

# Depopulation of Albania and Its Movement toward the UK

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## Abstract

Albania experienced irregular economic growth, which was related to institutional and political changes, which had a considerable influence on population mobility. According to INSTAT despite a dramatic fall in rural poverty to 15% in 2009, unemployment remained high, particularly among young mothers, who retreated from the labor market in large numbers after communist control of the labor market terminated mandatory participation. The methodology used in this study consists merely of the conducted research and data collection. Initially, various research was carried out to understand the changes in population size and the main problems that caused the movement. Around 75% of Albanian emigrants currently call Italy and Greece home, with the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Belgium following closely after. According to research conducted by British government authorities in August 2022, 1727 Albanian entries were recorded in May and June 2022, particularly in comparison to just 898 between 2018 and 2021, implying that Albanians made up between 50 and 60 percent of irregular small boat migrants' arrivals. The methodology used in this study consists merely of the conducted research and data collection. Initially, various research was carried out to understand the changes in population size and the main problems that caused the movement. The most often claimed motivation was economic, which was frequently tied to political instability. Most male migrants to the UK go alone; however, they may rely on family members and trusted contacts as well as less trusted and frequently unscrupulous agencies along the way. A result of this research paper is that Albanians are migrating because of poverty. Albania is facing a catastrophic demographic decline as a result of reduced birth rates and increased emigration. This research paper aims to address several reasons why Albanian inhabitants seek to move abroad.

## Keywords

Migration, Development, Population, Albania, United Kingdom

## 1. Introduction

Albania witnessed a sporadic rate of economic development, which was linked to institutional and political changes that also had a significant impact on population movement. In terms of economic development, Albania has experienced growth and underwent substantial changes. The country implemented structural reforms, including the privatization and liberalization of the economy, with the aim of attracting foreign investment and stimulating economic progress (King & Vullnetari, 2003). Key sectors such as construction, services, and tourism have played a prominent role in Albania's economic expansion, leveraging its favorable geographical location, natural attractiveness, and rich cultural heritage (Borriçi & Osmani, 2015). Additionally, remittances from overseas Albanians have significantly contributed to the country's economic stability (Jushi et al., 2021). However, Albania still faces various economic challenges. Issues such as high levels of informality, corruption, and weak institutional frameworks have hindered the full realization of the country's economic potential (Berhani & Hysa, 2014). Income inequality persists, particularly with disparities between urban and rural areas, while unemployment, particularly among the youth, remains a persistent issue (Leibbrandt et al., 2010).

In terms of political changes, Albania has made strides toward democratization since the fall of communism. Regular multi-party elections have been conducted, leading to a more diverse and pluralistic political landscape (Carothers, 2002). Nevertheless, political instability, polarization, and allegations of corruption have posed obstacles to effective governance and hindered overall progress (Feilcke-Tiemann, 2006). The country's aspiration for European Union membership has served as a catalyst for political and institutional reforms. Albania has undertaken efforts in areas such as the judiciary and public administration, although further work is necessary to address concerns regarding the rule of law, corruption, and organized crime (Cepiku, 2004).

A rapid pace of communist modernization stressed the development of heavy industries and transportation infrastructure in the 1950s and 1960s. Albania's final two diplomatic contacts with other nations (the (then) USSR and China) were severed, resulting in a halt in technology transfers and the deterioration of industrial equipment (Ditter & Gedeshi, 2000). During the communist era, Albanian society functioned in total autonomy under one of the world's most repressive regimes. The right to migrate abroad was denied to the inhabitants. Internal migrations were severely restricted beginning in the mid-1960s through interregional labor force allocation in the context of industrial decentralization, rural retention, and a zero urban development strategy (Sjöberg, 1992; 1994). These political actions corresponded with a cultural revolution and agricultural institutional improvements (i.e., the completion of land collectivization). Restrictions on urban ward movement were also implemented to boost agricultural productivity during the time of international isolation, with the proclaimed objective of achieving self-sufficiency (Borchert, 1975).

