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# International Migration in Albania

Results from the 2024 Albania Household Migration  
Survey

*In collaboration with :*



**giz**

Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



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# International Migration in Albania:

**Results from the 2024 Albania Household Migration Survey**

November 2025



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# Overview

## Background and Context

Migration is a defining feature of Albania's socioeconomic landscape, however the availability of comprehensive migration data in the country remains limited. With an estimated 1.6 million Albanians living abroad<sup>1</sup> and 108,503 having returned over the past 12 years, migration profoundly shapes Albania's demographic, economic, and social fabric. Over one-third of Albanian households have at least one member who has lived or is currently living abroad. However, previous data collection efforts have been fragmented, focusing on specific aspects of migration without capturing the full migration journey of migrants. Meanwhile, although collected by different government agencies, the potential of administrative data on migration is limited due to a lack of standardization and limited interoperability.

The Albania Household Migration Survey 2024 addresses critical data gaps that have historically hindered effective migration policy development in Albania. Implemented by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) in partnership with the World Bank, the survey provides the necessary data to conduct comprehensive analysis of migration patterns in the country. Covering 3,804 migrant households and 1,198 non-migrant households across all Albanian regions, this nationally representative survey provides unprecedented insights into the full migration lifecycle experienced by Albanian migrants—from pre-departure preparation, through the overseas experience, to post-return reintegration. The 2024 survey innovatively combines in-person interviews with household members in Albania and follow-up phone surveys with migrants abroad, yielding more accurate and detailed information than traditional approaches. This methodological advancement allows a better understanding of response biases in typical surveys and offers policymakers a clearer picture of migration's multifaceted impacts. Furthermore, the survey aligns with

the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, emphasizing the importance of collecting accurate, disaggregated data as the foundation for evidence-based policies.

## Main Findings from the Albania Migration Survey 2024

### *Profile of Albanian Migrants and Migration Patterns*

Albanian migration is predominantly characterized by young, male, mid-skilled workers seeking economic opportunities abroad, with significant geographical variations within the country. Current migrants are concentrated in the 25-44 age group, reflecting the economic motivations driving migration decisions. Nearly three-quarters of current migrants are male, with gender imbalances particularly pronounced in European destinations such as the United Kingdom, Greece, and Germany. The educational profiles reveal a positive selection into migration, with more than two thirds of migrants having completed upper secondary education, compared to 51 percent of non-migrants. The educational composition varies significantly by destination country, reflecting different migration pathways and self-selection patterns. The United States receives the most highly educated migrants (nearly one-third with tertiary education), followed by Germany and the United Kingdom, whereas, only 5 percent of Albanians in Greece have completed tertiary education. Migration patterns vary considerably across Albanian prefectures, with coastal and central regions experiencing higher migration rates due to their proximity to primary destinations such as Italy and Greece.

### *Pre-Departure Experiences and Preparation*

Before departure, migrants tend to work in lower-skilled occupations compared to non-migrants, earning around 10 percent less. Migrants' employment rates significantly decline as departure approaches. Three months prior to migration, three in four prospective work-

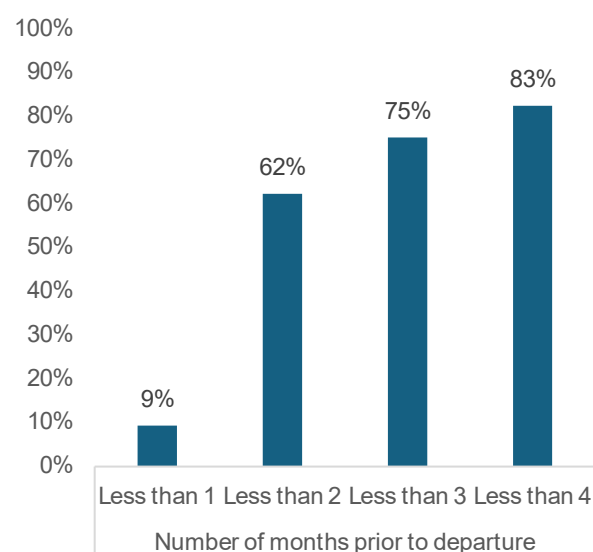
<sup>1</sup> INSTAT (2020).

ing-age migrants are employed, but this drops dramatically to 9 percent in the final month in Albania (Figure ES1, panel a). In comparison to non-migrants, prospective migrants tend to be employed in low- to mid-skilled jobs before migrating. Migrants are over-represented as 'Service and Sales Workers' and 'Craft and Related

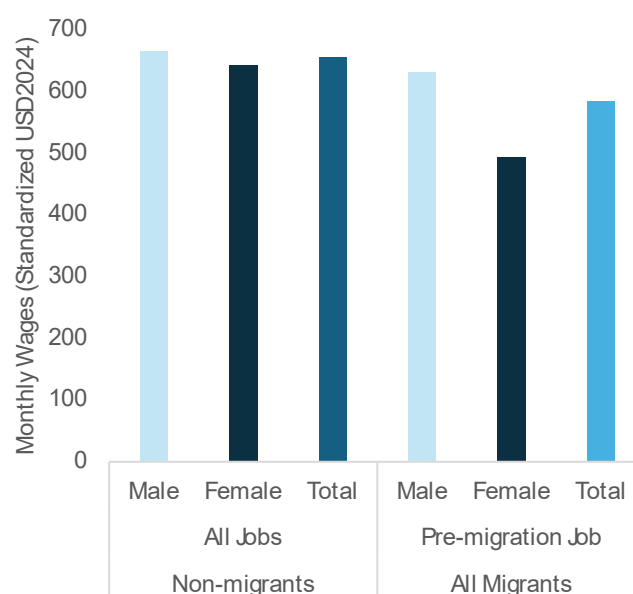
Trades' workers, while being less likely to hold white-collar positions such as 'Managers', 'Professionals' and 'Technicians'. Consequently, migrants earn, on average, about 10 percent less than non-migrants in Albania, and the earnings gap being even larger for female prospective migrants (Figure ES1, panel b).

Figure ES1. Labor market outcomes of migrants prior to departure

a. Employment rates



b. Wages



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Employment rates only include migrants who report any employment prior to migration.

While high income potential is a key driver of migration decisions, migrants consistently overestimate their potential earnings abroad, regardless of demographic background or destination. Migrants residing abroad expected to earn, on average, around USD 3,900 per month, but in reality, their actual earnings are only slightly above half that amount (USD 2,200). As a result, they save significantly less while abroad than they expected before migrating (USD 450 against expected USD 1,270). Similar findings are observed among migrants who have returned to Albania. The mismatched expectations persist across genders, education levels, and destination countries, with Greece showing the most severe gaps (52 percent earnings shortfall, 69 percent savings shortfall). This expectation gap represents a critical policy challenge, as it shows that migrants make important migration decisions based on imperfect information, which can lead to sub-optimal choices.

The utilization of pre-departure services in Albania remains limited, with most migrants relying on informal networks rather than structured support systems. Only a minority of prospective migrants access formal services to support their migration journey, with returnees showing particularly low engagement—just 5 percent used private employment agencies and 2 percent used public employment services. Current migrants demonstrate higher service utilization rate, with nearly one-fifth using international migration agencies and 16 percent accessing private and public employment agencies. Pre-departure skills training is even more limited, with approximately 24 percent of returnees and only 1 percent of current migrants receiving such preparation. Private providers dominate training delivery with 82 percent compared to 18 percent of training provided by public employment agencies, highlighting the limited role of government institutions in migration preparation.

A minority of migrants leave Albania with a secured formal job, although this varies by demographic characteristics and destination countries, reflecting different migration pathways and labor market access. Close to two-thirds of Albanian migrants leave the country without a job, while 37 percent leave with a formal employment agreement. More than half of current migrants abroad (56 percent) secured pre-departure employment contracts compared to only 16 percent of returnees, possibly reflecting higher educational attainment and different economic conditions. Female migrants are more likely than their male counterparts to have secured employment agreements, suggesting greater engagement with formal migration channels. Younger migrants aged 15-24 show the highest rate of pre-departure agreements (51 percent), although rates decline with age before rising again for individuals in the 55-64 age group. Patterns by destination country reveal that migrants to France, Germany, and

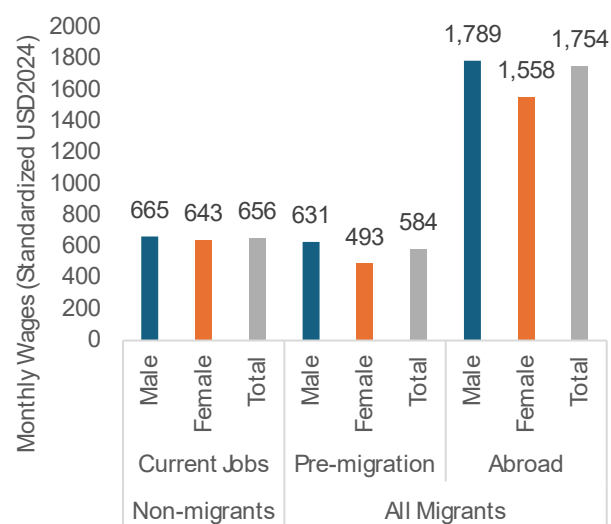
the United Kingdom are most likely to secure pre-departure employment (41-44 percent), while those heading to Italy, the United States, and Greece show lower rates (21-27 percent).

### Migration Experience and Labor Market Outcomes Abroad

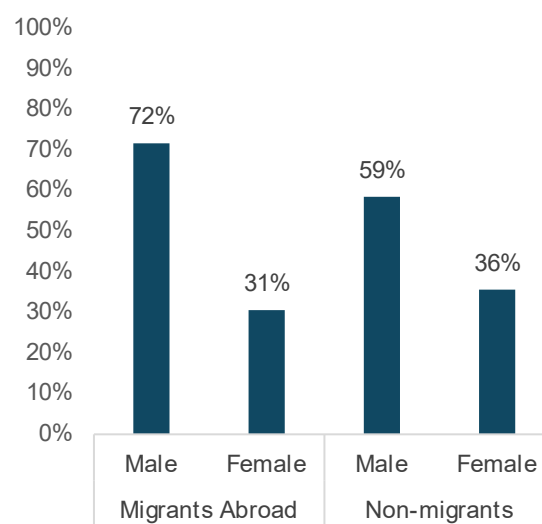
Albanian migrants achieve substantial income gains during their migration experience. On average, migrants earn 2.5 times more than they did before migrating, and nearly 2.5 times more than their peers who remain in Albania (Figure ES2, panel a). Male working-age migrants are also significantly more likely to be employed than male non-migrants (72 percent, compared to 59 percent), whereas female migrants tend to have lower employment rates than female non-migrants (Figure ES2, panel b). Overall, migration is associated with higher labor income for Albanians abroad.

Figure ES2. Labor market outcomes of migrants during migration

#### a. Wages



#### b. Employment rates



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

However, migrants face vulnerabilities, including higher likelihood of informal employment arrangements and more limited social protection coverage. Migration gains do not come without notable challenges. One in three migrants work without written employment contracts, compared to only 16 percent of non-migrant workers, and 27 percent hold limited-duration

contracts, compared to 12 percent of non-migrants. Additionally, 28 percent of employed migrants report that their employers do not provide pension contributions or paid annual leave, highlighting significant gaps in social protection. These vulnerabilities are particularly pronounced among younger, less educated, and recently arrived migrants.

Occupational downgrading also poses a significant challenge, with migrants frequently working in positions below their educational qualifications despite achieving higher absolute earnings. One in three current migrants and close to four in five returnees with tertiary education work in jobs requiring qualifications below their educational attainment. Male migrants dominate construction and manual labor sectors, with over 40 percent working as building framers and related trades workers, while female migrants concentrate in domestic cleaning (25 percent) and nursing/midwifery (17 percent). This occupational segmentation reflects broader trends in labor demand for migrant workers in destination countries and highlights a partial underutilization of their human capital.

**Migration costs are sizable, equivalent to approximately two months of pre-migration salary, and high living expenses abroad reduce the ability to save.** Albanian migrants currently abroad report total migration costs of around USD 1,100 which is equivalent to two months of an average salary. These initial costs are significantly higher than those reported by migrants who have returned to Albania (USD 370), partly reflecting more recent emigration and increased formalization requirements. Transportation remains the most common expense, alongside other important costs, including visa fees, medical check-ups, insurance, and, in some cases, orientation courses. Personal savings serve as the primary source of financing for 92-98 percent of migrants, though some also rely on external support from relatives and friends (42 and 41 percent of current migrants). Borrowing to finance migration affects about 15 percent of migrants overall, with higher rates among younger migrants (25-29 percent for individuals aged 15-34) and those with tertiary education (26 percent). High monthly spending abroad (around USD 1300-1600) further reduces savings potential, with more than 25 percent of returnee migrants unable to save any money by the time they return to Albania.

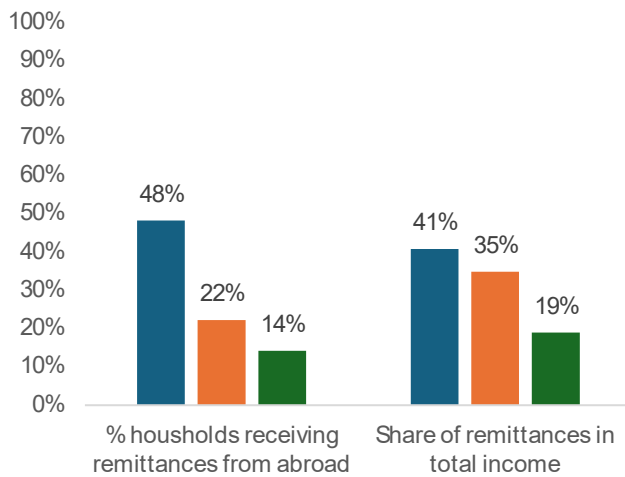
### *Migration Impact through Remittances and Human Capital Accumulation*

Remittances constitute a substantial economic resource, though their development potential remains largely untapped due to reliance on informal transfer channels and consumption-focused usage. Approximately half of migrant households received remittances within the 12 months prior to the survey (Figure ES3, panel a). For these beneficiary households, transfers from abroad represent 41 percent of their total income. Male and older migrants are significantly more likely to send remittances back home than female and younger migrants, reflecting higher employment rates and capacity to earn an income. Migrants tend to send remittances through informal channels, mostly via friends or themselves when visiting Albania, whereas formal channels, such as banks and money transfer operators are only used as a main method in only 30 percent of cases (Figure ES3, panel b). The widespread use of informal channels—particularly among returnees—limits the development potential of the financial sector and formal economic integration. Moreover, remittance usage focuses heavily on basic consumption, with 90 percent of households using these funds for food and daily needs, 36 percent for medical expenses, and 30 percent for education, while productive investments remain minimal (less than 2 percent for business expansion or agricultural inputs).

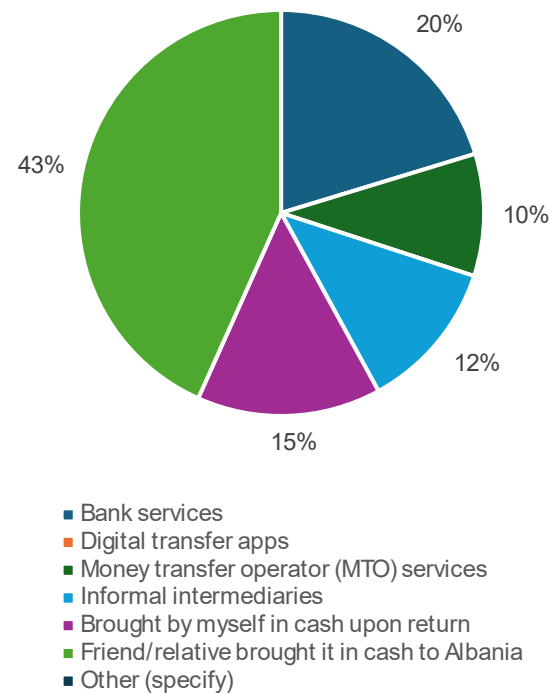


Figure ES3. International remittances

a. Share of households receiving remittances



b. Main remittance method by current migrants



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

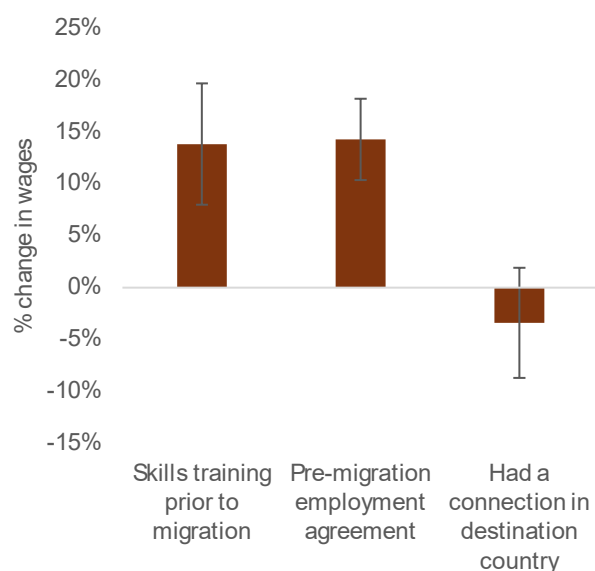
Migration is associated with human capital accumulation both directly—through education obtained abroad—and indirectly—through increased educational investments for family members remaining in Albania. More than one-quarter of current migrants with tertiary degrees obtained their education abroad, a significantly higher share than the 10 percent rate among returnees, indicating a growing trend of education-motivated migration among recent cohorts. Young migrants aged 15-24 show the highest participation in overseas education (with 20 percent having obtained their highest degrees abroad), while tertiary education dominates current enrollments abroad (59 percent of those studying). Indirect educational effects are also significant. Paternal migration is associated with a 7-percentage point increase in school enrollment for children aged 16-22 and a 14-percentage point increase for those aged 19-22, suggesting positive spillover effects of remittances on educational investments and higher aspirations within migrant families.

Preparation for migration and the use of formal structured pathways are also correlated with

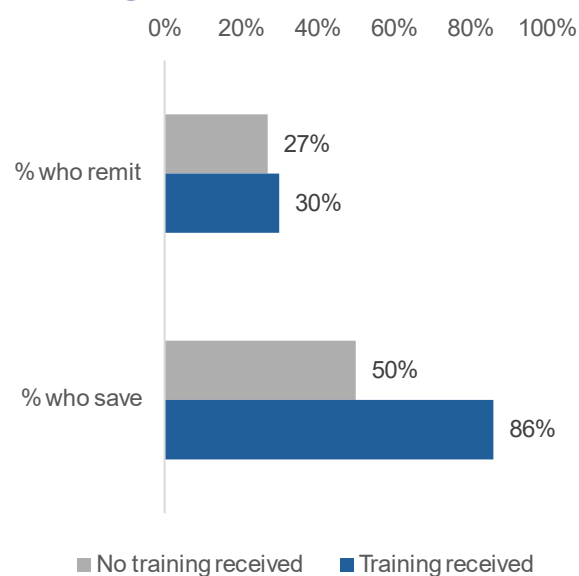
superior migration outcomes compared to informal approaches, positively reverting into the Albanian economy. Formal pre-departure measures, such as skills training and employment agreements, are associated with significantly higher wages abroad (Figure ES4, panel a) and smaller expectation gaps, even after accounting for differences in age, gender, education or year of migration. This emphasizes the importance of structured preparation programs in improving migration outcomes. Migrants who receive pre-departure skills training are significantly more likely to save and remit (Figure ES4, panel b). The correlation between formal employment arrangements and positive outcomes is particularly strong: migrants with written contracts and fixed-term arrangements demonstrate higher saving rates and greater likelihood of meeting financial expectations. Conversely, informal social connections alone do not translate into better economic outcomes, emphasizing the importance of structured support systems over reliance solely on diaspora networks. These findings underscore the critical role of investment in formal pre-departure programs and employment pathway facilitation.

Figure ES4. Association between pre-departure activities and earnings, saving and remittances abroad

a. Pre-departure activities and wages abroad



b. Savings and remittances by pre-migration training



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

### Return Migration and Reintegration Outcomes

Return migration is prevalent, with nearly half of all migrants identified in the survey having returned to Albania by 2024. The majority of return migration occurred recently, with 45 percent of all returnees having returned between 2020 and 2024, highlighting an acceleration in return rates. Return patterns vary significantly by destination, with migrants from neighboring countries like Italy and Greece more likely to return compared to those living in more distant destinations, reflecting both proximity factors and the nature of migration arrangements.

Returnees show progressive labor market integration over time despite initial challenges, with ultimate superior employment outcomes for those most established in the country compared to non-migrants. Recent returnees (those who arrived in 2020-2024) have the lowest employment rate at 46 percent, while those who returned in 2000-2004 reach a 93 percent employment rate, suggesting that time plays a central role in successful reintegration. Overall, working-age returnees achieve a 58 percent employment rate compared to 47 percent among non-migrants, but returnees who have

been back for less than a year are 22 percentage points less likely to be employed than similar non-migrants. The gender dimension reveals important differences, with male returnees achieving 67 percent employment compared to 59 percent for non-migrant males, whereas female returnees (34 percent) perform similarly to non-migrant females (36 percent), suggesting that migration experience particularly benefits male labor market outcomes.

Self-employment emerges as a reintegration strategy, particularly for early returnees and women, and although most operate without employees, they usually create more jobs than non-migrants. Self-employment rates among returnees increased from 7 percent for those returning in 2000-2004 to 29 percent for recent cohorts (2015-2024), peaking at 34 percent for those returning in 2010-2014. Early returning females show particularly high self-employment rates (41 percent) compared to males (25 percent), potentially reflecting barriers to formal wage employment. Although the vast majority of self-employed returnees operate as own-account workers (91-93 percent), regression analysis reveals that they are 0.8 percentage points more likely to become employers with paid em-



employees than non-migrants. This gap increases to 2.1 percentage points for those who spent more than six years abroad, highlighting the returnees' potential for job creation in Albanian economy. These findings are in line with past evidence showing that return migration after the Greek economic crisis in the early 2010s led to an increase in employment rates among non-migrant Albanians.<sup>2</sup>

The diversity of migration experiences and reasons to return shape the reintegration outcomes of return migrants. Albanian migrants return for a diversity of reasons, some according to their original plans and others unexpectedly. Early returnees—comprising 67 percent of those returning earlier than originally planned—are predominantly male (92 percent) and cite involuntary factors such as employer dismissal (26 percent) or inability to find work (10 percent) as primary return motivations. In contrast, planned returnees more often return due to contract completion (25 percent) or having achieved financial goals (6 percent). Successful migration experiences translate directly into superior reintegration outcomes, with returnees who worked abroad earning 3 percent more than non-migrants while those who did not work abroad earn 4 percent less, emphasizing the importance of supporting productive migration experiences.

## The way forward

Evidence from the 2024 Albania Household Migration Survey shows that migration can be a powerful driver of Albania's development, but outcomes depend on preparation, structures support, and sustained investment throughout the migration journey. The survey shows that migrants who access pre-departure services and secure jobs abroad achieve higher savings, remit more, and reintegrate more successfully into Albania's labor market. By contrast, those without preparation tend to overestimate their income and saving potential abroad, and may face negative shocks such as job losses or legal challenges that force them to unexpectedly

return to Albania. These findings underscore the need for tailored interventions—such as pre-departure training, financial literacy, and reintegration support—to maximize migration benefits for both individuals and the economy. However, such services remain limited, leaving significant potential underutilized.

Building a robust and sustainable data collection system is essential to inform evidence-based migration policy and turn migration into a long-term development asset for Albania. The 2024 survey provides an unprecedented window into the full migration cycle, filling major data gaps and enabling targeted policy design. However, moving forward, there is still space for improvement to address existing limitations, especially the survey's one-off nature. To ensure sustainability, embedding migration modules in regular national surveys and expanding definitions to capture different forms of migration is fundamental. The development of longitudinal survey would also enhance understanding of migration trajectories, particularly important given Albania's high temporary migration rates that single-point surveys may not fully capture. Moreover, strengthened cooperation with main destination countries could provide more accurate data on migrant outcomes while abroad, addressing current reliance on household members reporting that may introduce accuracy concerns. Finally, enhancing inter-agency data sharing, linking administrative records of border crossings, visas and permits, taxes, social security, or welfare programs, would improve tracking of migrant outcomes. With these sustained data efforts, Albania can design evidence-based programs that harness migration for job creation, investment, and human capital development, positioning it as a catalyst for long-term prosperity.

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2 Hausmann, and Nedelkoska (2018).



# Introduction

Migration is a persistent reality in Albania that shapes the country's social and economic landscape. Albania is a country on the move, with an estimated 1.6 million<sup>3</sup> Albanians living abroad and a growing number returning home. According to the 2023 Census, 108,503 Albanians have returned over the past 12 years, including 25,595 in 2023 alone. Albanian migrants—whether currently abroad or returnees—represent a potentially significant driver of economic development for the country via a multiplicity of channels.<sup>4</sup> Effectively channeling their contributions requires a clear understanding of their profiles and experiences. This, in turn, depends on the availability of continuous, up-to-date data to inform policies tailored to the diverse needs of both migrants abroad and those who have returned.

Despite recent efforts, the availability of migration data in Albania, as in many other countries,

is limited. Over the last two decades, Albania has continuously invested in strengthening data capacity on migration, including migration questions in general regular surveys (e.g., LSMS, LFS) and ad-hoc migration surveys. Recent work by the World Bank highlights gaps remain in Albania's migration data ecosystem.<sup>5</sup> Available data sources on migration do not fully capture the extent of international mobility (see Box 1). Most of the previous attempts do not collect information on past migration history, thus not being able to capture what part of the population in the country returned from a migration experience. Information on migrants currently abroad is even scarcer and may not be entirely accurate, given that questions about migrants are asked to household members staying in the country and not to migrants themselves. Moreover, information mostly consists of snapshots of migrants' situations at one specific period of time.

## Box 1: Migration in current datasets in Albania

Albania has different surveys, both periodic and ad-hoc, which include questions about current or return migrants. However, these data sources tend not to cover all types of migrants and their migration trajectories, which makes linkages between migration, human capital and development difficult to analyze. Examples of relevant data sources with information on migration are the following:

- *Labor Force Survey: The LFS is a nationwide survey conducted on a quarterly basis to collect data on the population's labor market status, as well as other demographic and socio-economic characteristics. It captures return migration relatively well by asking whether a person "ever worked abroad." On the other hand, it is only able to capture current migrants who "work abroad while residing in Albania," missing the majority of migrants that currently reside abroad.*
- *Living Standard Measurement Survey: this multi-purpose survey was one of the main sources of information to measure living conditions until it was discontinued in 2012. The survey captured current migrants and returnees relatively well given its broad definition. It asked about any household member currently living abroad (current migrant), or any member that ever lived abroad for at least 3 months and was now living in Albania (returnee).*
- *Return Migration Survey: This one-off survey implemented in 2013 provided more in-depth questions about migrants that had returned to Albania, including their migration histories, reasons behind em-*

3 INSTAT (2020).

4 World Bank. (2024).

5 Ibid.

igration and return, employment, savings, investments and remittances. Given the focus on return migration, the survey did not collect information about current migrants abroad, limiting the understanding about who remains abroad and who returns to Albania. Furthermore, it did not include more detailed labor market history and earnings of return migrants to assess the impact of the migration experience on income trajectories.

- *Household Migration Survey 2019: The main goal of this ad-hoc survey was to provide data aggregates on the stock and flows of migration (outflows of Albanians migrating abroad, and inflows of Albanian migrants returning to the country as well as foreign workers) between 2011 and 2019, based on a large representative sample. It has also collected socio-economic profiles of migrants and analyzed the motivations and plans of migrants. Given the focus of study, the survey does provide limited information on the personal socio-economic and labor market history of migrants.*

The lack of necessary data hinders the development of an evidence-based system to inform program design and decision-making. Based on the migration and return experience, different groups of migrants face different barriers and opportunities. Addressing existing data challenges is key to comprehensively understanding the diversity of migrants, their return experiences, needs, and challenges they face. This understanding is necessary to effectively provide tailored services to migrants at different stages of their migration journey, in order to enhance the benefits and mitigate the costs of migration for migrants, their families and the country more broadly. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018), recognizing the current data shortages on migration globally, includes as its first objective the need “to collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies”. These efforts include: (i) integrating migration-related topics in national censuses; (ii) conducting household surveys to collect information on the social and economic integration of migrants or adding standard migration modules to existing household surveys; and (iii) enhancing collaboration between government agencies responsible for migration data to produce migration-related statistics, including by using administrative records for statistical purposes.

In this context, the Albania Household Migration Survey 2024 is a necessary step in filling the data gap and an important tool that produces the necessary data on the migrant population. Since 2021, the World Bank has

supported the Albanian government, including by contributing to the development of the National Migration Strategy launched in May 2024. A key policy recommendation of the strategy focused on the need to strengthen data collection efforts (World Bank, 2024). Since then, the World Bank has partnered with the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) to support the implementation of that action and conducted the Albania Household Migration Survey 2024. The Albania Household Migration Survey 2024 is the first survey in the country that jointly tracks the migration and labor market history of migrants—from before migrating until the return to Albania—allowing to better understand the economic impact of migration in the country. The main in-person survey to household members in Albania is complemented by a follow-up phone survey directly to migrants abroad, which increases the accuracy of the collected information. By collecting data from both sources, the Albania Household Migration Survey 2024 improves the reliability of the information typically collected indirectly through household members in standard surveys.

The Albania Household Migration Survey 2024 has been designed to analyze the migration journey and understand its socio-economic effects on migrants, their families and the country. The survey collects information about migrants’ trajectories, starting from pre-departure, departure, time abroad, and return. It includes demographic characteristics, employment history, income, savings, remittances, access to services, social protection, and human capital development, among others (see Box

2). The collected data provides information on the expectations, gains, costs, vulnerabilities, and inefficiencies associated with migration throughout the life cycle. It also collects information about migrants' families, as well as non-migrant households in order to provide relevant comparisons. The survey data can inform the main policy questions related to emigration and human capital, job creation, savings and investments, and access and effectiveness of

different services for emigrants. Additionally, the survey collects data on the diaspora and how its members contribute to economic development at home, and provides information to assess the prevalence and impact of return migration on the Albanian economy, the main channels through which these impacts manifest themselves, and the main barriers limiting positive impacts.

## Box 2. The Albania Migration Survey 2024

The Albania Migration Survey 2024 is a nationally representative survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and the World Bank. It contains information on 3,804 migrant households and 1,198 non-migrant households across all regions of Albania. Migrant households are defined as households with at least one member who was residing abroad at the time of the survey (current migrant) or who had resided abroad in the past and had returned to Albania (returned migrant).

The Albania Migration Survey 2024 fills existing data gaps. It complements previous existing datasets on labor markets and international migration in Albania – such as the Census 2011 and 2023, the Labor Force Survey, the Living Standards Measurement Survey, the Return Migration Survey of 2013, and the Household Migration Survey 2019– as it focuses on the life cycle of the migration process. The goal of the survey is to better understand the demographic and socio-economic profile of migrants, gaps in expectations, vulnerabilities faced by migrants in destination countries and upon return, differences in the economic benefits of migration, as well as the reintegration of returned migrants into home labor market, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

The survey consists of 7 modules with questions about demographic information on all household members, information on migration status of each household member, employment for household members aged 15–64, previous work experience for adults, either abroad or returned, household-level characteristics for all households, detailed information on migration experience of returnees, and follow-up interviews with migrants abroad regarding their experience. The survey lays an emphasis on questions related to migrants' labor market outcomes before migrating, during the latest migration episode, and upon return to Albania.

The sampling methodology for the Albania Migration Survey 2024 is based on a two-stage approach consisting of: (i) the selection of primary sampling units (PSUs) based on the relative size of the migrant population, first in each prefecture and then in each PSU; and (ii) the random selection of households within each PSU based on two groups, migrant and non-migrant households (used as control group). 200 PSUs were selected based on the number of migrant households in each stratum defined by the Enumeration Area (EA) and prefecture level. See the Technical Annex for more details about the survey methodology.

This report complements previous analytical work on migration conducted by the World Bank and presents information from the Albania Household Migration Survey 2024, highlighting key findings emerging from the data. The

report "International Mobility as a Development Strategy" (World Bank, 2024) provided a broad overview of trends, drivers, and impacts of migration in Albania, as well as a legal and institutional analysis on the topic (see Box 3). The re-

port identified data gaps—particularly the lack of information tracking migrants’ outcomes over time—which prevent a good understanding of how migration affects labor market outcomes and which interventions can effectively improve the migration experience. This report fills existing knowledge gaps by using the recently implemented 2024 Albania Migration Survey. It provides salient features of migrants and their households and how they differ from non-migrant households in Albania. It also reports the evolution of migrants’ employment, human capital, and financial trajectories across the migration life cycle and beyond, to assess

the impact of migration on key drivers of economic development. In analyzing migrants’ profile and outcomes, the report distinguishes between current migrants (those currently living abroad) and return migrants (those who migrated abroad in the past and returned to Albania). This distinction is important because the two groups differ not only in their characteristics (see section 2.2), but also, in their place of residence (abroad or in Albania), therefore, they may require different types of support services, with different delivery mechanisms and responsible agencies.<sup>6</sup>

### Box 3: Main findings of the report *International Mobility as a Development Strategy*

Albania is a country with a highly mobile population and has one of the largest diasporas in Europe. More than one-third of the Albanian population is currently living abroad. The primary driver of emigration are the large wage differentials with main destination countries. Albania has the lowest average wages in the Western Balkans. Even after adjusting for cost of living across countries, the average wages in Albania are less than 20 percent of those in Germany or Austria, and 25 – 33 percent of those in Italy and Greece, respectively. Although difficult to quantify precisely, return migration is also substantial, with factors such as retirement prospects, family reunification, or a desire to reconnect with cultural roots likely influencing the decision to return to Albania.

Migration generates substantial economic benefits for Albania. Remittances represent close to 10 percent of GDP in 2022 and 18 percent of household income, making them the second most important source of income after labor. For one in four beneficiary households, remittances are the sole source of income. Remittances are a powerful poverty-alleviation tool: in the absence of remittances the poverty rate is estimated to be 30 percentage points higher. The report also showcases evidence of positive impacts of return migration on non-migrant employment and wages after the 2008 financial crisis. Other international financial flows are also significant, with foreign direct investment reaching 7.7 percent of GDP in 2022, with significant diaspora contributions. Albanians abroad also support the country through philanthropy, business networks, and knowledge transfers.

However, migration has also exacerbated demographic challenges, putting pressure on the supply of labor. Albania’s population has declined by 10 percent since 1990, with an even sharper reduction in the working-age population. Labor shortages are emerging, with 45 percent of firms reporting inability to fill vacancies due to a lack of workers, and many attributing this issue to emigration. Sectors most affected include production, mining, construction, services, and agro-processing. Projections in the report indicate labor shortages will worsen through 2030, particularly for low-skilled jobs.

Albania has developed its legal and institutional framework to effectively manage migration flows and support its mobile population, but challenges remain. Through various legislative and organizational initiatives, Albania has developed its migration governance structures and strengthened institutional col-

laboration across different institutions. Albanian migrants have well established rights under the law, and some receive services along the different stages of the migration cycle. However, the developmental impact of migration is limited by several issues, including: (i) high costs of sending remittances, prevalence of informal channels, and high usage for consumption purposes; (ii) reintegration challenges faced by certain groups of return migrants, particularly among those who return unexpectedly in Albania; (iii) limited availability and access to tailored services for migrants, hindered by bureaucratic, capacity and coordination challenges across different stakeholders responsible for providing support to migrants; and (iv) significant data gaps that hinder evidence-based policymaking for migration.

The report proposes transforming Albania's approach through a "globAL" workforce concept. Rather than viewing emigrants as lost resources, this vision recognizes that the population abroad remains connected and can contribute to development in multiple ways—through physical return, remittances, remote knowledge transfer, business networks, diaspora investments, trade connections, and international collaboration. The "globAL" workforce framework acknowledges that migrants 'return' in diverse forms—some physically, others through capital and knowledge flows, and many by maintaining simultaneous connections to Albania and host countries. Showcasing international examples, the report highlights the potential of this broader approach.

