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Albanian Migration: An Overview on its Trends and Patterns

Eglantina Zyka[1]

Abstract: Migration as a global problem, in Albania has been an ongoing phenomenon since the early 1990s, when the political and democratic changes in the country resulted in a number of economic and social changes. In 2021, out of 447.2 million residents in the EU, 37.5 million were born outside it, or 8.4% of the total population, 23.7 million were citizens of non-EU countries. Albania is one of the countries that has a considerable number of immigrants in the EU. A substantial number of Albanian moved outside the country in search of better opportunities and a higher standard of living. The primary destination countries for Albanian migrants are neighbouring: Greece and Italy, due to their geographical and cultural proximity. Migration in Albania is still a serious challenge in the road of Albania in European integration. According to Eurostat, the number of citizens of Albania receiving citizenship in the EU in 2020 was 146 % higher than in 2010**.** Albania in 2021 is in the third place (5.4%) of individuals who have received European citizenship, as well as the second place (13.3%) in the rejection of requests for European citizenship. The purpose of the paper is to present an overview of albanian migration, political and economical background of different migration waves, what are the challenges and new characteristics of albanian emigrants in recent years, how the characteristics of albanian emigrants has changed in the last years, making some comparison with some other Western balkan countries. The paper is based on different reports, data of the governmental and international institutions, other research papers on Albanian migration and official statements.

Keywords*:* Migration; Trends; Albania

1. Introduction

Immigration is a constant phenomenon in most developed coutries and a prominent feature of globalization. On 1 january 2022 there were 23.8 million people or 5.3% of the EU population, non-EU citizens[2]. Albania is one of the countries that has a considerable number of immigrants in the EU. Migration in Albania is still a serious challenge in the road of Albania in European integration. Since 2014, Albania is a candidate country, while the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between Albania and the EU came into force in April 2009. In march 2020 the European Council decide to open accession negotiations with Albania. In 2022 progres report of Albania is mentioned that Albania continues to meet the visa liberalisation requirements travelling to Schengen area, that has been in force since decemeber 2010. The number of citizens of Albania receiving citizenship in the EU in 2020 was 146 % higher than in 2010[3]. Albania in 2021 is in the third place (5.4%) of individuals who have received European citizenship, as well as the second place (13.3%) in the rejection of requests for European citizenship[4].

Albania has been affected by migration flows along over its history with different push and pull factors in different times, different pattern and different characteristics of migrants. It can be didived in three

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[1] Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana, Albania, Address: Place, "Mother Tereza" Tirana, Albania, Corresponding author: eglantinazyka@feut.edu.al.
[2] Eurostat, migration and migrant's population statistics, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics
[3]https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Enlargement_countries__statistics_on_migration,_residence_permits,_citizenship_and_asylum&oldid=485831.
[4] Eurostat (online data code: migr_acq).

stages, before 1944, during 1945-1990 and the period after the fall of communism in 1990. Kosta Barjaba (Barjaba, 2000, pp. 57-64) in 2000 consider albanian migration as a model with features like: very intense, largely economically driven, a high degree of irregularity, with many undocumented migrants, dynamic and rapidly evolving, to new destinations and routes of migration. Albanian migration has affected the working age young population being more prevalent for men, pull and push factors include a better life better economic conditions of living, unemployment, poverty, the international migration started as an individual and it became later a family phenomenon and remittances an important characteristic of migration that influence directly the life of the families of migrants[1]. Russell King considers Albania as a fascinating laboratory for the study of migration and development (King, 2005, p. 133), while Carletto *et al.* talk about a country on the move (Carletto, Davis, Stampini, & Zezza, 2006, p. 767). The most important political changes in the country were in march 1991 with the fall of the communism in the country and the 1997, the fall of piramidal schemes that lead to a civil unrest in Albania.

