International mobility as a development strategy: Albania Country Report

June 2024
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Executive Summary

Emigration, return, and re-emigration are facts of life for many Albanians...

Albania is a country with a highly mobile population. Estimates suggest that over 1.2 million Albanian citizens, or more than 44 percent of the current population, have migrated abroad. Albanian migrants are typically of working age and lower-skilled, with the majority living in neighboring Italy and Greece. In its recent history, Albania has experienced multiple waves of migration, beginning with economic migration following the collapse of the communist regime, followed by family reunification, and then most recently a diversification of types of emigration. Emigration is driven by large income differentials, with Albania having one of the lowest average wage rates in Europe, and the lowest in the Western Balkans. Albanians are also progressively moving to more and further destinations in Western Europe, particularly Germany. In accordance with these geographical shifts, the profile of migrants has also diversified, with a progressively higher share of high-skilled workers. Nevertheless, asylum seeking is still prevalent, with 193,000 Albanians seeking asylum in the EU between 2010-2019, with an acceptance rate of just about 2 percent, demonstrating the differing migration pathways.

The Albanian migration story is not just one of emigration, but also of return. Economic liberalization, increases in trade, and financial opening in Albania have created sustained growth that has led to a dynamic economy and more opportunities for migrants to come back. Though there are challenges to gathering accurate data, estimates indicate a total return population of around 250,000 people since the year 2000. This suggests that for every four migrants who left in the last 20 years, approximately one returned. The migrants who return are mainly young, and male, with a secondary education, meaning that though men and women migrate in equal numbers, men are more likely to return. The vast majority of returnees are working-age and some return with tertiary education or

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1 Gëdeshi and King (2020).
2 European Training Foundation (2007); Gëdeshi and King (2020).
3 Gëdeshi and King (2020).
4 This importantly refers to the formal designation of a migrant as someone who spent at least 12 months abroad, which undercounts the many others who return after less than a year. According to the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey, less than 50 percent of migrants were abroad for more than 12 months in their most recent migration episode. INSTAT and IOM (2020) and INSTAT and IOM (2013) also show significant percentages of migrants abroad for less than a full year.
formal vocational skills gained while abroad. While there are signs in the most recent data that overall, more tertiary-educated migrants are starting to return, the number of returnees is also driven by high levels of recent asylum-seekers, including some who may not have spent a full year abroad in the process and may not be officially counted. These trends are important because migrants may have very different experiences returning based both on their level of education and if they were forced to return or were able to plan for it more consciously.\(^5\)

**Figure ES2. Profile of return migrants**

- **75% male**
  - In 2013, half of returnees were under the age of 35 but by 2019 it was 40%.
  - Mainly young and male with a secondary education.
  - In 2013, only 6% of returnees had a tertiary education but by 2019, it was 12%.
  - They bring a diversity of skills. Though over 50% worked in construction or agriculture, another 30% worked in hotels, restaurants, or “other sectors of industry” abroad.

Migration can be a powerful force for growth and development in Albania...

**Albanian migrants have the potential to be a tremendous driver of development.** Unleashing their impact would mean embracing the idea of a global Albanian (globAL) workforce that consists of Albanians around the world, who have the potential to ‘return’ to Albania in many ways. This would mean thinking more broadly about the concept of a migrant’s return and recognizing that while many physically do so, some will not, and others are building ties abroad, remaining simultaneously connected at home and to other places around the world. Having a globAL vision means recognizing that one third of the population may be out of the country, but they are not gone and can all contribute in different ways to Albania’s growth and development. Migrants who physically return can fill labor shortages and skill gaps, bring back new ideas and innovative practices, or start their own businesses providing employment for others. Members of a globAL workforce abroad can send remittances, transfer knowledge remotely, build business networks, and invest in Albania. A globAL workforce of Albanians abroad also creates opportunities to connect Albania to the rest of the world through trade, business expansion, and knowledge networks – and sets the stage for conversations on how to collaborate with other countries on building the right skills together in the most effective ways. A globAL vision means designing a system that focuses

\(^5\) Due to the scarcity of detailed migration data in Albania, it is challenging to establish clear typologies of migrants and returnees (e.g., economic migrants, failed asylum-seekers, low-skilled/high-skilled) and to provide detailed corresponding statistics for each group. These data limitations underscore the importance of strengthening migration data collection including detailed data on socio-economic characteristics to better tailor services, which is one of the recommendations provided in the report.
holistically on migration, recognizes the role it can play in development when migrants have successful experiences, and supports emigrants to ‘return’ in all the possible ways they can.

*Figure ES3. The idea of a glob(AL) workforce*

Other countries have shown how policies can be developed to leverage a global workforce for significant development gains. Similar to Albania today, emigration was a defining feature of Ireland’s demographic and economic experience through most of the 20th century. As the economy grew, Ireland took steps to develop connections with its extensive diaspora and build a more globalized identity. They shifted the paradigm from viewing emigrants as ‘traitors’ to seeing them as heroes who connected the country with the global economy and ‘opened up Ireland for business.’ Ireland’s diaspora engagement has grown into a wide-ranging ‘Global Irish’ program that offers supportive programs to returning migrants and the diaspora. Their services range from providing assistance in settling abroad to maintaining connections and starting a business back home, with the goal of being a hub for Irish emigrants around the world. A closer neighbor, Bosnia and Herzegovina, recently launched a project with funds from USAID that was focused on leveraging the contributions of the diaspora for development by identifying obstacles in the business-enabling environment, providing grants and technical assistance to small businesses, and facilitating investment from the diaspora. The project gave out US$ 2 million in grants, leading to an investment of US$ 22 million of diaspora members’ own capital, the creation of 1,571 jobs, and an increase in sales of 70 percent for firms receiving support. The project generated huge development impact, particularly in smaller municipalities where migrants were originally from.

For Albania, previous evidence already shows that the global workforce can be an asset, while future trends suggest they will become an even more valuable resource for addressing skills

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6 Barrett (2005).
7 Minto-Coy (2009).
8 [https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/](https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/)
gaps and labor shortages. Following the financial crisis of 2008, Albanian migrants who returned from Greece were shown to have generated strong positive impacts in the local labor market – for those who never left. A one percentage point increase in the share of return migrants in a district in Albania increased the employment chances of those who never migrated by 0.6 percent and increased real wages by 2-2.5 percent, including increasing the relevant wages for low-skilled non-migrants by 2.5-2.9 percent. The positive labor market impacts from return migration were eventually translated into economic growth for the country, as they generated gains for the local economy between 0.8 to 1.3 percent of 2009 GDP, offsetting 60-80 percent of the negative effect of reduced remittances during the same period.\(^9\) In this case, a global workforce returning with skills and experience proved an important asset for development. Despite strong economic growth in Albania now, there is evidence of skill and labor gaps that returning migrants could be well-placed to fill. According to surveys, more than 50 percent of firms in Albania faced difficulties in recruiting applicants with the right skills and work experience, especially job-specific technical skills.\(^10\) Almost 10 percent of all firms reported their biggest obstacle to be an inadequately educated workforce.\(^11\) Furthermore, projections of labor supply and demand up to the year 2030 suggests that Albania will be facing labor shortages by the end of the decade, especially among low-education level jobs.\(^12\) The global workforce offers a set of workers with a diverse set of skills and experience that could addresses these gaps and shortages for Albania. In 2019, 84 percent of return migrants were of working age and 36 percent were unemployed.\(^13\) Providing services to leverage this returning labor force could have an important positive impact for Albania’s growth and development.

![Figure ES4. Leveraging the international experience and labor potential of returning migrants through reintegration is an opportunity to boost economic outcomes for all](image)


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\(^9\) Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018).
\(^12\) Leitner (2021).
\(^13\) The unemployment rate, which refers to those who are active in the labor force was higher, at 47.2 percent.
However, many returning migrants currently face challenges due to gaps in the existing reintegration infrastructure...

Though they represent an important economic opportunity, some migrants face challenges upon their return due to the persistence of the difficult conditions that led them to leave or to the disruptive process of return itself. Economically, return migrants often struggle, and according to the most recent Household Migration Survey, have an unemployment rate of 47.2 percent, which is significantly higher than the national average of 12.0 percent in 2021. Economic outcomes are influenced by the nature of a migrant’s return, and those who chose to return are likely to have better outcomes than those who were forced to do so. The survey found that over one third of returnees intend to migrate again, but that number increases up to 82 percent for some estimates of returning asylum-seekers. Asylum-seekers also typically have lower education levels than the population average and pertain to the poorest segments of Albanian society. Upon return, they face many of the same challenges. Even migrants with higher skill levels face challenges with recognition of their overseas certifications. In addition, return migrants face multi-dimensional difficulties related to bureaucratic barriers, stigma and isolation, and adaptation to unfamiliar systems, especially for children and spouses. Ethnic Roma and Egyptian minorities face further discrimination. These challenges are often worsened by a lack of available services and institutional factors that weaken their effectiveness.

Albania has developed a comprehensive legal framework around migration, positioning the country for success, but gaps exist in five key areas. While the institutional framework has been strengthened over the years and collaboration outlined between various institutions, the gaps have led to limited uptake in services and limits on the resources and capacities of existing structures. The first gap is data, which acts as a barrier to serving return migrants because there is limited understanding of how many there are, their profile, and reintegration needs. In addition, limited standardization of data prevents institutions from being able to exchange with each other and fully address multi-dimensional cases. The second gap is coordination, and despite a well-developed institutional framework, the overall system still faces challenges with cohesion, especially around clarity on who has responsibility for specific roles. Coordination is also a challenge between local authorities, who are responsible for service delivery, and national authorities who determine policy. The third gap is tailored services and recognition of the specific context and barriers that migrants face. While migrants are eligible for employment services and economic aid in some cases, there is not currently a coordinated national outreach campaign to raise their awareness, nor a variety of other services that could be tailored to migrants’ needs. The fourth gap is bureaucratic barriers, and though migrants are eligible for supportive services, they are often prevented from receiving them by documentation challenges or other issues transferring records. The fifth gap is capacity, which includes both human and financial resources, and impacts the ability of institutions to provide and track services at both the local and national level.

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14 INSTAT and IOM (2020).
15 INSTAT (2021).
16 INSTAT and IOM (2020).
A new system could position Albania to leverage migration for development...

Designing a new migration system with a global vision would help the country address these gaps. Such a system would rely on informed decision-making, enforce seamless collaboration, offer multi-dimensional global services, guarantee efficient access, and maintain expertise and capability. Informed decision-making refers to having a comprehensive understanding of who migrants are and the needs they face, to be able to make decisions on necessary services and learn from results achieved. Seamless collaboration refers to the cooperation across institutions and between stakeholders that is necessary to address the complex variety of types of ‘return’ that migrants can engage in. Multi-dimensional global services are necessary given the varied needs of migrants in a global workforce, depending on their individual characteristics and how they are returning. A global system has services that begin prior to a migration experience, cross borders, and extend beyond just the economic sphere. Efficient access is about making processes as easy as possible, which means limiting the time required for enrollment, mapping the extent of services available, ensuring standardized procedures and intake needs, and reducing unnecessary steps for service providers. Finally, expertise and capability are necessary for creating a system that migrants can trust. The system needs to be adequately resourced, and staff can be fully trained and up-to-date on all services that are available to migrants.
A globAL system can be built through a collection of concrete actions organized around the five pillars. Each action would require ownership and contribution from specific government institutions and financing from within the budget or outside sources. While a system can be put in place without implementing every action from the plan, an interoperable database, digitalized service access, an expansion of available programs, strengthened data collection on migrants, and an integrated case management system are all elements that represent fundamental parts of a successful new globAL system.

A first step to implement a globAL vision is to strengthen return and reintegration services, building on existing efforts with the National Agency for Employment and Skills playing a key role...
The key to designing a globAL system based on the five pillars is to create a single system with standardized entry points that channel migrants into comprehensive services through integrated case management. While a low-skill asylum-seeker, a high-skill retiree, and a businessperson living abroad all have different needs, building a comprehensive system means creating multiple entry points but bringing all migrants into the same system as members of the same globAL workforce. Once a migrant is in the system, implementing integrated case management is the difference between just offering more services and truly instituting a globAL system. A globAL system serves all different types of migrants but needs to be able to identify the specific needs they have and ensure they access appropriate services. A strong case management system provides this personalized and comprehensive approach through close collaboration and constant communication between relevant institutions. Integrated case management systems for migrants have precedent around the world and have even been piloted on a smaller scale by development partners in Albania, especially in minority communities. The legislative and institutional building blocks are already in place for such a system – the biggest change required is a shift in perspective to recognize that globAL Albanians are not just workers, recipients of aid, or even foreign experts, but rather migrants with complex lives, needs, and abilities to contribute to development.

Recognizing the fundamental importance of employment services and the existing mandate under law to provide services to migrants, NAES could be a natural entry point into the globAL system.\(^{17}\) NAES is a key agency for the implementation of the 2023-2030 National Employment and Skills Strategy that emphasizes the provision of services to address the needs of different target groups, while at the same time deepening the agency’s efforts to serve hard-to-employ groups. NAES can play an important role in the globAL vision, given both the fundamental importance of employment services for return migrants and its preexisting mandate for the establishment of structures to support return migrants. However, this would require a revitalization of the migration counters in NAES offices, which is already underway, but also a rebranding into globAL structures that embrace a globAL vision of the complex ways migrants can connect with Albania. NAES would rebrand representatives as globAL counselors who are trained to work with returning migrants and support them in accessing all globAL services. Their role would be to meet with migrants, guide them through the registration process, provide information on available services, fill out Individual Employment Plans, and connect them to additional services. More broadly, NAES could increase outreach efforts and connect with migrants around the world. To act as an entry point for globAL, NAES could expand digital access, make vulnerability assessments multi-dimensional to be able to refer to other institutions, and increase staffing to be able to provide more individualized attention.

\(^{17}\) While focusing mainly on one specific policy aspect, namely the reintegration support under the leadership of NAES, the present report also aims to provide a comprehensive overview of policy directions by consolidating various pieces produced by the World Bank team to assist different government agencies in Albania. Such pieces include the development of an action plan detailing specific measures and assigning roles and responsibilities to government entities which has informed the Albanian government’s migration strategy launched in May 2024, a mapping of development partners, the work they do and their respective programs, a review of the institutional arrangements among government agencies in Albania, and the development of an outreach strategy to specifically target potential returnees tailored to the Albanian context.
NAES could consider strengthening services for the reintegration of returnees into the domestic economy as a promising starting point to achieve a globAl vision. While all the identified gaps are relevant and can be addressed as part of the broader migration agenda, this report develops a more detailed proposal on providing comprehensive services to facilitate the return and reintegration of the Albanian diaspora. This focus is due to two main factors. First, a sizable number of Albanian migrants come back after living abroad, which contrasts with more modest return flows in other Western Balkan countries. This group represent a large untapped potential for the Albanian economy. In the past, it has been shown that they can generate strong positive local labor market impacts and therefore large economic gains for the Albanian economy, bringing back valuable skills, experiences, and financial resources. Second, return migrants often encounter high vulnerabilities leading to worse labor market outcomes upon return than the non-migrant population, which calls for focused investments in their support and integration. As such, NAES could consider starting the reform process by strengthening or introducing three types of services to unlock the potential of returning Albanian migrants: outreach, labor market services, and services beyond the labor market. While the most basic reintegration programs will only consist of limited outreach efforts, normally through distributing information to emigrants abroad, more advanced programs will build stronger connections with the diaspora and help emigrants in the process of connecting and returning to the country through logistical and financial aid. Reintegration programs then progressively add layers of complexity by providing assistance with labor market and immediate economic integration. The most advanced programs combine this economic integration support with services that go beyond the labor market and include assistance with long-term establishment, including for families, and psychosocial support.

Given the importance of services that go beyond the labor market, local administrative units are one of the natural partners for NAES. Municipalities are mandated under law to provide social care services and their Needs Assessment and Case Referrals Units (NARUs) are mandated to implement a case management model. Including local administrative units as a second entry point to the globAl system would significantly expand geographic coverage and potentially be much more accessible for certain profiles of migrants. However, local administrative units and their NARUs would need to expand their targeting for case management to include return migrants and improve collaboration with NAES employment services through mutual referral of cases. They would be tasked with conducting initial and full assessments of migrants, producing case management plans
in collaboration with NAES, providing comprehensive information and referrals, and conducting strong monitoring and evaluation as part of integrated case management.

Figure ES9. Local administrative units can expand case management expertise to the global workforce

A global system with integrated case management that brings together entry points at NAES and the local administrative units fits easily within the existing migration infrastructure in Albania. There is already an existing mandate for integration between both institutions due to the employment requirements of the Ndihma Ekonomike program that is managed at the local administrative units. They are required to work together, communicate on cases, and ensure that recipients are fulfilling their requirements. Building a global system would simply expand that collaboration to manage services for all different types of migrants. Migrants would create individual employment plans at NAES and undergo needs assessments at the NARUs, which would be combined in an integrated data management system to create integrated case management plans that address a migrant’s multi-dimensional global needs. This type of close collaboration between both institutions and with migrants is the essence of a global system that is fundamentally about building stronger connections between a government and its mobile citizens – wherever they are.

Figure ES10. Integrated case management in a global system

Integrated Case Management:
- Information and referral
- Initial assessment
- Full assessment
- Preparation of the Individual Employment Plan and Individual Plan of Care and Support
- Implementation, monitoring, and review
- Closure of case
The increasing attention received by migration in Albania’s policy agenda might create momentum to drive reforms that would benefit the whole Albanian workforce. The reforms needed for NAES to become the go-to agency serving the global Albanian workforce would be fully aligned with the agency’s current efforts to serve different groups of the Albanian population, enhance their skills, and support their transition to the labor market. While capacity constraints currently limit NAES’ ability to fully implement this transformation, the momentum around the migration agenda could accelerate investment to:

- Ensure adequate outreach to a more diverse set of target groups
- Diversify services with the support of non-public providers
- Streamline bureaucratic procedures with the increasing adoption of digitalization
- Develop a stronger information system
- Connect data systems for the delivery of integrated services

Such investment would represent an opportunity not only to untap the potential of the globAL workforce, but also to build structures and introduce services that are currently being explored by NAES to strengthen human capital development and utilization in Albania.

Building a globAL system is an ambitious endeavor that has the potential to mark Albania as a global example. But it is also feasible and fits within the existing institutional framework, building off existing mandates. The biggest requirement is a change in perspective, a recognition that as a country with a mobile workforce, Albania has an asset that can be leveraged for development impact. A globAL system recognizes that the third of the population living around the world can contribute to Albania in many ways and an effective reintegration system unleashes the potential of returnees, no matter where they are. It emphasizes the connection between a country and its people and understands that migration will be a key to growth around the world going forward, with Albania leading the way.
Chapter I. Background and Context

Section 1.1. The migration of citizens of Albania: trends, drivers, profile and outcomes

Albania has one of the largest diasporas in Europe and Central Asia. Migration represents a distinguishing feature of the Albanian post-communist transition and remains a prominent phenomenon more than three decades since the fall of communism. According to data from UN DESA, over 1.2 million Albanian citizens live abroad (left panel of figure 1). As a percentage of the population in the country, emigration rates reached 44 percent, the second largest share in Europe and Central Asia only after Bosnia and Herzegovina (right panel of figure 1). The emigrant population rapidly increased in the 1990s, from 200,000 to 800,000. Despite growing economic opportunities at home, INSTAT estimates that nearly 466,000 Albanians left the country in just the last decade (between 2010 and 2021), representing almost 16 percent of the average total population.

Figure 1: Size of the emigrant population from Albania and comparison with other ECA sending countries

a. Size of the emigrant population by year
b. Share of emigrants to the total population

Starting in the early 1990s, Albania experienced three major migration waves, each with its own particular characteristics, largely reflecting Albania’s stage of development at the time. These three waves began after more than 40 years of a communist regime (1945-1990), during which international migration was largely halted as crossing the country's borders was outlawed and

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18 Gëdeshi and King (2020).
19 World Bank Global Migration Database.
punishable. The fall of the regime in 1990 led to an immediate exodus, sparking the beginning of the first of the three major post-communism migration waves.

The first wave was primarily marked by economic migration due to a lack of opportunities at home. It coincided with the transition from the communist regime to a democratic system, and from centralized planning to an open-market economy. It was characterized by intensive and often undocumented international migration, mainly stemming from rural areas and dominated by men.\textsuperscript{21} At the time, international migration was seen as a way out of poverty.\textsuperscript{22} The collapse of the pyramid savings scheme in 1997, the Albanian Civil War, and the Kosovo crisis in 1998-1999 all contributed to the trend of outmigration. Migration during this wave was also almost entirely to neighboring countries, with around 90 percent of Albanians living abroad by the year 2000 located in just three countries: Greece, Italy, and North Macedonia.\textsuperscript{23} As of the early 2000s, 25 percent of the total population, and over 35 percent of the workforce, had emigrated.\textsuperscript{24}

The second major wave followed, and primarily consisted of family reunification with the early migrants who were able to legalize their immigration status in their host countries.\textsuperscript{25} The socio-economic status of the early migrants had also improved as they integrated further into their host countries. During this decade, Albania had begun to achieve political and economic stability and was experiencing economic growth and poverty reduction.\textsuperscript{26} As a result, migration flows were less intense than in the first wave and were mainly conducted through legal channels. Furthermore, the radius of migration began to extend beyond Italy and Greece to include other European countries and North America.\textsuperscript{27}

The third major wave saw more complex migration dynamics emerging, involving the early stages of immigration of other foreign nationals, the reinvigoration of outgoing international migration, and importantly the beginning of an outward movement of asylum-seekers. The renewal of outward migration was mainly driven by economic factors and asylum-seeking toward European countries, especially Germany. The increase in asylum-seekers was due in part to the limited opportunities for legal labor migration to destinations throughout the European Union.\textsuperscript{28} Asylum-seeking from Albania peaked in 2015 with close to 66,000 applications, and continues to be significant today, although at a slower pace (figure 2). However, acceptance rates are extremely low at around 2 percent,\textsuperscript{29} due in part to EU-wide readmission agreements signed with all Western Balkan countries, including Albania.

\textsuperscript{21} Gëdeshi and King (2020).
\textsuperscript{22} Zezza, Carletto, and Davis (2005); Castaldo, Litchfield, and Reilly (2005).
\textsuperscript{23} World Bank Global Migration Database.
\textsuperscript{24} Republic of Albania (2018).
\textsuperscript{25} Gëdeshi and King (2020).
\textsuperscript{26} World Bank (2007).
\textsuperscript{27} World Bank (2019).
\textsuperscript{28} Dubow, Tan, and Kuschminder (2021).
\textsuperscript{29} Gëdeshi and King (2020).
Migration is highly concentrated in neighboring countries such as Italy and Greece, although recent emigration flows have been more diversified. According to statistics from UN DESA, close to 40 percent of Albanian emigrants in 2020 were residing in Italy, and 36 percent in Greece (see left panel of figure 3). The other 25 percent of emigrants mostly reside in OECD countries in Western Europe and North America, particularly the United States (8 percent) and Germany (5 percent), and in neighboring North Macedonia (5 percent), where ethnic Albanians represent the second largest ethnic group. In the last years, the global financial crisis shaped the geography of where economic opportunities were concentrated and led to further shifts in popular destinations for Albanian emigrants. On the one hand, new residency permits to Albanian migrants in Italy and Greece have significantly slowed down, from close to 100,000 per year in 2008, to 30,000 in 2013, and have never reached 50,000 since then. On the other hand, there has been a continuous increase in the number of residency permits approved for Albanians in further away countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia, particularly in Germany where the numbers increased from less than 500 in the late 2000s to more than 13,000 in 2022 (right panel of figure 3).

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30 Gëdeshi and King (2020); Ratha (2016).
Driven by the long history of migration, recent waves of migration to the EU are mainly linked to family reunification. Given the large size of older cohorts that remained abroad longer term, the main type of permit new Albanian emigrants in the EU obtained during the last decade was for family reunification purposes (figure 4, left panel). Visas for family reasons account for around half of the total visas provided for Albanian migrants, while employment visas fluctuate around 20 percent and student visas less than five percent. The availability of employment permits for Albanian citizens is largely dependent on the state of the EU economy and the subsequent strength of the labor demand. Coinciding with the financial and sovereign debt crises, the availability of work permits dried up until 2015, when it started to pick up again. In 2020, the total number of permits temporarily dropped due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but as restrictions eased in 2021, the emigration of Albanian citizens to the EU in search of employment opportunities rose again. Close to 20,000 employment permits were issued in 2022.

Emigration from Albania ranges from seasonal and short-term migration to longer term episodes that, in some instances, become permanent. Albania migration has a strong seasonal component which in some instances is not fully captured by official statistics. Estimates from surveys in Albania show that many Albanians migrate for less than a year and then return back home.\(^{31}\) In the late 1990s, Albania signed bilateral agreements on seasonal labor migration with Greece and Italy to provide legal pathways for migration in key sectors such as agriculture and construction.\(^{32}\) However, other statistics from destination countries point at more long-term migration episodes. According to OECD-DIOC statistics, two-thirds of the Albanian diaspora in OECD countries in 2015 had been

\(^{31}\) INSTAT and IOM (2020); INSTAT and IOM (2013). According to the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey, less than 50 percent of migrants were abroad for more than 12 months in their most recent migration episode.

