and sociocultural practices influence peoples' daily life and identity, developing a new frame sense of belonging and citizenship.⁹⁶ Social integration within a destination country often happens among people from the same country of origin and provides the returnee with the feeling of being part of an ethnic group; such migrant communities can become well organized and attract the attention of governments.⁹⁷ This is where the term *diaspora* comes into consideration.

In the academic literature transnationalism is related to terms as globalisation, migration, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, multiculturalism, post-migration studies and internationalism.⁹⁸ Transnationalism emerged as a research area in the 1990s. Many, including those in academia, saw it as the „*little man's*" answer to globalisation, which was seen as the domain of economic "big players".⁹⁹

Figure 4 below summarises how transnationalism has been defined by different scholars, such as Porter, Schiller, Vertovec and Itzigsohn, over time. Tedeschi, Vorobeve and Jauhiainen's article is a study of the current debate on transnationalism; it illustrates the different types of transnationalism, which have many criteria, such as the type of actors involved (organisations or private citizens); the type of activities

⁹² IOM, International Dialogue on Migration Intersessional Workshop, p. 2

⁹³ Cassarino, Theorising Return Migration, p.262

⁹⁴ , p. 262

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 262

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 263

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 263

⁹⁸ Miriam Tedeschi, Ekaterina Vorobeve and Jussi S. Jauhiainen, Transnationalism, Current Debates and New Perspectives, GeoJournal 87 (2) 2022: 603–619, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-020-10271-8>, p. 603

⁹⁹ Linda Jakubowicz, Transnationalism – Migration – Integration. Migration and Nation State in the Modern World Order through the Prism of the Concept of Transnationalism, SIAK-Journal – Journal for Police Science and Practice 2 (2012): 4–18, https://doi.org/10.7396/IE_2012_A, p.5

(economic, political and sociocultural); the degree of integration/segregation; the degree of cosmopolitanism (the actors build connections with more than two countries); the degree of emotional belonging (the feeling of belonging to one country) and the intensity of connection with the home or other country.¹⁰⁰

Figure 4. Main Definitions of Transnationalism.

Form of transnationalism	Description
<i>Transnationalism: cross border activities and social processes</i>	„migration creates networks and links between people and institutions across borders”
<i>Transnationalism: economic, sociocultural and political</i>	„transnational entrepreneurs mobilize their contacts across borders in search of suppliers, capital, markets and promote national identity or facilitate cultural events - political activities of party officials, government functionaries, or community leaders whose aim to gain political power”
<i>Broad transnationalism</i>	„refers to a sporadic physical movement between the two countries and occasional personal involvement, but nevertheless include both countries as reference points”
<i>Narrow transnationalism</i>	„refers to individuals engaged in economic, political, social, or cultural practices, involving regular cross boarder movement, high institutionalization, or constant personal participation”
<i>Minor transnationalism</i>	„cultural transversalism includes minor cultural articulations in relations to major one, as well as minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether”
<i>Reverse transnationalism</i>	„second generation return to homeland and their links to the country of birth”
<i>Transnationalism ‘from below’</i>	„migrant practices relating to their country of origin in economic, cultural and political terms”
<i>Transnationalism ‘from above’</i>	„home country policies that channel the transnational activities of migrants”
<i>Rejection-based (reactive) Transnationalism</i>	„symbolic: identification with the home country as a reaction to the experience of discrimination and racism - economic: investment at origin country, so gaining satisfaction and prestige in their home society”

Source: Tedeschi, Vorobeve and Jauhiainen, *Transnationalism: Current Debates and New Perspectives* (2022).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Tedeschi, Vorobeve and S. Jauhiainen, *Transnationalism: Current Debates and New Perspectives*, p. 608

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.609

Transnationalism means partnerships must be strengthened for all concerned and this means involving the relevant stakeholders.¹⁰² These stakeholders include home and host governments, local authorities, migrants and their families, migrant networks and associations, civil society and the private sector.¹⁰³

To sum things up, transnationalism shows the strong links between migrants and their families, as well as the way migrants meet each other to form a supporting group. Transnationalism is concerned with cross-border activities, such as sociocultural, political and economic ones, which affect the identity of individuals in their everyday lives. In this process, migrants are able to take advantage of their abilities, both in terms of knowing how to do so and in terms of putting this knowledge into practice. Migration is seen as circular, so return migration is not necessarily the end of a successful or failed migration. Returning migration takes place when resources and conditions are advantageous and is not necessarily permanent.

3.2.2 Circular migration as manifestation of transnational ties

In the context of transnationalism, as already mentioned, the phenomenon of migration is regarded as a circular process, with people moving in and out of countries as they seek new opportunities and better lives. The term 'circular migration' is used to describe the repeated migration movement/experiences of individuals between the home country and other destination countries.¹⁰⁴ In other words, this movement, is characterized by a multiple migration and return circles, including and sharing parts of people's daily lives between home and destination countries.¹⁰⁵

Circular migration differs from the process of return migration because return migration is defined as a single movement/process of emigration and return.¹⁰⁶ Also, circular migration is distinct from commuting, as far as, the process of commuting refers to the quotidian movement of the people, which ends with their return to their place of residence at the end of the day.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² IOM, International Dialogue on Migration Intersessional Workshop, p.5

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.5

¹⁰⁴ Graeme Hugo, What We Know About Circular Migration and Enhanced Mobility, Policy Brief No. 7, Migration Policy Institute (MPI), 2013, p.2

¹⁰⁵ Hugo, What We Know About Circular Migration and Enhanced Mobility, p. 2

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.2

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.2

Another definition describes circular migration as repeated movement of people between two or more countries.¹⁰⁸ The characteristic of the concept of circular migration emphasises the constant people's involvement in this movement/flow (in both home and destination countries), for the reasons such as for e.g. study or work.¹⁰⁹ In the relevant literature on the subject, main characteristic of circular migration is the notion of return, signifying here the repeated movement back and forth between the countries.¹¹⁰

Circular migration is considered as a profitable process for three parts of actors involved in this process: for those immigrants seeking for better job opportunities, for the destination countries because needing to fill open vacancies and for the home countries because they are receiving migrant remittances.¹¹¹ Different scholars emphasise the importance of all the parties involved in the circular migration process, can benefit from it; to profit from this win- win situation, negotiations are needed between host, destination countries and migrants, focusing on establishing fair conditions for all parties involved.¹¹²

On the other hand, circular migration can also have negative effects on migrants and in their countries of origin and destination.¹¹³ Integration problems in the host country can arise and labour shortages due to circular migration can cause more poverty in home countries, sharpening brain drain problems because as highly skilled migrants may not return.¹¹⁴ Also, due circular migration, migrants are confronted with potential exploitation risks.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Magdaléna Přívarová, Circular Migration of Highly Skilled Labor in EU Countries and Its Impact on Migration Policies, *Economy & Business* 18, no. 1 (2024): 89–96, <https://doi.org/10.62991/eb1996485205>, p.91

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 91

¹¹⁰ Hugo, What We Know About Circular Migration and Enhanced Mobility, p.2

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 6-7

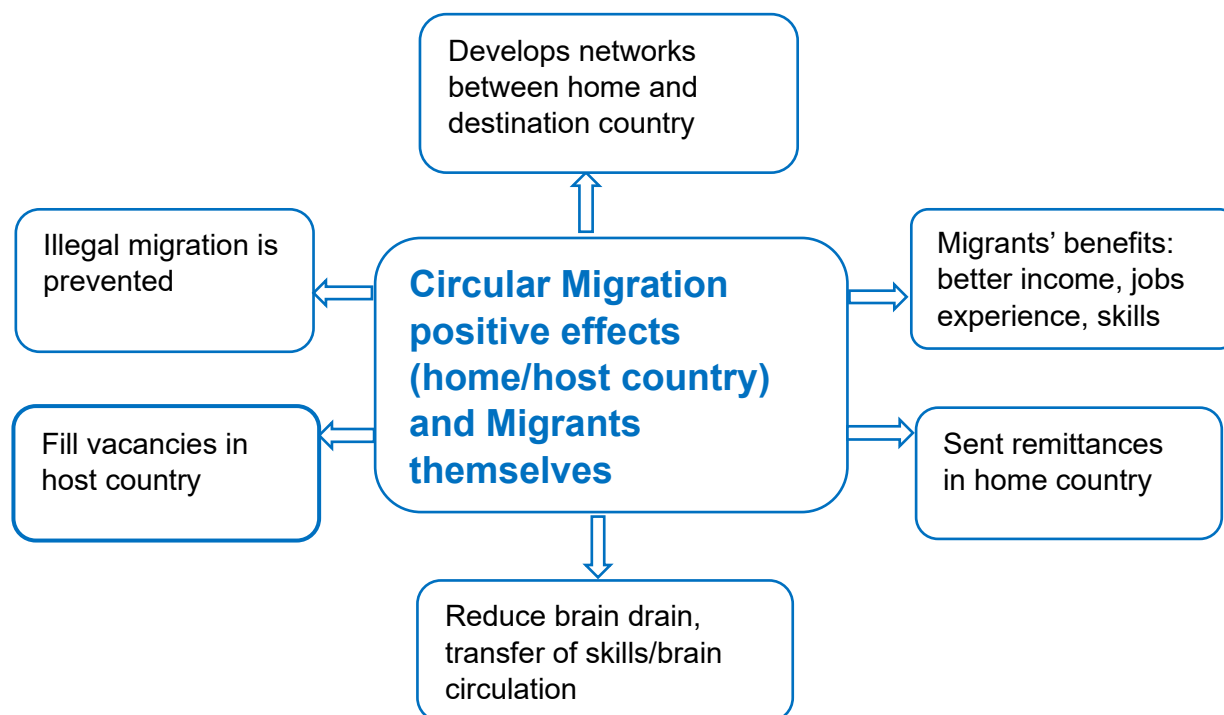
¹¹² Přívarová, Circular Migration of Highly Skilled Labor in EU Countries and Its Impact on Migration Policies, p. 91

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 91

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 91

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 91

Figure 5. Positive Effects of Circular Migration.



Source: Author's illustration based on examination of articles about Circular Migration in Kodra (2021)¹¹⁶ and Hugo (2013).¹¹⁷

In concluding this discussion, circular migration represents a component of migratory process, as a repeat movement forth and back. The economic contribution¹¹⁸ of circular migrants plays a significant role for the country of origin, because circular migrants send a greater amount of money home than other migrants who reside permanently in the host country. Also circulating migrants help to build international social networks, sharing information from host countries with their home countries and connecting job seekers with employers.¹¹⁹ The host country also benefits from circular migration in several ways: firstly, it helps to fill vacancies, secondly, it reduces illegal immigration and thirdly, it contributes to reducing population ageing.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Mejola Kodra, Circular Migration and Triple Benefits: The Case of Albanian Migrants to Italy, Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences 12, no. 4 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2021-0025>, p. 32-33

¹¹⁷ Hugo, What We Know About Circular Migration and Enhanced Mobility, p. 6-7

¹¹⁸ Kodra, Circular Migration and Triple Benefits: The Case of Albanian Migrants to Italy, p.34

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 34

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 34

3.2.3 Theorizing Diaspora as a transnational social formation

The development of transport routes, technology and international labour markets has made the movement easier and more attractive for people today. The formation of communities of immigrants living away from their homeland, known as diasporas, is also a consequence of these movements.¹²¹ In other words, the migration process is leading to the formation of diaspora communities and groups of people in the destination countries, where they go to live.

The Glossary on Migration¹²² defines diaspora as people who leave their country of origin but remain connected to it. Additionally, this glossary states that the concept encompasses more established expatriate communities, migrant workers, dual nationals and second-/third-generation migrants.¹²³ „*The Greek noun “diaspora” was coined after the verb diaspeirō (from dia, “through” and speirō, “to sow”), which literally means “to disperse” or “to scatter” (hence, by extension, “to take root elsewhere”).*”¹²⁴ According to various literature on topic, originally, the term diaspora was referred to the exile of Jewish people.¹²⁵ After that, the concept is used to describe different types of migration and the formation of communities across borders.

The concept of a diaspora is complex to define; the term is often used in policy documents to refer to nationals living outside their country of origin.¹²⁶ Conceptually, diaspora differs from migrant population even when the definition is interpreted as broadly as possible.¹²⁷

The term diaspora has been described and conceptualised in different ways by theorists at different times. Three¹²⁸ principal characteristics of diaspora definitions are identified:

¹²¹ Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, *Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review*, Journal of Political Science 21 (2021): 100–108. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v21i0.35268>, p.100

¹²² European Commission, *Asylum and Migration Glossary 2.0*, p.50

¹²³ Ibid., p. 50

¹²⁴ Ato Quayson und Girish Daswani , *Introduction – Diaspora and Transnationalism, Scapes, Scales, and Scopes*, in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*, John Wiley & Sons, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118320792.ch1>, p.8

¹²⁵ Quayson und Daswani, *Introduction – Diaspora and Transnationalism, Scapes, Scales, and Scopes*, p.9

¹²⁶ A. Qaisrani, B. Perchinig, J. Jokić-Bornstein, M. Hendow, V. Bilger, and V. Kobzeva, *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans*, ECONDIA Final Report, ICMPD, Vienna, 2023, p.21

¹²⁷ Qaisrani et al., *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans*, p.21

¹²⁸ Nagendra, *Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review*, p.101

- i. the causes of migration or dispersal: (Jews dispersal or Palestinians), also newer concept as trade diasporas (Chinese) or labour migration diasporas (Turkish, Mexicans).
- ii. cross-border experiences: explain the link/experience between homeland and destination country
- iii. the incorporation of migrants into the second cultural space: integration in the host country/society. The older notion of diaspora explains that the migrants do not integrate socially, maintaining so boundaries and a newer view of diaspora concept, accents on the cultural hybridity issue in the wake of distribution.¹²⁹

Exploring various theoretical approaches about diaspora, it is possible to examine four phases¹³⁰: the first one includes only the victimhood of diaspora: in this classical initial phase, the immigrants have been involuntarily sent out from the home country; the second phase expands the victimhood of diaspora by including the cultural, social and historical diversity elements of immigrants; the third phase concentrates on formation of cultural identity by decomposing the bipolar perceptions of the home and host country; the last one, the fourth phase, describes the importance of the origin and the historical exploitation of the individuals of poor countries.¹³¹

The concept of diaspora implies an interpretation and understanding of the relations between the origin and host country, from the perspective of immigrants who left (voluntarily or not) and at the same time from the perspective of the host society, where they live.¹³² And it is crucial to understand that diasporas must not be seen as an isolated entity but as a result of various convergences of people, ideas or cultural orientations.¹³³

Recently, the term diaspora has been prevalent both in academic research and public discourses. Diasporas are being used more in discussions on migration and development today than two decades ago; this is because policymakers and

¹²⁹ Thomas Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners?* in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, IMISCOE Research, Amsterdam University Press, 2010, ISBN 978-90-8964-238-7, e-ISBN 978-90-4851-266-9, p.13

¹³⁰ Nagendra, *Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review*, p.100-101

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.100-101

¹³² Quayson und Daswani, *Introduction – Diaspora and Transnationalism*, p. 3

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 4

international organizations want them to be involved in development and investment in their countries of origin.¹³⁴ So, many governments or nationalist groups tend to use the diaspora term for both controlling individuals outside the country and following agendas of nation-state-building, also for different political projects.¹³⁵

To draw conclusions about this part of the work, it is important to note that the diaspora concept has been part of a transforming process, starting from the traumatic experience of forced migration (the dispersion of people) to the formation of cultural identity, by examining the contrasting perceptions of the home and host countries. After that, the concept gradually began to integrate different forms of voluntarily (or not) cross borders movements and settlements, including also the historical, cultural and political diversity of immigrants, in its conceptual explanation.

3.2.4 The connection between Transnationalism and Diaspora

Transnationalism and diaspora, as already mentioned, are key concepts that help us understand terms such as nation and identity, in today's globalised world, where people and ideas are increasingly mobile and interconnected. However, diaspora is already a popular and old term, transnationalism is comparatively new.¹³⁶ The two concepts have ambiguous boundaries and are often related to each other and due to their continual overlap in definition and meaning; the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism cannot really be separated.¹³⁷ The terms diaspora and transnationalism describe both processes that cross borders, and the difference lies in the fact that, the term of diaspora is used more often to describe a religious or national group/community, living outside their country of origin, while transnationalism is more used to describe all types of migrant social formation, such as transnational networks, groups and organizations.¹³⁸

According to various sources of literature, in order to discuss the concepts of transnationalism and diaspora, it is important to first clarify the question of crossing borders, as this marks a turning point for both terms. To this end, it is important to

¹³⁴ Malin Frankenhaeuser and Marion Noack, Promoting Diaspora Engagement: What Have We Learnt? Working Paper, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), 2015, p. 6

¹³⁵ Faist, Diaspora and transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners? p. 11

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 11

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 11

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 9-10

consider globalisation studies. These concepts overlap with globalisation theories, in explaining new forms of migration, mobility and mediatisation.¹³⁹ While globalization is seen as a universal and worldwide process/phenomenon, transnationalism and diaspora consider the phenomenon in terms of an explicit social/geographical space (a specific set of countries/regions or states).¹⁴⁰

As indicated, both concepts have similarities and differences. Focusing now on the similarities¹⁴¹, diaspora and transnationalism are flexible terms that refer to cross borders' issues; as previously mentioned, both terms describe the connections to the country of origin and the integration of migrants in the host country. Literature on the topic uses the term diaspora to refer to the relationship between countries of origin, dispersed people and host countries; transnationalism focuses on integration in the new destination country.¹⁴² In other words, diaspora studies focus on the particularities of diasporic communities, while the transnationalism approach focuses on the integration of migrants and their transnational activities.

The differences between diaspora and transnationalism concern the fact, that transnationalism is more a broader term than diaspora in two aspects¹⁴³: scope of the group and narrower concept of transnational community. Diaspora concerns the ethnic/religious/national groups and communities, while transnationalism focuses on the issue of all varieties of social formations/movements.¹⁴⁴ So is diaspora often more closely related to a specific form of transnational organization, a specific relation between a country of origin and a set of destination countries; while transnational community includes an expansive radius of phenomena.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Quayson und Daswani, Introduction – Diaspora and Transnationalism, p. 2

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 14-15

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 20-21

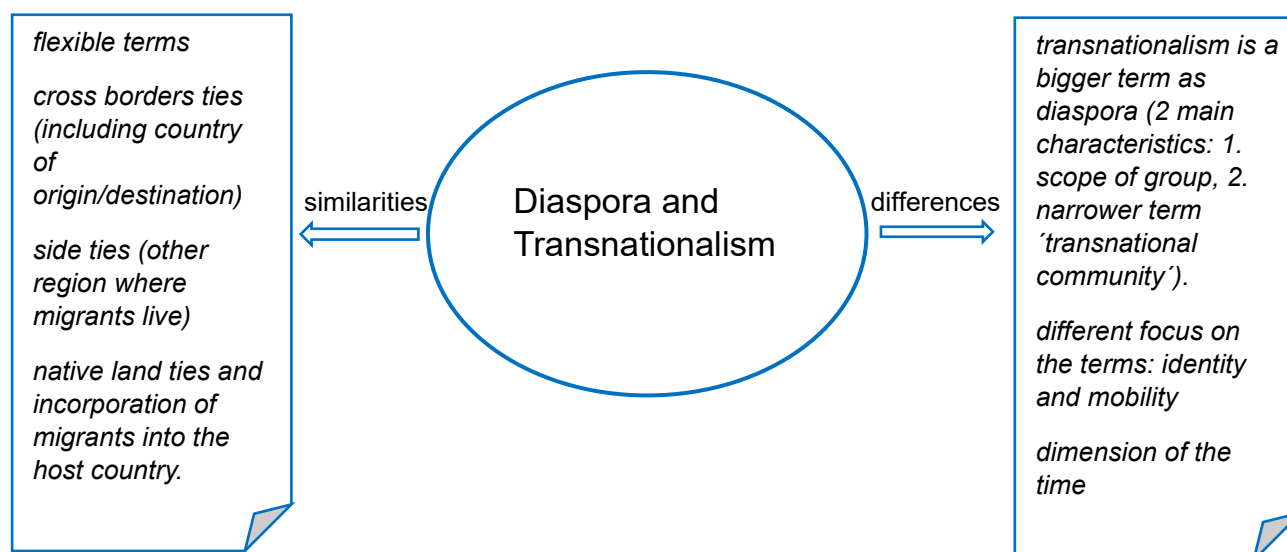
¹⁴² Ibid., p. 20-21

¹⁴³ Faist, Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of Dance Partners?, p. 21-22

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 21-22

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 21-22

Figure 6. Similarities and Differences Diaspora and Transnationalism.



Source: Author's illustration based on Faist, *Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of Dance Partners?* (2010) ¹⁴⁶

Another distinction concerns the relationship between mobility and identity; diaspora focuses more on the characteristics of a united identity while transnationalism focuses on cross border mobility.¹⁴⁷ The next distinction emphasizes the dimension of the time; the difference between the two terms is that diaspora focuses on a multi-generational relationship, while transnationalism focuses on contemporary migrant movements.¹⁴⁸

3.2.5 Discovering Political Transnationalism: migrants being politically active

Literature on the topic shows that migrants can compare the political, socio-cultural, and economic effects and factors of their country of origin and their host country; they may then emphasise their desire to interact with people from their home country in different contexts; may evaluate their experiences by comparing the local way of doing things, using so their own home country as a reference point.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Faist, *Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of Dance Partners?*, p. 20-22

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 21-22

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 21-22

¹⁴⁹ Özge Bilgili and Marta Bivand Erdal, *Migrant Transnationalism: IMISCOE Short Reader*, IMISCOE Research Series. Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-91554-3>, p.80

The ways that migrants engage with politics can be different. This could include participating in protests, joining a local association, voting in elections in their home country, or campaigning for political issues there.¹⁵⁰ The political activism of migrants creates crucial discussions on citizenship, belonging and loyalties in multiple nation-states, making political transnationalism a contested topic.¹⁵¹

Transnational activities¹⁵² refer to a set of activities that can be categorized as political transnationalism: hometown civic communities founded by migrants; alliances of immigrant committees with home country political associations; fundraisers for home country electoral candidates; consular officials and representatives of national political parties abroad; dual nationality granted by home country governments and migrants elected to home country legislatures.

Let's take a look at some of the specific ways in which migrants may engage in political transnationalism, as discussed in the literature on this topic. Transnational political activity of migrants can be divided into two types¹⁵³:

- i. homelands-directed politics: where migrants engage in activities in their host country to create social change in their country of origin. Here, migrants can establish relationships with the government of their destination country to influence policies in their homeland.
- ii. locally specific transnational politics: where migrants support and work with their local community in the country they came from.

I would like now to discuss a research study, examining how migrants engage in activities in their host country to effect social change in their country of origin (the first type of transnational activities over mentioned). To say it in other words, in this aspect, migrants can establish relationships with the government of their destination country to influence policies in their homeland.

I refer to Džihic's policy analyses (Policy Brief 2024)¹⁵⁴ about the new forms of transnational political activity of the Bosnian diaspora in Austria. The author's research

¹⁵⁰ Bilgili and Bivand Erdal, *Migrant Transnationalism*, p.81

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 81

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 81

¹⁵⁴ Vedran Džihic, *Die bosnische Diaspora in Österreich zwischen politischer Apathie im Herkunftsland und neuen Formen der politischen Beteiligung im Aufnahmeland*, Policy Brief Nr. 10, Universität für Weiterbildung Krems (UWK), 2024, 1–18.

focused on the Bosnian diaspora in Austria. Austria has been a popular destination for Bosnians for over 60 years, particularly during the Bosnian War of the 1990s, when large numbers of refugees arrived in Austria.¹⁵⁵ Many Bosnian people had already arrived and settled in Austria during the guest worker movement of the 1960s. This master's thesis also analyses the issue of guest workers in the section on the Western Balkans.