Socio- economic background of Albania. Albania as well as many other countries of Central and Eastern Europe opened the way to free commerce in the early '90s. According to INSTAT[2] GDP per capita in Albania range from 1127$ dollars in 2000, 2674$ in 2005, 4094$ in 2010, 3953$ in 2015, 6493$ in 2021. The unemployment rate in 2021 was 11.5% and for the group age 15-29 this rate is the biggest rate 20.9%. Into this group for women (21.4%) is higher than for men of this group (20.5%)

Demografic profile of Albania's is characterised by three main phenomena: large internal and external migratory waves, declining mortality rates, and declining fertility rates. The population of Albania in 2022 was 2,842,321 where in 1993 the population was 3,300,771, (growth rate is -14.2%). The natural increase, for the first time was negative in 2021, being -3296 meaning the number of deaths is greater that the number of births. The Albanian population is ageing with a median age 38.2 years on 1 January 2022, increasing from year to year. The percentage of population for 65 years and more is 15.2% in 2021 comparing to 11 % in 2011while the percentage of group age 0-14 years was 16.5% in 2021 comparing to 21.6 % in 2011. In 2022 the birth rate was 11.149 from 23,127 in 93. Fertility rate range from 2.786 in 93 to 1.56 in 2022.

Gedeshi and King (Gedeshi & King, 2018) mentioned that new trends in potential migration from Albania include: the desire to migrate is higher among the following categories: young people in their late 20s, the better educated and most qualified, those who were employed and persons earning medium-high incomes. Meanwhile, about a decade earlier, the desire to migrate was higher among young people in their early 20s, less educated and less qualified, unemployed and persons earning a low income. In Albania, there is substantial net emigration of the highly educated, especially among those who are in their early to late 20s, who have more recently finished their tertiary education in Albania[3]. The paper presents an overview of Albanian migration, its historical view, political and economical background of different migration waves, what are the challenges and new characteristics of albanian emigrants in recent years, how the characteristics of albanian emigrants has changed during the last years doing some comparisons with other Balkan Western countries.

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[1] IOM: 2008, Migration in Albania: A Country Profile 2008.

[2] https://www.instat.gov.al/media/9828/popullsia-me-1-janar-2022_final-15-04-2022.pdf

[3] Sandra M. Leitner, "Net migration and its skill composition in the Western Balkan countries between 2010 and 2019, results from a cohort analysis", The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw), Vienna, Working Paper No. 197, 2021
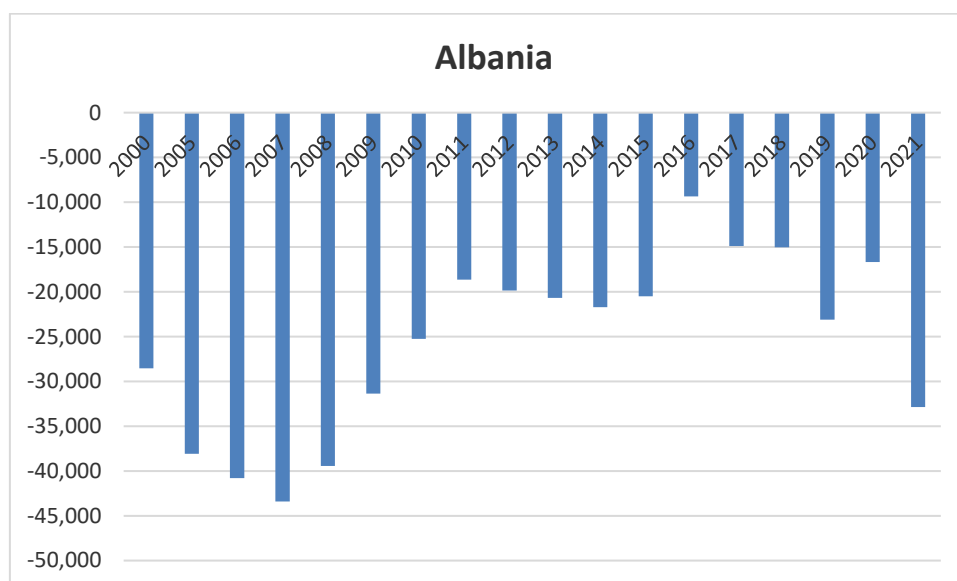
2. Data and Methodology