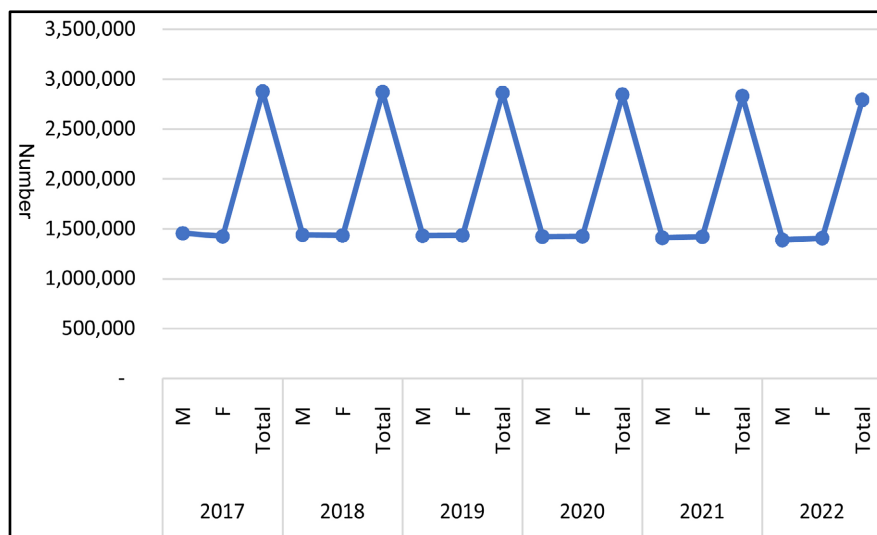
In 1989, the nation was among the least urbanized and poorest in Europe, with just 36% of the people living in cities. As previous industries shuttered and the state sector decreased during the post-communist privatization process, unemployment rose sharply (World Bank, 2007). As Albania opened up to the rest of the world, individuals began to migrate in huge numbers in search of a better life in the European Union's bordering nations (Italy and Greece). Rural populations also migrated en masse to the cities, which were the epicenters of social and economic development (INSTAT 2004a; King & Vullnetari, 2003). One-third of rural households were still living below the national poverty line in 2002. In contrast, the second transition decade saw political and economic consolidation, as well as high rates of GDP growth (7% per year) and the rise of the service sector (World Bank, 2007). Despite a significant reduction in rural poverty to 15% in 2009 (INSTAT et al., 2009), unemployment remained high, particularly among young mothers, who retreated from the labor market in huge numbers when communist control ended forced participation (INSTAT, 2004b). The labor market position was worse in secondary cities than in the capital (Tirana), which benefited the most from Albania's new economic extraversion; rural underemployment remains common. The migratory trend remained unabated: the number of Albanians residing abroad constituted more than one-third of the inhabitants in 2011, while more than half of the population lives in cities, indicating a strong pace of urbanization (INSTAT, 2012). With so many people living overseas and plummeting birth rates, it is not unexpected that the country's resident population, which stood at 2.86 million at the start of 2019, is also declining. The table below is shown the population in total between the years 2011 and the year 2018, see **Table 1**. The graph is shown the six years of the total population of Albania ranked Female and Male (years 2017 and 2022) see **Graph 1**. Moreover, over the past few decades, Albania has experienced a notable decline in population and as shown in **Graph 2**.

According to INSTAT, Albania has a 9.7 percent fewer population than it did in 1989. Albania's population was 1.07 million in 1945, having quadrupled under

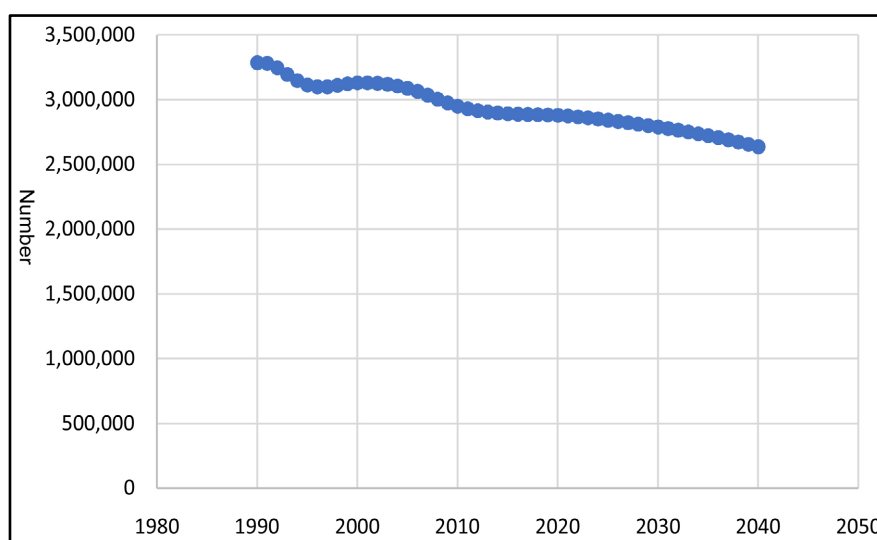
**Table 1.** Albania's population between 2011-2018.

