

Emigration of Albanian Youth: Reasons and Challenges Ahead

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Abstract: - One of major socio-economic concerns in Albania is youth emigration. This phenomenon has long term consequences for the labour market, for the innovation potential and for the demographic balance of Albania, that are considered very important in different ways. This study investigates the main factors influencing the intent of young adults in the age of 18 - 35 years old to emigrate, by also examining the costs perceived by them and the possible policy approaches. For the aim of this study, we have conducted research that combines quantitative and qualitative data. Through a survey of 736 respondents, through 20 semi structured interviews and two focus groups we have gathered data and developed a quantitative analysis that includes descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and a regression model with a specific focus on key factors such as economic conditions, trust in institutions, skill inequality, and networks of migrants. The findings of this analysis suggest that the increased migration intentions are strongly connected to high levels of unemployment, low incomes expectation, and perceptions of corruption. Contrary to these suggestions, an increased trust in public institutions and optimistic views about opportunities for career progress in Albania, tend to decrease the probability of leaving intentions. The networks of migrants, by making the process of moving abroad more accessible through uncertainty and information barriers reduction also play an important role in this process. These findings are supported by the qualitative results, through revealing a broader sense of dissatisfaction by the government, limited opportunities for professional development, and a strong attraction toward systems of evaluations based on merit in EU countries. The results of this study indicate that the decisions to migrate are influenced by a combination of factors such as the economic pressures, institutional challenges and personal aspirations, rather than by a single factor. Considering the results of the analysis, this study suggests that there is a need for policies that improve labour market opportunities, strengthen governance, support youth entrepreneurship, and promote forms of circular migration instead of permanent outflows. These findings together, emphasize the importance of coordinated and long-term strategies to reduce the ongoing drain of young talents in Albania.

Key-Words: - The push-pull model, human capital theory, skills mismatch, diaspora networks, youth unemployment.

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1 Introduction

The emigration of young people from Albania is a complex phenomenon. A single perspective alone cannot explain its complexity, but a combination of perspectives that highlight different aspects of the decision to migrate can give a better understanding of this phenomenon.

One of the most common approaches used to explain youth migration is the push-pull model, originally developed by [1]. This model explains migration from two points of view: first as the result of pressuring factors that push individuals away from their home country, such as unemployment, low wages, or weak institutions and second, attracting

factors such as better job opportunities, higher incomes, and more stable political and social systems from other countries pulling them, [2], [3]. Along to this theory, human capital theory offers another important perspective by viewing migration as a strategic life decision. From this point of view, individual's migration choice reflects their need to increase their incomes and return from education and skills and to improve their economic prospective in the long-term, [4], [5].

The social network theory is another perspective that emphasizes the importance of personal connections. Migration networks reduce financial, and psychological barriers associated with

international mobility as well as reduce information barriers and by all these means they increase the probability of migration, [6].

The situation in Albania reflects a combination of all these perspectives. High levels of youth unemployment, inconsistency among education and labour market needs, limited access to qualitative public services, and low confidence in institutions create strong motives for young people to consider migration, [7], [8]. At the same time, opportunities abroad such as more predictable career paths, better working conditions, and established Diaspora networks make powerful pulling factors that sustain migration flows, [3], [9], [10]. These patterns with the passing of time, contribute in forming of a structural brain drain, with potential consequences in innovation, workforce revitalization, and demographic stability of the country they are leaving, [8], [11]. For this reason, understanding both the causes and the consequences of youth emigration is essential. This will support better the policy making.

Empirical studies on this topic provide us with further insights related to how these factors work in practice. Our research conducted by using the survey, shows that both economic and institutional conditions play a significant role in determining people's intentions to migrate. For example, in the study [11] were found that many Albanian students perceive limited opportunities at home, low wages, and weak institutional support, as the reason for studying abroad, and for not returning in Albania after graduation. Similarly, everyday experiences with corruption, favouritism, and bureaucratic inefficiencies tend to reinforce the desire to emigrate, [9], [12]. In addition, job insecurity and skill mismatches make it difficult for many graduates to find suitable employment, encouraging them to seek opportunities in countries where their qualifications are more highly valued, [9], [10].