The findings of this policy analysis from Džihic revealed that „a new form of relatively strong, hybrid, ethnically based transnational political activism”¹⁵⁶ emerged within the Bosnian diaspora in Austria, after 2000. The author highlights that this new form of participation exists in a fluid „Sowohl-als-auch”¹⁵⁷ space between Bosnia Herzegovina and Austria.

3.2.6 Diaspora Engagement Policies: diaspora as a key policy actor

Research shows that political transnationalism is important for understanding the interactions between origin states and their diaspora communities; according to various literature on the topic, diaspora engagement policy refers to national government proposals, on how diaspora communities can become involved.¹⁵⁸ Many official documents recognize the importance of the diaspora's political and economic contributions to their home countries. Diaspora engagement policies aim to protect diaspora members, strengthen national identity, encourage stronger links with the country of origin, and promote economic and social development.¹⁵⁹

Several relevant official policy proposals¹⁶⁰ from (United Nation, IOM, OECD, World Bank and other relevant studies) have been created to contribute to this debate and to help governments and policymakers to deal with the issue of diaspora. These proposals contribute to understanding the role of migrants and to developing official policies in this direction.¹⁶¹ For example, since 2006, the UN has played an important

¹⁵⁵ Džihic, Die bosnische Diaspora in Österreich, p.5

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 6

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 6

¹⁵⁸ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt? p.7

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.7

¹⁶⁰ Agnieszka Weinar, Instrumentalising Diasporas for Development: International and European Policy Discourses, in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, IMISCOE Research, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, ISBN 978-90-8964-238-7, e-ISBN 978-90-4851-266-9, p.73

¹⁶¹ Weinar, *Instrumentalising Diasporas for Development*, p.73

role, as a mediating actor between home and host countries in developing such policies, aiming to help governments managing and identifying problems in their current diaspora policies in order to develop successful, effective strategies.¹⁶²

These international policy proposals in terms of migration and development have attracted the interest of many countries around the world; many of them have begun to adopt these policies and to develop diaspora strategies (as for e.g African Union, India, Philippines).¹⁶³ In the European Union's migration policies, the concept of diaspora is described more closely than by international organisations, emphasizing the importance of the membership for the diasporic community.¹⁶⁴ The process of engaging with diaspora is complicated and it impacts a wide range of themes and sectors so far a matter of concern for national and government bodies.¹⁶⁵

The terms diaspora, transnational community and migrants' communities have been used by policymakers to describe the diasporic actors in the official documents.¹⁶⁶ In the main relevant policy documents, the diasporic actors have been described as individuals, who act on a purely voluntary basis, guided by their own principles.¹⁶⁷

To be a diasporic actor in policies, individuals must meet three¹⁶⁸ main requirements: the ethnic/national origin; the ability to participate and contribute to the growth of their home/origin country; and the willingness to do so any time. One of the most relevant aspects of diasporic actors is its economic relevance, due to its supporting role benefitting the home country and other members of the group.¹⁶⁹

The term diaspora is frequently used in the field of political science to refer to the political engagement of certain groups and the process of their re-identification.¹⁷⁰ Politically speaking, it describes a variety of groups and has evolved from an abstract noun to a concept used to describe diasporic communities, organizations and individuals.¹⁷¹ The personification¹⁷² of the diaspora, has the capacity to act as an agent

¹⁶² Weinar, Instrumentalising Diasporas for Development, p.73

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 79

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 80

¹⁶⁵ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt? , p.7

¹⁶⁶ Weinar, Instrumentalising Diasporas for Development, p.78

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 78

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 86

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 86

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 76

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 76

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 76

of development policy. The governments develop migration policies to control their own borders, to regulate the migration flows in their countries as well as develop policies for their diaspora communities abroad, in order to achieve political and economic goals on an international scale.¹⁷³

One approach is to differentiate diaspora policies according to the main instruments applied, which can be divided into three categories: economic, political, or legal.¹⁷⁴ Another approach is to analyse the differentiation based on the main objectives, which often exist in parallel with each other; in this case three main categories are identified to describe the diaspora engagement policies¹⁷⁵:

- i. capacity-building policies: diaspora as an integral part of the national society (transnational society including citizenship but also the descendant of migrants, considered as a representative nation-building practice, e.g. Dua Lipa was granted the Albanian citizenship).
- ii. extending rights to diaspora: rights related to political integration but also civil and social (parliamentary representation, extraterritorial vote rights, citizenship rights).
- iii. extraction obligations from the diaspora: economic and political benefits.

Closer analysis of these points shows that the diaspora is seen as part of the national identity, as evidenced by Dua Lipa's citizenship.¹⁷⁶ States can also boost national identity among the diaspora, by offering language courses and celebrating national, cultural and religious events with them (e.g., at embassies).¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, states may establish institutions to govern diaspora communities and these institutions may include government offices, as well as other initiatives such as monitoring, building transnational networks and setting up consular and consultative bodies.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Bilgili and Bivand Erdal, *Migrant Transnationalism*, p. 84

¹⁷⁴ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, *Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt?* p.7

¹⁷⁵ Bilgili and Bivand Erdal, *Migrant Transnationalism*, p.84

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85

The second category focuses on extending the rights of the diaspora. Notably, countries extend these rights to migrants abroad in order to encourage them to engage more actively in politics.¹⁷⁹ These rights include political representation, extraterritorial voting rights, citizenship rights, welfare protection, tourism services, and property ownership rights.¹⁸⁰

The third point of the diaspora' engagement policy emphasizes economic and political benefits. The extraction of obligations is linked to migration as well as development debates having not only a strong economic dimension, but also a strong political dimension.¹⁸¹ Diasporas often assert influence on policy in host countries and shape the "political image" of the home country and furthermore, migrants are encouraged to act as lobbyists.¹⁸² Engaging with diasporas is complex; it affects many sectors and is a concern to national institutions and different levels of government.¹⁸³

3.2.7 External voting

External voting as part of the diaspora engagement policy concerns the right of migrants living abroad to vote in elections in their home country.¹⁸⁴ A significant number of governments have already established such policies, enabling their individuals to vote in the country in which they currently reside. Citizenship of the home country is here an essential prerequisite for voting, but many governments also allow dual citizenship.¹⁸⁵ The practice of external voting as part of the transnational electoral process can be considered as a form of remittance.¹⁸⁶ The option to vote in elections while living abroad can be interpreted as a form of political remittance, „defined as the transfer of political principles, vocabulary and practices between two or more places with which migrants and their descendants have a connection”.¹⁸⁷ According to this, the concept of political remittances is understood as an act to improve democratic values back in the home country.¹⁸⁸

¹⁷⁹ Bilgili and Bivand Erdal, *Migrant Transnationalism*, p. 85

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p.85

¹⁸³ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, *Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt?* p. 7

¹⁸⁴ Bilgili and Bivand Erdal, *Migrant Transnationalism*, p.85

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.85

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.86

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.87

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.87

Diasporas are involved in many areas, including philanthropy, development, humanitarian aid, politics, society, trade, tourism, remittances, investment and business.¹⁸⁹ The following four areas¹⁹⁰ are important for projects involving diaspora engagement for development: „getting to know the diaspora; supporting states in developing diaspora engagement policies; empowering the diaspora; and creating spaces for interaction.” At this point, the conclusion is that new ways of working are needed for diaspora engagement policies; this is because diaspora issues cover many areas, require new forms of collaboration and „it is important to find the right interlocutors, raise awareness of diaspora issues, hold consultations, and strengthen inter-agency cooperation.”¹⁹¹



4. Case study: Albania

4.1 People leaving Albania

Migration remains an important and challenging issue for many countries around the world, affecting both countries of origin and host countries. Various literature suggests that talented and skilled individuals are essential for a country's development, as they help advance its economy, society and politics. The migration of professionals to other countries for better work and living conditions, is one of the main reasons why developing countries, like Albania, are currently struggling to attract talent.¹⁹²

„The term migration comes from the Latin term for ‘migraine’ and means ‘to move’ and it is a phenomenon that stems directly from people having the freedom and opportunity to move from one place to another.”¹⁹³ It is known that factors such as a high quality of life, better job prospects and educational opportunities in the destination country can motivate people to move there. In their research study on the migration of

¹⁸⁹ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt? p. 8

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 8-16

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.17

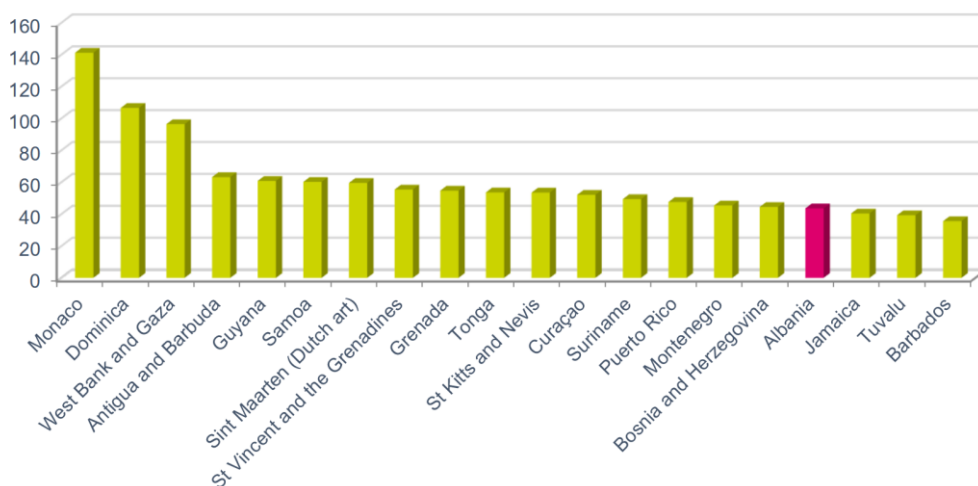
¹⁹² Megi Marku, The Effect of the Brain Drain in the Sustainable Development of Albania, Conference Paper, ResearchGate, 2022, accessed 29 November 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359894010_The_effect_of_the_brain_drain_in_the_sustainable_development_of_Albania.

¹⁹³ Juventina Ngjela, Edvaldo Begotaraj and Natalja Qana, Population Movements and Migration as a Trend: The Case of Albania, Journal of Balkan Studies 2, no. 1 (2022): 65–81, <http://doi.org/10.51331/A020>, p.65

students from Albania, Russell King and Ilir Gedeshi state that „Albania has been described as an ideal laboratory for the study of migration”.¹⁹⁴ They “justify” this statement on several grounds¹⁹⁵: first, the scale of the outflow since the early 1990s is massive; second, the exodus has a unique character since 1990; third, emigration has affected all Albanian society and all regions of the country; fourth, migration is ongoing, but less of a migration of poverty, desperation and protest.

This statistical graphic (fig. 7) shows that, compared to its population, Albania has one of the highest numbers of emigrants in the world; according to this data, Albania is in 17th place.¹⁹⁶

Figure 7. Albania: 17th Place Worldwide in number of migrants relative to its population.



Source: Gedeshi, *How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania* (2021)¹⁹⁷

Albanians are emigrating for the following factors¹⁹⁸: as low wages, better working conditions as well as leisure time, better access to education in the host country and political motives. The graphic below (fig.8), from the National Diaspora Strategy, shows in percentage terms the reasons why Albanians are leaving.

¹⁹⁴ Russell King and Ilir Gëdeshi, *The Actual and Potential Migration of Students from Albania: A Putative Brain Drain?*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office Tirana, 2020, p.8

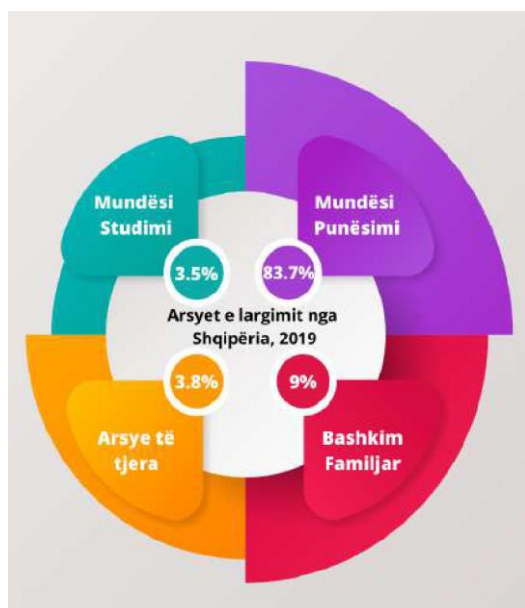
¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.8

¹⁹⁶ Ilir Gedeshi, *How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania*, European Training Foundation / Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw), 2021, accessed 21 August 2025. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/migration_albania.pdf, p.11

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.11

¹⁹⁸ Lindita Kiri, *Global Migration Strategies: Albanian Migration after 1990*, *Balkan Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 9, no. 2 (2023): 89–96, <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjir-2023-0010>, p.92

Figure 8. Reasons for Leaving.



Source: Republic of Albania, *Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025 (2020)*¹⁹⁹.

This data indicates that the main reason for emigration is to find a better job (83.7%). 9% of emigrants move for family reunification, while 3.5% do so for study and 3.8% for other reasons.²⁰⁰

Gedeshi and King²⁰¹ stated that, the desire to emigrate, is high among the Albanian population. The authors presented the findings of the Gallup World Poll survey, which placed Albania third among the potential emigrant nations (fig.9); the graph below also illustrates how the desire to emigrate grew by 20 percentage points between 2013 and 2016 in comparison to 2010 and 2012.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Republic of Albania, *Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025*, p.15

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.15

²⁰¹ Ilir Gedeshi and Russell King, *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, UNDP, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.16488.93449>, p.12

²⁰² Ibid., p.12

Figure 9. Albania 3rd Place in desire to emigrate.

Country	Desire to migrate		Difference
	2010–2012	2013–2016	
Sierra Leone	51	62	11*
Haiti	53	56	3
Albania	36	56	20*
Liberia	53	54	1
Congo (Kinshasa)	37	50	13*
Dominican Republic	49	50	1
Honduras	41	48	7*
Armenia	40	47	7*
Syria	32	46	14*
El Salvador	34	46	12*
Ghana	40	45	5
Nigeria	41	43	2
Jamaica	43	40	-3
Congo (Brazzaville)	38	39	1
Togo	41	39	-2
Sudan	29	37	8
Guinea	33	36	3
Bosnia-Herzegovina	20	36	16*
Puerto Rico	n/a	35	n/a
Moldova	32	35	3

Source: Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain, Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora* (2018)²⁰³

The Albanian migration has been a long-term phenomenon²⁰⁴, with three²⁰⁵ peaks during the 1990s. *The first wave* of migration saw people choose to leave Albania by boat; after plural elections in March 1991²⁰⁶, around 25,000 people left the country for the coast of Italy. The main features of the first peak of migration included large numbers of people leaving, mainly with an illegal status as and young men migrating to neighbouring countries Greece and Italy for economic reasons.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain, Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, p.12

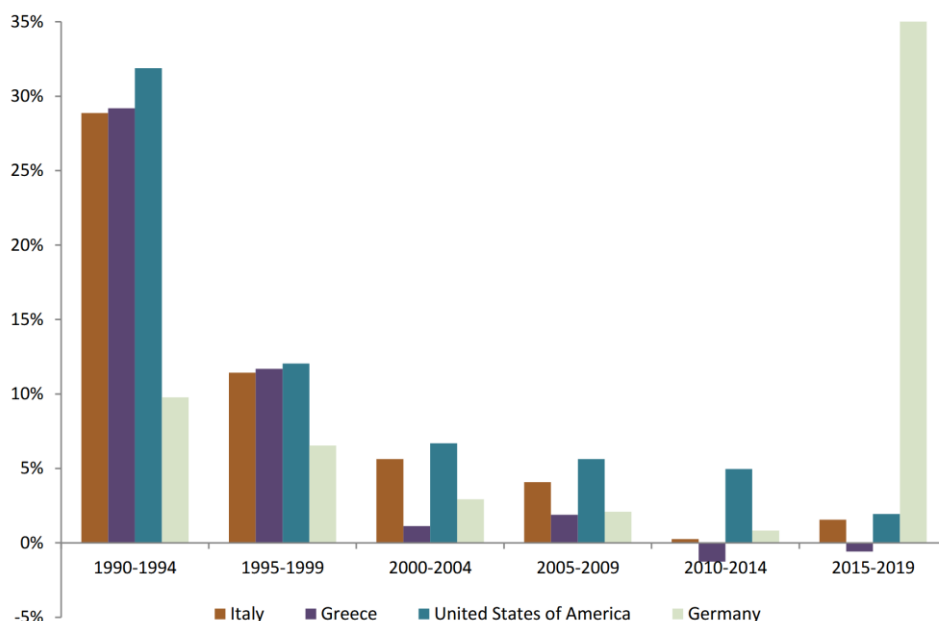
²⁰⁴ Gedeshi, *How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania*, p.5

²⁰⁵ Gedeshi und King, *Research Study into Brain Gain : Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, p.10

²⁰⁶ Ngjela, Begotaraj and Qana, *Population Movements and Migration as a Trend*, p.65

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.65

Figure 10. Growth Rates of Albanian Emigration (1990 - 2019).



Source: INSTAT, *Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra* (2020) ²⁰⁸

As the Fig.10 (*Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra*, INSTAT 2020) shows, the number of emigrants to Italy, Greece and the USA has increased intensively during the five-year periods 1990-1994 and 1995-1999, which constitute the period of mass emigration of Albanians.²⁰⁹

Further, this data shows, that during the years 1990-1994, the number of Albanian emigrants to Greece, Italy and the USA increased each year by about 30% of the number of the previous year and these rates fell to about 11% during the period 1995-1999.²¹⁰

After 2000, the growth rate of the number of Albanian emigrants to Greece dropped rapidly and reaching negative levels during the period 2010-2019; in Italy and the US, the yearly growth rate of immigration fell to steadily to about 3% between 2015-2019.²¹¹ Albanian immigration to Germany²¹² grew differently than in Italy, Greece and the USA; it increased by about 10% a year between 1990 and 1994, then slowed to around 1% a year between 2010 and 2014 and since 2015, it has increased at about 35% a year,

²⁰⁸ INSTAT, Albanian Institute of Statistics, *Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra*, 2020, accessed 30 September 2025. <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/7848/diaspora-ne-shifra-2020.pdf>. p.16

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p.16

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.16

²¹¹ Ibid., p.16-17

²¹² Ibid., p.17

making Germany so far a, main destination. To conclude, Fig.10 illustrates that the number of Albanian immigrants in Germany rose from 1.3% (2015) to 4.2% (2019).²¹³ This next statistical data (fig. 11), which is also taken from the 2020 INSTAT report on the diaspora, shows the main host countries (Italy, Greece, USA, Germany, Canada, UK, Belgium, other countries) that Albanian emigrants settled in between 1995 and 2019.²¹⁴

Figure 11. Main Destinations Countries of Albanian Emigrants (Italy, Greece, USA, Germany, Canada, UK, Belgium, other countries (in percent, 1995–2019).

Viti	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
Itali	31,9%	33,3%	37,4%	39,3%	39,6%	39,4%
Greqi	45,9%	48,6%	43,8%	41,5%	38,7%	35,3%
ShBA	4,5%	4,8%	5,7%	6,4%	8,1%	8,2%
Gjermani	1,7%	1,4%	1,4%	1,3%	1,3%	4,2%
Kanada	0,7%	0,8%	1,0%	1,2%	1,4%	1,4%
Mbretëria e Bashkuar	0,2%	0,3%	0,8%	0,7%	0,9%	0,9%
Belgjikë	0,4%	0,3%	0,3%	0,5%	0,8%	0,9%
Vendet e tjera	14,8%	10,7%	9,7%	9,0%	9,2%	9,7%

Source: INSTAT, *Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra* (2020) ²¹⁵

The second wave was marked by legalisation, family unification, integration and economic improvement.²¹⁶ Between 2001 and 2010, migration flows matured, with more family reunification and regularisation schemes²¹⁷ leading in Italy and Greece in the late 1990s and early 2000s led to rapid settlement and integration. The flows continued, but at a lower intensity due to greater economic stability in Albania.²¹⁸

It can be stated that, several factors, including the global economic crisis, caused then significant changes to Albanian migration between 2011 and 2020.²¹⁹ During this period, people emigrated primarily due to a lack of educational prospects and opportunities in Albania; Greece and Italy become therefore less popular destinations for Albanian migrants.²²⁰ Germany and other Western European countries, as well as

²¹³ INSTAT, *Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra*, 2020, p.17

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.15

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15

²¹⁶ Gedeshi, *How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania*, p.5

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 5

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 5

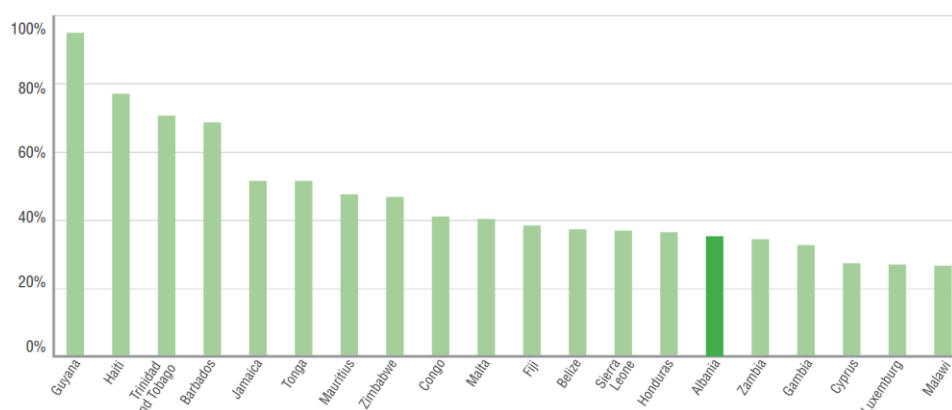
North America, are set to become the main host countries for highly qualified and well-educated Albanian migrants in the coming years.²²¹

4.1.1 Albania's migratory journey since the 90s: the Brain Drain

Following the dissolution of the communist regime in the 1990s, a significant number of Albanian professionals have moved to other countries, thereby precipitating an increase in the phenomenon of brain drain. As mentioned earlier, the 1990s saw the first big migratory wave in the country, characterised by a general exodus and brain drain. Among those who emigrated, were also well-educated and highly qualified Albanians, seeking for better economic opportunities in developed countries.

The World Bank's 2016 Migration and Remittances Factbook puts Albania at 15th place (fig.12) worldwide when it comes to the proportion of the population that has received a tertiary education.²²²

Figure 12. Albania among top countries for tertiary-educated migrants.