2011-2018	Albania
1/1/2011	2,907,361
1/1/2012	2,904,122
1/1/2013	2,900,668
1/1/2014	2,896,998
1/1/2015	2,893,107
1/1/2016	2,888,995
1/1/2017	2,884,624
1/1/2018	2,879,941

Source: INSTAT, 2019.



**Graph 1.** The population on the first of January by age group and sex.



**Graph 2.** Actual and projected population 1990-2040. Source: Zhujiworld, 2023.

communism, although it has been slowly dropping since the collapse of communism in Albania. INSTAT expects that by 2031, the population will be 2.75 million and a UN projection foresees it to shrink to 2.66 million by 2050.

## 2. Methodology

Secondary research is gathering pre-existing data through desk review and does not require ethical approval because it does not include direct contact with people or the generation of new data. A systematic literature review assesses the evidence and findings of previous authors in connection to a given research topic or subject. A systematic literature review is one study approach that might be used to achieve the goal of the analysis. A thorough literature review starts with the planned and purposeful selection of data, which includes the types of infor-

mation to be included in the review, such as journal articles, conference proceedings papers, and publications relevant to the study's aim. The main difference between a literature review and a systematic literature review is that a literature review provides evidence from a high-level summary of fields related to a research question (Xiao & Watson, 2019). A systematic review gathers all empirical data that corresponds to a method meant to address a specific research question. Researchers performing systematic reviews use certain procedures to prevent bias to produce more accurate findings that may be used to aid decision-making. This research paper explains the great change in the population that Albania has had during the last 3 decades, as well as the consequences that lead to these changes. The methodology used in this study consists merely of the conducted research and data collection. Initially, various research was carried out to understand the changes in population size and the main problems that caused the movement. The statistics were searched on the number of migrant populations in Albania and the countries where Albanians migrate the most. Economic, social, and political reasons were taken into account.

### 3. Literature Review

The issue of emigration is highly political and contentious. According to the opposition, more than 500,000 Albanians have departed the nation in the last decade or so. Indeed, if you total together the number of emigrants predicted by INSTAT during the previous 12 years, you get more than that. However, INSTAT also tracks estimates of persons returning to the nation, which total more than 260,000 during the same period. It's also worth noting that the same individual might be tallied many times if they arrive and depart, as many do. Gross emigration is the tendency, but precise numbers are hard to come by. Finding out the number of Albanians who emigrate is difficult because many of them try their luck by applying for political asylum; nevertheless, these numbers do not appear in INSTAT emigration data until a person regularizes their actual status. Nearly no Albanians are eligible for political asylum internationally, however, for many, especially those from low-income areas, it was and is beneficial to apply and then spend a few months there, being housed by them and having access to social security as well as other advantages, rather than being jobless or poorly paid at home. 1965 attempts were made in total across all EU countries in 2010 before Albanians received visa-free travel to the Schengen region in December 2010. After that, though, the numbers started to increase, reaching a peak of 68,950 in 2015, with Germany having the greatest number. The latter is the main factor that influenced the mass movement. Changes in the political system, changes in the economic system, and the lack of jobs were among the main factors that made people consider emigration. Migration has caused various international issues for Albania. Transnational networks and diaspora communities have emerged as facilitators of migration, providing resources and support. The brain drain phenomenon has led to the loss of skilled professionals and educated individuals

who migrate abroad in search of better opportunities (Gërmenji & Milo, 2011). This creates a shortage of skilled workers and hampers the progress of sectors requiring specialized expertise. The influx of migrants has also posed social and cultural challenges, straining social cohesion and integration efforts (Vathi, 2015). Cultural clashes and difficulties in ensuring inclusivity among diverse communities have emerged as a result. Migration intersects with political implications, influencing domestic politics and potentially leading to political polarization (Letizia, 2009). Managing migration flows and addressing border control issues can have diplomatic ramifications, particularly regarding refugee resettlement or irregular migration (Kruse, 2006). Security concerns arise from irregular migration, human trafficking, and smuggling networks, requiring efforts in border control and law enforcement.