This tendency has significant consequences. The continued leaving of young and educated individuals poses significant challenges for both economic development and demographic stability in Albania [8]. The aging of workforce with the youth flow, can have an impact in reducing productivity, limiting innovation, and placing additional pressures on public services and the social welfare system as a whole.

Several ways to address these challenges are suggested by a growing number of recent research oriented toward policies. These include measures such as the promotion of circular migration forms, the improvement of public services quality and accessibility, strengthening of institutional confidence and ensuring that education systems are better

aligned with labour market needs. Job security enhancement and working conditions improvement are also seen as important steps in making domestic opportunities more attractive to young people, [9], [10], [11], [12].

Despite all these research contributions, there are still important gaps in the literature to be filled. The existing research on Albanian youth emigration is mainly focused on macroeconomic trends using descriptive survey evidence. To approaches that use mixed methods that integrate statistical modelling with qualitative interpretations of migration drives, has been given little attention. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on three main points: firstly, identifying the key factors that influence youth emigration in Albania; secondly, examining the implications such as economic, social, and demographic ones; and thirdly, evaluating the potential policy responses that could help reduce outward migration. By bringing together theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and policy considerations on this topic, this study helps for a better comprehensive explanation of the drivers and consequences of youth emigration in Albania.

2 Materials and Methods

This study combines quantitative and qualitative data in order to examine the factors influencing youth emigration in Albania, as well as its broader implications and possible policy responses. The two types of data are collected and analysed in parallel, by using a convergent design that helps to provide a more inclusive and consistent interpretation of the findings, [13], [14].

The quantitative part of the study is based on survey data and selected secondary indicators, by focusing on examining how economic, educational, institutional, and social factors influence migration tendency among young people. The analysis in this study includes descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression models. All these together will help to identify statistically important and systematic correlations of the data. The survey itself was drafted by using confirmed topics, adapted from previous studies on migration drives, ensuring both reliability and comparability with the existing research, [10], [15].

The qualitative data are focused on the way how individuals experience and interpret their situation. The data for this study were collected through semi structured interviews and focus group discussions, conducted in different regions of Albania. These interviews helped to understand and explore better the migration motives, expectations, and perceived

barriers by young people. This analysis of the data gathered for the purpose of this study were analysed by using different topics. This helped identify the most frequent topics such as: the aspirations of young people for finding better opportunities abroad, their concerns about institutional confidence and trust, and the influence of social and cultural factors on their decisions to migrate. By using this method, our study identifies individual experiences underlying these patterns, along with broader trends evident within the data.

By, combining primary and secondary sources we could address better the discussion. Primary data were collected through a survey conducted during January - March 2025, with 736 young people aged 18–35 from both urban areas (Tirana, Elbasan, Fier) and rural areas. The questionnaire drafted for this purpose, included the Likert scale for topics such as: economic expectations, perceptions of corruption, confidence in public institutions, and migration intentions.

Secondary data were collected by official national and international sources of information, including INSTAT for labour market and demographic data, the World Bank for economic indicators [8], the OECD for migration trends, and Eurostat for comparative data across European countries.

In addition to the survey, qualitative data were collected through 20 semi structured interviews with young professionals, policymakers, and labour market experts. Two focus groups with ten participants each were used for the same purpose, in order to provide additional perspective and to better understand the motivations behind migration intentions.

To ensure a balanced representation across gender, education levels and regions, a stratified sampling approach was used for the quantitative analysis. The sample included approximately 51% female and 49% male participants, grouped into three main educational categories: high school, vocational education, and university graduates.

For the qualitative part of the analysis, the participants were selected on purpose in order to include a range of experiences, from individuals planning to emigrate to those who had already returned to Albania. For the aim of this analysis, experts from public institutions and NGO-s working with youth and migration were also included, in order to provide a broader institutional perspective.

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the participation in the study was completely on voluntary basis.

All participants provided informed consent for the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study.

2.1 Variables and Measurements

To measure the variables, this study uses standardized scales. The set of variables, including dependent, independent, and derived variables are measured by the standardized scales. The dependent variable, *migration intention*, is measured by using a five-point Likert scale from “very unlikely” to “very likely,” that indicates the respondents’ probability of migrating.