The remainder of the report is organized as follows. Section 2 provides information on the profile of migrants and their households, comparing them with the non-migrant population. Section 3 describes the migration journey—from pre-departure to return phase—analyzing

the potential benefits, costs and vulnerabilities for migrants and their families. Section 4 summarizes the key findings and provides some policy recommendations. The survey methodology is outlined on Annex 1.



# Profile of Migrants

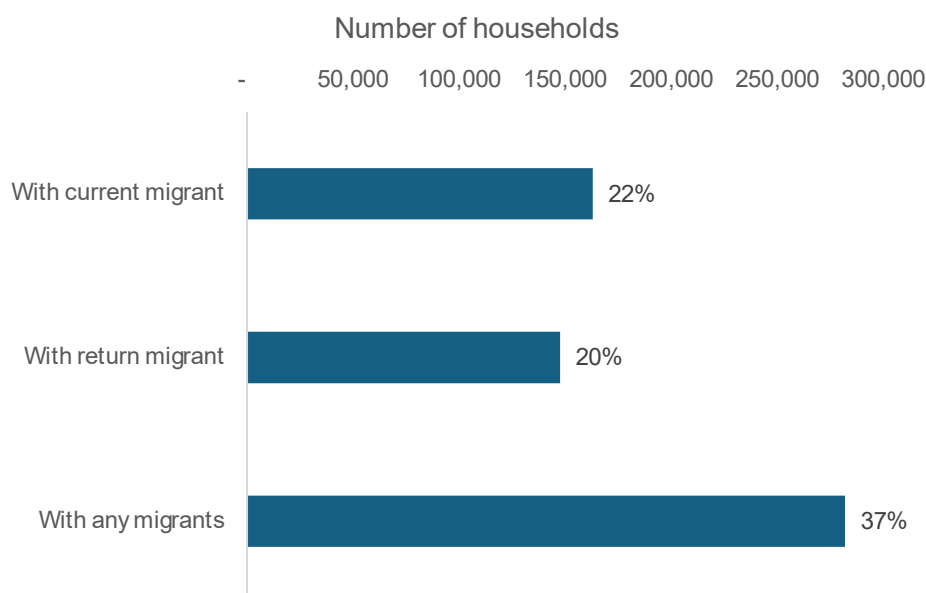
## 2.1 Migrant Households

More than one in three households in Albania have at least one migrant member. According to the Albania Migration Survey 2024, 37 percent of Albanian households have a migrant member (Figure 37). Migrant households are defined as those that have at least a member who is currently abroad (current migrants) or who lived abroad in the past and has since returned to Albania (returnees). The share of households with current migrants and those with returnees is similar (22 and 20 percent, respectively). Furthermore, five percent of Albanian households have several members who are either current migrants or returnees.

While migration is prevalent across the country, there are notable geographical differences. Migration is more common in the coastal and central regions (Figure 2). Historically, coastal

regions have experienced higher migration rates given their proximity to main destination countries such as Italy and Greece.<sup>7</sup> Data reveals that the prefecture of Berat stands out as the prefecture with the highest overall migration rate, with approximately 69 percent of households having at least one member abroad or who has returned. In the prefectures of Vlore and Lezhe, one in two households also report experiencing migration of some of their members. While Berat and Vlore have the highest share of households with return migrants, Lezhe leads in the share of households with members currently abroad. On the other hand, the prefectures of Gjirokaster, Kukes and Diber, experience relatively lower migration rates. These prefectures have traditionally witnessed greater isolation along with high levels of poverty.<sup>8</sup> The prefecture of Tirana, which is the capital and largest prefecture, also has a relatively low share of households with migrants abroad, potentially reflecting greater local economic opportunities that reduce the need for outward migration.

Figure 1. Share of migrant households in Albania



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

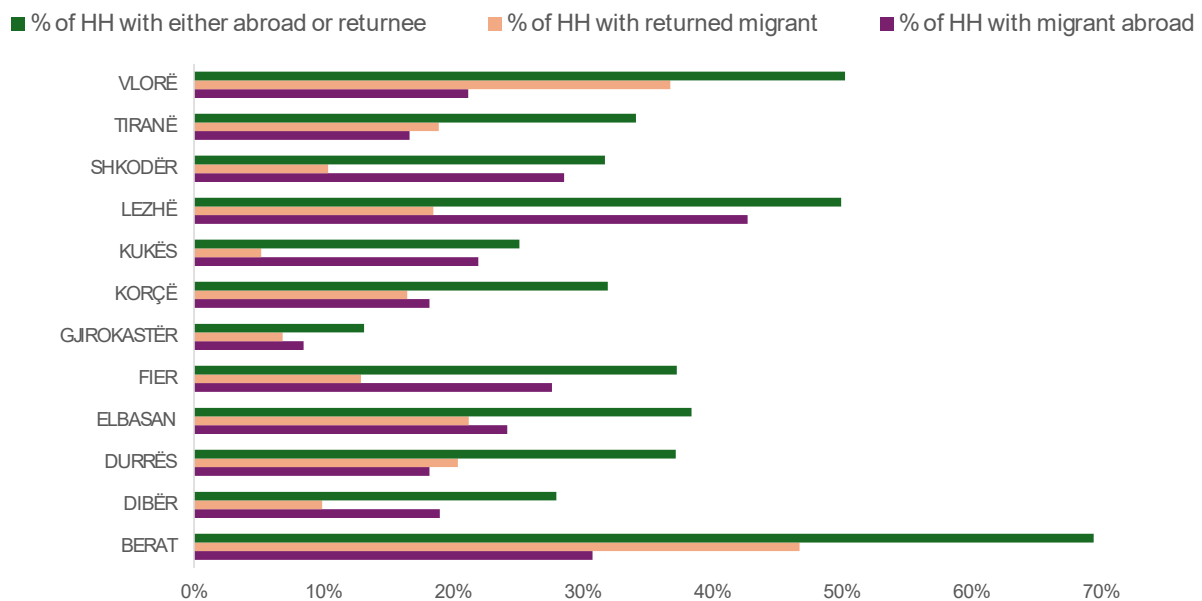
Note: Data labels refer to the percentage of migrant households in the country

<sup>7</sup> Gëdeshi and Jorgoni (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Betti et al. (2018).



Figure 2. Percentage of households with current and return migrants by prefecture



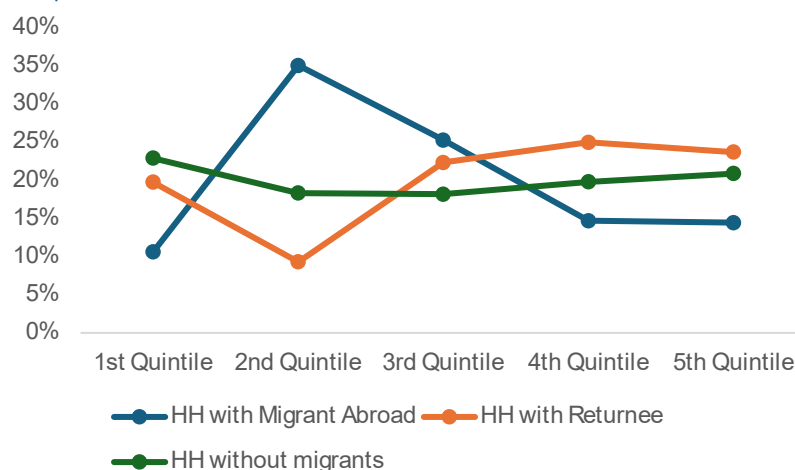
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Households with a migrant abroad tend to belong to low to middle income groups, while those with return migrants are more concentrated among higher-income households. The distribution of migrant and non-migrant households across income quintiles reveals that households with members currently abroad are more concentrated in the second (35 percent) and third quintiles (25 percent), accounting for over 60 percent of this group (Figure 3, panel a). Migrant households also have the lowest concentration of households in the lowest quintile (11 percent). On the other hand, households with returnees are more evenly distributed across the higher quintiles, peaking at the fourth

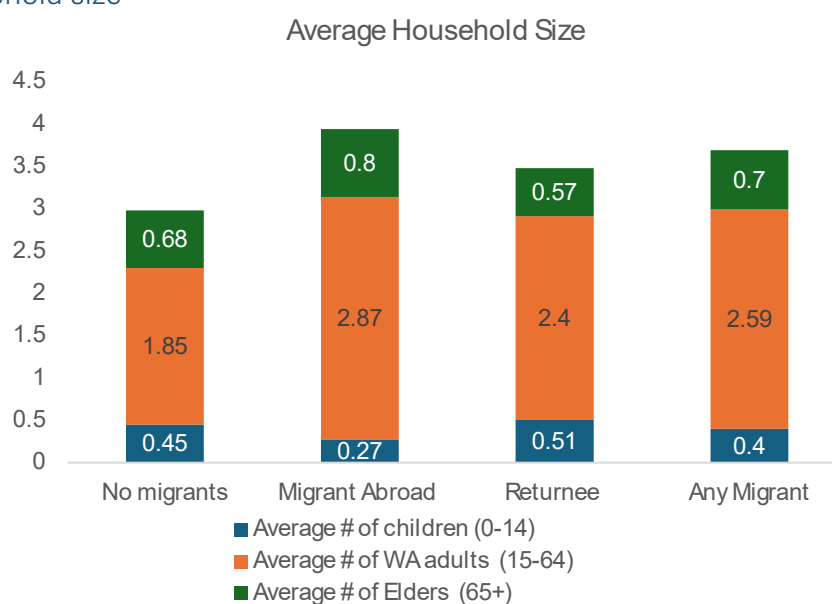
quintile (25 percent) and fifth quintiles (24 percent). This may indicate that return migration is more common among those who have achieved some level of economic stability abroad or have successfully reintegrated. It may also reflect a selection effect, as return migrants are typically older than current ones (having completed their migration episode), and income is positively correlated with age and experience. Non-migrant households are more evenly distributed across all quintiles, ranging between 18 to 23 percent. These patterns suggest that migration is both a response to and a driver of household economic conditions.

Figure 3. Comparison of migrant and non-migrant households

Panel a: By income quintile



Panel b: Household size



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

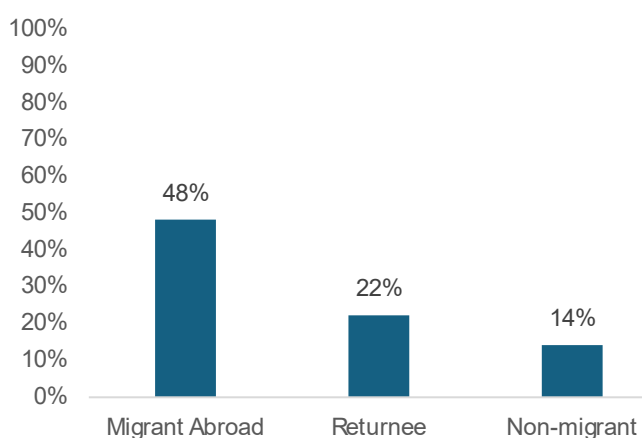
Migrant households tend to be larger in size, with more working-age adults. Households with migrants currently abroad have the largest average household size (3.9 members), compared to households with returnees (3.5 members) and non-migrant households which have on average fewer than 3 members (Figure 3, panel b). At the same time, households with migrants abroad have the lowest average number of children (0.3). This may reflect the higher non-monetary costs of migration for individuals with children – hence less migration among households with children– while migration among individuals without children during child-bearing years may also delay child-bearing. In contrast, households with returnees report the highest average number of children (0.5), indicating a different family structure, possibly due to differences in age structure, as returnees are, on average, older than current migrants. Migrant households have on average 2.9 working-age adults (15-64 years), compared to 2.4 in households with returnees and just 1.9 in non-migrant households. In terms of elderly members (65+), migrant households also have slightly older individuals (0.8) than non-migrant households (0.7), or households with return migrants (0.6).

non-migrant households, accounting for a large share of total income. About half of migrant households received remittances from abroad within the last 12 months prior to the survey, representing 41 percent of their total income (Figure 4, Panel a and Panel b). Just over one-fifth of households with return migrants also received remittances during the same period, which represent over one-third (35 percent) of their total income. Although this share is lower than that for households with a migrant currently abroad, it is higher than that of non-migrant households. This suggests that migration continues to have prolonged effects through remittance flows even after migrants return, possibly through the expansion of international networks. Interestingly, 14 percent of non-migrant households also receive remittances from abroad, accounting for about one-fifth of their total income. This shows spillover effects of migration with some non-migrant households continuing to benefit from extended family or social networks abroad.

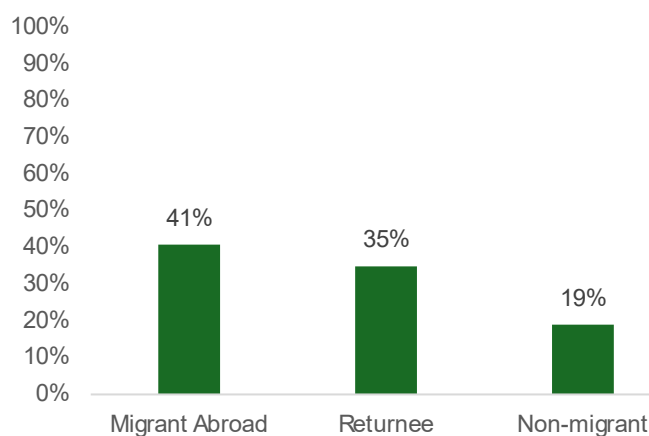
Remittances are a significant source for migrant households and, to a lesser extent, for

Figure 4. The role of remittances

Panel a: Share of household receiving remittances from abroad by household type



Panel b: Share of remittances in total household income



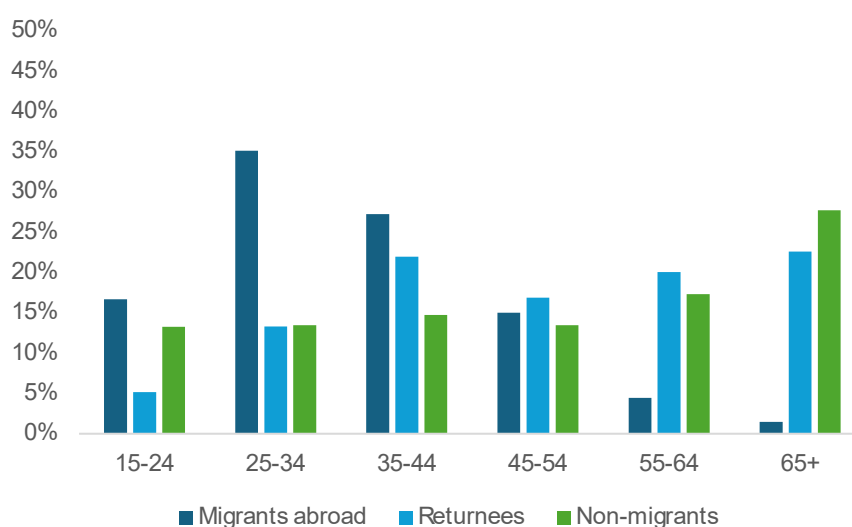
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.3

## 2.2. Profile of Migrants

The emerging profile of migrants is predominantly prime-age, male, and mid-skilled.<sup>9</sup> Migrants currently abroad are mostly younger working-age individuals, whereas older adults are more prevalent among returnees and non-migrants. Over one third of migrants currently abroad (35 percent) are between 25–34 years old, and an additional 27 percent fall within

the 35–44 age-group (Figure 5). In contrast, the age profile of returnees is more similar to the non-migrant population and is more evenly spread across age groups. Nearly one in four returnees is 65 years old or older, and another 20 percent are between 55–64 years old. As a comparison, non-migrants have the highest share of the population aged 65 and over (28 percent), along with a relatively even distribution across the other age groups.

Figure 5. Age distribution by migration status



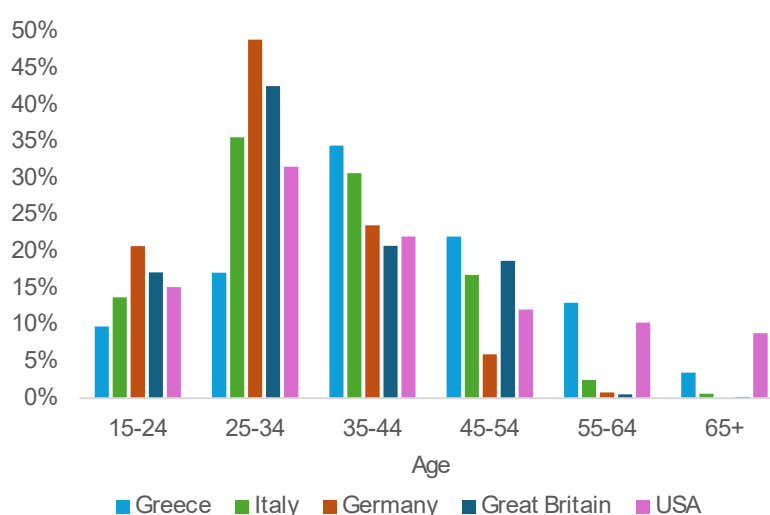
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Compared to statistics gathered in destination countries, data on migrants from household surveys in origin countries are often more effective at identifying short-term and seasonal migration episodes, and less effective at estimating permanent or whole-household migration. This is evident in the overall profile of migrants, given that short-term migration is often more low-skilled and male dominated.

The age profile of Albanian migrants varies considerably depending on the destination country, although prime-age workers (25-44) are over-represented. Younger Albanians dominate migration flows to most countries, while older migrants are more prevalent in traditional destinations such as the USA and Greece, where migration pathways have developed over several decades. Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) attract predominantly younger migrants, with nearly half (49 percent) of migrants in Germany and 43 percent in the UK falling in the 25-34 age-group (Figure 6). Italy also hosts a significant share of young migrants, though its migrant population is more evenly distributed across age groups. Notably, Italy has the largest

proportion of migrants falling in the 35-44 and 25-34 age groups (31 and 36 percent respectively). The United States (US) displays a broader age distribution, with substantial shares among both younger migrants (32 percent of population aged 25-34) and older age groups (19 percent aged 55 or above). This pattern suggests a more established diaspora, with different generations deciding to establish long-term roots in the host country.

Figure 6. Age distribution of migrants currently abroad by destination country

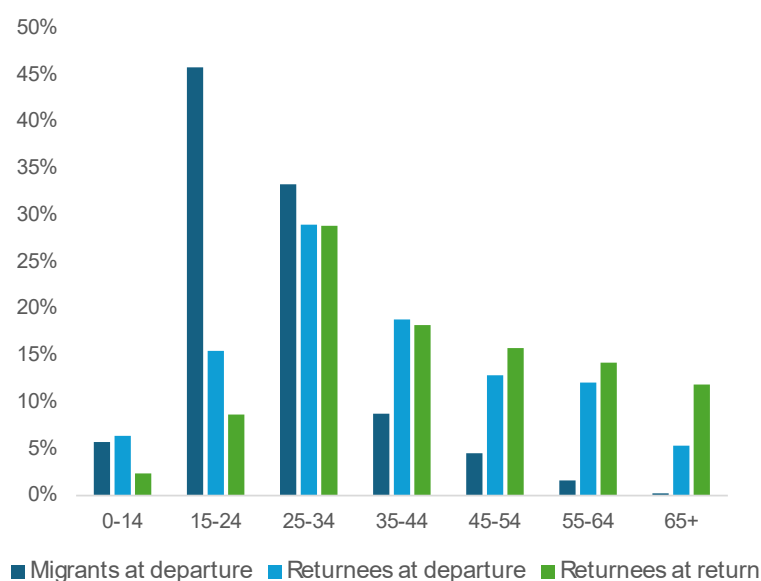


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Migrants tend to migrate at a young age, particularly among the more recent waves and they return later in life after relatively long periods abroad, although still at a younger average age than the non-migrant population. Nearly 80 percent of current migrants left at a young age, highlighting the youth-driven nature of migration. Specifically, 46 percent of individuals migrated between the ages of 15-24 years, and another 33 percent departed between the ages of 25-34 years (Figure 7). In contrast, returnees exhibit a more balanced age profile at the time of migration. Only 16 percent migrated as youth (15-24 years), while larger shares left at older ages—29 percent left between 25-34 years, 19

percent between 35-44 years, and 13 percent between 45-54 years. The age distribution at the time of return further suggests that return migration often occurs later in life. Only 9 percent of returnees were between 15-24 years upon return, while 29 percent were between 25-34 years, and more than 60 percent were 35 or older. Notably, 12 percent of returnees were 65 or above, indicating that many return after long periods abroad, sometimes following retirement. Nevertheless, migrants return at a younger average age compared to the non-migrant population, contributing to a reduction in population aging in the country.

Figure 7. Age of migrants at departure and return



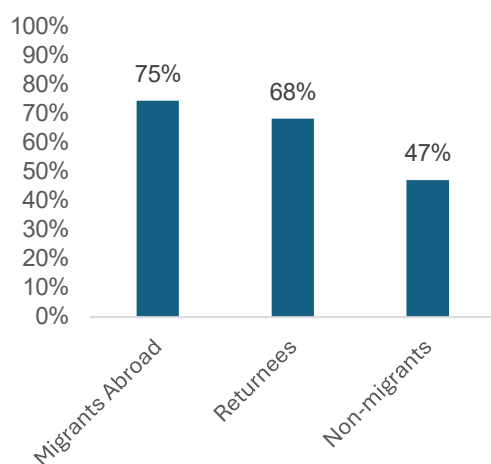
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Albanian migration emerges as a male-dominated phenomenon, particularly among those migrating to European countries. About three out of four migrants currently living abroad are male (Figure 8, panel a). Similarly, nearly 70 percent of return migrants are male. This contrasts with the non-migrant population, where women (53 percent) slightly outnumber men. Gender imbalances are even more pronounced in certain bilateral migration corridors, particularly in the UK (86 percent), Greece (79 percent), and Germany (76 percent) (Figure 8, panel b). On the

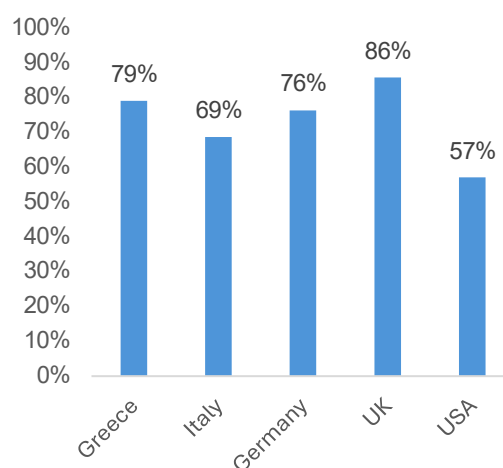
other hand, migration to the US shows a more even gender distribution, with men accounting for about 57 percent of migrants in the country. The gender composition of migrants also varies by skill level. While highly educated migrants show near gender parity (with men representing 54 percent of those with tertiary education), low-skilled migrants are predominantly male (77 percent of those with upper secondary education, and 83 percent of those with lower education levels).

Figure 8. Migrants by sex and country of destination

Panel a. Male migrants (in %)



Panel b. Male migrants (in %) by destination country

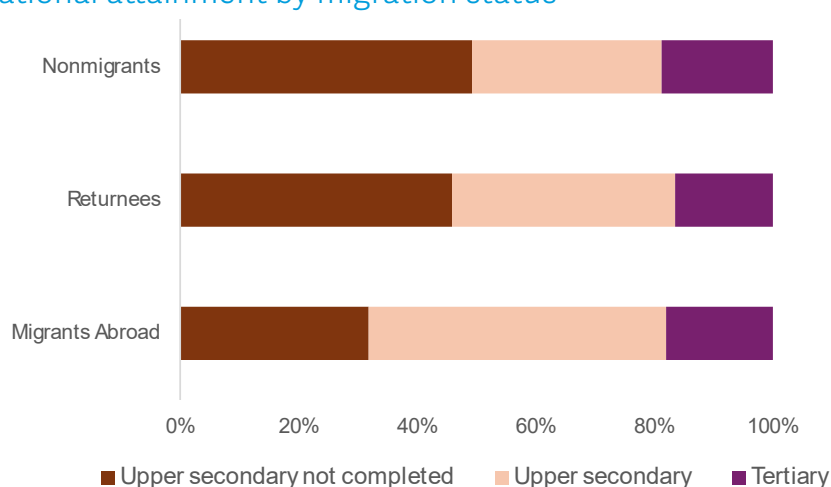


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Migrants are more likely to have middle education levels compared to the population in Albania. Those currently abroad tend to be more educated than both returnees and non-migrants, with more than two thirds having completed upper secondary education, compared to 54 percent of returnees and 51 percent of non-migrants (Figure 9). Additionally, 18 percent of current migrants have attained tertiary education, which is slightly higher than the 16 percent among returnees and comparable to the 19 percent among non-migrants. These figures suggest an increasingly positive selection into

migration, especially among migrants abroad, as individuals with higher educational attainment may be more likely or better positioned to migrate, integrate into foreign labor markets, or pursue further educational opportunities. The relatively lower educational levels observed among returnees may reflect older migration cohorts, or different migration outcomes, including the return of those with fewer opportunities to remain abroad, a preference for short-term migration episodes, or the reintegration of migrants who faced limited success in destination countries.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 9. Educational attainment by migration status



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

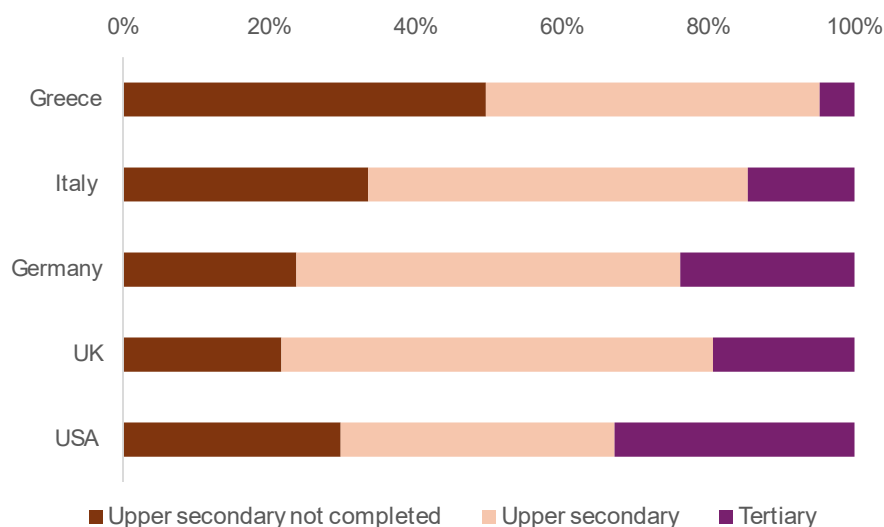
The educational profile of Albanian migrants also varies by country of destination, reflecting self-selection and different pathways and opportunities abroad. Migrants to Western and Northern Europe, as well as the US, tend to have higher levels of education, with the US receiving the most highly educated migrants. In contrast, a nearby destination like Greece receives the least educated migrants.<sup>11</sup> The US emerges as the country that has received migrants with the highest educational attainment, with nearly one-third of migrants aged 25 years and older having completed tertiary education (Figure 10). This is by far the highest share of current

migrants with tertiary education, followed by Germany (24 percent), the UK (19 percent), and Italy (15 percent). Greece, in contrast, has the lowest share of Albanian migrants with tertiary education, only 5 percent, while nearly half of migrants have not completed upper secondary education. Upper secondary education is the most common level of educational attainment across destination countries (59 percent in the UK, 53 percent in Germany, and 52 percent in Italy).

<sup>10</sup> This evidence is consistent with the theoretical framework of Borjas and Bratsberg (1996), which suggests that due to the relative returns to skills in origin and destination countries, when migrants are positively selected at origin, returnees will be negatively selected among all migrants. Evidence from Egypt in Wahba (2015) supports this framework; however, the overall evidence on selection, especially of return migrants, is mixed and depends on other country-specific factors at both the origin and the destination. Bossavie and Özden (2023).

<sup>11</sup> This pattern of low-skilled migrants moving to closer destinations within the region while high-skilled migrants tend to move further away is common around the world (World Bank, 2018).

Figure 10. Educational attainment of migrants currently abroad by country of destination



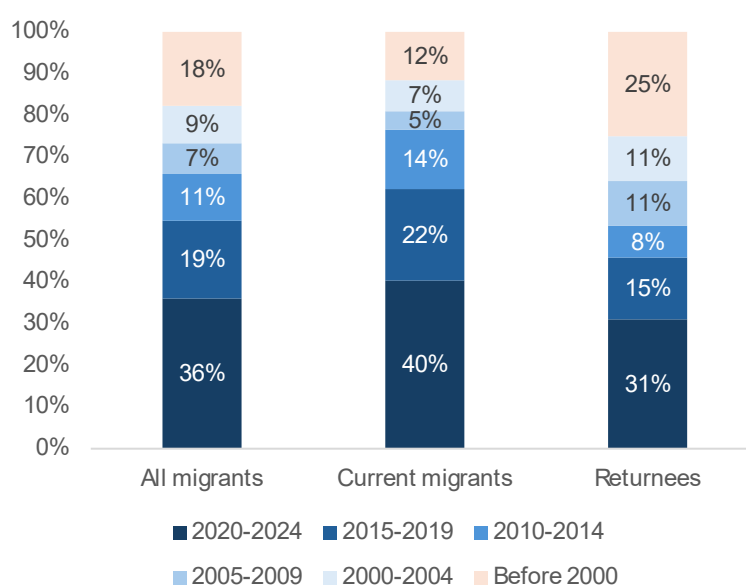
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Education level is for current migrants age 25+.

The Albania Migration Survey 2024 captures different migrant cohorts based on their year of departure, with returnees mostly coming from older cohorts compared to current migrants. More than one third of all Albanian migrants left the country in the five years prior to the survey (2020-24), and another one in five did so up to ten years prior (figure 11). On the other hand, about 20 percent of all migrants belong to older cohorts who left the country before the turn of

the century. As expected, return migrants are generally from older cohorts, although more than 30 percent left Albania since 2020 and had returned by 2024, indicating the prevalence of short-term migration episodes. In turn, current migrants abroad are more likely to belong to newer cohorts, with 40 percent having left the country since 2020. Nevertheless, one in five migrants currently abroad had been living abroad for at least 20 years by 2024.

Figure 11. Year of departure of Albanian migrants



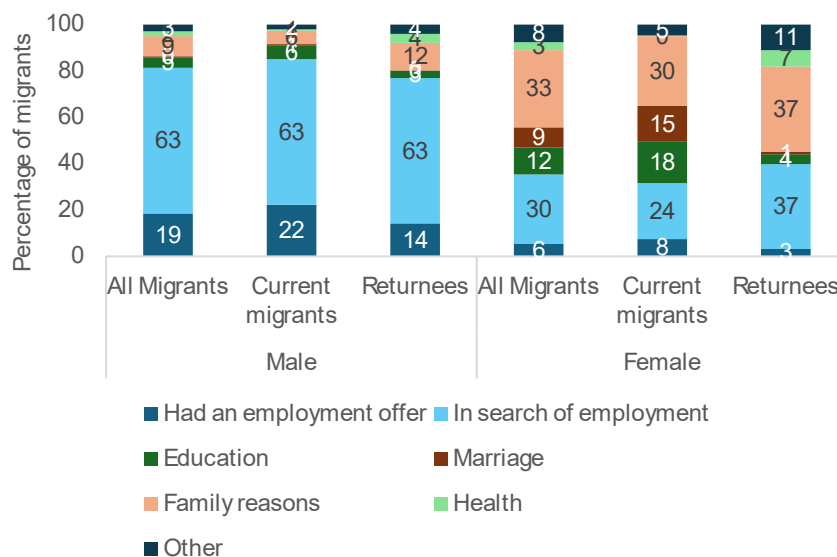
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

The profile of Albanian migrants is also diverse in terms of migration drivers and legal pathways, with male migrants currently abroad being more likely to have migrated for employment reasons and through informal channels compared to returnees. Migrants leave for a diversity of reasons (figure 12, panel a), but mostly in search of better economic opportunities (~70 percent). Other relevant motivations include family reasons (16 percent) and education (6 percent). Migrants currently abroad are more likely to have migrated for economic or educational purposes, while a larger share of returnees migrated for family reasons. Based

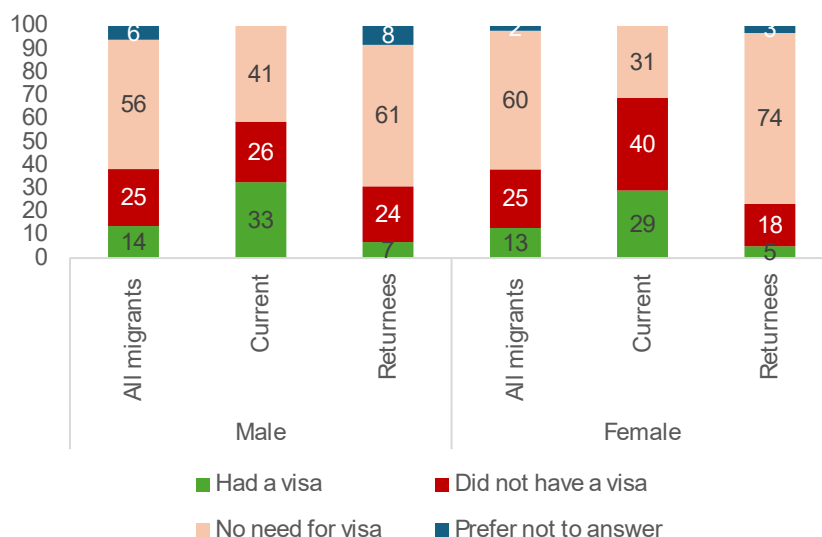
on gender, there are striking differences in motivations, with the vast majority of men migrating for employment compared to just over one third of women, who are more likely to move for family or education reasons. In terms of documentation, most Albanian migrate through legal pathways, although one in four migrated without having the required legal documents to enter or stay in the host country (figure 12, panel b). Specifically, 23 percent of returnees and 29 percent of current migrants lacked the required visas and other documents, which in some instances leads to deportation from the destination country back to Albania.

Figure 12. Other characteristics of current and return migrants

Panel a. Drivers of migration



Panel b. Legal documents to enter host country



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.



# The Migration Journey

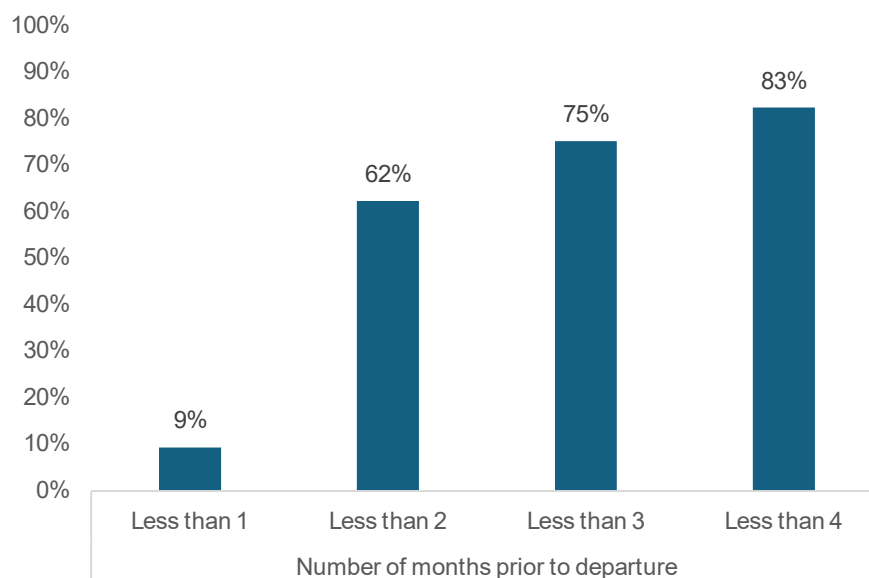
## 3.1. Pre-departure

### 3.1.1. Labor Market Outcomes Before Migration

Before migrating, migrants' employment rates decline significantly by the time of departure. The employment rate among migrants two to four months prior to departure ranges from

62 to 83 percent (Figure 13).<sup>12</sup> This rate is significantly higher than that of the non-migrant population (between 15 and 50 percent). However, employment rates tend to fall as the departure approaches, dropping to 62 percent two months prior and to a strikingly low level of 9 percent in the last month in the country. Given the structure of the data, it is not possible to know whether pre-migration job losses push migrants to seek employment opportunities abroad, or if migrants voluntarily leave their jobs in the country to find better jobs abroad.