Source: Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain, Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora* (2018) ²²³

The emigration of highly skilled individuals from Albania, has had and still has a negative impact on the country's economy, affecting both the social and political aspects; the main reasons²²⁴ given for leaving are economic and political factors, a better quality of life, education and family related reasons. Highly skilled people from

²²¹ Gedeshi, How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania, p. 5

²²² Gedeshi und King, *Research Study into Brain Gain : Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, p.10

²²³ Ibid., p.20

²²⁴ Kiri, *Global Migration Strategies: Albanian Migration after 1990*, p.92

Albania are migrating due to low wages, poor career prospects, poor working conditions, political pressure and instability and a weak institutional structure in scientific research.²²⁵

The departure of the highly skilled has been associated with a decline in population and a loss in the young labour force across various sectors.²²⁶ The aspiration to achieve a higher quality of life, joined with an abundance of employment opportunities, has resulted in a significant number of professionals opting for international mobility.²²⁷ Statistics²²⁸ on this topic show that about 2000 - 4000 students leave Albania each year to study abroad, resulting in the loss of human resources. Also, further data on this subject reveal that, since 1990, almost half of professors and scientists have left the country.²²⁹ Further studies and research on Albanian brain drain phenomenon, show that most of the people who left, had already completed bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies.²³⁰

The Albanian skilled migrant can be categorised into three distinct groups²³¹:

- i. the first group consists of skilled people who emigrated mainly illegally during the two waves of mass migration 1991-1993 and 1997-1999. The decision to leave was not motivated by personal professional aspirations but rather by the necessity to ensure economic survival.
- ii. the second group comprises of skilled people who emigrated regularly between 1993-1997 and successively from 1999 onwards. The motivation for leaving Albania was due to the various factors as for example: de-industrialisation of the country, the absence of adequate employment and income opportunities, budgetary cuts of research, are known as primary push factors for migration for the second category.²³²

²²⁵ Mimoza Agolli and Aida Gugu, *Developing Brain Gain Policies in the Western Balkans: Albania*, European Movement Albania (EMA), Tirana, 2010, p.3

²²⁶ Tataj and Akbaş, *Brain Drain Toward EU and Its Impact on Labor Market: Albanian Case*, p.372

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 373

²²⁸ Marku, *The Effect of the Brain Drain in the Sustainable Development of Albania*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Ngjela, Begotaraj and Qana, *Population Movements and Migration as a Trend: The Case of Albania*, p.77

²³¹ Etleva Gërmenji and Lindita Milo, *Migration of the Skilled from Albania: Brain Drain or Brain Gain?* *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13, no. 3 (2011): 339–356, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2011.593339>, p.343

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 343

- iii. the third group includes skilled individuals who since 1991 could emigrate for study and after graduation many of them choose to stay and work in the host country.

Additionally, the scientific Albanian diaspora, the brain drain, can also be classified into three main professional groups²³³:

- i. engineers, agronomists, teachers, geologists, economists, doctors and artists
- ii. university lecturers, researchers and other professionals
- iii. Albanian students

As previously mentioned, various research studies on this topic suggest that there are new migration trends among highly educated Albanians, indicating that they are now more likely to emigrate to Germany and other advanced OECD countries than to Italy and Greece; migrants from Albania nowadays tend to be young doctors who have achieved excellent academic results and also can quickly learn the language of the host country.²³⁴

Statistics of the recent years show that the emigration of professionals from the health sector is also damaging the health system; with over 600 doctors have already left the country (mostly cardiologists, orthopaedists and paediatricians), making this sector, actually, the most severely affected by the phenomenon of the brain drain.²³⁵ As already discussed, various professionals²³⁶ from this sector, including also, nurses, dentists and pharmacists, have already left Albania in pursuit of better work opportunities abroad.

In summary, Albania has experienced brain drain since the 1990s and this continues to this day. Young people from a variety of professional backgrounds leave the country in search of better educational and employment opportunities abroad. The healthcare sector appears to be the most affected by brain drain nowadays. As previously mentioned, various factors influence the decision to leave. Most Albanian intellectuals

²³³ Gedeshi and King, Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora, p.21-23

²³⁴ Gedeshi, How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania, p.20

²³⁵ Kiri, Global Migration Strategies: Albanian Migration after 1990, p. 93

²³⁶ Ilir Gedeshi, Russell King and Amarildo Ceka, The Emigration of Medical Doctors from Albania: Brain Drain vs Return and Cooperation, Central and Eastern European Migration Review 13, no. 2 (2024): 5–25. <https://doi.org/10.54667/ceemr.202416>. , p.4

and professionals compare aspects such as the economy, politics, society, and education in Albania with those in their intended destination countries. These individuals also tend to have sufficient foreign language skills to facilitate their integration into their destination country.

4.1.2 Western Balkans Brain Drain and their Diaspora Engagement Policies

The Western Balkans has historically experienced population outflows linked to political and economic circumstances. About 21% of the Western Balkan population lives abroad, with 87% outside the region.²³⁷ According to statistical data, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the highest proportion of international migrants (48%), followed by Albania (44%), North Macedonia (38%), Kosovo (21%), Montenegro (21%) and Serbia (14.5%).²³⁸

Figure 13. WB6 Countries Emigration Rates (Global, OECD Countries).

Western Country	Emigration (Global) ⁴⁷	Emigration rate to OECD Countries ⁴⁸
Albania	44%	28%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	48%	20%
Kosovo ¹	31%	22%
Montenegro	21%	9%
North Macedonia	38%	18%
Serbia	14.5%	10%

Source: Qaisrani et al., *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans* (2023).²³⁹

The WB6 countries are experiencing mass migration due to „a mix of personal, economic, social and political factors; key drivers to migration include high

²³⁷ Qaisrani et al., *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans*, p. 27

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 27

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 31

unemployment, low wages, weak educational and training systems, poor social security measures and an ineffective health service.”²⁴⁰

The emigration from the Western Balkans was also impacted by Western Europe's labour attracting policies, which resulted in many people seeking employment and a better life in the West; at this point, it is appropriate to mention the so-called guest worker issue.²⁴¹ In order to meet industrial demand, Austria and Germany signed guest worker agreements with the former Yugoslavia (which now comprises the countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia) and around 30% of guest workers from former Yugoslavia went to Germany in the 1960s.²⁴²

As is known, Albania was not part of former Yugoslavia. The communist regime of Enver Hoxha (1945-1990) prohibited emigration. Consequently, Albania was not involved in the guest worker schemes, only a few people left the country during this period; most of them were political activists.²⁴³

The political instability at the end of the 1980s, with the fall of communism and the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, led to widespread migration from the Western Balkans; for example, in Albania, restrictions were eased in 1990, resulting in 20% of the population leaving.²⁴⁴

The graph (fig.14) below shows the number of Western Balkan migrants who became EU nationals between 2002 and 2020; Albanians rank in first place among the Western Balkan migrants who have acquired an EU nationality, followed by Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Russell King and Ilir Gëdeshi, Editorial Introduction: New Trends in Migration in the Western Balkans, *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 12, no. 2 (2023): 5–14.
<https://doi.org/10.54667/ceemr.2023.27>, p.8

²⁴¹ Alida Vračić, *The Way Back: Brain Drain and Prosperity in the Western Balkans*, Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, accessed March 20, 2025.
<http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep21635>, p.3

²⁴² Qaisrani et al., *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans*, p.27

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.28

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.28

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.35

Figure 14. Acquisition of EU Nationality by WB6 Countries.

Country of origin	Acquisition of nationality in EU+ (2002-2020)
Albania	507,336
Bosnia and Herzegovina	227,563
Kosovo ^{1, 66}	88,009
Montenegro	8,735
North Macedonia	133,076
Serbia	195,234

Source: Qaisrani et al., *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans* (2023). ²⁴⁶

In her policy brief, Vracic²⁴⁷ stated, the Western Balkans will probably continue to export smart, educated people for years to come, as destination countries control this migration. She also said the „public discourse on the brain drain in the Western Balkans, is oversimplified and fails to recognise the benefits of emigration; including knowledge transfers, remittances and access to advanced technology, which improves stability and long-term development opportunities in the region.“²⁴⁸

Vracic, also said „Western Balkans governments must talk about emigration and be willing to take part in this difficult debate.“²⁴⁹

The emigration of young, skilled people has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in the WB6 countries, with many leaving to seek opportunities elsewhere; unemployment, government failure and growing authoritarianism are forcing people in the Western Balkans to leave their countries.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Qaisrani et al., *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans*, p.35

²⁴⁷ Vračić, *The Way Back: Brain Drain and Prosperity in the Western Balkans*, p.1

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1

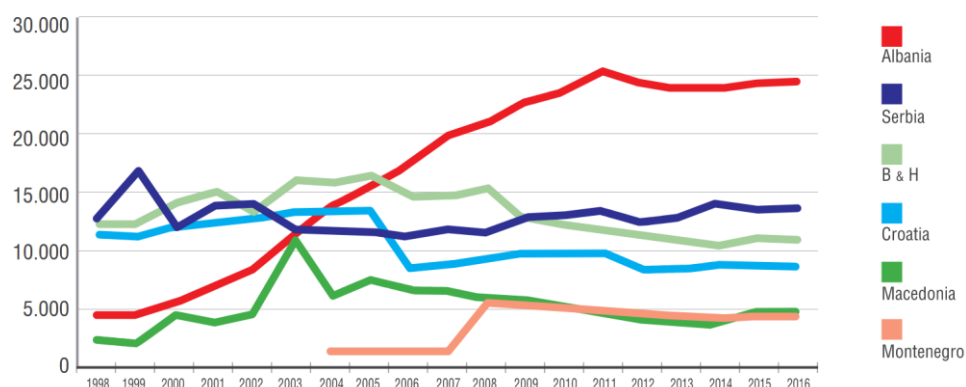
²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 1

²⁵⁰ Alida Vračić, *Luck like the Irish: How Emigration Can Be Good for the Western Balkans*, Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 2019, p.3

Over the years, the desire to study abroad has grown among students from the WB6 countries, with Germany and Italy being the most popular destinations.²⁵¹

The graphic (fig.15), illustrates the number of students from the Western Balkans who have gone to study abroad in different years; Albania is the country from the WB6 group with the highest number of students who have chosen to study abroad.²⁵²

Figure 15. Numbers of Individuals from WB6 Countries Studying Abroad.



Source: Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, (2018) ²⁵³

According to various publications, the governments of the six Western Balkan countries have not done enough for a long time to address the issue of brain drain; policymakers in the region have long ignored the problem, generalising it and failing to recognise it as a distinct policy area.²⁵⁴

However, the growing phenomenon of brain drain has prompted the governments of the six Balkan countries to adopt a variety of policies; since 2010 Western Balkan countries have prioritised migration and diaspora engagement to optimise growth and development gains, reduce brain drain, local labour shortages and irregular migration.²⁵⁵ The Western Balkan governments initially used retentions policies to try to keep skilled young people in the region, while return and resource policies were used less frequently.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ King and Gëdeshi, Editorial Introduction: New Trends in Migration in the Western Balkans, p.9

²⁵² Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, p. 24

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 24

²⁵⁴ Icoski, *Toward a New Youth Brain-Drain Paradigm in the Western Balkans*, p. 8

²⁵⁵ Qaisrani et al., *Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans*, p.37

²⁵⁶ Icoski, *Toward a New Youth Brain-Drain Paradigm in the Western Balkans*, p.8

The WB6 countries have established and expanded institutional structures for migration, with some countries setting up ministries and others integrating special agencies.²⁵⁷ The focus was initially on building institutions, identifying and mapping diaspora members and increasing remittances by reducing transaction costs.²⁵⁸

Additionally, there is now also a growing interest in leveraging the potential of diaspora members by engaging them in development processes and brain gain initiatives.²⁵⁹

As listed below, key strategies and policies have been adopted in the WB6 countries²⁶⁰:

Albania: National Strategy on Migration Governance and the Action Plan 2019-2022; National Strategy of Diaspora 2018-2024 and 2021-2025

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Policy on Cooperation with Diaspora 2017

North Macedonia: Resolution on Migration Policy 2009-2014; the Action Plan, the Resolution on Migration Policy 2015-2020 and the National Strategy for Cooperation with the Diaspora 2019-2023

Montenegro: National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016; Law on Cooperation of Montenegro with its Diaspora Emigrants 2018

Kosovo: Strategy on Migration 2013-2018; Strategy for Diaspora 2013-2018 and 2019-2024

Serbia: Migration Management Strategy 2009; Strategy for Preserving and Strengthening the Relations between the Homeland and the Diaspora and the Homeland and Serbs 2011; The Economic Migration Strategy 2021-2027

Even though the strategies have been created and implemented, they tend to be ineffective²⁶¹ due to the instability of WB6 governments and the poor coordination that often occurs. Monitoring and evaluation of these strategies is rare.²⁶² A key challenge for the WB6 diaspora is the lack of trust in government and public institutions, which hinders their involvement in homeland development.²⁶³

²⁵⁷ Qaisrani et al., Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans, p. 37

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 37

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 37

²⁶⁰ Hansjörg Brey, Christian Hagemann, Valeska Esch and Viktoria Palm, Emigration from the Western Balkans, Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 2021, accessed 27 June 2025, <http://iriss.idn.org.rs/1676/1/6PREDO~1.PDF>, p.72-73

²⁶¹ Qaisrani et al., Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans, p.49

²⁶² King and Gëdeshi, Editorial Introduction: New Trends in Migration in the Western Balkans, p.9

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 9

Further, research studies on the topic show that the promotion of circular migration is important because returnees have a significant impact on government services and the financial sector.²⁶⁴ These data indicate that circular migration is a particularly relevant factor in knowledge transfer for the WB6 countries, and as such, should be promoted; statistical data has shown that at least 20 per cent of employees in the financial industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia hold foreign qualifications and that most Albanian government employees were educated abroad.²⁶⁵

The development of temporary and circular migration strategies has been identified as a potential solution to reduce emigration and prevent permanent departure, particularly among skilled migrants.²⁶⁶ The sustainable cooperation of the Western Balkans with their diaspora requires better diaspora policy institutions and recruitment processes involving development and diaspora cooperation experts.²⁶⁷

4.2 Albanian Diaspora: the Old and the New Diaspora

The publication 'Diaspora e Shqiperise ne Shifra'²⁶⁸ conducted by INSTAT as part of the Diaspora Strategy, aims to assess the size and profile of the Albanian diaspora regarding basic demographic and social characteristics.

In this publication report, the term diaspora is understood to encompass three distinct groups: firstly, the ancient Albanian communities dispersed across the globe; secondly, individuals who have been born in Albania and are residing outside its borders; and thirdly, individuals of Albanian origin who have been born outside Albania, maintain continuous linguistic, cultural and traditional ties with their country of origin and aspiring to cultivate and perpetuate these connections with Albania.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ Vračić, The Way Back: Brain Drain and Prosperity in the Western Balkans, p. 16

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 16

²⁶⁶ Brey et al., Emigration from the Western Balkans, p.70

²⁶⁷ Qaisrani et al., Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans, p.149

²⁶⁸ INSTAT, Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra, 2020, p. 1-28

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 6

According to the INSTAT 2020 (fig. 16), the Albanian diaspora is estimated to be 1,668,135 individuals outside the territory of Albania, comprising 884,719 men and 799,416 women.²⁷⁰

Figure 16. Albanian Diaspora Demographics (per age, male, female and total).

Grup-mosha	Meshkuj	Femra	Gjithsej
0-4	44.800	40.019	84.819
5-9	60.366	51.387	111.753
10-14	64.382	55.002	119.384
15-19	59.689	50.083	109.772
20-24	67.194	54.763	121.957
25-29	76.080	68.332	144.412
30-34	86.217	88.497	174.714
35-39	88.703	86.680	175.383
40-44	84.799	78.971	163.770
45-49	74.845	65.170	140.015
50-54	58.579	48.733	107.312
55-59	45.266	37.828	83.094
60-64	31.953	25.457	57.410
65-69	17.533	13.975	31.508
70-74	8.054	6.480	14.534
75-79	5.700	9.862	15.562
80-84	3.471	4.539	8.010
85+	7.088	13.638	20.726
Gjithsej	884.719	799.416	1.684.135

Source: INSTAT, *Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra* (2020)²⁷¹

Further, this report of INSTAT on Diaspora, shows that during 2019, an increase in the diaspora of approximately 2.6% was observed: a 2.6% increase has been observed in the male demographic of the diaspora, while a 2.7% increase has been observed in the female demographic.²⁷²

Diaspora demographics also indicate that the population is relatively young; the age group (0-14 years) constitutes approximately 19% of the population, while the majority (approximately 76%) belongs to the age group (15-64 years) and the over 65 age group accounts for around 5%, according to this report.²⁷³

The history of Albanian diaspora can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase occurs prior to 1944, the second phase extends during the communist regime

²⁷⁰ INSTAT, *Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra*, 2020, p. 8

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 8

²⁷² Ibid., p. 8

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 8

(1945 to 1990) and the third phase occurs after 1990.²⁷⁴ As known, various factors such as multiple wars, foreign invasion and difficult economic situations have generally accompanied the Albanian migration over several periods of time. During these times, different Albanian diaspora groups have been established abroad.

Albanian diaspora can be distributed into five main groups: students, economic migrants, family members of economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and unaccompanied minors.²⁷⁵ Moreover, the Albanian diaspora can be classified into two categories²⁷⁶: *the old diaspora and the new diaspora*. The old diaspora consists of those who emigrated pre 1944 and those who left between '45 and '90, mainly Albanians from former Yugoslavia; the new diaspora consists of those who emigrated post '90, coinciding with the post-communist migration wave.²⁷⁷

The central distinction between the two groups pertains to the temporal context of migration and the geographical destination of the migrants.²⁷⁸ Analysing the temporal aspect, the oldest²⁷⁹ Albanian communities consist of the Arbëreshë in Italy and the Arvanites in Greece, emigration occurred after the death of Gjergj Kastrioti (Skanderbeg).²⁸⁰ After this, during the period of Ahmed Zogu (King of Albania) and World War II, the emigration continued primarily to the USA, Canada and Australia where another Albanian diaspora was formed.²⁸¹ During the communist period, when Albania was completely isolated from the West and the rest of the world, emigration was not allowed, only a few people left; after 1990, the end of communism, a phase of significant migration established new Albanian diasporic groups.²⁸²

The 'Mapping and Profiling of the Albanian Diaspora Survey'²⁸³ shows that most Albanian migrants in Italy are well-integrated and feel strongly connected to their host

²⁷⁴ Joniada Barjaba, Albanian Diaspora across the World, Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies 5, no. 3 (2019): 173–184. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajms.5-3-3>, p.174

²⁷⁵ Barjaba, Albanian Diaspora across the World, p.174

²⁷⁶ INSTAT, Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra 2020, p.3

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p.3

²⁷⁸ Barjaba, Albanian Diaspora across the World, p.174

²⁷⁹ INSTAT, Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra 2020, p.10

²⁸⁰ Kiri, Global Migration Strategies: Albanian Migration after 1990, p.91

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 91

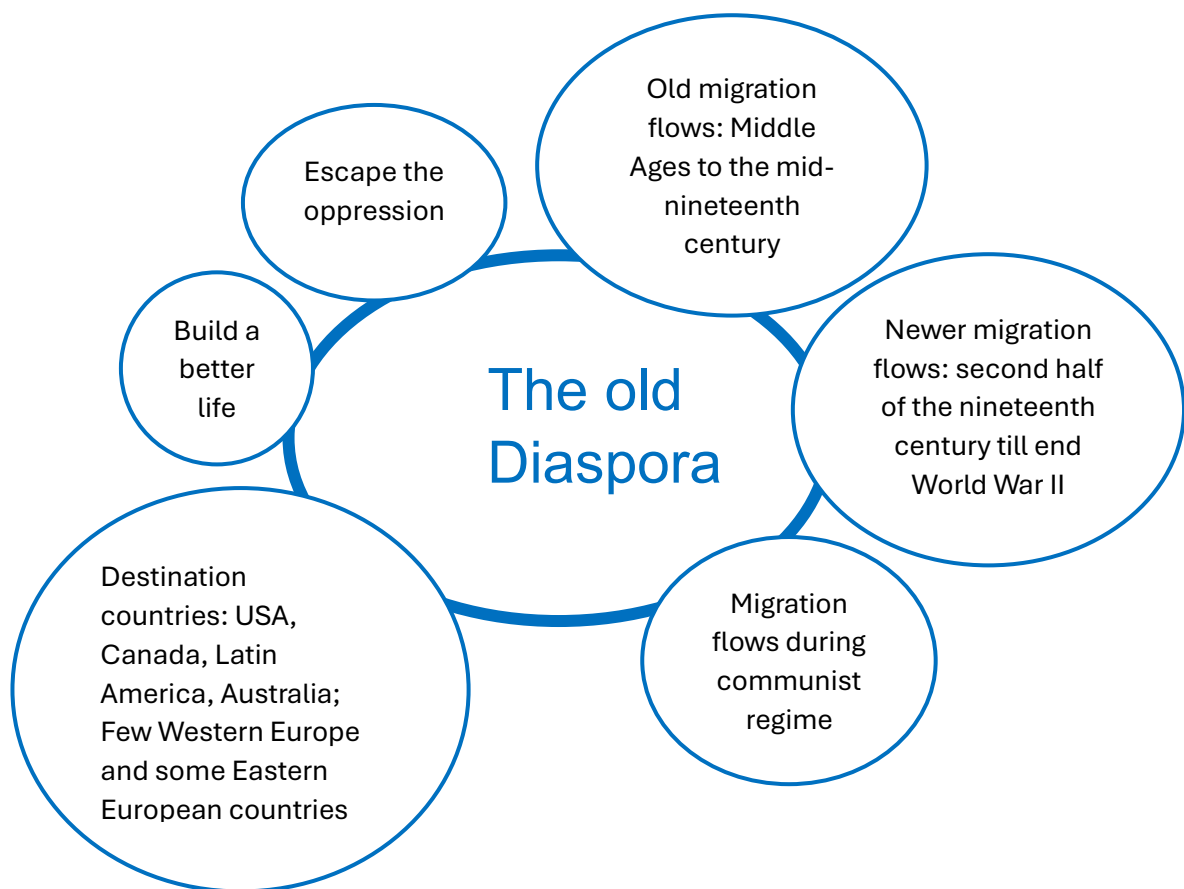
²⁸² Ibid., p. 91-92

²⁸³ Coletti, Raffaella, Anna Ferro, Daniele Frigeri, Venere Stefania Sanna, and Elisa Del Negro (CeSPI), Mapping and Profiling of Albanian Diaspora: An Economic and Social Survey in Five Italian Regions, Overview of the Situation in France and Belgium, International Organization for Migration, Country Office in Albania, 2021, ISBN 978-92-9268-106-7 (PDF), 978-92-9268-107-4 (print), p. xiv

country; the Albanian diaspora in Italy values its close ties with Albania, which create business opportunities. Furthermore, the survey reveals that the Albanian diaspora is largely composed of highly skilled professionals who enjoy stable economic and professional situations. It could be argued that the old diaspora plays a fundamental role in nation building, whereas the new diaspora has a different set of objectives, namely exploring entrepreneurial opportunities and contributing to the private sector.²⁸⁴

For instance, the old diaspora has made a significant contribution to the independence of Albania and Kosovo, preserving national sentiment and establishing Albanian schools where the Albanian language is taught, as well as publishing and distributing Albanian books in host countries; additionally, the new diaspora continues to preserve the Albanian language and cultural identity, while also being engaged in business activities.²⁸⁵

Figure 17. Old and New Diaspora.



²⁸⁴ Barjaba, *Albanian Diaspora across the World*, p. 181

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.181



Source: Author's Illustration based on Barjaba, Albanian Diaspora across the World (2019) ²⁸⁶

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the Albanian diaspora is becoming progressively involved with Albania, contributing in protecting the Albanian language and cultural identity worldwide, defending individual social rights and improving socioeconomic development of Albania.