Independent variables are grouped in four main categories: economic, educational, institutional, and social factors. Economic variables include: *perceived unemployment* and *income expectations*, both measured on a five-point Likert scale, reflecting respondents’ perceptions of labour market conditions and comparative incomes outlook relative to opportunities abroad. Educational variables include: *perceived quality of education* and *skills mismatch*, also measured using a five-point Likert’s scale, assessing both the effectiveness of the education system and the alignment between acquired skills and labour market demands.

Institutional factors include: *perceived corruption* and *confidence in public institutions*, measured by using a five-point Likert’s scale, from “very low” to “very high”. These variables aim to reflect the broader governance environment influencing individual decision making. Social factors include: *family migration history*, measured as a binary variable (0 = no, 1 = yes), and *peer influence*, measured on a five-point Likert’s scale, considering the role of social networks in affecting the migration intentions of young people. Policy awareness and perceptions of mitigation strategies are also measured by using a five-point Likert’s scale, reflecting the level of information of respondents and their evaluation of policy effectiveness in addressing migration.

The dependent variable, *migration intention*, represents the probability that respondents plan to emigrate within the next three years. Independent variables were grouped according to the push–pull and human capital frameworks, capturing economic dissatisfaction, educational value, institutional trust, and social influence.

For the purpose of this study, we conducted the quantitative analyses by using SPSS (v.29). All variables were interpreted using descriptive statistics.

By using the ANOVA procedure (Analysis of variance) was tested whether migration intention differed significantly across demographic and regional subgroups (1):

$$MigrationIntention_i = \mu + \alpha_j + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where μ is the overall mean, α_j represents group effects (education, gender, region) and ϵ_i is the term of error.

Significant F-ratios were followed by Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests.

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to identify predictors of migration intention:

$$MigrationIntention_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Unemployment)_i + \beta_2(IncomeExpectations)_i - \beta_3(QualityEducation)_i + \beta_4(SkillMismatch)_i + \beta_5(Corruption)_i - \beta_6(TrustInstitutions)_i + \beta_7(FamilyHistory)_i + \beta_8(PeerInfluence)_i + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

This multiple linear regression (2) predicts each individual's migration intention from eight predictors. Each coefficient β_j shows the expected change in the mean migration intention for a one-unit increase in that predictor, holding all other factors constant.

Consistent with common practice in social science research, Likert-scale variables were treated as approximately interval-level measures for parametric analysis. The ordinal logistic regression produced substantively similar results, supporting the robustness of the primary OLS estimates.

By using thematic analysis [16], [17], we analysed qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. The transcripts were coded by using an inductive approach to identify frequent topics related to motivations, expectations, and policy perceptions. Themes were then mapped against the quantitative results to ensure convergence and complementarity.

The integration of results followed a convergent parallel design, in which quantitative and qualitative findings were analysed independently and then compared for consistency, [18]. Quantitative patterns explaining who is likely to emigrate were complemented by qualitative insights explaining why these intentions exist, strengthening the theoretical interpretation based on push-pull and human capital frameworks.

2.2 Limitations

Although the study's mixed methods approach enhances validity, certain limitations of this study remain. Given that the survey was conducted at a single point in time, the results are restricted and

they not necessarily reflect the migration behaviour in the long term. Additionally, using self reported measures may result in social desirability prejudice. Even with these constraints, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data in this study, offers a strong insight into youth emigration dynamics and informs policy development in Albania.

3 Results

736 responses of the questionnaires are used for the scope of these analyses, targeting the age group of 18-35 years old. The respondents represent different geographic regions and educational backgrounds in Albania. The conducted quantitative analysis shows some interesting results. The descriptive statistics indicates that 64.7% of respondents have expressed a moderate to high migration intentions (scores ≥ 4 on the 5-point Likert's scale), confirming the assumption that migration remains a dominant aspiration among youth in Albania. The score for the implied migration intention was 3.89 (SD = 1.12), reflecting a considerable general tendency toward emigration.

The initial assessments among demographic groups suggest that migration intentions are higher among university graduates, urban residents, and respondents coming from families with a migration history. These results sustain the previous studies and are reliable with the existing literature on migration, also emphasizing the importance of education, economic expectations, and migration networks as important factors in determining the behaviour toward migration.