Figure 13. Employment rate of migrants prior to departure



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: It only includes migrants that report any employment history prior to migration.

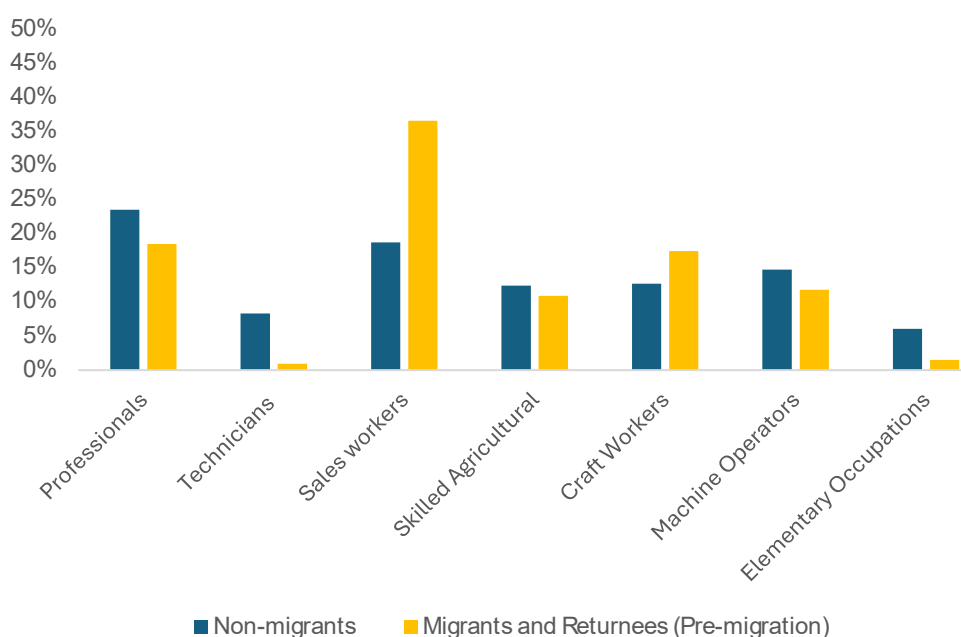
Before migrating, prospective migrants tend to be employed in low- to mid-skilled jobs, particularly in sectors such as hospitality and construction. In Albania, migrants are particularly concentrated in services and sales occupations, which account for nearly 40 percent of migrant employment compared to approximately 20 percent among non-migrants (Figure 14, panel a). In contrast, non-migrants are more likely to be employed in higher-skilled positions, such as professionals (24 percent) and technicians (8 percent), reflecting a higher education level or greater access to formal employment for those who remain in Albania. Migrants are also

more represented in craft and related trades (18 percent compared to 13 percent of non-migrant workers). By sector, 36 percent of migrants worked in hospitality and construction before migrating, compared to only 17 percent of non-migrants (Figure 14, panel b). Migrants are also over-represented among ICT and health-care workers, while they are less likely to have experience in public administration, education, as well as retail and wholesale trade.

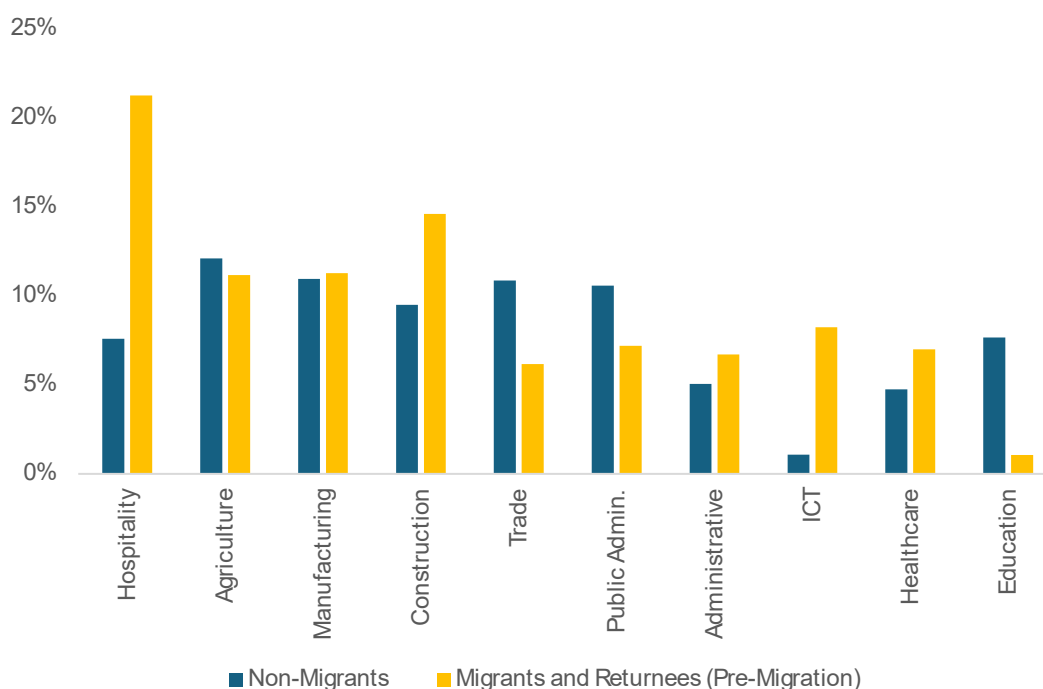
<sup>12</sup> Due to a limited sample size of 136 migrants with a complete pre-migration employment history, a proxy for the employment rate of migrants prior to departure is calculated as the percentage of those who were employed less than 1-4 months prior to departure.

Figure 14. Occupations and sectors held by migrants before migrating, compared to non-migrants

Panel a: ISCO occupations



Panel b: NACE sector of activity

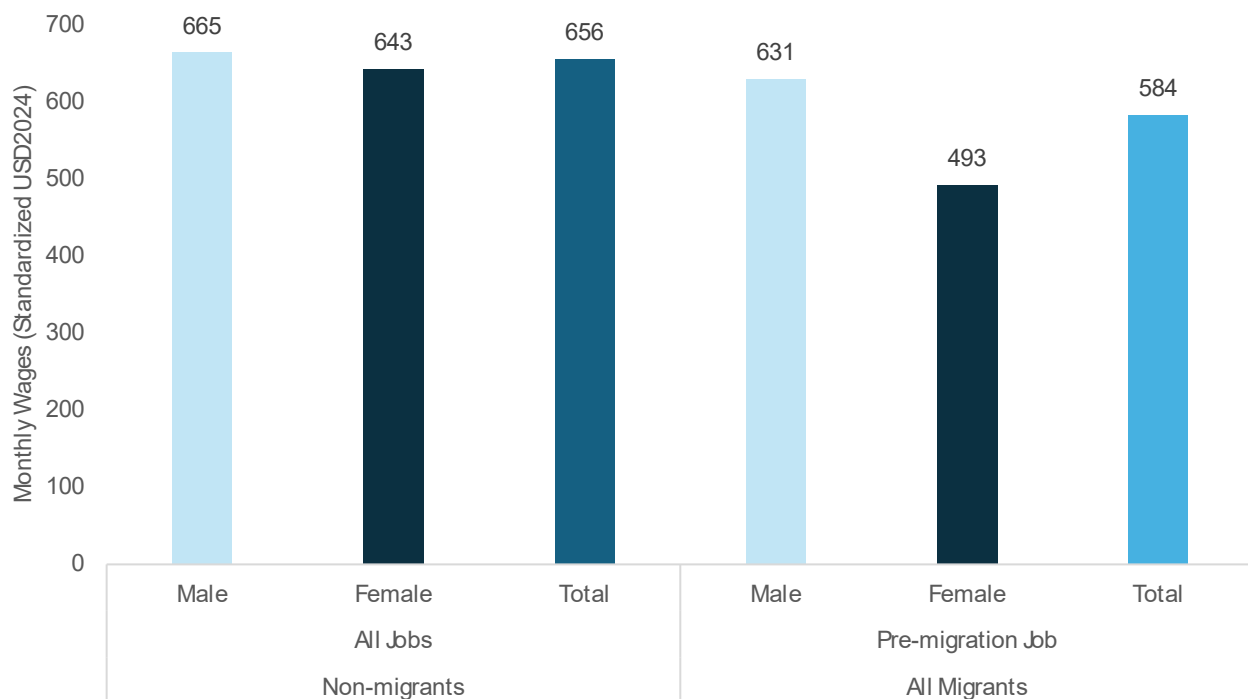


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Prior to departure, migrants earn about 10 percent less than non-migrants (figure 15), with the pay gap being larger among females. The lower pre-departure earnings of migrants reflect their higher concentration in low- to mid-skilled jobs, compared to non-migrants. The gender pay

gap is also more substantial for prospective migrants, where the difference between the average earnings of male and female migrants is over 25 percent, compared to a difference of only 3 percent among non-migrants.

Figure 15. Average monthly wages pre-departure



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

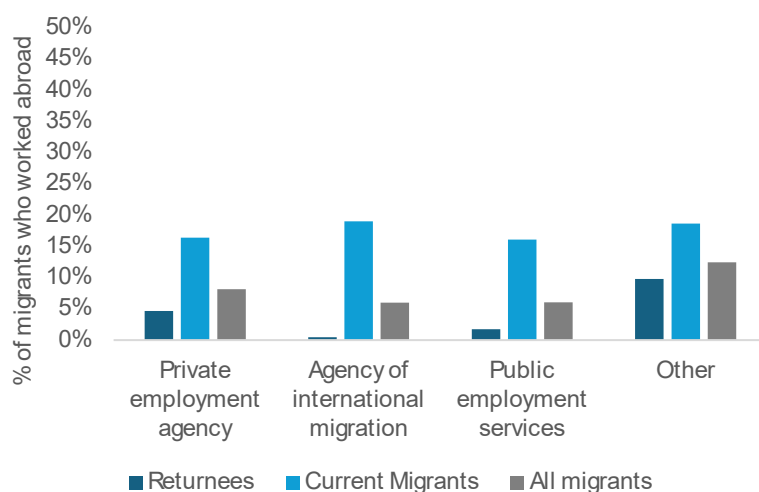
Note: Throughout the survey analysis, outliers are removed for reported monetary values through the process of winsorization at the 1st and 99th percentiles. Wages are then standardized to 2024 U.S. Dollars based on the exchange rate and consumer price index of the year of reference (in this case the year of employment).

### 3.1.2. Pre-Departure Services and Arrangements

In Albania, the use of services is generally low prior to migration, particularly among migrants who have already returned to the country. Returnees often have minimal engagement with formal support structures: only 5 percent reported using private employment agencies, and just 2 percent used public employment services prior to departure (Figure 16). An additional 10 percent indicated they used other types of services. Current migrants report a higher usage of services, although they still represent a minority. Nearly one-fifth used the services of international migration agencies, and 16 percent used private and public employment agencies, while another 19 percent reported using other services without specifying them. These differences between current migrants and returnees can also be observed among the same cohorts,

possibly due to current migrants being more likely to migrate through formal and structured pathways, whereas returnees relied more heavily on informal channels. Overall, only a minority of prospective migrants use the services designed to support their migration journey.

Figure 16. Use of services in Albania prior to migration by type of agency and migration type

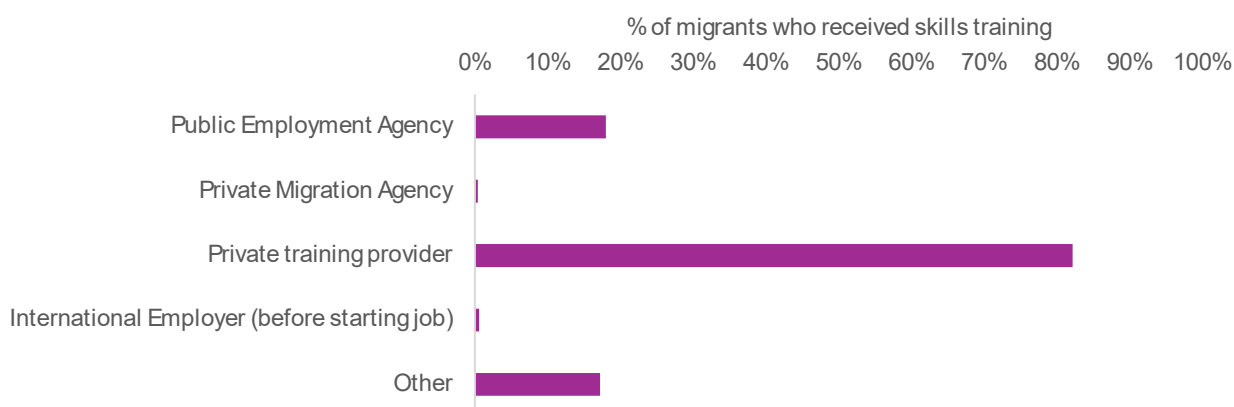


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Only a minority of migrants receive skill training before departure, with private providers being the primary option for those who enroll in training. Approximately one-fourth of return migrants (24 percent) and just one percent of current migrants reported having received such training.<sup>13</sup> Skill training is provided mainly by private training providers (82 percent) followed by public employment agency (18 percent),

and private migration agencies standing at a mere 0.4 percent (Figure 17). The prevalence of pre-departure skills training decreases with age, and is primarily concentrated among those who have left most recently. Furthermore, only 0.6 percent of return migrants reported receiving skills training from their international employers in preparation for work abroad.

Figure 17. Skills training providers for returnees prior to migration



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Pre-departure skills training is mainly concentrated among younger and prime working-age migrants, with a higher participation rate among women as compared to men, and a significantly

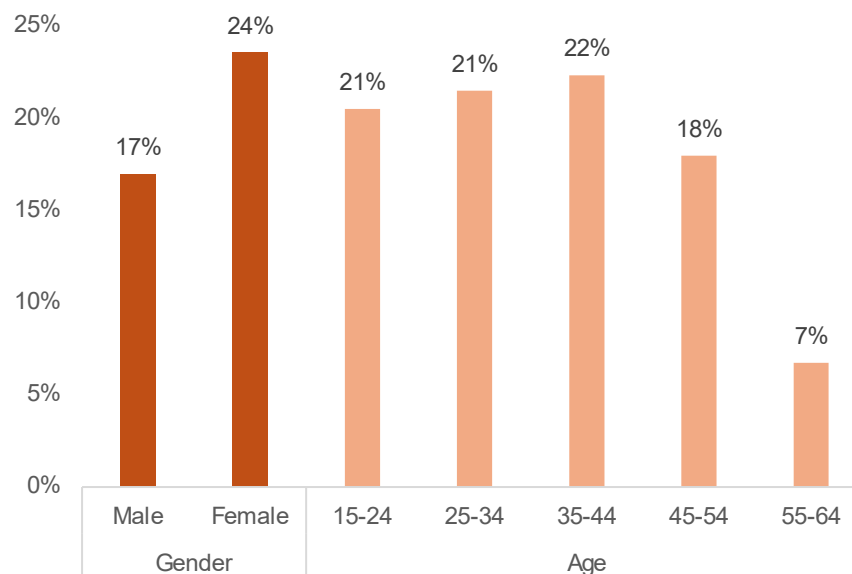
lower rate among older age groups. Female migrants are more likely to have received training than their male counterparts (24 percent and 17 percent, respectively), suggesting that prepara-

<sup>13</sup> These results are based on the question "In the 12 months prior to migration, did you take any skill training to prepare for work overseas?" from the 2024 Albania Migration Survey, and thus refer to any training related to work.

tion programs are either more effective at targeting women or that women are more likely to participate in these pre-migration initiatives (Figure 18). Training rates peak among individuals aged 25 to 44, with the highest participation at around 22 percent among those aged 35 to 44 years. This indicates that prime age working migrants are more likely to benefit from these

training programs, ultimately enhancing their employability. Conversely, participation rates drop sharply for older migrants, with only 6 percent of those aged 55–64 receiving training. These patterns highlight that demand for training is larger among migrants who are better positioned to maximize their international employment experience over a number of years.

Figure 18. Percentage of all migrants who received skills training, by sex and age

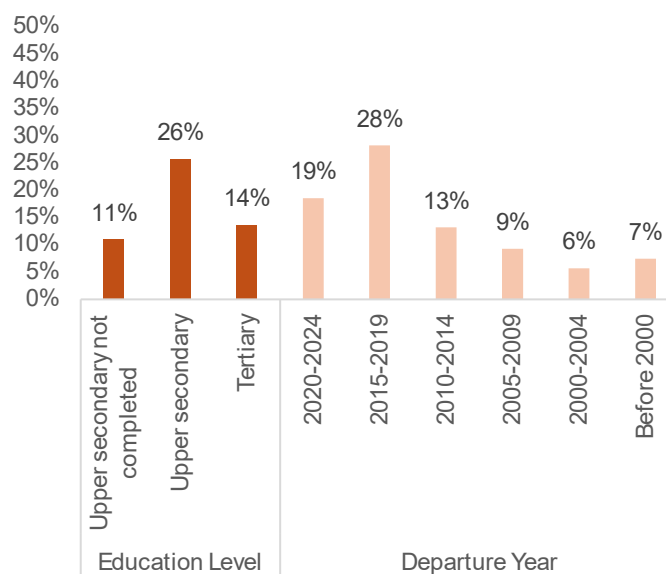


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Skills training is also more prevalent among migrants with upper secondary education and those who left in recent years. Migrants with upper secondary education have the highest participation rates in training (26 percent), surpassing both individuals with incomplete secondary education (11 percent) and those with tertiary education (14 percent) (Figure 19). The differences in training rates based on education level may be influenced by two factors: legal barriers that restrict access to vocational education and training for individuals who have not completed lower secondary schooling, and a decreased perceived cost-benefit for additional training among highly educated migrants. Moreover, training is more common among recent migrants, particularly those who left between 2015 and 2019 (28 percent) and from 2020 to 2024 (19 percent). In contrast, individuals who migrated earlier—especially before 2005—report significantly lower levels of training. This could be in line with the expansion of training

opportunities that are likely to be better integrated into newer migration support programs.

Figure 19. Percentage of migrants who received skills training, by education level and departure year

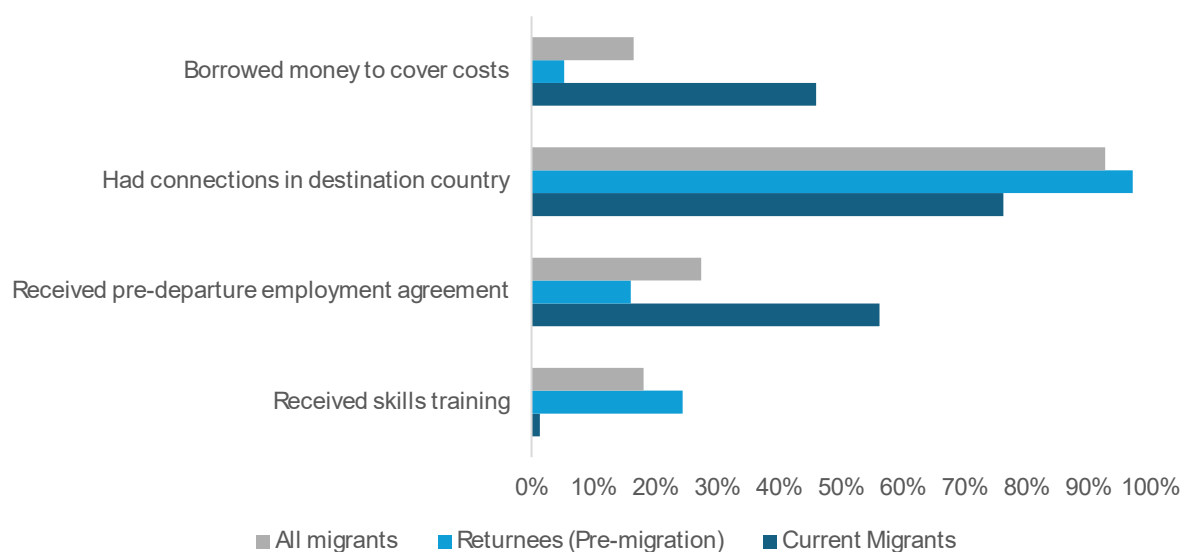


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Before migrating, only a small number of migrants secure employment agreements with employers in destination countries, relying heavily on informal social networks. While more than half of current migrants have secured pre-departure employment contracts, only 16 percent of those who have returned to Albania had such agreements (Figure 20). This difference may be partly attributed to greater reliance on formal migration channels by current migrants, which likely enhances their chances of obtaining formal employment. Although

nearly all returnees (97 percent) report having connections in the destination country, these connections and networks do not seem to materialize into a higher number of pre-departure employment agreements, at least formally. Additionally, there is a notable difference between migrants currently abroad and returnees in terms of financing migration costs. Almost half of the current migrants (46 percent) report having borrowed money to cover their migration costs as compared to only 4 percent of returnees.

Figure 20. Activities undertaken in preparation for migration

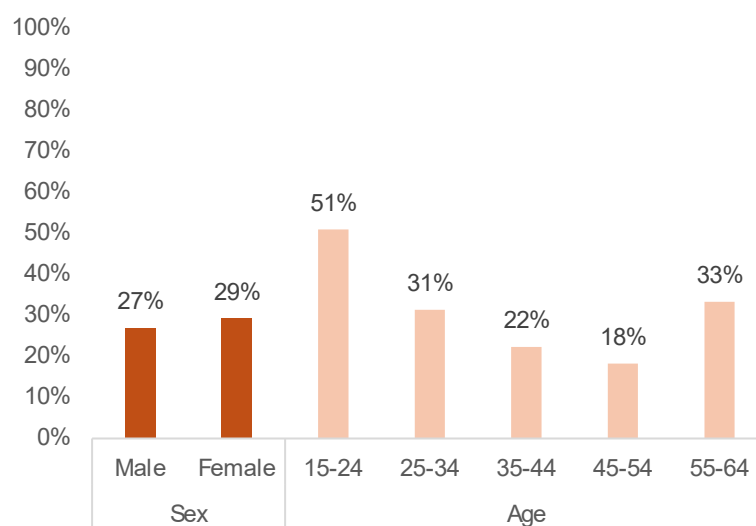


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Pre-departure employment agreements are more common among female migrants than male migrants, suggesting that women may be more engaged in formal migration channels or in pre-migration support programs. This is especially pertinent given that the significant majority of migrants are male, which may indicate that female migrants are more selective about the opportunities they pursue for migration. Another possible reason could be the greater availability of training in fields where women are disproportionately employed while abroad.

In terms of age, younger migrants, particularly those aged 15–24, are the most likely to have secured employment before departure (51 percent), indicating a greater likelihood of engagement with structured pathways or programs designed for youth (Figure 21). Agreement rates decline with age, reaching a low of 18 percent among individuals aged 45–54, before rising again to 33 percent for the 55–64 age group—possibly reflecting formal contract-based migration among older workers.

**Figure 21. Percentage of migrants with a pre-departure employment agreement by sex and age**



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Education level and recency of migration influence the likelihood of securing employment before departure, with higher rates among the more educated and those migrating during earlier periods. Pre-departure employment agreements are more common among migrants with tertiary education, at 36 percent, compared to 23 percent for those with upper secondary education and 30 percent for those who did not complete upper secondary education (Figure 22). This disparity suggests that the most educated migrants may have better access to formal employment pathways or recruitment channels prior to migration. The prevalence of pre-departure agreements also varies considerably by year of departure, with the highest rates being found among those who migrated before 2000 (55 percent), indicating that earlier migration waves may have been more structured or

more closely tied to formal employment offers. In contrast, the rates for recent migrants, particularly those who left between 2020 and 2024, are significantly lower (22 percent), potentially reflecting disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the rates for individuals who migrated between 2005 and 2019 remain relatively stable, ranging from 28 to 29 percent, suggesting consistent access to employment agreements during that period.

Figure 22. Share of migrants with pre-departure employment agreement by education and departure year

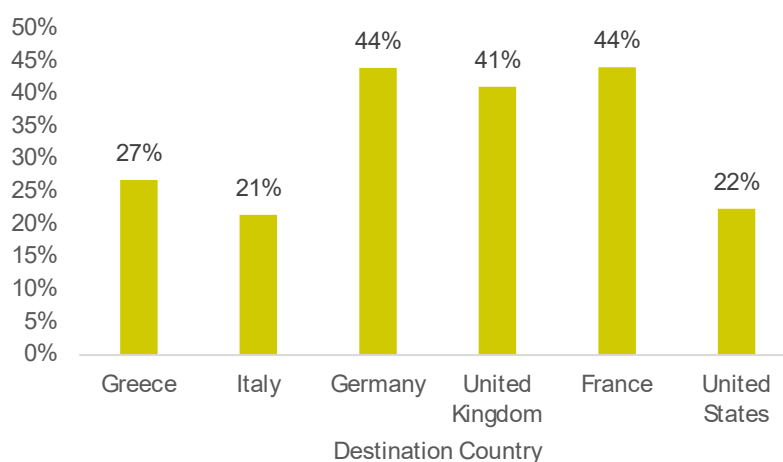


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Pre-departure employment agreements also vary notably depending on the destination country, reflecting differences in migration pathways and motivations, as well as labor market regulations. Migrants heading to France, Germany, and the United Kingdom are significantly more likely to have secured employment before departure (at 44, 44 and 41 percent, respectively), suggesting greater reliance on formal labor channels in these countries (Figure 23). In contrast, migrants travelling to Italy, the

United States, and Greece display lower rates of pre-departure agreements (at 21, 22, and 27 percent, respectively). This discrepancy may stem from various factors, including non-employment migration (such as family reunification or education purposes), or higher levels of informal pathways.

Figure 23. Percentage of migrants with a pre-departure employment agreement by country of destination



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

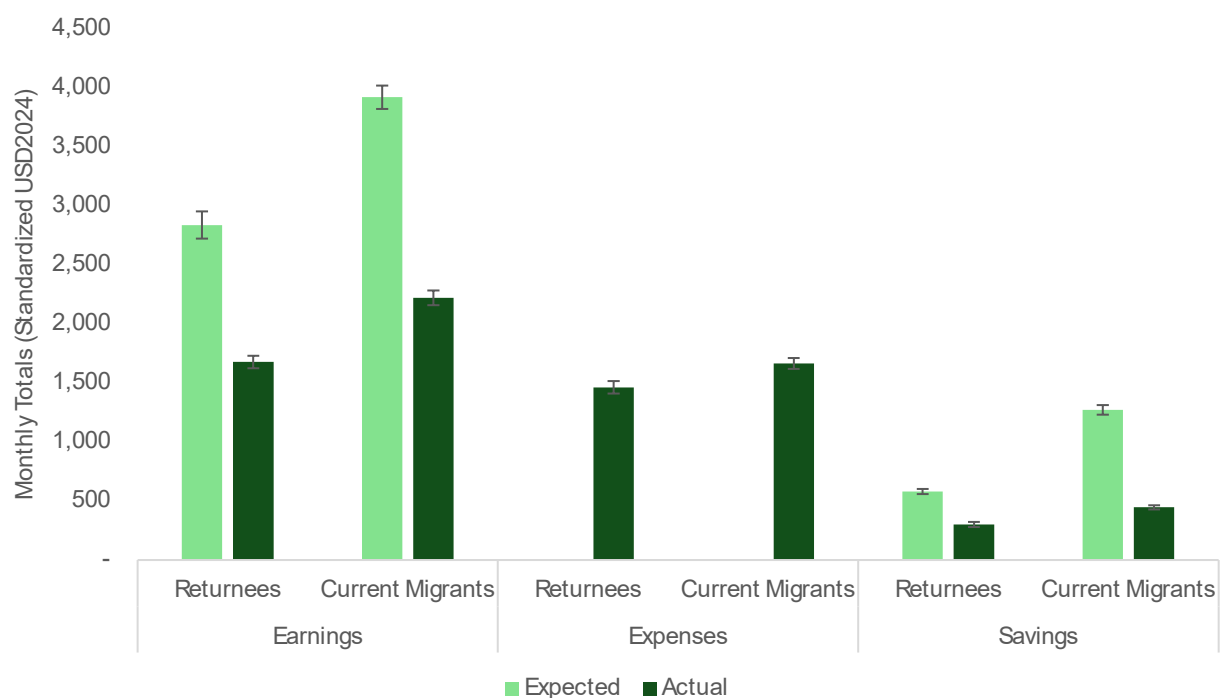


### 3.1.3. Expected Earnings Abroad

Expected earnings play a significant role in driving migration, although migrants overestimate the income and savings they can achieve abroad. There is a mismatch between the pre-departure expectations of Albanian migrants and the reality of their migration experience in terms of earnings, expenses, and savings. While both groups anticipated higher income—returnees expected around \$2,839 in monthly earnings while current migrants about \$3,922—the actual earnings fell significantly short, at \$1,678 and \$2,222, respectively (Figure 24).<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the savings achieved were also much lower than anticipated. On average, returnees surveyed managed to save \$300, compared to an expected \$581, and current migrants saved an average of \$446, well below the expected \$1,273. The gap

between expectations and actual outcomes with regard to earnings and savings accumulated abroad could potentially affect long-term financial goals and stability of Albanian migrants. Mismatched expectations can also impact migration decisions, and failure to meet these expectations can lead to negative outcomes for both migrants and the destination countries, as well as upon their return to Albania. The biased wage expectations of Albanian migrants are consistent with similar findings from other countries, such as the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, empirical evidence suggests that in certain cases, migrants underestimate their potential earnings abroad, often due to a disproportionate focus on potential negative outcomes and the underreported incomes by prior migrants, which serve to manage remittance expectations.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 24. Expected and actual savings for returnees and migrants who worked abroad



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Savings and earnings are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles, then standardized to USD2024.

<sup>14</sup> Standardized USD \$ 2024 (monthly) and winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentile. Expected earnings are standardized based on the year of departure and actual earnings by the most recent year the migrant worked abroad.

<sup>15</sup> Bossavie and Bartl (2024).

<sup>16</sup> McKenzie, Gibson, and Stillman (2013).

Female migrants report higher expected earnings than their male counterparts, yet both genders face substantial shortfalls in actual income and savings. Female migrants anticipate earnings of USD \$3,276, which is nearly twice as much as their actual earnings of USD \$1,666. In comparison, male migrants anticipate to earn USD \$3,120, which is about 67 percent more than their actual earnings of USD \$1,866 (Figure 25). In terms of actual earnings, women earn

less than men after migration, indicating a persistent gender gap in income and a wider disparity between expected and actual income for female migrants. Despite earning less, female migrants report slightly higher savings with an average of USD \$411 compared to USD \$327 for males), thus reflecting a smaller gap between expected savings and reality for women.

Figure 25. Expected versus actual earning and savings for all migrants, by sex



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Savings and earnings are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles, then standardized to USD2024.

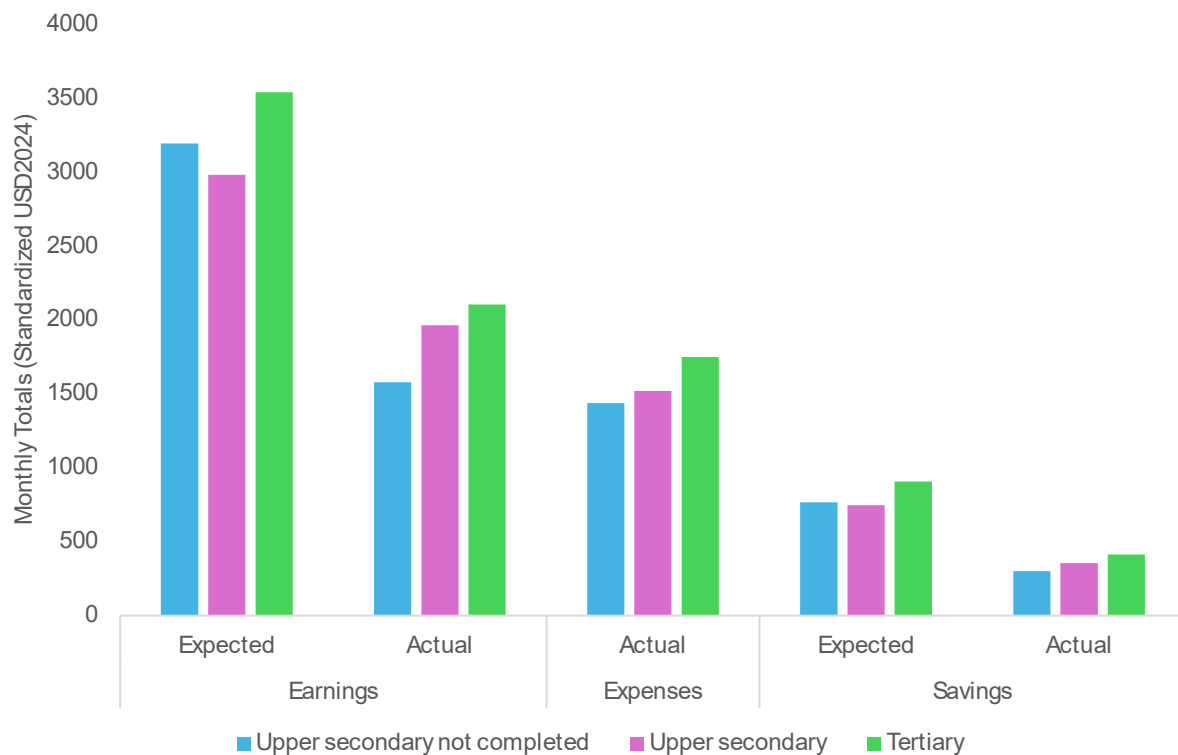
There remains a significant gap between anticipated and actual earnings across all levels of educational attainment. Migrants with tertiary education report the highest expected monthly earnings (USD \$3,542), followed by those without upper secondary education (USD \$3,195), and upper secondary graduates (USD \$2,983) (Figure 26). Notably, as education levels decrease, the proportional decline between financial expectations and actual outcomes becomes sharper. Actual earnings for all three groups fall significantly short of their expectations – with tertiary-educated migrants earning USD \$2,105, which represents a 41 percent shortfall; upper secondary graduates earning USD \$1,965, or a

34 percent shortfall; and with those who did not complete upper secondary education earning just USD \$1,579, which corresponds to a 51 percent shortfall. Despite having a higher earning potential, tertiary-educated migrants also report the highest expenses, about USD \$1,750, which reflects higher living costs, different lifestyles, greater responsibilities, or cost-of-living expectations associated with higher education. Savings follow a similar pattern: migrants with higher educational attainment tend to save more in absolute terms, yet all groups experience significant gaps between expected and actual savings, despite their educational level. Tertiary-educated migrants expect to save USD

\$908 per month but actually manage to save only USD \$412—resulting in a 55 percent gap. Individuals with upper secondary education anticipate to save about USD \$747 but save about USD \$355, reflecting a 53 percent gap. The large-

est discrepancy is observed among migrants without upper secondary education, whose actual savings are estimated to be about USD \$300, or a 61 percent shortfall of their expected savings of USD \$766.