To achieve the goals proposed by this article, a descriptive study was conducted, using the most recent studies and relevant articles. This paper has been developed based on secondary sources of data, based on different reports, studies, documents, data of the governmental and international institutions, other research papers on Albanian migration and official statements such as Eurostat, IOM, World Bank, United Nation, UNICEF, INSTAT. A thorough desk research is developed in order to put together all available international reports on albanian migration and its trends.

3. Albanian Migration Development

Albania has been experiencing emigration throughout all its history. The net migration for the country has been always negativ but the phenomen has been very accurate after 90, with the fall of the communism regime. Before 1944, the US and some Latin American states were the main destination countries. After 1945 with the rise of Enver Hoxha regim, the country was economically and socially isolated. Most of emigrants from Albania in this period left the country because of political factors. Families of those who migrated suffered dire consequences.

According to the data of Eurostat for the decade from 91 to 1999 the net migration range from -123.619 in 1991 to -105.229 in 1999 (see fig.nr.1). The reason during this period were political and economic reason including the fall of the communism, the pyramidal scheme of 97 and the crisis of the war in Kosovo in 1999. For the period from 2000 to 2021 the net migration got up and down in its values reaching its lowest value in 2016, but increasing again after 2016 except in 2020 where it was the pandemic situation. By the end of 2011, about 1.4 million people or about one third of Albanian population was estimated to be leaving abroad[1].

Figure 1. Net Migration in Albania, 2000-2021
Source: data from Eurostat, Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level
[DEMO_GIND__custom_6365921] and author elaboration.

Comparing with other Western Balkan countries, Albania is the only country with negative net migration during all years and together with Kosovo are the countries with the highest values of negative net migration during years (see table nr.1).

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[1] European Commission," Social impact of emigration and rural-urban migration in central and eastern Europe",final country report Albania, april 2012, pg. 6.

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Table 1. Net migration in Western Balkan countries

Countries	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Bosnia and Herzegovina	727	-271	0	244	0	NA	0	-2,255	0	NA	NA	NA
Montenegro	-936	-910	-952	-930	-937	-938	-936	-937	-937	-937	-938	-937
North Macedonia	-621	-795	-934	-455	-475	-508	-161	163	225	-276	-755	-221,826
Albania	-25,267	-18,626	-19,841	-20,684	-21,702	-20,501	-9,346	-14,904	-15,027	-23,096	-16,684	-32,853
Kosovo	-440 444	-34 674	15 159	-17 167	-33 982	-49 732	-2 994	294	-16 603	-25 919	2821	NA

Source: Eurostat, Population Change-Demographic balance and crude rates at national level
[DEMO_GIND__custom_6365921]

International migrant stock as a percentage of the total population, for Albania in 1990 was 2 % of the total population going to 2.5% in 2000, 2.1% in 2005, 1.8% in 2010, 1,8% in 2015 and 1.7% in 2020, a constant phenomenon during all these years[1]. Female migrants as a percentage of the international migrant stock varies from 53.7 % in 1990, 53,4% in 95 to 49 % from 2005 to 2020 while for North Macedonia this percentage doesn't change, it is constant to 58.3% for all the period from 1990 to 2020. For Montenegro and Serbia this percentage is increasing respectively to 60.6% and 56% in 2020.

According to Eurostat in 2021, the number of people asking for asylum in EU is increased from 5% in 2020 ne 8.8%. In 2021, Albania is in the third place (5,4%) of person acquiring citizenship in an EU member state, and the second place (13.3%) in refusing it. In 2020 Albania is in the first place for the increase of this number between 2010 and 2020. (see the table nr.2).