To do a statistical evaluation of group differences, independent samples t-tests were conducted for key binary demographic variables, including gender, residence location (urban vs. rural), and family migration history.

Table 1. Independent-Samples t-Test Results

Variable	Group 1 ($\mu \pm \delta$)	Group 2 ($\mu \pm \delta$)	df	t-test	p-value
Gender (Male vs Female)	3.76 $\pm$ 1.10	4.01 $\pm$ 1.13	734	-2.84	0.005
Residence (Urban vs Rural)	4.02 $\pm$ 1.08	3.61 $\pm$ 1.14	734	4.67	<0.001
Family Migration History (yes vs No)	4.18 $\pm$ 1.02	3.54 $\pm$ 1.16	734	7.12	<0.001

Source: Author's calculations

As shown in Table 1, the t-test results indicate statistically significant differences across all examined groups. Responding residents in urban areas reported significantly higher migration intentions compared to rural resident respondents, while individuals with family migration experience history showed significantly stronger migration aspirations. Gender differences were also statistically significant, although the extent of the effect was comparatively smaller. These findings provide preliminary evidence that migration intentions vary systematically across demographic and social categories.

To further assess the association between categorical variables, migration intention scores were grouped into three categories: low (1–2), moderate (3), and high (4–5). Pearson chi-square

(χ^2) tests were then conducted to evaluate the relationship between migration intention categories and selected demographic variables.

Table 2. Chi-Square Test of Indipendence Results

Variables	χ^2	df	p-value	Cramer's V
Migration Intention x Gender	8.27	2	0.016	0.11
Migration Intention x Residence	15.94	2	<0.001	0.15
Migration Intention x Educationn Level	21.38	4	<0.001	0.17
Migration Intention x Family Migration History	32.45	2	<0.001	0.21

Source: Author's calculations

Although considering statistically significant connections among variables, the extent showed from weak to moderate according to Cramér's V values. The chi-square analyses in the Table 2 confirm statistically significant connections between migration intention and all examined variables by classification. The strongest connection was observed among family migration history, supporting migration network theory and suggesting that prior migration experience within the household significantly effects migration intentions. The level of education and the location of residence also showed meaningful connections with migration intention, strengthening the importance of socioeconomic and structural factors.

A multiple linear regression model was estimated using migration intention as the dependent variable.

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std.Error of the Estimate
1	.781	.610	.606	.712

Source: Author's calculations

As shown in Table 3, the model explains approximately 61% of the variance in migration intentions (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.606$), showing significant explanatory influence for cross sectional data in social science. The model suggests that the included economic, institutional, educational, and social variables explain the main dimensions influencing migration aspirations among Albanian youth.

The overall statistical significance of the regression model was further evaluated through ANOVA (analysis of variance).

Table 4. ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regresion	292.47	8	36.56	72.09	<.001
Residual	186.50	727	0.26		
Total	479.97	735			

Source: Author's calculations

The results from the ANOVA analysis in the Table 4, confirm that the model used in this study is highly significant, with an overall explanation of $F(8,727) = 72.09$, $p < 0.001$, demonstrating that the independent variables together explain a significant part of variation in migration intentions of young people.

Prior to estimation, key assumptions underlying ANOVA and regression analysis were evaluated. To further examine group-level variation, one-way ANOVA tests were also performed for selected categorical variables.

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA

Factor	Groups Compared	F	p-value
Education Level	Secondary/ Undergraduate/ Postgraduate	5.67	0.004
Income Expectations	Low / Medium / High	7.12	0.001
Institutional Trust	Low / Medium / High	3.45	0.034

Source: Author's calculations

As shown in Table 5, the ANOVA group variable comparisons indicate statistically significant differences in migration intention across educational categories, income expectation levels, and institutional confidence groups. Post-hoc analyses (Tukey HSD and Games–Howell, where appropriate) revealed that the grater differences were observed between respondents with low versus high income expectations, emphasizing further the importance of economic motivations in migration decision making.