**Figure 26. Expected versus actual earnings and savings for all migrants, by educational attainment**



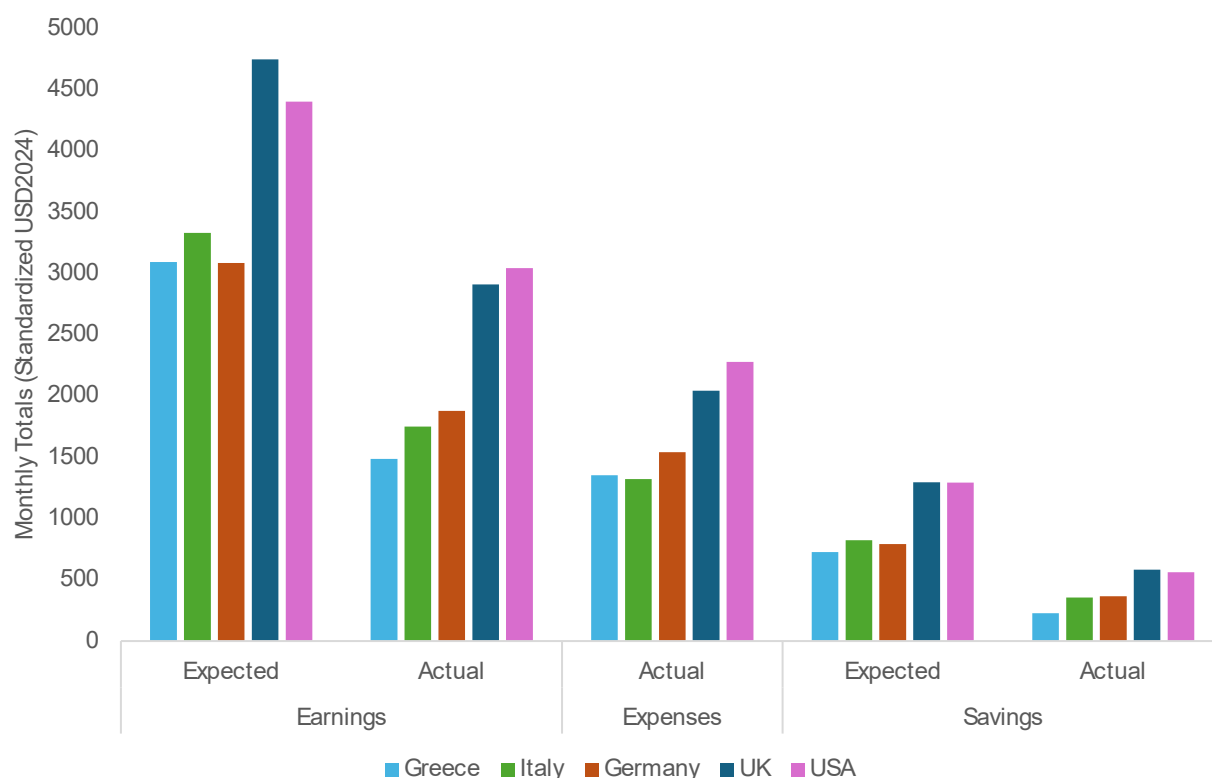
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: All values are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles, then standardized to USD2024.

There is a persistent mismatch between expectations and actual incomes and savings, regardless of the destination country. Expected earnings vary significantly by destination, with migrants heading to the UK and USA anticipating the highest incomes among the main destination countries, with USD 4,746 and USD 4,400, respectively. While those heading to Greece and Germany expect lower figures, about USD 3,093 and USD 3,084, respectively (Figure 27). Higher expectations arise from the perceived higher standards of living in countries such as the UK and USA. However, they may also be influenced by limited access to accurate information and weaker social networks, which are more common in distant destinations. Actual earnings fall notably short of expectations across all destinations, but the most pronounced gap is observed

in Greece, where migrants earn 52 percent less than they have anticipated. Other destination countries also feature significant earnings gaps, ranging from 31 percent in the USA to 47 percent in Italy. Despite these lower earnings, actual expenses remain relatively high across destinations, further compressing the ability to save. Consequently, savings fall well below expected levels. The savings gap is most severe for migrants in Greece, with savings falling 69 percent below expectations. In the UK, USA, Italy, and Germany the gaps are similarly concerning, ranging from 54 to 57 percent. These findings highlight the need for improved pre-migration information and financial planning support tailored to the economic realities of specific destination countries.

Figure 27. Expected versus actual earnings and savings for all migrants, by country of destination



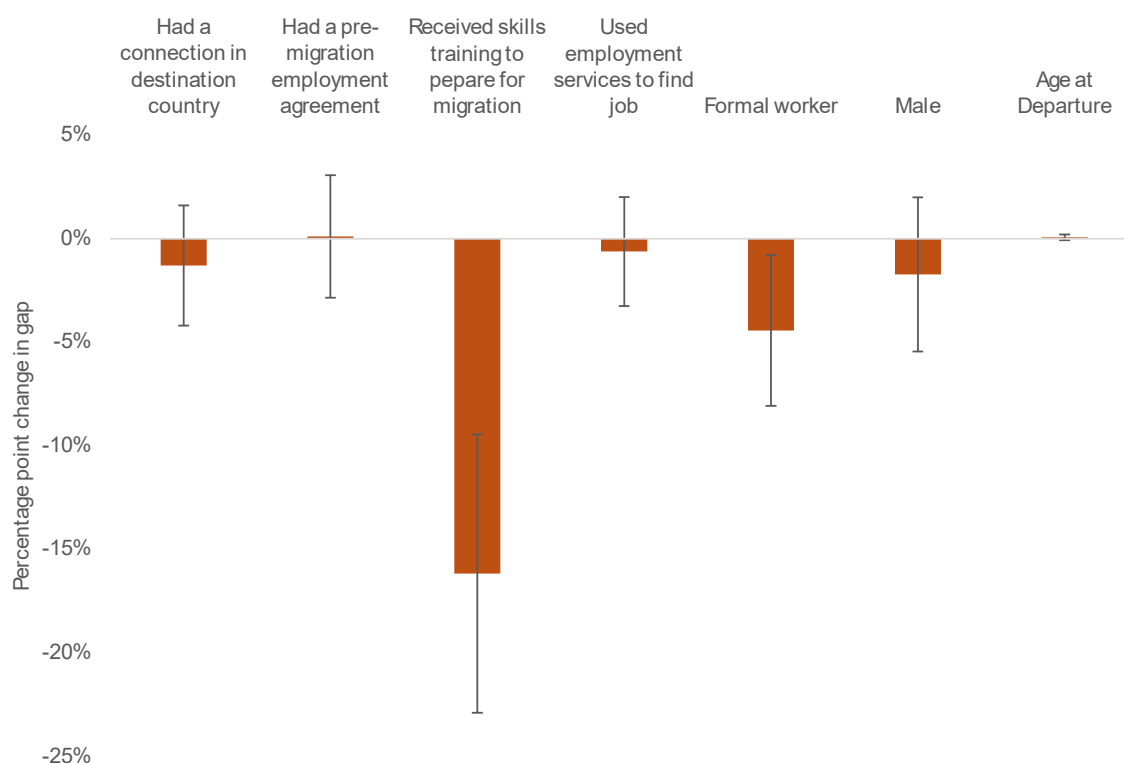
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: All values are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles, then standardized to USD2024.

Interventions such as pre-migration training or the ability to secure formal employment abroad are significantly linked to a reduction in the gaps between migrant's expectations and actual outcomes, compared to informal support mechanisms or demographic traits. These findings highlight the importance of investing in preparatory training programs and improving access to formal employment pathways before migration. Migrants who received skills training prior to migrating experienced the largest reduction in the earnings gap between expected and actual earnings abroad, with an average change of approximately 16 percentage points (Figure 28). However, access to formal preparatory skills training remains limited in Albania, and it is not comprehensively offered by public agencies.<sup>17</sup> Migrants who secure formal employment abroad experience a more moderate reduction in the earnings gap (-4 percentage points). In both instances,

the reduction in mismatches is primarily due to an increase in actual earnings rather than a decrease in expected income prior to migration. Other factors such as having connections in the destination country, possessing a pre-migration employment agreement, using employment services, gender, and age at the time of departure have a statistically insignificant impact.

Figure 28. Correlation between different factors and the gap of expected and actual earnings abroad



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Values reflect the coefficients of a linear regression on the gap between expected and actual earnings as a percentage of expected earnings, controlling for demographic factors, year of departure, and both destination (country) and origin (region) fixed effects.

## 3.2. The Migration Experience

### 3.2.1. Costs of Migration

Migration is relatively expensive, with initial costs amounting to two months of pre-migration earnings. Current migrants report a total migration cost of USD \$1,103, which is about 3 times higher than the amount of USD \$368 reported by return migrants. This is partly attributed to the more recent emigration period. In comparison, current migrants from Central Asian countries typically incur, on average, lower costs at around USD 400 for their journey abroad, primarily to the Russian Federation.<sup>18</sup> Overall, migrants in Albania are expected to spend up to two months' worth of their average pre-migra-

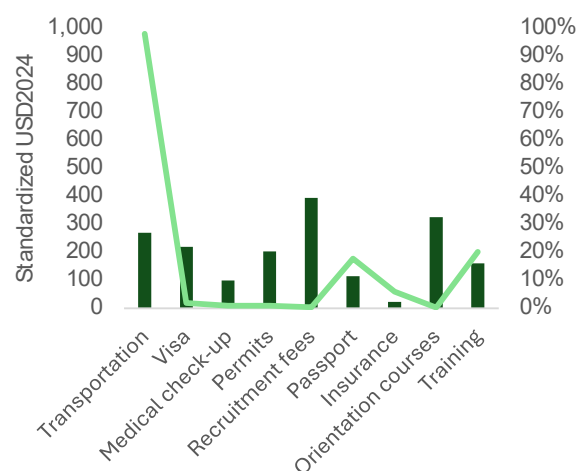
tion salary on migration costs. Transportation is the most commonly reported expense associated with migration for both groups; but, current migrants tend to face significantly higher average costs (Figure 29, panels a and b). Current migrants also incur higher costs and a greater likelihood of having to pay for visa fees, medical check-ups, insurance, and orientation courses—suggesting increased formalization and compliance with the requirements of the host country. Returnees, on the other hand, report lower incidence and lower average costs across most categories, apart from training costs, which are more common among them. Globally, migration costs vary significantly by migration corridor, and it most likely that these expenses are covered by low-skilled migrants.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Migrants from South Asia going to the Gulf, however, incur costs that are way higher, estimated at around USD 4000 (Ahmed and Bossavie 2022).

<sup>19</sup> World Bank (2023).

Figure 29. Cost of migration

Panel a. For current migrants



Panel b. For returnees



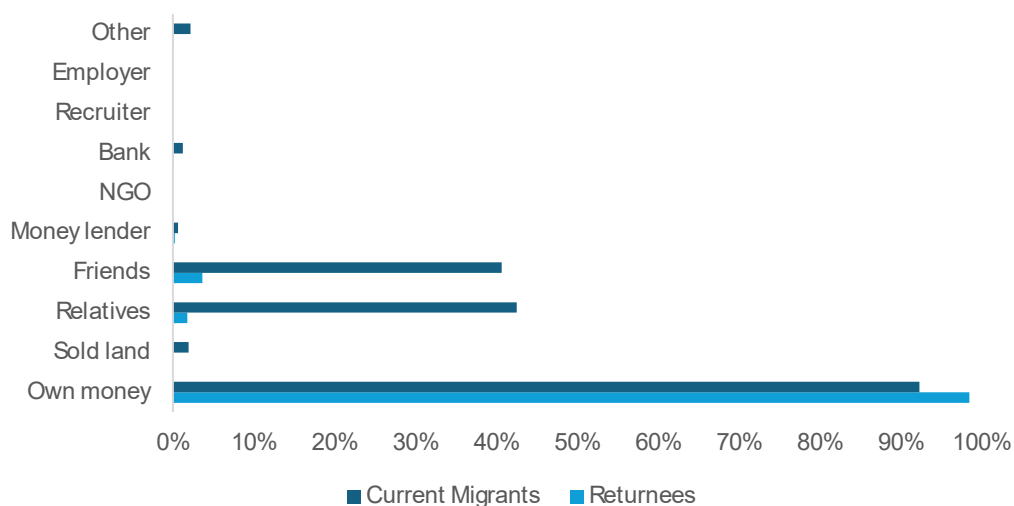
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024

Note: Costs are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentile and standardized to USD2024 based on the year of departure.

Personal savings are the primary source of financing for migrants, although 40 percent of those currently abroad also rely on family and friends. Current migrants show a significantly greater reliance on external support from social networks—both for funding their migration and for preparing for the journey. The vast majority of migrants, about 98 percent of returnees and 92 percent of current migrants, financed their migration journey through personal savings (Figure 30). Current migrants also demonstrate significant financial reliance on relatives and friends (42 percent and 41 percent, respectively), compared to returnees (2 percent and 4 percent,

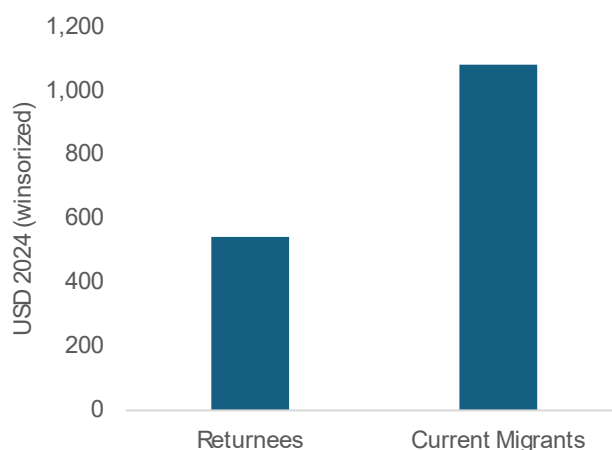
respectively). Other sources of financing, such as borrowing from money lenders and banks, are insignificant for both groups, with rates of less than or around 1 percent. About 2 percent of migrants currently abroad report having sold land to finance their migration, whereas none of the return migrants did so, indicating that current migrants may possess more assets compared to returnees and could be more inclined to plan a return to their home country. The average amount borrowed by current migrants, at USD \$1,083, is roughly double the amount of USD \$544 reported by returnees (Figure 31).

Figure 30. Sources of financing for the migration journey



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Figure 31. Average amount borrowed among migrant borrowers



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

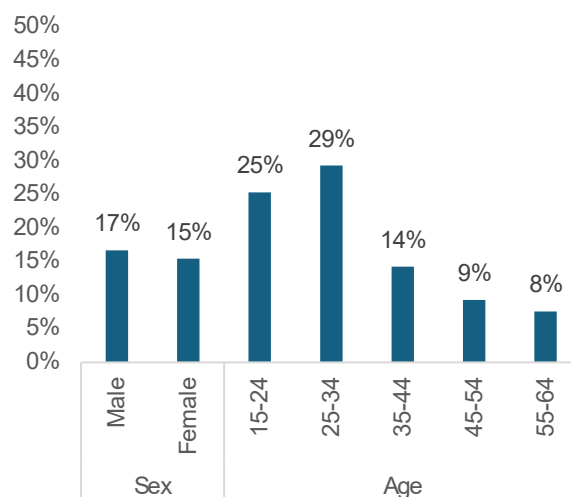
Note: Amounts are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentile, then standardized to USD2024, according to the year of departure.

### 3.2.2. Borrowing to Finance Migration Costs

Borrowing to finance migration is not very common, although more than a quarter of migrant youth do so. Slightly more than 15 percent of migrants borrow money to cover the initial costs of migration. This is more common among younger migrants, particularly those in the 25–34 age group (29 percent) and 15–24 age group (25 percent). This suggests that younger individuals, who are less likely to have accumulated savings

or a stable income, are more dependent on loans to cover migration costs. As age increases, borrowing rates decline sharply—falling to 14 percent for those aged 35–44, and just 8 percent for migrants aged 55–64 (Figure 32). This trend likely reflects greater financial stability or access to personal resources among older migrants. Gender differences in borrowing are relatively minor. Male migrants report a slightly higher borrowing rate of 17 percent compared to 15 percent for females, indicating broadly similar financial strategies across genders when preparing for migration.

Figure 32. Percentage of migrants who borrowed money to cover migration costs by sex and age

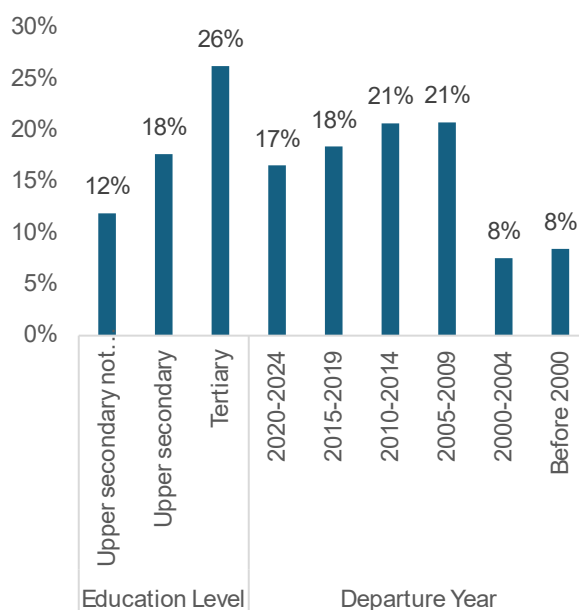


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Educational attainment and the year of departure are associated with distinct borrowing patterns used to finance migration. Highly educated and mid-period migrants are more likely to finance their migration through loans, highlighting differences in both the financial need and access to resources. Borrowing is most common among migrants with tertiary education (26 percent), followed by those with upper secondary education (18 percent), while it is the lowest among individuals without upper secondary education (12 percent) (Figure 33). This pattern may reflect greater access to credit or a stronger willingness to invest in migration among the more educated, who anticipate higher returns abroad. Borrowing rates also vary across different migration cohorts. Migrants

who left between 2005 and 2014 report the highest borrowing rates (around 21 percent), possibly due to expanded migration opportunities coupled with increased costs during this period. On the other hand, borrowing rates are somewhat lower, at 17 percent, among recent migrants (2020–2024), potentially linked to economic uncertainty or restricted mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lowest borrowing rates are observed among those who migrated before 2005, particularly among those who left before 2000 (8 percent), suggesting that earlier migrants may have faced lower costs or relied more on family networks.

**Figure 33. Percentage of migrants who borrowed money, by education level and year of departure**



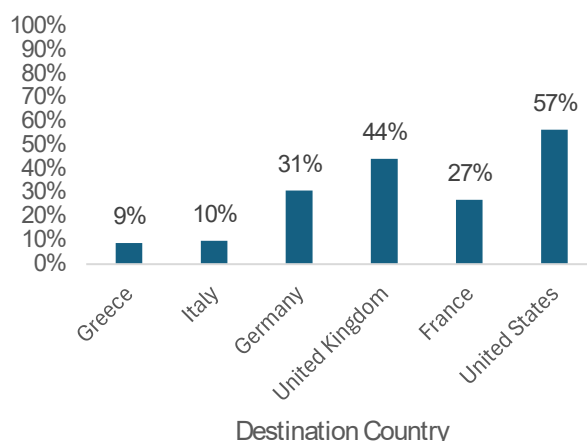
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

The financial burden of migration varies by destination country, with migrants moving to higher-income and more distant countries being more likely to incur substantial costs, which require loans or other financial support. The extent of borrowing to cover migration costs varies widely across destination countries, reflecting differences in migration costs, entry requirements, and the nature of migration pathways. Migrants heading to the United States (56 percent) and the United Kingdom (44 percent) report the highest borrowing rates, indicating

that migration to these countries typically involves higher upfront costs—such as visa fees, travel expenses, and recruitment charges—often requiring financial assistance (Figure 34). In contrast, borrowing is significantly lower among migrants travelling to Greece (9 percent) and Italy (10 percent), which may be due to proximity, lower costs, or more informal migration channels. Whereas, Germany (31 percent) and France (27 percent) fall in the middle range.



Figure 34. Percentage of migrants who borrowed money to cover costs by country of destination



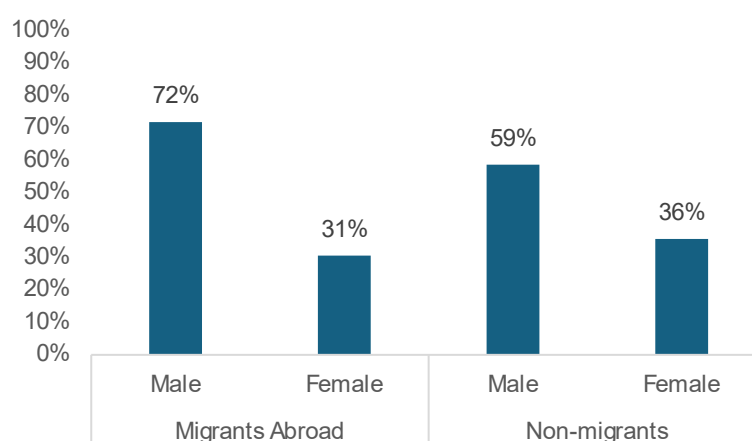
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

### 3.2.3. Labor Market Outcomes of Migrants Abroad

Albanian migrants abroad exhibit higher employment rates compared to non-migrants, driven by greater employment opportunities for men. Male migrants display the strongest labor market outcomes, while women, regardless of their migration status, face persistent barriers to employment. Employment rates among male migrants abroad reach 72 percent, nearly

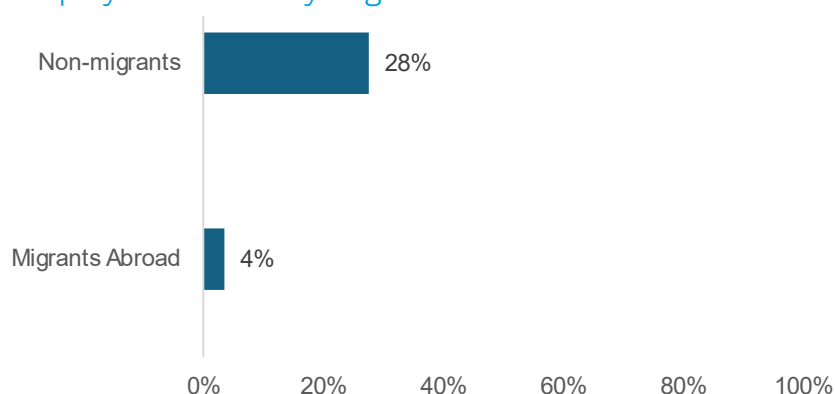
13 percentage points higher compared to 59 percent for non-migrants in Albania (Figure 35). Women employment rate remains generally low (36 percent), regardless of their migration status, and significantly lower for female migrants (31 percent). This may be due to differences in migration motivations, as women are more likely to migrate for family reunification or educational reasons. In terms of employment type, migrants have lower self-employment rates compared to the non-migrant population (Figure 36).

Figure 35. Employment rates by migration status and sex



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Figure 36. Self-employment rates by migration status

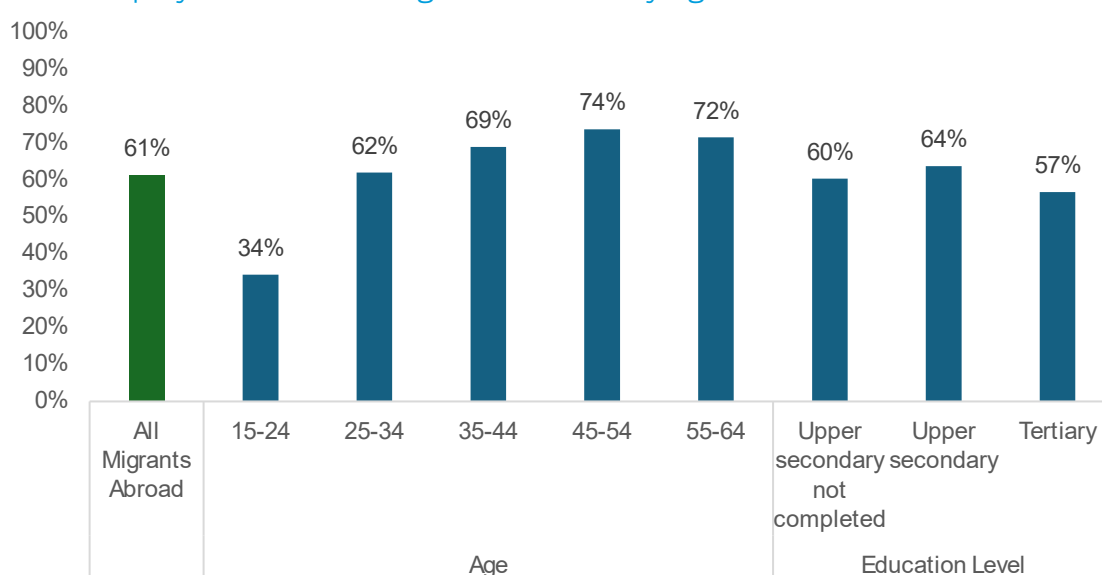


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Employment outcomes among migrants abroad vary notably by age, reflecting positive returns to experience, yet remain relatively similar across all levels of educational attainment. Younger migrants (aged 15–24) have the lowest employment rate at 34 percent, likely due to limited work experience or ongoing education (Figure 37). In contrast, employment rates improve significantly with age, peaking at 74 percent for individuals aged 45–54, and remaining high at 72 percent for those aged 55–64. This suggests that older migrants are generally more established in the labor market and may benefit from the vast work experience, stability, or networks abroad. Furthermore, differences related to educational attainment also reveal important trends. Migrants with upper secondary education show the highest employment rate (64 percent), slightly ahead of those without upper

secondary education (60 percent). However, migrants with tertiary education report a lower employment rate (57 percent), which reflects the occupational downgrading, difficulties in the recognition of foreign qualifications, over-qualification, or more selective job preferences. Concerning gender, the lower employment rates among tertiary-educated migrants are particularly noticeable among men. Conversely, there exists a positive correlation between education level and employment status among women. These findings suggest that while education typically enhances labor market outcomes, it may not fully translate into employment gains for highly educated migrants abroad. Instead, age and work experience appear to play a more critical role in securing employment in destination countries.

Figure 37. Employment rate of migrants abroad by age and education level

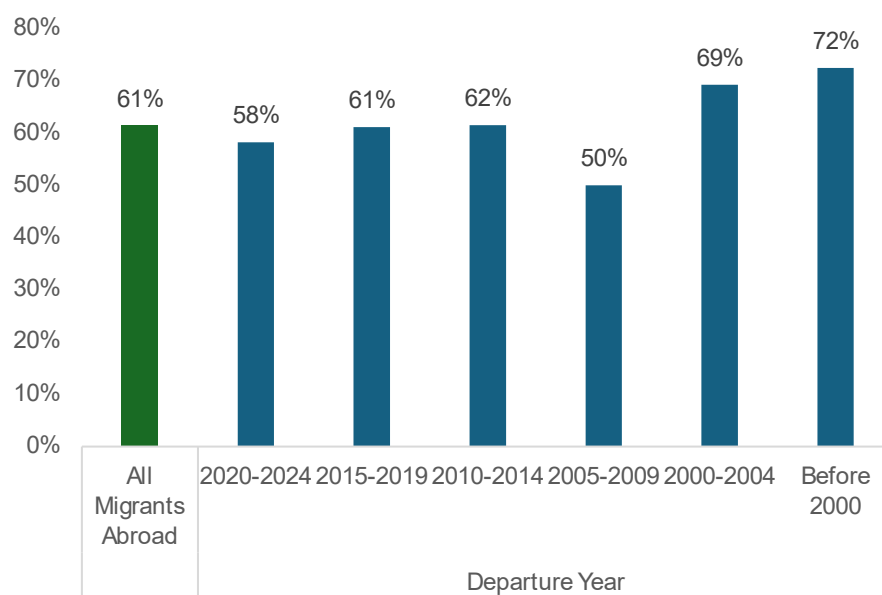


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Employment rates also vary by departure cohort, with earlier migrants generally experiencing higher levels of employment. These findings likely reflect changes in labor market conditions, migration policies, and migrants' profile over time. Differences may also stem from shifts in migration patterns from Albania, which was primarily marked by economic motives but has evolved to include more family reunification and other motives.<sup>20</sup> Migrants who left before 2000 report the highest employment rates (73 percent), followed by those who departed between 2000 and 2004 (69 percent), thus suggesting stronger labor integration for earlier cohorts (Figure 38). In contrast, employment rates are notably lower among those who migrated between 2005 and 2009 (50 percent)—

the lowest among all groups—possibly due to unfavorable economic conditions, challenges in labor market absorption during that period, particularly as a result of the global financial crisis of 2009, or an increase in family reunification among those who had previously emigrated. More recent cohorts (2010–2024) show relatively stable employment levels ranging from 58 to 61 percent. This stability may result from evolving migration pathways, skill levels, or destination-specific access to labor markets. Similar employment trends are observed for different cohorts of male and female migrants.

Figure 38. Employment rate of migrants abroad by year of departure



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Migrants also experience significant wage gains through migration. Migrants earn substantially more while abroad compared to their pre-departure earnings. On average, their monthly wages abroad are 2.5 times higher than their pre-migration wages (Figure 39)<sup>21</sup>, and nearly 2.5 times higher than those of non-migrants in Albania. Gender pay gap is persistent across all groups, with men earning more than women, both in

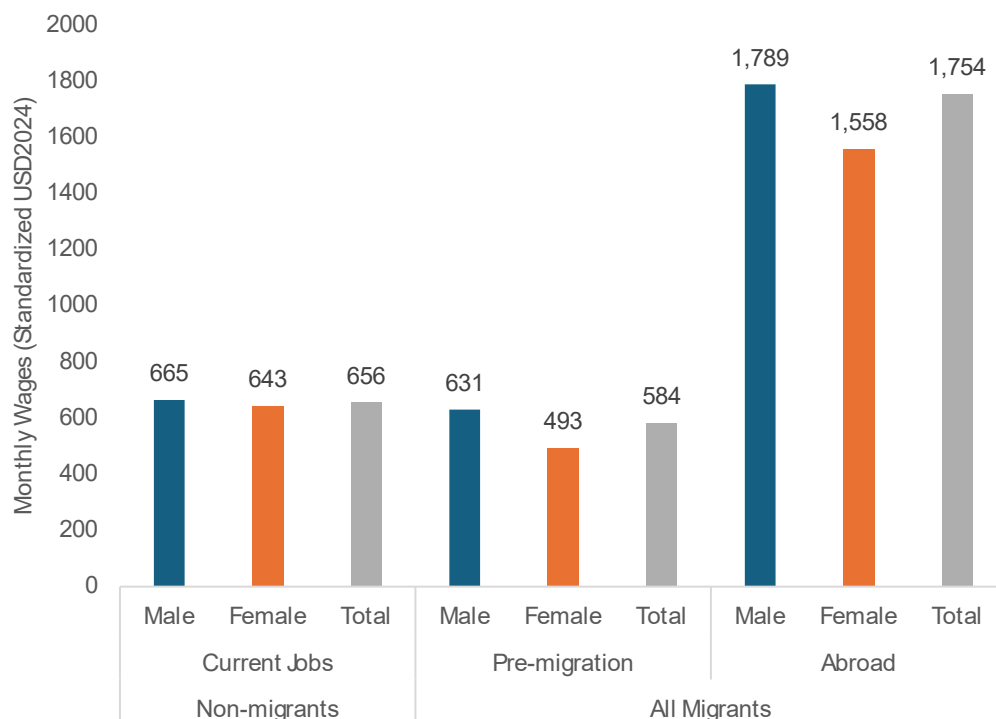
Albania and abroad. Nevertheless, the gender wage gap narrows for migrants abroad when compared to their pre-departure situation, declining from 22 percent to 13 percent. Wage premiums are observed across all education levels, but in particular among individuals with middle and upper levels of education (figure 39, panel b).

<sup>20</sup> World Bank (2024).

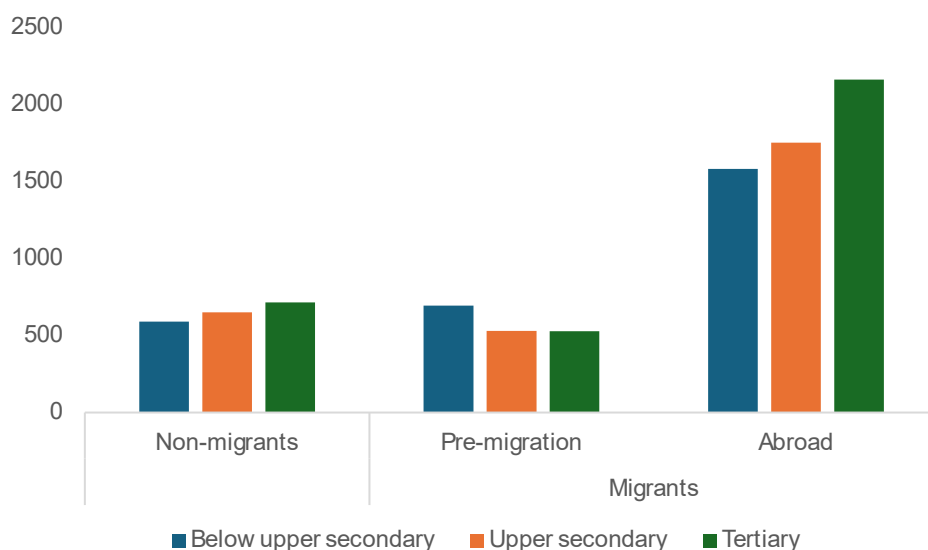
<sup>21</sup> These income gains align with global evidence, which suggests that low-skilled workers who migrate abroad earn 2 to 4 times more than they would in their origin country (World Bank, 2023).

Figure 39. Average monthly wages by migration status

Panel a. By gender



Panel b. By education level



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Wages are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentile, then standardized to USD2024, according to the most recent year of employment in that job.

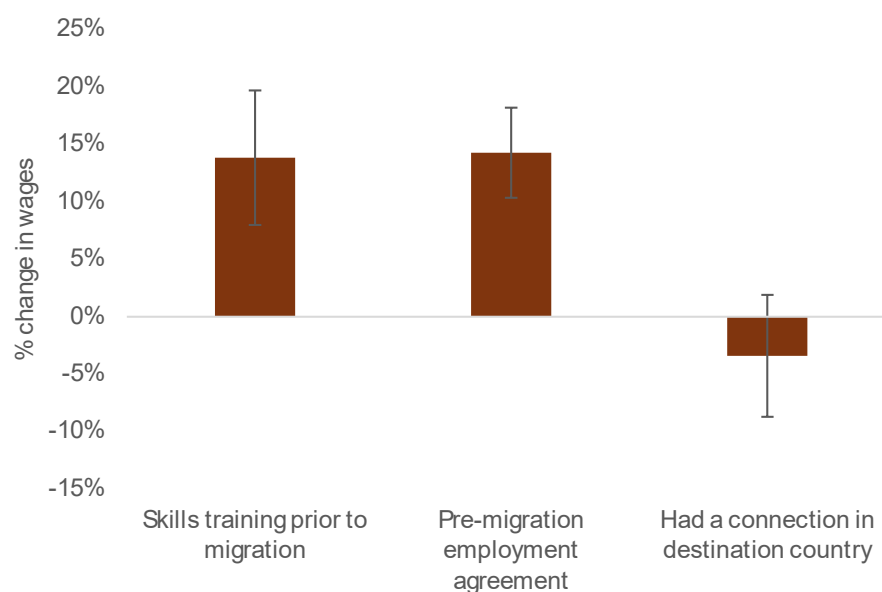
Formal pre-departure measures, such as skills training and formal employment agreements, are associated with increases in migrant earnings abroad, more so than informal social ties. These findings highlight the importance of in-

vesting in preparatory programs to maximize the economic benefits of migration. Pre-departure training programs have been shown in various contexts to improve migrant's financial behavior through better information and decision-mak-

ing.<sup>22</sup> Migrants who received skills training prior to departure earn on average 14 percent more than those who did not,<sup>23</sup> suggesting that formal preparation has a positive impact on migrants' productivity and competitiveness in the labor market abroad (Figure 40). Pre-migration employment agreements are also positively associated with higher average wages for migrants abroad, with an increase of about 14 percent compared to those without such agreements.

This suggests that securing an employment contract prior to departure can help migrants access more stable, better-paying jobs and avoid informal arrangements. On the contrary, having personal connections in the destination country does not appear to have a statistically significant effect on migrants' average wages abroad. This implies that informal support networks alone do not necessarily lead to better economic outcomes.

Figure 40. Association between pre-departure activities and wages earned abroad



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Estimated changes in wages are derived from a linear regression on the log of wages earned abroad, controlling for demographic factors, departure year, time spent abroad, and including destination country fixed effects.

Despite the sizable income gains, migrants abroad often experience occupational downgrading that limit their migration potential. Male migrants dominate the construction and manual labor sectors, while women are concentrated in caregiving, cleaning, and service-oriented roles. This segmentation reflects broader trends in labor demand for low- and medium-skilled migrant labor in destination countries. The most common occupation overall—especially among male migrants—is in frame building and related trades, accounting for over 40 percent of male migrants, while it is

nearly absent among females (Figure 41, panel a). In contrast, female migrants are heavily concentrated in domestic work, hotel service, and office cleaning and assistance (25 percent), as well as in nursing and midwifery professions (17 percent), with minimal male representation in these sectors. Another key feature of migrants in the host labor market is the relatively sizable occupational downgrading. One in three current migrants and close to four in five returnees with tertiary education worked in jobs with requirements below their qualifications (Figure 41, panels b), a challenge significantly more

<sup>22</sup> Barsbai (2018).