\(^{32}\) Barjaba and Barjaba (2015) and Vullnetari (2015).
residing abroad for more than 10 years. 18 percent had been living abroad for 5 to 10 years, and only 16 percent for less than 5 years. The median duration of stay for Albanians in Greece is 13 years. In many instances, the long-term stays of Albanian emigrants in destination countries lead to obtaining foreign citizenship, further strengthening their ties to the host country. Since the early 2000s, there was a rapid increase in the number of Albanians obtaining another nationality, peaking in 2016 with close to 70,000 people. While the number of emigrants acquiring another citizenship has progressively reduced since then, it rose again in 2022 to 50,000. In many European countries where dual citizenship is not allowed, the acquisition of a foreign nationality entails dropping the Albanian nationality. This is the case in Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, or Slovenia. However, the vast majority of Albanian emigrants who acquire another nationality are in Italy or Greece, which in both cases allows for dual citizenship.

Profile of Albanian emigrants

The emigration of Albanians is gender balanced and concentrated among the prime working age. In Albania around 90 percent of migrants are of working age, which is significantly higher than for the non-migrant population (figure 5, panel a), and they are highly likely to be economically active. A similar number of Albanian citizens abroad are male and female, although the gender composition varies depending on the type of migration, with seasonal workers more likely to be male. In terms of education levels, the majority of Albanian migrants are low-skilled, with only slightly above 10 percent having tertiary education, compared to more than 20 percent of the non-migrant population.

These estimates, however, tend to exclude short-term seasonal migrants that are not registered as residents in the destination country.

The median duration of stay is important because analyzing the demographics of migrants in Greece is actually indicative of the profile of migrants ~13 years ago, which may be different than today.

OECD (2022).
population having completed tertiary schooling (figure 5, panel b). On the other hand, around half of Albanian migrants have low-education levels, having completed a maximum of primary education or less. In terms of wealth, migrants are three-times more likely to come from the poorest income quintile households than from the top income quintile.36

Figure 5: Age and education structure of migrant and non-migrant population in Albania

a. Age composition

b. Education levels

While the desire to emigrate remains high among Albanians, the profile of prospective migrants is diversifying, moving away from primarily low-skilled migrants. Current studies show that over half (52 percent) of Albanians between the ages of 18 and 40 wish to emigrate.37 Though the desire has been high, the profile of those who wish to migrate is changing. Previously, results from the European Training Foundation (ETF) survey conducted in 2007 showed that the majority of those who wished to migrate were unemployed with little or no formal skills, had limited levels of education, and were low-income. The new profile of those who wish to migrate relates to the development trajectory of Albania. Albania has made considerable progress in terms of economic growth, poverty reduction, and public safety,38 and has transitioned from a low-income country with a large part of the economy and employment reliant on agriculture to a country with more skilled and educated people and middle to high-income levels. As overall demographics change, so too naturally changes the profile of those seeking jobs abroad.39

The changing profile of emigrants coincides with changes in the choice of destination location. The map of the desired destination countries has transformed, from mainly Italy and Greece to countries like Germany, UK, and the United States.40 Figure 6 shows how changes in profile and destination overlap, as destinations are dramatically different for tertiary-educated Albanians.

36 World Bank (2024).
37 Gëdeshi and King (2020).
38 World Bank (2007).
39 Gëdeshi and King (2020).
40 European Training Foundation (2007); Gëdeshi and King (2020).
compared to those who are non-tertiary-educated. Given that higher-skilled migrants tend to have more means, education opens up opportunities to migrate to further away destinations – unlike lower-skilled and less well-off migrants who often go to the nearest destinations. Some countries with lower populations of Albanian migrants like Norway, France, and Sweden have seen their numbers increase by more than 300 percent in the last ten years. A comparison of migrant profiles between historic destinations like Greece and Italy and new destinations like France, the United States, Norway, and Sweden shows the difference.

Figure 6: Share of tertiary educated Albanian migrants by destination country

Drivers

Large disparities in wages and employment opportunities vis-à-vis main destination countries are the main factors for emigration, although other factors play a role. In spite of recent improvements, Albania has the lowest average wages in the Western Balkans, and gaps with Western European countries are large. Even after controlling for differences in the cost of living across countries, average wages in Albania are less than 20 percent of those in Germany or Austria, and 25 and 33 percent of those in neighboring Italy and Greece, respectively (figure 7, panel a). These wage differentials are strongly correlated with migration flows across different European countries, with higher wages countries attracting more migration while those with lower wages usually face more people leaving the country (figure 7, panel b). The labor market in Albania also shows lower employment rates among the working-age population than its EU peers. After a decade of sustained improvements, the employment rate has stagnated since 2019 at slightly over 60 percent of the working wage population.41 This contrasts with countries in the European Union which, on average, have employment rates of around 70 percent. Similarly, the unemployment rate remains high, above 12 percent (double that of the EU), and particularly affects young people (28 percent for those 15-24), which is the group with more inclinations to migrate in search of better economic opportunities.

41 Instat (2023).
abroad. While economic factors continue to play a central role in the wish to migrate, they are complemented by other factors such as seeking better education for children, and dissatisfaction with social security, healthcare, civil service, the justice system, and other non-economic factors. In addition to the aforementioned driving factors, gaps in information or misinformation can also encourage emigration by fostering unrealistic expectations about economic opportunities and living conditions in destination countries, prompting individuals to pursue migration journeys that can lead to poorer economic outcomes. That was the case behind the rapid spike in asylum petitions of Albanese in Europe in 2015/16, where a majority was misguided by perceptions of easy entry policies to EU countries during the time of large arrivals of refugees from other countries, and then were mostly rejected and returned to their country of origin.

Figure 7: Wage differentials across Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Net Earnings (2017 PPP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMS13 EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ILOSTAT (2023).

Economic outcomes in destination countries

Male Albanian migrants tend to have better labor market outcomes than their non-migrant peers, with higher employment rates. Migration is associated with a higher probability of being employed for Albanian male migrants. According to the statistics from the OECD in 2015, 67 percent of male emigrants in OECD countries ages 15-64 were employed compared to 61 percent of non-migrants in Albania (Figure 8). On the other hand, employment rates for Albanian migrant women are similarly low compared to those that stay in the country. When disaggregating by education level, both migrant and non-migrant Albanian working age populations have higher employment rates the higher the education level they have. Among men, the employment premium is the largest for lower-skilled groups, while it is almost non-existent for tertiary-educated groups. Similar patterns are observed for women, although the difference between migrants and non-migrants is smaller.

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42 Gëdeshi and King (2018); European Values Survey 2021.
However, Albanian migrant workers are usually employed in low-skilled elementary occupations. In line with the average low education level of Albanian emigrants, they usually find employment opportunities in low-skilled sectors. For example, in Greece, the predominant occupations include house builders, crop farm laborers, and office cleaners (figure 9). The same trend can be seen in Italy, the other main destination for migrants, especially those who left Albania in the 1990s and 2000s. According to an IOM survey\textsuperscript{43}, more than 50 percent of Albanians employed in Italy work in specialized manual labor, including a significant portion of the 47 percent who work in the industrial sector and the 29 percent who work in construction. This is largely due to the fact that 62 percent of migrants hold a secondary school degree (refers to lower-level secondary education), only 31 percent have a full high school degree (completed secondary education), and just 6 percent have a university degree.

\textsuperscript{43} IOM (2020).
Section 1.2. Albanian returnees

The story of migration in Albania is not just about emigration but also about return, although exact numbers of returnees are difficult to assess. Estimates of the number of returnees in Albania are an undercount of the total number, as registration as a returning migrant is based on self-declaration (often at the border), and most returnees do not declare themselves as such upon their arrival. Although Albania does not have an official figure, studies conducted through surveys, interviews, and focus groups can provide estimates (see figure 10). According to the 2011 census, 140,000 migrants returned between 2001-2011. The Albanian Household Migration Survey conducted by the Albanian Institute of Statistics shows that another 100,000 migrants had returned by 2019. This would suggest a total return migration population of around 250,000 since the year 2000. Importantly, estimates of returns are typically for migrants who spent at least 12 months abroad, which is the amount required to be formally considered as a returning migrant - but does not

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45 INSTAT and IOM (2013).
46 INSTAT and IOM (2020).
47 This is a rough estimate that may both miss and also overcount some cyclical or overlapping migration. It is meant to be an estimate and is in line with international estimates of percentages of migrants that return.
account for all people who leave for another country and return.\textsuperscript{48,49} The cyclicity of migration is also observed by the intentions to re-migrate among part of the returnee population.\textsuperscript{50,51} Those who migrate more cyclically could potentially be counted multiple times across different estimates. Regardless of exact numbers, the concept of return migration is clearly a growing topic of importance for Albania as it continues to develop. For migrants who have returned, the main host countries were Greece, Italy, and Germany. Return from Greece and Italy was particularly prevalent after the financial crisis in 2008 that impacted those countries disproportionately hard. Returns from Germany have increased more recently as it is a principal target destination for asylum-seekers from Albania (see Box 1).

**Figure 10: Estimates of return migration numbers in Albania**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Important Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 – 2011</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>Census 2011 (Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania, INSTAT/IOM)\textsuperscript{52}</td>
<td>Return migrants are those recorded in the census as having returned from living abroad. This may also reflect cyclical migration or temporary return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 – 2014</td>
<td>150,000 – 180,000</td>
<td>CESS/Potential Migrant Survey (New Trends in Potential Migration from Albania, Gedeshi and King)\textsuperscript{53}</td>
<td>Based on estimates of return migration by year according to survey data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 – 2013</td>
<td>134,000</td>
<td>2013 National survey on return migration (Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania, INSTAT/IOM)\textsuperscript{54}</td>
<td>Only counts Albanian citizens 18 years and older who returned during 2009-2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 – 2019</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>Household Migration Survey 2019 (National Household Migration Survey in Albania, INSTAT/IOM/GIZ)\textsuperscript{55}</td>
<td>Based on changes of residence – in particular those who were not present in 2011 but were present in 2019. Refers to persons who had spent at least one year in another country and returned to Albania. Subtracts a certain estimate for non-nationals migrating to Albania.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{48}INSTAT and IOM (2020); INSTAT and IOM (2013).
\textsuperscript{49}According to the 2018 Demographic and Health Survey, less than 50 percent of migrants were abroad for more than 12 months in their most recent migration episode.
\textsuperscript{50}Although representative data on recent waves of Albanian rejected asylum seekers in Europe are lacking, qualitative evidence suggests that there is a strong intention to remigrate among this group.
\textsuperscript{51}The constraints in data highlight the necessity to bolster migration data collection, particularly concerning detailed information on the migration episodes and plans, which are key to understand their needs and interests of different services and other support in Albania. This information can support more evidence-based tailored services, especially in vulnerable contexts such as those of failed migration attempts or asylum cases.
\textsuperscript{52}INSTAT and IOM (2013).
\textsuperscript{53}Gëdeshi and King (2018).
\textsuperscript{54}INSTAT and IOM (2013).
\textsuperscript{55}INSTAT and IOM (2020).
Annual reports of asylum seekers in Europe (Albanian returned asylum seekers: Reintegration or re-emigration?)

This number refers to asylum seekers who may not have spent at least a year outside Albania. The estimate of 190,000 is calculated based off reports of 193,000 Albanian citizens applying for asylum in EU countries with a 98 percent rejection rate.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021 (until June)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Arrivals</td>
<td>21,681</td>
<td>20,632</td>
<td>15,539</td>
<td>12,404</td>
<td>7,485</td>
<td>3,608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Box 1. The case of asylum seekers

The number of emigrants returning to Albania has also risen as more Albanians to seek asylum in Europe. This number grew substantially from 2012 onwards and reached its peak in 2015 when 67,000 Albanians applied for asylum in the EU, mainly in Germany. EU-wide readmission agreements signed with all Western Balkan countries, including Albania, facilitated the return of many of those asylum-seekers. The total number of Albanians applying for asylum in the EU between 2010 and 2019 is 193,000. However, due to very low acceptance rates (around 2 percent) and the readmission agreements, return migration, either voluntary or forced, has increased considerably. Figure 11 shows how a significant number of migrants returning to Albania are deported asylum-seekers.

Figure 11: Deported Albanians Registered by the Border and Migration Department of the State Police (2016-2021)

Returning migrants are a heterogeneous group though they tend to be working-age males with mid-education levels. Due to the profile of who has traditionally been emigrating, current returnees are mainly young working-age men (between the ages of 18-64 years) with a secondary education. According to data from the 2013 National Survey on Return Migration, 50 percent of returnees were under the age of 35 and 35 percent were under the age of 30. This suggests that many migrants are returning in the early stages of their life. Only 6 percent of returnees were over the retirement age of 65. Interestingly, nearly 75 percent of returnees were male, which is strikingly different than the gender balance observed among Albanians abroad. In terms of marital status, nearly 50 percent were married prior to their emigration and 30 percent returned to Albania single. Returnees were also mostly low-skill, and over 50 percent had a secondary education or less. Only around 6 percent of returnees had a tertiary education, though notably nearly half of those returnees had received their tertiary education abroad. The percentage of migrants with a vocational degree also increased from 4.3 percent before emigration to 6.2 percent upon returning – suggesting that

56 Gëdeshi and Xhaferaj (2016).
migrants are seeking tertiary education and vocational skills while abroad. In terms of employment experience, slightly over 70 percent of return migrants in the 2013 survey had work experience in three main sectors gained during their time abroad: agriculture (14.6 percent), construction (44.3 percent) and hotels and restaurants (12 percent). While specific income data for returnees is not available, they are likely to come from poorer households than the general migrant population, particularly failed asylum seekers and others forced to return.

More recent data from the Household Migration Survey in 2019 suggest that, although still low, returnees have slightly higher education levels. The vast majority of returnees during the 2010s were still of working age (84 percent), but only around 40 percent were under the age of 35, and a slightly higher 9 percent were above the retirement age. The more recent data still show nearly 75 percent of returnees to be men, which suggests men are much more likely to migrate cyclically or seasonally and then return compared to women. The data also show a slightly higher tertiary education rate among returnees of around 12 percent. Given the changing profile of emigration, the profile of return migrants reflects those evolving characteristics. In terms of skill level, although the majority are currently low-skill, as the profile of who is emigrating has been changing, there is a likelihood that future returnees will include even more tertiary-educated migrants as well.

An important distinction in the profile of returnees arises between those who choose to return and those who are forced to do so. This is often seen as a distinction between economic migrants choosing to return (for various reasons) and asylum-seekers who are denied entry and forced back to Albania. The distinction is not necessarily that simple – many economic migrants can be ‘forced’ to return due to job losses abroad (as was the case in Italy and Greece after the financial crisis), expiration of permits or visas, family emergencies, or other acute reasons. Similarly, some asylum-seekers were already economic migrants in neighboring countries like Greece prior to seeking

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57 INSTAT and IOM (2013).
58 Ibid.
59 Evidence on the economic situation of returnees is scarce and not statistically representative.
60 The more recent data utilize a different survey methodology that leaves room for variation. They determine return migrant status by absence in 2011 and presence in 2019, which also includes non-Albanian immigrants. The total number of return migrants is calculated removing those immigrants, but it may still affect the demographic profile.
61 INSTAT and IOM (2020).
62 Gëdeshi and Xhaferaj (2016).
asylum. Although ‘choosing to return’ is not a binary distinction, it can still be useful for understanding the experiences of different populations of returning migrants.

The demographic profile of returnees intersects with the type of emigration. Most returning asylum seekers spent little more than a year in their country of destination before returning to Albania. Those who return voluntarily may have spent many years abroad or plan to cyclically emigrate and return. Furthermore, asylum-seekers are even younger than economic migrants, with 80 percent under the age of 34, including 34 percent of children under 18 years old. Qualitative data suggest that the majority come from Northern and Northeast Albania, which are regions with higher levels of material poverty and fewer economic opportunities. The distinctions between skill level and how voluntary their decision was to return are important because they will naturally impact the migrant’s return experience. Reintegration policies and services aimed toward migrants are most effective when they recognize the heterogeneity of returnees and in particular, the differences caused by skill level and type of return.

Drivers of return migration

Economic migrants return for different reasons, some determined by their current conditions abroad and others by improving conditions in Albania. While most migrants leave Albania in pursuit of employment opportunities, many return due to emerging opportunities at home. According to the 2018 Household Migration Survey, 26.5 percent of returned migrants reported having returned for employment purposes, though this varied by country of destination, from 17.6 percent of returnees from Germany to over 30 percent for returnees from Greece. Importantly, one such economic motivation for return is entrepreneurship, which is a lucrative way to put new skills gained abroad to use. Another national study conducted by INSTAT in 2013 found that while permanent employment levels were similar for returnees before and after their migration, the self-employment rate of these individuals increased from 7.5 percent prior to migration to 21.6 percent upon return. However, for some migrants, the motivation for return could be due to diminished prospects in their countries of destination. For example, during the financial crisis in Greece, the unemployment rate of Albanians jumped from 6 percent to 40 percent, likely motivating many migrants to return to Albania.

While many migrants return for economic reasons, others return for family and other motivations. Data suggest that different motivations for return are linked to gender and other demographic variables. For example, women are more likely to return for family reasons than men and those who were married prior to migration are also more likely to return for non-economic

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63 Ibid.
64 Given data limitations, the reason for return—particularly whether a returnee is a failed asylum seeker forced to return—is the main proxy used to infer potential vulnerabilities and needs.
65 Due to the scarcity of detailed migration data in Albania, it is challenging to establish clear typologies of migrants and returnees (e.g., economic migrants vs asylum-seekers, or low-skilled vs high-skilled) and to provide detailed corresponding statistics for each group. Firstly, data on different typologies often come from various sources and may not be representative, making strict comparisons across groups non-reliable. Secondly, typologies can sometimes overlap implying that an individual might fit into multiple categories simultaneously. These data limitations underscore the importance of strengthening migration data collection including detailed data on socio-economic characteristics to better tailor services, which is one of the recommendations provided later in the report.
66 INSTAT and IOM (2020).
68 INSTAT and IOM (2013).
69 Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018).
70 This is also likely a product of the gendered dimensions of Albanian emigration.
reasons. The data also suggest that transnational ties and social contacts are the most important determinants of a migrant’s decision to return. In the end, it is often likely a mix of different motivations that cause a migrant to return.

Outcomes

Returnees’ skill level and reasons for returning also have implications for the challenges they face when back in Albania. Just like emigration, return migration is a complex process. Especially migrants who spent significant time abroad may no longer be familiar with the institutions or social elements of life in Albania and face challenges that should not be overlooked. Furthermore, those who were forced to return are likely returning to difficult situations that influenced their initial decision to leave. In many of these instances, they unexpectedly return without achieving predetermined saving goals, which can influence their capacity to invest in opening businesses, pay for education, or address pending debts. Their challenges may be compounded by social stigma and difficulties in adaptation. While those who return ‘voluntarily’ may have had more time to make the decision to return, gathering sufficient information and leveraging networks for new opportunities, the process of reintegration may not be immediate or simple, and their challenges are likely compounded by having spent many years away. All returning migrants may have complex reintegration needs not just for themselves but also for their families. The challenges returnees face can be addressed through reintegration policies and programs, but the services offered need to meet the diverse needs of different types of returnees.

Some returning migrants in Albania experience worse economic outcomes than the non-migrant population. According to INSTAT, returned migrants have an unemployment rate of approximately 47.2 percent, which is significantly higher than the national average of 12.0 percent in 2021. Furthermore, inactivity rates are 18 percent. The nature of a migrant’s return certainly plays a role in their economic reintegration and those who had time to make a conscious return decision, weighing the costs and benefits of all options, are likely to have better economic outcomes than those who were forced to return. For example, a study of returnees from 2013 (mostly coming from Italy and Greece following the European financial crisis) found that 63.2 percent reported having lost their job in their country of residence, compared to only 13.2 percent who said there were better job opportunities for them in Albania. For these return migrants, unemployment rates after their return were even higher than they were prior to migration (60.3 percent post-return compared to 58.8 percent pre-migration). Nearly 40 percent mentioned their financial situation in Albania was worse than it was abroad, while only 20 percent said it was improved. Even high-skilled migrants who would anticipate ample job prospects faced challenges in having their skills, certifications, and experience officially recognized.

Given their poor economic outcomes, many return migrants have the intention of migrating again. The most recent Household Migration Survey found that over one-third (35 percent) of returnees intended to migrate again, compared to 38 percent who did not plan to do so, and 27

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71 García-Pereiro and Biscione (2016).
72 INSTAT and IOM (2020).
73 INSTAT (2021).
74 INSTAT and IOM (2020).
75 Given the design of the survey, there is potential for overlap between these two groups as respondents were allowed to select multiple responses to describe their reason for return.
76 INSTAT and IOM (2013).
77 Ibid.
percent who were unsure. For some countries of destination these remigration prospects are even higher – half of the return migrants from Germany (a common destination for asylum-seekers) intend to migrate again.

Asylum seekers and all those who return involuntarily face even worse economic opportunities and overwhelmingly prefer re-migration as a pathway to improving their conditions. Studies have shown that returning asylum seekers have lower education levels than the population average and are over-represented among the poorest segments of Albanian society. Upon return, they face many of the same factors that influenced their original migration decision, such as poverty, unemployment or underemployment, lack of social protection, and debt from up-front migration costs. In fact, only about 24 percent of returned asylum seekers report being in formal employment. They are also less likely to become entrepreneurs compared to those who planned and saved for that purpose. Rather than seeking out low-wage informal employment, the overwhelming majority of returned asylum seekers intend to migrate again, seeing it as the most effective coping mechanism for their poor economic situations. Many aspire to do so through non-asylum pathways, and some enroll in education or language training to better equip themselves for employment abroad. For the most disadvantaged, migrating again as asylum-seekers remains a strongly considered option.

In addition to poor economic outcomes, return migrants face challenges associated with adjusting their lives back to Albania. Migrants who have spent many years abroad may have had children and built families who have health and educational needs upon return. Returnee families can face challenges with the Albanian language and navigating Albanian institutions. They can be isolated, encounter stigma, and struggle to reintegrate into society. These additional challenges are intersectional and can impact a family’s ability to provide for itself upon return. It is also a compounding challenge for the whole country when returnee families can only rely on social assistance programs to sustain their livelihoods.

Some groups face additional discrimination that can hinder reintegration. Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptian minorities, while representing an important share of return migrants, face even more acute barriers to reintegration. Lack of documentation, low education levels, lack of financial resources, and discrimination are often among the additional challenges that make this group more vulnerable and in need of more support upon return. The differences in education and living conditions, lack of employment and access to healthcare, and lack of information and networking between the Roma and non-Roma communities also further deepen the divide in reintegration between these two groups.

The challenges that returning migrants face are compounded by contextual and institutional factors. Gëdeshi and King (2020) and Dubow and Kuschminder (2021) look at how many of the previously mentioned challenges return migrants face manifest in Albania. They emphasize that these challenges are deepened by a lack of available services or institutional factors that hamper their effectiveness. Some migrants are not identified as such and are therefore unable to receive support. Unclear or changing eligibility rules mean many migrants are blocked from economic aid. In addition,
the high degree of informality in the Albanian market can make it difficult for donors to fulfill the requirements needed to disburse funds. For example, rental subsidies are often not able to be provided due to a lack of formal housing contracts. Similarly, some salary matching programs cannot be applied in the case of informal jobs. A lack of social infrastructure can also prevent certain groups from finding employment, such as mothers with no childcare. All these factors combine to create significant multi-dimensional challenges for migrants that can leave them feeling unsupported and left behind.

**Section 1.3. The impacts of migration in Albania**

**Migration is a powerful source of income for Albanian households, as part of the larger earnings obtained abroad is channeled back through remittances.** Remittances are one of the most important international transfers in the Albanian economy, representing 9.9 percent of GDP in 2022. Estimates suggest that remittances play an influential macroeconomic role and contributed 5.1 percent to the real GDP growth in 2017. At the micro level, data from the Life in Transition survey of 2023 shows that around two in three male migrants send remittances back home, while only one in three female migrants do so. This gender disparity is partly explained by the different motives of migration with a significantly higher share of male migrants being employed and earning wages. In 2018, data from the Albanian Household Wealth Survey show that 23 percent of Albanian households received remittances, with similar numbers to previous estimates for 2006. The average annual inflow of remittances per household is around 2,000 euros. Remittances are the second most important source of household income for Albanian households (only after labor income), accounting for 18 percent of their total income. This share is particularly large for higher income households (23 percent for those in the top quintile) while still sizable for the poorest families (14 percent of households income for the bottom quintile). For one in four households, remittances were the only source of household income. Evidence from Albania shows that poverty would increase by 30 percentage points in the absence of remittances (Dushku, 2019).

**The gains from migration revert back to Albania in more diverse forms such as diaspora investments, knowledge transfers or the building of global networks.** In addition to acting as a key lifeline for thousands of households, remittances sent by migrants represent a powerful flow of finance in other ways. Migrants abroad also send money in the form of philanthropy or to assist with development through mechanisms such as diaspora bonds. The diaspora has also a key role in bringing foreign direct investment to the country (OECD, 2022), which represented 7.7 percent of GDP in 2022. Many migrants use their knowledge gains, forming collaborations with those remaining in Albania, leading to a return flow of new ideas and technologies to Albania. Migrants who accumulate savings abroad may also seek to invest them back home in Albania through houses, businesses, or other options – often in anticipation of an eventual return.