Table 2. Persons acquiring citizenship of an EU Member State, 2010 and 2020 (in thousand)

	2010	2020
Albania	16.5	40.5
Turkey	46.5	23.7
Serbia	11.1	8.9
North Macedonia	3.3	5.0
Montenegro	0.5	0.7
Kosovo	NA	8.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7.8	6.3

Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr_acq)

First residence permits issued within the EU to citizens of candidate countries, in 2020, for Albania the main reason was family reason the same reason as in 2010.

The average age[2] of Albanian migrants in 1990 was 31.9 years, in 95 was 32,6 years, in 2000 was 32.9 years, in 2005 was 26 years, in 2010 was 19.8 years, 2015 was 19.1 years, in 2020 was 17.4 years, showing a decrease in the average age. In the years 90 the majority of migrants belongs to the group age 30-34 and 35-29 with 25.5% of migrants, in 95 this percentage was 20.6%. For the years 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020 the total percentage of the group age 15-29, respectively 27.7%, 24.2%, 22.6 %, 27%, 25.9% are higher than the total percentage of the group age 30-39, respectively 15.8%, 11.1%, 6.4%, 9.2% and 12.4 %.

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[1] United Nation, International migrant Stock 2020: Destination.
[2] United Nation on international migrant stock at mid-year by age.

Table 3. International Migrant Stock at Mid-Year by Age, 1990-2020

Year	15-29 (in %)	30-44 (in %)	Average age	Median Age
1990	27.6	35.8	31.9	32.4
1995	26.7	28.9	32.6	29.6
2000	25.8	22.1	32.9	25.4
2005	24.2	15.4	26	20.6
2010	22.6	8.7	19.8	16
2015	27.1	12.0	19.1	18
2020	25.9	16.1	17.4	18.6

Source: United nation, International migrant stock 2020, author's elaboration

The average age and median age for Albanian migrants is decreasing from 90 to 2020 meaning that the youngest population is more affected to leave the country. For Albanian migrant's male the median age ranges from 29.2 years in 90 to 17.8 years while for Albanian female migrants from 35.4 years in 1990 to 19.6 years in 2020[1].

From 2000 and later, the majority of Albanian migrants belong to group age 0-9 years, from 22.2% in 2000 to 32.6% in 2020.This percentage increased year by year from 2000 to 2020.

In other Western Balkan countries, the situation is different, during years the percentages is higher for group age 30-44 years and 45-49 years than for 0-14 and 5-29 years.

Table 4. Percentage Distribution of the International Migrant Stock by Age and by Country, 1990-2020.

Group age	Years	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
0-14	1990	16.5	9.2	NA	7.6	5.6
	1995	24.2	12.8	NA	9.3	5.6
	2000	31.9	14.2	NA	10.2	5.1
	2005	39.9	14.6	NA	11.1	3.7
	2010	47.9	14.1	7	11.9	2.2
	2015	43.6	14.2	4.5	12.5	2.1
	2020	42.8	11.2	4.3	12.4	1.8
15-29	1990	27.6	15	NA	13.7	16.8
	1995	26.7	20.8	NA	11.1	15.3
	2000	25.8	25.5	NA	9.9	15.1
	2005	24.2	20.4	NA	8.6	13.6
	2010	22.6	20.9	18.2	8	12
	2015	27.1	21.2	17.8	8.2	10.4
	2020	25.9	19.6	17.8	12.6	6.2
30-44	1990	35.8	27.6	NA	24.8	25.9
	1995	28.9	25.3	NA	23.2	23
	2000	22.1	26.7	NA	20.9	22.7
	2005	15.4	29.5	NA	19.2	21.9
	2010	8.7	30.9	26.8	17.4	21
	2015	12	30.7	24.7	15.7	21.2
	2020	16.1	29.5	23.8	16.9	18.5
45-49	1990	13.8	26.5	NA	31.3	24.5
	1995	13.8	22.5	NA	30.9	26.3
	2000	13.8	18.4	NA	30	26.5
	2005	13.8	19.1	NA	28.8	27.5
	2010	13.8	19.3	26.3	27.6	28.6
	2015	13.8	20.1	25.7	26.3	28.5
	2020	13.8	23.5	24.1	21.3	25.5

Source: United nation, International migrant stock 2020, author's elaboration

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[1] United Nation, International migrant stock 2020: Age, sex and destination.