4.2.1 The Scientific Diaspora

Various research studies and statistics have helped to define the key characteristics of the Albanian scientific diaspora. So, for example, the average age of the Albanian scientific diaspora is said to be 37 years old, where „72 percent are younger than 40 years, and only 2.3 percent are 60 years of age or older”²⁸⁷

In their research study about the Albanian scientific diaspora, Gedeshi und King²⁸⁸ state that 72% of Albanian scientists are concentrated in the most industrialised OECD countries. The US is the main destination of Albanian PhDs, leading with 28.3%;

²⁸⁶ Barjaba, Albanian Diaspora across the World, p.173–184.

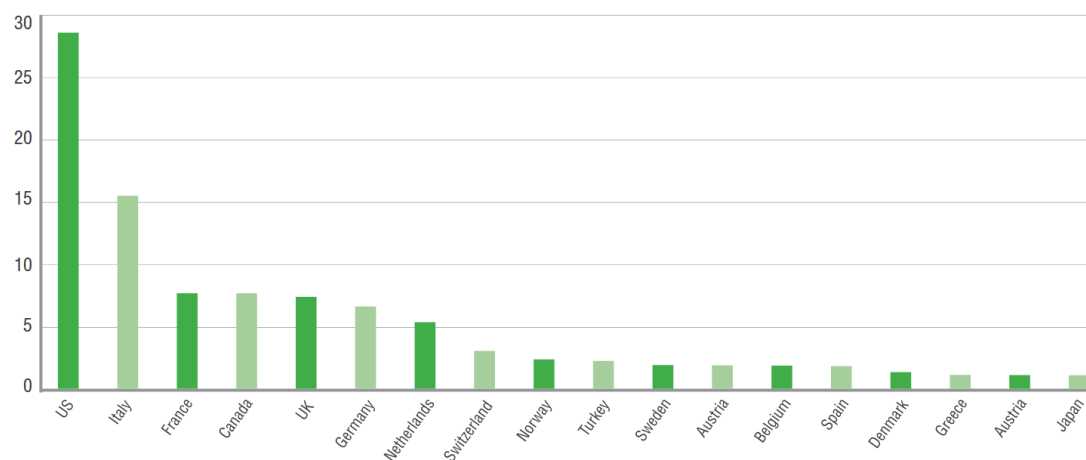
²⁸⁷ Gedeshi and King, Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora, p.34

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 36

eighteen per cent of Albanian PhD holders currently living in the US, completed their studies in Italy, France, the UK, Germany or the Netherlands.²⁸⁹

The authors of this research stated that Italy is an important starting point for the Albanian scientific diaspora, because Italy is located close to Albania and the two countries have a lot of cultural similarities; many Albanian scientists live in Italy.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, fig.18, from this research, illustrates that France, Canada, the UK and Germany are at the same level, in terms of the Albanian scientific diaspora's choice of destination country. Another group of Albanian scientists, lives and works in smaller, highly developed Western European countries, including the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, Denmark; Australia and Japan host a still smaller group.²⁹¹ The graphic below, provides more detailed information on all the statistics mentioned so far.

Figure 18. Key Destination Countries of Albanian Scientists.



Source: Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora* (2018) ²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora* p. 36

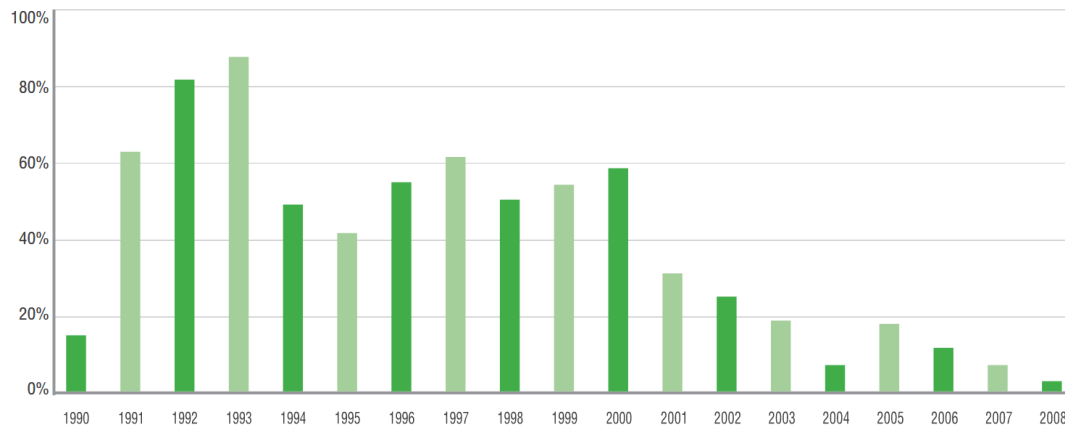
²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 36

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 36

²⁹² Ibid., p. 36

Since 1990, around 50%²⁹³ of academics, researchers and intellectuals have left Albania. Approximately 70% of Albanians who obtained a PhD in Western Europe or the US since 1990 have either emigrated or never returned.²⁹⁴

Figure 19. Albanian Brain Drain from Universities and Research Institutions (1990-2008).



Source: Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain, Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora* (2018)²⁹⁵

Several factors that have influenced the decision of the Albanian scientific diaspora to emigrate over time²⁹⁶:

- i. study in a prestigious university
- ii. pursue professional and training opportunities
- iii. individuals who emigrated with their family
- iv. political factors, economic factors
- v. poor infrastructure, equipment and facilities for research work in Albania

The decision about which destination country to choose is influenced by two factors²⁹⁷: the reputation of the university and the possibility of obtaining a scholarship and the

²⁹³ Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, p.36

²⁹⁴ UNDP Albania, *From Brain Drain to Brain Gain: Mobilising Albania's Skilled Diaspora*, Tirana: United Nations Development Programme, prepared by the Centre for Social and Economic Studies in collaboration with the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex, 2006, p. 4-5

²⁹⁵ Gedeshi and King, *Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora*, p. 23

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34

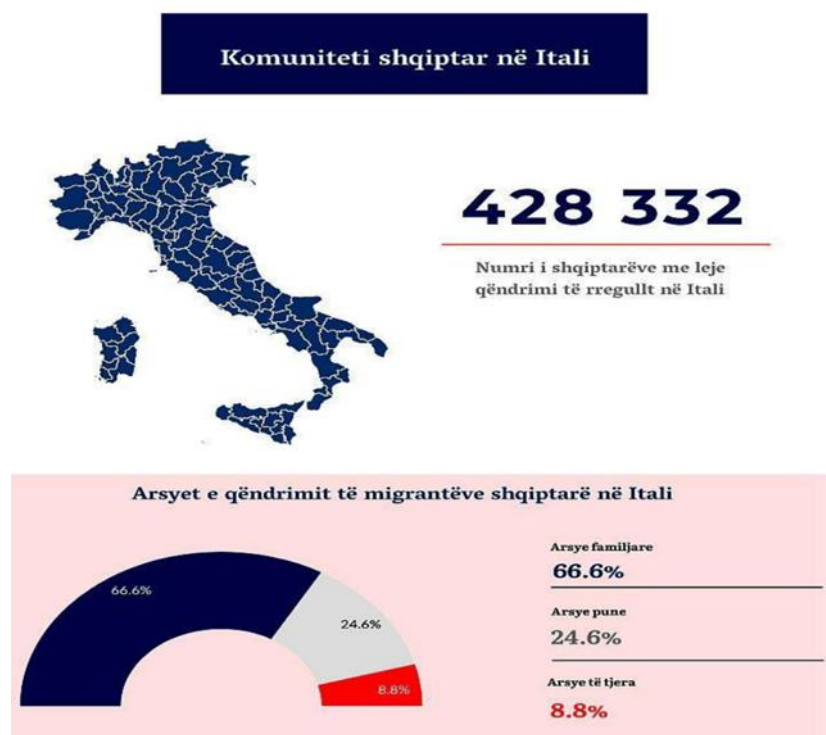
job opportunities related to knowing the destination country's language. Another characteristic of Albanian scientific diaspora is its accelerated growth since the end of communism, a trend that is likely to continue in the future.²⁹⁸

In conclusion, the Albanian scientific diaspora is relatively young. These young and well qualified people migrate abroad for better job and training opportunities. This trend continues today, also with many talented students choosing to remain abroad after university or postgraduate studies.

4.3 Circulating Albanian migrants: examples from Italy and Greece

Due to their geographical proximity, Greece and Italy have been the main destination countries for Albanian migrants since the 1990s. Italy and Greece have the largest Albanian diaspora, with significant migration flows between Albania and the two countries.

Figure 20. Albanian Community in Italy.



Source: Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy (2020) ²⁹⁹

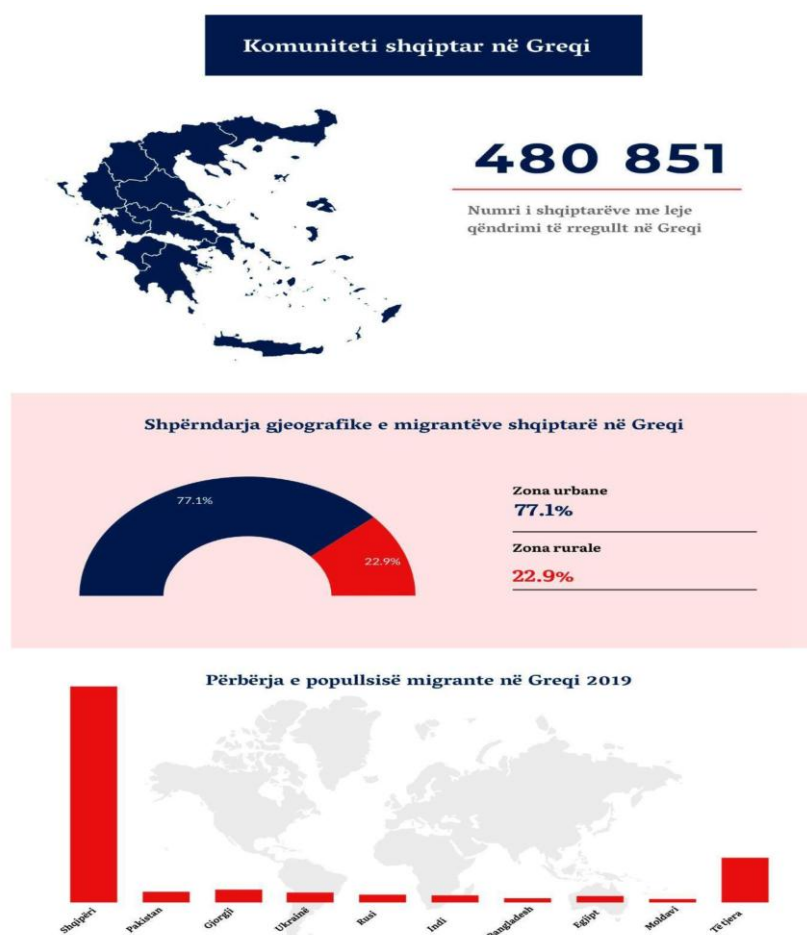
²⁹⁸ Gedeshi and King, Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora, p. 34

²⁹⁹ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.22

As this graphic (fig. 20) illustrates, approximately 428,332 Albanians are living in Italy with residence permits. The main reason for staying in Italy is to be close to family (66%), while 24.6% of people are there for job reasons and 8.8% for other reasons.

It is estimated that around 480,851 (fig. 21) Albanians with regular residence permits live in Greece; this illustration also reveals, the distribution of the population between rural and urban areas, with 22.9% residing in the countryside and 77.1% living in urban areas.³⁰⁰ Today, most migrants that live and work in Greece, are from Albania.³⁰¹

Figure 21. Albanian Community in Greece.



Source: Republic of Albania, Albanian National Diaspora Strategy (2020) ³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.23

³⁰¹ Denisa Titili and Maria Dojçe, Identity Formation and Dilemma of Two Cultures – The Case of Albanian Circular Migrants Living Between Albania and Greece, European Journal of Social Science Education and Research 8 (3) 2021, ISSN 2411-9563 (Print), ISSN 2312-8429 (Online), p.104

³⁰² Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.23

The emigration process has been an important factor in the socio-economic and political development of both Albania and two host countries. As already mentioned, the circular migration is considered a beneficial process for all the actors involved in this procedure. People coming from southeast Albania usually emigrated more to Greece; studies about the topic indicates that more than half of Greece's current migrant population, is coming from Albania.³⁰³

Also, since ancient times, Italy has been a country of destination for the Albanian diaspora, particularly for the Arbëresh³⁰⁴, settled in Southern Italy between the 14th and 18th centuries, fleeing persecution. These communities preserve their identity and are recognised as ethnic minorities in Italy, maintaining their own language, religion, traditions and customs.³⁰⁵ After the fall of the communist regime, following an extended period of emigration crossing more than 30 years, today Albanian migrants residing in Italy can be regarded as best integrated migrants.³⁰⁶

Studies about circular migration has identified five categories of Albanian circular migrants in Italy³⁰⁷:

- i. seasonal workers (persons working in tourism, agriculture, and farming)
- ii. students (return to work in Albanian universities, public administration, private sector who maintain constant connection to Italy and also students who study and live in Italy and visit consistently Albania)
- iii. entrepreneurial migrants (businesspeople living in Italy and having both business in Albania and Italy and people who returned in Albania after a successful business migration experience, but who need to visit Italy regularly due their business issues)
- iv. documented returnees (Albanian people with Italian citizenship or and a long permit document. This group of migrants return to Albania after feeling their migration experience has been completed but they still have connection and visit Italy for various reasons)

³⁰³ Kaleshi, Effects of Migration and Human Capital Formation in Albania, *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research* 8, no. 18 (2021): 93–109, <https://doi.org/10.26417/864jjj42q>, p. 95

³⁰⁴ Coletti et al., Mapping and Profiling of Albanian Diaspora, p. 7

³⁰⁵ Coletti et al., Mapping and Profiling of Albanian Diaspora, p.7

³⁰⁶ Kodra, Circular Migration and Triple Benefits: The Case of Albanian Migrants to Italy, p.34

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 35

- v. economic returnees (migrants who returned in Albania due the economic crisis in Italy and due the temporary and informal nature of their occupation, but who are intending again to return in Italy)

There are three main categories identified about circular Albanian migrants in Greece³⁰⁸:

- i. legal seasonal migration (migrants working seasonally under Greek foreign worker invitation, returning to Greece from May to October every year)
- ii. irregular seasonal migration (irregular migrants for seasonal work mostly field work)
- iii. legal circular migration of low- to semi-skilled workers (immigrants usually work in construction sector in Greece, between March- July, September-November and stay in Albania for the rest of the time)

The benefits of Albanian migrants' circulation in Greece have enabled them to earn a living, support their families and run their own businesses in Albania.³⁰⁹ Research into Albanian migrant circulation within the Greek context has identified the phenomenon characterised by the movement of low-skilled workers engaged in seasonal employment, with and without legal status.³¹⁰

Several factors, such as economic crises, the liberalisation of visas for Albanians, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and the retirement of Albanians, have influenced circular migration between Albania and Italy; in most cases, Albanian brain drain does not fill professional vacancies in Italy, resulting so in brain waste.³¹¹

This research study³¹² about circulating migrants in Italy, highlights three main important points:

- i. there has been an expansion of circular migration process between Albania and Italy
- ii. circular migrants who participated in this study, highlighted the benefits of this process toward themselves, the home and host country, in different perceptions

³⁰⁸ Denisa Titili and Maria Dojçe, Identity Formation and Dilemma of Two Cultures – The Case of Albanian Circular Migrants Living Between Albania and Greece, p.107-108

³⁰⁹ Denisa Titili and Maria Dojçe, Identity Formation and Dilemma of Two Cultures – The Case of Albanian Circular Migrants Living Between Albania and Greece, p.108

³¹⁰ Ibid., p.108

³¹¹ Kodra, Circular Migration and Triple Benefits: The Case of Albanian Migrants to Italy, p.38

³¹² Ibid., p.38

sometimes highlighting more benefits toward themselves and sometimes more toward home and host country.

- iii. circular migration policies in both home and host country are not well known among migrants.

In conclusion, these two case studies, drawn from Greece and Italy, provide an overview of Albanian circular migration. The close geographical proximity of Italy and Greece has resulted in the formation of relatively large Albanian migrant communities in these two countries. As these two cases show, circular migration is beneficial for the migrants themselves, as well as for Albania and the host countries. These studies emphasise the importance of developing circular migration policies in both host and destination countries and of implementing strategies that maximise the benefits of circular migration.



4.4 Albania's migration policies: the Brain Gain

Migration is a natural part of the human experience. People move from one country to another for war, economic, social and political reasons. Recently, many governments have recognised the potential of their diaspora's contribution to their countries' economic development by creating and implementing diaspora strategies to encourage their diaspora to engage with the home country. These strategies and policies should encourage highly skilled migrants to return to their country of origin, aiming to reverse the brain drain phenomenon. As mentioned, strategies that aim to encourage highly skilled migrants to return to their country of origin are known as brain gain policies.³¹³

According to INSTAT, the latest figures on the Albanian population show that 1.68 million Albanians were living abroad.³¹⁴ Albanian researchers³¹⁵ say that skilled migration is threatening the country's development, education and research having

³¹³ Ndreka, Return Migration Policies Towards a Comprehensive Approach, p.37-38

³¹⁴ Matilda Likaj, Ramiola Kalemi, Merlina Koseni Pograzha, and Fatma Ceyda Bas, The Trichotomy of Internationalization of Higher Education, Emigration and Social Policies: A National Level Research Case in Albania on University Youth as Potential Emigrants, *Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental* 18, no. 11 (2024): e09735, <https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n11-094>, p. 3

³¹⁵ Gërmenji and Milo, Migration of the skilled from Albania: brain drain or brain gain?, p. 341

economic, political and social consequences. In the absence of new regulations to address this issue, there is a risk for Albania of further loss of professional workers.³¹⁶

In this context, the Albanian government has tried to develop various strategies for the diaspora, with the aim of strengthening the relationship between the diaspora and the country of origin. The following section will address Albanian migration policies, providing an in-depth examination of return policies and existing diaspora engagement strategies, programmes and initiatives. Also particularly, this section will provide a comprehensive analysis of the National Diaspora Strategy, exploring its main objectives.

4.4.1 Introducing Albanian Return Migration Policies

The 'Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030'³¹⁷ recognises migration as a key goal, aiming for orderly, safe, regular and responsible mobility of people. Its aim is to strengthen migration policies at a national, regional and international level. Although the agenda does not specifically mention return migration, the policies can still be identified as an important aspect of legal migration in accordance with procedures, guidelines and international law.³¹⁸

Literature on return migration has described this phenomenon using expressions such as „*reflux migration, homeward migration, remigration, return flow, second-time migration, repatriation, and “retromigration”*“.³¹⁹ IOM's Policies and Practice in Europe report, states that, “return” refers to going back from one country to another.³²⁰ Furthermore, this report³²¹ illustrates the different ways in which the return process happens namely as:

- i. voluntary return: refers to an independent decision that the individual makes

³¹⁶ Tataj and Akbaş, Brain Drain Toward EU and Its Impact on Labor Market: Albanian Case, p. 373

³¹⁷ Ndreka, Return Migration Policies Towards a Compressive Approach, p. 34-35

³¹⁸ Ibid., p.35

³¹⁹ Kovács, Zoltán, Lajos Boros, Gábor Hegedűs, and Gábor Lados, Returning People to the Homeland: Tools and Methods Supporting Remigrants in a European Context, Re-Turn Consortium, 2012, p.6

³²⁰ IOM, Return Migration: Policies and Practices in Europe, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Advisory Committee on Aliens Affairs, The Netherlands, 2004, ISBN 92-9068-190-X., p.10

³²¹ IOM, Return Migration: Policies and Practices in Europe, p.10

- ii. assisted voluntary return: includes assistance for return and where possible includes also reintegration measures
- iii. involuntary, or non-voluntary, or forced return: refers to a return process undertaken involuntarily

As mentioned above, the return process is classified as voluntary, in many cases often assisted return and involuntary for those migrants obliged to leave the country of destination. The first two categories give the person the freedom to choose whether to remain or leave, while the third category does not allow them to choose, they are so forced to return.

Four possible reasons explain return migration: failure to integrate into the host country; preference for the home country; achievement of a savings objective; and opening of employment opportunities in the home country thanks to experience acquired abroad.³²²

There are two main types of return migration policies: the first type of policy is known as a reactive state policy: which mean, migrants decide to return, regardless of the state's reaction and the state will then support returned migrants in adapting to their current socioeconomic context, if it has reintegration measures in place; the second type is known as an active state policy which means the state wants, through these policies, actively encourages migrants to return home, as a way of resolving economic and social problems.³²³

The strategies of the Albanian government on return migration, listed below, include both reactive and active state policy. The first strategy on return migration policies implemented by the Albanian government was the 'National Strategy for Migration'³²⁴, introduced in 2004; the key focus of this strategy was the voluntary return of Albanian immigrants residing illegally in EU countries through IOM programmes.

Another proposal in terms of return migration policies was the 'Law on Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Motives'³²⁵, approved in 2006; with the focus of this

³²² OECD, International Migration Outlook 2008, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2008. https://doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2008-en, p.163.

³²³ Ndreka, Return Migration Policies Towards a Comprehensive Approach, p.35

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 40

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 40

law, is to encourage the voluntary return of Albanian migrants while helping them to integrate socially, economically and politically.