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87 World Bank (2022b).
89 World Bank Life in Transition Survey IV.
90 Dushku (2019).
91 Frashëri (2007).
92 Ibid.
93 Dushku (2019).
Migration also alleviates labor market pressures in the form of lower unemployment. In the last two decades, there has been a progressive reduction in unemployment rates, from close to 20 percent in the early 2000s to a record low of 11 percent in 2022, which coincides with the constant migration flow of part of the population out of the country, in particular those without employment opportunities.

However, labor shortages in the economy are emerging, partly linked to emigration. Since 1990, the population in Albania has decreased by 10 percent, in spite of the relatively strong contribution of natural population growth (births minus deaths), which was more than compensated by a rapid outflow of migrants (figure 13, panel a). Given that the migrant population is heavily concentrated among the prime age, the reduction of the working age population, and thus the labor supply has been even more acute. According to the recent Balkan Business Opinion Barometer (2021), 45 percent of firms report being unable to fill their vacancies due to a lack of workers with needed skills, and 38 percent considered that these shortages are due to the emigration of part of the labor force (figure 13, panel b). These labor shortages can limit firm productivity and economic growth given the suboptimal allocation of resources. Sectors with larger unmet labor demand include production, mining, construction, and services. Labor demand differs significantly across sectors. Employers reported increasing demand across three main axes: (i) lower-skilled workers in firms operating in the sectors of industry, tourism, and construction; (ii) lower-medium-skilled workers in the agro-processing, trade, and repair sectors; and (iii) higher-skilled workers in the business services sector.

Projections at the economy-wide level indicate that Albania will face further labor shortages, although migration patterns do not have major weight on these trends. These shortages will be especially prominent among low education level jobs, which are projected to decline but will still account for the highest share of total labor by 2030. High-education jobs will also experience shortages and will account for the second highest share of jobs. Importantly, scenarios of ‘zero net migration’ do little to ameliorate labor shortages.

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95 World Bank (2018).
96 The STEP Employer Survey was administered to 600 firms in Albania between March and October 2017. The survey is a product of the World Bank and is used to measure workforce competencies and skills demand by employers.
The return of high-skilled migrants may also represent a ‘brain gain’ opportunity for the country.\textsuperscript{98} Not all migrants are, or return as, vulnerable and low-skilled, with difficult economic prospects. Emigrants from Albania are increasingly highly skilled and many migrants acquire additional skills or education abroad. High skilled return migrants in particular have been shown to bring skills, experience, and technology that lead to increases in productivity and innovation\textsuperscript{99} – if able to reintegrate and apply their newfound knowledge. Previous research based on the 2005 Albanian Living Standards Measurement Study showed that past migration experience increased the likelihood of upward occupational mobility, suggesting that migrants gain productive skills and experience abroad.\textsuperscript{100} Recent evidence in Albania has also shown that return migration episodes positively affected the employment and wages of non-migrants, especially low-skilled workers, through entrepreneurship and job creation by migrants (see Box 2), eventually translating into positive impacts on GDP.\textsuperscript{101} Even when returning migrants re-migrate, it can result in better outcomes abroad – and increase future ‘brain gain’ for when they return again.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{98} Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018); Bucheli and Fontenla (2022); World Bank (2023).
\textsuperscript{99} Bucheli and Fontenla (2022); Bahar et al. (2019).
\textsuperscript{100} Kilic and Carletto (2009).
\textsuperscript{101} Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018).
\textsuperscript{102} For more on diaspora externalities, see Dickerson and Ozden (2018).
Box 2: Empirical evidence from Albania shows how returning migrants fuel opportunities.

Albanian migrants who returned to Albania after the economic crisis in Greece generated strong positive local labor market impacts, including for those who had not left the country. The economic crisis of 2008 hit Greece particularly hard, reducing opportunities for Albanian migrants and spurring a large wave of return migration to Albania. This return of migrants increased the country’s labor force by 5 percent in less than four years. An empirical study by Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018) examined how this return migration affected the Albanian labor market and especially the levels of employment and earnings of non-migrants. They found that most migrants returned to their local district of origin where they engaged mostly in self-employment and entrepreneurship activities, including agriculture, construction, trade, and hospitality. As entrepreneurs, they not only created jobs for themselves but also for non-migrants who remained in unemployment or inactive in the labor market. Empirically, a one percentage point (1pp) increase in the share of return migrants in an Albanian district was associated with an increase in the chances of non-migrant Albanians living in that district of being employed by 0.6 percent. The effect was even stronger for low-skilled non-migrants (0.8 percent). The entrepreneurship of return migrants had a similarly positive impact on wages. It was found that the real wages of non-migrants increased between 2-2.5 percent for a one percentage point increase in the number of return migrants, while the relevant wage increase for low-skilled non-migrants was even more pronounced, between 2.5 and 5.9 percent.

The gains from return migration translated into economic growth for Albania. The positive labor market impacts of return migration were found to have generated large GDP gains for the local economy, between 0.8 to 1.3 percent of 2009 GDP. The positive GDP effect managed to offset 60 to 80 percent of the negative effect of reduced remittances during the crisis period.103

103 Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018).
Chapter II. Diagnostic of the Legislative and Institutional Migration Infrastructure in Albania

This chapter provides an overview of the migration system in Albania that regulates the flows of emigrants from Albania to third countries and the provision of services from the time they plan to migrate, to the time they reside abroad, until they return to Albania.

Section 2.1. Framework to analyze the emigration system

The system that governs emigration throughout the whole migration lifecycle can be examined through the lens of a common framework (see figure 15). At the top of the migration system lies the governance structure. On the one hand, this includes all national strategies, domestic laws, and bilateral and multilateral agreements that regulate the movement of migrant workers between Albania and other countries, migrants’ rights and responsibilities, as well as the ties, engagement, and services that the country provides to its diaspora. Unilateral regulations of labor mobility in destination countries can also have profound repercussions on emigration flows in sending countries such as Albania and, thus, also need to be included as part of the legal framework of analysis. The governance structure also covers the institutional setting which, based on national strategies and legal documents governing emigration such as diaspora laws, establishes roles and responsibilities of different domestic agencies as well as coordination mechanisms between them.

Emigration consists of several phases that present different challenges for migrants and require support measures to enhance the overall benefits of migration while reducing its risks. In each of the stages of migration, migrants face certain barriers and challenges, from the point where prospective migrants start considering migrating to another country, to the time they spend abroad, until they return to Albania and integrate back into the domestic economy (or decide to re-migrate – e.g., circular migration).

Pre-departure services and regulations can help migrants better prepare for the migration experience. Before departing, potential migrants often have information asymmetries with respect to employment opportunities and the migration process, skills mismatches with what job opportunities demand at destination (particularly host language fluency), and financial constraints that limit their ability to finance the upfront costs of migration. To better prepare prospective migrants and avoid misinformation, well-developed emigration systems provide different services such as orientation sessions that include information on job vacancies and legal and bureaucratic requirements to migrate, financial support, or training programs. Best practices also include thorough regulation and management of recruitment agencies to protect migrants’ rights and avoid abuses.

During the migration period, services that protect migrants against shocks, enhance social and economic engagement of the diaspora and incentivize return, can significantly improve the gains of migration for migrants and Albania alike. While migrants can largely benefit from larger income opportunities in destination countries, they are also more exposed to negative shocks as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Advanced migration systems provide a range of services to their citizens abroad, including consular services, emergency relief, or access to insurance funds to cover them in the event of negative shocks. To enhance the benefits of emigration, another important aspect is strengthening the broader engagement with the diaspora by building trust,
improving the business environment and deepening the outreach efforts in order to benefit from the expansion of global networks, the channeling of investments and the transfer of know-how to the domestic economy. In order to incentivize return migration, some governments provide tax exemptions and other financial incentives and repatriation support (such as travel costs or temporary housing allowances), as well as information on job opportunities in the home country.

Upon return to Albania, interventions can support migrants’ reintegration into the home economy. Return migrants, particularly the most vulnerable, such as those forced to return or those that unexpectedly return without achieving their migration saving or education targets, can face certain re-integration barriers and challenges. Migration policy can provide reintegration support for those most in need, including one-stop shops providing information on different services and employment opportunities, and facilitating activation through ALMPs.

*Figure 15: Framework to analyze the system of migration and return of citizens of Albania*

Following this framework, sub-section 2.2 assesses the body of legislation that governs and affects emigration in Albania, including national strategies, domestic laws, bilateral agreements, and third-country regulations. Sub-section 2.3 studies the institutional organization of all different agencies in Albania with roles and responsibilities to regulate or provide services to emigrants. Sub-section 2.4 analyzes the provision of services throughout the migration life cycle, including pre-departure, during migration, and upon return to Albania.
Section 2.2. Legislative framework regulating migration of Albanians

In line with its own development and integration goals, the Albanian government has adopted legislative policy on migration that has evolved over time, driven by both internal and external factors. The main strategy, which covers the overall development and integration agenda of the country (including migration) is the "National Strategy on Development and Integration (NSDI) 2015-2020," updated in 2022 to extend through 2030. This strategy has been a major step toward achieving a comprehensive migration governance policy. It envisions the establishment of an effective system of migration governance, which includes the emigration of Albanian citizens, return migration, immigration of foreigners, and the impact of migration on Albania’s development. The strategy recognizes the importance of migration for Albania’s integration and development and was importantly designed in compliance with EU requirements. In order to ensure a better response to the multiple dimensions of migration, the strategy aims to consolidate disparate elements of migration policy into a singular legislation. It also aims to increase the efficiency of coordination around migration, improve data collection, and provide an effective monitoring and evaluation framework. In addition to the NSDI, the government has also adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as part of its own national priorities and has welcomed the Global Compact for Migration and its objectives.\(^\text{104}\) EU requirements mandate that the legal framework aligns with EU and international standards, which was also taken into account in the design of the legislation.

![Figure 16: Albania has taken important steps to promote reintegration](image)

The National Strategy on Development and Integration also aims to promote safe and regular routes of migration in Albania, to prevent irregular migration, and to streamline 70 percent of migration from Albania through regular bilateral agreements. As such, it requires the

\(^{104}\) Ministry of Interior, Republic of Albania (2019).
improvement of legislation in the area of labor migration, more effective implementation of existing labor migration agreements with countries of destination, and an increase in the number of new agreements to ensure ethical recruitment and protection of rights. In order to increase the skills and employability of the Albanian labor force, the strategy dictates that labor migration agreements should include internship programs in foreign enterprises as well as an increase in the number of youth exchange agreements with EU countries.

The “National Strategy on Migration (NSM) 2019-2022” and the “National Action Plan on Migration (NAPM) 2019 – 2022” are two of Albania’s other key initiatives on migration. The NSM and NAPM set out four key migration related development goals:

1) Ensuring strategic governance of migration in Albania
2) Ensuring safe and orderly migration from, through, and to Albania
3) Developing an effective labor migration policy that has a positive impact on the national and local socioeconomic development
4) Promoting and protecting migrants’ rights and integration.

The strategy sets out to effectively govern migration in Albania by addressing challenges resulting from migratory movements and enhancing the development impact of migration to the benefit of migrants and the Albanian society. It aims to ensure safe and orderly migration from, though, and to Albania by increasing the effectiveness of control mechanisms for safe and orderly admission, stay, and transit of foreigners, and return and reintegration of Albanian citizens. It recognizes the importance of adequate allocation of resources to meet the challenges of evolving migration flows. It aims to enhance mechanisms of co-operation with the authorities of other countries for both emigration and immigration. It looks to enhance the positive impact of migration by integrating migration policy more closely into the management of the labor market. It includes provisions for incentives for the return of workers in demand, better use of returnees’ skills, and the productive use of remittances and other contributions migrants transfer. It also aims to supply prospective migrants with comprehensive information on their rights and opportunities, particularly facilitating orderly forms of labor migration (circular and seasonal) and ultimately a return to the Albanian labor market. It includes measures to identify challenges facing non-nationals in exercising their guaranteed rights and proposes measures to safeguard them. The strategy demands special attention be given to reducing impediments to the effective enjoyment of rights by the most vulnerable categories, such as female migrants, children, youth, persons with disabilities, and the elderly.\footnote{The strategy was developed back in 2018 and therefore does not include any specific reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, COVID-19 impact is regularly taken into account during the implementation of the Action Plan measures.}

The “National Strategy on Migration (NSM)” has been recently updated in early May 2024 to cover the period 2024-2030.\footnote{Council of Ministers Decision No.271 of 2 May 2024.} The updated NSM extends the strategic goals of the previous period and focuses on four strategic goals including:

1) Guarantee the strategic governance of migration in Albania.
2) Develop effective migration policies for employment to increase the positive social and economic development impact of migration at the national and local level.
3) Promote regular migration, protect the rights of migrants and their integration into Albanian society.
4) Strengthen the international defense system of migration, guarantee the rights of asylum seekers and refugees and provide sustainable solutions.
The updated NSM has a special focus on strengthening international cooperation and global partnerships for safe and regular migration. It aims to promote effective labor migration policies to positively impact social and economic development at the national and local level. It also aims to strengthen the reintegration measures and mechanisms to ensure sustainable support of returnees while evaluating their needs. In doing so, it focuses on closely cooperating with local migration and diaspora offices in the municipalities. The NSM 2024-2030, also aims to put in place preventative measures against immigration of Albanian citizens abroad and reduce the number of asylum-seeking applications. There is also added attention on foreigners to guarantee and improve services for them and their integration in Albania. The NSM also aims to strengthen the international migration defense system by guaranteeing the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees in accordance with the new EU migration policy, which combines migration and asylum policies.

**Emigration of Albanians**

The National Strategy on Development and Integration sets out strategic objectives to increase the impact of emigration on development by creating legal and institutional mechanisms. This includes promoting the use of formal channels for sending remittances to Albania and improving remittances related services for migrants in order to channel remittances towards productive investments in the country. It also includes the protection of the rights of Albanian migrants in host countries, demanding equal treatment according to the international standards, as well as mapping, building trust, mobilizing, and organizing Albanian communities abroad, in order to establish cooperation mechanisms. The cooperation mechanisms are also seen as a way to encourage entrepreneurial initiative, investment, philanthropy, technology transfer, and to foster innovation.

The National Strategy on Diaspora and Migration 2018-2024 was developed to foster a stronger relationship with the diaspora and make productive use of diaspora networks to positively affect the social and economic development for the country. It aimed to re-evaluate and expand the National Civil Register with data on migrants and periodically review the legal basis for migrants’ registration. Particular importance is given in the strategy to the determination of responsibilities and data to be collected as well as the appropriate network and infrastructure. The strategy also promotes diaspora rights in host countries. Diaspora organizations will receive government assistance to support Albanians working and living abroad, addressing the needs and requests for information and services from young migrants, encouraging political participation, ensuring labor rights, assisting with naturalization processes, and religious rights. It also makes provisions for the training of migrants’ families as recipients of remittances. The strategy also promotes the establishment of a platform that will provide micro-credit funds to members of the diaspora. The strategy also encourages negotiations related to signing bilateral agreements for the transfer of social insurance between host countries and Albania. There will also be a reassessment of the accumulating arrangements of voluntary contributions for social insurance and if necessary, signed agreements between the Social Insurance Institute and banks. In this framework, an assessment of a specific action plan on the issue of Albanian migrants’ pensions will be carried out. The National Diaspora Strategy will also plan awareness-raising campaigns on the various opportunities to appeal against violations of migrants’ rights through host country and international legal structures.

The “Albanian National Diaspora Strategy 2021-2025” aims to create institutional structures that attract diaspora professionals for short- and long-term engagements in Albania. It conducts a reassessment of the cooperation between donors and the “Brain Gain” or “Brain Return” model programs. In order to ensure the possibility of return, responsible institutions are charged with maintaining relations with the diaspora and providing them with employment opportunities in
Albania. The strategy also sets out the establishment of professional networks in the diaspora, including information and awareness raising campaigns for:

- Voter registration of migrants.
- Preservation of the Albanian identity and culture.
- Issues of professional interest or related to recent political and socio-economic developments in Albania.

The strategy also seeks to strengthen the role of the Diaspora Business Chamber and establish a legal framework for investments from the Albanian Diaspora. In addition, the National Diaspora Strategy highlights business and investment as a key priority area with a set of actions as listed below:

- Fostering collaboration between the Business Chamber of the Diaspora and diaspora business network to establish the Diaspora Business Registry.
- Creation of local administrative structures to provide information and support for investments from interested individuals in the diaspora.
- Dissemination of information about investment opportunities in Albania to attract members of the Albanian diaspora to invest in the country.
- Carrying out regular assessments of the remittances market and other financial services available to diaspora members, in partnership with the Bank of Albania, to ensure greater access and usage of regulated channels.
- Creating specialized administrative offices within public institutions to address issues and inquiries from diaspora members with a focus on remittances and investments.
- Collaborating with banks and other financial service providers to develop tailor-made services for the diaspora, with the help of diaspora associations.
- Promoting circular migration between Albania and host countries with Albanian diaspora communities through favorable measures or bilateral agreements, prioritizing Greece and Italy. Establishing a contact and coordination office to assess foreign labor markets and provide information to responsible institutions.
- Promoting Albanian agricultural and food products through activities targeting organized networks of Albanian producers and diaspora business networks involved in trading such products.

Migration is also included in the "National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2014-2020" and the "National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2019-2022", which is also being updated for the period 2023-2030, to increase infrastructure and capacity to provide services to migrants for employment. The strategy also aims to increase cooperation with other countries for the management of emigration for employment through bilateral employment agreements, as well maintain legislation on labor immigration in-line with EU requirements. An important role is also given to the recognition of professional qualification training acquired abroad, as well as skills acquired informally that would facilitate a smoother reintegration of migrants in the labor market. Furthermore, the strategies set out to align with the needs of the market, while reflecting the principles of multi-functionality, equality, diversity, and flexibility. The strategy also establishes a scheme to manage the labor market needs of beneficiaries of economic assistance, which could include migrants. The strategy demands stronger collaboration between different governmental structures and institutions to better provide employment services that are specifically targeted to the needs of migrants.
Rights for Albanian emigrants are established under law and include provisions of services and support throughout the migration life cycle. In March 2003, Albania adopted Law No.9034 “On the Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Reasons of Employment” amended by Law No.10389 of March 3, 2011. Under this law, emigrants have the right to information and counselling free of charge concerning vocational training, labor intermediation services, social protection, organization in labor unions, opportunities for housing, education and social security, and recognition of their living and working conditions. Furthermore, competent central authorities issue documents required by Albanian citizens intending to emigrate for employment purposes or labor-based vocational training. With regards to the diaspora, the Law No. 16/2018 “On the Albanian Diaspora” establishes the requirements to set, keep, and strengthen ties with the diaspora and preserve and cultivate national, linguistic, cultural, and educational identity, as well as their connection to state institutions in Albania. As such, the law foresees the establishment of the Coordinating Council for Diaspora, which is the main institution responsible for diaspora relations.

The Albanian government has also taken measures towards the portability of social security and earned benefits by reaching and signing bilateral agreements with various countries based on the Stabilization and Association Agreement and by the provisions made in the Albanian law on social insurance. This law specifies that social insurance covers Albanian citizens (including those who previously lived abroad), stateless persons, as well as foreign citizens and stateless persons who are working in Albania. With 16 agreements already in place and negotiations ongoing for an additional 17 countries, Albania is demonstrating a commitment to foster international cooperation and protect the rights of its diaspora. The agreement with Italy, one of the primary destination countries for Albanian migrants, was signed in February 2024 but awaits ratification by both countries parliaments and therefore it might take time before it enters into force.

Upon enactment, this agreement is expected to cover around 500,000 Albanian workers who have worked and paid social security contributions in the two countries. Still, among the top 10 destinations for Albanian migrants, agreements are yet to be established with five countries, including Greece, the US, France, the UK, and Sweden. In the absence of bilateral agreements between Albania and destination countries particularly the ones with significant share of migrants, social security contributions cannot be transferred, or rights accounted for. This leaves migrants with work histories in both Albania and the host country particularly vulnerable and is a challenge facing individuals who return to Albania before reaching retirement age.

The “National Action Plan on Remittances 2007-2010” was put in place to comply with the strategic goals of productively using remittances through formal channels to foster economic development. This action plan included eight main measures. One measure was to expand and improve remittance data collection, research, analysis, policies, and procedures. The goal was to properly analyze and determine the impact of remittances on the economy and their potential for stimulating economic growth. It called for improving the reliability of statistics on remittances and focusing on accurate estimations of informal flows. It also required building institutional capacity for data collection and analysis of remittances pattern use, the impact of remittances on savings, education, labor supply, and income inequality. A second measure focused on expanding Albanian banking services linked to remittances to increase the use of formal channels. It included the promotion and sharing of best practices among banks, expansion of banking services in rural areas, and

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108 While bilateral agreements cater primarily to the needs of Albanian migrants engaged in formal employment, not all migrants fall within this category. For those residing in countries where a bilateral agreement with Albania has not been yet established as well as for those employed in the informal sector or involved in activities that are not covered by such agreements, access to social insurance coverage remains challenging.
and facilitation of links with financial institutions for young migrants. Other measures included the enhancement of collaboration between Albanian banks and banks in migrant host countries to improve remittances services, and the strengthening of capacity of Albanian microfinance institutions and the Albanian Post to provide remittance services. Awareness raising campaigns were planned to increase the use of formal channels and efforts were planned to improve infrastructure and the regulatory environment. This included simplifying procedures, strengthening the legal framework on money laundering, supporting microfinancing institutions in acquiring technology and legalization activities, and expanding the Albanian Post nationwide network to fill service gaps in rural areas.

**Return of Albanian migrants to Albania**

The National Strategy on Development and Integration (NSDI) sets out strategic objectives to increase the sustainability of return migration by supporting reintegration of returned migrants. This is intended to be carried out through enhancing recognition of skills and qualifications (formal and informal), obtained abroad by Albanian citizens and their integration in the labor market. In addition, active labor market measures and VET training are offered to return migrants, as well as promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship activities among those in rural areas.

In line with the strategic vision of the NSDI to establish an effective migration governance system in Albania, various strategic documents setting out policies covering the different aspects of migration governance have previously been put in place. One such strategy was the “Strategy on Reintegration of Albanian Returnees 2010-2015,” which aimed to support the reintegration of Albanian citizens returned voluntarily or by force in Albania by providing reintegration services, minimizing migration costs, and maximizing their contribution to the country’s economic development. It also encouraged the voluntary return of Albanian emigrants abroad through the production of leaflets with information on rights and services to be provided by consular, diplomatic, and emigrants’ associations. Furthermore, to better prepare for the reception of returned unaccompanied minors at border points, relevant referral mechanisms were to be created along with necessary reception facilities. This strategy also aimed to broaden reintegration services to guarantee permanent return of migrants to Albania by providing career guidance, job placement, and vocational training. It also foresaw drafting and implementing joint employment programs with small businesses.

The Law No. 9034 “On the Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Reasons of Employment” provides the legal basis for the support to return migrants. The law foresees that competent central authorities should encourage and support the reintegration of emigrants in the economic, social and political life of the country by creating fiscal facilities and implementing business development programs, employment programs and labor-based vocational training. Competent central authorities should also issue documents required by Albanian returned migrants for employment purposes or labor-based vocational training.

In principle, the establishment of the Migration Counters was a step towards improving reintegration assistance for return migrants. The Migration Counters were supposed to interview returned Albanian citizens who would voluntarily approach them. They were then to provide information on public and private services and refer return migrant to specific programs implemented by civil society, according to their needs. They were also supposed to provide information on reintegration support through information packages prepared by the relevant institutions. The referral of return migrants by the Migration Counters would include referrals to: the
National Social Service for psycho-social assistance, the public vocational training centers, educational institutions for the education of children or equivalency of diplomas, municipality administration for shelter needs, relevant health care institutions to follow procedures to benefit health care services, business promotion institutions in the event migrants wish to invest in Albania, the relevant structures of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in the case of returnees from rural areas who may benefit from agricultural subsidy schemes, and programs of civil society for reintegration of returnees that are active in the operating area of the Migration Counter.

The National Strategy on Migration also seeks to revitalize the NAES-operated migration counters in order to improve returnees’ access to public services and programs for employment, self-employment, and professional qualifications. To address the lack of information available to returnees, which is identified as one of the key barriers to access reintegration services, the strategy includes provisions to improve information sharing and initiate public outreach tools to communicate available support. Border crossings and other appropriate state structures will serve as contact points for these information sharing campaigns. Furthermore, the strategy also emphasizes specific measures to help the establishment of small businesses by returnees including investment funds, free legal aid, preferential loans, and more.

Box 3. Monitoring of the National Migration Strategy

The Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan of the “National Strategy for Migration 2019-2022” has determined that the measures for reintegration of return migrants assigned to NAES have been partially fulfilled. The main actions assigned to NAES were:

- To provide incentives for the education, training, and employment of young people and unaccompanied minors in cooperation with local authorities
- To carry out a detailed assessment of the specific challenges and needs of return migrants for their more effective integration in the labor market
- To strengthen cooperation with counterpart institutions in destination countries for the transfer of good practices in providing information to migrants

As per Law No.15/2019 “On Employment Promotion” migrants who are within two years of their return are eligible for employment promotion programs. Data from 2019 show that 578 return migrants (182 women) were registered as unemployed jobseekers with NAES, and 167 (46 women) were employed through intermediation, while 73 had received vocational training courses. A total of 128 return migrants received Employment Promotion Programs (EPPs). In this same year, 148 return migrants were part of the Start Smart program providing jobseekers with soft skills to increase their employability.