Data were then collected regarding the movement towards the UK, as well as the main ways and reasons for the movement towards this country. The main findings that were made were that the biggest movement comes from rural areas, which, as a result of the focus on urban areas, have been neglected. Also, the lower living conditions in these areas make these individuals consider internal migratory movements, emigration, or leaving their country at certain times of the year to secure a job and better conditions for their families.

#### **4. Albanian Emigrants and Their Impact on Albania's Economy**

Beginning in early 2015, a flood of “economic asylum applicants” fled Albania, mostly to Germany. The bulk came from central and southern Albania (Vlor and Fier), but there was also a large movement from northern Albania (Kuks and Tropoj). According to official German sources, 22,209 Albanians sought asylum in Germany during the first six months of 2015, compared to 3913 applications during the same time in 2014. According to Eurostat data, Albania placed fourth in the number of asylum applicants to the European Union during the first quarter of 2015. Albanian asylum applicants, particularly those sent to Germany, were encouraged by indications that the German government was re-considering its migration laws to recruit fresh foreign workers. Many Albanians, as did the media, identified themselves as economic asylum seekers, citing reasons like unemployment and poverty for fleeing Albania in their asylum interviews. Economic considerations are not recognized under the 1951 Geneva Convention, which defines a refugee as a person who is persecuted or fears persecution because of membership in a political, religious, or ethnic group. Given their view that Germany was looking for employees, many Albanians used the phrase economic asylum seeker to justify their stay in Germany, maybe unaware that it would disqualify them for asylum. According to Manfred Schmidt, president of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, many may have been deceived by smugglers into believing this was a legitimate way to secure residency in the European Union. In June, the German Embassy in Tirana began

an ad campaign with the tagline “no economic asylum in Germany” to discourage future asylum applicants. During a visit to Albania in July, German Chancellor Angela Merkel underlined that no economic asylum seekers would be admitted to Germany and that the job market would only be available to competent employees. Germany is currently debating whether to add Albania, as well as neighboring Kosovo and Montenegro, to a list of “safe nations”, which would expedite the processing and repatriation of unsuccessful asylum applicants (Barjaba, 2018).

In 2018, there were 22,475 Albanians requesting asylum in the EU, but the bulk of them (9665) were in France since there, in contrast to Germany, the process for processing people and deporting those who are denied asylum is drawn out. The precise number of emigrants is difficult to estimate, however, according to Eurostat, 869,455 Albanians resided in the EU in 2017. Also if we include Albanians in the United States and other non-EU nations, along with those inside the EU who are no longer eligible as Albanians because they have obtained EU citizenship, there is still some disparity since the Eurostat total is half of the INSTAT estimate of the Albanian diaspora. In fact, according to Eurostat, 286,677 people left Greece and Italy between 2012 and 2017, the overwhelming amount of them for financial purposes, which helps to explain at least some of the population declines in those countries. The past few years have seen a sharp decline in the number of Albanians recorded in Italy, but far less in Greece. Albania’s population is undoubtedly a cause for concern, yet remittances from abroad are an important part of the country’s economy.

The percentage contribution of this income to the gross domestic product has been declining over time, though, as diaspora families have to spend more on taking care of themselves while they are away from home. The World Bank claims that in 1993 when almost nothing was working in Albania and after the initial exodus of tens of thousands of young men, remittances accounted for up to 28 percent of GDP. Albania’s population is undoubtedly a cause for concern, yet remittances from the diaspora are an important part of the country’s economy. In 2018, it was 9.6 percent. The fact that numerous people have relocated both inside and outside of Albania is another problem regarding social and demographic expansion. As a result, while a sizable portion of the population from the south moved to Greece and a sizeable portion from the north moved to Italy, a sizable portion of the population from all over Albania moved to Tirana, contributing to an increase in depopulation, especially in rural and hilly regions. The only place in the nation where the population is projected to increase during 2019 is the capital, which will account for almost 35% of the overall population. Albania is comparable to other areas of Europe as well as the rest of the region in terms of aging and fertility rates. Immigration helps wealthier countries make up for declining populations, unlike the poor Balkans. Zhllima et al. (2017) notes that Albania’s population is still largely young and has a small proportion of elderly people. In contrast to Western Europe, where it persisted for half a cen-

ture, it will barely survive a few years or at most a generation.