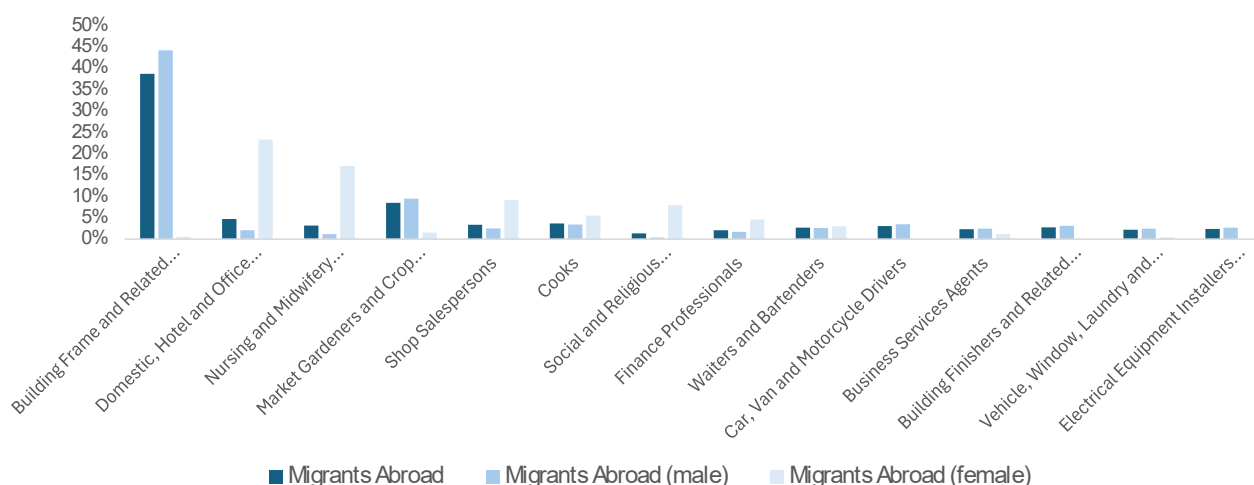
<sup>23</sup> The impact on wages is found when controlling for demographic characteristics, year of departure, length of time spent abroad, and including regional fixed effects.

prevalent than for non-migrants (Figure 41, panel c). Occupational downgrading occurs to all migrants around the world that may arise from a mismatch between the skills and attributes

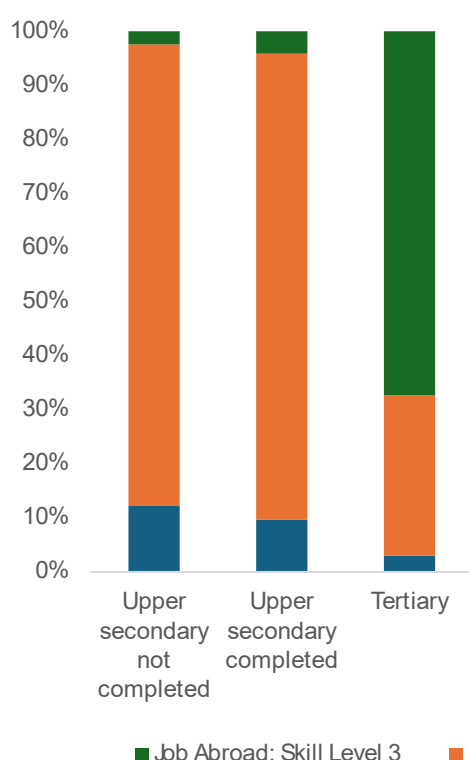
they possess and those required in the destination country. It can also result from the inability to transfer the qualifications earned or the perceived quality of education in origin countries.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 41. Occupations and skill levels for migrants abroad

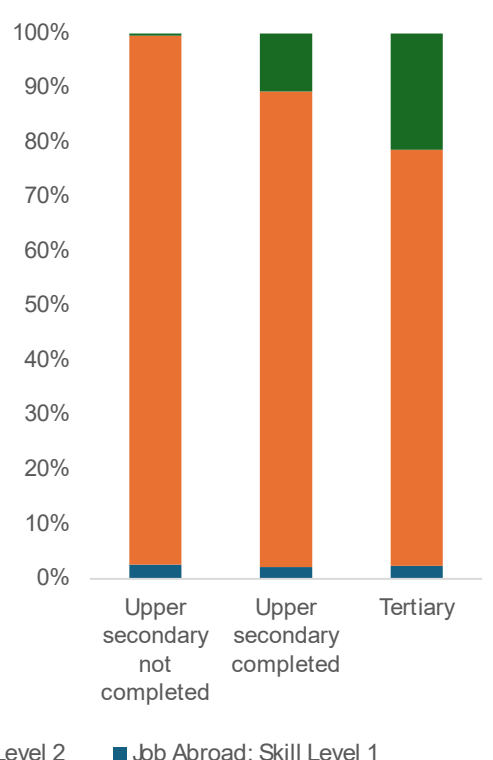
Panel a. Occupations for migrants abroad by sex



Panel b. Occupational and educational skill level (current migrants and returnees)



Panel c. Occupational and educational skill level (non-migrants)



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: In panels b and c, the skill level of the occupation refers to the qualifications required according to the ILO categorization, with level 3 being associated with tertiary education qualifications, level 2 upper secondary education, and level 1 requirements below upper secondary education.

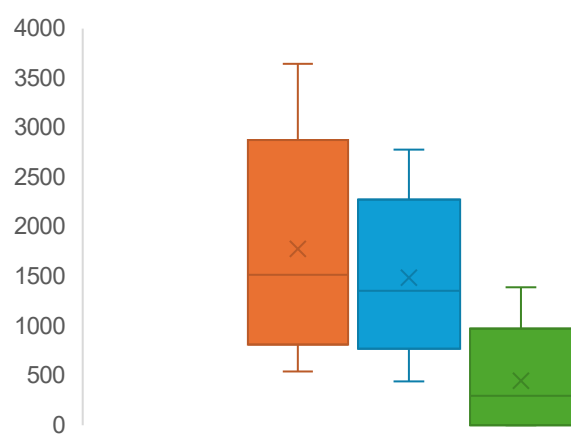
### 3.2.4. Spending and Savings of Migrants Abroad

High monthly spending abroad reduces savings potential, with more than 25 percent of returned migrants unable to save money by the time they return to Albania. Although migrants tend to earn more abroad than in Albania, they also face high expenses that reduce their saving potential, especially for returned migrants when they were abroad (Figure 42). Current migrants earn an average of USD1,900 per month, which is higher than the median monthly wage of USD 1,500 reported by returnees. However, current migrants also face higher monthly expenses (USD 1,600 vs 1,300). When comparing

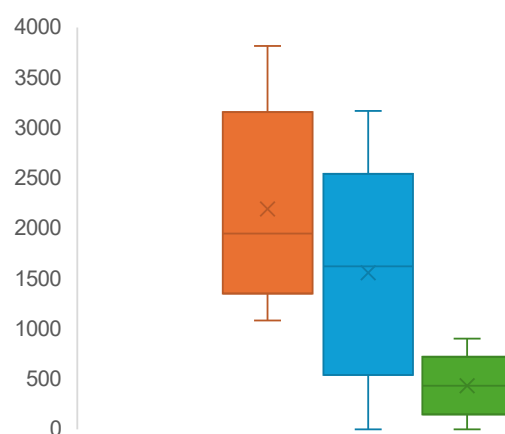
the distribution of wages and expenses, a larger percentage of current migrants manage to earn more than they spend, resulting in positive savings during their migration period. Returned migrants in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of savings were still unable to save any money. On the other hand, the median migrant currently abroad is able to save around USD 400, with only few being unable to save anything at all. The higher earnings and spending of current migrants can be attributed not only to the more recent migration trends (as they report on more recent periods), but also to intrinsic differences in their profiles compared to returnees, including a greater reliance on formal migration channels that can lead to better economic outcomes.

Figure 42. Wages, expenses, and savings for migrants while abroad

Panel a. Returnees



Panel b. Current migrants



Wages Expenses Savings

Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Values are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentile, then standardized to USD2024. The box-and-whisker plot provides summary information about the minimum, first quartile (Q1), median (Q2), third quartile (Q3), and maximum values of monthly wages, expenses and savings of current migrants and returnees while abroad in USD.

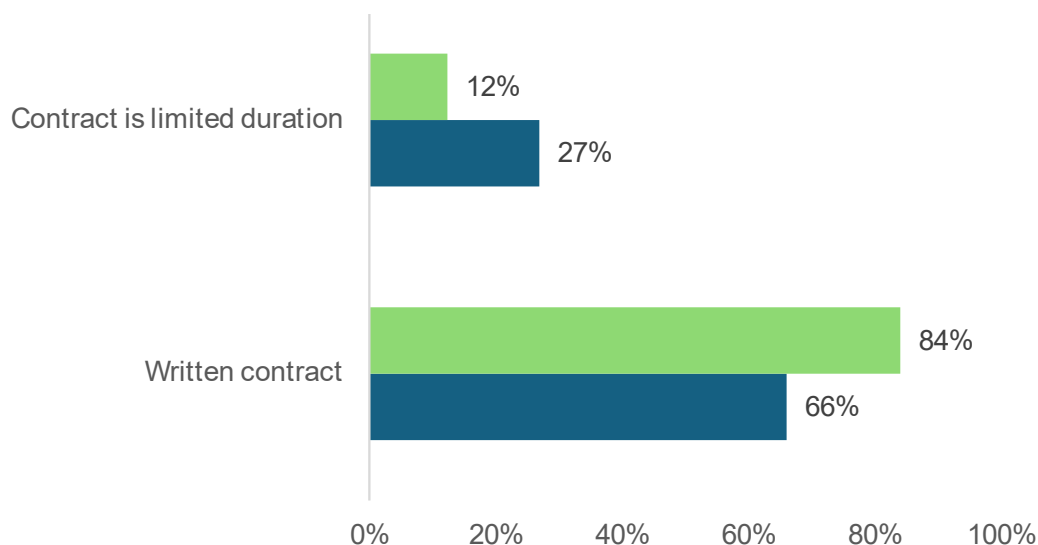
### 3.2.5. Migrants' Vulnerabilities Abroad

Migrants also face higher vulnerabilities in destination countries, marked by higher levels of informality and lower access to benefits. Around one in three migrant workers is employed without a written employment contract, compared to only 16 percent of non-migrant

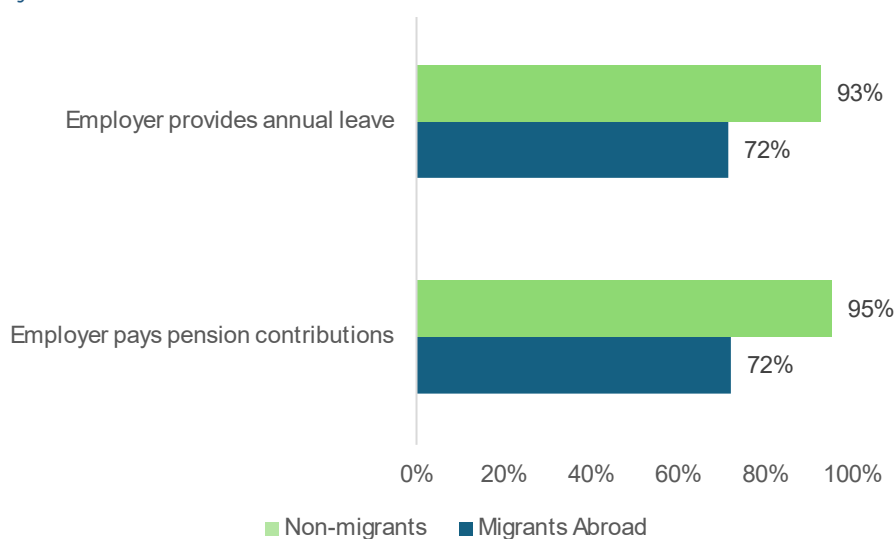
workers (Figure 43, panel a). Migrants are also more than twice as likely as non-migrants to hold temporary contracts (27 percent versus 12 percent). Furthermore, while non-migrant individuals benefit from the almost universal coverage of social insurance and employment benefits, 28 percent of migrants do not receive pension contributions or paid annual leave from their employers (Figure 43, panel b).

Figure 43. Types of contracts and employment benefits by migration status

## Panel a. Types of contracts



## Panel b. Employment benefits



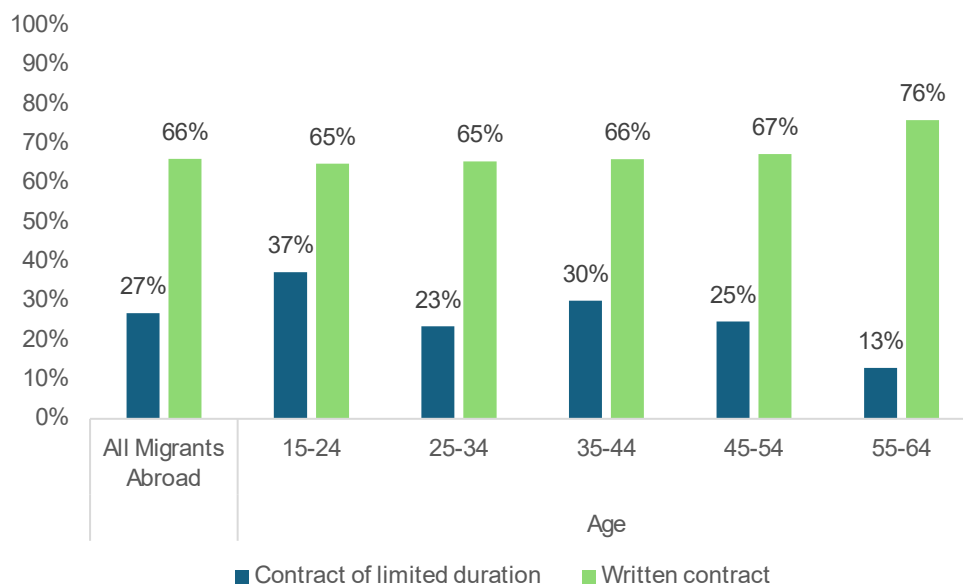
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

The vulnerabilities in contractual arrangements among migrants abroad appear to improve with age, reflecting more secure and stable positions over time in the labor market. Younger migrants (aged 15–24) are the most likely to be employed under contracts of limited duration (37.3 percent), which may indicate entry-level or less stable job opportunities typically available to younger workers. This rate declines steadily with age, reaching just 13 percent for those aged 55–64, who are more likely to hold permanent or formal jobs (Figure 44). Similarly, the prevalence

of written contracts increases with age, with 65 percent of youth aged 15 to 24 years reporting to possess a written contract, compared to 76 percent among those aged 55–64. This pattern suggests that older migrants may be more established in the labor market and have greater access to formal employment arrangements, possibly reflecting accumulated experience, stronger negotiation power, or employment in more stable sectors.



Figure 44. Types of contracts for migrants abroad by age



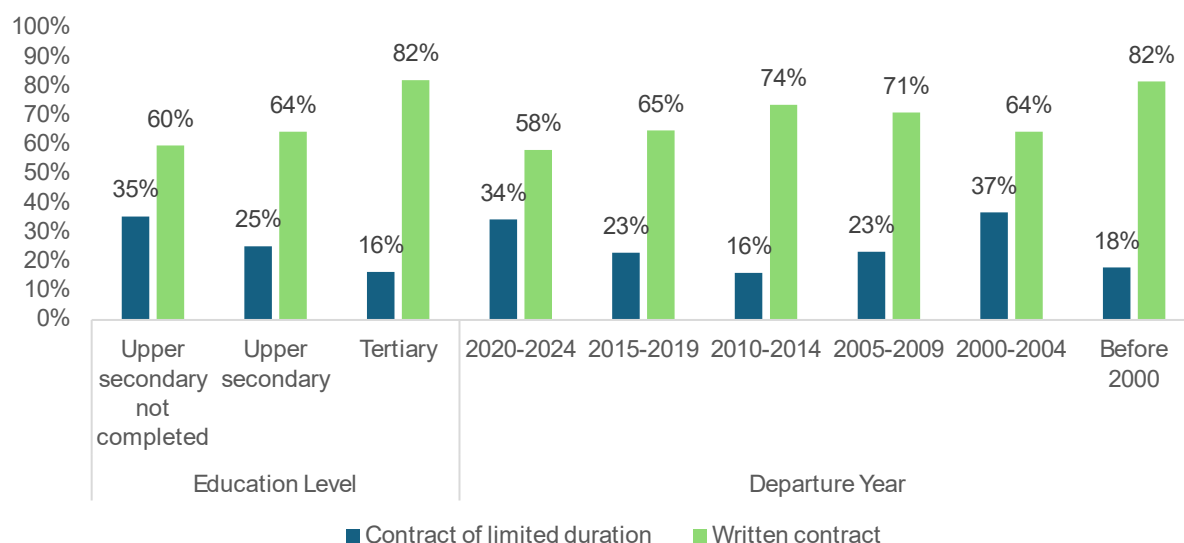
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Employment conditions also improve with educational attainment, emphasizing the impact of human capital in job security and formality. Migrants with lower education levels—specifically those who did not complete upper secondary education—are more likely to be employed under limited duration contracts (35 percent), indicating more precarious employment (Figure 45). In contrast, only 16 percent of migrants with tertiary education work under such contracts, suggesting greater access to stable employment. This pattern is reinforced by the prevalence of written contracts: just under 60 percent of migrants without upper secondary education report having written contracts, compared to 82 percent for those with tertiary education. These patterns indicate that higher educational attainment improves access to formal and secure employment opportunities abroad, whereas migrants with lower education levels may face more unstable job arrangements, even though they have higher employment rates.

The quality of employment is also associated with the length of stay abroad, with more veteran migrants being more likely to have formal and longer-term contracts. The length of stay in the country also improves employment formality. Migrants currently abroad who left

Albania between 2020 and 2024 report the highest share of limited duration contracts (34 percent), while those who migrated between 2010 and 2014 report the lowest (16 percent). Similarly, written contracts are most common among earlier migrants—particularly for those who left before 2000 (82 percent) and between 2010 and 2014 (74 percent)—compared to only 58 percent among the most recent cohorts. These findings suggest that recent migrants are more likely to enter the labor market through temporary or informal work, whereas migrants with longer stays abroad have shifted towards more formalized employment over time.

Figure 45. Types of contracts for current migrants by education level and year of departure



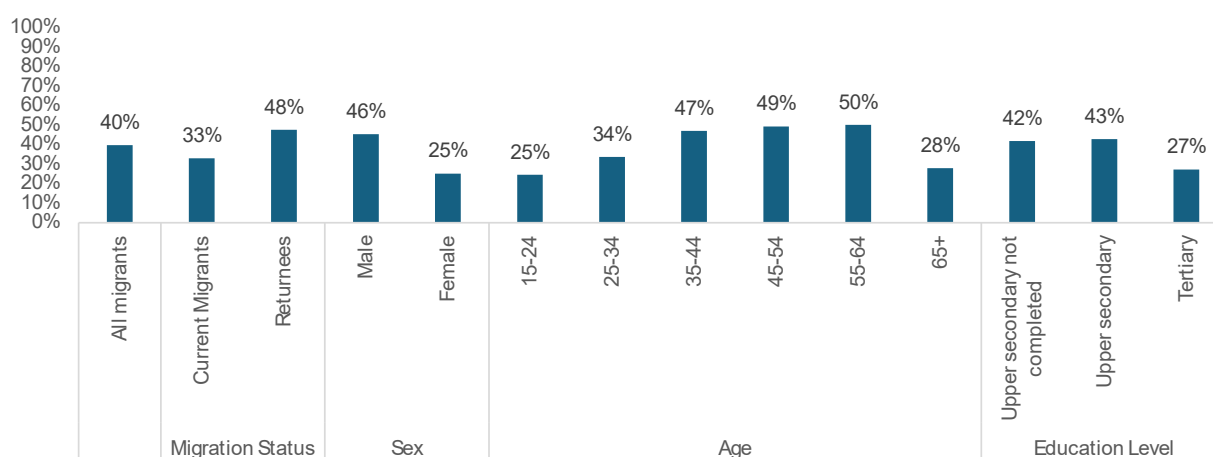
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

### 3.2.6. Migrants' Remittances Patterns

Remittances are commonly sent by Albanian migrants, particularly among male, working-age, and low to middle-educated migrants. Nearly 40 percent of all migrants reported having sent remittances during their time abroad, including nearly 50 percent of returned migrants and just over 30 percent of migrants currently abroad (Figure 46). Given their higher income and employment rates, male migrants are almost double as likely to have sent remittances

as female migrants. The incidence of sending remittances also increases with migrants' age, peaking at around 50 percent for those aged 45-64, although less than 30 percent of those aged 65 or older reported sending them. Educational level also affects remittance patterns, with migrants who have upper secondary education being more likely to send remittances (43 percent), compared to just 27 percent of tertiary-educated migrants. This is consistent with international evidence from other countries which suggests that high-skilled migrants may remit higher amounts but do so less frequently than low-skilled migrants.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 46. Percentage of migrants sending remittances by demographic characteristics

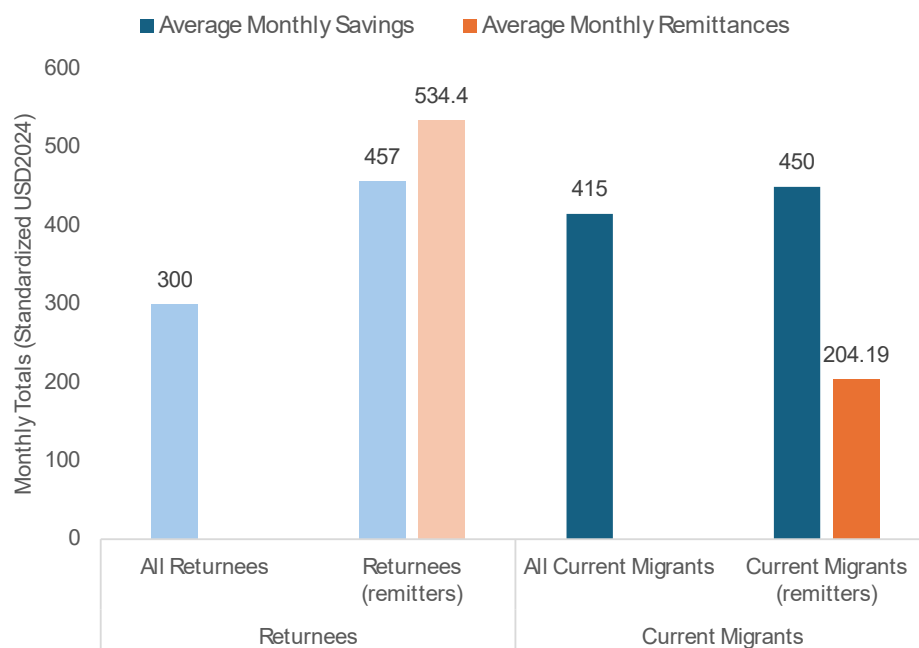


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Remittance behavior is positively associated with the ability to save during the migration experience. Returned migrants who sent money transfers while abroad were able to save, on average, 50 percent more than non-remitters (USD 450 vs USD 300) (Figure 47). Similar patterns are observed among migrant population currently abroad, although the saving gap between remitters and non-remitters is smaller. Return migrants who sent remittances were also closer to meeting their saving expectation compared to non-remitters. Among return migrants, remitters saved about 76 percent of what they expected, while those who did not remit saved less than half (42 percent) of what they expected (Figure 48). Overall, those who saved money

had slightly lower expectations for savings (USD \$535) than those who did not save (USD \$649), suggesting a mismatch between intentions and outcomes. Another important finding is that return migrants sent larger amounts of remittances while abroad compared to current migrants. This can be partly associated with some share of current migrants not wanting to return and progressively reducing their ties with the country. International evidence shows that migrants tend to remit more in the early years, but remittances decline gradually over time due to weakening ties with origin households,<sup>26</sup> whereas those intending to return maintain stronger family ties and continue to provide financial support to their families in the home country.

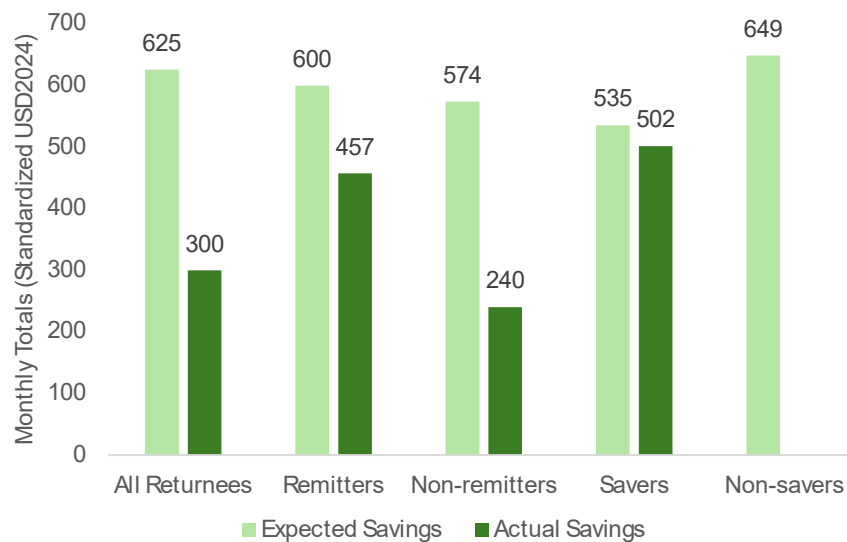
Figure 47. Savings and remittances



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Savings and remittances are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles, then standardized to USD2024. Light colors refer to returnees while dark colors refer to current migrants.

Figure 48. Expected and actual savings by remitting status of returnees



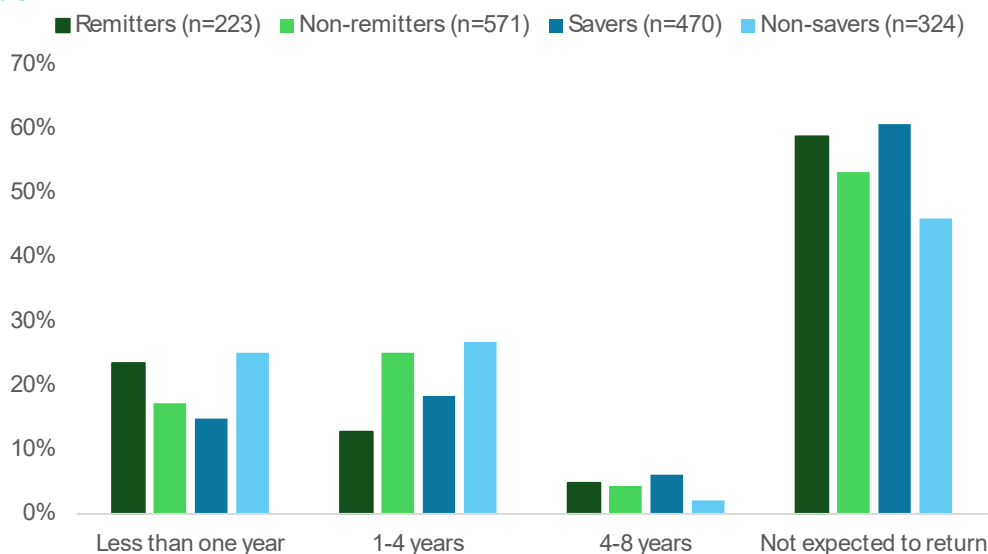
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Totals are winsorized at 1st and 99th percentile, then standardized to 2024 based on most recent year abroad.

Migration planning horizons influence financial behaviors like saving and remitting. Returnees who planned to stay longer or indefinitely were more likely to save and send remittances suggesting a connection between long-term expectations and financial means and opportunities. In contrast, those who anticipated shorter stays, especially non-savers, may lack incentives or opportunities to save and remit. Savers (61 percent) and remitters (59 percent) report higher rates of not expecting to return than those

who didn't save or remit (Figure 49). In contrast, non-savers and non-remitters expected shorter periods of migration. Non-savers were the most likely to anticipate a shorter stay abroad, with 25 percent expecting to stay less than one year—the highest among all groups—and over half projecting a maximum duration of four years. Similarly, non-remitters were more likely to project a stay of 1–4 years, with 25 percent falling into this category.

Figure 49. Expected amount of time spent abroad for returnees by saving and remitting status

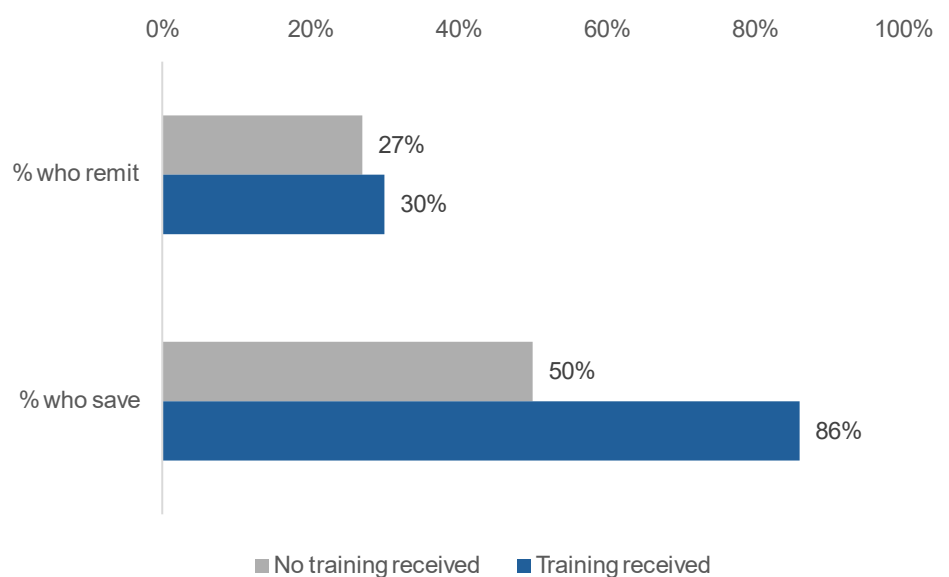


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024

Pre-migration training, which correlates with better income and saving capacity of migrants, is also associated with higher likelihood of remitting back to Albania. While only half of migrants that did not undergo pre-migration training are able to save money while abroad, more than 85 percent of those that received any form of training were able to save during their migra-

tion period (Figure 50). Pre-migration training not only correlates with a higher ability to save, but also to remit. Evidence shows that migrants who received training were more likely to send money back to Albania compared to those who did not have any pre-departure preparation (30 versus 27 percent).

**Figure 50. Percentage of returnees who save and remit, by pre-migration training status**

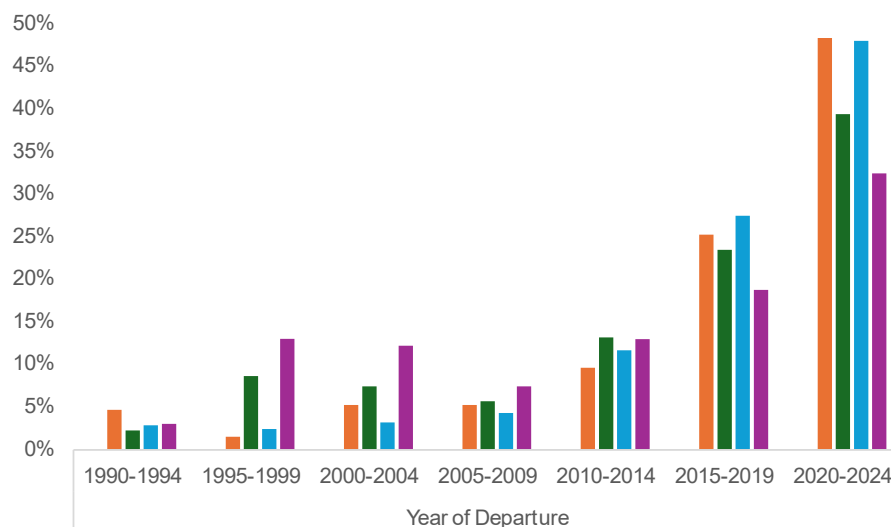


*Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.*

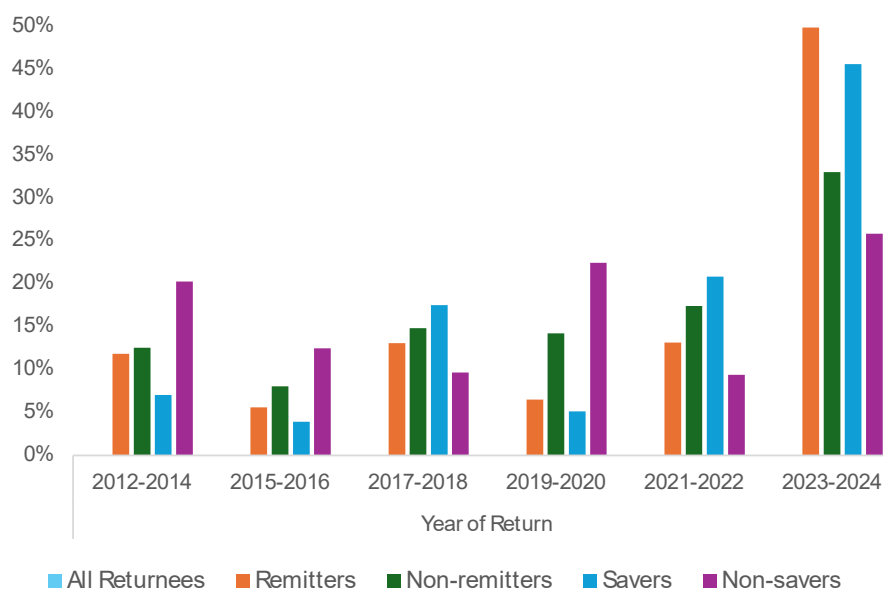
More recent cohorts of migrants tend to be more likely to save and remit. The higher incidence of recent migration episodes among savers and remitters suggests that more recent migrants view migration as a means to support financially their families back home or have more opportunities to do so. Recent migration dominates across all groups, but it is especially prominent among remitters and savers (Figure 51, panel a). Remitters are more concentrated in recent migration periods, with over 73 percent of those who left after 2015, and nearly 50 percent of those who returned between 2023 and 2024 (Figure 51, panel b), compared to only 63 percent of non-remitters leaving after 2015, and just 33 percent of non-remitters returning since 2023. Savers show a similar pattern, with nearly half migrating between 2020 and 2024 (compared to over 30 percent of non-savers), and the majority returning in recent years, particularly in 2023-2024, reaching up to 46 percent. On the other hand, non-savers account for the highest share

(28 percent) of early departures (1995-2004) and a larger share of returns between 2012 and 2020 (65 percent)..

Figure 51. Year of departure and return of return migrants by saving and remitting status  
Panel a. Year of departure



Panel b. Year of return



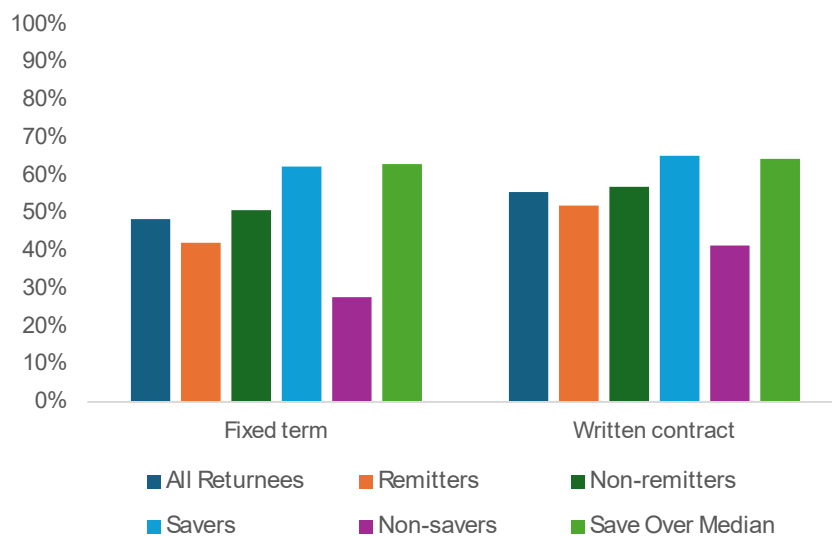
■ All Returnees ■ Remitters ■ Non-remitters ■ Savers ■ Non-savers

Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Savers, especially those who save above the median amount, are significantly more likely to have fixed-term and written contracts. Return migrants with formal, time-bound employment were more able to save, not only due to higher and more stable earnings, but also because the limited duration of their contracts may heighten the need to accumulate savings in preparation for future uncertainty. Over 60 percent of savers have fixed-term contracts, and over 65 percent have written contracts. Among high savers, these figures are even higher (Figure 52). In contrast, non-savers exhibit the lowest levels of

formal employment, with just 28 percent holding fixed-term contracts and 41 percent having written agreements—reflecting their generally more vulnerable working conditions. Remitters are slightly less likely than non-remitters to have formal contracts: 42 percent of remitters have held fixed-term contracts compared to 51 percent of non-remitters. Similarly, 52 percent of remitters have had written contracts, compared to 57 percent of non-remitters.