The report found that the measure related to the review of local government activities on migration, provision of services to migrants, and proposal of coordination mechanisms between local and central government structures was fulfilled. The fulfillment of this measure is related to the amendment of Law No. 139/2015 “On Local Self-Government” by Law No. 38/2019, giving the mandate to the local government to establish migration and diaspora structures. Fulfillment was also driven by reporting from the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth on educational services for school-aged children, awareness campaigns in cooperation with IOM, and additional psychosocial and integration services for children. During the year 2019-2020, 220 returnee students were enrolled in lower secondary and upper secondary education.
The report also found that measures related to the institutional framework, identification of barriers, and targeted programs for return migrants remain in progress. These measures include the division of responsibilities for migration within the central government and its agencies, an assessment of institutional capacities, the design and implementation of dedicated programs, the identification of barriers for reintegration, and training of migration counter staff. The measure on reviewing the institutional set-up to identify barriers, existing inefficiencies, and duplicated efforts remains unfulfilled.

Migration is fundamental to the “Intersectoral Strategy on Integrated Border Management 2021-2027” (an update to the “Strategy on Integrated Border Management 2016-2020”), which focuses on strengthening and modernizing border control to minimize illegal migration and supporting the return of Albanian migrants. The strategy aims to increase the capacity of border and migration police and improve cooperation and information sharing with other institutions for better identification and registration of migrants and asylum seekers. It also aims to improve the identification of undocumented migrants, increase the provision of legal services to people in need of international protection, strengthen repatriation services, and support voluntary return. In addition to enforcement, the Albanian government has been actively involved with disseminating information regarding regular migration through awareness raising campaigns. These efforts were part of the “Raising awareness and information about safety and empowerment for all - Albania / ARISE ALL” campaign, which extended to all 12 regions of Albania.109

Legal framework for service delivery and cooperation at the local level

Government agencies and institutions at the local level play an important role in return and reintegration, as they are the primary touchpoint for migrants to receive services. Although policies and strategies are crafted at the central level, the local government is also fundamentally involved in initiatives to support migration. Local agencies work directly with migrants and are in charge of developing social care plans, which are available to returning migrants as a designated vulnerable group. This is in line with the decentralization of economic aid at the local level. International organizations such as UNDP and UNICEF are collaborating with local government authorities to prepare these plans, which aim to assess the provision of existing services, address any existing gaps, and provide an action plan together with a monitoring and evaluation approach. As of 2019, 72 percent of municipalities have developed their plan.110

Existing legal provisions promote decentralization while encouraging cooperation between the local and central government institutions. In order to foster greater independence of local government and increase cooperation between local structures and the central government, Law No. 139/2015 “For Local Self-Government” gives local self-government units the right to create administrative structures to perform their functions, exercise their competencies, and to create economic units and institutions under them (Article 9). It also gives them the right to collaborate with other self-governing local units on common service provisions given to them by law through cooperation agreements, contracts, delegation of responsibilities. The relationship with the central government is based on the principles of subsidiarity, consultation, and cooperation for resolving

109 IOM Albania (n.d.).
common issues (Article 10). DCM No. 910\textsuperscript{111} of December 21, 2016 was amended by DCM No. 456 of June 10, 2020\textsuperscript{112} to include diaspora and migration in the list of issues that are considered as an object of consultation between the central government and local self-government.

**Coordinating efforts between the central and local government have started to take place.** In 2020, after the amendments to the Law No. 139/2015 “For Local Self-Government” by Law No. 38/2019 and the amendments to DCM No. 910 of December 21, 2016 by DCM No. 456 of June 10, 2020 on the Consultative Council, the Minister of Diaspora\textsuperscript{113} met with the director of the Agency for the Support of Local Self-Government, the deputy major of the municipality of Tirana and two representatives of GIZ to sign a memorandum of cooperation for the coordination of work on establishing local administrative structures for diaspora and migration.

**Based on the provisions and amendments of the law on local self-government, some municipalities have already responded and adopted local plans on the reintegration of migrants.** The municipality of Tirana, with the support of GIZ, has enacted the “Local Action Plan for Migration and Diaspora 2022-2026”. The action plan seeks to support the sustainable reintegration of migrants in all economic and social aspects in the municipality of Tirana and provide a fruitful collaboration with the diaspora. The action plan has identified four main challenges that need to be addressed over the course of five years.

1) *Structural and functional*: strengthening the structures for migration and diaspora, creating supporting mechanisms at the local level, and building capacity of local staff for issues related to migration and diaspora.

2) *Interinstitutional*: creating a communication network between stakeholders at the central and local level, as well as with international structures and stakeholders.

3) *Strategic and research oriented*: inclusion and reintegration of migrants and diaspora in the strategic and sectoral documents of the municipality of Tirana, the creation of a network of information exchange between institutions responsible for data at the local level, and the preparation of manuals and sectoral studies for different categories of migrants.

4) *Informational and awareness raising campaigns*: intensifying efforts to provide information to communities of migrants and diaspora on the availability of policies and services at the local level.

The action plan includes five strategic objectives:

1) Strengthening and functioning of local structures for migration and diaspora.

2) Fulfilling the functions for migration and diaspora according to the legal provisions in place.

3) Establishing a data system, assessment of needs, and referral of returnees from vulnerable groups.

4) Sustainable social and economic reintegration of return migrants.

5) Strengthening the role of the Albanian diaspora and their collaboration for social and economic development at the local level.

\textsuperscript{111} “On The Issues, Object of Consultation Object, and Structure, Procedure, Form, Organization and Functioning of the Consultative Council of the Central Government with the Local Self-Government”.


\textsuperscript{113} “Njësia e Diasporës në Bashkë / Ministri Majko takim me institucionet përgjegjëse” (2020).
Although the functions for the creation of dedicated structures for migration and diaspora were given to municipalities in 2019 based on the amendments to the law on local self-government, the municipality of Tirana already had various policies for migration put in place. Certain categories of return migrants were already included in some social and economic programs designed by the municipality. However, there was still a need to formally include return migrants in all strategic and sectoral plans. Since 2020, the municipality of Tirana has been implementing a project for the reintegration of return migrants (RE-IN-VEST II), financed by the German government under the project “Migration for Development”, organized by GIZ and implemented by World Vision. The program is focused on the social and economic reintegration of return migrants, the provision of specialized psycho-social support, and increased accessibility of employment opportunities and self-employment. The project has been implemented in the Administrative Unit Number 11 but return migrant families have been supported throughout the municipality of Tirana, and it is foreseen that the project will be extended to all administrative units within the municipality.

The municipality of Tirana has identified barriers blocking the support of return migrants linked to the legal framework in place. The community centers, which provide services to vulnerable categories do not include return migrants as a vulnerable group, as per the legislation in place. This creates a barrier for the inclusion of return migrants in the services provided through the community centers. Furthermore, return migrants are not included as a vulnerable category in Ndihma Ekonomike “NE” and disability payments. As such, it is necessary to create structures for case identification and referral, which may include migrants in the social programs available at the local level. The municipality of Tirana also does not have competencies in the field of social services, which are provided at the central level, but managed locally, therefore it has not included policies for the education of children of return migrants. However, this is not the case with child protection and social workers in 27 administrative units have assisted children from return migrant families demonstrating a viable inclusion strategy.

The first strategic goal of the new Local Action Plan for Migration and Diaspora 2022-2026 foresees the creation of the Center for the Reintegration of Migrants due to the provision for dedicated local structures. This center will function in accordance with the rules and regulations approved by the municipal council and will serve as a local focal point for vulnerable return migrants. At the center they will have access to specialized services for psycho-social, legal, and healthcare support. Services will be provided on the basis of identified need and through a referral system in the social programs and schemes offered by the municipality of Tirana. The municipality of Tirana also foresees capacity building and continuous training of the staff responsible for the structures of migration and diaspora, as well as other structures that are indirectly related to migration. Furthermore, the staff of the local government unit responsible for migration and diaspora should have adequate knowledge of the central structures that offer services for return migrants and how they may be referred based on specific needs. Finally, the municipality aims to promote migration structures and services through a designated website and counselling line connected to the center.

The second strategic objective mandates a network for information sharing to facilitate collaboration and coordination between local and central structures, as well as with international partners. To fulfill this objective, various measures are designed including the creation and dissemination of information packages on services offered in relation to migration and diaspora, the creation of a digital platform for information on migration and diaspora,
publication of a newsletter on projects related to migration and diaspora, the creation and publication of a digital calendar for collaboration on activities undertaken by local structures and central structures that operate in the field of migration and diaspora, the organization of ‘returnees week’ with activities in different fields including experience exchanges and best practices related to returnees, and the design of promotional materials for the city and the services it provides. The objective also calls for the establishment of contact with local and central government structures and the creation of a database, the establishment of regular informative inter-institutional meetings, information exchange between local and central governments, the creation of a local network for cooperation between the local structures, and civil society that operate in the field of migration and diaspora, and the creation of a database with projects related to migration and diaspora in the municipality.

The third strategic objective establishes a system for the exchange of data, evaluation of needs, and referral cases of vulnerable groups of return migrants at the local level. This is based on the need for data on the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of return migrants to design programs and services tailored to their needs. The system will identify and map returnees and support the coordination for service provision to them. It will offer services at the local level such as psycho-social support, legal support, healthcare support, temporary shelter, and more. A system of referral will also be put in place for the transfer of cases to the social and economic support schemes offered at the local and central level for vulnerable groups. Services will be monitored by the responsible structures at the municipality. Specific measures related to this objective include a study on the methodology for data collection and exchange at the local level, institutional agreements on data exchange between the central and local government, the design of a standard format for data collection in the migration counters in the 24 local administrative units, capacity building in data collection by the staff of administrative units, and publication of migration data in the open statistical portal. A system of cooperation, tracing, and referral of cases to the migration police will also be established, as well as the design of individual plans for each vulnerable category, experience exchanges with centers of reintegration of migrants in the Kosovo communes (on case management and protocols), capacity building of personnel involved in the system of needs assessment, provision of information and personal identification documents and certificates, and assistance on application and documentation for social assistance.

The fourth strategic objective establishes a sustainable and functional institutional system supported by adequate policies that focuses on return migrants eligible for social protection and economic aid. The municipality will be engaged in finding and implementing specific projects for categories of return migrants ensuring a continuous collaboration with national and international agencies operating in this field. Measures will include the guidance of return migrants towards employment and training opportunities, capacity building, and investment opportunities. The objective also includes information on procedures and necessary documentation, assistance for social protection schemes, as well as direct assistance with housing, seasonal employment, and other employment opportunities.

The final strategic objective is focused on collaboration with the diaspora through experience and skill exchanges, and the discovery of best practices. A first important step to this end is to establish contacts with the diaspora, signing twinning agreements with local structures in the region and beyond, and organizing common events in large Albanian diaspora communities. It also includes the promotion of cultural, culinary, and historical events with national and international organizations working with the diaspora. There are also plans for transfers of skills, especially in rural areas in order to increase the capacity of local farmers, promotion of bilateral business opportunities, and bilateral investment with the municipality of
Tirana in local infrastructure. Other actions include the creation of a diaspora register, increased twinning collaboration with municipalities in the diaspora to organize common events, the organization of thematic events with diaspora groups, networks and associations, the drafting and publishing of an information package on investment legislation in Albania and opportunities to invest in Tirana, the promotion and trading of Albanian products in the diaspora through a digital catalogue, encouraging opportunities for the diaspora to donate for local development in the municipality of Tirana, the promotion of "Club de chefs" for Albanian chefs in the diaspora, and the implementation of a financial scheme through which every Lek donated by the diaspora is matched three times by the municipality and invested in infrastructure and public works.

Other municipalities such as Shkodra, Kukes, Korca have also put in place their own “Local Action Plan for Migration and Diaspora 2022-2025” with the support of GIZ. These plans follow the same structure and methodology. Although they are not as detailed as that of the municipality of Tirana, and do not have allocated budgets for their planned activities, they include various fields of action related to migration and diaspora that reflect the legal requirements in place. They include topics of local institutional management of migration but focus on collaboration with the central government and international organizations. The action plans include the creation of a database of institutions and organizations that will serve for information exchange and collaboration in service provision for migrants and the diaspora. The plan also includes capacity building of staff in dealing with migrants and diaspora including through experience exchanges. The second field of action includes the provision of local social and public services targeted to return migrants and the diaspora. The role and training of social workers will be key in informing and referring return migrants to the available public and social services at the local and central level. The third field of action includes local economic development, which focuses on the identification and publication of investment needs that may be financed or donated by the diaspora. It also includes measures to support investments by migrants through the facilitation of procedures and support in application and documentation. The fourth field of action involves engagement in cultural and artistic activities through collaboration with the diaspora. The last field of action focuses on coordination of financial and technical support from the donor community. It envisions the creation of a system or database to facilitate collaboration with the donor community and different service providers. The database will ensure better coordination and referral to grants or supportive schemes for new businesses started by return migrants and members of the diaspora.

**Section 2.3. Institutional setting for emigration**

**Albania has invested in a strong institutional framework with sufficient institutional capacities, which is essential for effectively managing migration.** Through various legislative and organizational initiatives, Albania has expanded and strengthened its migration governing structures along with strengthening institutional collaboration between different institutions. In line with the dynamic nature of migration, various institutions are in charge of different aspects, including managing migration for employment, irregular migration and return, and readmission and re-integration of migrants.

**Supporting structures have been included in recent years to improve coordination and ensure accountability.** One such structure is the Technical Secretariat for Migration, which was established
in 2019. This structure falls under the Section for Migration at the Directorate of Anti-Trafficking and Migration in the MoI. The Technical Secretariat for Migration is mainly tasked with coordinating monitoring activities of all agencies involved in migration issues. In this capacity, it collects periodic reports by the agencies involved to ensure harmonization and identification of gaps, monitor the progress made in the implementation of the “National Strategy on Migration and its Action Plan 2019-2022”, as well as the updated NSM 2024-2030 and propose corrective measures if needed. The biannual progress report on the implementation of the strategy is submitted to the Technical Committee for Migration, which was established in 2020. The Technical Committee for Migration is composed of Directors of each leading agency or institution in charge of implementing the “National Strategy on Migration and its Action Plan 2019-2022” and the updated NSM 2024-2030. The committee is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Interior. In 2021, the Steering Group for Migration (SGM) was also established. The SGM is responsible for the review of the annual progress report on the national strategy prepared by the Technical Secretariat for Migration. The Steering Group on Migration makes policy proposals to the Council of Ministers regarding migration issues, based on the achievements and challenges identified by the Technical Secretariat in their annual reporting.

The overall institutional framework places the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and its subordinate structures as the main governing body overseeing national border control, and repatriation of Albanian returned migrants. The MoI is responsible for preventing and fighting irregular migration through integrated border management, which includes: (i) implementation of Readmission Agreements with other countries; (ii) reception, registering, and interviewing of returned citizens at the border, and providing them with accurate information about their rights and reintegration services available to them; (iii) regional and international cooperation in the exchange of statistical data on illegal migration.

Figure 17: Albania’s current institutional framework

Notes:
114 Ministry of Interior, Republic of Albania (2019); Ministry of Internal Affairs (2016).
Albania has assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) responsibility for various aspects of migration, such as drafting and implementation of visa policy, international collaboration, and diaspora engagement.\textsuperscript{115} The MoFA also supports Albanian emigrants abroad and advocates for protection of their rights. Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Directorate of Consular Affairs is charged with drafting policies for the entry and stay of foreigners in Albania, and treatment of foreigners in the country. Furthermore, this directorate drafts, monitors, and directs the policies on consular service activity. In relation to labor migration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was recently given authority over the National Diaspora Agency, which focuses on the Albanian National Diaspora Strategy for the period 2021-2025, and whose aim is to promote the inclusion and contribution of the diaspora in the socio-economic and political development of the country. The National Diaspora Agency has established a strong network of hundreds of thousands of contacts through outreach via diplomatic networks, newsletters, social networks, and cultural events. In its role connecting diaspora members with opportunities in Albania, the National Diaspora Agency leverages agreements with government and non-government agencies (including consulates and embassies), most of which are formalized through MOUs.

The Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) had assumed responsibility for labor migration and social protection, respectively, until the newly formed Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation (MoECI) came into place. Labor issues now fall under the MoECI since its establishment in January 2024 and a new Sector for Migration has been formed. These responsibilities, which were previously held by the MoFE and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth prior to its dissolution, include:

- Inclusion of Albanian returnees who have economic problems in the special group of unemployed jobseekers who benefit from the employment promotion program.
- Identification of needs for vocational training of Albanian returnees.
- Provision of ‘free of charge’ vocational training in the regional directorates for migrants who have economic problems.
- Establishment and functioning of ‘Migration Counters’ in all the local employment offices.
- Coordinating the implementation of policies in the field of reintegration of returned emigrants, as well as in cooperation with the State Social Service and local government units - responding to the needs for provision of social care services and supporting the application process for provision of economic aid to returned migrants.\textsuperscript{116}

Up until January 2024, the Ministry of Finance and Economy, along with its subordinate structures, setup and implemented labor migration schemes, as well as negotiating and implementing bilateral and multilateral labor agreements. It also monitored the functioning of recruitment agencies to ensure the ethical recruitment of migrant workers and oversees the work of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (formerly the National Employment Service). These functions now fall under the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection supervises the work of the State Social Service, which provides crucial support to vulnerable categories of people, including victims of trafficking and unaccompanied minors.

The labor market needs of migrants are managed by the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), which is the public body responsible for the implementation of active and passive labor market policies in Albania, as well as vocational education and training. A department focused on migration exists within NAES at the central level and staff mapped to this department are also placed in regional offices, covering the needs of prospective migrants, returnees, and immigrants. Returnees are entitled to register as unemployed jobseekers, and are denoted as

\textsuperscript{115} Ministry of Internal Affairs (2016).
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
one of the eligible groups to receive employment promotion programs (subsidized employment, on-the-job training, and internship). Although there no designated employment services or employment promotion programs tailored specifically to returnees, NAES provides employment services to return migrants along with vocational education and training based on identified needs and individual employment plans, which are in place and available to all unemployed jobseekers. It also runs the migration counters in the regional and local employment offices. This network of migration counters was originally established across the 12 regional offices, 24 local offices, and included several mobile teams to provide returnees with information and advisory services such as counseling. However, these counters are not currently active.

**The National Agency of Vocational Education and Training Qualifications (NAVETQ)** is in charge of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning. This is especially important for migrants who have acquired skills and experience working abroad. NAVETQ, which sat under the Ministry of Finance and Economy, and is now under the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation plays an important role managing accreditation for providers of VET. More broadly, NAVETQ aims to ensure a unified system of professional qualifications, recognized at the national level, based on the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF), as well as ensure the quality of teachers and instructors of vocational education and training (VET) through continuous qualification and training. The functions of NAVETQ include:

- Compile and review the national register of professions, qualifications, and their respective levels and standards.
- Design and review the draft curricula of professional qualifications.
- Draft and review the training standards for VET teachers.
- Define the principles and criteria of evaluation and certification for professional qualifications and administer the national register of issued certificates.
- Accredit VET institutions for professional qualifications.
- Issue certificates of professional qualifications for individuals.
- Ensure that competency standards are fully in line with international best practices, particularly with the European Qualifications Framework and the European VET Credit System.
- Ensure the interaction of all contributing actors in society, at all levels and stages of planning, development, and implementation of VET programs.

**Given the multidimensional needs of returning migrants, other ministries also play important roles in the reintegration process.** The Ministry of Education and Sports is responsible for the reintegration of school-age migrants. They are tasked with validating the equivalence of school documents, conducting alternative evaluation processes in case school documents for children are missing, ensuring school registration, offering psycho-social services, and organizing special summer courses on the Albanian language for children with insufficient Albanian language proficiency. The offices of State Social Services, Child Protection Units, Economic Aid authorities, health facilities and other institutions are all also authorized to provide returnee reintegration services. Finally, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) implements policies to support returnees who live in rural areas.

**Municipalities have been given a central role in the provision of social services in the field of migration and diaspora.** As part of the reform for local self-government, Law No.139/2015 “For

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118 Ministry of Internal Affairs (2016).
Local Self-Government**, amended by the law No.38/2019\(^{119}\) sets various functions of the municipalities provide services for the diaspora and return migrants. These functions include:

- The promotion of events, inside and outside the country, to maintain communication and strengthen relations with the Albanian diaspora and emigrants.
- The provision of assistance and information in cooperation with institutions responsible for investments from the diaspora and migrants.
- The coordination of work with responsible ministries to guarantee the provision of assistance and information on issues related to diaspora and migration.
- The creation and administration of social services, at the local level, for vulnerable groups, persons with disabilities, children, women, female heads of households, female victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking, mothers or parents with many children, the elderly, etc.
- The construction and administration of social housing.
- Construction and administration of centers for the provision of local social services.
- Creation, in cooperation with the ministry responsible for social welfare, of the social fund for the financing of these services.

The Consultative Council of Central and Local Government is the main consultative unit between the central and local governments. It is a platform to discussed proposed laws, proposed DCMs, draft policies and draft strategies that regulate or have a of direct influence on the rights and obligations the units of local self-government. The Consultive Council has 11 representatives from the central government and nine representatives from local government. It includes vice ministers responsible for security, finances, justice, infrastructure, social services, education, European integration, and has added a representative from the ministry responsible for the diaspora.

The Agency for the Support of Local Self-Government (AMVV) has a coordinating role between central and local authorities. Under the Ministry of the Interior, the agency adopts a comprehensive approach to the process of decentralization and strengthening of local government, in accordance with the principles of the European Charter for Local Self-Government. The agency is involved in improving the legal framework that directly impacts competencies at the local level. The AMVV is a central coordinating institution in support of local government for resolving issues and difficulties that arise during the exercise of their functions. The AMVV also acts as the technical secretariat of the Consultative Council of Central and Local Government, making the link between the central and local government. The agency plays a very important role in the coordination of projects financed by foreign donors and the Albanian government at the local level. It is also in continuous contact with the leaders and staff of the Local Government Units, as well as various central government institutions, with the aim of supporting them in addressing issues and challenges in the exercise of governance functions and competencies.

Section 2.4. Services provided to emigrants throughout the migration cycle

**Prospective migrants**

The National Agency for Employment and Skills provides information for potential migrants on the emigration process for different destinations. The information is available online and is

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\(^{119}\) Për Disa Shtesa Dhe Ndryshime Në Ligjin Nr. 139/2015 "Për Vetëqeverisjen Vendore" (2019).
broken down by migration profile for 24 potential destinations, including the conditions for eligibility and the appropriate permits for different occupations and types of employment. Prospective migrants can also find information on the procedures for emigration to each destination, including where and how to apply, necessary documentation, and any further requirements. Additional information such as the rights that migrants have in destination countries, including ability to participate freely in the labor market and achieve long-term residence, is also available.120

**Some development partners also offer services for prospective migrants, typically to promote safe and regular migration.** As part of the regular labor migration and mobility component of GIZ’s “Migration and Diaspora Programme,” potential migrants can receive information on safe and regular migration channels. The program also provides capacity building to NAES to enhance the advisory services they provide to those seeking to migrate. IOM also provides technical support to relevant government institutions to develop evidence-based labor migration policies that are grounded in labor market dynamics in both destinations and Albania. Technical assistance also promotes regulation for the ethical recruitment of potential migrants.121

**Current emigrants and diaspora**

Albania provides consular services to Albanian migrants through 40 embassies, 10 consulates, and 6 other diplomatic representations in 41 countries around the world. The consular services provided include applications for identity and travel documents, civic status acts (marriage, birth and death certificates), legalization of documents, consular notarial acts and translations of documents, renunciation or obtention of citizenship for migrant or family members. Embassies and consular offices also provide assistance and protection for Albanians their family members who are in a difficult or emergency situation (e.g., if arrested or detained abroad, or for citizens who pass away), or in case their rights are violated in their residence country. The assistance and help are provided in accordance with international acts, mutual agreements, and concrete situations.

**Legal provisions ensure further rights of Albanian migrants.** Under the Law No.9034 “On the Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Reasons of Employment” amended by Law No.10389 of March 3, 2011, emigrants have the right to information and counselling free of charge concerning vocational training, labor intermediation services, social protection, organization in labor unions, opportunities for housing, education and social security, and recognition of their living and working conditions.

Albanian migrants also benefit from the portability of social security and earned benefits in various countries where there are bilateral agreements and based on the provisions made in the Albanian law on social insurance.122 Social insurance covers all Albanian citizens, including those who previously lived abroad, stateless persons, as well as foreign citizens and stateless persons who are working in Albania.