Technological advancements have made migration more accessible by reducing travel costs and improving communication (Czaika & De Haas, 2014). Global inequalities and limited opportunities in home countries have driven individuals to migrate (Vadean & Piracha, 2010). Policymakers must consider these dynamics to harness the benefits of globalization and address its challenges.

### Where Do Albanians Migrate the Most?

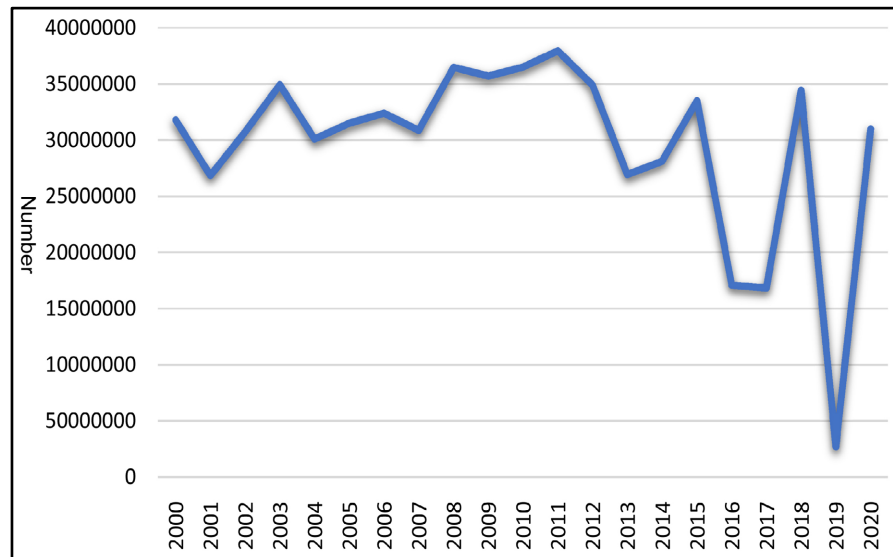
Around 75% of Albanian emigrants currently call Italy and Greece home, with the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Belgium following closely after. Most Albanians who emigrate do so for financial and economic reasons to improve their standard of living and access to higher education.

Germany has recently been a popular travel destination for Albanian citizens for the same reasons. In 2020 (from March 1 to December 31), the German government granted visas to 778 Albanians who were trained professionals and trainees from third countries (Bither & Ziebarth, 2018). Germany has recently been a popular travel destination for Albanian citizens for the same reasons. In parallel, fewer people left for Italy and the United States. In addition, among the countries of the European Union, Albania was placed sixth in the world in terms of the number of resident permits issued in 2019, according to Eurostat statistics. By the end of 2019, some 868,000 Albanians have obtained such licenses. A poll taken in June 2020 revealed that 50% of Albanians were still thinking about leaving their country (83% wanted to leave and 49% were seriously considering it). This is the largest number in the region, and Albania is the only country in the Balkans where more people desire to leave than stay.

Only 46% of Albanians declare a desire to remain in their country. Such opinions result, among other things, from dissatisfaction with the nation's economic development, poor living conditions, or a dearth of job possibilities (Council, 2020). Furthermore, 23% of families depend on remittances from emigrants, according to data from the World Bank and Bank of Albania (on average, EUR 2000 each year). In 2020, remittances will comprise 9.9% of the GDP. For some Albanian households, remittances are their sole source of income. The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in a decrease in this level. Remittances totaled EUR 471 million from January to September 2020, down EUR 50 million (about 10%) from the same period in 2019. It should be mentioned that a significant number of Albanian expatriates travel to Albania every year, so boosting the development of the industry, which generates a sizeable percentage of the nation's income (see **Graph 3**).