Further, another strategy in this direction was implementing 'Reintegration of returned Albanian citizen, 2010-2015', to ensure a sustainable return for Albanian citizens, minimise the costs of reintegration, maximise benefits, and promote their contribution to the country's economic development.³²⁶

4.4.2 Albanian Diaspora Engagement Policies

In the context of diaspora engagement policies, it usually refers to a state or government seeking to engage with individuals living outside their country of origin.³²⁷

The Albanian government has recently attempted to engage with the Albanian diaspora within the country by developing legislative proposals in this direction. The government recognises its diaspora as a valuable resource for development, knowledge exchange and cultural promotion.³²⁸ 'The National Strategy of Migration Governance' and its 'Action Plan', implemented 2019, aims to establish successful migration governance in Albania; its four main objectives³²⁹ are:

- i. ensuring strategic governance of migration in Albania
- ii. assisting secure and organized migration from, through and to Albania
- iii. developing a successful labour migration policy while improving the positive effect of migration in the national/local socio-economic development of the country
- iv. promoting and defending migrants' rights and their integration into society

Furthermore, the 'Law on Diaspora' (2018)³³⁰, identifies the specific role and responsibility of the relevant Albanian authorities and ministries dealing with diaspora issues; the focus of this law highlights various main aspects as for example:

- i. maintaining and fostering relations between the diaspora and the home country
- ii. setting up the Coordination Council of the Diaspora

³²⁶ Ndreka, Return Migration Policies Towards a Comprehensive Approach, p. 40

³²⁷ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt? p. 5

³²⁸ Qaisrani et al., Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans, p.38

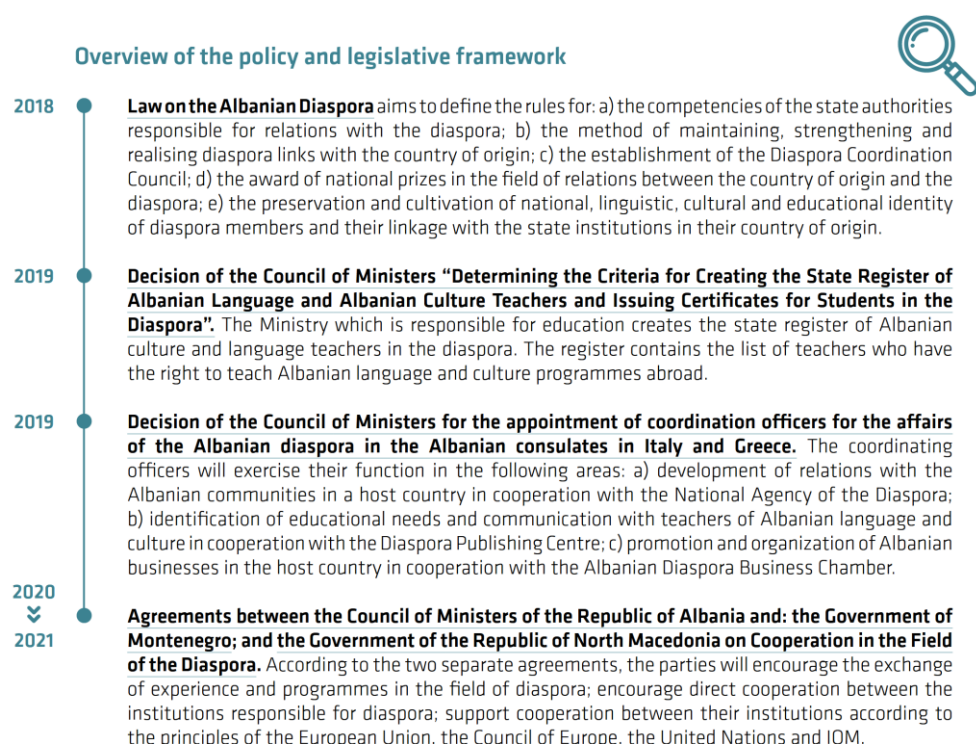
³²⁹ Gedeshi, How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania, p. 22-23

³³⁰ Ibid., p 24

- iii. preserving and cultivating the national identity, language and education of members of the diaspora, etc
- iv. importance of strengthening economic ties with Albanians abroad
- v. establishing cooperation in the field of science and in the development of new technologies between the diaspora and institutions in Albania.

A key policy proposal in the context of diaspora engagement is the ‘National Strategy on Albanian Diaspora 2021-2025’³³¹ and its associated Action Plan is as an extension of the ‘National Strategy on Diaspora and Migration 2018-2024’.

Figure 21. Albanian Diaspora Engagement Legislative Framework.



Source: Barjaba, *Diaspora Engagement Mapping Albania, Factsheet (2022)*³³²

³³¹ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025

³³² Joniada Barjaba, *Diaspora Engagement Mapping Albania, Factsheet* created under the ECONIDAS project, funded by the European Union (DG Near), implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), 2022, accessed 30 September 2025.
<https://diasporaforddevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Albania-Factsheet-v.4.pdf>.

The focus of the strategy is the role of the Albanian diaspora, its organisation and connection to Albanian's socio-economic development.³³³ The Strategy is the leading document that guides Albania's engagement with its diaspora. The goal of this proposal is to combine various aspects of diasporic engagement, including economics, culture and education.³³⁴

The main objectives³³⁵ of this strategy are:

- i. strengthen diaspora networks to enhance economic ties, facilitate knowledge transfer and encourage professional collaborations.
- ii. encourage investments and knowledge/technology transfer to boost Albanian economic involvement abroad.
- iii. protecting and promoting Albanian identity and heritage in the diaspora.
- iv. integrating the diaspora into public life in Albania by including them in decision-making.
- v. creating a database of diaspora organisations, associations and individuals to help the government monitor and assess their engagement, effectiveness and allocation of resources.
- vi. collaborate internationally, especially with neighbours like Kosovo.

In terms of brain gain policies, the strategy aims to encourage the diaspora experts and professionals to contribute and share their knowledge with other people in Albania whether for short or long time; in this strategy *„the Albanian government wants to encourage qualified emigrants to return for short-term visits for work, teaching or training”*³³⁶, establishing networks, involving professionals from various sectors, including business, education, medicine and law, within the Albanian diaspora and motivating young people to pursue a professional career in their homeland.³³⁷

Several Ministerial Decisions³³⁸ were also initiated to achieve these goals: for instance, the Council of Ministers' decision, recommended the appointment of coordination officers for the Albanian diaspora at the Albanian consulates in Italy and Greece; these

³³³ Gedeshi, How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania, p.23

³³⁴ Giulia Mori, Júlia Puigdomènech Vidal, and Melissa Siegel, Diaspora Engagement Report: Case Studies and Best Practices for Ukraine, Maastricht University & UNU-MERIT, 2025.
<https://doi.org/10.18356/9789210026000>, p.11

³³⁵ Mori, Puigdomènech Vidal und Siegel, Diaspora Engagement Report, p. 11

³³⁶ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025 p.16

³³⁷ Ibid., p.16

³³⁸ Qaisrani et al., Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans, p.38

officers are responsible for developing and maintaining relations with the diaspora and promoting the Albanian language and culture.

4.4.3 Programmes and Initiatives

The Albanian government has also launched many programmes and initiatives to encourage members of the scientific diaspora to reconnect with their home country. The 'Brain Gain Programme, 2006 - 2011(BGP)', launched in 2006, was one of the first initiatives addressing brain gain policies, playing a crucial role in establishing brain gain policies in Albania. This official national project was a collaboration between the Albanian government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)³³⁹; the initiative's main focus was to integrate highly skilled Albanians into public administration and encourage their participation in the country's political development.

*"The objective of the BRAIN GAIN Programme is to provide support for the government in establishing incentive elements and policy-making mechanisms to effectively change the engagement of the Albanian Diaspora and highly qualified migrants in the scientific, administrative and economic development of the country"*³⁴⁰

This programme is designed around many main goals³⁴¹ and objectives³⁴² which are outlined below:

- i. establish a welcoming atmosphere for returnees in Albania to encourage their contribution to the country's development.
- ii. create a legal framework for their full integration into the public administration.
- iii. generate a database of researchers and scientists working abroad.
- iv. invite students and researchers to seminars and conferences in Albania
- v. facilitate activities of the Diaspora Institute and promote their entrepreneurs and investors

³³⁹ Bana Lajda, Brain Circulation, the Phenomenon and Challenges, European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 2, no. 1 (2016), ISSN 2411-958X (Print), ISSN 2411-4138 (Online), p.162

³⁴⁰ Group 484 Centre for Migration and Vladimir Petronijevic, BRAIN GAIN POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, p.17

³⁴¹ Agolli and Gugu, Developing Brain Gain Policies in the Western Balkans: ALBANIA, p. 6

³⁴² European Movement Albania (EMA), Brain Gain Policies and Their Impact on the European Integration, Policy Paper, Tiranë, Albania, 2010, p.7

From a broad viewpoint, the BGP is considered a significant step to incorporate the brain drain phenomenon into central Albanian public policy, reviewing administrative and legislative policies supporting strategy, as well as introducing measures such as financial incentives and simplified recruitment procedures within the public administration.³⁴³

It also involves the work of research institutions in various scientific cooperation programmes.³⁴⁴ The intellectual capital of the diaspora and well-qualified returning migrants could support Albania's EU integration³⁴⁵, encourage science and technology in the country, and provide it with a new resource.

Other diaspora engagement initiatives³⁴⁶ are listed below and include:

- i. Diaspora Summits Albania has hosted three Diaspora Summits (in 2016, 2019 and 2023) to strengthen ties with its citizens abroad; these Summits have provided a platform for Albanians worldwide to collaborate with the Albanian government on various issues.
- ii. Engaging the Albanian Diaspora in Albania's Social and Economic Development IOM programme (2017-2021) sought to encourage diaspora involvement in Albania's social and economic development.
- iii. Connect Albania (2017) is an online platform that engages the Albanian diaspora to encourage foreign investment in Albania; the programme encourages Albanians abroad to act as intermediaries for FDI (Foreign Direct Investment).
- iv. The student protests in December 2018 led to the 'Punë Të Mbarë' (Good Work) initiative; it was the largest demonstration in the democratic transition and the Albanian government was forced to adopt the Pact for the University to address students' concerns.³⁴⁷ The government presented 'Punetembare Platform'³⁴⁸ as a new mechanism that gave the opportunity to all excellent students, recent graduates, to secure a job in public institutions.

³⁴³ Group 484 Centre for Migration and Vladimir Petronijevic, BRAIN GAIN POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, p. 18-19

³⁴⁴ European Movement Albania (EMA), Is the return worth it? On the reintegration of high skilled returnees in Albania, Policy Study, Tiranë, Albania 2011, p.5

³⁴⁵ Group 484 Centre for Migration and Vladimir Petronijevic, BRAIN GAIN POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, p. 18

³⁴⁶ Mori, Puigdomènech Vidal and Siegel, Diaspora Engagement Report, p.12

³⁴⁷ Renis Meta, Shqipëria në rënie të lirë demografike.

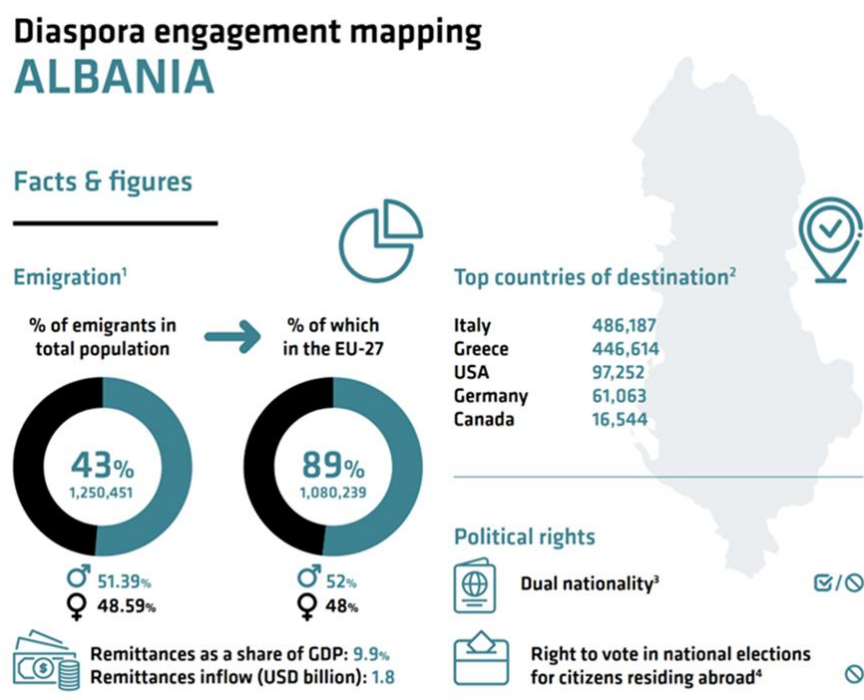
³⁴⁸ Republic of Albania, Platforma e Punësimit Të Studentëve Të Ekselencës.

- v. Code for Albania (2019) is a professional development programme offering high-level technical training to high school students.
- vi. Albanian Diaspora contributing to the agriculture of the home country (2021): the programme focuses on Albania's rural socio-economic development, especially through agriculture.
- vii. The initiative 'Gati per Shqiperine'³⁴⁹ (Ready for Albania)³⁵⁰ launched in 2021, invites all Albanian emigrants who have graduated with a bachelor's or master's degree in Albania or abroad, to contribute to the home country either virtually or physically and support the Albanian public administration.³⁵¹

4.4.4 Analysing the Albanian Diaspora Engagement Policies

Figure 22 below, summarises the key facts on diaspora engagement policy, including emigration issues, the top destination countries, remittances and political rights such as dual citizenship and the right to vote.

Figure 22. Facts and Figures, Albanian Diaspora Engagement.



Source: Barjaba, *Diaspora Engagement Mapping Albania, Factsheet (2022)* ³⁵²

³⁴⁹ Agjencia Kombëtare e Shoqërisë së Informacionit, Platforma Gati per Shqiperine.

³⁵⁰ Gedeshi, How Migration, Human Capital and the Labour Market Interact in Albania, p.25

³⁵¹ Meta, Shqipëria në rënie të lirë demografike.

³⁵² Barjaba, *Diaspora Engagement Mapping Albania*.

This section will now examine and analyse the brain gain programme, initiatives and strategies on diaspora engagement in detail, as introduced previously. The analysis will consider the gaps left by these policies and the feedback they have received from various national and international studies on the subject.

As discussed previously, the policies for engaging with the diaspora range from securing the rights and protection of diaspora members, to strengthening a sense of national identity and encouraging stronger links with the country of origin, as well as contributions to its social and economic development.³⁵³ Consequently, „policies pertaining to the engagement of diasporas comprise a collective of institutional legislative arrangements and it is important to note, that these policies should not be comprehended as a singular state strategy.”³⁵⁴ From this point on, it becomes clear that Albanian diaspora engagement policies are a combination of institutional, legislative, projects and initiatives, as well as programmes.

Diaspora engagement policies are a key aspect of political transnationalism (see here, the chapter 4.4.2, Albanian Diaspora Engagement Policies for more information). Diasporas, are now playing an important role as policy actors in this context. In simple words, the aim of diaspora engagement policies is to protect members, strengthen national identity and encourage stronger links with the country of origin. These policies also aim to promote the economic and social development of origin country.

As demonstrated in the preceding sections of this study, the Albanian government has implemented a variety of policy laws and initiatives to foster engagement with its diaspora. These include for example, the Brain Gain Programme, the ‘National Strategy on the Albanian Diaspora’, the ‘Law on the Diaspora’, and the initiatives ‘Pune te Mbare’ and ‘Gati per Shqiperine’.

As I mentioned earlier, numerous official policy proposals from organisations such as the UN, IOM, OECD and the World Bank have contributed to this debate, helping governments and policymakers address the issue of diaspora communities; these policies aim to help governments identify and solve problems in their diaspora policies and develop effective strategies. Since 2006, for example, the UN has played an important role as a mediator between home and host countries in developing such

³⁵³ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt? p.7

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p.7

policies. At this point, evidence suggests that Albania has also adopted its diaspora engagement policy with the assistance of international experts, including those from the International Organization for Migration (IOM)³⁵⁵ and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).³⁵⁶

“The Diaspora National Strategy and its Action Plan 2021-2025 were drafted with the contribution of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group chaired by the Minister of State for the Diaspora. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group was supported by a team of national and international experts, who were engaged by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) within the program “Engagement of the Albanian Diaspora for the socio-economic development of Albania”. ”³⁵⁷

“In order to achieve that goal and reverse the sense of the brain drain towards a brain gain / return process, UNDP commissioned a policy paper and set up project implementation unit within the Council of Ministers to manage the programme, have a direct impact and effect on the policy-making processes related to migration and Diaspora involvement.”³⁵⁸

As the section on diaspora engagement policies explains, policymakers have used the terms diaspora, transnational community and migrant communities to describe diasporic actors in official documents. These individuals act on a voluntary basis and their actions are guided by their own principles. A diasporic actor is defined by three key characteristics: their ethnic or national origin, their ability to participate and contribute to the growth of their home country and their willingness to do so at any time.

A key aspect of the role of a diasporic actor is its economic relevance, due to its role in supporting both the home country and other members of the group. To this point, the following question has been proposed: in what manner is the diasporic actor in Albanian strategies described? The Albanian government's National Diaspora Strategy defines the diaspora as the community of Albanian migrants living abroad to have

³⁵⁵ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.8

³⁵⁶ Group 484 Centre for Migration and Vladimir Petronijevic, BRAIN GAIN POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, p.11-12

³⁵⁷ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.8

³⁵⁸ Group 484 Centre for Migration and Vladimir Petronijevic, BRAIN GAIN POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, p.11-12

strong sentimental and material links with Albania and to be integrated into the environment and institutions of the host society.³⁵⁹

“Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021- 2025 defines the principles of the state policy of the Republic of Albania for the support of the Albanian communities who legally live in their host countries.”³⁶⁰

“The Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021- 2025 promotes the development of state policies for the inclusion and contribution of Albanian communities abroad in the socio-economic and political development of the country of origin.”³⁶¹

One way to analyse diaspora policies is to differentiate them, according to the main instruments applied (see here chapter 4.4.2 about diaspora engagement), into three categories: economic, political or legal. Another approach is to analyse differentiation based on objectives, which often exist in parallel to each other.

Here, three categories are identified to describe diaspora engagement policies: capacity-building policies: diaspora as an integral part of the national society; extending rights to the diaspora: rights related to political integration but also civil and social (parliamentary representation, extraterritorial vote rights, citizenship rights); extracting obligations from the diaspora: economic and political benefits.

Now, let us consider these categories of diaspora engagement, namely capacity building, extending rights, and extracting obligations and analyse them in relation to Albanian diaspora proposals. Starting with the first point, which is related to capacity building and the preservation and promotion of the Albanian identity; the National Diaspora Strategy sets out the following:

“The National Diaspora Strategy 2021 - 2025 provides for the increase of contributions from Diaspora and of the cooperation with state institutions for the preservation and strengthening the national identity of Albanian citizens. Cultural Centres in the Diaspora and teaching through common curriculum as a product of the Agreement between the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of the Republic of Albania and the Ministry of Education and Technology of the Republic of Kosovo.”³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Mori, Puigdomènech Vidal and Siegel, Diaspora Engagement Report, p.10

³⁶⁰ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.7

³⁶¹ Ibid., p.7

³⁶² Ibid., p.39

“The National Diaspora Strategy 2021-2025 focuses on preserving the national, cultural and linguistic identity of Albanian communities in host countries. This will be carried out in close cooperation with Diaspora and involvement in specific cultural and educational projects will prevent further linguistic assimilation, especially in the second and third generations of Diaspora. Albanian Diaspora, with its special cultural characteristics and traditions, encourages the younger generations to preserve their national identity, even though they may live in a host society or have hybrid identities.”³⁶³

At this point, it can be stated that the Albanian government, aims to increase contributions from the diaspora and cooperation with state institutions, to preserve and strengthen national identity; to this purpose, the government intends to set up cultural centres for the diaspora, based on a shared curriculum developed in collaboration with the Albanian and Kosovan Ministries of Education.³⁶⁴ Furthermore, it is suggested that the Albanian diaspora can help younger generations of Albanians to maintain their identity while living in a host society.³⁶⁵

The Albanian government has also established many institutions and representative bodies to monitor and encourage the involvement of the diaspora, aiming to foster stronger connections and engagement, between the diaspora and Albania. Research studies have demonstrated the importance of setting up special interministerial working groups to engage with the diaspora; these groups improve policy processes and guarantee the sustainability of capacity development. Encouraging stakeholders to collaborate on diaspora engagement increases the probability of a sustainable impact on capacity development.³⁶⁶

In the case of Albania, the relevant institutions³⁶⁷ are: Diaspora Coordination Council, Parliamentary Subcommittee on Diaspora and Migration, Diaspora State Committee, National Diaspora Agency. There are also economic and development agencies, such as the Albanian Diaspora Development Fund and the Albanian Diaspora Trade and Business Chamber. The strategy emphasises also the economic benefits³⁶⁸ of engaging with the diaspora. The aim is to strengthen and expand these networks, to

³⁶³ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.39

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p.7

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p.7

³⁶⁶ Frankenhaeuser and Noack, Promoting Diaspora Engagement what have we learnt? p.11

³⁶⁷ Mori, Puigdomènech Vidal and Siegel, Diaspora Engagement Report, p.8-9

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p.11

improve economic ties, as well as to increase the economic involvement of Albanians abroad.

Furthermore, the role of Albanian consulates and embassies³⁶⁹ has evolved to provide improved services to the diaspora, such as issuing legal documents, promoting economic and cultural initiatives. The focus on accessible and efficient services aims to strengthen diaspora connections.

“Embassies and consulates shall prepare periodic reports on the situation and organization of the Albanian Diaspora. In view of protecting the rights of Albanian citizens, the embassies and consular offices of the Republic of Albania shall have at their disposal legal experts specialized in migration and human rights issues who shall assist with the rules and practices of immigration in the host countries”.³⁷⁰

“The National Diaspora Strategy 2021-2025 shall raise the awareness of the Albanian citizens abroad on the use of consular and diplomatic services provided by Albanian missions through the electronic consular platform. It will contain information on non-governmental organizations accredited in the host countries, providing legal assistance and protection to foreign communities.”³⁷¹

Another important aspect of diaspora engagement policies is external voting. Many governments' diaspora engagement policies include external voting, whereby migrants living abroad can vote in their home country's elections (see the chapter on external voting for more information). A significant number of governments, including Albania, have already introduced this policy. In order to vote, individuals must be citizens of the home country; however, many governments also allow dual citizenship. Albania is also a country that permits dual citizenship.

According to, Law No. 113/2020 'On Citizenship', it is possible to hold other citizenships alongside Albanian citizenship.³⁷² Albanian citizenship³⁷³ is a legally recognised relationship between an individual and the state; it can be acquired, regained, lost or abandoned in line with the law and international standards, as set out by the Republic of Albania.

³⁶⁹ Mori, Puigdomènech Vidal and Siegel, Diaspora Engagement Report, p.9

³⁷⁰ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.49

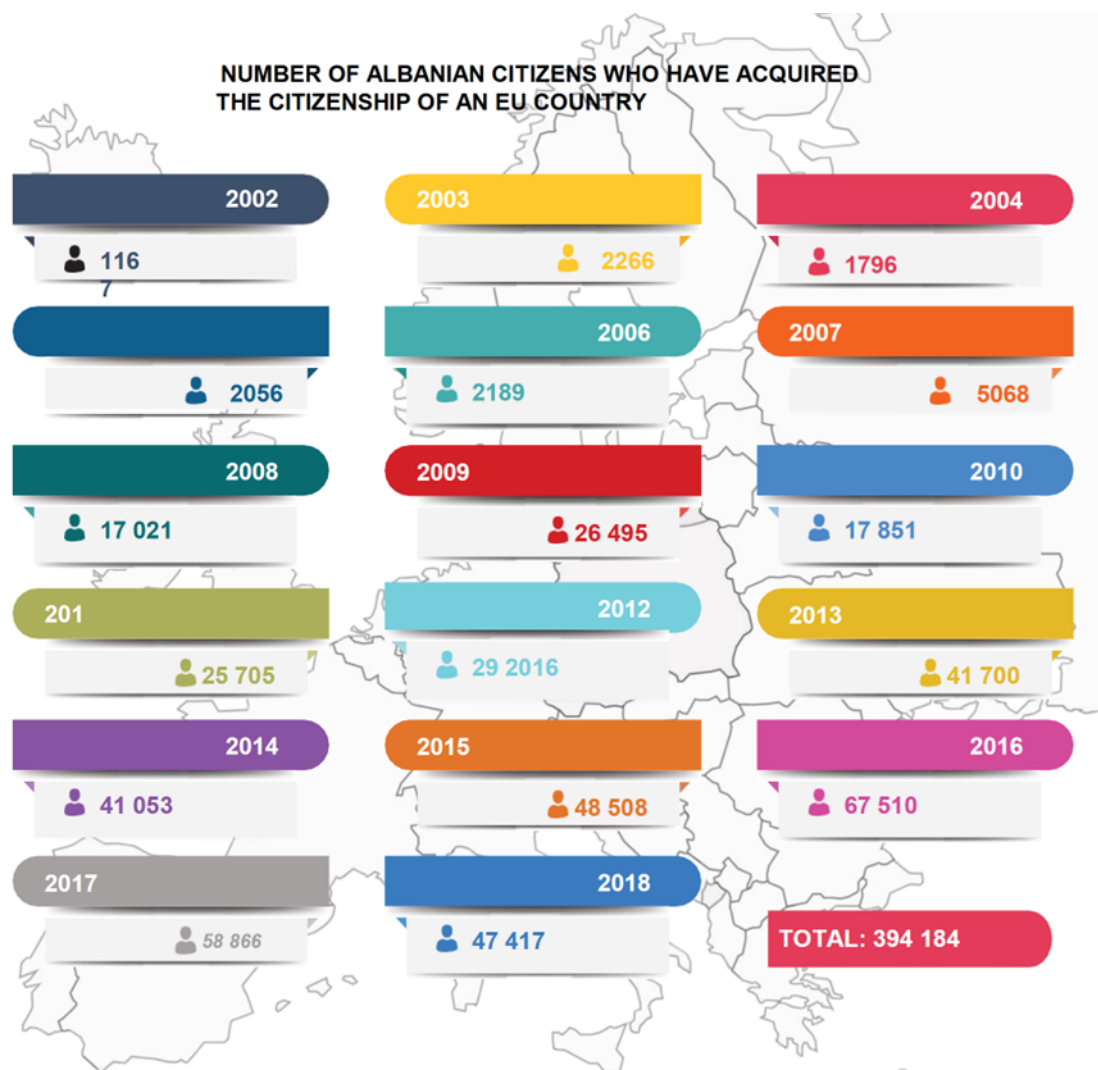
³⁷¹ Ibid., p.49

³⁷² Republic of Albania, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Ceshtjet e Shtetësisë / Citizenship Issues, accessed 29 November 2025, <https://punetejashtme.gov.al/ceshtjet-e-shtetesisë/>.