In addition to the National Diaspora Agency, different actors also provide services to the diaspora, reaching migrants while they are abroad. One component of the IOM ‘Diaspora Engagement Programme’ focuses on assistance with knowledge and skills transfers back to Albania, as well as providing fellowship opportunities within Albania and abroad. A second component

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121 [https://albania.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdll1401/files/inline-files/info-sheet-lm.pdf](https://albania.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdll1401/files/inline-files/info-sheet-lm.pdf)
focuses on investment opportunities for Albanians abroad through 'Connect Albania,' which works with the Albanian Diaspora Business Chamber to promote and facilitate the engagement of specifically those migrants living in Italy to invest in development projects in Albania. The Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF) also works on engaging the Albanian diaspora, most notably through the Research Expertise from the Academic Diaspora (READ) Fellowship program that aims to connect higher education institutions in Albania with the scientific diaspora and their respective academic institutions. The program is part of a broader portfolio that seeks to build stronger bonds between local researchers and diaspora members looking to contribute to Albania's development. The program will award up to 100 grants to diaspora academics and 100 grants to resident scholars with a budget of US$2.7 million to produce co-authored research papers, jointly supervise PhD students, co-develop curricula, and co-teach lectures in Albania.

Two organizations have established, in collaboration with destination countries, assisted return programs that provide pre-return counselling and comprehensive services for select migrants who want to return to Albania via their programs. As part of their core mandate, IOM works directly with destination countries through their Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programs and provides continuous reception and reintegration assistance for returnees. Migrants under these programs are supported by IOM in the pre-return phase while overseas with fact sheets about return options, virtual counselling, and through the preparation of reintegration plans. GIZ also works directly with the German government to implement programs that help people return to Albania from Germany either voluntarily or by force. GIZ runs a website with useful information on return programs and staffs a hotline and online help center for further counselling.

Returnees

Return migrants are entitled to supportive services by NAES and Vocational Training Courses. Return migrants from households in need may also receive economic aid, inclusion in social housing schemes, assistance with registration of children in primary care facilities and schools, free and adequate healthcare. In order to support the reintegration process, migrants who returned in the past two years may register as unemployed jobseekers with NAES, where an Individual Employment Plan is prepared, are provided with information on available reintegration services, and are eligible for employment promotion programs and VET, which are delivered by NAES. However, very few return migrants have registered at the migration counters (only 289 migrants were registered in migration counters in 2016), accounting for less than 1 percent of arrivals that year. Furthermore, in 2019, out of 5,338 recipients of active labor market measures, only 56 were return migrants. The numbers have gone further down in 2020 – out of 4,146 recipients of active labor market measures, only 11 were migrants. There is also a very limited uptake by migrants of VET. In 2019, out of 15,143 registrations in VET, only 73 were return migrants. Likewise, in 2020, out of 7,427 registrations in VET, only 52 were return migrants.

Municipalities also have in place structures that could in principle support return migrants, although planned services are not always operational. The Social Service Directorate at the

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123 https://albania.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1401/files/documents/Flyer_Connect_Albania_EN_print_WEB.PDF
124 https://live-aadf.pantheonsite.io/project/read-program/
125 https://www.returningfromgermany.de/en/
126 Law no. 9668 'On emigration of Albanian citizens for employment reasons' created a special status for returned Albanian migrants who have spent at least a year abroad, and granted them the right to, inter alia, social and economic protection, and free employment orientation, vocational training, education and social housing.
127 World Bank (2021a).
128 Ministry of Internal Affairs (2016).
municipality is the main provider of social services at the local level, especially supporting vulnerable groups. Within the Social Service Directorate there are different sectors responsible for service provision, which include the Sector of Ndihma Ekonomike (NE – Economic Aid Scheme) that has dedicated specialists at the administrative units, Community Centers, the Child Protection Unit, the Shelter and Unit against Domestic Violence, the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit, and specialists for persons with disabilities. Municipalities offer social-care services based on cases that are referred by the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit through their Community Centers (ranging from psycho-social support to services on employment promotion, assistance with homework for children, assistance in business start-ups, daily services for the elderly, shelter services, and services for victims of domestic violence and victims of trafficking, etc.). They also manage social services such as NE, disability benefits, newborn benefits, and more. Social workers in the Needs Assessment and Care Referral Unit may be activated to identify migrants and their needs according to law No. 121/2016. The social worker provides case management and may request social care services on their behalf. They can also assist with applications, documentation, intermediation, counseling, or other referrals. A series of reports have looked specifically at the accessibility of quality local services for Roma and Egyptian minority returnees within the local government framework. The findings from assessments show that overall, many municipalities do not have dedicated systems of identification and registration of return migrants. The focus of the municipalities has not been on prioritizing return migrants and there has been a lack of dedicated instruments for data collection, as well as a lack of know-how on the identification of return migrants, and especially return migrants from vulnerable groups such as the Roma and Egyptian communities.

With the support of UNDP, a case management approach has been piloted for providing services to return migrants from the Roma and Egyptian communities in the municipalities of Berat, Fier and Devoll. The guidelines of the pilot include the following structure:

1) An ad-hoc committee is created with representatives from the local self-government units (municipality), social workers, central government representatives, social administrators, and businesses. The ad-hoc committee is in charge of inter-institutional arrangements and cooperation. It has a focal point in the local self-government units.

2) A social worker from the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit identifies cases and checks on their social and economic status before referring the case to the focal point at the local administrative unit, which takes the case to the ad-hoc committee.

3) Based on the needs identified by the social worker at the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit, the ad-hoc committee, through its members, offers the necessary services for which they are responsible. The process is regularly monitored by the focal point at the local administrative unit, who closely follows the cases and ensures provision of services.

4) The social worker at the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit transmits all data on the case though the individual/family referral form to the electronic register MIS, which is regularly monitored by the State Social Services and periodically reported to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

5) The case is closed after receipt of services and reintegration. This determination is based on the case management form and referral of individuals/families from the social worker at the NARU. As per the assessment of the social worker, the focal point is notified, who notifies the ad-hoc committee.

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129 On Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania (2016).
130 Dhembo (2022); EU and UNDP (2021); EU and UNDP (2022a).
131 Dhembo (2022).
132 EU and UNDP (2022b).
In addition to the government, reintegration-related services are also being provided by NGOs, international organizations, and other non-government actors, who have a strong and active presence on the ground and maintain networks with the diaspora. Development partner activities often fill gaps identified through their own assessments and may include for example, the provision of services at the community level. A significant example is the work by GIZ, in partnership with NAES, focused on the establishment of the German Information Centres on Migration, Vocational Training and Career (DIMAK) in Tirana and Shkodra, which offer services to prospective migrants and returnees.133

Development partners also provide direct assistance connecting returning migrants with labor market opportunities. One example of how development partners provide assistance with employment is the DIMAK centers run by GIZ, where returnees can get advice on job applications, attend job fairs, and receive assistance with recognition of their professional qualifications, all with the aim of connecting to economic opportunities. GIZ also has implemented programs that offer temporary salary subsidies to local employers in exchange for hiring return migrants. The DIMAK centers collaborate with other development partners to expand their reach and provide job placement and employment to more recipients.

In addition to employment assistance, multiple development partners offer vocational training services to prepare migrants for additional labor market opportunities. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has designed a “Skills for Jobs” program to support the Albanian government in addressing the lack of market-relevant skills. Returning migrants are eligible as a designated vulnerable group to participate in the vocational education and training system, which aims to serve 10,000 young people, though returnees account for only a portion. As part of the vocational training program, SDC also offers apprenticeship opportunities. Another example is Swiss Contact, who implements a modular training and coaching program (Digi-VET) for vocational schools. They collaborate with other development partners and employers, while using a coaching methodology, to prepare return migrants with the professional competencies required to secure jobs. The program is currently in its second phase, which continues through 2023.

Development partners often step in to work closely with the government to provide support for return migrants in case of emergency or for those in need of legal and psychological support. For example, Terre des Hommes works specifically with return asylum seekers and offers immediate housing support for those families who are particularly vulnerable. They also provide small grants and cash assistance to cover daily needs such as food and school supplies for those families at risk. Tirana Legal Aid Society (TLAS) focuses on legal issues, providing legal aid services to those at risk of statelessness. They have identified returnees who have children born abroad as an at-risk population eligible for their services. Given the impact of psychological trauma on all aspects of reintegration, many organizations work with or include psychological support services in their programs to help returning migrants deal with the trauma of return. Organizations like Different and Equal and Caritas work specifically with victims of trafficking, exploitation, and abuse, who have unique emergency and legal needs.

Increased efforts have been undertaken to accommodate children of return migrants in schools. Every child has the right to schooling, and in the case of return migrants, local education offices and schools assist in the enrollment of children in schools. They provide help with the equalizing of school documents, but also assist families to enroll their children in school even when they have incomplete documentation. In addition, within the schools, children of return migrants are supported through psychosocial counselling services. Additional services are provided through the schools, which function as community centers by offering courses in the Albanian language as

133 DIMAK centers are located inside two NAES local employment offices, in Tirana and Shkodra.
extracurricular activities that may be attended by children of return migrants, whose knowledge of the Albanian language may be lacking. Lastly, children of return migrants may also attend the “Let’s do our homework” afterschool program put in place by the Ministry of Education and Sports to assist families with support on homework. There is also a close collaboration between education offices and schools with the local government and IOM for the reintegration of children and prevention of re-migration.

Box 5. Mapping return migrants’ access to services

The journey of a return migrant is not always straightforward and easy. Prior to return, some information might be available, mainly through diaspora organizations, events, the electronic platform e-Albania, and development partners in the country of destination. Upon return, information is available through the migrant’s first access point (i.e. airport, border checkpoint) provided that the returnee declares themselves as such. Even though local government authorities have developed initiatives to facilitate the reintegration process of returnees in their community, in practice, returnees need to visit several different agencies to seek different types of services. Conceptually, a broader range of services are available, but not specifically targeted to return migrants. In most cases, services are provided by development partners who have a strong presence on the ground, sometimes in cooperation with the local authorities.

The following is a map of how returning migrants typically access services in Albania. It shows their initial access points and the different places they need to go to receive services for their multi-dimensional needs. It can be used to identify challenges, obstacles, or bureaucratic barriers for migrants to receive the support they need.

Figure 18: Intake and registration at the local level

*Note: not all offices and services are available in all Albanian municipalities*
Chapter III: Policy Actions to Enhance the Benefits of Migration in Albania

Section 3.1. A solid base to enhance migration as a development strategy

The Albanian large and vibrant global workforce has the potential to be a catalyst of development for the country. With more than 1.2 million migrants, Albania has one of the largest diasporas globally when compared to the domestic population. This diaspora has shown to be engaged with the country, with more than half of migrants sending remittances back home, which represent close to 10 percent of the country's GDP. The Albanian global workforce is an asset for the country, providing financial resources, knowledge transfers, and connecting Albania to global business networks.

Many migrants return to Albania after a period abroad and, while some do so in “vulnerable” conditions, many of them bring back skills, experiences and resources valuable to the country. There is incomplete data on the number of returnees, although estimates point at a sizable number returning every year. About one-third of the migrant population in the 1990s had returned home by 2005 (Piracha and Vadean, 2010). Economic shocks in destination countries push more Albanian migrants to return. For example, during the European financial crisis, 150,000-180,000 Albanians returned to the country from Greece and Italy in only four years, or about 20 percent of the migrant population at that time. Some migrants return unexpectedly, particularly rejected asylum seekers repatriated under readmission agreements, and face challenges to integrate into the labor market. However, others return after a successful migration journey where they acquire skills and increased savings. Evidence shows that migrants returning to Albania increase the supply and diversity of skills and become additional job creators through entrepreneurship. Following the financial crisis of 2008, Albanian migrants who returned from Greece were shown to have generated strong positive impacts on the economy, also for the non-migrant population, increasing their employment chances and wages, and generating gains for the local economy between 0.8 to 1.3 percent of 2009 GDP.

Albania has invested in a strong legal and institutional framework to effectively manage migration flows and to support its mobile population. Through various legislative and organizational initiatives, Albania has expanded and strengthened its migration governing structures along with strengthening institutional collaboration between different institutions. The National Strategy on Development and Integration aims to promote formal migration routes, increasing the impact of emigration on development and facilitating the integration of returned migrants. Diaspora strategies also have the goal of using diaspora networks for the economic development of the country, as well as incentivizing the return of qualified emigrants to increase the availability of skills in the country. In line with these goals, Albania has developed a comprehensive legal system that develops an organizational structure with clear divisions of roles and responsibilities for different agencies to support migrants throughout their journeys.

134 Most conservative scenarios estimate more than 10,000 returnees annually, on average, during the last two decades, although they tend to be an undercounting, as they do not capture migrants that migrate more informally or for shorter periods of time (temporary or seasonal migrants).
135 Barjaba and Barjaba (2015).
Rights for Albanian emigrants are well established under law and services are provided by different stakeholders throughout the migration cycle. Emigrants have access to consular services, portability of social insurance in countries where bilateral social security agreements have been signed, and other services mainly provided by development partners. Different stakeholders also recognize the challenges and opportunities associated with return migration. Returning migrants are eligible to receive employment services and employment promotion programs from NAES. Development partners also play a strong role in the delivery of a variety of reintegration services, particularly to disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities.

However, the developmental impact of migration is still hindered by a number of barriers. While remittances are a main source of income for Albanian households, they have been on a declining trend in the last decades. Given the high cost of sending them through formal channels (around 9.1 percent, compared to the SDG target of 3 percent) there is a large share that still arrives through unregulated channels, reducing its potential support to the economy. Furthermore, remittances are mostly channeled towards consumption, while the usage of migrants’ financial resources for investments opportunities has remained subdued. Another important challenge is the return and reintegration of Albanian emigrants into the local economy. Many migrants decide to return to Albania, although the country still struggles to attract the most skilled emigrant population, given the disparities in income opportunities vis-à-vis main destination countries. Moreover, the high number of involuntary repatriations of Albanian migrants indicates the interruption of migration plans that might be associated with vulnerabilities, misallocation of resources, insufficient savings and, even in some cases, indebtedness. When they return, migrants face relevant barriers that lead to worse labor market outcomes compared to the non-migrant population, thus limiting the potential beneficial impact of their migration experiences (which in many instances include new skills and financial resources) in the domestic economy.

Existing gaps in the Albanian migration system can be categorized into five areas. The first gap is data, which acts as a barrier to serving both emigrants and return migrants because there is limited understanding of how many there are, their profile, and their needs throughout their migration journey. In addition, limited standardization of data prevents institutions from being able to exchange with each other and fully address multi-dimensional cases. The second gap is coordination, and despite a well-developed institutional framework, the overall system still faces challenges with cohesion, especially around clarity on who has responsibility for specific roles. Coordination is also a challenge between local authorities, who are responsible for service delivery, and national authorities who determine policy. The third gap is tailored services and recognition of the specific context and barriers that migrants face. While migrants are eligible for employment services and economic aid in some cases, there is not currently a coordinated national outreach campaign to raise their awareness, nor a variety of other services that would be tailored to the needs migrants face. The fourth gap is bureaucratic barriers, and though migrants are eligible for supportive services, they are often prevented from receiving them by bureaucratic challenges. The fifth gap is capacity, which includes both human and financial resources and impacts the ability of institutions to provide and track services at both the local and national level.

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The following section gives recommendations on how Albania can better leverage its global workforce. Subsection 3.2.1 explores reintegration from the perspective of a global workforce, highlighting notable examples of how various countries have implemented policies to harness a global workforce for substantial development benefits. Subsection 3.2.2 offers recommendations on how Albania can address existing gaps to better leverage its global workforce. Subsection 3.2.3 outlines the role of NAES as a key actor to achieve the GlobAL vision. Subsection 3.2.4 examines the reintegration services provided to the GlobAL diaspora, categorized into three main areas: outreach, labor market services, and services beyond the labor market. Finally, Subsection 3.2.5 presents various options for the Government of Albania to consider in its efforts to more effectively promote the return and reintegration of its migrant population.

Section 3.2 Deep dive: strengthening the migration system to achieve the GlobAL vision

3.2.1. Reimagining reintegration based on a globAL approach

Unleashing the development benefits of return migration means thinking more broadly about the concept of a migrant’s return and transforming reintegration into a vision of a global Albanian (globAL) workforce that includes Albanian migrants around the world. Investing in reintegration services for migrants returning to Albania has the potential to unlock abundant opportunities. Yet while some migrants may return, others will not, and some fall somewhere in between — they build ties abroad and simultaneously remain connected at home. For them, ‘return’ may not be permanently relocating back to Albania, but rather finding other ways to stay close to home and contribute to the country’s growth and development. For some time, migration from Albania was primarily one-way. It grew to become more cyclical as migrants began to return — and now is on the brink of a third stage of evolution in which more migrants approach a form of duality — existing as global Albanians who are both abroad and at home. This duality occurs more as migration flows from Albania continue to diversify. Imagine a highly educated academic who returns annually to Albania to teach courses and collaborate on research; a construction worker who goes abroad to make money, returns to be with family, and goes back again; a young person who graduates university abroad and starts a business, deciding to open another office in Albania, traveling back...
and forth; or a young woman who goes abroad seeking opportunities and sends remittances home to care for her parents. All of these migrants are in various stages of ‘return’, and all are part of the global Albanian workforce, bringing unique skills and representing opportunities to be unlocked. Though one third of the population may be out of the country, they are not gone. Some will return and need reintegration – and all will return in their own way and remain part of a globAL workforce that can be harnessed for economic development.

Figure 20: The idea of a glob(AL) workforce

A reintegrated globAL workforce gives Albania the opportunity to more fully participate in the global economy. Albanians who emigrate and work abroad build networks, acting as ambassadors for economic interests that connect Albania and the rest of the world through trade, business expansion, and knowledge networks. Creating these linkages between countries and conceptualizing a mobile dispersed workforce opens up opportunities for Albania to discuss with destination countries about topics such as collaboration on skills training for the globAL workforce and protecting vulnerable migrants. The diaspora can be a powerful force for origin countries, especially as migrants becomes more educated. Even when they are physically outside Albania, they are still part of the globAL workforce, with the potential to connect Albania with other countries. Albania needs its people to participate in every way they can, to be a part of its growth and development.

Other countries have shown how policies can be developed to leverage a global workforce for significant development gains. Similar to Albania today, emigration was a defining feature of Ireland’s demographic and economic experience through most of the 20th century. As the economy grew, Ireland took steps to develop connections with its extensive diaspora and build a more globalized identity. They shifted the paradigm from viewing emigrants as ‘traitors’ to seeing them as heroes who connected the country with the global economy and ‘opened up Ireland for business.’

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139 Minto-Coy (2009).
Ireland’s diaspora engagement has grown into a wide-ranging ‘Global Irish’ program that offers supportive programs to returning migrants and the diaspora. Their services range from providing assistance in settling abroad to maintaining connections and starting a business back home, with the goal of being a hub for Irish emigrants around the world (Box 3).  

### Box 3: The case of Ireland

**Ireland offers an example of how a migrant origin country can conceptualize reintegration through the lens of a global workforce.** In terms of development and migration, there are similarities to Albania’s current trajectory. Emigration was a fundamental part of Ireland’s experience since the 1800’s and it remained high for most of the 20th century. In fact, it was a defining feature of Ireland’s demographic and economic experience. For the most part, this emigration consisted of young working age people and while early on it was dominated by the low-skilled and unemployed, as education levels in Ireland increased, emigrants became increasingly high-skilled. At one point, the population of the country was cut in half due to emigration. However, economic growth in the mid to late 1990s led to a reversal of trends and even net immigration, including the return of many migrants abroad. Eventually, Ireland reached a point where the highest-skilled members of the diaspora were returning (as well as highly skilled immigrants from other countries) and by the 1990’s 31.7 percent of returnees had beyond a secondary education, compared to just 16.8 percent of non-migrants in the country. Ireland’s transition from a synonym for emigration to a prominent country of return and destination for migrants was quick but not accidental. As the economy had begun to grow, Ireland took purposeful steps to connect with the extensive diaspora it knew existed and shifted toward a more globalized identity. As it connected with migrants abroad, it also connected with the global economy and ‘opened for business,’ supported by millions of Irish overseas. Along this journey, the diaspora engagement system evolved to find new ways to support the diaspora in many forms of return.

**Ireland has engaged in an evolving effort to build a global Irish workforce including through support for returning migrants and building stronger connections with those still abroad.** Throughout the 1800’s and 1900’s, remittances were an important support for the Irish economy and raised the living standards for many families. In addition, through tourism, demand for local goods, and political advocacy, the diaspora clearly showed it had become a powerful economic force. Ireland also continued to focus on building their education system and raising standards, even if it meant more high-skilled individuals were emigrating, because they recognized that a more skilled diaspora would mean greater accumulation of financial and human capital abroad. In fact, returning migrants would later be a driving force in the development of the IT industry in Ireland, which was vital for growth, because highly-skilled migrants returned with wealth, skills, and networks. As the overall economic outlook improved in the late 1900’s, Ireland sought to shift the paradigm from viewing emigrants as ‘traitors’ to seeing them as heroes who could help the country grow. They also sought to further ignite feelings of nationalism and allegiance among the diaspora. The growing economy created labor shortages, which became a recruitment tool for returning migrants, and also created fiscal surpluses that Ireland used to formulate and fund their diaspora strategy. The strategy originated with a focus on providing welfare assistance.

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140 [https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/](https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/)
141 Barrett (2005).
142 Barrett (2005); Minto-Coy (2009).
143 Minto-Coy (2009).
144 Minto-Coy (2009).
to vulnerable Irish abroad and was in part motivated by the concern that the strength of the Irish identity, attachment, and affiliation might be going away for those who had not returned.\textsuperscript{145} It later expanded to include efforts to encourage return, promote philanthropy, and build business networks. One example was an effort to bring together Irish emigrants working in high positions in Silicon Valley with the aim of promoting investment in Irish companies, a strong example of imagining a Global Irish workforce able to ‘return’ in different ways.

The vision for a ‘Global Irish’ workforce is based on the idea that all Irish abroad can contribute to the country’s development in different ways, which has led to a wide-ranging collection of programs. With the headline of “Helping Irish people and people of Irish descent maintain their connections to Ireland and each other, through information and support,” the most recent Global Irish strategy, launched in 2020, announces itself as a hub for emigrants and embodies the government’s plans to support and engage with Irish diaspora communities and organizations around the world.\textsuperscript{146} The implementation of the strategy is an intergovernmental effort, supported by the Ministry of State for the Diaspora, and the Interdepartmental Committee on the Irish Abroad.

Information and services for all categories of migrants abroad are consolidated into a specially designed one-stop-shop website.\textsuperscript{147} A sample of specific use cases include: registration of persons of Irish origin born outside of Ireland, application for an Irish passport, authentication or legalization of documents, applications for obtaining a Certificate of Freedom to get married abroad, information on Irish Embassies or Consulates in countries of destination, and information on voting entitlements in Irish referendums. The website also contains information to help emigrants settle into new homes abroad and links to social groups and international networks. A Consular Assistance Charter is available and accessible 24/7 via email, phone, social media and through all Irish Embassies and Consulates worldwide. For those abroad looking to stay connected to home, the website provides information on Ireland, links to news outlets, TV and radio channels and access to a newsletter.\textsuperscript{148} The website also integrates with the Global Irish Diaspora Directory, which includes 1,000 Irish business and professional networks and organizations in all countries where the Irish diaspora is settled. It also links to a Global Irish Communications Handbook that was designed to support Irish diaspora organizations to develop their communications strategy. Finally, the website is linked directly to Ireland’s central government website.

One element of the Global Irish umbrella is information and services for those who may want to return, which include job and training opportunities, entrepreneurship resources, and details on education and housing. The Citizens Information website, along with the network of Citizens Information centers also provide advice and both online and in-person support to those seeking to return to Ireland. Their resources cover areas such as financial issues, residency, education, and navigating social welfare services. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection also provides dedicated materials for those moving to Ireland, including information on the social welfare system. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners also offers a guide to the tax system in Ireland and has resources on getting set up to pay taxes and access revenue services and supports.

Global Irish also includes a variety of programs that aim to support the welfare of the Irish abroad and strengthen their bond with Ireland. The ‘Emigrant Support Program,’\textsuperscript{149} which has

\textsuperscript{145} Boyle, Kitchin, and Ancien (2016).
\textsuperscript{146} https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/
\textsuperscript{147} https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/support-overseas/emigrant-support-programme/
\textsuperscript{148} “Global Irish Ireland’s Diaspora Policy” (2015).
\textsuperscript{149} https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/support-overseas/emigrant-support-programme/
been implemented since 2004, provides financial support to organizations engaged in the delivery of front-line advisory services and community care to Irish emigrants, particularly to the most vulnerable and marginalized, including the elderly. It also facilitates Irish Government investment in a range of cultural, community, and heritage projects, which foster a vibrant sense of Irish community and identity. The program has assisted over 530 organizations in 37 countries with grants over 220 million euros. For Irish emigrants looking to return, the Crosscare Migrant Project\textsuperscript{150} provides information about moving back, as well as specialized assistance with social welfare applications and appeals, social housing applications, medical cards, and other statutory supports. Supportive of general mobility, it also supports Irish citizens moving abroad and foreigners immigrating to Ireland. The Safe Home Ireland program similarly provides information, advice, and advocacy support to anyone who may be contemplating returning or moving to Ireland, including housing assistance especially to older Irish emigrants. Finally, the Back for Business Program\textsuperscript{151} is a mentoring program for returning migrant entrepreneurs that helps them re-establish contacts and networks in Ireland. Started in 2017, it supports up to 50 entrepreneurs annually through six-month development programs.