The increase in spontaneous movement flows in the 1990s produced the map of Albanian migration. The majority of Albanian migrants (about 600,000) have landed in Greece and Italy (500,000). Albanians are by far the largest immigrant community in Greece, whereas they are the second largest immigrant group in Italy after Romanians. The estimated surviving 150,000 people have mostly settled





**Graph 3.** Remittances, official aid for development, and social and economic support (US\$). Source: World Bank, 2022.

in Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

## 5. Albanians' Movement toward the UK

As per the UK, Albanians have one of the highest population densities of unauthorized immigrants there. To a map-based effort published in September 2008 by the International Organization for Migration, there weren't any present official estimates of the total ethnic Albanian population in the UK. The majority of those polled for the exercise believed there were somewhere between 70,000 and 100,000 inhabitants there. According to the 2011 Census, England and Wales, both had 13,295 Albanian-born people, while Scotland and Northern Ireland seemed to have 196 and 55, respectively. According to the Office for National Statistics, as of 2019, there had been 29,000 people who were born in Kosovo and 47,000 people who were born in Albania living in the United Kingdom. According to research conducted by British government authorities in August 2022, 1727 Albanian entries were recorded in May and June 2022, particularly in comparison to just 898 between 2018 and 2021, implying that Albanians made up between 50 and 60 percent of irregular small boat migrants arrivals. Albanians accounted for roughly 18% of all recorded arrivals during the first half of 2022 (Brown, 2022). Albanians exceeded all other ethnicities as the largest group seeking asylum in the UK in the second half of 2022, with 3289 applications. In the fiscal year ending June 2022, initial choices were made in the best interest of 53% of Albanian asylum requests. In October 2022, approximately 12,000 Albanians reached the UK via tiny boats across the English Channel migrant crossings. An estimated 10,000 were adult men, accounting for between one to two percent of Albania's overall male population (Brown, 2022).

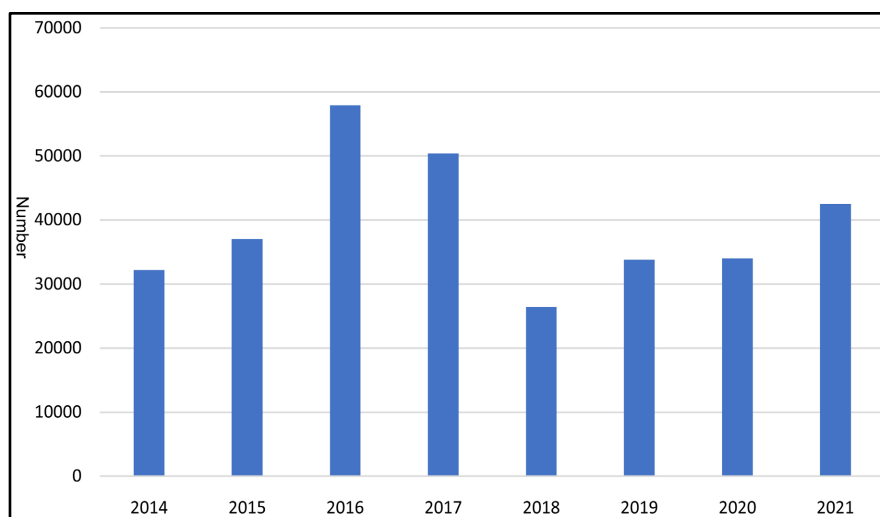
Only 50 Albanians immigrated through this route in 2020, and 800 did so in 2021, resulting in “exponential growth.” The primary reason for this widescale shift is usually economic (BBC News, 2022). 30 years after the dictatorship fell, its borders were opened, and approximately 60% of Albania’s adult population wished to leave the country. They cited corruption, low pay, poor working conditions, and a low standard of living as primary justifications. According to the most recent Eurostat data, the median net annual household income in Albania was only €1997 (£1720) in 2018, whereas it was €21,464 in the UK. Youth unemployment is a major issue in Albania, driving youngsters to leave the country (BBC News, 2022). In 2012, the rate of poverty and individuals living under the poverty line was 14.31%, and with the increase of the prices, but not of the salaries, this rate is expected to be higher, considering also the high number of migrants during the years (see **Graph 4**).

“Albania was the leading small boat arriving nationality seeking for asylum in the year ending September 2022, accounting for 24% of total small boat arrivals requesting for asylum in that time,” according to a Home Office report. In the fiscal year ending September 2022, 85% of the 8466 Albanian small boat entries (7219 persons, corresponding to 6624 applications) sought refuge (Sturge, 2019). There were 152 withdrawn applications (2%) and 50 initial decisions (1%), with the following outcomes:

- 26% (13) were denied based on third-country residency;
- 74% (37) were denied for other reasons; and
- none were awarded refugee status or any sort of leave.