³⁷³ INSTAT, Diaspora e Shqipërisë në Shifra 2020, p.6

A significant number of Albanian citizens have acquired EU citizenship, as demonstrated by the graphic (fig.23). Albanians rank second in the European Union in terms of the number of their citizens who obtain citizenship of an EU country ³⁷⁴; the highest number of Albanian citizens obtaining citizenship of a European Union country was recorded in 2016 (fig.23) with 67,510 cases.³⁷⁵

Figure 23. Number of Albanian nationals acquiring European Union citizenship (2002 - 2018).



Source: Republic of Albania, National Diaspora Strategy on Albanian Diaspora (2020). ³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.24

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p.24

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.24

External voting is considered an act of transferring political principles, ideas and practices between countries (see the section on external voting, for more information). Voting abroad is regarded as a type of remittance. Remittances from the diaspora are important for the economic, political and social development of their countries of origin. In this context, voting abroad is considered a type of remittance because participating in elections is also seen as a way of strengthening democratic values in one's home country.

The National Diaspora Strategy emphasizes political participation and integration of diaspora representatives into Albania's political system.³⁷⁷

“The right to vote and get involved in politics will create a new space for Diaspora to be an active part of the Albanian society. The engagement in the public and political life of Diaspora representatives will provide for taking some steps to change the Albanian legal framework, in order to welcome and respect the role of Diaspora and regular migration. The inclusion of Diaspora representatives in the electoral and political system enables the engagement in expertise and protection of interests to take place within the system.”³⁷⁸

For the first time, Albanian citizens residing abroad were granted the opportunity to participate in the electoral process for the general elections held on 11 May 2025.³⁷⁹ Additionally, it is important to emphasise that, implementing out-of-country voting (OCV) and engaging with the diaspora is crucial for Albania's EU accession³⁸⁰, as it promotes European values, enhances democratic legitimacy, aligns policies, boosts economic development and strengthens civil society.³⁸¹

The right to vote abroad for Albanian citizens was a significant step taken by the Albanian government towards engaging with the diaspora; promoting European values is an essential aspect of Albania's progress towards EU standards and external voting can facilitate this process.³⁸²

³⁷⁷ Mori, Puigdomènech Vidal and Siegel, Diaspora Engagement Report, p.10

³⁷⁸ Republic of Albania, Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025, p.41

³⁷⁹ Ambasada e Republikës së Shqipërisë në Austri, Njoftim për qytetarët shqiptarë me banim jashtë vendit mbi procesin zgjedhor dhe regjistrimin e diasporës, accessed 1 October 2025, <https://ambasadat.gov.al/austria/newsroom/njoftim-per-qytetaret-shqiptare-me-banim-jashte-vendit-mbi-procesin-zgjedhor-dhe-regjistrimin-e-diaspores/>.

³⁸⁰ Bledar Milaqi, Understanding the Significance of the Diaspora's Vote in Albania, Policy document, Institute of Political Studies, Tirane, 2023, p. 28

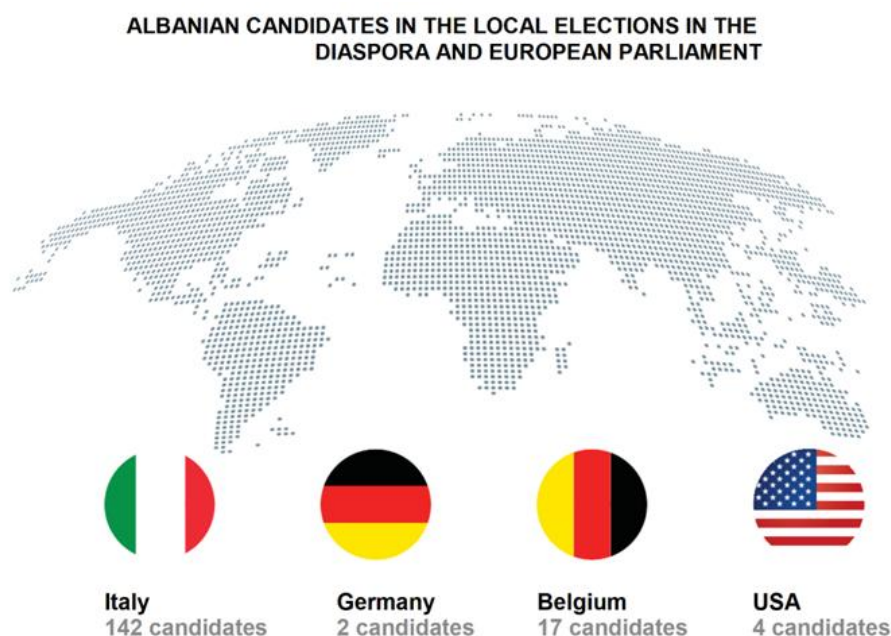
³⁸¹ Milaqi, Understanding the Significance of the Diaspora's Vote in Albania, p. 34

³⁸² Ibid., p.34

As discussed in the theoretical section of this study, transnationalism emphasises the significant social, economic and political ties that migrants have with their countries of origin and destination. It can also be stated that today, Albanian migrants are widely regarded as being well integrated into their host countries. Living in another country has motivated migrants to seek participation in and stand for, elections in their new countries.

The graphic (fig. 24) illustrates the growing political engagement of Albanian migrants across various nations; the votes of Albanian migrants are also now considered important in the electoral processes of their host countries.³⁸³

Figure 24. Number of Albanian Political Candidates in the Diaspora.



Source: Republic of Albania, *Albanian National Diaspora Strategy (2020)*³⁸⁴

In conclusion, it can be said that the Albanian government has attempted to develop strategies and establish a framework to strengthen its relationship with its diaspora. These strategies, including laws, proposals and initiatives, aim to protect the identity, rights and contributions of Albanian communities living abroad. The primary objective is to encourage the diaspora to play an active role in Albania's economic, social and political development.

³⁸³ Republic of Albania, *Albanian Diaspora National Strategy 2021–2025*, p.25

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25

The National Diaspora Strategy also emphasises the importance of the diaspora's political participation. For the first time, Albanian citizens living abroad were permitted to vote in the general election in May 2025. By enabling citizens to vote from abroad, the Albanian government has taken a significant step towards engaging with the diaspora. This is important for Albania's EU accession, as it promotes European values, enhances democratic legitimacy, harmonises policies, stimulates economic growth and empowers civil society.

4.4.5 Effectiveness, Obstacles and Critiques

What are the gaps left by Albanian brain gain policies and diaspora engagement? What feedback have received these strategies? Although official data on Albanian brain gain policies and diaspora engagement are documented, reintegration policies remain under researched and not widely discussed.³⁸⁵ Furthermore many other scholars argue that the success of immigration policies is contested; in addition they say that states have often failed in their attempts to manage and regulate immigration.³⁸⁶ So diaspora engagement policies are often fragmented and not always implemented effectively.³⁸⁷

The Albanian 'Brain Gain Programme' is affected by two factors, which limit its impact: firstly, the number beneficiaries is low (137)³⁸⁸ and secondly, the sources and competencies available to it are limited.³⁸⁹ Also, the lack of long-term vision and stability in policymaking, combined with the conflictual nature of Albanian politics, has hindered the effective implementation of brain gain strategies in Albania and not allowing the Brain Gain Programme to achieve the desired results.³⁹⁰

Research studies indicates, these initiatives are half-finished, lacking monitoring and evaluation and reflection on their success; it is evident, that initiatives such as 'Good Work' and 'Ready for Albania' are steps in the right direction, however, the lack of a

³⁸⁵ Ndreka, Return Migration Policies Towards a Comprehensive Approach p.40

³⁸⁶ Mathias Czaika and Hein de Haas, The Effectiveness of Immigration Policies, Population and Development Review 39, no. 3 (2013): 487–508, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2013.00613.x>, p.487

³⁸⁷ Bilgili and Bivand Erdal, Migrant Transnationalism, p.84

³⁸⁸ Bana, Brain Circulation, the Phenomenon and Challenges, p.162-163

³⁸⁹ European Movement in Albania, Is the return worth it? On the reintegration of high skilled returnees in Albania, p. 5-6

³⁹⁰ Meta, Shqipëria në rënie të lirë demografike.

clear, sustainable implementation strategy, significantly reduces their effectiveness and makes it difficult to assess their real impact; these initiatives appear to be more symbolic than structured and they do not seek to establish long-term change in the context of brain gain policies.³⁹¹

Despite the implementation of policy development, legislation and the establishment of specialised bodies, obstacles to the effectiveness of the policies remain in the case of Albania; these obstacles include institutional change, communication gaps, political factors and a lack of data.³⁹²

For example, the diaspora has criticised the frequent restructuring of Albania's recently created diaspora departments and change of personnel, particularly following elections, hinder effectiveness and efficiency.³⁹³

There is also a lack of regular and structured communication between the diaspora and Albanian diaspora institutions, which is problematic given the potential for collaboration between these two groups.³⁹⁴

Members of the Albanian diaspora mentioned corruption and political instability as reasons for not engaging further with Albania.³⁹⁵ The diaspora participants in this master's thesis also said that effective communication and an absence of corruption are fundamental to their engagement with the Albanian government. This topic will be discussed in detail in the section on the analysis of the interviews.

Although the Albanian government has attempted to collect data on qualified diaspora members to create diaspora skills databases, however, appears unclear how effective these initiatives have been; without data on the diaspora, engaging with them is more difficult; these data information is essential for developing long-term and effective diaspora engagement policies.³⁹⁶



³⁹¹ Meta, Shqipëria në rënie të lirë demografike.

³⁹² Barjaba, Diaspora Engagement Mapping Albania

³⁹³ Qaisrani et al., Study of the Diasporas' Contributions to the Socio-Economic Development in the Western Balkans p. 149

³⁹⁴ Barjaba, Diaspora Engagement Mapping Albania

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

5. Analysis and discussion of interviews

5.1 Interviews with Albanian scientific diaspora

The following section will analyse the interviews that were conducted with persons from the Albanian diaspora. This analysis is based on eight problem centred interviews (PCI) with Albanian migrants currently living in Austria, Italy and Denmark.

Data collection took place in October-November 2025. All participants gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Vienna. Those with people in Italy and Denmark were conducted via online platforms such as Zoom and Teams.

I can confirm that online, problem-centred interviews could be conducted without difficulty. Despite some initial technical issues, which were resolved quickly, the interviews proceeded well. Since the start of the pandemic, online meetings have become commonplace in many jobs. This online space also enabled me to connect with Albanians living abroad for this investigation.

It was also interesting to compare face-to-face and online interviews. I can conclude that both types of interviews allowed the interviewee freely to express their opinions, whether in person or online. Figure 25 summarises the key characteristics of the interviewees. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, their identities are known only by their initials and approximate age.

The interviews were conducted in Albanian and Italian language, so that the participants could express themselves openly and feel confident about sharing their thoughts and feelings. They were guaranteed that the information would be kept confidential.

Figure 25. Participants Profile.

Name	Age/Gender	Education	Profession	Year of emigration	Residence Albania	Destination country 1 or more	Nationality 1/ 2
A.B	Early 40s/M	Master (AUT)	IT Project Manager	2018	Tirane	Austria	Albanian/Austrian
A.GJ	Early 40s/M	Master (ITA)	Head of finance and administration	2001	Lezhe	Italy/Denmark	Albanian/Italian
A.H	Early 30s /F	Master (S &AUT)	Data Analyst	2003	Vlore	Italy/Spain/Austria	Albanian/Italian
A.P	Early 40s /F	Master (ITA)	Teacher	2004	Lezhe	Italy/Denmark	Albanian/Italian
E.P	Early 40s/F	Master (ITA)	Flight security	2005	Lezhe	Italy	Albanian
L.P	Early 20s/F	Bachelor (ALB)	Student	2024	Shkoder	Austria	Albanian
M.F	Early 40s/M	Bachelor (ALB)	Businessman	1997 2016	Vlore	Italy/Spain/Austria	Albanian
O.K	Late 20s/F	Master (ALB)	Assistant manager	2022	Tirane	Austria	Albanian

Source: Author's illustration, online and face-to face interviews with Albanian scientific diaspora (October-November 2025).

5.2 Characteristics of participants

The interviews included five women and three men. Four of them already hold dual citizenship, Albanian, Italian and Austrian nationality. As was mentioned earlier, Albanian law on citizenship permits dual citizenship. In terms of the number of their citizens obtaining citizenship of an EU country, Albanians rank second in the European

Union (for more information, see section: Analysing the Albanian diaspora engagement policies).

As said before, brain drain in Albania began in the 90s and it also continues. Many qualified people from a range of backgrounds are leaving Albania for better opportunities abroad, often settling there permanently. Many young Albanians also study abroad but never return. This trend is also evident in the profile of the participants in this study, who immigrated between 1997 and 2024.

As discussed in the section on the classification of highly qualified migrants, the main way to classify them is based on education, specifically tertiary education. This classification was considered when selecting the participants for this investigation. The participants' academic achievements are outlined in Figure 25, which shows that they all have completed bachelor's and master's degrees. The participants with the initials A.B, L.P and M.F have completed their bachelor's studies in Albania. A.B also completed a master's degree in Austria and L.P is currently studying for a master's degree in Vienna. The other four interviewees had successfully completed their bachelor's and master's studies abroad, namely in Italy, Spain and Austria.

As previously mentioned, and as the statistical data in this thesis demonstrate, the average age of the Albanian scientific diaspora is 37 years old. It is presumed that the scientific diaspora is mostly under 40 years old, with 72% of its members falling into this age group. The participants in this study range in age from their early 20s to their early 40s, as exposed in Figure 25.

It is a recognised fact that, the decision of the Albanian scientific diaspora to emigrate, is influenced by a number of factors, including the opportunity to study at prestigious universities and to pursue professional opportunities. Economic and political factors also impact this decision, as do poor infrastructure and research facilities. Then, the choice of destination country is driven by the reputation of the university or the availability of job opportunities. This investigation found that six of the interviewees had migrated primarily for educational reasons, one had migrated with her family, and one had migrated for economic reasons, seeking better job opportunities.

Another notable feature of the Albanian scientific diaspora is its rapid growth since the collapse of communism, a trend that is expected to persist. Table 1 also shows that L.P (in her early 20s) and O.K (in her late 20s), left in 2024 and 2022 respectively. This

confirms that the trend of highly qualified young people leaving Albania is still ongoing. Albania has recently seen more educated people emigrating to other advanced OECD countries than before, for example to Italy and Greece. The interviews revealed that many participants had moved to other countries, such as Denmark and Austria, after their Italian migration experience. Moreover, some of them, who emigrated in the last 10 years, chose Austria as their first country of destination. For example, A.B said, that, he left Tirana in September 2018 for Austria to pursue a master's degree in the city of Linz. Another interviewer, O.K specified that she left Albania in November 2022. Her husband had received a job offer in Austria, so she decided to join him and try a new job too. L.P also stated that she had decided to leave Albania in 2024 and come to Austria. This decision was influenced by academic and professional factors.

5.2.1 Method and findings

The problem centred interview (PCI) focuses on interviewees' subjective perceptions and experiences of a particular set of issues. The open style allows the interviewer to speak freely and questions guide the conversation. The PCI interview begins with a narrative introduction (see methodology part of this work); the interviewee is then invited to tell a story, after which interviewers ask questions to check understanding.

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were invited to talk about their experience of moving from Albania to another country. They were asked about the reasons for their departure, their connection to Albania, their education and work experience as well as the advantages of being a transnational migrant. The subject of the Albanian diaspora community and their participation in this year's electoral process were then addressed.

Specific questions were asked by me to find out about the brain gain strategies implemented by the Albanian government. The aim was to understand the potential impact of these strategies and how well-known they were, as well as how people evaluated the government's approach. Participants were also asked if they had ever considered returning to Albania and what would be required from them to do so. The discussion then moved on to the benefits of brain circulation. Participants were asked if they would be willing to contribute to a specific project in Albania and connect with the Albanian scientific diaspora worldwide. In conclusion, the participants were invited to share their thoughts on the role of embassies in fostering connections between the

Albanian diaspora and Albania, as well as their views on how embassies can promote brain circulation.

The analysis provides a broader understanding of the interviewees' responses by examining the main questions concerning their transnational experience and the diasporic issue. It then considers the impact of government strategies and initiatives, as well as the question of return. The importance of brain circulation is also explored. Finally, the key findings are summarised in the conclusion.

The following areas will be analysed based on the responses provided by the interviewee:

Brain drain phenomenon

Connection with Albania and transnational experience

Diaspora, political transnationalism and external voting

Albanian brain gain strategies

Return issue and brain circulation

Role of the embassies

5.2.2 Brain drain phenomenon

Following the collapse of communism, a huge number of Albanians left the country, marking the beginning of a new phase of emigration. This saw the development of new Albanian communities abroad, characterised by the notion 'new diaspora'. The decision to leave Albania is influenced by factors such as the economy, politics, society and education. Those who leave tend to have foreign language skills, which makes integration easier. All participants interviewed for this investigation are part of the so-called new diaspora group, because they all emigrated after the 1990s. The reasons why they left Albania were educational, family and economic, as the interviews revealed. Participants in this study who had emigrated to Italy to study, stated that they already knew the Italian language.

This research data shows that five out of eight participants have emigrated primarily to Italy. Due to its geographical proximity, Italy, along with Greece, has been a popular destination for Albanian migrants since the 1990s. For instance, E.P stated that she

left Albania to study and gain new experiences. Given its proximity to Albania and the opportunity to take the university entrance exam in Venice, Italy was an obvious choice for her.

5.2.3 Connection with Albania and transnational experience

In transnationalism, migrants maintain contact with their home countries through visits or regular remittances. Identity and mobility are now transnational matters; migrants can build a transnational identity, attaching them to both their birthplace and host country. Their transnational identity and constant movement between countries fosters emotional and social links with both (see here the section about Transnationalism). For all participants, the connection with Albania remains strong. This is evident from the regular visits participants make to Albania, typically at least once a year. Family ties are the common factor.

„Albania is my home country. I was born there, I spent my childhood there and I still have family, friends and ex-colleagues there. I try to visit Albania three or four times a year.” (O.K)

„I have strong connections with Albania through family and friends. I visit Albania almost every three months, maintaining cultural and social ties.” (L.P)

„Family, friends, relatives, nationality, we have a home there and we don't want that connection to disappear. Having a home there means I can always go back, even when my parents are no longer alive. That's why we go at least once a year, and this year we're even going twice at Christmas.” (A.G)

„Well, no more than once a year, a week or two, depending on my commitments. The relationship is close because I still have my parents, my siblings and some of my friends, but I see them little or not at all because some of them have already moved away.” (E.P)

A.P asserts that the connection to Albania is significant to her children, despite the fact that they were not born in Albania; *„even for the children, they can enjoy their grandparents and Albania, where their roots lie, even though they were all born outside Albania, in Europe. They should not forget their origins, their Albanian roots, even though we have Italian citizenship. They need to know and experience where we come from.”*

M.F stated „family, businesses and network of friendships”. He has a business in Albania, too and he has been there more than five times in the past year. This is a form of circular migration, which is defined as the movement of people back and forth between two places, often in a recurring pattern (see circular migration section for further details).

The participants stated that they are grateful for this transnational experience, which has given them access to benefits such as a better education and improved employment opportunities. For instance, five of the participants stated that they had left Albania to pursue better educational opportunities abroad. They also emphasised the importance of a good education, stating that it enables individuals to fulfil their intellectual potential and opens promising career prospects upon graduation.

„A good education primarily allows significant development in a person's personal growth; a good education opens the mind to new ideas and provides the foundation for building a better future, both at a personal and collective level.” (A.H)

„For me, a good education means having the opportunity to learn new skills, develop professionally and contribute to society.” (L.P)

A.B emphasises that a good education would help the next generation not only to acquire knowledge, but also to become more critical and innovative. He also said that a better education system would help Albania to grow economically and strengthen democratic values; *„a better education means equipping the next generation with knowledge, skills and values, preparing young people for the workforce and ensuring equal opportunities for all. It also means creating a generation with more critical thinking towards the political class, a generation eager to innovate and raise living standards. Better education in Albania would also bring economic development, strengthen democratic institutions, reduce emigration, improve healthcare and enhance national dignity”*

The interviewees held different thoughts about educational opportunities in Albania and destination countries. Many of them said that, when they finished high school in Albania 20 years ago, there weren't many interesting university courses available. However, M.F says that Albania offers valuable educational opportunities, and if you want an education, you can achieve it; *„the same educational opportunities as in the country I live in now are available in Albania. If an education is desired and desired, success will be achieved.”*

L.P pointed out that although Albania has good teachers and many talented young people, it lacks investment and suffers from a lack of practical training and access to modern learning facilities; *„where I live now, there are more opportunities, laboratories and practical programmes, and it is easier to find a job once you have finished your studies.”* She also said that the two countries(Albania and Austria) have the same goal when it comes to education. However, the difference lies in the conditions and opportunities available.

E.P says that she doesn't think education can be good or bad; rather, it depends on how much it can offer you once completed, in terms of creating opportunities for you to shape your life and create a better path. The level of “better” is dependent on the country in which you live, the opportunities that are given to you based on your studies and the experiences you have had.

O.K, is in her late 20s and finished university in Albania. She says that educational opportunities in Albania have improved and Albanian universities have now also international partnerships; *„the Albanian education system is improving, offering excellent educational opportunities. The right to education is guaranteed by the Albanian constitution.”*

A.GJ lived in Italy and now he lives in Denmark. He found that the two countries differ in terms of their education systems. In Italy, the focus is more on theory, while in Denmark, there is a greater emphasis on practical learning; *„in Italy, I encountered a lot of theory and little practice. There were immense volumes of study and little practical experience, for example in court, for a student like me who studied law. Here in Denmark, however, from the third year onward, you go to the courts, gain practical experience directly in the courts, and they pay you. You work a little and study while gaining practical experience.”*

A.B said education in Austria is free, well-organised with a high standard, with strict anti-plagiarism policies, unlike what often happens with degrees or doctorates in Albania. Austrian investments and infrastructure are more developed than those in Albania and its professional education system is more advanced.