Figure 52. Contract situation for return migrants by saving and remitting status



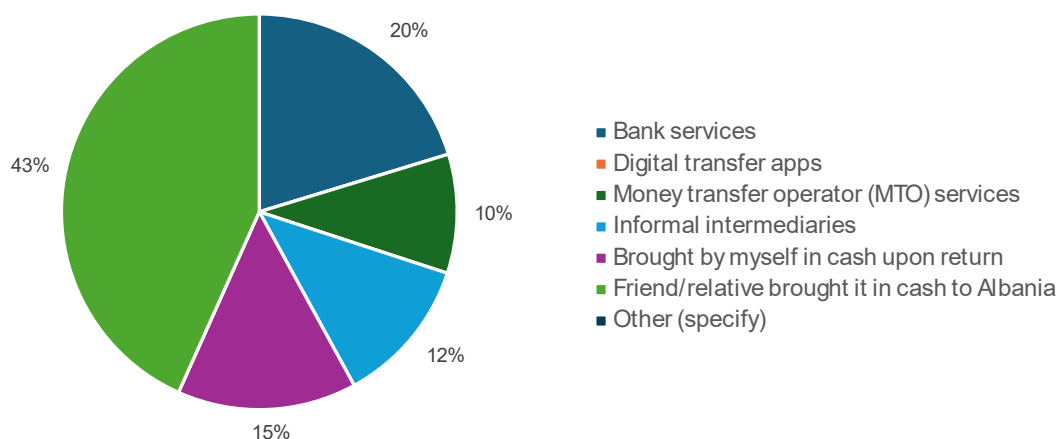
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Remittances remain largely untapped in the Albanian economy, with a sizable prevalence of informal channels. That is particularly the case among return migrants, nearly all of whom report sending remittances in cash either through family or friends or carry it with them upon they return to Albania (Figure 53, panel b). While current migrants also favor informal routes, they show a slightly more diversified approach to sending remittances. Approximately 20 percent opt for bank services, 10 percent use money transfer operators, and 12 percent rely on informal intermediaries, which are rarely used by returnees. Nevertheless, 60 percent of current migrants still transfer money to Albania in cash,

either through family, friends, or personally. Returnees exit the migration cycle, often transferring savings in bulk upon return, while current migrants may need more frequent, smaller remittances to support their families, prompting them to explore additional options. Formal financial channels such as banks and MTOs, are underutilized, especially among returnees, while digital application are not used by either group. This might point to issues related to accessibility, gaps in digital literacy, or high transaction fees. International evidence shows that preferences for informal remittance channels could be due to familiarity,<sup>27</sup> perceived lower costs, or distrust of formal financial systems.<sup>28</sup>

Figure 53. Main method of remittance by migration status

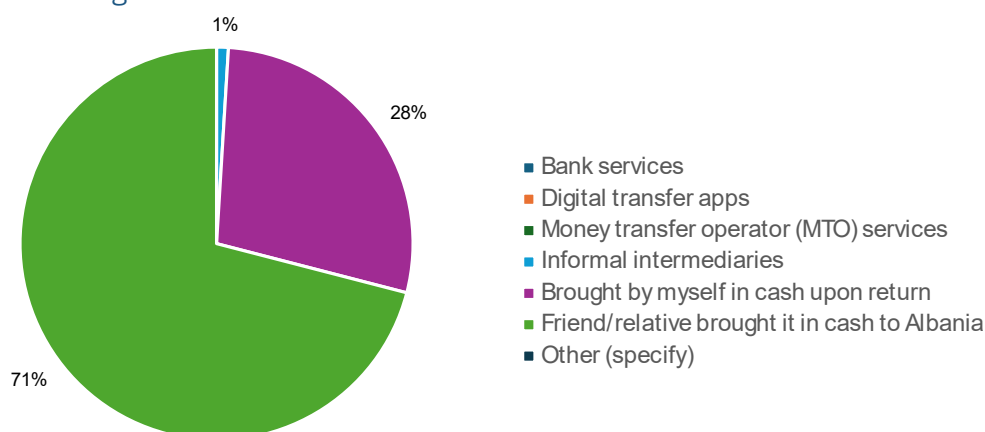
Panel a. Current migrants



<sup>27</sup> Kosse and Vermeulen (2014).

<sup>28</sup> Yang (2011).

Panel b. Return migrants

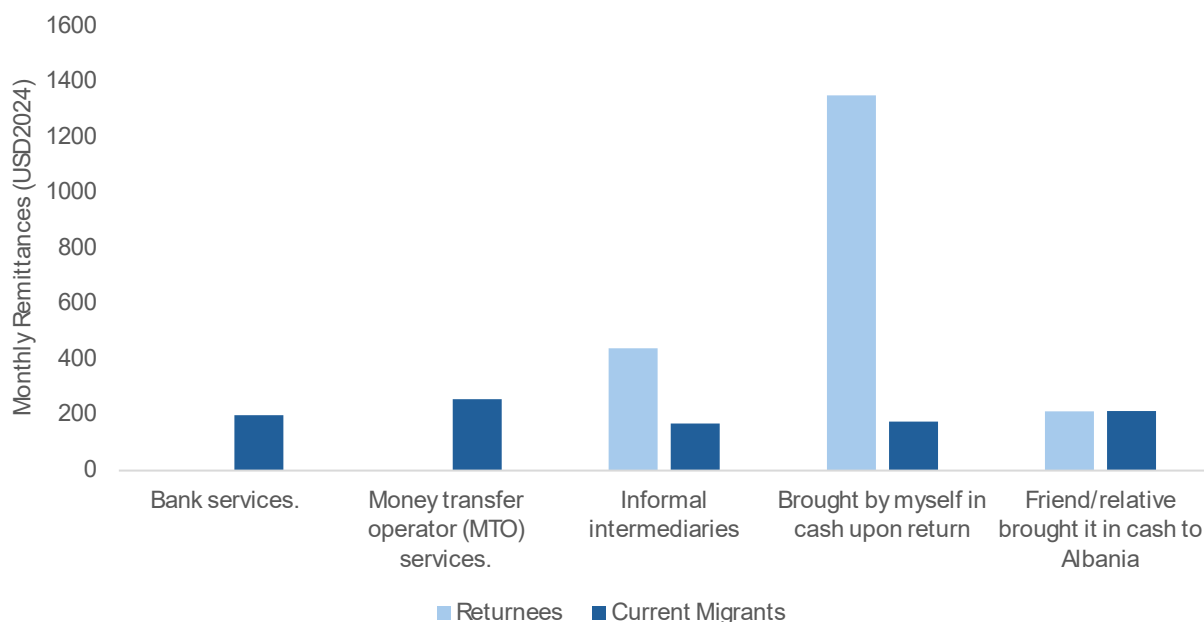


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Migrants are not only more likely to use informal methods, but they also remit high amounts through these channels. When comparing the different transfer methods among returnees, the highest average amount is in cash carried by them upon return (USD \$1,351), followed by the amount sent through informal intermediaries (USD \$440), and cash carried by friends and

relatives to Albania (USD \$213) (Figure 54). The highest amount of remittance sent by current migrants through MTOs is on average USD \$257, followed by bank services averaging USD \$200. Informal cash methods also remain common among current migrants, averaging around USD \$170–220 across types.

Figure 54. Average monthly amount remitted by method and migration status



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Remittance amounts are winsorized at the 1st and 99th percentiles, then standardized to USD2024 based on the most recent year abroad.

Given the informal nature of many remittances, traditional methods used in main surveys under-report their true extent. Typical household surveys collect information on remittances by

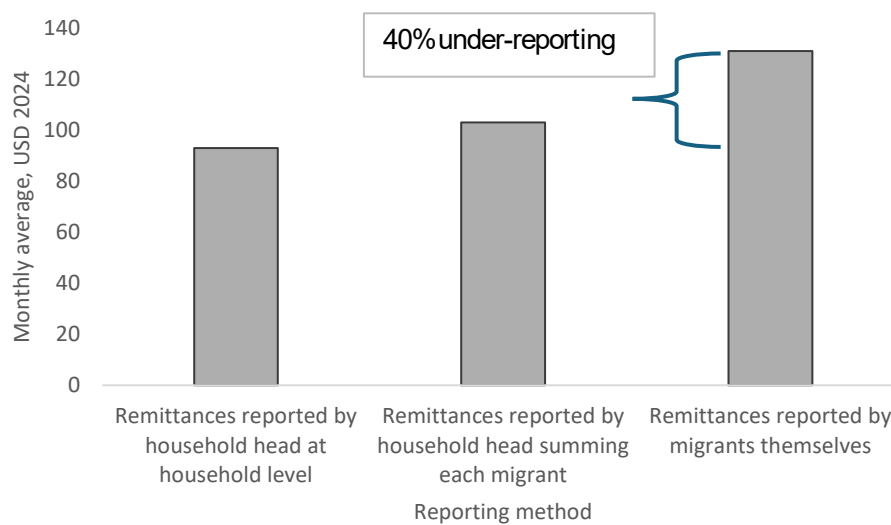
asking household members in Albania about received remittances from abroad. However, recent international studies have shown that recipient households tend to under-report the



amount of remittances received from senders compared to administrative record. Remittances reported from migrants themselves are generally more accurate (De Arcangelis et al. 2023). A unique aspect of the 2024 Albania Migration Survey is its ability to measure the extent of this under-reporting. When asked about the size of total remittances received, migrant households report an average of 93 USD per month (figure 55). When household members are asked about remittances from each individual migrant

member, the total increases by 10 percent to 103 USD. However, the most significant change occurs when migrants abroad are directly asked about the likelihood and size of remittances, reporting an average of 131 USD, that is, more than 40 percent higher than what household members in Albania report through traditional methods. This emphasizes the importance of conducting more extensive surveys that collect information directly from migrants to enhance data accuracy.

Figure 55. Average reported amount remitted by reporting method

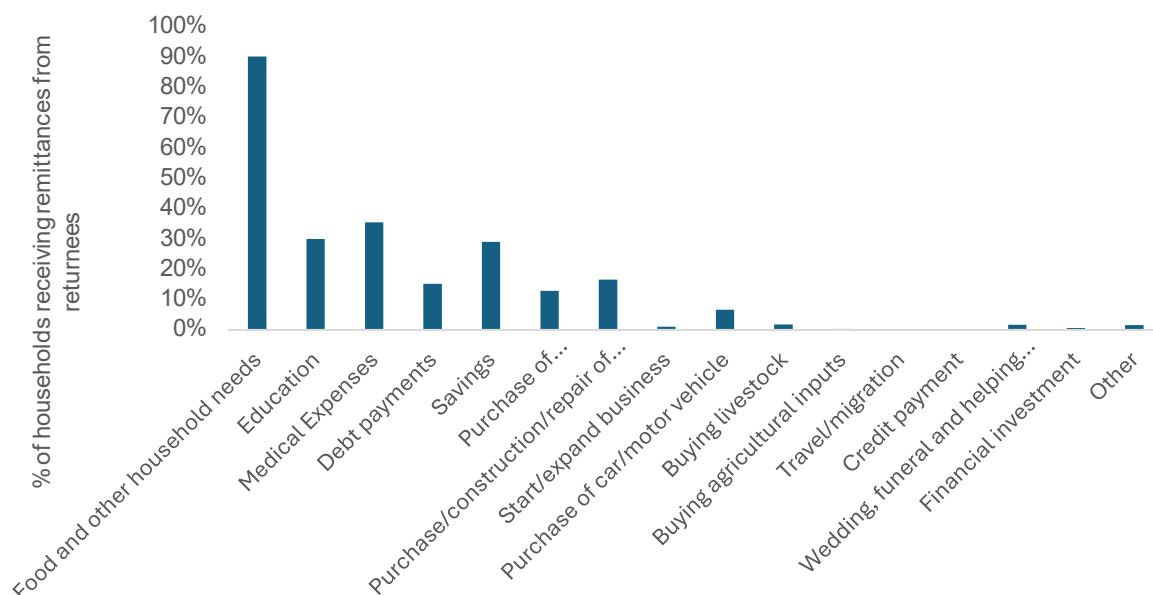


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Remittances sent by migrants are primarily used to support consumption and essential services, particularly in food, health, and education. While a meaningful portion is saved, very few households invest remittances in businesses, agriculture, or other productive ventures. This indicates a strong preference for essential and immediate consumption, with significantly less focus on investment or income-generating activities. There is a heavy focus on basic consumption with an overwhelming majority of households (90 percent) using remittances for food and daily necessities, highlighting the role of remittances as basic welfare mechanism (Figure 56). Medical expenses (36 percent), and education (30 percent) are also often cited as expenditures, emphasizing the importance of remittances in supporting additional needs and human capital. Close to one-third of house-

holds report saving a portion of the remittances received, however the use of these funds for productive investments, such as business expansion, financial investments, the purchase of agricultural inputs and livestock, remains very limited, with less than 2 percent of households engaging in such activities. This picture does not seem to have changed from evidence found in 2005, which showed that financial gains from migration were not used for productive agricultural investments and activities.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, evidence shows that there is also limited spending on assets (13 percent) and durable goods (7 percent), while housing investments are more common (17 percent). The use of remittances for social and migration costs is also very limited, confined to less than 2 percent of households.

Figure 56. Percentage of households who report using remittances for different reasons among the top 3 uses



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

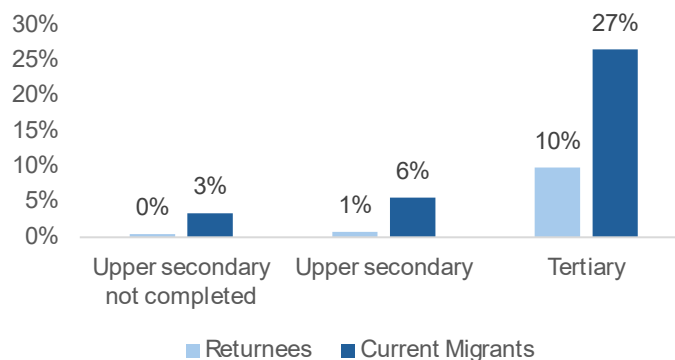
Note: Based on responses from households with returned migrants. Respondents were asked to report a maximum of three intended uses. All other potential uses were reported by less than two percent of households.

### 3.2.7. Migration and Human Capital Accumulation

The migration experience can also enhance human capital accumulation. Many Albanian migrants choose to pursue further education and many other gain valuable work experience abroad. Not only does education play a key role in shaping migration decisions, labor market integration, and return patterns, but also migration itself can support human capital accumulation.

More than a quarter of current migrants with a tertiary degree have completed tertiary education abroad (Figure 57). This figure is significantly higher than that among returnees with tertiary education (10 percent), pointing to a growing trend of migration for educational purposes among more recent cohorts of migrants. Furthermore, nearly 60 percent of migrants enhance their human capital through international work experience, which leads to positive wage returns back in Albania (see section 4).

Figure 57. Percentage of migrants who obtained their highest degree outside of Albania, by education level

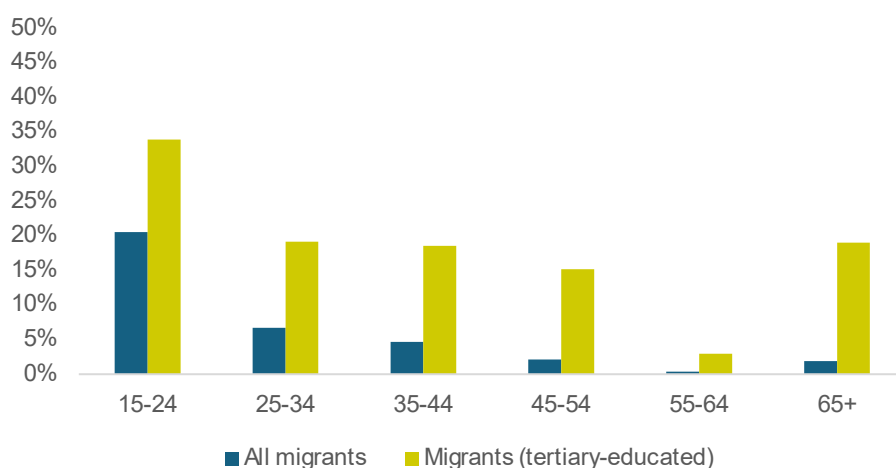


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Young migrants aged 15 to 24 years old are the most likely to have attained their highest level of education abroad. Among all migrants and returnees, this age group has the highest share (20 percent) of individuals who achieved their highest degree abroad (Figure 58). There is an overall decreasing trend of obtaining education abroad as age increases, ranging from 7 percent among the 25-34 age group to 0.4 percent among those aged 55-64. More than

one in three individuals aged 15-24 completed their tertiary education abroad, suggesting that younger individuals are the most active in pursuing higher education abroad. This may reflect growing student mobility, scholarship opportunities, or targeted migration for study purposes in recent years. Although young adult migrants dominate in tertiary education attainments abroad, older age groups also benefit from international investments in human capital.

**Figure 58. Percentage of migrants who obtained their highest degree outside Albania, by age**



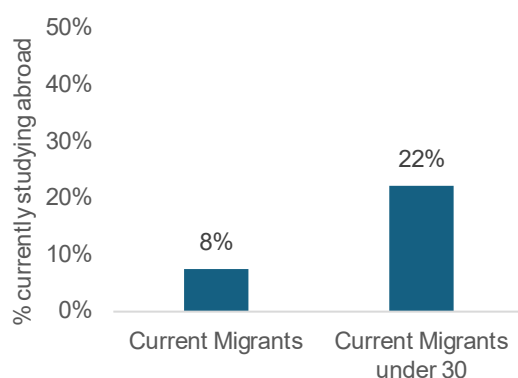
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Tertiary education dominates enrollments abroad by current migrants. Nearly 1 in 4 migrants under 30 (and 7.5 percent of total migrants) are currently studying abroad, reinforcing the role of migration in supporting educational pathways for youth (Figure 59, panel a). Tertiary education

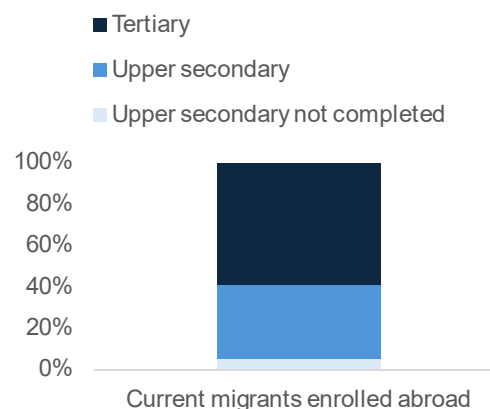
(59 percent) dominates the educational level of current migrants enrolled abroad (Figure 59, panel b), while 36 percent are enrolled in upper secondary education. On the other hand, only 5 percent of those enrolled have not yet completed upper secondary.

**Figure 59. Education for migrants abroad**

Panel a. Migrants currently studying abroad



Panel b. Education level of migrants currently enrolled abroad

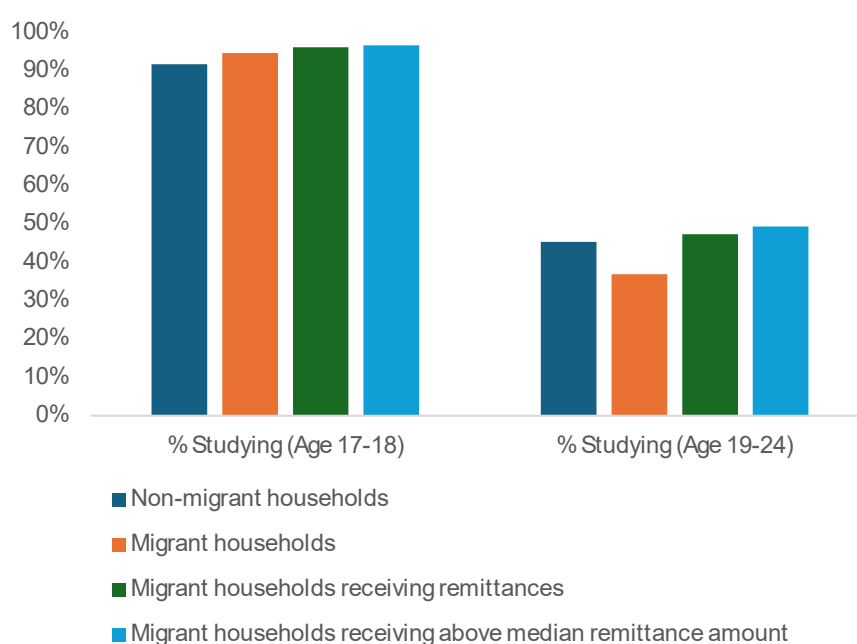


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Migration also shows an indirect link to educational investments, as young people from migrant households have higher enrollment rates, particularly if their families receive remittances. After the compulsory-education age (6–16), teenagers aged 17–18 from migrant households are slightly more likely to be enrolled in formal education compared to their peers in non-migrant households (95 percent versus 92 percent) (Figure 60). Enrollment rates are particularly high for teenagers in migrant households that receive remittances, highlighting the

potential role that remittances play in financing educational investments. Among youth aged 19–24, those from migrant households are less likely to be enrolled in school compared to those from non-migrant households (37 percent versus 45 percent). However, this pattern is reversed for youth in remittance-receiving migrant households, who perform better overall. This shows how potential negative effects on children's education, deriving from the absence of a parent, can be compensated by increased financial resources to invest in education.

Figure 60. Percentage of individuals currently enrolled in formal education

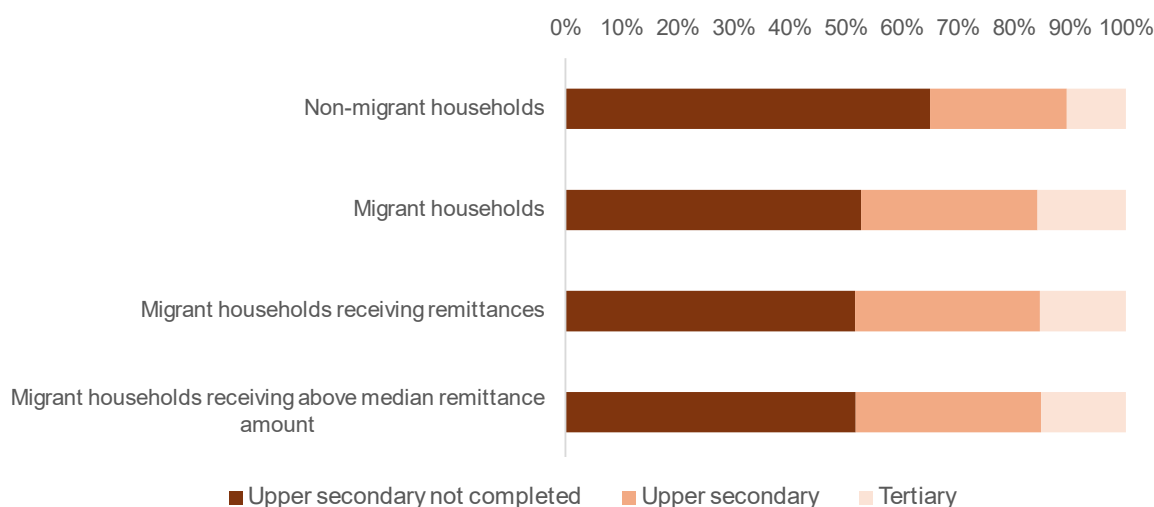


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

At the same time, migrant households, particularly those receiving remittances, tend to have higher educational attainment compared to non-migrant households. About 53 percent of adult individuals (aged 25 years and above) in migrant households have not completed upper secondary education, compared to 65 percent among non-migrant households (Figure 61). Among migrant households receiving remittances, and those receiving above the median amount, education levels are similar, but higher than non-migrant households. Among migrant households, 31 percent of individuals have completed upper secondary education, compared to 24 percent for non-migrant households. Migrant households receiving remittances and

those receiving remittances above the median show higher rates around 33 percent. Similarly, 16 percent of migrant households (insignificant differences found for those receiving remittances) have tertiary education compared to 11 percent for non-migrant households.

Figure 61. Education level of household members in Albania ages 25 or under

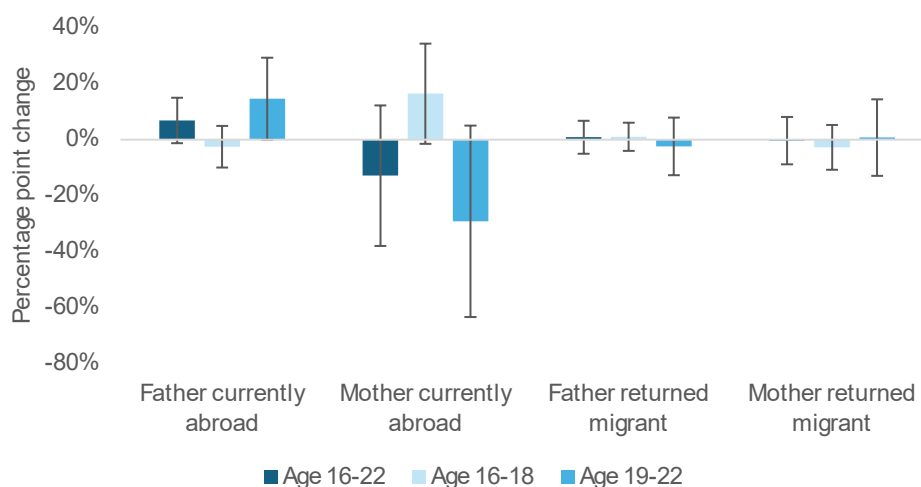


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Regression analysis shows that paternal migration is generally associated with an increased likelihood of children's school enrollment in Albania, whereas such evidence is more mixed for maternal migration. Having a migrant father working abroad is associated with a 7-percentage point increase in the enrollment of children aged 16-22 years, and a 14-percentage point increase in the enrollment of children aged 19-22 years, suggesting the potential positive effects of remittances (Figure 62). In contrast, having a mother abroad increases the likelihood of enrollment for children aged 16-18 years, but has a

negative impact on the likelihood of enrollment for children aged 19-22 years, although these effects are not statistically significant. In general, the less clear positive effects of maternal migration may reflect their role as the primary caregiver in many households, thus their absence could disrupt children's education, compensating the positive effects of higher income. Return migration of either fathers or mothers does not have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of children's school enrollment in Albania.

Figure 62. Association between migration and the likelihood of a child in Albania being currently enrolled in school



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Estimated impacts are derived from a linear regression model on the likelihood of a child in Albania being currently enrolled in school, controlling for the education level of their parents and including regional fixed effects.

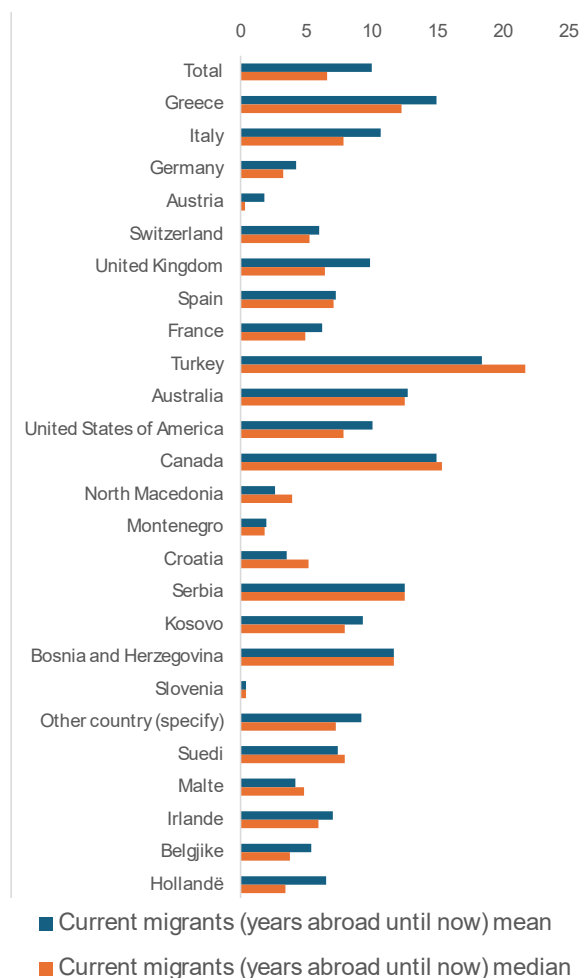
### 3.2.8 Migration Duration and Plans

The analysis of the duration of stay shows that current migrants typically spend longer periods abroad than returnees, suggesting that those still overseas are either more firmly settled, or face different conditions that influence their return decisions. Albanian migrants currently abroad have spent an average of 10 years abroad, with a median stay of 6.6 years (Figure 63, panel a). Returnees, on the other hand, have shorter migration episodes, averaging 6.1 years abroad, with a median of only 1.9 years (Figure 63, panel b). Nearly 40 percent of returnees stayed abroad for less than a year, demonstrating a significant incidence of short-term migratory episodes. Greece and Italy are the most prominent destinations for long-term stays among both current

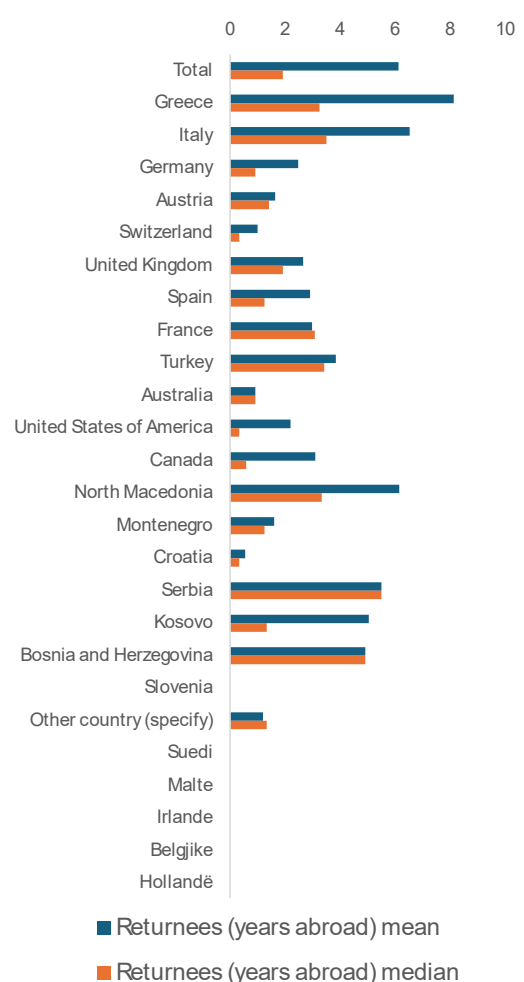
migrants and returnees. Since the first wave of migration following the fall of communism in the early 1990s, these countries have remained the primary destinations, largely due to their geographic proximity and cultural ties. Current migrants in Greece have spent an average of 14.9 years abroad, compared to 8.1 years among returnees. Similarly, current migrants in Italy report an average stay of 10.7 years abroad, compared to 6.5 years among returnees. Migrants to countries such as the United Kingdom (9.8 years), Canada (14.9 years), and the USA (10.0 years) also report relatively long stays, especially among current migrants. In contrast, destinations that have gained momentum in recent years — such as Germany, France and Austria — show significantly shorter durations, particularly for returnees (averaging between 1.6 and 3 years).

Figure 63. Duration of time abroad

Panel a. For current migrants



Panel b. For return migrants

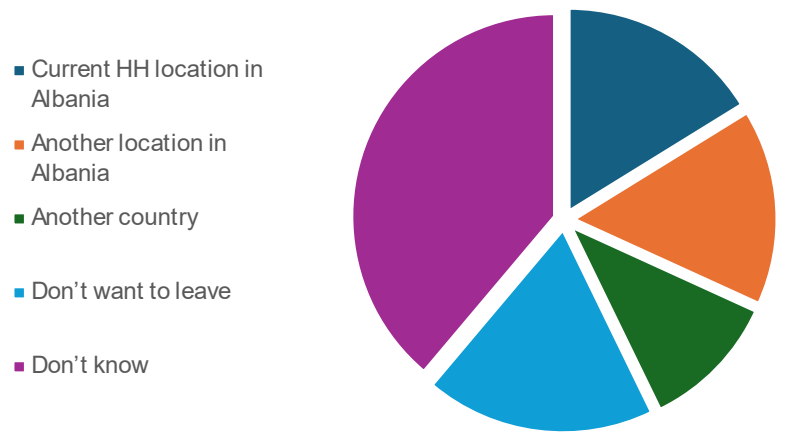


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

A large share of current migrants remains uncertain about their future plans, with only a minority expressing a desire to return to Albania, highlighting ongoing mobility and unsettled migration trajectories. Notably, a significant 39 percent of current migrants remain undecided about their future plans, reflecting considerable uncertainty regarding their long-term intentions

(Figure 64). Additionally, 18 percent of current migrants express no desire to return to Albania at all. Meanwhile, 16 percent of current migrants intend to return to their current household location in Albania, 15 percent plan to resettle in another part of the country, whereas 11 percent aim to migrate to a different country rather than returning to Albania.

**Figure 64. Intended destinations of current migrants upon leaving their current location**



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

#### Box 4: Albanian Diaspora: Findings from the IOM Qualitative Study (2025)

The interviewed members of the Albanian diaspora are actively engaged in a wide range of initiatives that contribute to the country's cultural, academic, economic, and institutional development. About one in five members of the diaspora is active in diaspora organizations and associations, mostly in relation to the promotion of the Albanian identity abroad (e.g., language schools, cultural events). In the academic sphere, diaspora interviewees spoke of being deeply involved in knowledge exchange and institutional collaboration. Economically, diaspora members are increasingly looking beyond traditional remittances toward more strategic forms of investment, including real estate, tourism, and technology ventures. Some are already managing businesses in Albania or supporting family-run enterprises. Diaspora investors have a strong preference to invest in their places of origin due to emotional and cultural attachment. Institutionally, the diaspora also contributes to policy-making and strategic planning, such as in EU integration-related projects, by offering technical expertise. The Diaspora Coordination Council has been involved in shaping the National Diaspora Strategy, advising on diaspora voting rights, and supporting cultural and educational initiatives.

However, the diaspora engagement is limited by several challenges. Discussions with various diaspora members and organizations reveal the following barriers: (I) institutional barriers, including the limited activity of key agencies such as the National Diaspora Agency and the Albanian Diaspora Development Fund, as well as challenges in inter-ministerial coordination; (II) the absence of a centralized diaspora database; (III) limited outreach and communication campaigns aimed at engaging the diaspora; (IV) a lack of structured pathways for diaspora professionals to contribute to Albania's development, which remain ad hoc and often donor project-based;



(V) limited trust in Albanian institutions and concerns about excessive bureaucracy, particularly among professionals; (VI) concerns about the business environment, gaps in the legal framework to support diaspora investors and the absence of dedicated funds to channel investments; and (VII) a growing cultural disconnect among second- and third-generation diaspora that assimilates abroad, resulting in diminishing ties to their Albanian heritage.