For Albanian migrants, from 90 to 2020, the percentage of group age 0-14 years is increasing from 16.5% to 42.8 %, related also with family reunification. In 90 and 95, the majority of migrants belong to group age 30- 49 years and from 2000 and later the majority of migrants belong to the group age 0 - 29 years, increasing during all period in study. The situation is different in other Western Balkan countries, when the majority of migrants belong to the group age from 30-49 years, and the situation remain the same till 2020.

The percentage of women in fertility age, 15-49 years, in Albanian migrants' stock, is decreasing from 69.5% in 1990 to 33,2 % in 2010 but increasing again after 2010 going to 42.5% in 2020[1]. In demographic aspect all these migrants' flows had their influence on declining the number of populations, ageing population and declining birthrate in Albania. The population of Albania in 2022 was 2,842,321 starting to decline since 1993 where the population was 3,300,771, the growth rate is -14.2%. During this period, from 93 to 2022 the growth rate has been negative from year to year. The birth rate vary form 23.127 per 1000 people in 93 to 11.149 in 2022 with a decreasing by 52% from 93 to 2022. Fertility rate range from 2.786 in 93 to 1.56 in 2022, decreasing by 44%.[2]

For North Macedonia and Serbia, the percentage of women in fertility age (in migrant stock), is decreasing respectively from 48.5% in 1990 to 35.8% in 2020 and from 51.8% in 1990 to 31.1% in 2020. In Montenegro also this percentage is decreasing from 53.1% in 2010 in 48.7% in 2020. Only in Bosnia and Hercegovina this percentage is increasing from 52.6% in 1990 to 59.1 % in 2020. For North Macedonia and Serbia there is also an increase in the median age of the migrants from 1990 to 2020, respectively from 47 years to 51.4 years and from 43.4 years to 58.9 years. For Montenegro there is data for the period 2010-2020, where it is noticed an increase in the median age of migrants from 43.8 to 47.5 years. While for Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a decrease from 44.2 years in 1990 to 39.7 years in 2020.[3]

The main destination for Albanian migrants in the beginning of 90 were Greece and Italy as neighbors' countries. These countries remain the main destination during years but there is an increase even for other Western European countries especially Germany, but also UK, USA and Canada. In UK, in 2022 the number of Albanian asylum applicants was 15925 applicants, in 2019 was 4233 applicants and in 2010 only 219 applicants[4].

Table 5. Destination Countries for Albanian Migrants

Countries	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
Italy	31.9	33.3	37.4	39.3	39.6	39.4
Greece	45.9	48.6	43.8	41.5	38.7	35.3
USA	4.5	4.8	5.7	6.4	8.1	8.2
Germany	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	4.2
Canada	0.7	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.4
UK	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.9
Belgium	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.8	0.9
Other	14.8	10.7	9.7	9.0	9.2	9.7

Source European Training Foundation, 20215,

The main reasons for migration in Albania were wage and employment gap, investing in human capital, mistrust in public administration, inspiring a better life, as important push factors for emigrating6. The demand for high quality education influences many individuals and families to migrate to secure a better education for them and for their children. The main reason to leave Albania is for economic reason with

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[1] The same as 14.
[2] United Nation/World population prospects, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ALB/albania.
[3] The same as 14.
[4] Home Office immigration statistics, Asy_D01.
[5] European Training Foundation, how migration, human capital and the labor market interact in Albania, 2021.
[6] European Training Foundation report "Use it or lose it "how do migration human capital and the labour market interact in Western Balkans, 2022.

57% and education is in the second place with 17.4% where 5.4% werer to obtain education and 12% to finance children's education[1].