Other countries invest in their diaspora by supporting transnational business activities and encouraging entrepreneurship initiatives. A neighboring country to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, recently launched a project with funds from USAID aimed at leveraging diaspora contributions for development. The project focused on identifying obstacles in the business environment, providing grants and technical assistance to small businesses, and facilitating diaspora investment. It awarded US$ 2 million in grants, which resulted in US$ 22 million of diaspora investment, the creation of 1,571 jobs, and a 70 percent increase in sales for supported firms. This

\textsuperscript{150} https://www.migrantproject.ie/
\textsuperscript{151} https://www.backforbusiness.com/
The project had a significant developmental impact, especially in smaller municipalities where the migrants originally came from (Box 4).

**Box 4: Investing in a global workforce can produce high returns: Evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The Diaspora Invest Project, implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, offers a successful example of how a country can leverage the contributions of their diaspora for the socio-economic development of the country. The project, which was launched in 2017 with a budget of US$ 6.6 million from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), offered grants to incentivize diaspora entrepreneurs to launch or expand their businesses back home. The project is comprised of three components designed to mobilize the economic contributions of the diaspora.

- Identification of obstacles in the business-enabling environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and development of an institutional policy framework to facilitate diaspora investment.
- Provision of grants and technical assistance to selected early-stage micro, small, and medium enterprises and start-ups, including through the development of a ‘Diaspora Marketplace’.
- Development of a local platform to provide business services and facilitation to potential diaspora investors including a ‘One-Stop-Shop’ and a Diaspora Business Network Platform.

After the completion of the first five-year phase, a follow-up phase is to be implemented between 2022-2027, which will significantly increase the budget allocation to US$17 million and include grant matching from municipalities.

The project has yielded important positive economic impacts and exceeded previously set evaluation targets. Initial grants worth US$2 million were made to 164 firms, who in turn invested US$22 million of their own capital, translating into an investment multiplier of eleven. Supported firms grew significantly, increasing their sales over 70 percent, which led to the creation of 1,571 new jobs. Approximately three fourths of new sales were generated in export markets, mainly in countries where diaspora owners had previously resided – likely owing to their knowledge and connections. On the domestic side, investments generated by the projects were distributed across 64 different municipalities nationwide, covering nearly half of the municipalities in the country and generating huge impacts for local development. This was particularly relevant in smaller municipalities that were previously struggling to attract investment, both foreign and local. The distribution was largely driven by the fact that diaspora investors chose to invest in their hometowns instead of the large industrial areas of the country.

The project also strengthened the institutional framework around diaspora investment by facilitating the creation of several new tools, including a one-stop-shop support center and web platform, to serve businesses and investors. The dedicated web portal, the Diaspora Business Network Platform (BNP), was created at the outset of the project and exists to provide comprehensive information on diaspora investment. It also includes a function to register diaspora organizations, which are collected and visualized in an online BiH Diaspora Map. The BNP also has a mechanism to connect potential investors with investment projects. The one-stop-shop support center, Diaspora Business Center (DBC), was set up to provide information and investment facilitation for new investors, as well as technical assistance to firms already established by members of the diaspora. The Diaspora Invest project has also supported the establishment of the Diaspora Business Advisory Council (DiaBAC), a consultative body composed of high-level diaspora businesspeople, which aims to strengthen the link between the local private sector and
international markets. Additional institutional functions include the implementation of an internship program for young diaspora professionals, a pilot diaspora mentorship program between diaspora mentors and local small businesses, and a pilot diaspora export agent program.

Figure 22: Investing in the global workforce can produce high returns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financed by USAID (6.6m), this project provides:</th>
<th>Number of beneficiary firms: 164</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Financial and technical assistance for selected diaspora firms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Set-up of diaspora business centers at municipality level to be the go-to service center for diaspora investors</td>
<td>Number of jobs created by funded firms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64 municipalities</td>
<td>1,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Development of a Diaspora Business Network Platform to provide information to potential diaspora investors</td>
<td>Investment multiplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 times $2 ➔ 22.3m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2. How can Albania address the existing gaps and transform them into strengths to create an effective global workforce system?

Albania has the opportunity to strengthen the migration system for its mobile population by focusing its efforts on five key pillars. An effective system relies on informed decision-making, enforces seamless collaboration, offers multi-dimensional global services, guarantees efficient access, and maintains expertise and capability. Building a strong foundation out of these five pillars requires addressing the previously mentioned gaps in implementation and transforming them into strengths that underly the migration system. Each pillar can be constructed generally by following the examples from international experience and can be fortified concretely through specific recommendations laid out in an action plan compiled by the World Bank and has informed the migration strategy launched by the Albanian government in May 2024. However, most importantly – it requires a change in perspective to embrace the concept of a global workforce and Albania’s powerful role in the global economy.

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152 The action plan contains concrete actions along with the roles and responsibilities assigned to various government agencies in Albania.
Figure 23: Five pillars of success for an effective global workforce system

**Informed decision-making**

The first pillar to building a system that relies on informed decision-making is addressing existing data challenges to have a comprehensive understanding of who migrants are, how they are returning, and the needs they face. This includes ensuring that the standard definition of migrants and ‘returnees’ exists across national censuses, administrative data and surveys, as well as for data collected at intake for any public programs. Then, to effectively provide services and utilize the full strength of the global workforce, the first concern is knowing to whom services should be provided and ensuring that there is some record of those they have received. This is especially important to link services provided to migrants at different stages of their migration journey. In the case of Albania, it is also important to distinguish between returning migrants based on their demographic indicators like age and skill, and how voluntary their return was. These groups face different barriers and opportunities and having a more comprehensive data-driven understanding of their needs will ensure better decision-making in serving them in a way that maximizes their opportunities.

In addition to standardizing the definition of migrant, a regular Household Migration Survey is an important tool that would produce necessary data on the migrant population. While previous surveys have helped understand the scale of migration and certain demographic dimensions, regular and consistent surveys using new methodologies to account for common biases in migration data would ensure an up-to-date, detailed profile of migrants and returnees, including their historical trajectories. Surveying migrants can be challenging because questions are often directed at those who have migrated in the past and are affected by recall biases about their experiences in the past. Additionally, asking other household members about migrants who are currently abroad raises similar recall challenges. Most surveys also record a static picture of migration based on when they are conducted. This leads to issues of cohort effects as the composition of migrants changes over time (which is the case in Albania), business cycle effects based on the types of migration and seasonality, and self-selection into migration and return. Ideally, surveys are
conducted in a way that can track entire migration trajectories, including departure and return, and produce analysis on the labor market outcomes over time. Innovative survey methods have been used to gather more accurate data on migrants, including panel data that follow migrants and non-migrants over time (‘Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey’ 1998-2018; ‘Listening to the Citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan’ surveys 2018-2023), adding retrospective questions used to construct labor market and educational history (The ‘Bangladesh Return Migrant Survey’ 2018/2019), or surveying migrants in both origin and destination countries (e.g., the Mexican Migration Project 1982-1989).

A new integrated database would allow for standardized data to be consistently collected and effectively shared between stakeholders. An integrated database would ensure that collected data are standardized and records for individuals can be traced across their entire migration trajectory. Such a database would allow for holistic reporting on the services a migrant has received and the outcomes that have resulted. It would also ensure that a returning migrant can be referred to all available services based on their expressed needs. An integrated database would also allow for easy sharing of data between different actors. From a higher-level perspective, a consistent integrated database would allow for a holistic view of all reintegration services being offered, including geographically where migrants are returning, informing strategic decision making about priorities and resource expenditure. A new integrated system could also be designed to be user friendly for staff in all ministries to be able to access and use effectively with minimal training. Finally, it would prevent migrants from having to provide the same information on different intake forms, which disincentivizes their utilization of new services. Overall, a database ensures proper communication and more accurate collection of data that can be used for informed decision-making.

Consistent data collection and integration is also vital for implementing a broader system of monitoring and evaluation to be able to make decisions based on results and evidence. Through the collection of information, it is possible to recalibrate programs, initiatives, and resources to be more effective. Situations are also constantly changing, affecting the decisions migrants make to return as well as the decisions of stakeholders within Albania. Consistent monitoring and evaluation of migration programs, which relies on strong data collection, is necessary to be able to make informed decisions and improve the initiatives offered to migrants.

Seamless collaboration

A successful migration system needs to be built on stronger collaboration across institutions and coordination between a wide range of stakeholders. A reintegration program that recognizes the diversity of types of ‘return’ will inherently be complex enough to require coordination between multiple agencies. While there is a strong strategic and legislative arrangement already in place in Albania that includes designated roles for an array of agencies and institutions, it is often the case that one stakeholder does not have knowledge about what is being offered by others. Especially given that migrants may ‘return’ in different ways over time, seamless collaboration between the wide variety of agencies they engage with can ensure that they are not disincentivized from seeking services. It is also the case in Albania that sometimes municipalities and the federal government provide overlapping services. Addressing challenges of coordination among providers would significantly improve the efficiency of the many existing initiatives and create a sense of seamless implementation between all partners. Coordination of support of different institutions throughout the migration journey can also be seamless to ensure that the whole experience is coherent. Furthermore, in Albania there are opportunities for the private sector, civil society, NGOs, and international organizations to offer important services that also assist in reconnecting migrants and Albania. A comprehensive system incorporates these pieces into collaboration with the government. Seamless collaboration also extends to partnerships with other countries where migrants may be
living, as some services will rely on foreign institutions or regulations. Only through open dialogue with all these partners is it possible to secure resources, to examine which efforts will deserve more or less of those resources, and to make sure that reintegration services will be provided to all different types of returning migrants in a way that is efficient, respectful, and aligned with the country’s development priorities.

Multi-dimensional global services

Migration systems can provide services across the different stages of migration. The needs of the Albanian global workforce are varied. They differ depending on the characteristics of the migrant and the form in which the migrant is ‘returning.’ And for those physically relocating to Albania, the needs differ based on both their skill level and whether they are returning voluntarily. In order to serve all these types of migrants there is a need to design a system with services that are multi-dimensional and even cross-border. A global system encompasses the entire migration experience, integrating into pre-departure activities like training and public information campaigns. It includes services while a migrant is abroad, which means coordinating with labor attachés, embassies, and diaspora groups to standardize procedures and resources. And multi-dimensional services offer migrants many ways to ‘return’ from physical relocation to sending remittances or building business connections, and more.

In order to be effective, services can be tailored to the specific needs and conditions of different groups of migrants in all aspects of their lives that could connect them to Albania. Since migrants live complex and multi-dimensional lives, this means that services will go beyond economic incentives and reintegration. Migrants can ‘return’ in many different ways and need global services to support them. For those who do relocate back to Albania, some may need financial incentives while others may need financial support. Some may require skills training that can be tailored to both the experience they have and labor market needs. Others return with jobs but require support enrolling their children in the correct level of education or a foreign-born spouse in language training. The services required will depend on that migrant’s situation. Characteristics like family composition, skill level, time abroad, and more will determine the precise combination of services that they require for successful reintegration. When planning for additional support, the main principles of reintegration can be taken into account. Services then can be centered around migrants’ needs, inclusive of the community, and delivered through broad partnership.

Efficient access

Designing a system that guarantees efficient access for return migrants means reducing bureaucratic barriers and other unnecessary hindrances to achieving available opportunities. Providing such a wide variety of reintegration services is an inherently bureaucratic process that requires documentation and paperwork. The burden on migrants can be reduced by coordination between agencies or ministries in Albania, or in some cases collaboration with destination country authorities. Efficient access also means limiting the amount of time required to qualify or enroll in services. It involves a comprehensive procedural mapping of all services that are available, to ensure standardized procedures that do not break down or look different in different municipalities. It means migrants would be able to have a clear view of all the potential services they qualify for. Limiting bureaucratic barriers for those relocating back to Albania importantly recognizes the often-traumatic conditions of return, the limited familiarity some migrants have with services at their country of origin, and the lack of time many returnees had to plan for their return. Standardizing intake and documentation needs across different institutions also helps migrants and
reduces unnecessary steps for service providers, creating easier referral mechanisms and data sharing.

One way to ensure efficient access to services is to consolidate information and procedures to a digital platform like e-Albania. Being able to access information and initiate processes online can be a significant convenience. It is especially true in the case of migrants who are likely planning their return from outside Albania or seeking other methods of ‘return’ that involve staying abroad. Leveraging the existing infrastructure of e-Albania would be a convenient location for online access to services. It would be accessible by migrants before, during, or after their time abroad and they are likely already familiar with the platform, using it for other government services. Services could be accessed through a dedicated website that provides a wide range of information including all the different services the government offers to promote building connection with Albania and methods of ‘return.’ It would include a consistent set of steps that returning migrants would need to follow to access services, standardizing the process and removing barriers. Being contained within e-Albania would also serve to reinforce the concept of a global workforce as something inherently Albanian and the idea of connecting with Albania and contributing together to its development. E-Albania is an example of a digital platform that would ensure efficient access to a wide range of services depending on the specific context of a returning migrant. It has potential to remove some of the bureaucratic barriers that currently exist to access services by simplifying or clarifying procedures. It also has options for integration with other tools to facilitate access, such as AI support. In order for a platform like e-Albania to work, steps would need to be taken to ensure sufficient digital literacy and access to internet connection for subsets of returning migrants that may struggle in those areas. There would need to be some integration of online access with in-person visits to ensure that nobody is left behind due to digital accessibility. Additionally, options for remote authentication and setting up accounts for non-residents can be explored to maximize access to the platform.

Expertise and capability

A successful migration system depends on the expertise and capability of its workers, and the financial backing to ensure they can succeed. Programs need to be adequately resourced, which includes funds and time dedicated to training the extensive staff required for implementation. Staff at all levels from local delivery to strategic decision-making can be trained on monitoring and evaluation efforts, and kept up to date with changes in legislation or context. It is important that implementing staff is also aware of all services that are available to migrants, which change over time. Especially in the case of increased utilization of a broader array of reintegration services, significant increases in staffing may be required to provide the comprehensive support that returnees need. Returning migrants also need to be able to trust the information and services they receive, as well as be sure that offices will be open and that wait times or delays will not be prohibitive. Building the idea of a global workforce that is connected to Albania requires buy-in from all stakeholders, including migrants. Creating that connection fundamentally relies on trust, which is a product of demonstrating expertise and capability. While financial constraints are inevitable, adequate resources are required to prove to migrants that the connection will be strong and durable.

3.2.3. NAES as a key actor for the achievement of the GlobAL vision

Implementing a globAL system requires a fundamental expansion of how a country views migration but it can easily be grounded in Albania’s existing migration infrastructure. A globAL vision entails expanding services, deepening connections between people and their country,
rethinking what it means to migrate from Albania, and recognizing the contributions to development that migrants can make at all stages in their migration. But fortunately, in Albania, the strong institutional framework already in place means there is not a need for dramatic structural changes - the existing legislation and institutional mandates can be easily adapted to accommodate a globAL system. The most pressing element of expanding services is ensuring that migrants have a consistent entry point to access them, and in an ideal situation, multiple entry points to accommodate different types of migrants and those with different needs. Most vulnerable return migrants, many of whom have low-skilled levels and unexpectedly return to Albania – including rejected asylum applicants forced to return – have large and multidimensional needs, from housing support to economic assistance, upskilling, and ALMPs like wage subsidies to ease their reintegration to the labor market. On the other hand, other migrants return home as part of their migration plans, having saved money, and acquired skills and experience while abroad. For these, support might take the form of job matching, information provision on how to navigate the bureaucratic legal and business environment or building their networks. A globAL system serves all these people and recognizes that they contribute in different ways – and may need different services. Despite their differences, all members of the Albanian global workforce can be channeled into the same globAL system.

**A natural consolidation point for globAL services is within NAES.** NAES can play an important role in the globAL vision, given both the fundamental importance of employment services for return migrants (see Box 8), and the preexisting mandate under the law “On Emigration of Albanian Citizens for Employment Purposes” for the establishment of structures within NAES to support return migrants. In fact, NAES is already taking active steps to revitalize their previous attempt at those structures - the migration counters, as well as to expand their web presence and have more dedicated services for return migrants.153

**But in addition to having employment needs, some migrants are also vulnerable and have multi-dimensional challenges that extend beyond the labor market – so there is a need to include an array of social services within the globAL system.** Fortunately, there are already institutional mandates in Albania that can accommodate both social and employment services for return migrants, as well as to increase collaboration between them. This way, together they can provide true multi-dimensional globAL services for the benefit of return migrants and the country.

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**Box 8. The role of Public Employment Services (PES) in connecting with migrants**

In a world in which jobs and skills go beyond geographical boundaries, the Public Employment Services (PES) plays a natural role in providing globAL services. Envisioning a globAL workforce is about recognizing that Albanian workers and skills across borders are a part of the Albanian economy and are both dynamic and a force for development. In a globAL vision, the PES can serve as an important contributor, encapsulating the interconnected dimensions of individuals, skills, knowledge, and job opportunities, even extending to those beyond the borders.

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153 While focusing mainly on one specific policy aspect, namely the reintegration support under the leadership of NAES, the present report also aims to provide a comprehensive overview of policy directions by consolidating various pieces produced by the World Bank team to assist different government agencies in Albania. Such pieces include the development of an action plan detailing specific measures and assigning roles and responsibilities to government entities, which has informed the Albanian government’s migration strategy launched in May 2024, a mapping of development partners, the work they do and their respective programs, a review of the institutional arrangements among government agencies in Albania, and the development of an outreach strategy to specifically target potential returnees tailored to the Albanian context.
of a country. A worker who spends ten years working in specialized agriculture in Greece may return to be with family but is looking for a job and brings skills that may be a useful complement for existing opportunities in Albania. A young migrant who goes to Switzerland to receive a tertiary degree in IT may have valuable insights and interest in supporting the IT industry in Albania through investment. Migration is about opportunities and building skillsets to meet them, with important implications for businesses and broader industry in both countries. As such, often the PES is the institution naturally placed to manage the global workforce.

The PES, with its expertise in labor market dynamics, workforce development, and job matching, is well-placed to focus on jobs as a fundamental need that forms the bedrock of economic and societal prosperity. Its primary mission is to connect individuals with suitable employment opportunities, making it the frontline agency in facilitating the link between people and jobs. PES are generally well connected with government agencies, key ministries and other important stakeholders such as the private sector and not-for-profit organizations. The PES has a good knowledge of labor market conditions and of skills needs within the country as a whole. It generally has the structure to be able to assess jobseeker needs, shortcomings, and aspirations through counseling, as well as the structure for provision of reskilling/upskilling and training as needed. PES have the means (or connections) for provision of financial assistance to assist with integration; and the capacity to guide jobseekers towards successful paths in the labor market.

When the PES plays a strong role in providing services for labor migration, there are synergistic benefits that go to other vulnerable jobseekers and the mission of the PES itself. Economic migrants, returnees, and refugees, and unemployed job seekers, ethnic minorities, and those who have spent time out of the labor force face some similar barriers to successful labor market integration. Examples of common challenges, include financial vulnerability, language barriers, skills mismatch, psychological distress, missing documentation, difficulties getting skills recognized and certified, and potential stigmatization among local communities. Tools and systems that are developed to provide labor market services to any of these groups will be beneficial in serving other groups as well. Although a different combination is needed for different audiences, the structure to support vulnerable populations, once developed, can be tailored to successfully work with all jobseekers. For those reasons, a growing number of PES have been developing an array of labor migration services, which include regular assistance to migrant returnees.154 In the case of Albania, the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) has been tasked with a key role in providing reintegration services for migrants. Although the migration counters have not yet been fully operationalized, migration remains a national priority and there is recognition that returning migrants are an important source of labor and skills that contribute to overall economic growth.

When the circumstances for labor migrants are sufficiently different than those of other job seekers, some countries create tailored paths for migrants who return (or would like to) or provide separate tools taking into consideration the specific challenges they face. In Morocco, the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills (ANAPEC) specifically cooperates with IOM on skill mobility, the economic integration of migrants and the reintegration of Moroccans living abroad.155 In Portugal, the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) has integrated services such as language training for migrants and foreign language support

154 OECD, IDB, and WAPES (2016).
155 IOM (2022).
lines for employment and self-employment. IEFP also has a presence at local migrant integration support centers to contribute in the provision of comprehensive services for migrants. These services and paths were developed to reflect the specific challenges migrant members of those global workforces faced.

In addition to being the primary provider of labor market services, the PES can also play an important role in outreach to migrants. A comprehensive global system addresses all the needs that migrants face throughout the migration process, including meeting their economic and social needs before, during, and after their time abroad. In order to connect migrants with these available services, outreach efforts are an important element of a global system. The most basic programs focus on reintegration after a migrant returns and will only consist of limited outreach efforts, normally through passively distributing information to migrants as they return and occasionally to emigrants while they are abroad. More advanced programs have stronger outreach components and will focus on building stronger connections with migrants throughout the process, including with the diaspora abroad to help emigrants in the process of connecting with their home country and potentially returning through logistical and financial support. Reintegration components of global systems then progressively add layers of complexity by providing assistance with labor market needs and immediate economic integration. The most advanced global systems combine this economic integration support with services that go beyond the labor market and include assistance with long-term establishment, including for families, and psychosocial support. While some of these services extend beyond the role of the PES, as the organization that manages the global workforce and labor market services, it can also play a key role in conducting outreach and ensuring that migrants remain connected and aware of all available opportunities.

While the PES may not be directly responsible for providing services that go beyond the labor market, collaboration and coordination with those service providers is important because their services will also impact labor market outcomes. In addition to employment needs, migrants face complex and multi-dimensional challenges that extend beyond the labor market, thus requiring supportive services that go beyond economic reintegration. Often for migrants who return, finding a job and achieving economic sustainability is a first order need that can be met directly by the PES. However, broader global services are multi-dimensional and can include psychological assistance, provision of rights to family members (to live and work in the country, if not nationals), cash assistance for the vulnerable, assistance with children’s education, and support with health treatments. In fact, failing to address these needs may preclude the possibility of a migrant returning or successfully reintegrating into the labor market. Reintegration programs that successfully include these features will require coordination between the PES that is responsible for labor market integration and other ministries and government agencies. This coordination could include combined programming, data sharing, or mutual referral. Given the linkages, outreach efforts to connect with migrants could account for information about both labor market services and those that go beyond it, in order to be most efficient. Recognizing the multidimensionality of returning migrants’ needs and the linkages between economic, social, and psychological integration is necessary to fully address all the constraints faced by return migrants and provide the best conditions for successful reintegration. Strong coordination is not automatic and needs to be actively pursued. In a global system, the PES has an important coordinating role, bringing in other institutions that provide global services to present everything as a

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156 OECD (2019).
comprehensive package, and ensuring that outreach efforts effectively convey all information to migrants.

Box 9: How does the GlobAL agenda fit with NAES’ current capacity and its future ambitions?

Public employment service provision in Albania has been undergoing significant changes in the last years, supported by different international partners. In 2019, the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) replaced the old National Employment Service (NES) and now is in charge of both employment services and programs and vocational education and training (VET). The reform modified the type of ALMPs provided, developed an information system, increased the number of digital services and put an emphasis on strengthening the links with employers, building a business relation department and expanding the services and support provided.

NAES’ new vision entails the provision of increasingly diversified services to address the needs of different target groups, while at the same time deepening the agency’s efforts to serve hard-to-employ groups. NAES is a key agency to implement the 2023-2030 National Employment and Skills Strategy that emphasizes the development of skills demanded in the labor market. NAES, with support from GIZ and UNDP, has piloted the provision of soft skills training in vocational training centers as well as digital skills training. At the same time, efforts have been made to expand and strengthen the provision of services to hard-to-employ groups in the country, financing external providers to be the implementers for service provision such as community work, group counseling, orientation, and referrals to training.

Nevertheless, several capacity constraints currently limit NAES’ ability to fully implement this transformation. One of them is the availability of human resources. In spite of improvements in the last years, the caseload remains significantly high, with 665 jobseekers registered per counselor. The information system for data collection and monitoring can be strengthened as well as its interoperability with other key agencies. These two challenges can be addressed to increase the ability to develop a case management system for vulnerable populations. There are also challenges to expand the engagement of employers with NAES, with only 7.4 percent using public employment services to fill their job vacancies, which in turns reduces the incentives of workers, particularly high-skilled ones, to use NAES services.

The increasing attention received by migration in Albania’s policy agenda might create momentum to drive reforms that would benefits the whole Albanian workforce. The reforms needed for NAES to become the go-to agency serving the global Albanian workforce would be fully aligned with the current efforts to serve different groups of the Albanian population, enhance their skills and support their transition to the labor market. Investment in:

- Ensuring adequate outreach to a more diverse set of target groups
- Diversifying services with the support of non-public providers
- Streamlining bureaucratic procedures with the increasing adoption of digitalization
- Developing a stronger information system
- Connecting data systems for the delivery of integrated services

can represent an opportunity not only to untap the potential of the GlobAL, but also to build structure and introduce practices that are currently being explored by NAES and other agencies to strengthen human capital development and utilization in Albania.
In order for NAES to fulfill its mandated role, it would need to expand its vision and recreate the migration structures in the vision of globAL, while increasing its capacity to coordinate with other institutions. As it seeks to revitalize the migration counter structures that were mandated under law but never fully implemented, there are several important shifts for NAES to seize the opportunity to rebrand and push the new idea of a globAL vision taking responsibility for the whole globAL workforce.

- **Embracing a globAL vision:** A globAL vision would mean a new emphasis on the connectivity between Albania and its migrants. It would reinvigorate the idea of connectivity through mutual support – from Albania to its migrants through reintegration services and from migrants to the country through development impact, especially when they return.