### Reasons for Migration to the UK and Journey

The most often claimed motivation was economic, which was frequently tied to political instability. Most views of Albanian emigration are consistent with this (Barjaba, 2000; De Soto et al., 2002; Kule et al., 2002; King, 2004). The following were the most often cited reasons:



**Graph 4.** Number of migrants during the years. Source: INSTAT.

- Albania's overall poverty and lack of jobs; the more particular economic and social circumstances;
- Political uncertainty in the aftermath of the fall of the pyramids and the Kosovo refugee crisis, with an occasional mention of the blood feud (males only);
- Family gatherings (mainly for women).

Most male migrants to the UK go alone, however, they may rely on family members and trusted contacts as well as less trusted and frequently unscrupulous agencies along the way. Many have worked in Greece first, where it is simple to cross the border and work in the underground sector, generally in agricultural or construction tasks, to save money for the much longer and more expensive voyage to England. This is frequently followed by purchasing a passage (a few hundred dollars) in a high-speed dinghy between Vlora and the south Italian coast. It is also conceivable for an Albanian to live and work as an undocumented migrant in Italy for some time. The actual significance of Italy, though, is that it is a member of the Schengen region, which extends overland to the Channel coast. The voyage over this vast expanse of borderless Europe is mainly made by rail to Belgium, where Albanian agents arrange, again for a charge, efforts to pass to the UK in the backs of lorries, usually without the driver's knowledge. Women and children are also transported in this manner; however, some may fly in to join their spouses or relatives provided their travel documents and funds are in order. Although the exact path varies, this description of the voyage to the UK is common for both men and women. Some reports are even more traumatic, involving being abandoned in the water at night off the Italian coast, theft by agents along the route, assault, and bribery, and near-suffocation in vehicle backseats (Dalipaj, 2005).

As migrants' knowledge of English and "the system" improves over time, and as some of them sort out their immigration status (e.g., being granted exceptional leave to remain or, since 2002, humanitarian protection status), their relationship with the labor market improves, with higher wages, more secure contracts of employment, and, in a few cases, independent small businesses, for example, as painters and decorators. Women tend to work as assistants in stores and catering facilities, or as cleaners in hotels and private houses if they work at all (the majority are at home caring for small children). Because they are mostly informal sector occupations, the remuneration is low, sometimes even below the minimum wage (King & Vullnetari, 2012).

To address the issue of mass migration, the Albanian administration should consider implementing measures that target the root causes of migration, improve economic conditions, and enhance social and political stability. Firstly, focusing on economic development and job creation is crucial. Policies that promote entrepreneurship, attract foreign investment, and support key sectors such as manufacturing, services, and tourism can generate employment opportunities (Lohrmann, 2000).

Investing in education and skills training is another important measure. By

equipping the workforce with the necessary skills, individuals can find employment both within the country and abroad, reducing unemployment rates and enhancing the competitiveness of the labor market (Kilic et al., 2009). Strengthening social protection measures, such as providing unemployment benefits, healthcare, and social welfare programs, can act as a safety net for those facing economic hardships. These measures alleviate poverty and reduce the incentive for migration (Gentilini et al., 2022). Addressing corruption and improving governance are crucial steps for creating a favorable environment for economic growth. Implementing anti-corruption measures, strengthening the rule of law, and enhancing transparency and accountability in public institutions are essential (Cepiku & Mititelu, 2011). Enhancing political stability and social cohesion is also vital in encouraging individuals to stay in the country. Promoting inclusive governance, fostering dialogue between different social groups, and addressing social inequalities contribute to a stable and cohesive society (King & Mai, 2008).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper aimed to address the reasons why Albanians are migrating especially to the UK recently. Albanians are migrating because of poverty. It is not true that Albanians are criminals. Our intention is not to go to other nations and commit crimes. We have concluded that the economy of Albania has helped to grow a lot the remittance due to the emigrants that have gone in UK recent years.

Regarding the literature review of the study as a result of the declining population and the increase in average age, the government will be forced to make adjustments in public finances and spend higher sums of money on the health care system and pensions.

Albania is facing a catastrophic demographic decline as a result of reduced birth rates and increased emigration. Every day hundreds of youngsters and particularly men are leaving this country. Despite the deployment of particular remedies, no Albanian administration has been able to address it thus far.

In this study, we concluded that the reasons why most people migrate are poor living conditions, the feeling of insecurity, and poor economic and social politics. It should be anticipated that this condition will worsen over time if immediate measures are not taken. Proper economic and social policies should be taken to reduce the number of people leaving the country every day.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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