Table 5. Total Outbound Albanian Students Studying Abroad

Years	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Nr. students	23 548	25 314	24 387	22 257	20 690	19 503	17 576	17 811	18 764	11 098	11 675

Source: UIS Statistics (unesco.org)

The destination countries for international albanian students the first destination is Germany with 18% of albanian students, following by Italy with 15%, Greece with 11%, Turkey and US by 9.8% and 9.7% respectively, France with 5%, Austria and UK with 4% [2]. The total Public expenditures on education in Albania varies from 3.3% of GDP in 2013 to 3.4 % in 2020 remain constant from year to year during this period. The evidence indicates of net emigration among highly educated people[3]. Over the last decade large outflow migration of educated people is important and one of the elements of this brain drain is the migration of Albanian doctors especially to Germany (Gedeshi, King & Ceka, 2023). Brain drain is particularly strong among the young – more specifically among those who are in their early to late 20s and have therefore more recently finished their tertiary education in Albania (15-19 and 20-24), the highly educated account about 40% of the total cumulative outflow in the period 2010-2019 (Leitner, 2021, pp. 38; 52).

Conclusions

Albania is characterized by a high level of migration over times, especially after 1990 with the fall of communism in the country. By the end of 2011, about 1.4 million people or about one third of Albanian population was estimated to be leaving abroad.

The number of citizens of Albania receiving citizenship in the EU in 2020 was 146 % higher than in 2010. Albania in 2021 is in the third place (5.4%) of individuals who have received European citizenship, as well as the second place (13.3%) in the rejection of requests for European citizenship.

For the period from 2000 to 2021 the net migration got up and down, with its lowest value in 2016, but increasing again after 2016, except the 2020 due to pandemic situation. Comparing with other Western Balkan countries, Albania is the only country with negative net migration during all years.

The youngest population is more affected to leave the country, the average age and median age for Albanian migrants is decreasing from 1990 to 2020, respectively from 31.9 years to 17.4 years and from 32.4 to 18.6 years. For male migrants the median age decreases from 29.2 years in 90 to 17.8 years while for female migrants there is a decrease 35.4 years in 1990 to 19.6 years in 2020. From 2000 and later, the majority of Albanian migrants belong to group age 0-9 years, from 22.2% in 2000 to 32.6% in 2020. This percentage increased year by year from 2000 to 2020.

In other Western Balkan countries, the situation is different, for the period 1990-2020, the percentages are higher for group age 30-44 years and 45-49 years.

For Albanian migration, in 90 and 95, the majority of migrants belong to group age 30- 49 years and from 2000 and later the majority of migrants belong to the group age 0 -29 years, increasing during all period in study. The situation is different in other Western Balkan countries, when the majority of migrants belong to the group age from 30-49 years, and the situation remain the same till 2020.

The percentage of women in fertility age, 15-49 years, in Albanian migrants' stock is decreasing from 1990 to 2010 but increasing again from 2010 and later. For North Macedonia and Serbia, the percentage

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[1] The same as 18
[2] UIS Statistics (unesco.org).
[3] European Training Foundation report "Use it or lose it "how do migration human capital and the labour market interact in Western Balkans, 2022.

of women in fertility age (in migrant stock), is decreasing respectively from 1990 to 2020. In Montenegro also this percentage is decreasing from 53.1% in 2010 in 48.7% in 2020.

The main destination for Albanian migrants in the beginning of 90 were Greece and Italy as neighbors' countries. These countries remain the main destination during years but there is an increase even for other Western European countries especially Germany, UK but also USA and Canada. In the last year, the education has contributed to push factors for migration and the brain drain it is serious especially for Albanian doctors. Two-digit unemployment, rates, wage and employment gap, investing in human capital, mistrust in public administration, inspiring a better life are some of the push factors that generate migrant flows where in the years 90 was for political reason and poverty.

The recent changes in Albanian migration over the last decade are also reflected in its social and demographic structure and the quality of its population flows.

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