- **Connecting with all migrants:** NAES would have to expand its outreach efforts, connect with a broader swath of migrants and overcome the lack of territorial coverage, as offices are located primarily in the West.

- **Rebranding for greater appeal:** In addition, NAES would rebrand representatives as globAL counselors, who are trained specifically in the needs of returning migrants to support them in accessing globAL services. These globAL counselors would exist at specific structures within the 40 NAES regional and local offices, where they would meet returning migrants, provide them information on globAL services, register them in a database, guide them through filling out Individual Employment Plans, and connect them to additional services.

- **Strengthening existing collaboration with social services:** Fortunately, the existing requirement that all adult members of Ndihma Ekonomike recipient households must register with employment services, means that there are existing expectations of collaboration between NAES and the social services.

- **Building capacity to meet the vision:** NAES would also need to continue its existing efforts to increase digital access, which is important both for improving connectivity to other institutions and databases, as well as for attracting different types of migrants. NAES would also need to expand its vulnerability assessment to be sure it can collect information that comprehensively records returning migrants’ needs. Finally, in order to embrace a globAL vision, NAES would need to expand its capacity to improve on the current ratio of 600-1200:1 jobseekers to counselors. GlobAL counselors would have increased responsibility with an expanded offering of services and would need more time with each returning migrant.

- **Improving the interoperability with other systems:** given the multifaceted needs of some of the globAL workforce, the interoperability of NAES data system with other institutions such as the Social Service Registry need to be consolidated.

As a result of these changes, NAES could become a go-to agency for migrants with different profiles. An expanded globAL vision for NAES would imply that the agency could increasingly be seen as a resource for all migrants, regardless of skill levels or individual circumstances. Embracing the globAL brand is a key element for building a community of Albanian migrants whose experience abroad brings unique challenges and opportunities.
In a globAL system, municipal local administrative units are also a natural entry point for many return migrants who have needs that go beyond the labor market, and they have an existing mandate to provide support. Including local administrative units in the globAL system of service delivery (along with NAES) significantly expands its geographic coverage and ability to absorb different categories of return migrants. In Albania’s existing institutional infrastructure, municipalities are mandated under law as responsible for the administration of social care services. They are further mandated to implement a case management model at the local level as the foundation of an integrated social care system through the Needs Assessment and Case Referral units (NARUs) fully described in Chapter 2. In addition, there is already the expectation of collaboration between the NARUs and employment offices due to the mandated overlap between receipt of Ndihma Ekonomike and participation in employment services. Incorporating local administrative units into the globAL system, builds globAL into the existing social care framework, which is linked to employment services and has the mandate to provide case management based on assessed vulnerability. It is also worth noting that the Law of Emigration leaves open the opportunity to create an umbrella at the central level that included both the Ministry of Finance and Economy, and now the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection for supervision of services to returning migrants.

In order to provide globAL services, local administrative units would draw on their existing case management system and expand it to encompass returning migrants, while improving collaboration with employment services through mutual referral. They would be responsible for the following steps:

- Improve targeting mechanisms to include return migrants as a designated category.
- Provide information regarding case management and referral to other appropriate services. Referrals would be done electronically through designated referral forms.
- Conduct initial assessments, which would be rapid determinations of immediate danger. If no immediate danger is present, the social worker from NARU would communicate with employment services to arrange a full assessment.
- Conduct full assessments in collaboration with employment services. NARU social workers would be in charge of completing the needs assessment form that collects basic information on the individual and their social care needs, as well as obstacles the individual encounters.
to fulfill them. The form also collects information on services previously received, information regarding the suitability of the living environment, their financial situation, income and resources, family relationships, health and mental health status, and relevant documentation. This would be combined with the Individual Employment Plan conducted by the global counselor at NAES to complete the assessment.

- In collaboration with NAEs, produce an integrated case management plan, which is used to determine the type of services required and the order they should be provided.
- Implement, monitor, and review the achievement of objectives in the case management plan, while maintaining continuous communication with the global counselor at NAES.
- Determining, alongside the global counselor, the completion of the case based on employment retention and the satisfaction of other needs.

Figure 25: How local administrative units can strengthen their role

As clearly detailed in the preceding steps, expanding the role of social services in a global system would require improving collaboration and connectivity with NAES. This would mean ensuring connectivity between the MIS system at NAES and the National Register for NE at the local administrative units to be able to comprehensively collect and share data on cases. Although the current legal framework expects communication between NAES and the municipalities for the provision of NE, it is not currently active and would need to be improved.
Expanding the roles of NAES and the municipalities to incorporate a globAL vision and collaborate on multi-dimensional globAL services for return migrants means creating an integrated case management system. Integrated case management is the difference between just offering more services to returned migrants and implementing a globAL system. Importantly, the institutional framework already exists to justify this type of system under law. While NAES is authorized to create structures and provide services to return migrants, the NARUs have the mandate to implement case management and there is already an expectation of referral capabilities between the two institutions. The key to transforming these overlapping mandates into an integrated case management is to streamline collaboration between them, improve communication, and automate as much of the process as possible. Integrated case management relies on having shared information in order to understand the full complexity of a case and provide multi-dimensional services. For example, the globAL counselor at NAES needs to be able to see information entered by social care workers at the municipality to provide the most effective globAL services. Having real-time, updated, and comprehensive information allows for more effective processing with fewer bureaucratic barriers. To make this happen, staff at all relevant institutions would be trained on integrated case management and how to make decisions collaboratively based on as much information as possible. Protocols would need to be developed to determine how responsibility is shared for case ownership between NAES and the municipalities. There would also need to be a perspective shift – to recognize that globAL Albanians are not just workers or just recipients of economic aid, but rather multi-dimensional people of all types and categorizations.

Box 9. Case management has been implemented for return migrants, including in Albania

Bangladesh recently implemented a sustainable reintegration model based on holistic welfare for returning migrants that takes the form of a case management system. Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Bangladesh faced the challenge of quickly reintegrating hundreds of thousands of returning overseas workers. They recognized the inherent difficulty of providing comprehensive reintegration services to different types of returnees across different institutions. The needs and experiences of returning migrants were diverse and required a new system to address them. There was also risk that migrants who most needed support would be the ones least likely to successfully navigate a complicated array of systems to receive it. With the
support of the World Bank, Bangladesh implemented an integrated case management system for returning migrants. The specific objectives of the program included:

- Identifying and registering eligible returning migrant workers in a database.
- Providing orientation and psychosocial counselling.
- Offering referral services for skills enhancement, financial support, or other welfare needs.
- Promoting livelihood opportunities through job placement, entrepreneurship, or remigration.
- Offering cash incentives to select beneficiaries.

As part of the case management system, the government developed a new reintegration information system to track migrants across services. They recognized that the influx of returnees would have multidimensional needs that could not be met by just one institution.

**Figure 27: The RAISE case management system in Bangladesh**

Integrated case management embodies the essence of a globAL system by building an enduring connection between the case manager, all the relevant institutions, and the migrant. It embraces the complexity of the multidimensional needs of globAL workers. Effective case management would be client-centered in that it responds to the multitude of ways a migrant can ‘return’ and connect to Albania – and the ways they can be served based on that connection. GlobAL is fundamentally about building connections between the globAL workforce and Albania, which is reflected in the case management approach. This connection can take many forms, leading a migrant down many different paths. Instead of becoming fragmented, case management consolidates and organizes all the different contributions migrants make into one model. It also lays a strong
foundation for monitoring and evaluation with a focal point that has the ability to track and view all the services provided and outcomes achieved.

3.2.4 Reintegration services as the natural starting point for the implementation of a GlobAL vision

**Given the significant untapped potential of Albanian returnees for the country’s development, the next subsection delves into one specific part of the support provision to the GlobAL diaspora which is the reintegration of return migrants into the domestic economy and proposes practical approaches to enhance current efforts.** While the identified gaps and challenges in section 3.1. are all relevant and can be addressed as part of the broader migration agenda, this subsection focuses on providing comprehensive services to facilitate the return and reintegration of the Albanian diaspora. This focus is due to two main factors. First, a sizable number of Albanian migrants come back after living abroad, which contrasts with more modest return flows in other Western Balkan countries. This group represents a large untapped potential for the Albanian economy. In the past, it has been shown that they can generate strong positive impacts in the local labor market and therefore large economic gains for the Albanian economy, bringing back valuable skills, experiences, global networks, and financial resources. Second, return migrants often encounter high vulnerabilities leading to worse labor market outcomes upon return than the non-migrant population, which calls for focused investments in their support and integration. While the legal framework has developed a comprehensive set of rights and access to services, the implementation, breadth and cohesiveness of services to return migrants can be strengthened. This subsection brings evidence from best practices on how Albania can unlock the potential developmental impact of its returnee population.

**International experience suggests that reintegration services can be grouped into three main categories: outreach, labor market services, and services beyond the labor market.** While the most basic reintegration programs will only consist of limited outreach efforts, normally through distributing information to emigrants abroad, more advanced programs will build stronger connections with the diaspora and help emigrants in the process of connecting and returning to the country through logistic and financial aid. Reintegration programs then progressively add layers of complexity by providing assistance with labor market and immediate economic integration. The most advanced programs combine this economic integration support with services that go beyond the labor market and include assistance with long-term establishment, including for families, and psychosocial support. It is helpful to analyze specific practices from other countries that are most successful within the framework of those three categories of services.

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157 This was evident from the significant positive impacts on the local labor market created by returnees from Greece after the financial crisis, who engaged in entrepreneurship in their home districts upon returning. Source: Hausmann and Nedelkoska (2018).
Figure 28: Program components and corresponding objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program component</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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| 1. Outreach       | ▪ Reach out to target populations to inform and raise awareness  
                   ▪ Provide useful and easy-to-access information  
                   ▪ Provide target groups with the necessary tools to make return as safe and easy as possible  
                   ▪ Strengthen connections to promote knowledge sharing and investment |
| 2. Labor market services | ▪ Provide core labor market support services  
                          ▪ Prepare target groups for the labor market prior to their return  
                          ▪ Create tailored paths in the PES for target groups, or provide separate tools |
| 3. Services beyond the labor market | ▪ Incentivize return and long-term settlement  
                                           ▪ Support social reintegration process  
                                           ▪ Offer logistical, administrative, financial, and coordination assistance  
                                           ▪ Ease reintegration for the forcibly displaced |

3.2.4.1. Outreach

The first step for providing services to migrants is to define target groups and clear objectives.\(^{158}\) For instance, with regards to outreach, well-defined target groups will help establish the key audience the information is intended to reach. Throughout the program design, knowing and understanding the target group will allow for more tailored approaches that will respond better to their needs, making the program more effective. Clear objectives will inform the content of the information and guide the initiatives to be implemented, ensuring that the program will reach the outputs desired. Some countries have an advantage in clearly understanding their emigrant population because migration is governed through strict bilateral agreements that guarantee comprehensive data, but others need to make significant efforts to learn about the characteristics of their diaspora.

Outreach efforts vary based on timing, chosen medium, and the necessary information that needs to be conveyed. Some outreach campaigns actively reach out to specific target groups to inform and raise awareness at specific points in time, while others are designed for permanence, with dedicated websites consolidating information, hotlines, or contact e-mails. The strongest programs offer a combination of both targeted short-term and sustainable long-term outreach. Other outreach efforts are designed to incentivize or provide assistance for return. The specific format generally depends on context, government intention, budget, and the governance structure of the program. For the communication element of outreach, international programs can be analyzed in two subcategories: the channels of communication (or the 'how' to convey the information) and the information to be conveyed through these channels (or the 'what' to convey). Knowing the audience

\(^{158}\) Dickerson and Ozden (2018).
allows for the program to better choose and tailor both of these elements to the context of the target group.

**Channels: How to reach out to the migrant population?**

Effective outreach campaigns often are conducted through partnerships with agencies or organizations that have strong ties to diaspora populations. These partnerships can include international organizations, local agencies, NGOs, country diplomatic networks, and diaspora groups and organizations and are vital for extending outreach to targeted groups, especially in emigrants' host countries. Some organizations have on-the-ground presence and might already work closely with the intended target group, further extending the capacity and effectiveness of the outreach. For example, the Mexican “Programa de Repatriacion” (Repatriation program) targets Mexican migrants in the US and operates through over 50 consulates throughout the US\(^\text{159}\) to disseminate information. The program has in place a dedicated e-mail and hotline for migrants, as well as an online directory of regional institutions\(^\text{160}\) they can contact in case of need. The Irish Emigrant Support Programme,\(^\text{161}\) on the other hand, relies heavily on diaspora organizations to conduct outreach to emigrant Irish populations.

**Having a variety of communication methods is the most effective way to ensure outreach to different groups.** Countries are often deciding between different modalities of communication: websites, leaflets, printed guides, social-media, cultural events, e-mail, calls, letters, and more, but each of these modalities can be chosen and tailored according to the intended target group. For example, social media will generally be targeted toward younger generations, with access to internet, while letters and leaflets may appeal to older generations with less online habits. Some of the messages might be better communicated through visuals, for instance, via short videos and infographics. One model is the Irish program “Safe Home,”\(^\text{162}\) which has grown to provide information via e-mail, by phone, and by e-newsletter, after beginning with outreach through home visits due to the target population of elderly Irish emigrants.

Effective outreach also often allows target groups to contact the agency responsible for the reintegration efforts directly. This is important because each person has their own unique context and many may have questions that are not encompassed by easily available information. There are different methods to allow for interaction between clients and the responsible agency such as dedicated e-mail addresses or hotlines for questions. The Renkuosi Lituva program\(^\text{163}\) from Lithuania, offers a comprehensive set of information for return migrants, but also has an online chat where prospective returnees can talk to consultants from the Migration Information Center. For the Portuguese program “Regressar,” an agency called “Point of Contact for the Return of the Emigrant” (PCRE)\(^\text{164}\) was created to manage contact with potential return migrants, and to coordinate program implementation.

Indirect outreach to migrants can be conducted through established partnerships with agencies or organizations that have strong ties to diaspora and migrant communities. First, establishing partnerships with diplomatic networks, diaspora groups, Albanian expatriate associations, and international organizations can be instrumental for extending outreach while emigrants are still in host communities. These entities often have direct access to migrants and can

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\(^\text{159}\) https://www.gob.mx/inm/acciones-y-programas/programa-de-repatriacion-12469
\(^\text{160}\) https://www.gob.mx/inm/documentos/directorio-de-los-enlaces-de-repatriacion
\(^\text{161}\) https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/support-overseas/emigrant-support-programme/
\(^\text{162}\) https://safehomeireland.com/outreach-home-visits/
\(^\text{163}\) https://www.renkuosilietuva.lt/en/
serve as valuable channels for disseminating information. Additionally, leveraging popular digital platforms and social media that are widely used by the global community can help maintain a strong indirect channel of communication as migrants return to their country.

**Outreach efforts in Albania are currently being expanded in collaboration with government agencies and other development partners.** The National Diaspora Agency, which was recently integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has established a network of contacts by utilizing outreach channels that include diplomatic networks, newsletters, social networks, and cultural events. They utilize these channels, as well as agreements with government and non-government agencies overseas, to connect diaspora members with opportunities in Albania. In addition, NAES is expanding outreach efforts, cooperating with GIZ to create a comprehensive website that will include all information that is needed by returning migrants in their journey and reintegration process. While targeted outreach efforts are currently not in place, NAES is also collaborating with the World Bank on a strategy to specifically target potential returnees. Other development partners, including some NGOs, maintain strong connections with diaspora groups that could be utilized as outreach channels. IOM has also developed materials including an informative guide that is available for migrants returning through their programs.

**Information: What could outreach communication include?**

Two key aspects for determining what information needs to be shared are knowing the information the target audience will need the most and making that information as accessible as possible. The material should be useful and comprehensive, but also appealing and straightforward, to avoid discouraging prospective returnees with daunting details. Important information that is usually conveyed includes:

- **Diaspora related information**: networks, business opportunities, investment opportunities, volunteering and philanthropy, information on home country development.
- **Reasons to return**: cultural bonds, children and family, business, and employment opportunities.
- **How to return**: necessary documents, registration, procedures, transfer of benefits and pensions, referral to the diplomatic network.
- **Availability of employment**: job portals, how to start a business, referral to job centers.
- **Service availability in return country**: health care, social benefits, reintegration programs, pensions.

An example of a country that provides comprehensive return information is Malaysia, with its “Returning Expert Program,” which is geared towards highly skilled emigrants. Potential returnees can access information about the program’s financial incentives to return, assistance for schooling of their children, eligibility criteria, FAQs, and success stories. The Spanish “Return Plan to Spain” and Portuguese return program make available a comprehensive guide on how to return, including all administrative steps, benefits, and services available. Online platforms have been introduced in a number of countries to provide information of interest to nationals abroad.

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Box 10. Web portals as instruments to connect with a global workforce

Around the world, countries are utilizing online platforms to provide comprehensive information to different migrant groups. These websites typically cover a range of valuable information, including pre-arrival services, post-arrival information, employment-related details, job search and matching functionalities, and support for entrepreneurship. Some websites have a dedicated section for employers, offering features such as accessing CVs, posting vacancies, and connecting with individuals seeking employment. Additional features found on these websites may comprise success stories and testimonials, psychological guides, key figures, links to embassies and consular offices, and various contact methods such as submission forms, emails, chatbots, and dedicated hotlines. The Polish government has developed an online platform providing extensive information, on a variety of topics of interest, differentiating between potential and current returnees. Information includes practical advice on return including on social benefits, health, reestablishment also thought the use of videos, information about programs and services available back home, a psychological guide, Q&A, business activity opportunities, news etc. For convenience, tailored information is provided according to the migrant’s host country. Similarly, the online platform “Renkuosi Litueva” in Lithuania provides extensive information in various topics such as key information about Lithuania, steps to take before the return and first steps in Lithuania, employment opportunities, information about housing, education, health insurance and recognition of foreign qualifications, FAQ, and success stories. Among other functions, web portals from Lithuania and Poland offer step-by-step relocation guides and links to employment offices and job opportunities.

Outreach strategies can be conducted by agencies in charge of migration but are often outsourced to Public Employment Services (PES), who are well-placed to provide communication on job opportunities, training possibilities, social assistance, and other labor market information. For instance, in the program “Return Plan to Spain”, the PES is the one
responsible for communication of job offers and all available financial benefits. Likewise, the Portuguese PES is responsible for information on support to return and job offers.

In Albania, there are plans to develop materials to provide comprehensive return information to potential returnees but for recently returned migrants, there is currently limited access to information. The previously mentioned website in development with NAES and GIZ will include all information that is needed for return migrants to reintegrate into Albanian society. However, at the moment, many returning migrants arrive in Albania unaware of the services that are available to them. The current inactivity of the Migration Counters further limits the information that is provided to returnees.

3.2.4.2. Labor market services

Core labor market support services, including assisting returnees in finding employment or starting a business, are fundamental for attaining self-sufficiency. Economic reintegration is central to the success of reintegration programs. Typically, returning migrants are integrated into public employment services, as many services provided are closely related with existing PES mandates. However, it is important to considering the specific challenges faced by return migrants, which are often different than non-migrant job seekers. For instance, career guidance, individualized development plans, job referral, vocational training, and recognition of formally and informally acquired skills and qualifications are all often provided to job-seekers more generally, but other services specifically take into account the challenges and opportunities of returning migrants, including mentoring programs (i.e. connecting with citizens who have previously returned and successfully integrated or started a business), entrepreneurship training, and business loans. While these services may not exist under PES mandates, countries have implemented them specifically for returnees.

Preparing migrants for the labor market prior to their return can speed up the process of finding a job and economic reintegration in the country. For instance, the Spanish PES has an online platform that makes available several employment services exclusively on-line, that can be accessed before a migrant returns. The Portuguese PES also allows citizens abroad to register online, look for job offers online on their platform, and share their CV with employers. In the Philippines, the TESDA Online Program (TOP) is a web-based platform that offers free Online Courses for the technical education and skills development of Filipino workers including returning overseas workers. In this program, online skill training is available even prior to return. In India, the SWADES project gathers information on the skills of returning migrants through 'skills cards', builds a database of available skillsets, and assists with employment matching of returnees to employers in India or abroad. If a migrant spends less time inactive upon return, it can decrease demotivation, reduce reliance on social assistance, speed social reintegration and decrease the overall psychological, social, and economic costs of return.

172 https://e-tesda.gov.ph/
To connect returning migrants with jobs, aside from integration into broader public employment services, some countries create tailored paths for returnees or provide separate tools. Returnees do not face the same barriers to accessing the labor market as local non-migrant jobseekers, given their specific resources, constraints, and the conditions of their return. In India, the ASEEM Portal, launched in 2020, uses AI to connect Indian migrant workers with well-paid job opportunities in their hometowns. The portal is available to all Indians, but in the specific case of migrants, it can be combined with the previously mentioned SWADES skills card. This is an example of efficiently building upon tools that already exist and tailoring them to the context of returning migrants. The Portuguese PES recognizes the challenges returning migrants face by offering recognition of formal and documented qualifications, as well as recognition of professional skills acquired through work experience and/or non-formal training (RVCC). In Malaysia, Talentcorp, the agency in charge of the implementation of the Returning Expert Program, assists Malaysian professionals who wish to return to find employment by connecting them with companies in the country and by organizing networking events. This measure is tailored to the specific target group of high-skilled returning migrants and has the potential to increase chances of return for program participants.

Some governments work closely with the private sector to facilitate efficient matching of returning migrants with skills and employment opportunities. In some countries this takes the form of collaborating with employers and industry associations to organize job fairs or career exhibitions, such as is the case in Bulgaria. Other countries also work directly with the private sector to identify and compile job vacancies, creating a portal or platform that returning migrants can access. This is the case in countries like Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Poland where employers create their own profiles or post positions on job matching platforms. In Portugal, the government also engages with the private sector to recruit volunteer corporate mentors who provide guidance, orientation, and vital career information to returning migrants who are perhaps unfamiliar with the opportunities available. Engagement with the private sector is vital because employers are the best equipped to identify most precisely where workers are needed and the types of skills that are not being found in the current labor pool. This information can be utilized for job matching but also importantly can guide upskilling programs and vocational. In rarer cases, private sector engagement can also inform incentive programs for specific industries or skillsets that would provide a boost to the economy. The Regressar program in Portugal offers to reimburse moving expenses for certain workers that businesses recruit back from abroad. This type of financial incentive is most efficient when there is strong private sector engagement to determine the most pressing skills gaps a country faces.

Peer-to-peer mentoring has also been implemented to improve the overall experience of economic reintegration for migrants. Programs specifically aim to pair returning migrants with local citizens who have previously returned. The mentors then are given responsibility to help the mentee to integrate (or reintegrate) socially and economically. For instance, the Irish program Back for Business pairs migrants who return wanting to develop their business with well-established Irish businesspeople. The initiative is intended to improve the business prospects of returning migrants who may bring skills but are unfamiliar with the business landscape in the country they are returning to. The mentor can assist the mentee to navigate the bureaucratic environment and

173 [https://smis.nsdcindia.org/](https://smis.nsdcindia.org/)
176 [https://www.backforbusiness.com/](https://www.backforbusiness.com/)
improve their business networks. Similarly, the Portuguese “Mentors for Migrants”\textsuperscript{177} program pairs return migrants with Portuguese residents, but for social reintegration purposes.\textsuperscript{177} 

In Albania, labor market services are offered principally by NAES through their National Employment Offices, although uptake among returnees has been limited. Returnees are eligible to register as unemployed jobseekers to receive employment services and are meant to be served directly at the currently inactive Migration Counters. They are also eligible to receive vocational education and training, as well as participate in the new mandatory preparation program NAES offers, which includes job search and soft skills for jobseekers. Currently, NAES also has an active employer engagement program with staff in each local office. Approximately half of all employers registered with the tax office are in the registry and there are annual targets to ensure increases in registered employers each year. The intention of this employer outreach program is to expand the pool of job vacancies and improve NAES’s ability to match jobseekers with information on different segments of the labor market. Despite their eligibility status, few returnees access employment services offered by NAES. This is due in part to limited knowledge of their availability and limited tailoring of the services to returnees’ needs. Although approximately 25,000 migrants return to Albania each year, only 400 returnees were registered with NAES as of November 2022.

Gaps in labor market services are frequently filled by development partners who have programs focused specifically on returnee reintegration. Organizations like GIZ, UNDP, Swiss Contact, World Vision and many others offer labor market services as part of reintegration programs for migrants, though they are limited in scale. These services are often tailored to returnees’ specific needs and combined with other reintegration services. Development partners also focus attention for labor market services on vulnerable groups of returnees, such as Roma and Egyptian communities.

3.2.4.3. Services beyond the labor market

Some countries have recognized that for a migrant, returning is a multidimensional and complex process, which requires supportive services that go beyond economic reintegration. These additional services most commonly include psychological assistance, provision of rights to family members (to live and work in the country, if not nationals), cash assistance for the vulnerable, assistance with children’s education, and support with health treatments. Reintegration programs that include these features often require coordination with other ministries and government agencies in addition to public employment services that cover labor market integration. Recognizing the multidimensionality of returning migrants’ needs and the linkages between economic, social, and psychological integration is necessary to fully address all of the constraints faced by return migrants and provide the best conditions for successful reintegration.