The estimated regression coefficients are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
Constant	0.823	0.191	-	4.31	<.001
Perceived Unemployment	0.211	0.045	0.192	4.69	<.001
Income Expectations	0.327	0.053	0.284	6.17	<.001
Quality of Education	-0.143	0.048	-0.116	-2.98	.003
Skill Mismatch	0.195	0.044	0.176	4.43	<.001
Perceived Corruption	0.258	0.049	0.233	5.24	<.001
Trust in Public Institutions	-0.174	0.047	-0.162	-3.70	<.001
Family Migration History	0.108	0.037	0.094	2.92	.004
Peer Influence	0.162	0.041	0.148	3.95	<.001

Source: Author's calculations

As shown in Table 6, the regression analysis shows that all independent variables are statistically significant and significantly explain migration intentions. Among these eight variables considered, income expectations and perceived corruption are the strongest explanatory variables for a direct positive relationship. The results indicate that both economic differences and disappointment in institutions are key factors influencing migration intentions.

In the same way, perceived unemployment and skill mismatch demonstrate significant positive effects, indicating that labour market insecurity and underutilization of qualifications function as important push factors that increase migration intention. In contrast, the trust in public institutions and quality of education are negatively associated with migration intention. This implies that stronger institutions and improved educational quality may reduce migration intentions.

Social network variables also play an important role in explaining these connections. Family migration history along with peer influence, increase migration intention significantly, supporting theories that emphasize the role of migrant networks in reducing information and psychological barriers of migration.

The regression equation (3) estimated by the connection among variables is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{MigrationIntention} = & 0.823 + 0.211(\text{Perceived} \\ & \text{Unemployment}) + 0.327(\text{IncomeExpectations}) - \\ & 0.143(\text{QualityofEducation}) + 0.195 \\ & (\text{SkillMismatch}) + 0.258(\text{PerceivedCorruption}) - \\ & 0.174(\text{TrustinPublicInstitutions}) + 0.108(\text{FamilyMigr} \\ & \text{ationHistory}) + 0.162(\text{PeerInfluence}) \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

All statistical analyses conducted in this study including chi-square test, t-test, ANOVA, descriptive statistics and the regression model yield consistent results indicating that migration intention among Albanian youth is shaped by the interaction of economic incentives, institutional effectiveness, labor market conditions, educational experiences and social networks.

4 Discussion

The findings of this analysis suggest that migration decisions among Albanian youth are not driven by a single dominant factor, but by the interaction of different factors acting together. The most central factors are the economic considerations, particularly the income level expectations and the perceived unemployment. The results also highlight the importance of institutional effectiveness and social environment. This means that even if the economic conditions can improve, there will be other determined concerns about corruption or lack of meritocracy and these factors may continue to push young people to seek better opportunities abroad. This connection between economic and institutional factors reflects a more complex decision-making process than the usual hypothetical on in the literature about migration.

4.1 Economic Factors (Strongest Predictors)

The most powerful influence is exercised by the Economic variables. *Income Expectations* emerged as the strongest predictor of migration intention. There is a belief among youth that they will earn

significantly more abroad than in Albania. This reflects the perceived wage disparities between Albania and EU countries, perceptions that wages in Albania do not reflect the investment in education, and the high cost of living relative to salaries. This matches human capital theory [4], in which migration is an investment for higher returns.

Perceived Unemployment: Young people who believe unemployment is high or who personally experience job insecurity are more likely to want to emigrate. INSTAT [7] and OECD [9] reports show constant youth unemployment and these aligns with the results of the analysis. Our findings confirm the importance of economic insecurity and ambitions for improved socioeconomic status in driving migration intentions.

4.2 Educational Factors

Skills Mismatch: the young people that are more likely to migrate are them who believe that their education does not match the market needs. We can show some examples of mismatch: IT graduates working in unrelated jobs, business graduates facing low paying entry level roles, and overqualification for available positions. This result reinforces OECD [9] findings on structural misalignment between higher education and the Albanian labour market.

Quality of Education: The confidence in domestic educational institutions may reduce the drivers for migrating, considering that there is a perception that the higher the education quality, the lower the migration intention. So, the dissatisfaction with the curricula content, the lack of practical training and the perceived old-fashioned teaching methods push youth to try to find better education or employment abroad. This dissatisfaction with education is not only about *school* but also about its *poor alignment with job opportunities in the market*.