As previously mentioned, transnational migration, or circular migration, has various benefits for migrants, as well as for their home and host countries. According to the participants, the benefits for them are certainly a higher income, work experience and a higher standard of living with better healthcare system. They also said that travelling widely developing personally broaden your horizons and enable to form own opinions.

As migrants, they contribute to the economic system and cultural diversity, offering a different perspective that can benefit the community and the country in which they live.

„Definitely a higher income, work experience in large companies (e.g. corporate)” (A.H). She also said that the advantages she gave to Italy and Austria were in the form of intellectual and financial contributions.

„Changing and exchanging my experience, what I have received; being integrated into the culture of Italian society.” And “Italy, take advantage of me because I pay taxes.” (E.P)

„Income, work experience, education, and benefits are the services you get, even if you pay a lot of taxes, but the services are there” and “I have been working, paying taxes, and contributing to pensions and economic benefits in both Italy and Denmark.” (A.GJ)

„My work contributes to Austria's socio-economic system. I also contribute positively as a good example of integration here in Austrian society.” (O.K)

„As an immigrant, I offer the country where I live my professional experience, the work I do, and the skills I have gained from my education and experience.” (L.P)

„High contributions from taxes and the salary I receive, work productivity, civilized behaviour, etc.” (A.B)

5.2.4 Diaspora, political transnationalism and external voting

The movement of people across borders is an ongoing phenomenon. Advances in transportation routes and technology, as well as international labour markets, have facilitated this movement. Consequently, immigrant communities are formed. These communities are also known as diaspora communities (see chapter about diaspora).

Five of the participants said that they were part of an Albanian diaspora community. They said that establishing and maintaining this connection and being part of the diaspora, was very important to them. Three of the study's participants and me are members of the Illyrian Brains Network. Illyrian Brains³⁹⁷ is a diaspora community that was created by a group of young people from Albania and Kosovo living abroad; the aim of Illyrian Brains is to bring together the “brains” of Albanians around the world in order to create opportunities for collaboration with each other, encourage mutual

³⁹⁷ IllyrianBrains Network, <https://www.illyrianbrains.com/>

support and, most importantly, strengthen the connection with Albania and the Albanian language. Members of this diaspora group meet each other frequently in various cities around the world. The Illyrian Brains community organises a variety of social events, including small meetings and happy hours, both online and in person. These events are designed to strengthen connections and facilitate greater personal contact between members of the group. This diaspora community also organises various workshops and training events to help group members develop professionally, academically and personally. Furthermore, the members of this diaspora network, have the opportunity to participate in live webinars and presentations on a range of social, cultural and economic subjects related to Albania.

L.P. *„I have just joined an Albanian community called Illyrian Brains here in Vienna, where I meet with Albanians every month”.* Also, A.B and O.K are part of the Illyrian Brains Vienna community.

„In Italy, I was part of a wonderful Albanian diaspora group, the Albanian Catholic Christian diaspora. The parish brought us together not only for religious reasons, but also for cultural events and community dinners.” (A.P)

„Here in Denmark, I am part of both the Albanian and Italian diaspora communities. I have dual citizenship, which are separate from each other and I feel the need to cultivate both. With the Albanian diaspora, we organise dinners and football matches, and we attend festivals and events.” (A.GJ)

„Personally, yes! I am part of an Albanian community group not represented by an association.” (M.F)

As stated earlier, the diaspora has become a significant policy actor. Governments now recognise the political and economic contributions of the diaspora to their home countries. In order to achieve the engagement of diaspora in the development of the country, the authorities attempt to create effective diaspora engagement policies. People's migration experience enables political engagement. They can compare the political, socio-cultural and economic factors and effects of their home and host countries. Migrants can engage with politics in many ways, for example by protesting or voting.

One policy encouraging diaspora engagement is external voting, which allows migrants living abroad to vote in their home country. For the first time, Albanian citizens

living abroad were given the opportunity to participate in the May 2025 general elections; the Central Election Commission (CEC) operates an electronic platform for voter registration from abroad and those eligible were invited to register on it.³⁹⁸

Five interviewers exercised their democratic right to vote in this year's Albanian elections. They emphasised the significance of exercising this right and participating in the electoral process, highlighting their commitment to contributing to the Albanian political landscape. They had previously registered with the Electoral Commission's online platform. One participant M.F voted in person in Albania.

A.GJ, one of the interviewers, also highlighted the issue of political activism. He explained that he was interested in being active in Albania's political sphere. He stated that he had been extended an invitation to stand for election in Albania. However, he refused because he said the system hadn't changed, noting that the corruption frame included vote buying, voter intimidation, fraud, process and institution manipulation.

5.2.5 Albanian brain gains strategies

At this stage of the interview, I asked specific questions to explore the Albanian government's strategies for brain gain (for more information, see sections on Albanian Diaspora Engagement Policies, Programmes and initiatives). The objective was threefold: to ascertain the potential impact of these strategies, to evaluate their level of recognition and to assess respondents' evaluation of the government's approach.

E.P and A.H said that they have not been familiarised with the strategies previously stated. As previously mentioned, there is currently a lack of regular communication between the diaspora and Albanian institutions.

„I have no knowledge of these initiatives, I have never been informed about them by anyone and I have had no contact with them. The government must adopt a more determined and serious approach and work harder to ensure that these strategies are communicated effectively throughout the diaspora”. (E.P)

³⁹⁸ KQZ Albania, The Central Election Commission, accessed 24 October 2025, <https://kqz.gov.al/home>

„I don't know them and I haven't heard of them. I think they are certainly very important and positive initiatives for a country like Albania, to promote the return of all skilled emigrants.” (A.H)

A.B said that he has vaguely heard about the Brain Gain Programme, but not about the other initiatives. He also said that it is difficult for him to give a constructive opinion about these initiatives because he doesn't have any information about them. But he is certainly in favour of such initiatives. M.F stated that he had no personal knowledge of these initiatives, but he had observed a significant number of professionals returning to Albania in recent years. Both A.GJ and A.P are sceptical about the effectiveness of the strategies due to the current political climate in Albania.

A.GJ believes that the programme aims to encourage intellectuals to return home and improve the system, which would be a positive step. However, if the political climate remains corrupt, the plans will not succeed; *„I see that Albanians around the world find opportunities to express what they have acquired over the years: their professionalism. While in Albania, this is not possible because there, the system says to you: you can come, but you have to do as we say. If you do as we say, it's fine; if not, you go back to where you came from. So, you feel more like a stranger in your own home.”*

O.K said that she had heard about the strategies and had read about them online. She also says that it is positive that the Albanian government or Albanian institutions are trying to attract talent and involve the diaspora and that this is something that should be encouraged. However, she has some concerns about the practical implementation of these initiatives and the creation of an enabling environment for return, such as economic initiatives and support for entrepreneurs; *„If sustainable measures are implemented to guarantee that returning emigrants will no longer be faced with the barriers that previously drove them away, such as corruption and a lack of prospects, then the desired outcome will be achieved.”*

L.P expressed the opinion that, in principle, these initiatives are beneficial as they seek to attract professionals and establish connections between them and Albania. However, she added that the practical implementation often falls short of expectations. While the idea is positive, there is a need to be more transparent and supportive, as well as more concrete in results for people to gain sufficient confidence to join.

5.2.6 Return issue and brain circulation

Is turning back home realistic or is it a matter of brain circulation? This is a significant question in relation to this investigation. Many Albanian intellectuals who have lived, studied and worked abroad are thought to have considered returning home. However, how realistic is this process, and how well do the government's approaches and strategies meet this group's needs? This remains a challenging question.

As stated previously, the return process is considered voluntary in many instances, frequently involving assisted return, and involuntary for migrants who have no choice and must leave the destination country. On the other hand, brain circulation describes the repeated movement of skilled people between countries. This process facilitates the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experiences in both directions and may also help to develop economic opportunities.

The following discussion will explore the participants' responses to the question of whether they would be willing to return to Albania, as well as their thoughts on brain circulation. It can be stated that many participants thought about returning to Albania, but all of them said that they are not ready to take that step. A.GJ and A.P have confirmed that their initial intentions were to pursue their academic studies in Italy, with the subsequent aspiration of returning to Albania upon completion of their university education. They say the moment isn't right now and they're not ready to turn back. They say political and economic instability in Albania makes a return impossible.

„I left to study and planned to stay in Italy until I finished my master's degree and then return. However, I realised upon returning to Albania for holidays that the environment was no longer right for me. I had made progress living abroad and found it hard to adapt. I want to help my country, but I don't feel I can return right now.” (A.P)

„I decided to remain in Italy after completing my studies because conditions in Albania did not allow me to return after investing so much time, energy and resources, both human and financial. Returning to face a harsh reality that leaves you no room for action or expression, this changed the idea of returning that I had when I left. But also, based on the stories of friends and colleagues who have returned in Albania, seeing that they can no longer fit into social, political, and institutional life in Albania, unable to give back what they had acquired from living abroad.” (A.GJ)

L.P says that she is always thinking about returning. The idea of being close to her family and my people motivates her, as does the prospect of contributing to Albanian

development. However, she doesn't return because there are better job opportunities, higher salaries, greater stability and better living conditions here in Austria. In Albania, economic security is lacking and professional opportunities are limited.

E.P often thinks about returning but won't take that step yet. She's not ready to turn back to Albania due to medical, work and political reasons; *„I often think about returning, but that would mean taking a big step and I'm not ready to do that. The reasons are: medical, work, a very unstable situation and political corruption.“*

The elevated quality of life in Austria, a quality that is not replicated in Albania, is the primary factor motivating A.B, A.H and O.K to remain in Austria and not return to Albania.

„If the quality of life in Albania improved and there were significant political, economic, health and educational changes, I would be very keen to return.“ (O.K)

„No. The main reason for not returning is definitely the quality of life. I find that the quality of life is better in Austria. Furthermore, I think that the average income in Albania is still very low and I see huge gaps in terms of meritocracy.“ (A.H)

„Of course I have thought about it, but at the moment I don't see it as reasonable. If I were to return, it would only be for the purpose of contributing to a better and more prosperous Albania, and not for better job opportunities or living conditions, since I have already achieved those here in Austria.“ (A.B)

For M.F, the return to Albania will be as a final destination in the future; *„Currently, I haven't thought about returning, but I see it as a final destination.“*

The participating individuals in these interviews, say that they are ready to take part in the circulation process, as long as they are offered the opportunity to contribute to a specific project in Albania. They also believe that these processes would strengthen the connection between the diaspora and Albania. They said that living abroad does not stop people from contributing to Albania.

„Yes, of course, the fact that I live abroad does not prevent me from contributing to Albania; on the contrary, I would be very happy if I were given the opportunity“ (A.B)

„If I were offered the opportunity to be part of an interesting project in line with my professional experience and educational background, I would be available.“ (A.H)

„Of course, I will contribute with great pleasure.“ (O.K)

„Although I don't live in Albania, I would like to support projects that bring change, particularly in my field. I don't believe I need to be there in person to offer my assistance.” (L.P)

„Yes, I would gladly contribute to provide a benefit to my country.” (M.F)

For E.P, it is important that if she works on a specific project in Albania and shares her expertise, nobody will steal her work and pass it off as their own. She noted that in Albania, due to the corruption issue, someone can sometimes take your work and claim it as their own; *„I would be willing to work for Albania, provided that my work is not taken by someone else. However, I will always be ready to work for Albania, our bond will never break”.*

A.GJ noted that he would always be ready to contribute with his expertise, but only if he could carry out his work freely and in accordance with national law. He noted the discrepancy between national law and executive action. He said that Albania has quite good national regulations. These laws are similar to those in Italy, France and other Western countries. However, there is a problem with that. If the law says one thing, but the executive says you have to do it another way, there's a problem; *„I would be very willing, if they give me the space and opportunity to do what I do, in accordance with national regulations. I would also be willing to return for a longer period to work on a related project. I can also give my opinion on a specific draft if someone asks me for it. For example, I can hold an online meeting on Teams to discuss it if someone sends me an email asking for my thoughts.”*

The discussion then moved on to the measures that the Albanian government could adopt to encourage brain circulation. These could include coordinating short-term visits for consultancy purposes with Albanian universities, encouraging the sharing of experiences, and promoting mutual teaching. Participants agreed that all of these measures could facilitate the exchange of experiences among intellectual elites. They believed that, as long as they were implemented effectively, all the suggested measures could incentivise the intellectual elite to participate in the brain circulation process. Visits, collaborations, online platforms and financial support are all important factors; such initiatives motivate professionals and help them to make contacts and bring new ideas to Albania.

5.2.7 Role of the embassies

The final question of the interview was about the role of embassies in promoting brain circulation and connections between the Albanian diaspora and Albania. The participants said that diplomatic missions could significantly influence the promotion of mobility and the circulation of talent between Albania and Albanian communities residing abroad.

„I think embassies play a key role. They can serve as a bridge between the diaspora and Albania by organising meetings, projects, conferences and collaboration opportunities. If they function well, they can facilitate the circulation of talent.” (L.P)

M.F said that embassies are important in this direction and that a well-run embassy usually yields positive results. A.H suggested that this could be a good strategy in the future, as diplomatic missions could play a key role in promoting mobility. To achieve this, the Albanian government could invest more in its embassies abroad; *„diplomatic missions can indeed play a key role in promoting mobility and the circulation of talent between Albania and Albanian communities abroad. Currently, I am not aware of any offers from the Albanian Embassy. This could certainly be an area in which the Albanian government could invest”*

O.K highlighted the potential of embassies to facilitate the establishment of these connections, which could be instrumental in facilitating the transfer of knowledge and expertise, a crucial aspect for Albania's economic and social advancement; *„if this promotion is used well, the diplomatic mission can help not only in the physical return of talents but also in the return of knowledge, experience and networks that are vital for Albania's development.”*

A.GJ stated that embassies can facilitate brain circulation. He believes institutional reform is needed in this area and that ambassadors should only follow the diplomatic route. The tasks must be clearly defined and separated. He said that, in Albanian diplomatic offices, the ambassador is currently responsible for all political, diplomatic and administrative decisions. There is no administrative manager at the embassy who can liaise with the diaspora and Albania. He also gave the example of the Italian embassy in Denmark; *„embassies can facilitate brain circulation. Let me give you an example: the Italian Embassy in Denmark. They have public lists of professionals on their website. If you need a lawyer, for example, you can find one on the list. The same applies to social workers and psychologists.”*

5.3 Findings summary

To summarise this analysis, the interviewees included five female and three male participants. The participants are aged between their early 20s and early 40s. The profile of the participants in this study shows that they immigrated between 1997 and 2024. This illustrates the brain drain from Albania, which started in the 1990s and continues to this day. Young Albanians from various professional backgrounds are leaving to seek better educational and employment opportunities abroad. Five interviewees migrated for education, one with her family, two for economic reasons. Five of the eight participants had emigrated to Italy, a popular destination for Albanian migrants since the 1990s. Five of the participants had studied abroad in Italy, Spain or Austria. Three had studied in Albania. Three of the participants also acquired Italian citizenship, while one participant acquired Austrian citizenship.

The transnational experience strengthens the bond between participants and their families, as evidenced by their regular visits to Albania. Family ties are a key aspect of this experience. Participants express gratitude for this experience, citing improved education, employment prospects better living and healthcare conditions, as key benefits. Six out of eight respondents were part of an Albanian diaspora community and this connection was of great importance to them. Five of the interviewees exercised their democratic right to vote in this year's Albanian elections, emphasising their commitment to the political system. During the interview, A.GJ raised the issue of political activism. He said that he wanted to be involved in Albanian politics, but had declined an invitation to stand for election, because he felt that the system had not changed due to corruption and election manipulation.

Questions were asked to investigate the brain gain strategies of the Albanian government. The aim was to assess their impact, level of awareness and popularity. Participants expressed a variety of opinions about these strategies. Overall, they agreed that it was positive for the Albanian government and institutions to try to attract talent and engage with the diaspora and that this should be encouraged.

It was noted that many participants were not previously familiar with the strategies, meaning they had no personal knowledge of the initiatives. Participants also pointed out the current lack of effective communication. The implementation of brain gain

strategies has been hindered by a lack of long-term vision, corruption, unstable policymaking and the conflictual nature of Albanian politics. Due to the current political climate in Albania, which many participants in this investigation still perceive as corrupt, they were sceptical about the effectiveness of the strategies. They expressed doubts about how these initiatives could be implemented in practice and how an environment could be created that would encourage people to return, including through economic initiatives and support for entrepreneurs.

Many participants said that they would like to return to Albania; they often think about it, but for now, they are not planning to take that step. They say that the time isn't right yet and that they're not ready to go back. Many state that they initially intended to pursue their academic studies abroad before returning to Albania upon completing their university education, but they now claim, that political and economic instability in Albania makes this impossible. They are therefore not ready to return due to medical, work-related and political reasons. The high quality of life in the host countries, which cannot be offered in Albania, is also a key factor in some people's decision to stay in their destination country rather than return to Albania.

All participants confirmed their willingness to contribute to a brain circulation process in Albania, which would facilitate connections between the diaspora and the country. They are willing to share their expertise, provided they can work freely and in accordance with national law. They emphasised that transparency and an absence of corruption are vital for this process.

At the end of the interview, the participants said that diplomatic missions could significantly increase the movement of talent between Albania and its diaspora. They suggested that this could be an effective strategy if embassies played a pivotal role in facilitating mobility. To achieve this, the Albanian government should invest more in its embassies abroad to enable them to facilitate these crucial connections for the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

5.4 Expert interview analyses

The interviewee Renis Meta is an associate lecturer in the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana. He lectures on four programmes of study: Administration, Social Policies, Social Work in

Social Services and Social Policies in the Justice System. His experience is diverse, ranging from working in highly important Albanian institutions to contributing to and working in civil society, as well as engaging as an expert and policy analyst. Renis Meta has been involved in the civic and political life of Albania for a long time. He has participated in youth-led initiatives, research projects and advocacy groups, influencing public policies and discourse in Albania.

The interview was conducted via Zoom in November 2025. Before the interview began, the interviewee was given a brief overview of the procedure and the purpose of the interview. He was very cooperative and provided comprehensive answers to the questions.

The interview was recorded directly from the online platform and the material was subsequently transcribed. As this was not considered necessary for this expert interview, the interviewee's facial expressions and gestures were not transcribed. The expert interview was analysed using content analysis. As previously stated, Mayring's methodology for analysing interviewees' answers involved paraphrasing, generalising and summarising. Following paraphrasing, generalisation and two reductions, the following categories were identified:

Brain drain in Albania from '90 to now

Albanian brain gain policies, programmes and initiatives

The impact of these policies, pull and push factors

Brain gain and Albanian EU integration

Brain circulation and the future

Renis Meta, began to explain the phenomenon of brain drain in Albania, starting with the 1990s. He confirmed that a significant number of Albanians started to leave the country during this period. Based on his experience and statistical data from Albania, he said that this trend of emigration continues to be prevalent, what he called a haemorrhage, that has never stopped.

He stated that if in the 90s everyone left, whether for work, education, or not. Today well-educated, qualified, and young Albanians with higher education leave. Emigration today is different from the 1990s and 2000s: brain drain in Albania is linked to living conditions. While the main reason for leaving in the '90s was economic, today young

people mainly leave for social reasons, such as corruption and nepotism and issues with education and healthcare. He said that, since Albania does still not have a solution to these deep-rooted problems relating to social, cultural, economic and political issues, this phenomenon will continue.

„There are distortions in the way we govern that still exist today. As long as these issues persist in our society, they will be closely related to migration, which will continue constantly.”

He noted that various studies on the topic had shown that Albania had the highest rate of departure of highly qualified individuals. Meta said that Albania currently experiences „pure brain drain”, with qualified people leaving the country. The issue of brain drain has not been a major concern in Albanian politics for the last 30 years, to the extent that there is now a lack of young people in the country.

When I asked him about his opinion on the Albanian government's brain gain policies, and how successful and effective these strategies have been in achieving their objectives, he began his analysis with addressing two questions; The first question he raised was whether these strategies were sufficient given the large number of scientists in the diaspora. *„Has Albania implemented sufficient strategies and programmes to encourage young people to return?”* He believes Albania hasn't implemented sufficient policies, especially given its large number of young, well-educated and highly qualified Albanians people in diaspora. He thinks the country needs more initiatives to support its large number of well-educated Albanians living abroad.

The second question was about whether the Albanian authorities were really willing to reverse the brain drain: *„have the policies been taken seriously by those in power, meaning, have the leaders really been serious about the calls and programs they have implemented to reverse the brain drain in Albania? Even to this question I can give an answer that they didn't have, they didn't have a clear purpose.”*

As previously explained, throughout his professional career, Renis Meta has participated in discussions about the issues facing young people in Albania, representing civil society. He stated that the Albanian political establishment has been apathetic towards the phenomenon of brain drain and has always viewed it as an undesirable fact of life; Albanian politicians recognise a problem but don't believe in it's significance; politics doesn't want to face it. Meta said that if these young people were

in Albania, the way the country is governed and elections conducted would be very different. According to him, Albanian politicians have no interest in keeping these young elites and qualified people in Albania; they want them away.

He believes that these well-educated and qualified individuals are vital to the social, cultural, economic and political development of Albanian society. According to Meta, it is these young, educated people who have the courage to stand up to injustice. He believes that Albania is impoverishing itself spiritually, culturally, socially and politically by letting them leave, as this makes it much easier for the government to do whatever it wants.

Further, in this context, he talked particularly about the Brain Gain Programme, explaining that the initiative began around 2000 with the help of the UNDP, was initiated by Fatos Nano³⁹⁹, and later being implemented. He stated that one of the main reasons for the programme's failure was that nepotism and corruption that held these young professionals from advancing in their careers. In his opinion, *„a clash of cultures occurred when young, educated Albanians who had qualified abroad encountered the nepotism and corruption that are prevalent in Albanian culture”*. He said that these factors held these young professionals from advancing in their careers. He added that people who have qualified abroad and want to develop their careers in Albania face limited opportunities due to these aforementioned factors.

For him, *„Albanian politics has used these kinds of policies as marketing tools for last 30 years”*. He said that, although the Albanian government has invited diaspora experts to contribute to their ideas, they are unable to do so freely without becoming politically tied, which hinders their career progression. Despite these programmes and initiatives being implemented, he said that *„there are still too few of these individuals in key leadership positions within the Albanian government and the number of returnees remains minimal.”*

He also pointed out that there has been no ongoing communication regarding these programmes. In essence, he believes that the government launched the programmes, but there has been no follow-up, no accurate figures have been provided and the

³⁹⁹ Note: Fatos Nano (1952–2025) was an Albanian politician and socialist leader who served as Prime Minister of Albania from 1991, 1997- 1998 and from 2002 to 2005. He was the founder and first leader of the Socialist Party of Albania.

programmes have not been promoted. Renis Meta emphasised the importance of having a long-term vision for brain gain programmes and strategies.