In addition to conducting informational outreach to prospective return migrants, some programs go beyond and provide logistical, financial, and coordination assistance. Services provided may include help with physical return, such as travel coordination (i.e., purchasing tickets), assistance moving assets, and supports for family members. Other programs provide assistance to returnees in finding housing prior to return (or in some cases, after), and support and relief in case of forceful repatriation. This assistance is crucial for families who wish to return and do not have the means or knowledge, to ease and incentivize the return of nationals who are abroad, and to ease the

\textsuperscript{177} https://mentores.acm.gov.pt/home
process for those forcibly returned. For migrants who are not already looking to return, some programs financially encourage them to do so monetarily or through tax incentives.

**Financial assistance and other return support can make the process easier and more affordable.** The Portuguese PES is responsible for managing the “Measure to Support the Return of Emigrants to Portugal”\(^{178}\) program, which provides ‘expense sharing’ for the return (air ticket, moving costs) of emigrants who accept a job in Portugal, and their families. The Irish “Safe Home”\(^{179}\) program provides assistance to Irish born emigrants to find housing in Ireland, even prior to their return. This kind of support can not only make return more reasonable for families who could not otherwise afford it but can also incentivize families and/or individuals for whom logistics and financials are barriers for this type of life-changing decision. It can also ease the reintegration period for those whose return was not really their decision.

**Some countries offer tax incentives to entice migrants to return by making the process more financially advantageous.** Return migration can be an expensive process, especially when a migrant is considering leaving behind a well-established (and perhaps better-paid) job. The full costs of relocation, housing, and new furniture, which are multiplied in cases of families abroad, are a disincentive to return. A way to attract migrants employed abroad (especially high-skilled migrants) and to reduce the impact of the return costs, is to offer tax incentives for those returning. For instance, the Portuguese program “Regressar” offers a 50 percent reduction in income taxes\(^{180}\) during the first five years after a migrant’s return. The program also extends several benefits\(^{181}\) to the members of the core family of the return migrant to provide further incentive. In Malaysia, the “Returning Expert Programme” offers the option of a 15 percent flat income tax\(^{182}\) for first five years upon return, instead of progressive taxation up to 25 percent at the highest tax bracket. Returning migrants also receive tax exemption on the import or purchase of up to two cars, permanent residency status for foreign spouses and children, and tax exemption for all personal effects brought back to Malaysia. It is important to highlight that despite the gains that this kind of program may bring to the country and to returnees, there may be political pushback. This is due to a possible perception of special privileges conceded to a population that is already often financially secure.

**Assistance in the return process is also important for migrants who are forcibly returned, as they often face severe conditions.** The Mexican “Programa de Repatriación”\(^{183}\) focuses on forcibly returned Mexican nationals and offers a wide array of services to ease the return process and safely receive them in the country. Services include food assistance, health checks, issuance of documentation, transfers to temporary shelters, and transportation discounts. This helps to attenuate the stressful situation of forceful return, which is conducted by police authorities and might include periods of incarceration (in the United States) and dire conditions. Kosovo has implemented a repatriation and reintegration system for migrants returned under readmission agreements that utilizes a case management approach to provide immediate, emergency, and sustainable reintegration services, according to migrants’ needs.

**Return and reintegration programs also provide assistance in navigating administrative and bureaucratic steps that are often unfamiliar to those who have been out of the country for extended time.** For example, the same Mexican “Programa de Repatriacion” (Repatriation program) also assists returnees in accessing social programs, in the recovery of belongings that might have

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178 https://www.iefp.pt/apoio-ao-regresso-de-emigrantes
179 https://safehomeireland.com/about-us/
181 https://www.iefp.pt/apoio-ao-regresso-de-emigrantes
183 https://www.gob.mx/inm/acciones-y-programas/programa-de-repatriacion
remained in the destination country, in getting new identity cards and other documentation needs. The program offers assistance in validating educational achievement and in the certification and evaluation of skills and abilities acquired. The program assists migrants in setting up and accessing financial services, provides legal orientation regarding procedures that might be faced during repatriation, and offers advice on any issues pending in main countries of destination like the United States or Canada, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the program provides support in accessing health services, including addressing psychosocial needs.

**Income assistance is an important component of some return programs, especially for the most vulnerable.** Migrants frequently return with low financial reserves, no job, and in need of support to resettle. Financial assistance is often provided, as a way to mitigate the negative effects stemming from those situations, which can inhibit job-seeking. For instance, the Spanish PES manages five different income assistance schemes for returning migrants: 184

1) Allowance for Returned Emigrants, which aims to complement the protection offered by unemployment assistance.
2) Income for Returned Emigrants (RAI), which is a specific program for economically vulnerable people with great difficulty finding jobs.
3) Unemployment subsidies for returnees who are over 52 years old.
4) Unemployment benefits for returned migrants who paid contributions into unemployment insurance in Spain before leaving.
5) A program that includes the sharing of return costs when needed

### Box 11. Social insurance instruments for Albanian migrants

**Social protection is important for migrants to mitigate risks, and to enhance their experience abroad and upon return.** Migrants require access to social services including education, housing, and basic amenities to ensure that their basic needs are met throughout their migration process. Income security can also safeguard migrants against financial instability and ensure their economic well-being. Due to their mobility, migrants are less likely to have family and community to help them cope with lifecycle risks that arise. Their weaker social networks abroad make them less resilient in the face of shocks. Migrants’ needs for social protection are significantly influenced by their employment conditions and external environment. For example, migrants with permanent contracts often have more comprehensive benefits and migrants who reside in countries with higher quality and more available social services are typically better protected.

**Contributory social insurance schemes are an important social protection tool that can help ensure migrants are secure in their new environments.** However, migrants face challenges related to social insurance in six areas: gaps in coverage, poor benefit adequacy, portability restrictions, high vesting periods and lack of totalization (loss of past contributions), mismatch between schemes design and migrant characteristics, and observability (being identified by the government). The barriers that migrants face come from both institutional and legal restrictions. Migrants may be excluded from social protection programs at destination due to lack of citizenship or residence and may not be covered if their origin country does not have a scheme that allows contribution from abroad. Insufficient coordination between origin and destination country in the absence of bilateral agreements offers another obstacle. Practical barriers such as complex and time-consuming administrative procedures, lack of awareness, lack of auto-enrollment, language

barriers, cultural differences and unfamiliarity, or discrimination within the system also jeopardize migrants’ coverage through social insurance schemes.

**Migrants who are formally employed are usually covered by national policies and less exposed to coverage challenges, particularly if covered by social security agreements.** Many countries in Europe and Central Asia operate national social security schemes with mandatory contributions from employers for their employees. Social security agreements between countries are designed to help migrants navigate across multiple social security systems, avoiding the challenges many migrants face. The effective implementation of social security agreements relies on political will and being perceived as beneficial by both countries, as well as agreements on how benefits will be calculated across systems and smooth coordination between relevant authorities. In addition to social security agreements, other unilateral instruments exist. In some countries, the private sector offers insurance products for migrants, including from large international companies, commercial banks, and other policies linked to remittances. Some origin countries also offer voluntary contributions for migrants while they are abroad.

**For migrants from Albania who are not covered by social security agreements, there are options to ensure coverage.** The private sector in Albania has products that are available and potentially accessible but their lack of tailoring to migrant workers limits their relevance and real accessibility. However, the Albanian Institute of Social Insurance (ISSH) offers a Voluntary Insurance scheme that can also be accessed by migrants while they are abroad. The voluntary scheme operates alongside the compulsory scheme and the supplementary scheme and migrants can contribute voluntarily toward coverage, receiving benefits in return for participation.

**Preliminary findings from a World Bank assessment of the voluntary scheme suggest that there is space to strengthen social insurance instruments for Albanian migrants.** The World Bank assessment follows a delivery chain framework to examine a migrant’s interaction with the scheme from initial outreach to exit. In terms of outreach, although some information is accessible through certain channels for migrants, outreach is mainly directed to general audiences in Albania. Registration and enrollment are straightforward but require either physical presence or the authorization of a family member to be present on the migrant’s behalf. In order to make contributions, there is an in-person requirement that may act as a significant barrier to access for migrants. Despite these barriers, migrants account for one third of all contributors. Most contributors overall opt for the minimum payment, indicating a preference for affordability or financial constraints. Migrants’ participation in the scheme is hindered by a lack of digital mechanisms, awareness, expected utility, and disposable income.

**Other programs can focus on incentivizing savings for migrants to ensure they are protected upon return.** This also includes strengthening financial services throughout the country such as through expanding financial institutions to rural areas or improving market transparency through information on available services. Countries can also compile information on savings and banking procedures to educate migrant workers on the importance of financial management and how to access banking facilities. In 2020, the State Bank of Pakistan launched the Roshan Digital Account (RDA), which offered convenient and regulated digital channels and enabled overseas Pakistanis to set up bank accounts fully digitally. The account also offered access to attractive investment opportunities such as government-issued savings certificates and allowed for the repatriation of funds without requiring permission from the State Bank. Savings schemes can be important tools to ensure the reintegration process is smooth.

**Offering psychological support as part of a reintegration program can be important for migrants, especially in the event of forced repatriation or a failed migration attempt.** Many
returnees have to deal with reintegration, adjust to life-changing events and a new social context, overcome culture shock and other social barriers, and find a job, all while coping with trauma, which makes every aspect of reintegration more challenging. To help with these processes, programs can offer psychological support, often with the assistance of NGOs. For instance, the Spanish "Return Plan to Spain" offers psychological accompaniment\textsuperscript{185} after migrants return, in collaboration with the NGO Volvemos. Similarly, the Ministry of Social Security and Labor in Lithuania offers psychological counselling for migrants,\textsuperscript{186} including return migrants and refugees. While there is often more focus on the economic aspects of reintegration, programs like those in Spain and Lithuania that combine psychosocial support with typical employment services are recognizing the multidimensional nature of the return migration experience.

\textbf{In Albania, returning migrants are eligible for a variety of support services, even if uptake is often low.} Returnees from households in need are a priority group to access national services such as economic aid, housing assistance, and free healthcare, if they comply with general eligibility criteria. Returnees can also receive assistance equalizing school documents, enrolling children in the educational system, and access additional services provided through the schools, such as courses in the Albanian language for children who were born abroad. Psychosocial counselling services are also available to children of returnees. However, according to a UNDP assessment\textsuperscript{187}, there are also accessibility issues particularly for the most vulnerable return migrants. There are often barriers to coverage for returnees without the correct documentation or access to any form of sustainable income. This is particularly prevalent in minority Roma and Egyptian communities. In addition, sometimes additional services could be offered specifically to returnees but would require coordination between different government agencies.

3.2.5 Options for the introduction of different services

\textbf{The Government of Albania could consider different options in its effort to promote the return and reintegration of its migrant population more effectively.} The table below provides a menu of alternatives. Option 1 focuses on those programmatic aspects that fall under the existing mandate of NAES, given its central role in supporting workers to access to the labor market, and could be adopted with limited additional costs. The subsequent program options build out the Ministries and Agencies involved and require additional budgetary allocations.

\textit{Figure 30: Options for Supporting Migrant Return and Reintegration}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option 1 - Under the mandate of NAES, with modest additional costs, if any</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.a. A comprehensive website\textsuperscript{188} including all information needed for return migrants in their journey back and reintegration process.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{185} https://volvemos.org/nuestro-equipo-acompanamiento-psicologico

\textsuperscript{186} Gudelis and Klimavičiūtė (2020).

\textsuperscript{187} Dhembo (2022).

\textsuperscript{188} Information to be included: (i) Reasons to return: cultural bonds, children and family, business, and employment opportunities; (ii) How to return: necessary documents, registration, procedures, transfer of benefits and pensions, referral to the diplomatic network; (iii) Availability of employment: job portals, how to start a business, referral to job centers; (iv) Service availability in return country: health care, social benefits, reintegration programs, pensions; and (v) Diaspora related information: networks, business opportunities, investment opportunities, volunteering, information on home country development.
### 1.b. Outreach services

Setting up an e-mail and hotline for questions, sending out informational e-mails, letters and newsletters to groups and lists of Albanian migrants. Setting relationships with diaspora and migrant groups, communities, and representatives to disseminate origin-country related opportunities.

**Benefits:** Outreach activities help ensure that return migrants are aware of their rights, benefits, and options available so they can make informed decisions. Raising awareness can increase the program uptake and assist in a safe and sustainable return.

**Costs:**
- Building and hosting a website
- Setting up an e-mail and hotline for answering questions + staffing needs for managing question inflow and providing answers
- Short-term staffing for writing and reviewing a guidebook

**Who else should be involved:**
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (along with diplomatic network)
- Diaspora groups and communities
- NGOs that work with Albanian emigrants in host countries
- Ministry of Health and Social Protection

**Country examples:**
- Website: Malaysia, Lithuania, Portugal
- Outreach: Ireland, Ireland (2), Mexico
- Returning guide: Spain, Portugal, Mexico

### 1.c. Returning guide

Making available a guide containing all information and answering most frequently asked questions on the process and benefits of return (all administrative steps, benefits, services available, etc.)

**Benefits:**
- Providing employment services before return: such as making registration possible, providing online training platforms, making available online job database platform, promoting returnee CVs.
- Tailored Public Employment Services once in the country: career guidance, individualized development plans, job referrals, vocational training, provision of language classes and recognition of formally and informally acquired skills and qualifications. All of these services would be designed taking into consideration specific barriers faced by return migrants.

**Costs:**
- Changes of server capacity and potential changes in the PES job platform
- Developing or outsourcing courses to make available online
- PES staffing if necessary, to assist migrants overseas
- Adapting PES services: additional staffing, additional training for counselors, providing language courses and changing operations or developing a dedicated pilot program.

**Who else should be involved:**
- Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
- National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications

**Country examples:**
- Employment services prior to return: Philippines, Spain
- Adapted PES: India, Portugal, Malaysia, Spain

### Option 2 - Under the mandate of NAES, with inputs from other agencies and additional budget: Option 1 + 2.a. + 2.b.

**2.a. Providing employment services before return:**

**2.b. Tailored Public Employment Services once in the country:**

**Benefits:**
- Finding employment is key for the sustainable reintegration of return migrants, as well as the main tool for them to attain self-sufficiency and social reintegration, which also implies psychosocial gains. Quick integration into the labor market also reduces the time beneficiaries spend in income support programs, among other assistance, thus reducing public expenditure.

**Costs:**
- Changes of server capacity and potential changes in the PES job platform
- Developing or outsourcing courses to make available online
- PES staffing if necessary, to assist migrants overseas
- Adapting PES services: additional staffing, additional training for counselors, providing language courses and changing operations or developing a dedicated pilot program.

**Who else should be involved:**
- Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth
- National Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications

**Country examples:**
- Employment services prior to return: Philippines, Spain
- Adapted PES: India, Portugal, Malaysia, Spain

### Option 3 - Implemented in partnership with other agencies; more budget: Option 2 + 3.a + 3.b. + 3.c. + 3.d. + 3.e. + 3.f.

**3.a. Logistical assistance for return:**

Assistance with travel coordination for air, land, sea tickets, moving assets and bringing family members. May include sharing the costs of airline tickets or moving costs, or providing lump-sum benefits to motivate migration back or simply to help with costs.
### 3.b. Housing assistance: helping the return migrant and family to find temporary or permanent housing before and/or after the journey back.

### 3.c. Emergency services for the forcibly returned: food, health checks, issuance of documentation, transfers to temporary shelters, and transportation provision for citizens sent back by other countries.

### 3.d. Financial assistance for reintegration: providing cash transfers to return migrants for a determined amount of time to help them cope with unemployment, adjustments and returning costs such as housing and moving assets.

### 3.e. Business assistance and mentoring: mentoring programs (e.g., connection to citizens who have previously returned and successfully integrated, or started a business), entrepreneurship training and business loans.

### 3.f. Psychological assistance: affordable or free provision of psychological assistance to ease any migration-related traumas and ease the adaptation process of social reintegration

#### Benefits:
Logistical assistance is crucial to families who wish to return and do not have the means or knowledge. It can be used to ease and incentivize the return of nationals who are abroad. Emergency services for the forcibly returned aims to smoothen their return, meet their basic needs and human rights and prepare them for the reintegration journey. Psychological assistance can be extremely helpful for return migrants to cope with their traumas, insecurities, and difficulties in adjusting – this helping them to attain a sustainable reintegration. During reintegration, cash assistance is crucial for families to cope with moving costs, reintegration costs and as a mean of subsistence while they are looking for employment. Business assistance has comparable benefits to those of employment assistance – helping nationals to establish, bring back or create a business as a mean to attain self-sufficiency, social reintegration and to contribute with the country’s economic development.

#### Costs:
- Additional staffing for logistical assistance
- Provision of lump-sums to cover or share flight and moving costs
- Provision of staff and adequate services for emergency for the forcibly returned AND/OR costs related coordination with local NGOs and IOs
- Staffing, digital platform and system for connecting business mentors with mentees
- Costs for providing financial assistance will largely depend on volume of returnees, on targeting method chosen, coverage and amount to be given.
- Setting up credit lines and related costs to commercial banks for distribution + interest rate subsidy (if any)
- Hiring services for provision of psychological assistance AND/OR coordination with existing services (public or NGO)

#### Who else should be involved:
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
- Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation
- NGOs and international organizations providing services on the ground
- Chambers of commerce

#### Country examples:
- Logistical assistance: Portugal
- Housing assistance: Ireland
- Emergency services: Mexico
- Financial assistance: Portugal, Spain
- Business assistance and mentoring: Ireland, Portugal
- Psychological assistance: Lithuania, Spain, Mexico

#### Option 4 - Requires joint implementation with other agencies in areas that go beyond activation and cash support, large budget: Option 3 + 4.a + 4.b + 4.c

### 4.a. Tax exemptions/breaks: The use of financial incentives to potentially attract more high-skilled migrants, and make return migration more affordable for the more vulnerable.

### 4.b. Expanding and facilitating family reunification rights: providing family members of return migrants with migration rights and access to the labor market significantly eases the process of migration, also providing incentives for return.
### Savings schemes for migrants:
options include tailored savings account with digital accessibility, incentives for frequent transactions and active usage, attractive interest rates, higher limits on insurance, greater flexibility for withdrawal of funds, or use of deposit as guarantee for a loan. Options can also be explored for working with ISSH to tailor social insurance schemes to migrants’ needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits:</th>
<th>Costs:</th>
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</table>
| Tax exemptions incentivize additional high-income migrants to return, which generates human capital gains for the country but also brings gains in consumption and income taxes – even if lower at first due to tax cuts. High skilled individuals may also generate positive productivity and innovation spillovers. On the other hand, it can also help more vulnerable families to afford their transition back into Albania. Likewise, improving family reunification rights not only incentivizes return, but also allows for additional labor supply, income taxes, and consumption in the country. | ▪ Foregone tax revenues for return migrants who would have returned anyway without the program  
▪ Program administration  
▪ Supplementary indirect expenditures with additional return migrants  
▪ Costs related to providing family reunification rights are closely tied to the types of services and benefits that the government will allow families to have access to (employment support, education, health, etc.) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who else should be involved:</th>
<th>Country examples:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ▪ Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation  
▪ General Directorate of Taxation  
▪ Ministry of Health and Social Protection  
▪ Bank of Albania  
▪ Institute of Social Security | Tax exemption: Malaysia, Portugal  
Family reunification rights: EU countries  
Savings schemes: Pakistan, Philippines |

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**Box 12. Challenges to reaching (and measuring) success**

**Even programs that demonstrate good practices in return and reintegration may have shortcomings that could hinder their effectiveness.** The Migration Policy Institute\(^\text{189}\) raises three key challenges that reintegration programs often face, which affect their outcomes. Similarly to how Albania can learn from good practices around the world, it is also possible to learn from common shortcomings, to avoid them going forward.

1) **‘Narrow reach and scope’ of programs.** Reintegration programs are often small in scale, reaching only a small percentage of return migrants with a narrow mandate for services. For instance, programs focusing only on quick economic reintegration might miss all the other dimensions of reintegration, which will affect sustainability and long-term outcomes. Programs designed at a small scale may also not be scalable, even if successful with a limited scope. Programs designed to be small are also often inadequately resourced, resulting in low awareness among potential beneficiaries and reduced uptake.\(^\text{190}\)

2) **Failure to address structural issues.** Out-migration is generally closely connected to local systemic problems. These problems can be economic, political, environmental, related to the provision of basic services, labor-market nuances, or due to conflict. However, a failure to address these persistent problems increases the likelihood that reintegration will not be successful nor sustainable. In order to increase efficacy, programs should be strategically aligned with other initiatives aimed at solving or improving structural issues and incorporate community involvement at all levels.

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\(^{189}\) Newland and Salant (2018).  
\(^{190}\) Newland and Salant (2018) give the specific example of a 2013 study with returnees in Albania, according to which “more than one-quarter of respondents had no knowledge of the Migration Counters that had been set up to help returnees, and nearly 20 percent believed they did not exist”.

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3) **Short timeframe.** Reintegration programs that aim for short-term success without providing extended support, follow-up, or transition plans are likely to be limited in impact. The reintegration process is multi-dimensional and is not immediate. Reintegration assistance that ends in the middle of this process may jeopardize its own effectiveness and result in migrants re-migrating or over relying on social assistance.

**Reintegration programs often struggle with data gathering and evaluation, limiting their impact.** A literature review on migration programs (including reintegration) conducted by McKenzie and Yang (2015) concludes that very few of these programs are fully evaluated. Without strong data gathering and evaluation, it is very hard to understand shortcomings of these programs, leading to lack of improvement and the repetition of errors. Data gathering and evaluation need to be built into the design of the program to ensure continual improvement and to be able to serve as an example to other programs. Most knowledge on best practices with relation to migrant reintegration relies on limited qualitative surveys, which are valuable for obtaining personal experience, but not necessarily generalizable.

**Conclusion**

The emigration of Albanians abroad has been a prominent part of Albania's history, as it has been the return to Albania of a sizable share of them. With one of the largest diasporas in Europe and Central Asia, migration has been a distinguishing feature of Albanian life. Emigration comes in many forms and ranges from seasonal to long-term, but is primarily driven by those seeking economic opportunities, although not all migrants find the success they hoped for abroad. Given that 90 percent of migrants are working age, they can continue to represent an important part of the Albanian workforce both by strengthening their connections to Albania while abroad and by returning to the country with newly acquired skills or experiences. In Albania, the return of migrants has led to important positive impacts such as local labor market effects driven by their high levels of entrepreneurship, but it can also be a challenge as some returnees struggle with poor economic outcomes, an exacerbation of factors that pushed them to leave. While different groups of returned migrants may have disparate outcomes, they all share an experience of migration and of return. Albania has now the opportunity to implement policies that promote returnees' rapid reintegration back into the country fostering local development.

The existing migration infrastructure in Albania has been progressively developed in the last decades, although it can be further strengthened by developing a global vision that enhances the migration experience and facilitates the reintegration of returned migrants. Albania's framework for managing migration has evolved over time, though several gaps limit the extent of its development impact. Governing structures have been expanded and efforts have been made to align migration with development goals. Formal migration routes are promoted in the National Strategy on Development and Integration, while other strategies have focused on building diaspora networks for economic development and to incentivize migrants' return. However, there continues to be room for improving five different aspects of the Albanian migration system such as (i) the collection and use of data for migration policymaking, (ii) the coordination between institutions, levels of government, and other stakeholders, (iii) the provision of tailored services to migrants in their unique contexts, (iv) the existence of bureaucratic barriers that jeopardize migrants' to access services, and (v) the capacity constraints that lead to gaps in support. Recognizing that migrants continue to be a key part of the global Albanian workforce creates the potential for a reform agenda...
that can focus on strengthening migration governance, while developing different services at all stages of the migration cycle. Embracing a globAL vision means that a migrant's potential to support the Albania economy exists in many ways, including while they are abroad, and can be targeted through an array of specific policy tools.

**Given the prominence of physical return for migrants and the demonstrated positive impacts it has had on the local economy, a globAL vision can begin with strengthening the services for the reintegration of returned migrants and can pave the way for additional policy reforms.** A stronger vision for reintegration invokes an important role in the migration infrastructure for NAES, the agency that manages employment and skills. NAES can build on its understanding of labor market dynamics and existing workforce development and job-matching services to embrace returned migrants as key members of the workforce. Rebranding under the globAL identity, with an expanded vision, can ensure that NAES is seen as a resource for all migrants, regardless of their skill levels or individual circumstances. It can be seen as a pathway to connect them to opportunities, whether to leverage the assets they bring or address the challenges they face.

**The pathway to reintegrating migrants in a globAL system can begin with concrete policy actions.** This report offers several options for policies that can empower NAES to embrace the globAL vision and provide comprehensive reintegration services at different levels of budget and in partnership with other agencies. A first step has already been taken with the enaction of the new National Strategy for Migration 2024-2030, which reflects several action points provided in this report. The new strategy reflects the aim of revising migration policies based on accurate and coordinated data and emphasizes the objective to create opportunities and incentives for emigrants to contribute to sustainable development in Albania. Beyond specific policies, the new migration strategy calls for a change in perspective, a reminder that the third of the population living outside the borders of Albania is not lost. Going forward, migration will continue to be an engine of growth, innovation and productivity around the world. Albania, with its global workforce, is well-positioned to reap the benefits.
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