4.3 Institutional Factors (Powerful Push Factors)

The perceived Corruption is one of the strongest factors the predict migration. Being exposed to corruption, nepotism, lack of meritocracy, and favouritism in hiring mainly in public services, youth are significantly more likely to emigrate. This result supports the argument of [12] that declining institutional trust directly fuels migration pressure.

Trust in Public Institutions: When young people have high level of confidence in institutions, results in lower migration intentions, suggesting that confidence in government structures may lessen the outward migration pressures. In general, the targeted youth in Albania commonly express disappointment

in governance, low confidence in future vision, and doubt regarding effective political and economic reforms. This mirrors findings from [19] and [20]. The findings suggest that institutional factors may be nearly as influential as economic conditions in shaping migration intentions.

4.4 Social Factors

Peer influence and family migration history significantly predict migration intention, confirming the role of social networks as enablers of migration flows. This is consistent with network theory extensions of the push-pull framework, which emphasize how established migration networks reduce information asymmetry and migration costs, [9], [11].

These results indicate that Albanian youth migration is determined by a combination of economic dissatisfaction, institutional disappointment and social dissemination effects, rather than purely financial motives.

4.5 Qualitative Insights

The analysis of interview topics responses and focus groups reinforces the quantitative findings. Participants frequently cited *low salaries, unstable employment, political corruption and lack of career development* as dominant reasons for considering migration. Many viewed migration as a “temporary solution” but acknowledged that return intentions were low due to persistent institutional weaknesses. Among respondents, some linked migration with the perceived social status, arguing that being successful abroad is increasingly seen as personal achievement among peers.

Focus group discussions in addition to the interviews showed that youth perceive *policy interventions* as either ineffective or poorly implemented. Programs aiming to support entrepreneurship and youth employment were often described as “bureaucratic” and “short-term.” There were also some participants that expressed optimism regarding digital entrepreneurship and EU integration, indicating that targeted reforms could shift migration intentions if combined with credible governance improvements.

The findings align closely with the push-pull migration model and human capital theory, both of which provide strong explanatory foundations for Albanian youth emigration. Economic push factors (unemployment, low income, skill mismatch) and institutional push factors (corruption, weak trust) dominate the migration calculus, while external pull

factors (higher wages, meritocratic systems abroad) intensify these pressures, [1], [4], [21].

Moreover, the results confirm that migration among educated youth represents a *human capital investment decision*, where individuals seek to maximize returns on their education through labour mobility. Yet, the domestic loss of such capital imposes substantial costs on national productivity and innovation, [8], [9].

Even the significance of these findings, some of aspects justify a more careful interpretation.

We must stress that first, the migration intentions may not necessarily translate into actual migration behaviour, as decisions can be influenced by financial, legal, or family constraints. Second, confidence on self reported measures presents the probability for response bias, mainly in sensitive areas such as the perception of corruption or confidence in institutions. Third, although the regression model explains a significant part of the variance, there are some unobserved factors such as the psychological characteristics, risk preferences, or changes in international policy environments that may also play a significant role. In future studies on the topic the research would benefit from a broader prospect to better confine the development of migration intentions over the time and to differentiate between short-term aspirations and long-term mobility outcomes.

4.6 Contribution to the Literature

The contribution of this study to the empirical literature on youth migration is seen in several aspects:

- First, it offers one of the most comprehensive regression analyses of migration intention among Albanian youth.
- Second, it integrates qualitative insights to quantitative findings that is often missing in research on migration.
- Third, it reaffirms the multidimensional nature of youth emigration, showing that economic reforms alone cannot reduce migration pressure if are not accompanied by institutional improvements and confidence building.

The regression coefficients reveal several key insights consistent with both the push-pull migration model and the human capital theory.

5 Conclusions

This study provides extensive empirical evidence on youth emigration in Albania connected to a

multidimensional set of factors including economic constraints, institutional weaknesses, educational disparities, and social dynamics. The findings of this study confirm that migration intentions are widespread and systematically structured, reflecting structured and strategic decision-making processes rather than purely spontaneous or short-term reactions.