In answer to the question of whether these initiatives are known in Albania, he said that the government does not prioritise these strategies. Meta said that the *„government's narrative on how it deals with this issue is a typical example of the normalisation of globalisation and that this narrative serves only to minimise the problem.”* By presenting migration as a normal phenomenon that has occurred in Albania and will continue to do so in the future, the government is trying to downplay this problem as normal, according to Meta; this narrative that ignores the issue of brain drain has led to these consequences, where there are no more young people in the country. He stated that, Albania is now recruiting people for work from third countries and *„has today become for these people like a “mini-Italy”, a “mini-Greece” and a “mini-Germany”.*

According to Meta, the only ones talking about this problem are the civil society and organisations dealing with youth issues or conducting various studies; they are the only entities bringing this issue to public attention.

The discussion then moved on to the push and pull factors. At this point in the interview, Meta noted once again that corruption and political party affiliation are the main factors keeping these individuals away from Albania. According to him, these push factors also apply to individuals who may want to return to Albania. He stated that pull factors are either lacking or in short supply in Albania. He said that *„when balancing the pull and push factors for young, well-educated Albanians living abroad, the push factors are still more decisive in keeping these young people away than the pull factors are in attracting them.”* According to him, there is a huge disparity between the two types of factors in this context, and the Albanian government is not really trying to reduce it.

The next topic of discussion was brain gain policies and Albanian EU integration. Meta highlighted the size of the Albanian diaspora and the potential of sharing EU experience back home. According to him, this would aid Albania's EU integration and accelerate other reforms. Meta also says this could be very positive for the development of the Albanian public administration; *„with the support, experience and knowledge of these individuals, Albania could integrate and accede to the EU more quickly”.* He also says the scientific diaspora could make significant progress in

adopting a different work culture, paying more attention to matters and fighting against the Albanian culture of bureaucracy.

Considering how Albanians want to work and how they approach opportunities, Meta finds that the brain circulation process can be a more effective method than brain gain; it is a more realistic and effective strategy in his opinion. According to him *„brain circulation gives Albanian individuals the freedom to share their experience in Albania, while also allowing them to leave. Through consultancy approaches, they can contribute to Albania as experts”*. He said that brain circulation could be beneficial in other ways, such as providing mentoring opportunities. For example, he said that facilitating brain circulation with professionals living abroad would help the Albanian public administration gain experience and improve its capabilities. He believes, this would be a more effective policy as it would also attract professionals not intending to return to Albania, but wanting to contribute for a short time; *„it would also create a more fluid and concrete process for Albanians living abroad”*; this approach should be implemented in Albania.

Meta said also that embassies could play a crucial role in connecting the diaspora with Albania. They need to attract Albanian professionals and expertise, but the Albanian embassies do not; *„data shows that Albanian embassies are ineffective and fail to identify qualified individuals.”* He believes they absolutely should, as this is one of their main tasks.

In conclusion, Meta said that, firstly, any government in power in Albania that wants to implement, conceptualise and design a strategy or programme must have a long-term vision: *„this vision must be long-term, and not just a manifestation of a specific moment, particularly for strategies, programmes and brain gain initiatives”*; it should have the structure of a long-term strategy, with a beginning, development, and end a well-defined process; programmes should also have this structure. Secondly, these strategies should have one fundamental *„pure goal: to bring back these young people, professionals and academics; their return must be the purpose.”* The third point should cover the technical aspects of these brain gain strategies, which are related to pull and push factors. Meta said that the *„Albanian government needs to invest in pull factors by offering certain benefits to individuals through these programmes.”* He stated that pull factors must remain a high priority in order to attract the scientific diaspora to engage with or return to Albania.

5.5 Key findings from expert and diaspora interviews

This section will summarise the key findings of the interviews, highlighting the most important aspects of the discussion on Albanian brain gain policies. This investigation involved conducting interviews with members of the Albanian scientific diaspora, as well as with Renis Meta, who was consulted as an expert. The analysis resulted in four discussion points, which can be summarised as follows:

- i. the current lack of effective communication
- ii. the effectiveness of the strategies
- iii. push factors include corruption, political and economic instability
- iv. brain circulation and the role of the embassies

As the interviews with the Albanian diaspora revealed, many participants were not previously familiar with the strategies, meaning they had no personal knowledge of the initiatives. Meta also said that there has been no ongoing communication regarding these government initiatives, that they have not been promoted and that the policies have not been taken seriously by those in power. If these programmes are not promoted to the diaspora and the Albanian government does not take them seriously and make them a priority, the diaspora will not know about them and the government will not be able to engage them in these programmes. The lack of effective communication between the diaspora and Albanian institutions is a cause for concern and must be prioritised.

The question now is about the effectiveness of the strategies. According to Meta, these initiatives are not effective because there are too few initiatives and programmes in relation to the huge number of Albanian scientists in the diaspora abroad. Also, there has been no follow-up and no accurate figures have been provided on how these initiatives and programmes have functioned.

Due to the current political climate in Albania, which many participants in this investigation still perceive as corrupt, they were sceptical about the effectiveness of the strategies. At this point, Meta also stated that the Albanian political framework is corrupt. In his opinion, a clash of cultures occurred when young, educated Albanians, who had qualified abroad, encountered the nepotism and corruption prevalent in Albanian culture. He stated that one of the main reasons for the failure of the Brain

Gain Programme was that these young professionals were held from advancing in their careers by nepotism and corruption.

Meta noted once again that corruption, political party affiliation, education and healthcare issues are the main factors preventing these individuals from returning to Albania. He said that Albania is currently experiencing migration as a pure brain drain, with qualified people leaving the country. He claims that these push factors are decisive in keeping these individuals away from Albania, and that pull factors, are lacking. He said that, for young, well-educated Albanians living abroad, the push factors are more decisive in keeping them away than the pull factors in attracting them. He added that there is a huge disparity between the two types of factors in this context and the Albanian government is not trying to reduce it. As Meta said, this imbalance between pull and push factors can also be seen in the responses that the scientific diaspora has given to the question of return. Participants often think of returning to Albania, but they're not planning to yet as the time isn't right. Many said they planned to study abroad, then return home, but political and economic instability in Albania makes this impossible. Therefore, they are not ready to return for medical, work-related and these over mentioned political reasons. The high quality of life in the host countries, which cannot be offered in Albania, is also a key factor influencing some people's decision to remain in their destination country rather than return to Albania.

All participants confirmed their willingness to contribute to a brain circulation process in Albania, facilitating connections between the diaspora and the country. They are willing to share their expertise, provided they can work freely and in accordance with national law. Transparency and an absence of corruption are vital for this process. Meta found that brain circulation could be a more effective method than brain gain. He considered here the fact how Albanians want to work and approach opportunities. Brain circulation gives Albanian individuals the freedom to share their experiences in Albania while also enabling them to leave. Through consultancy, they can contribute to Albania as experts. He added that brain circulation could be beneficial in other ways, such as providing mentoring opportunities. For example, facilitating brain circulation with professionals living abroad would help the Albanian public administration to gain experience and improve its capabilities. He believes this would be a more effective policy, as it would also attract professionals who do not want to return to Albania

permanently, but who wish to contribute for a limited time. It would also create a more fluid and concrete process for Albanians living abroad.

Participants from the diaspora said that diplomatic missions could significantly increase the flow of talent between Albania and its diaspora. Meta also said that embassies could play a crucial role in connecting the diaspora with Albania. He believes that they should absolutely attract Albanian professionals and expertise, as this is one of their primary responsibilities. However, Albanian embassies are ineffective and fail to identify qualified individuals, as data show. Participants also suggested that embassies could play a pivotal role in facilitating mobility. According to them, currently, the Albanian embassies in the host countries where they live do not facilitate this connection. They wish that the Albanian government could more invest in its embassies abroad to facilitate these connections and knowledge transfer between Albania and its diaspora.



6. Conclusions

This thesis aimed to analyse brain drain in Albania, exploring its causes and consequences. The government intends to reverse this phenomenon and develop an effective diaspora policy. The study emphasised the benefits of circular migration, also known as brain circulation, which is a strategy designed to prevent brain drain by facilitating the exchange of skills, knowledge and experience.

The research was based on the following questions: *How does the Albanian government attempt to manage, implement and develop effective as well as successful diaspora policies? What's the impact of brain gain strategies on Albanian scientific diaspora?*

The research question led to further sub-questions. For example, *how is political transnationalism evident in diaspora policies? In what ways is the transnational experience of Albanian migrants manifested? What benefits does brain circulation bring to migrants?*

In answer to the research questions, this study shows that the Albanian government has attempted to develop strategies to strengthen its relationship with the diaspora. These include laws, strategies and initiatives designed to protect the identity, rights and contributions of Albanian communities living abroad. The aim has been to encourage the diaspora to play an active role in the economic, social and political development of Albania. However, the success of these initiatives is still in question. Despite the presence of data on brain gain and diaspora policies, these policies remain under-researched and discussed. Brain gain strategies have been hindered by lack of vision, instability in policymaking and conflict in Albanian politics. Frequent restructuring by Albania's diaspora departments has drawn criticism from the Albanian diaspora, which believes it hinders effectiveness and efficiency. Research also shows that corruption is a reason, why members of the Albanian diaspora, are not engaging further with Albania.

The strategies were met with scepticism by many of the participants in this study, who still perceive the current political climate in Albania to be corrupt. They expressed doubts about how these initiatives could be implemented in practice and how an environment could be created that would encourage people to return, including through economic initiatives and support for entrepreneurs. The expert also sees the Albanian political framework as corrupt. A clash of cultures occurred when young, educated Albanians, qualified abroad, encountered nepotism and corruption. He stated that this was a key factor in the failure of the Brain Gain Programme.

Many participants in this study stated that they were not familiar with the strategies, meaning they had no personal experience of the initiatives. The participants also identified the current absence of effective communication as a problem. The expert said there has been no communication about these government initiatives, they haven't been promoted, and those in power, haven't taken them seriously.

In terms of political transnationalism, the Albanian National Diaspora Strategy emphasises the importance of political participation within the diaspora. As part of this, external voting enables migrants living abroad to vote in their home country. This year, Albanian voters living abroad could vote in a general election for the first time. Five of the interviewees from this study voted, demonstrating their political engagement. The political activism of migrants often raises questions about citizenship and belonging. While citizenship of the home country is usually a prerequisite for voting, many

governments also permit dual citizenship. For example, Albania permits dual citizenship, enabling Albanian migrants who already hold another citizenship to participate in Albanian elections.

The question of the experiences of Albanian migrants living abroad can be stated as follows: the study revealed that the participants still have a strong connection with Albania. Participants said they were grateful for the opportunities this experience had provided, including access to a better education, improved employment prospects as well as cultural and intellectual enrichment for migrants and the host country alike. They said that a higher income and work experience had led to a higher standard of living and better access to healthcare. They also highlighted that travelling widely and personal development broaden your horizons, enabling you to form your own opinions. As migrants, they contribute to the economic system and cultural diversity, offering a different perspective that can benefit the community and the country in which they now live.

The interviewees were ready to share their expertise, as long as they can work freely and in accordance with national law. According to them, the process of brain circulation would also strengthen the connection between the diaspora and Albania. They added that living abroad does not prevent them from contributing to Albania and emphasized that transparency and anti-corruption measures are essential to this process. Furthermore, they believe that these exchanges, visits, and collaborations, as well as online platforms, allow the diaspora to stay in touch with their Albanian colleagues and introduce new ideas to the country. According to the expert, brain circulation enables the Albanian diaspora to share their experiences in Albania and, at the same time, to be free to leave. Through consultancy, the diaspora can contribute as experts and provide mentoring opportunities. He believes that the brain circulation process would create a more fluid and concrete procedure for Albanians living abroad.

Participants from the diaspora who participated in the investigation of this master's thesis said, that diplomatic missions could significantly increase the flow of talent between Albania and its diaspora. According to the participants, the Albanian embassies in their current host countries do not offer this service, meaning they did not receive information about these processes or participate in any related events. Attracting Albanian professionals and expertise is one of the primary responsibilities of

embassies, according to the expert. However, he argued that Albanian embassies are, now, unsuccessful in identifying the Albanian scientific diaspora.

This study contributes to the debate surrounding transnationalism by emphasising the strong social, political and economic connections between migrants, their host countries and their countries of origin. Migrants who live in more than one country regularly interact and exchange ideas across national borders. The concept of brain circulation emphasises that the movement of talent can benefit both, the country of origin and the destination country.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the ongoing debate about the importance of regular communication between Albania and its diaspora. Creating a database of the Albanian diaspora could encourage engagement with the home country. Additionally, embassies and consulates can play a pivotal role in fostering connections between the diaspora and Albania.

This master thesis opened with a question: 'Turning back home or brain circulation?' For now, the answer is that the Albanian scientific diaspora that participated in this study do not intend to return to Albania, because of its current political, social, and economic instability. The high quality of life in the host countries, which cannot be offered in Albania and the disparity between the push and pull factors in the Albanian context are key factors in their decision to stay in their destination country rather than return to Albania. Meanwhile, the interviewees consider brain circulation to be an effective strategy for engaging the diaspora with the home country. It would also create a more flexible and practical process for Albanians living abroad.

In essence, it is fundamental for Albania to implement more effective and successful long-term brain gain and brain circulation strategies to address the issue of brain drain and to engage the diaspora in the country development. Until this happens, the debate between brain drain and brain gain will remain and continue.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Diaspora interview guide: Albanian language

- Mosha
 - Gjinia
 - Kombësia (1 apo 2 nënshtetësi)
 - Profesioni
 - Arsimi (bachelor, master)
 - Vendi i banimit (vendi i origjinës në Shqipëri dhe destinacioni)
 - Viti i migrimit
1. Më trego historinë tënde të migrimit: kur dhe pse u largove, ku shkove dhe ku jeton tani?
 2. Cila është lidhja jote me Shqipërinë?
 - Sa shpesh e viziton ti Shqipërinë?
 3. Çfarë do të thotë për ty një arsim/edukim i mirë?
 - Cili është roli i tij?
 - Çfarë mendon për mundësitë arsimore në Shqipëri dhe në vendin ku jeton tani? Cilat janë ngjashmëritë dhe dallimet?
 4. Çfarë pune bën dhe çfarë mendon për mundësitë e punësimit në Shqipëri krahasuar me këtu?
 - Çfarë përfitimesh/avantazhesh ke pasur ti si emigrant personalisht?
 - Çfarë përfitimesh i ofron ti si imigrant vendit ku jeton tani?
 5. A je anëtar i ndonjë grupi komunitar shqiptar këtu ku jeton aktualisht?
 6. A votove për zgjedhjet parlamentare në Maj?
 - Nëse po, si votove? (në prezencë apo me zarf, nepermjet regjistrimit online)
 7. Qeveria shqiptare ka zbatuar një sërë iniciativash që synojnë të nxisin kthimin e elitës intelektuale shqiptare dhe qarkullimin e talenteve. Ndër këto mund të përmendim, programin 'Brain Gain', 'Punë të Mbarë', 'Gati për Shqipërinë', si dhe 'Strategjinë Kombëtare për Diasporën Shqiptare'.
 - A ke dëgjuar ti për këto strategji më parë? Ke informacione mbi keto iniciativa?
 - Nëse po, si je informuar?
 - Cili është opinionin tuaj?
 8. A ke menduar ndonjëherë të kthehesh në Shqipëri?
 - Nëse po, çfarë të shtyn të kthehesh?
 9. Cilat janë arsyet pse nuk kthehesh?
 10. Nëse nuk ke ndërmend të kthehesh në Shqipëri, a do të ishe i gatshëm të përdorësh aftësitë dhe njohuritë e tua, për shembull duke kontribuar në një projekt specifik në Shqipëri?

11. Për të nxitur promovimin, shkëmbimin e përvojës midis elitave intelektuale, qeveria mund të marrë masa konkrete si, për shembull: organizimi i vizitave të shkurtra studimore për ekspertë, mbështetja e bashkëpunimit me universitetet, krijimi i platformave digjitale për profesionistët, si dhe ofrimi i stimujve financiarë.
 - Sipas mendimit tënd, a mund të lehtësojnë këto iniciativa shkëmbimin e përvojës midis elitave intelektuale?
12. Ambasadat mund të luajnë një rol të rëndësishëm në promovimin dhe shkëmbimin e përvojës midis elitave intelektuale si dhe qarkullimin e talenteve midis Shqiperise dhe Diapores shqiptare neper bote.
 - Cili është mendimi juaj mbi këtë aspekt?

Appendix B: Diaspora interview guide: English language

- Age
 - Nationality (1 or 2)
 - Gender
 - Occupation
 - Education
 - Place of residence (country of origin and host country)
 - Year of migration
1. Tell me about your migration story: when and why you left, where you went, and where you live now.
 2. What is your connection to Albania?
 - How often do you visit Albania?
 3. What does a good education mean to you?
 - What is its role?
 - What do you think about educational opportunities in Albania compared to the country where you live? What are the similarities and differences?
 4. What is your job and how do job opportunities in Albania compare with those here?
 - What advantages have you gained as an emigrant?
 - What advantages do you offer the country in which you now live?
 5. Are you part of the Albanian diaspora or an Albanian community group?
 6. Did you vote in this year's Albanian elections?
 - If so, how did you vote? (in person or by post)
 7. The Albanian government has implemented a series of initiatives aimed at promoting the return of the Albanian intellectual elite, mobility, and the circulation of talent. These include the 'Brain Gain Programme', 'Pune te Mbare', 'Gati per Shqiperine', and the 'Albanian Diaspora National Strategy'.

- Are you familiar with these strategies, have you heard of them before?
 - If so, how did you learn about them?
 - What is your opinion of them?
8. Have you ever considered returning to Albania?
- If so, what would motivate you to do so?
9. What are the reasons for not returning?
10. If you do not intend to return to Albania, would you be willing to contribute your skills and knowledge to a specific project there?
11. In order to promote brain circulation processes, the government can take measures such as organising short visits for experts, supporting cooperation with universities, creating online platforms for professionals and offering financial incentives?
- In your opinion, could such initiatives facilitate the exchange of experiences among the intellectual elite?
12. Embassies could play an important role in promoting the exchange of experiences between intellectual elites and the circulation of talent between Albania and its diaspora around the world.
- What is your opinion on this aspect?

Appendix C: Expert interview guide: Albanian language

1. Cilat janë vëzhgimet tuaja mbi emigracionin shqiptar që nga vitet '90 deri në ditët e sotme, veçanërisht në lidhje me fenomenin e "largimit të trurit"?
2. Cilat janë pasojat e humbjes së elites intelektuale?
 - Çfarë ka ndodhur me Shqipërinë si pasojë e këtij fenomeni?
3. Sa e rëndësishme është për Shqipërinë që ta përmbysë fenomenin e "Brain Drain" dhe ta parandalojë atë?
 - Cilat mund të jenë arsyet?
4. Ju përshkruani në disa nga artikuj tuaj nje apati të institucioneve dhe të klasës politike shqiptare, kundrejt politikave të 'Brain Gain'. Ju thoni se qeveria shqiptare e ka injoruar për një kohë të gjatë fenomenin e "Brain Drain" dhe e konsideron atë si një të vërtetë të padëshirueshme.
 - A mund ta shpjegoni më hollësisht këtë opinion personal?
5. Programi 'Brain Gain', iniciativat 'Pune të Mbarë', 'Gati për Shqipërinë' si dhe 'Strategjia Kombëtare e Diasporës Shqiptare', janë projektuar me qëllimin që të inkurajojnë persona shqiptarë, brenda dhe jashtë vendit, me talente të vecanta dhe kualifikime të larta, që të kthehen, ose dhe të ndërtojnë karrierën e tyre në Shqipëri.
 - Cili është opinionin juaj mbi qëllimet e qeverisë shqiptare për këto strategji?

- Sa të suksesshme dhe efektive janë këto strategji, sipas mendimit tuaj?
6. Si perceptohen në përgjithësi politikat 'Brain Gain' në Shqipëri?
 - A janë këto iniciativa të njohura nga publiku në përgjithësi dhe veçanërisht nga të rinjtë me kualifikime të larta apo studentët e shkëlqyer, që planifikojnë të emigrojnë?
 7. Cilët mund të jenë faktorët kryesorë për ti besuar apo për të qenë skeptik ndaj qeverisë mbi këto programe e iniciativa?
 8. A mund të raportoni ndonjë rezultat konkret, që erdhi falë këtyre programeve dhe iniciativave 'brain gain'?
 9. Tani, duke pasur parasysh, procesin e integritetit të Shqipërisë në Bashkimin Evropian, çfarë ndikimi kanë politikat 'brain gain' në realizimin e këtij procesi?
 - Opinioni juaj mbi këtë aspekt?
 10. Thuhet, se vendet që kanë përjetuar një largim të madh të elites intelektuale, mund të përfitojnë sot, duke planifikuar, kordinuar e zhvilluar strategji të "qarkullimit të trurit".
 - Cilat përfitime konkrete, si për shëmbull, ekonomike apo sociale, mund të ketë Shqipëria, në rast se implementon strategji të mirefillta të qarkullimit të talentëve? Mendimit tuaj në këtë drejtim?
 11. Perspektiva juaj mbi të ardhmen e politikave 'Brain Gain' në Shqipëri.
 - Deri tani, cilat mësimë mund të nxirren nga realizimi i programeve dhe iniciativave të 'Brain Gain' në Shqipëri?
 - Sipas mendimit tuaj, cilat duhet të jenë prioritetet e qeverisë shqiptare, në vitet e ardhshme, për ti forcuar këto politika dhe për ti bërë me tërheqëse për eliten intelektuale?

Appendix D: Expert interview guide: English language

1. What are your observations on Albanian emigration from the 1990s to the present day, with particular reference to the phenomenon of the brain drain?
2. What are the consequences of losing the intellectual elite?
 - What has happened to Albania as a result of this phenomenon?
3. How important is it for Albania to reverse the "brain drain" phenomenon and prevent it?
 - What could be the reasons?
4. In some of your articles, you describe the apathy of institutions and the political class towards the brain gain policies. You state that the Albanian government has long ignored the phenomenon of "brain drain" and considers it an undesirable truth.

- To what precisely are you referring? Could you please explain that in more detail?
- 5. The 'Brain Gain Programme', *Pune të Mbarë*, *'Gati për Shqipërinë'* and the 'Albanian Diaspora National Strategy', are designed with the aim of encouraging Albanian individuals, both inside and outside the country, with special talents and high qualifications, to return or build their careers in Albania.
 - What is your opinion on the goals of the Albanian government regarding these strategies?
 - How successful and effective are these strategies, in your opinion?
- 6. How are 'brain gain' policies generally perceived in Albania?
 - Are these initiatives widely known, especially to young people with high qualifications or excellent students who plan to emigrate?
- 7. What affects the level of trust or scepticism among the highly educated towards government initiatives?
- 8. Could you share any concrete results from these 'brain gain' programmes and initiatives?
- 9. Now, considering the process of Albania's integration into the European Union, what impact do brain gain policies have on the realisation of this process?
 - Your opinion on this aspect?
- 10. Countries that have experienced significant "brain drain" can benefit from planning, coordinating and developing strategies for 'brain circulation'.
 - What concrete economic or social benefits could Albania have, if it implemented effective brain circulation strategies? What is your opinion on this?
- 11. What is your perspective on the future of 'Brain Gain' policies in Albania?
 - What lessons can be learned from the implementation of 'Brain Gain' programmes and initiatives in Albania so far?
 - In your opinion, what should the Albanian government prioritise in the coming years to strengthen these policies and make them more attractive to the intellectual elite?