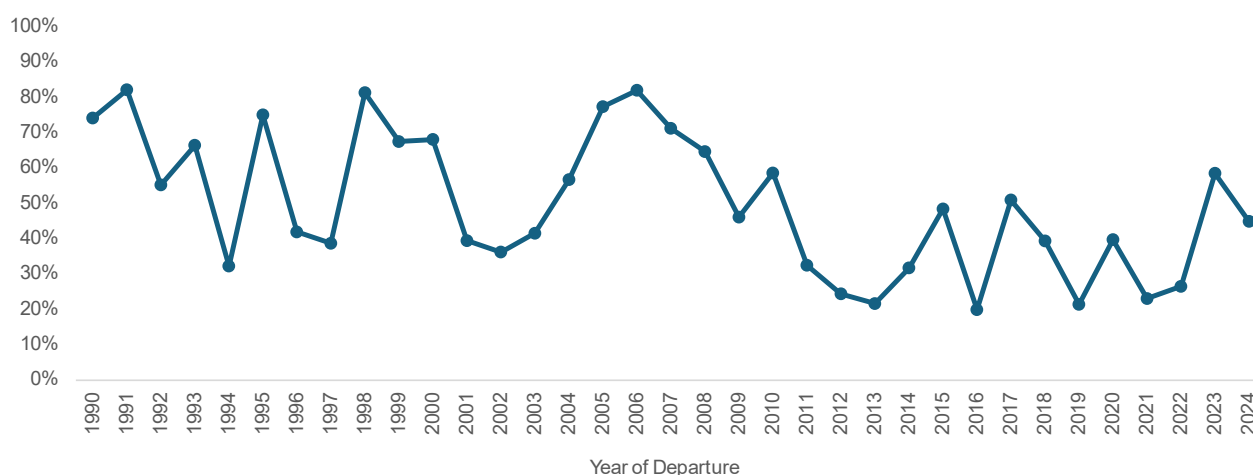
### 3.3. Return phase in Albania

#### 3.3.1. Prevalence and profile of return migration

Return migration is prevalent in Albania, with almost half of all migrants identified by the Albania Migration Survey returning after a period

of time abroad.<sup>30</sup> Some returned after short migratory episodes while others spent many years abroad, demonstrating the extent and variation of return dynamics.<sup>31</sup> Migrants who departed longer ago are more likely to have returned by 2024, although recent years have also seen an increase in return rate (Figure 65).<sup>32</sup>

Figure 65. Rate of return, by year of departure



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

The majority of return migration occurred recently, with 45 percent of all returnees coming back between 2020 and 2024. The share of returnees who came back in earlier periods is much lower, with only around 10–19 percent returning in each five-year window between 2000 and 2019 (Figure 66, panel a). This trend highlights a significant acceleration in return migration in the most recent years. The timing of return differs notably between those who returned earlier than they expected and those who did not. A larger share of early returnees came back between 2016 and 2021, particularly

during 2016–2018 (22 percent) and 2019–2021 (19 percent) (Figure 66, panel b), coinciding with the peak of the European migration crisis when many Albanian emigrants unsuccessfully sought asylum in EU countries. By contrast, a majority (63 percent) of non-early returnees are concentrated in the most recent period (2022–2024).

<sup>30</sup> This is in line with estimates that around 40 percent of all migrants worldwide eventually return to their country of origin (World Bank, 2023).

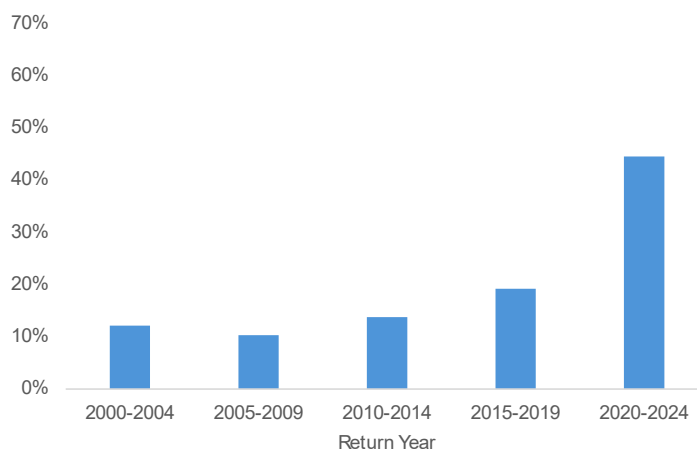
<sup>31</sup> The nature of a household survey conducted in an origin country means it is more likely to capture short-term and temporary migration than global statistics, but less likely to capture permanent and full-family migration. This results in a calculated return rate that is higher than other data sources.

<sup>32</sup> The return rate is the percentage of migrants that left in a given year that had returned back to Albania by 2024.

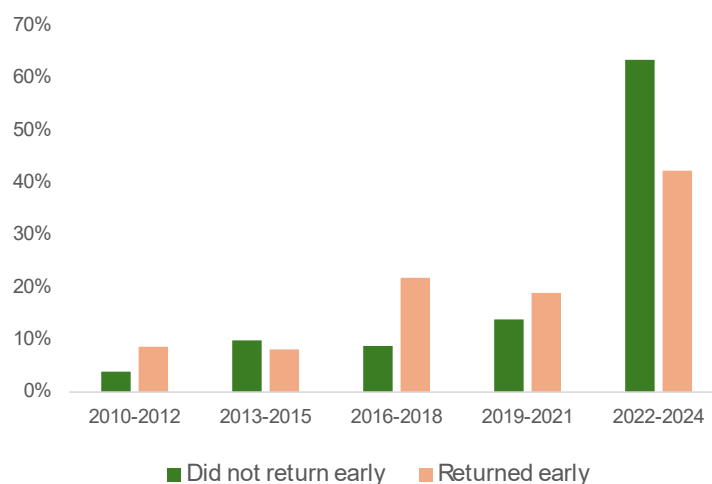


Figure 66. Albanian returnees by year of return

Panel a. Year of return: All returnees



Panel b. Year of return: Early and Not-Early returnees



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: In panel b migrants who return early are those who report having returned earlier than they originally expected.

The demographic profile of returnees shows significant differences between those who returned earlier than expected and those who returned as planned. Early returnees<sup>33</sup> make up 67 percent of return migrants, with a predominance of males at 92 percent, compared to 67 percent among those who did not return early. This suggests that men were significantly more likely to shorten their migration experience compared to expectations (Figure 67, panels a and b). In terms of age, individuals who did not return early are generally younger: 33.5 percent are aged 25–34, while early returnees are

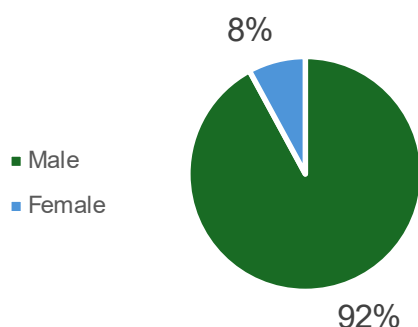
more concentrated in the 35–54 age range (33.5 percent) (Figure 68, panel a). Moreover, at the time of return, non-early returnees were more likely to be between 25–34 years old, making up 39 percent of that category. Meanwhile, early returnees showed a broader age distribution but with a notable concentration (23 percent) among those aged 45–54 (Figure 68, panel b). These findings imply that older male migrants were more likely to return earlier than expected, potentially due to administrative, employment, health, or family considerations.

33

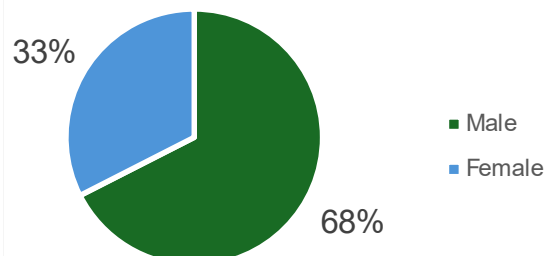
67 percent answered yes when asked if they returned earlier than originally planned.

Figure 67. Gender of returnees

Panel a. Gender of returnees for early returns



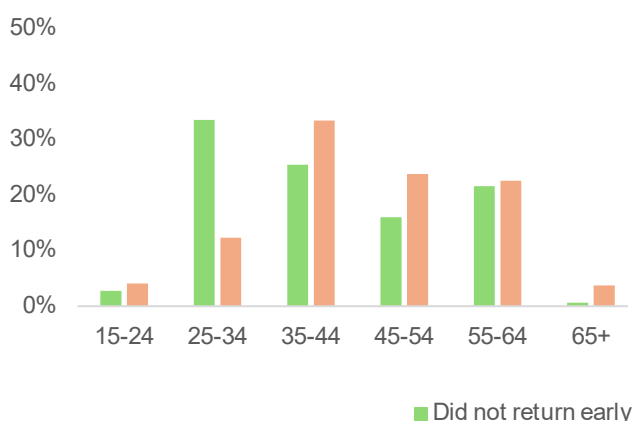
Panel b. Gender of returnees for non-early returns



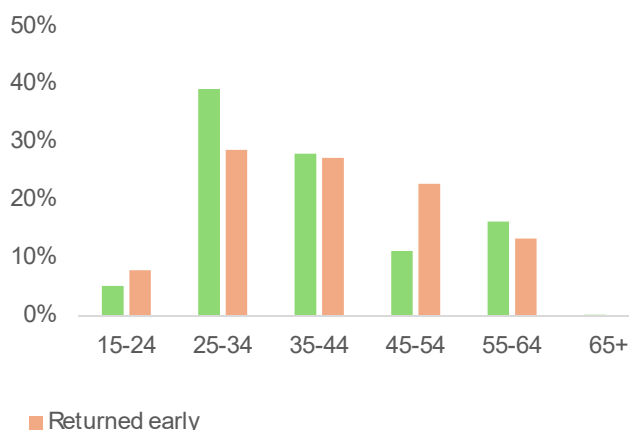
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Figure 68. Age of returnees who did and did not return early

Panel a. Age of returnees



Panel b. Age of returnees at return

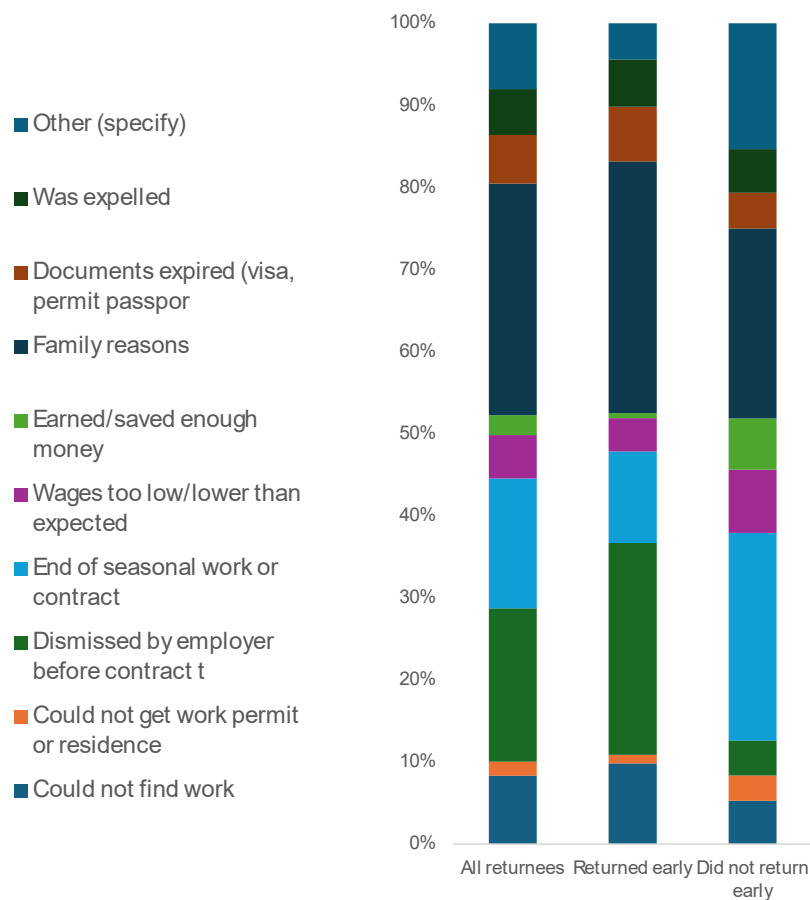


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Early returns are more closely associated with job loss, lack of opportunities, and administrative issues in the host country, while planned returns are more often linked to contract completion and financial achievements. Family reasons are a common driver of return for both groups of returnees, though it is slightly more frequent among early returnees. All returnees report family reasons at a rate of 28 percent as the main reason for return to Albania (Figure 69). This rises to 31 percent among those who left early and remains high at 23 percent for those who did not return early. The reasons for return differ significantly between those who left early and those who did not leave early. Early returnees are more likely to cite involuntary factors

such as dismissal by the employer (26 percent) or inability to find work (10 percent), while those who stayed abroad longer often returned due to the end of a seasonal work or contract (25 percent) or because they had earned and saved enough money (6 percent).

Figure 69. Reasons for returning to Albania



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

### 3.3.2. Reintegration of return migrants in the Albanian labor market

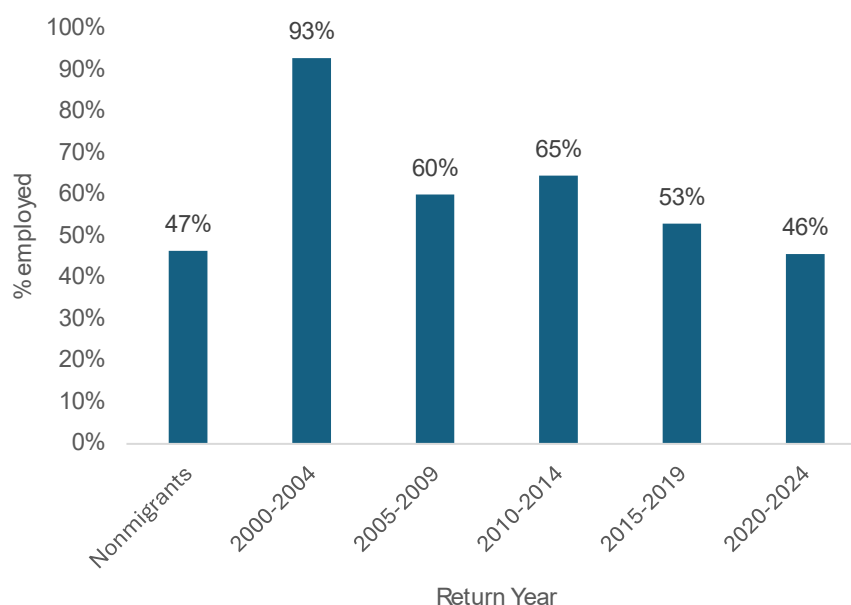
Returnees tend to integrate well into the Albanian labor market in the medium term, with higher employment rates compared to non-migrants, although those who return more recently are less likely to be employed. Overall, 58 percent of working age returnees are employed in Albania, compared to 47 percent among their non-migrant peers. However, employment rates among returnees are noticeably lower for those who have returned more recently. Returnees who came back between 2000 and 2004 show the highest employment rate at 93 percent (Figure 70). This rate declines steadily for more recent returnees, falling to 60 percent

for those who returned in 2005–2009, 65 percent in 2010–2014, and 53 percent in 2015–2019. The lowest employment rate, 46 percent, is observed among the most recent returnees (2020–2024), suggesting increasing challenges for reintegration into the labor market in the short-run, and that more recent returnees may require a longer period to reintegrate. Return migrants are entitled to supportive services for their reintegration into Albania, especially through the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), but the uptake of these services is limited, and they are not necessarily tailored to the specific needs and conditions of different groups of migrants who return under different circumstances.<sup>34</sup> This is especially important given the increase in recent year of asylum-seekers who are often forced to return, who tend to have higher reintegration needs.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> World Bank (2024). *The limited uptake of these services has been linked to limited awareness among the returnee community and imperfect tailoring to their needs (ibid).*

<sup>35</sup> Those who are forced to return are less likely to have prepared for their return with regards to savings or accumulation

Figure 70. Employment rate of returnees by year of return



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

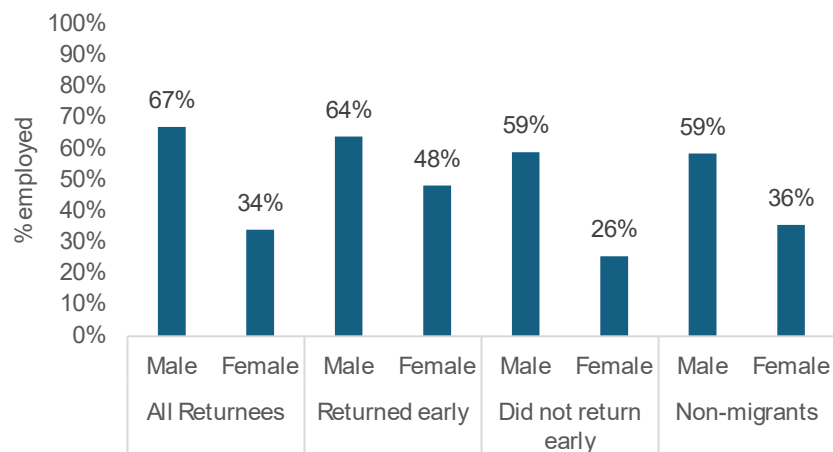
Employment rates vary depending on socio-economic characteristics and the migration experience, which is shaped by the legal status of migrants. Compared to non-migrants, returnees have higher employment rates (58 percent versus 47 percent) (Figure 71). Male returnees show relatively high employment rates (67 percent), which are higher than non-migrant males (59 percent). This suggests that migration experience may provide men with a slight advantage when reentering the labor market upon return. Meanwhile, female returnees overall have lower employment rates (34 percent) compared to their male counterparts, but in line with their non-migrant female peers (36 percent), suggesting that migration does not significantly improve labor market outcomes for women. Early returning males (64 percent) are somewhat less likely to be employed compared to all male returnees, but still more than those who did not return early (59 percent) and non-migrant males. Early returning females fare much better in employment rate (48 percent) than females who did not return early (26 percent). This suggests that early-returning women may have stronger economic motivations or engage more in self-employment. Females who

did not return early show the lowest employment rate (26 percent), even below non-migrant females. Previous evidence shows that the legal status abroad shapes labor market outcomes back in Albania, with rejected asylum seekers facing more limited economic opportunities at home leading them to greater intentions to re-migrate.<sup>36</sup>

of social and human capital (David, 2017; Mezger Kveder and Flahaux, 2013).

36 World Bank (2024).

Figure 71. Employment rate of returnees by sex and time of return



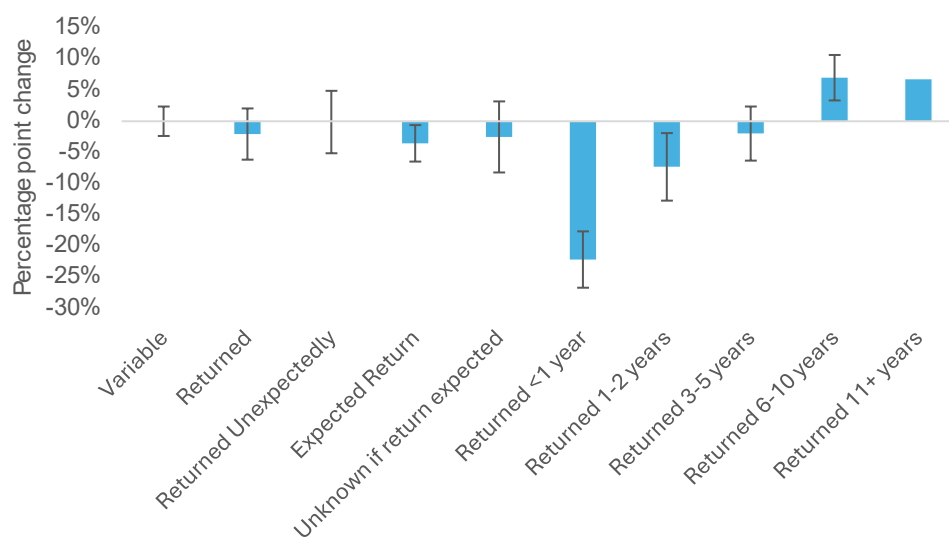
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: The distinction between those who returned early and those who didn't comes from an additional survey module conducted with a subset of returned migrants, including many recently returned, which is why there is a discrepancy between the employment rate for returnees and the rates for those who did or did not return early.

Controlling for differences in individual characteristics, return migration is associated with a lower likelihood of being employed in the short-term compared to non-migrants, but it increases over time. Taking into account demographic factors, return migration is associated with a 2-percentage point decrease in the likelihood of being employed for returnees compared to non-migrants (Figure 72). This negative effect is even more pronounced among those who have been returned to Albania for less than a

year, as they are 22 percentage points less likely to be employed than similar non-migrants, possibly reflecting limited reintegration time or premature return due to limited migration experiences. Returned migrants are still less likely to be employed until they have been in Albania for more than two years, and by 6-10 years returned, they are 7 percentage points more likely to be employed, suggesting that challenges with reintegration initially hinder the potential employment gains from return.

Figure 72. Association between return migration and employment rates



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

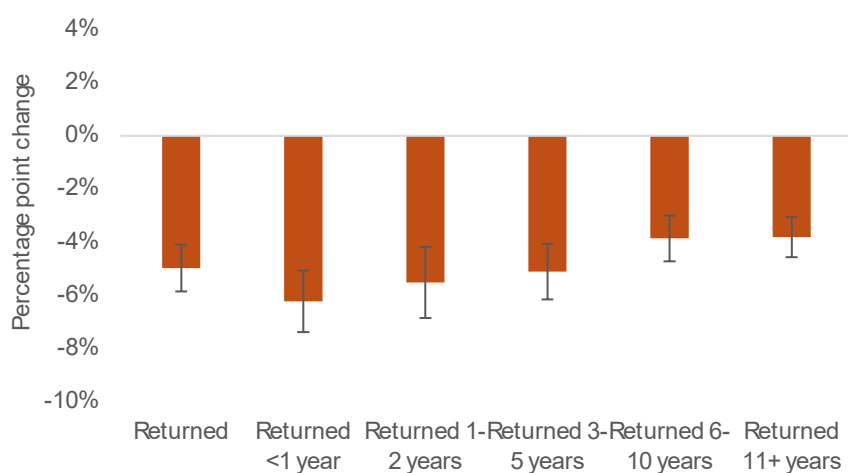
Note: Estimates for impact on employment rate are from a linear regression model on the likelihood of being employed, controlling for demographic factors and including regional fixed effects.

Lower activity rates in the labor market, particularly among returned migrants who accumulated savings while abroad, point to a potential disincentivizing effect of migration on the labor supply in Albania. Returned migrants who are not employed are also 5 percentage points less likely to be searching for work than similar non-migrants, an effect that persists over time, albeit reducing, to less than 4 percentage points for migrants who have been returned for over 11 years (Figure 73, panel a). Return migrants who are neither employed nor searching

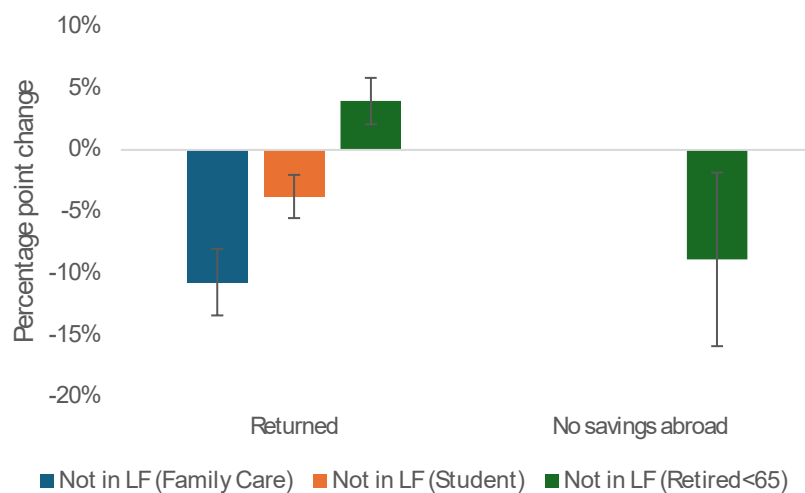
for work are less likely than non-migrant peers to be out of the labor force due to family care reasons (11 percentage points less likely) or to study (4 percentage points less likely), but they are 4 percentage points more likely to report as being retired, for those below the statutory retirement age. However, return migrants who did not accumulate savings abroad are 9 percentage points less likely to retire early than non-migrants, demonstrating that reduced employment upon return can be a product of successful experiences abroad.

Figure 73. Association between return migration and labor market status

Panel a. Likelihood of searching for work for those not employed



Panel b. Likelihood of being out of the labor force by reason for absence



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

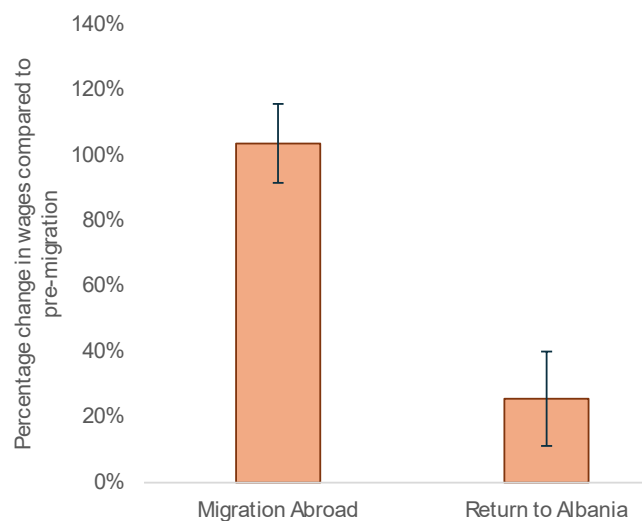
Note: Regression estimates are from linear regression models with controls for demographic factors and including regional fixed effects. It compares return migrants to non-migrants.

According to regression analysis, migrants earn significantly higher wages while abroad, and although these gains diminish upon return to Albania, they are still higher than pre-migration earnings. Migrants experience a significant increase in wages while abroad compared to their pre-migration levels, averaging an increase of 104 percent (Figure 74, panel a). This corresponds to an increase in real wages of about

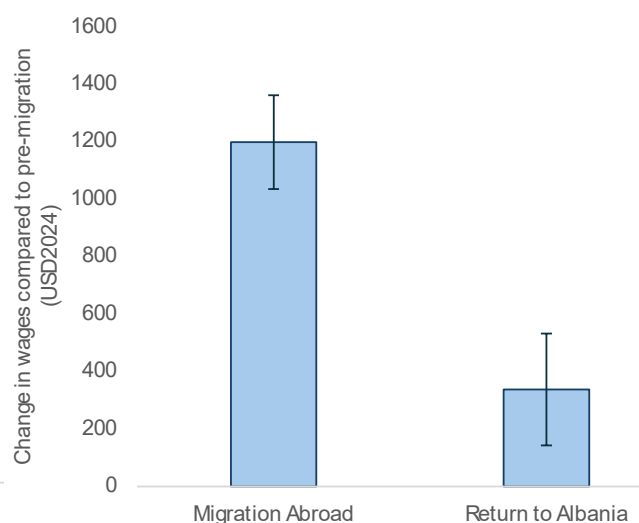
USD \$1,200 (Figure 74, panel b). Upon return the gains are smaller, but still significantly above pre-migration levels. The wage upon return is only 26 percent higher than before migration, which represents approximately USD \$340 absolute wage gain. This shows that gaining work experience abroad is associated with higher earnings upon return to Albania.

**Figure 74. Wage premiums for migration and return**

Panel a. Association of migration with monthly wages (in percentage change)



Panel b. Association of migration with monthly wages (in USD)



*Note: Estimates of changes in wages are from a panel regression that compares wages for individual migrants before migration, while abroad, and upon return to Albania.*

The impact of returning from migration on wages is complex and depends on the success of the migration experience, particularly on whether the migrant worked while abroad. On average, returned migrants do not earn more than comparable non-migrants (Figure 75). Return migrants who were employed abroad earn 3 percent more than non-migrant peers, while migrants who did not work overseas earn 4 percent less, suggesting that wage gains upon return are driven largely by employment experience acquired abroad. This pattern holds regardless of whether migrants returned to work in the same sector in Albania as the one in which they worked abroad. These findings are consistent with international evidence suggesting that the success of a migrant's experience abroad could determine the impact on their socioeconomic

outcomes upon return.<sup>37</sup> Positive wage premiums are observed among returnees with medium education levels, and among those coming from Italy, whereas such higher wage gains are not evident for other groups of returnees.

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Wahba (2015); Beauchemin et al. (2022); and David (2017).

## Box 6: Key policy recommendations on migration by the World Bank (2024)

The report “International Mobility as a Development Strategy” (World Bank, 2024) advocates for building a comprehensive migration system (“GlobAL”), which sees migrants as a global Albanian (global) workforce, strengthening the support, harnessing their skills and resources, and ensuring their contributions to the domestic economy and society. The “GlobAL” system is built on five pillars:

### Pillar 1: Informed Decision-Making

- *Building a comprehensive understanding of migrant populations and needs through robust data systems.*

#### Core Components:

- *Standardizing definitions of current and return migrants across all government databases, surveys, and administrative records to ensure consistent migrant identification.*
- *Implementing household migration surveys that track entire migration trajectories and not just snapshots at one point in time.*
- *Creating an integrated database system linking all migrant services and outcomes across agencies, enabling holistic case management and preventing duplicate data collection.*
- *Implementing evidence-based monitoring and evaluation to continuously improve programs based on actual results and adjust them based on needs.*

### Pillar 2: Seamless Collaboration

- *Creating a coordinated response across all stakeholders involved in migration governance and services.*

#### Core Components:

- *Strengthening inter-agency coordination mechanisms with clear roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols between ministries and agencies.*
- *Ensuring alignment between central and local governments to eliminate service duplication and gaps, ensuring consistent service delivery nationwide.*
- *Building multi-stakeholder partnerships integrating private sector, NGOs, international organizations, and diaspora groups into service ecosystem.*
- *Expanding the cross-border collaboration with destination countries to provide services throughout the migration journey.*

### Pillar 3: Multi-Dimensional Global Services

- *Providing comprehensive support to migrants addressing all aspects of their multidimensional and evolving needs.*

#### Core Components:

- *Expanding services to cover the full migration cycle, from pre-departure preparation through post-return integration, including for those remaining abroad.*
- *Tailoring service packages based on migrant characteristics such as skill level, family composition, employment outcomes, and intentions to return.*



## Pillar 4: Efficient Access

- *Eliminating bureaucratic barriers and streamlining service delivery through digital innovation.*

### Core Components:

- *Consolidating all information, services and procedures into a single digital portal such as e-Albania, accessible before, during, and after migration.*
- *Standardizing procedures across all agencies and municipalities, with consistent intake processes and documentation requirements.*
- *Building a digital-first approach with remote authentication, online applications, and AI-supported guidance, while maintaining in-person alternatives.*
- *Simplifying bureaucratic procedures, reducing paperwork, waiting times, and unnecessary steps through inter-agency coordination.*

## Pillar 5: Expertise and Capability

- *Ensuring system sustainability through adequate resources, training, and institutional capacity.*

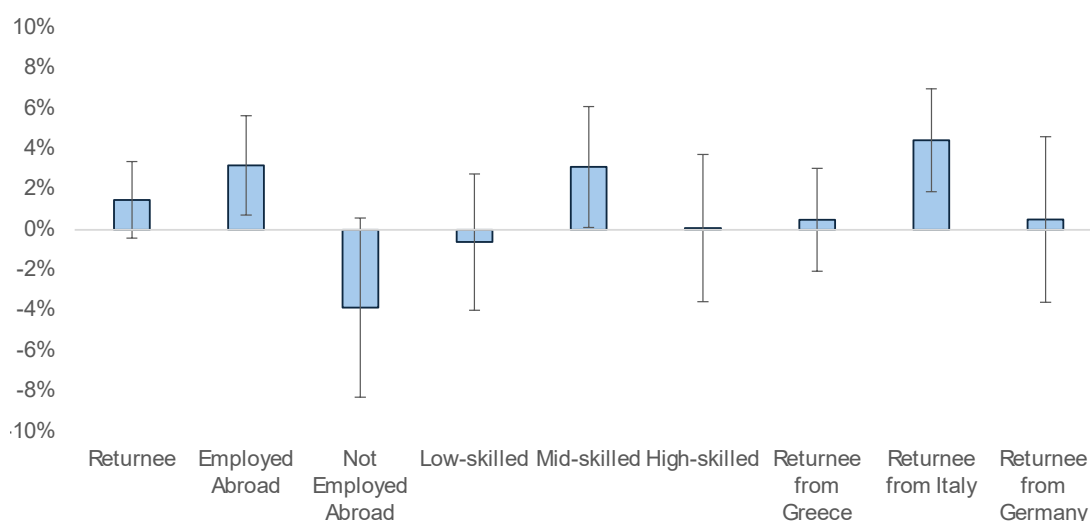
### Core Components:

- *Ensuring adequate staffing levels across all service delivery points, from local offices to strategic decision-making roles.*
- *Investing in comprehensive training programs keeping staff updated on available services, best practices, and regulatory changes.*
- *Sustaining financial commitments to ensure reliable operations, consistent service quality, and system maintenance.*

The findings from the 2024 Albania Migration Survey highlighted in this report support the above-mentioned policy recommendations. Investments in these types of surveys that track migrants over time reduce biases in the assessment of migration impacts for better policymaking.<sup>1</sup> Survey results also show that investing in expanding services to migrants including pre-departure may increase migrants' outcomes, given the strong association with better labor market opportunities abroad and upon returning to Albania. Furthermore, tailoring service packages based on migrant characteristics also prove to be fundamental given the wide diversity of migrants' needs and outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> For example, results from the survey show that, return migrants earn significantly higher wages than their earnings prior to migration, while comparing their earnings to non-migrants (which is what typical surveys allow to do to approximate the association of migration with labor market outcomes in Albania) show no difference in earnings, which could lead to misleading diagnostics.

Figure 75. Wage gaps between return migrants and non-migrants



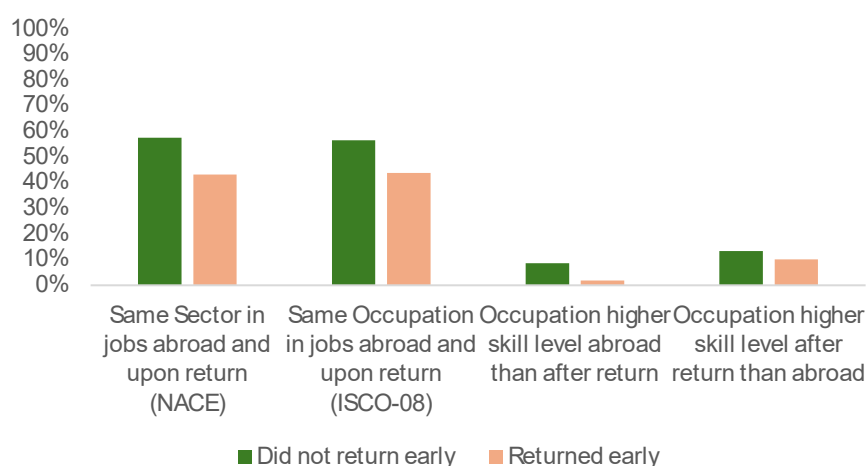
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: Estimates are from a linear regression on the log of wages earned in post-migration jobs, controlling for demographic characteristics and including regional fixed effects.

Return migrants often experience occupational and sectoral shifts after coming back to Albania, with early returnees showing more pronounced changes. Early returnees appear more likely to experience disruption in their professional trajectories, with less alignment between their jobs abroad and at home. Among those who did not return early, about 42 percent returned to work in a different sector compared

to their job abroad, and 43 percent moved to a different occupation (Figure 76), indicating more frequent transitions or disruptions. Conversely, 9 percent of non-early returnees report having higher-skilled jobs abroad than after return, while just 2 percent of early returnees report this, possibly due to lower-skilled positions abroad and more frequent lateral transitions into occupations with similar skill level.