The analysis shows that the economical factors alone are not enough as a motive for migration. Institutional confidence, particularly corruption and trust, play a significant role in influencing both perceptions and intentions. This stresses the need to adopt a more integrated approach that addresses a better governance, transparency, and institutional confidence and to move beyond the simply economic policy responses.

Additionally, the results of this analysis highlight the importance of aligning the education system with the labour market demands. Education and skills mismatches not only reduce labour market opportunities but also weaken confidence in long-term professional prospects in the Albanian labour market, reinforcing migration encouragement. The addressing of these structural inefficiencies is essential for enhancing the retention of human capital.

In the mean time, this study emphasizes the role of social networks in nourishing migration flows, suggesting that policy interventions must account for the self-reinforcing nature of migration dynamics. Strategies aimed at attracting the diaspora and promoting circular migration may therefore offer more realistic and sustainable solutions than endeavours to completely stop migration.

As a result, the findings of this study point to the urgent need for a coordinated and long-term national strategy focused on youth retention. This strategy should integrate labour market reforms, education system improvements, and institutional strengthening in order to create an environment in which young people perceive credible and attractive long-term opportunities within Albania. The continued youth emigration may further intensify the demographic decline, labour force reductions, and also hinder the long-term development challenges for Albania, if new strategies are not applied.

6 Policy Recommendations

As a result of these findings, there is a need for several targeted policy interventions in order to alleviate the emigration intentions among youth in Albania and increase the national human capital.

The measures we propose, have the aim to address structural push factors such as to strengthen the institutional confidence, to improve the alignment of education with the labour market demand, and to broaden the opportunities for professional and economic development.

- a. *Support the Labour Market Opportunities for Youth*
 - Promote the creation of new jobs in high-productivity sectors, including ICT, renewable energy, tourism, and advanced manufacturing, through the creation of investment incentives and public-private partnerships.
 - Develop new youth employment programs, mainly programs that offer paid internships, paid traineeships, and hiring incentives for businesses in order to hire new graduates.
 - Support entrepreneurship and self-employment by proposing different grant schemes, by simplifying the administrative procedures, and developing new mentorship programs that allow young people to create opportunities at local bases rather than seek them abroad.
- b. *Improve Income Security and Wage levels to be attractive*
 - Present more progressive wage support measures for young professionals in strategic sectors, in order to reduce the wage gap between Albanian and EU labour markets.
 - Fair labour contracts enforcement, for ensuring payment in time, safe working environment and conditions, and protection from informal work practices that undermine the stability of incomes.
- c. *Labour Market Needs Aligned with Education and Skills*
 - Reformation of Curricula in education by integrating practical, digital, and entrepreneurial skills aligned with labour market needs.
 - Develop better the dual education and vocational training, allowing students to combine formal learning with industry experience in practice.
 - Create university-industry cooperation units to facilitate internships, research collaborations, and co-designed academic programs that reduce skill mismatch and gaps in the market.
- d. *Strengthening the Confidence in Institutions by reducing Corruption*
 - Implementation of transparent recruitment and promotion procedures by public administration in order to strengthen merit-based recruitment practices.

- Expand digital governance systems to reduce corruption opportunities and improve administrative efficiency.
- Reinforce all the mechanisms for institutional accountability, by transparent performance monitoring and reporting systems.
- e. *Adopt a Supportive Social Environment for Youth Retention*
 - Encourage the youth participation in public activities by and volunteering at the local level, in order to enhance their sense of belonging to the community.
 - Implement and support policies that are family oriented, including affordable housing schemes and childcare services, in order to reduce the household pressures driving to migration.
 - Engage the Albanian Diaspora giving them different opportunities to feel a strategic asset for their country
 - Create the diaspora mentorship networks in order to connect the returning migrant professionals with students and young entrepreneurs.
 - Smooth the circular migration programs, enabling skilled youth people to gain temporary experience abroad and return with enhanced skills, networks, and capital.
 - Encourage the investments of diaspora in local start-ups, agriculture, tourism, and innovation ecosystems through tax incentives and dedicated investment platforms.

In order for all these recommended interventions to be successful, the rely on continued institutional commitment, coordination across sectors, and constant investment in youth development policies is needed.

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