Figure 76. Jobs abroad vs. current jobs in Albania for return migrants



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

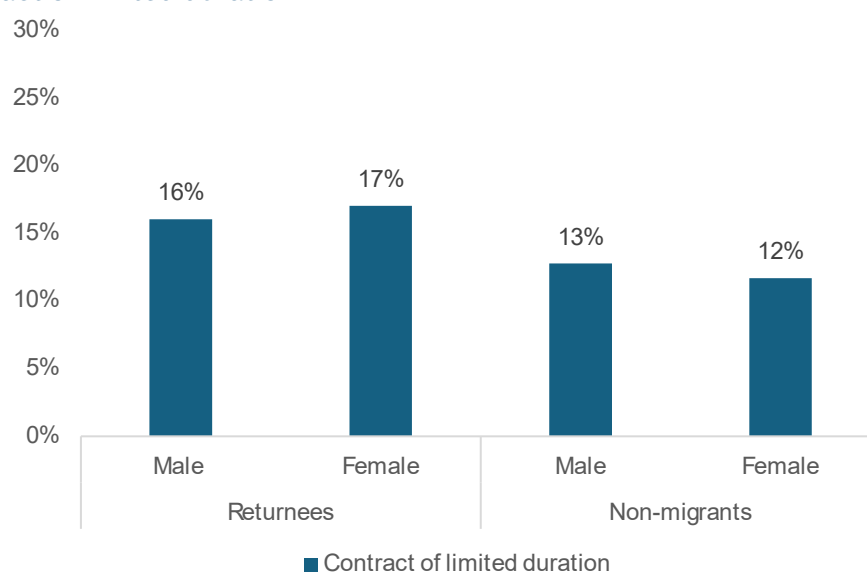
Note: Sector classifications are based on NACE 2-digit sector of economic activity. Occupational classifications follow the ISCO 3-digit categories. Skill levels are based on three broad categories: Level 3 (occupations starting with digits 1, 2 and 3, which are managers, professionals and technicians); Level 2 (occupations starting with digits 4, 5, 6, 7, which are clerks, service and sales workers, skilled agricultural workers, craft and related trades workers); Level 1 (occupations starting with digits 8 and 9, which are plant and machine operators, and elementary occupations).

Returnees and non-migrants show fairly high levels of formal employment arrangements, with negligible differences across groups. A relatively small share of both groups holds contracts of limited duration — 16 percent of male and 17 percent of female returnees, compared to 13 percent of male and 12 percent of female non-migrants (Figure 77, panel a). Written contracts are widespread among all categories suggesting that longer-term employment relationships are still the norm:

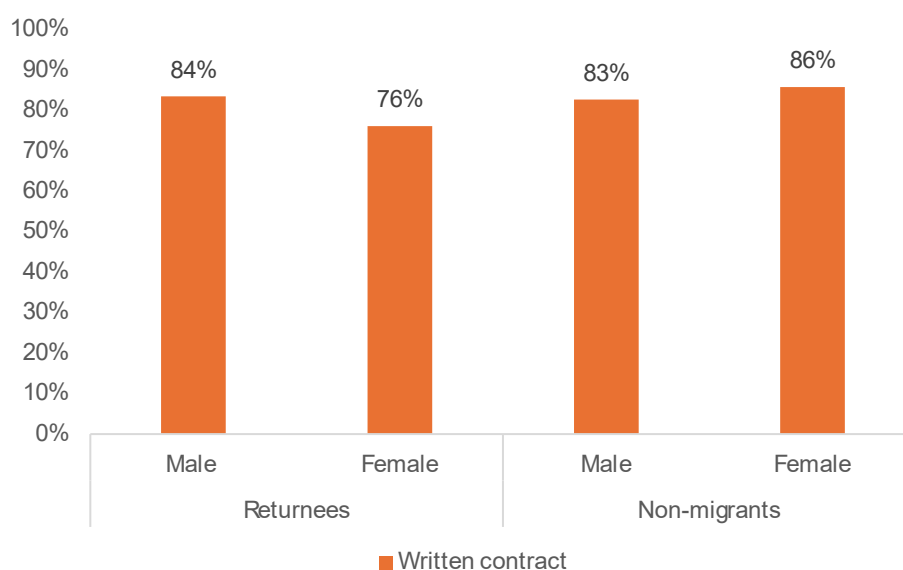
83 percent of male returnees and 76 percent of female returnees report having a written contract, compared to 83 percent of male and 86 percent of female non-migrants (Figure 77, panel b). Non-migrant women stand out with the highest rate of written contracts, whereas female returnees lag slightly behind, suggesting gendered barriers to formal employment may be more pronounced for women after re-turning.

Figure 77. Contracts by migration status and sex

Panel a. Contract of limited duration



Panel b. Written contract

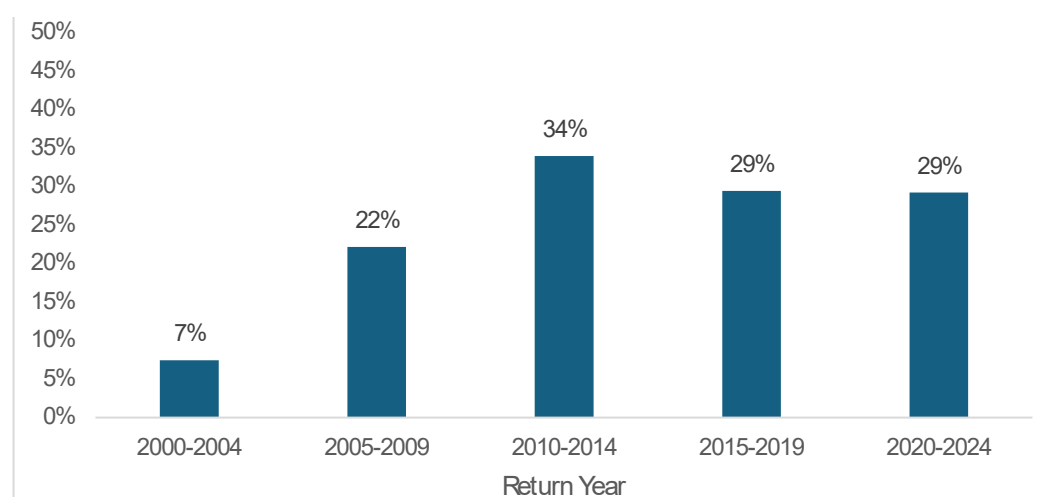


Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

The share of returnees who are self-employed has increased significantly over time until 2014, either due to enhanced entrepreneurial capacity or barriers to formal employment, but has stagnated since then. Overall, self-employment has evolved from a marginal reintegration strategy into a major feature of the returnee experience, particularly after 2010. The share of self-employed returnees increases from a mere 7 percent of those who returned from 2000-2004 to 22 percent from 2005-2009, peaking at 34 percent for those from 2010-2014, and at around 29 percent of the most recent cohorts (2015-2024) (Figure 78). This upward trend suggests that more recent returnees increasingly turn to self-employment as a pathway for economic reintegration, reflecting potentially both an opportunity and a necessity. On one hand, new

returnees may come back with stronger entrepreneurial drive and opportunities due to new ideas, enhanced skills, accumulated savings, expanded networks, etc.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, many may face barriers to reintegrating in the labor market through formal paid employment, and thus resort to self-employment instead. This dual interpretation of self-employment is partially due to different types of self-employment, including both own-account workers and employers with paid employees. Figure 78 further shows that recent returnees are less likely to be employed overall, but more likely to be self-employed than those who returned longer ago. Over time, however, this pattern reverses—the share of self-employed declines while wage employment increases, indicating gradual integration into the formal labor market.

Figure 78. Percentage of employed returnees who are self-employed, by year of return



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Self-employment is an important economic strategy, especially for early returnees and women. While overall employment rates show pronounced gender differences, self-employment rates between men and women are much narrower. Entrepreneurial activities may offer a more equitable option, decreasing gender disparities in the labor market for return migrants. Among all employed returnees, 25 percent of men and 21 percent of women are self-employed, showing relatively similar engagement across genders (Figure 79). Early returnees show a reversed gender gap of self-employment

among women (41 percent) compared to men (25 percent). Earlier evidence has also indicated that Albanian female returnees, particularly those with shorter migration spells, face significant wage-employment barriers, pushing them into self-employment as a default option.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, among those who did not return early, self-employment is lower overall (19 percent for men and 10 percent for women), implying that returnees who stayed longer abroad may have either better access to wage employment due to accumulated resources or skills,<sup>40</sup> or face fewer immediate pressures to generate income inde-

<sup>38</sup> Bossavie, Görlach, Özden and Wang (2025).

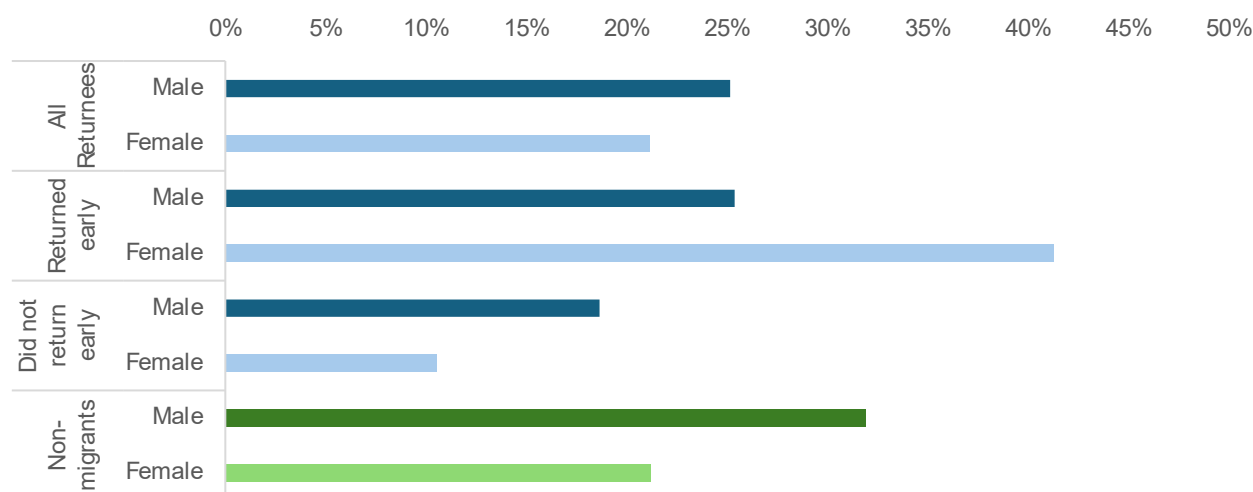
<sup>39</sup> Piracha and Vadean (2010).

<sup>40</sup> Wahba (2015).

pendently. Non-migrants show a slightly higher self-employment rate (28 percent) compared to returnees (24 percent). Likewise, non-migrant male self-employment rate (32 percent) is

higher compared to returnees, whereas women have similar rates, indicating self-employment may already be a common strategy among the local population.

Figure 79. Self-employment rate of returnees by sex and time of return



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Among self-employed returnees, the vast majority operate without paid employees, limiting the job creation potential of this migrant population. Nearly 93 percent of those who did not return early, and 91 percent of early returnees fall into this category (Figure 80). For comparison, 86 percent of non-migrant self-employed adults also operate without paid employees. On the other hand, only a small fraction reports being employers with paid employees (7 percent

and 9 percent, respectively), and contributing family work is negligible, noted only among early returnees (0.4 percent). This indicates that self-employment among returnees is largely small-scale with limited potential for business expansion, possibly due to financial constraints, lack of access to credit, or challenges in navigating the local business environment after returning.

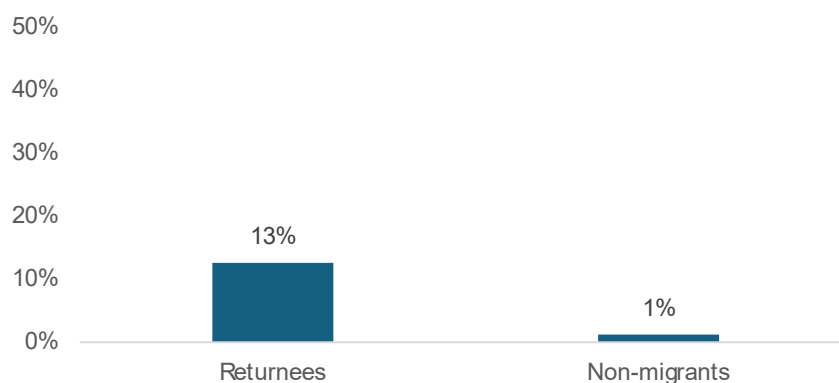
Figure 80. Types of self-employment for returnees



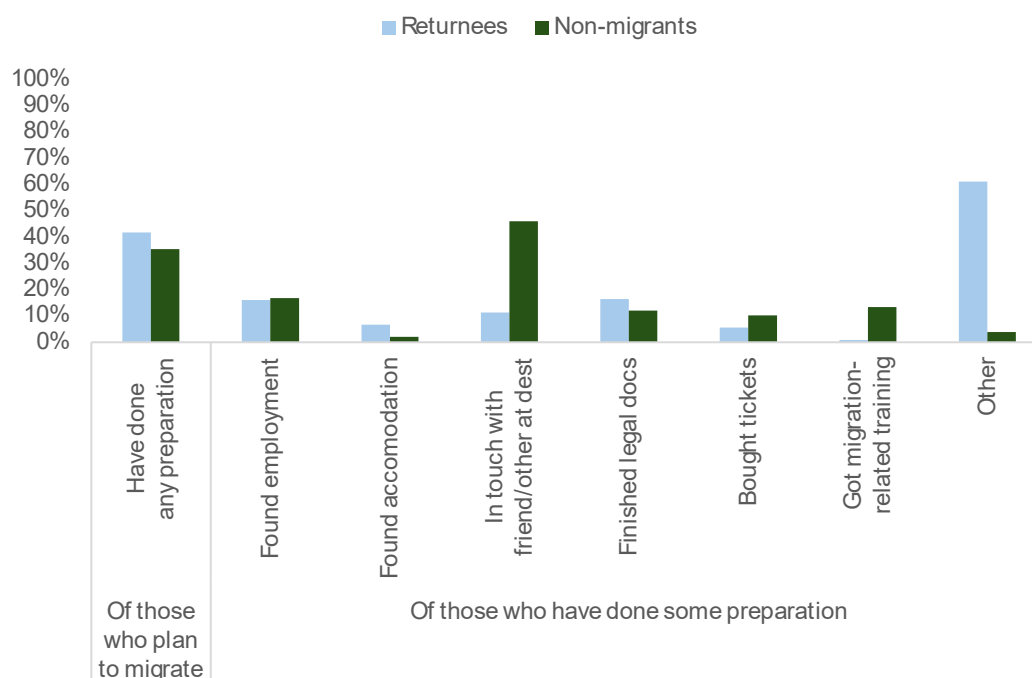
Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Figure 81. Association between return migration and self-employment and entrepreneurship

Panel a. Likelihood of self-employment



Panel b. Likelihood of self-employment with employees



Source: Albania Migration Survey 2024.

Note: The estimates for impact on likelihood of self-employment and likelihood of self-employment as an employer are from a linear regression that controls for demographic characteristics and includes regional fixed effects.

However, return migration is associated with a greater likelihood of becoming self-employed as an employer with paid employees once differences in demographic and regional characteristics are taken into consideration. Compared to non-migrant peers, return migrants are not more likely to be self-employed overall (Figure 81, panel a), but on average, they are 0.8 percentage points more likely to be employers

who have paid employees (Figure 81, panel b), which is a statistically significant difference given the low overall levels of self-employment as employers in Albania.<sup>41</sup> This likelihood increases to 1.5 percentage points among those who have been back in Albania for more than six years, perhaps indicating that the initial barriers are preventing return migrants from successfully engaging in entrepreneurship. Return migrants

<sup>41</sup> This finding is mostly consistent with previous evidence from Albania in Piracha and Vadean (2010), which found that past migration experience had a stronger effect on entrepreneurship (paid employees) than own account work and that own account workers were more likely to transition into paid employment with more time returned in Albania.

who spend more time abroad are also more likely to become employers: those who spent more than six years abroad are 2.1 percentage points more likely than comparable non-migrants to

be self-employed employers. This suggests that longer exposure abroad may lead to the acquisition of skills, resources, or aspirations that support entrepreneurial activity upon return.

### Box 5: Vulnerabilities of return migrants and limited access to services: Findings from the IOM migration qualitative survey

Return migrants may face additional barriers to reintegrate back in the Albanian society. Some migrants reported feeling alienation and cultural dissonance, particularly affecting children. Among certain groups of returnees particularly coming from marginalized communities such as Roma and Egyptian minorities, social stigma and discrimination increase their difficulties to adjust to life in Albania. Focus group discussions also showcase the emergence of psychological trauma and mental health challenges among migrants that were forced to return due to abrupt deportations. These challenges tend to be largely unaddressed, becoming a critical gap to their wellbeing.

Despite these barriers, there are few targeted initiatives for return migrants, partly stemming from under-registration of returnees, who often return without being formally recorded. Currently, systematic administrative data collection on the needs and integration outcomes returnees remains limited. The existing legal framework does not provide clear rights and standardized support for the reintegration of all returnees, services provided are often fragmented, and coordination issues have been reported.

Focus group discussions highlight the limited usage of services by return migrants. More vulnerable migrants are more likely to use available services such as temporary housing support, vocational training, financial support, or emergency aid from community centers. Psychological support, when available, is provided mostly by NGOs. Access to quality healthcare remains a challenge among returnees, which are cited as a relevant factor by some diaspora members in their reluctance to return. Structural barriers, such as lack of recognition of foreign medical records and the cost of translating documents, are also reported as challenges by some return migrants. Some interviewed returnees expressed negative perceptions on the capacity of institutions to support them.

Looking ahead, intentions to remigrate are relatively limited among return migrants, although higher than those of their non-migrant peers. Only 13 percent of returnees express plans to live abroad again within the next twelve months, compared to a negligible 1 percent among non-migrants (Figure 82, panel a).<sup>42</sup> Among those who do plan to migrate, returnees (42 percent) report a higher rate of preparatory activity than non-migrants (35 percent) (Figure 82, panel b). For returnees, the most common forms of preparation include searching for employment (16 percent), contacting friends at the

destination (11 percent), and completing legal documentation (16 percent). While non-migrants report similar levels of job search preparation (17 percent), they are far more likely to be in touch with contacts abroad (46 percent)—the most prevalent form of preparation in this group. Additionally, non-migrants show slightly higher rates in completing legal documents (12 percent) and purchasing tickets (10 percent) compared to returnees.

<sup>42</sup> Levels of intention to migrate vary between different surveys and reflect the challenge of assessing the seriousness of expressed intent. Previous surveys in Albania such as in Gëdeshi and King (2020) have found over a third of returnees intending to migrate. Asking potential migrants if they have made specific preparations to leave is one way to understand those who are more likely to actually depart.



## Conclusions and future directions

Results from the Albania Migration Survey 2024 highlight both the prevalence and the diversity of migration experiences in the country. Migration in Albania is a common phenomenon. More than one-third of households have at least one member that has lived or is currently living abroad, reflecting the deep and sustained influence of migration. The drivers of migration are primarily economic, but education, family reunification, and other social factors also play significant roles. Some migrants leave for short periods, others stay abroad for longer, whereas some others never come back. The survey also reveals considerable diversity among the return migrants: some return unexpectedly, while others have a clear return and adhere to it.

Before leaving the country, migrants tend to have lower wages than non-migrants and make only limited use of pre-departure services. Prior to departure, migrants generally show high employment rates, although employment drops significantly immediately before migration. Prospective migrants typically work in low- to mid-skilled jobs and earn around 10 percent less than the non-migrants. Expected earnings abroad are an important driver of migration; however, migrants often overestimate the income they can achieve abroad, earning on average 30 percent less than they anticipated. Overall, the use of pre-departure services and employment agreements is relatively low. One in four returnees received skills training and 30 percent of migrants secured an employment agreement before leaving Albania. Migrants with upper secondary education are more likely to receive pre-departure skills training, while migrants with tertiary education are more likely to sign employment agreements.

Migrants enjoy higher employment rates and wages while abroad than non-migrants, but they also face significant vulnerabilities, including occupational downgrading, informality and limited social protection. Despite frequently

failing to meet their income expectations, migrants earn on average 2.5 times more abroad than they earned in Albania. Both men and women earn higher wages, although the gender wage gap is larger among migrants than among non-migrants. Migrants' higher employment rates abroad also contribute to higher total income than non-migrants. However, some migrants experience occupational downgrading, working in jobs below their education levels. Albanian migrants are also more likely to be informally employed and have limited access to employment benefits in destination countries. These vulnerabilities are more pronounced among younger, those with lower levels of education and those who have recently arrived in the host country. The survey also shows that migration costs are substantial—equivalent to roughly two months of income—and that some migrants need to borrow money to finance part of these costs. High expenses while abroad reduce savings potential, resulting in more than 25 percent of returnees reporting that they were unable to save any income during their stay abroad.

Migration generates benefits for migrants, their families and the overall economy through different channels, including increased financial inflows of remittances and human capital accumulation. Remittances remain a vital source of support for many households, representing a substantial share of total income, even among some non-migrant families, highlighting the extensive reach of migration networks. Nearly half of migrants transfer part of their increased earnings back to Albania through remittances. Migrants who intend to return, males, prime-age workers, and those with low- to mid-skill levels are more likely to send remittances. The decision to remit is positively associated with migrants' success in generating income and savings abroad. However, remittances remain largely untapped, with high reliance on informal channels to send remittances, especially among the returnees. Furthermore, remittances are primarily allocated toward consumption and essential services rather than productive investments, limiting their broader economic impact. The survey also provides initial evidence



that migration contributes to human capital accumulation. Around one in four migrants with tertiary education obtained their degree abroad, and paternal migration is associated with an increased likelihood of school enrollment for their children.

**Return migration is widespread in Albania, with returnees progressively integrating into the domestic labor market over time.** According to the Albania Migration Survey 2024, nearly half of all Albanians who lived abroad at some point returned to the country by 2024. Migrants in neighboring countries (e.g., Italy, Greece) are more likely to return compared to those residing in more distant destinations. Migrants return for a variety of reasons. Some return earlier than expected, most often due to job loss abroad, documentation challenges, or for family reasons. A majority of migrants return as planned once they finalize work (including seasonal work) or to reunite with their families. In the short term, returnees have lower employment rates than non-migrants, although their labor market outcomes improve progressively the longer they remain in Albania.

**A key finding from the survey is that investments in migration readiness are associated with better labor market outcomes throughout the different stages of the migration journey.** However, not all migrants succeed in making the most out of the migration experience, with a significant number failing to achieve their income and saving expectations. These unsuccessful migration experiences also translate into weaker labor market outcomes upon return in Albania. Migrants who secured a job abroad enjoy higher earnings once back home, indicating returns to experience and skills from abroad. On the other hand, returnees whose migration journey was interrupted and who returned earlier than expected are more likely to be self-employed despite having lower savings, suggesting barriers to wage employment. Importantly, the report shows that pre-departure

support services improve migrants' outcomes at destination, increasing wages by 15 percent, and raising the likelihood of sending remittances. Yet such preparation remains limited. Overall, successful migration experiences can be supported with tailored services, which lead to higher savings and remittances, and better labor market integration upon return in Albania. Therefore, policies that invest in migrants' preparation before departure and support them throughout the migration life cycle can generate positive payoffs for the country's economic development.<sup>43</sup>

**These findings emphasize the importance of collecting high quality data on migration to track migrants' journey over time.** Migration is a complex phenomenon that needs to be followed throughout the migrant lifecycle. Individuals make migration and human capital investments based on their expectations of earnings throughout their work life. In order to understand these decisions and better inform coherent, long-term policy, robust data need to be collected throughout the migration journey, starting before migration – including the migrants' intentions to migrate and expectations about the migration experience– during the migration experience abroad, and after return to Albania. These findings confirm some of the recommendations made by the World Bank regarding the need to strengthen migration data systems (see Box 6).<sup>44</sup>

**The Albania Household Migration Survey 2024 addresses recommendations on reducing data gaps on migration in the country.** The survey provides an unprecedented view of migration across its full cycle. By collecting detailed information on migrants' labor market trajectories, remittances, education, reintegration, and migration intentions, the survey fills critical gaps in Albania's migration data ecosystem and lays a foundation for more targeted policies that can maximize the benefits of migration while mitigating its associated challenges. For the first

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed policy recommendations on how to enhance the benefits of migration in Albania while mitigating its costs, please see World Bank (2024).

<sup>44</sup> World Bank (2024).

time in Albania, this survey includes retrospective questions on migration and employment history, allowing to better track and link migration decisions with labor market outcomes. Another key innovation is that it targets both household members at home and migrants – both returnees and those currently abroad – by reducing the response biases observed in typical surveys that rely only on information provided by relatives. Overall, these types of surveys, which gather information directly from migrants about their migration and employment history, are costlier than traditional surveys, but they substantially improve the accuracy and richness of migration data. This evidence supports policy making by: (i) identifying the types of interventions associated with improvements in migrants' economic outcomes – both abroad and upon return to Albania – and with positive spillovers to the domestic economy; and (ii) helping tailor services to different groups of migrants based on the different challenges and barriers they face.

**Despite recent progress in improving the availability of migration data in the country, there is still space to enhance data collection.** A key challenge of the Albania Migration Survey 2024 is the potential for recall bias, as migrants and their families are asked to provide detailed information on past migration and employment, which becomes increasingly difficult to recall accurately over time. As a result, fewer migrants reported on their past employment, particularly prior to their departure, which may affect the representativeness of certain findings. In addition, future surveys could incorporate more information on the labor market history of non-migrants, in line with the best practices from other countries.<sup>45</sup>

Continued efforts are needed to ensure that such comprehensive data can be regularly collected in Albania in the future. First, given the technical complexity of combining in-person

and phone surveys with detailed questions on present and past employment and migration trajectories, both strong human resource capacity and adequate financial resources are essential to ensure the successful implementation of these efforts. Second, future survey efforts will need to address challenges related to the sampling frame. To mitigate potential sampling biases that may arise from using the 2023 census – given the changes in migration and residency patterns over the years – future migration surveys will need to address listing exercises to update the migration status of households in the selected enumeration areas.

**Addressing data needs will also require integrating migration modules into regular surveys and strengthening administrative data sharing and interoperability across government entities.** Enhanced data collection is essential for developing tailored, evidence-based migration policies. Government agencies can better integrate existing data sources, including border crossing records, visa and work permits, tax records, social security files, and welfare programs. This integration requires coordination, including data sharing and building interoperable data systems across agencies. Collaboration with main destination countries could further enhance data sharing to ensure better tracking of migrants' outcomes throughout their journey and support joint policy efforts. Additionally, expanding the definition of migrants in regular surveys such as the Labor Force Survey and the Income and Living Conditions Survey would allow for more comprehensive coverage of individuals, regardless of their reasons for migrating or duration of their stay abroad.<sup>46</sup> Finally, investing in longitudinal surveys that follow the same individuals over time can provide more insights into migration patterns, especially in countries with high temporary or seasonal migration, as in the case of Albania. While more costly, these data investments allow to address important biases of periodic surveys that sample differ-

<sup>45</sup> See, for example the World Bank Kyrgyz Migration Survey 2022/23.

<sup>46</sup> Most expansive definitions are captured by questions such as “Is there a member of this household that currently lives and/or work in another country, even if only temporarily?” (for migrants currently abroad), or “Has <person> ever lived abroad in the past for a period of at least three month?” (for migrants that returned to the home country).

ent individuals,<sup>47</sup> providing the most accurate data to analyze the effects of migration on the Albanian economy, including the non-migrant population. Finally, establishing a migration observatory would allow for regular analysis of migration trends and their economic and social impacts of migration, by using all available data sources in order to ensure informed policymaking.

The long-term impact of migration will depend on Albania's ability to manage it strategically, and robust and continuous data collection is essential to inform coherent, long-term policy. Without targeted interventions, much of the financial, social, and human capital that migrants contribute to the Albanian economy risks remaining underutilized. At the same time, the lack of comprehensive migration data continues to hinder the design and implementation of effective, evidence-based policies. However, with the right policies—rooted in comprehensive data, inclusive planning, and strong diaspora connections—migration can serve as a catalyst for job creation, human capital development, and investment. The Albania Household Migration Survey 2024 is a crucial step toward achieving this goal by providing new evidence, although further data collection efforts, such as those outlined above, will be necessary to guide the country's next phase of migration policy.

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<sup>47</sup> These biases include: (i) cohort effects, as there could be changes in the composition of immigrants in different periods of time (Borjas, 1985, 1995); (ii) business cycle effects, as immigrants arriving at different moments in the business cycle of the economy may have different wages and difficulties in entering the labor market (Aslund and Rooth, 2007); and (iii) the return migration effect, where in general the most successful migrants tend to remain abroad while those experiencing negative events return to the country of origin, (Dustmann and Weis, 2007; Lubotsky, 2007).

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# A1. Methodological Annex

The Albania Migration Survey 2024 is a nationally representative survey comprised of 5,002 surveyed households including 3,804 households with migration history, and 1,198 non-migration households. In total, the survey includes 17,905 individuals, of which 3,755 are migrants currently abroad, and 2,236 returnees. The survey includes seven modules including interviews with returnees, and a follow-up survey with 773 migrants abroad.

The survey includes modules at both the household and individual levels. The first module is the household roster, which collects demographic information on all household members, including relationship to the head, sex, age, marital status, education level, etc. The second module collects information on the migration status of each household member including living abroad, reasons for migration, returned, reason for return, employment abroad, remittances, future migration plans. The third module analyzes the current labor market outcomes, including employment for all household members ages 15-64, as well as employment status, job type, contract type, benefits, sector, occupation, wages, etc. The fourth module collects information on the employment history of all adult migrants (both those currently abroad and those who have returned), employment type and occupation, wages, employment start and end, etc. The fifth module includes information on the household income and assets. The sixth module is on returnees, and collects detailed information on the migration experience for returnees in the household, including employment abroad, expected wages and savings, real wages and savings, migration costs, activities prior to migration, employment services, remittances, or reasons for return. The seventh and last module covers current migrants, and is based on follow-up phone interviews with migrants abroad using contact information collected in Module 2 of the in-person household survey. Of the 3,755 migrants contacted, 773 completed the full phone survey, representing a 21% response rate. This module asks questions

about migrants' experience abroad, including employment, expected wages and savings, real wages and savings, migration costs, employment characteristics, remittances, and future migration plans.

**For the purpose of this analysis, the following definition of migrants are used:**

**Migrant household:** A household with at least one member who is a current international migrant and/or a member that is a return international migrant

**Return international migrant:** An adult member (age 15 and above) who currently lives in the household and previously lived abroad for paid work [either worked for pay abroad or migrated with the intention to work for pay] within the past 13 years. Individuals who went abroad only for tourism, to visit relatives, or to engage in unpaid family work are not considered return migrants.

**Current international migrant:** An adult member (age 15 and above) who currently lives abroad for paid work [either currently working for pay abroad or migrated with the intention to work for pay]. Individuals who are abroad only for tourism, to visit relatives or to engage in unpaid family work are not considered current migrants.



## A1.1. Sampling Frame

The sampling frame for the survey is drawn from summary data of the enumeration areas (EAs) defined for Albania's 2023 Census (CENS-2023). A stratified two-stage sampling design is used to select households both with and without a migration history. The primary sampling units (PSUs) selected in the first stage are the EAs,

which are small operational areas defined on maps for the 2023 Census enumeration. Albania has a total of 5,091 EAs in this frame list, each with at least one household with migration history (Table 1). Administratively, Albania is divided into 12 prefectures, and the sample is stratified accordingly to ensure geographic representation at the prefecture level.

Table 1. Distribution of EA-s and households in the sampling frame and sample by prefecture used as strata

	Prefectures	Total	HH_Emigration	%
01	BERAT	237	6219	5.1%
02	DIBËR	171	5281	4.3%
03	DURRËS	519	8867	7.2%
04	ELBASAN	457	12780	10.4%
05	FIER	559	14597	11.9%
06	GJIROKASTËR	167	3159	2.6%
07	KORCË	368	7169	5.8%
08	KUKËS	95	4137	3.4%
09	LEZHË	211	6166	5.0%
10	SHKODËR	330	9249	7.5%
11	TIRANA	1473	35107	28.6%
12	VLORË	504	9986	8.1%
Total	ALBANIA	5091	122717	100.0%

NOTE: Sampling Frame-Number of EAs-with at least one migration household.

The 200 Enumeration Areas (EAs), serving as the Primary Sampling Units (PSUs), are allocated proportionally based on the number of migrant households in each prefecture (Table 2). It is important to note that while stratification is applied at the prefecture level to enhance the efficiency of the sampling design, these strata are not intended to serve as separate domains for estimation. At the first stage of sampling, 200 EAs are systematically selected using probability proportional to size, with the size measured by the number of migrant households in each EA. This approach introduces implicit geographic stratification by sorting EAs geographically, which also helps capture the socioeconomic diversity of the population and improves the overall representativeness of the sample.

In the second stage, households are selected from the sampled EAs. Due to considerable variation in the number of migrant households across EAs (as shown in Table 2), it is not feasible to select the same number of households from each EA.

Table 2. Distribution of PSU-s by prefecture used as strata

Code	Prefecture	No. of PSU
01	BERAT	10
02	DIBËR	9
03	DURRËS	14
04	ELBASAN	21
05	FIER	24
06	GJIROKASTËR	5
07	KORÇË	12
08	KUKËS	7
09	LEZHË	10
10	SHKODËR	15
11	TIRANË	57
12	VLORË	16
Total		200

Table 3. Distribution of migrant and non-migrant households by prefecture

Prefecture Code	Prefecture Name	Number of Migrant Households	Number of Non-Migrant Households	Total Number of Households
01	BERAT	6 219	30 061	36 280
02	DIBËR	5 281	19 847	25 128
03	DURRËS	8 867	59 778	68 645
04	ELBASAN	12 780	57 386	70 166
05	FIER	14 597	66 820	81 417
06	GJIROKASTËR	3 159	18 600	21 759
07	KORÇË	7 169	48 710	55 879
08	KUKËS	4 137	11 908	16 045
09	LEZHË	6 166	24 407	30 573
10	SHKODËR	9 249	39 430	48 679
11	TIRANË	35 107	212 359	247 466
12	VLORË	9 986	43 927	53 913
Total		122 717	633 233	755 950

All households were selected without substitution from EAs that had 22 or fewer migrant households. In EAs with more than 22 migrant households, a sample of 22 households was selected, allowing for a maximum of 22 possible substitutes. An exception was made for the two largest EAs (in terms of the number of migrant households), where 30 households were selected due to the high concentration of migration.

Household selection within each EA was conducted using systematic random sampling, with households sorted geographically to ensure better spatial distribution. This approach yielded a final sample of 4,103 migrant households.

A household replacement strategy is applied to ensure that 4,000 migrant households respond to the survey. Table 4 presents the distribution



of replacement households by prefecture. In enumeration areas (EAs) with 22 or fewer migrant households, all households are included as potential replacements. For EAs with more than 22 migrant households, 22 households

are randomly selected to serve as replacements. This replacement process is closely supervised, with field supervisors responsible for monitoring and validating cases of refusals and non-contacts in the original sample.

**Table 4. Frame distribution of the size of EA size in terms of households with migration history**

EA_Class by Migrant HH	Min	Max	Total EA
1	1	10	1430
2	11	20	1064
3	21	30	962
4	31	40	766
5	41	50	423
6	51	70	349
7	71	145	97
			5091

**Table 5. Distribution of migrant households by prefecture**

	Prefecture	Sample	%
1	BERAT	219	5.3%
2	DIBER	199	4.9%
3	DURRES	274	6.7%
4	ELBASAN	448	10.9%
5	FIER	514	12.5%
6	GJIROKASTER	89	2.2%
7	KORCE	229	5.6%
8	KUKES	154	3.8%
9	LEZHE	203	4.9%
10	SHKODER	330	8.0%
11	TIRANA	1168	28.5%
12	VLORE	276	6.7%
	ALBANIA	4103	100.0%

**Table 6. Household sample distribution by prefecture**

	Prefecture	Sample_migration	Substitutions
01	BERAT	219	81
02	DIBËR	199	132
03	DURRËS	274	160
04	ELBASAN	448	335
05	FIER	514	327
06	GJIROKASTËR	89	44

07	KORÇË	229	64
08	KUKËS	154	144
09	LEZHË	203	150
10	SHKODËR	330	214
11	TIRANË	1168	580
12	VLORE	276	102
		4103	2333

The sample of non-migrant households consists of selecting 5 households randomly from the list of non-migrant households within the same 200 enumeration areas (EAs) used for the migration sample. An additional 5 households are selected as potential substitutes. The selection process involves randomly drawing 10

non-migrant households from each EA. These households are then divided systematically: households numbered 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are designated as the original sample, while households numbered 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 serve as replacements in case of non-response.





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