



# **REGIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP MOBILITY PROGRAMME**

**MIGRATION AND BRAIN DRAIN**

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ALBANIA, NORTH  
MACEDONIA, AND SERBIA**

**OPEN SOCIETY  
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WESTERN BALKANS

## Disclaimer

This Advocacy Research Report is prepared by the Migration and Brain Drain Working Group of the Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Program 2024 (RYLMP).

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## Introduction

The youth brain drain is a significant concern for the Western Balkan Six (WB6) countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia. These countries are experiencing one of the highest rates of youth emigration globally, with predictions suggesting that up to half of their skilled and educated young population may leave their countries in the next decades. This trend raises serious concerns about the democratic and economic development of the WB6 and their potential EU membership.

Historically, youth brain drain is deeply embedded in the culture and traditions of the WB6, eliciting strong emotions and intense public debate. Its sensitive nature makes it susceptible to politicization and manipulation by political parties, which have failed to reach a consensus on addressing the issue as distinct policy. Consequently, current policies on youth brain drain are inconsistent and largely rhetorical, often addressed within broader areas like youth employment, education, and diaspora engagement. Despite the formal policies and institutional mechanisms, all WB6 countries continue to see rising levels of youth emigration, highlighting the ineffectiveness of current measures to retain their young talent.

This policy paper examines the factors influencing outward migration among young people in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, and identifies the main sources shaping these perceptions. To explore these issues, the authors employed a regional survey targeting young individuals aged 18-35. The research encompassed 128 participants.

This research paper focuses on identifying the main issues in the politics of the three countries that drive talented young people to leave. Considering the factors that push young people to emigrate, this study aims to shed light not only on the causes but also on the factors that could change the reality in which these three Western Balkan countries find themselves. By hearing the truth from the voices of young people, especially those inclined to leave as soon as opportunity arises, this study aims to be a voice for awareness and a wake-up call for the executive governments of these countries to take effective measures to change the rising figures of this phenomenon.

In addition, this research paper considers recommendations from the diaspora and provides an analysis of how these three countries could or should approach the issue. It suggests measures based on practices from other countries, offering a comprehensive framework for effective action.

## Albania

Albania is experiencing a significant outflow of its youth population, with thousands leaving the country each year in search of better opportunities abroad. This trend is deeply rooted in various socio-economic and political factors, as highlighted by recent reports and analyses<sup>1</sup>.

Economic instability and low incomes are central push factors driving youth emigration from Albania. High unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, mean that young people struggle to find jobs that match their skills and educational backgrounds, leading to widespread underemployment. Even when jobs are available, wages are often insufficient to support a decent standard of living. This economic disparity forces many young Albanians to seek better-paying opportunities abroad<sup>2</sup>.

Political instability and governance issues further exacerbate the emigration problem. Widespread corruption of public institutions erodes trust in the government. Transparency International has frequently highlighted Albania's issues with corruption, demotivating young people from staying and investing in their future within the country. Inefficiency and bureaucratic red tape hinder business development and job creation, contributing to economic stagnation. In addition, general lack of trust in political leaders and institutions discourage youth engagement and optimism about the future<sup>3</sup>.

The mismatch between educational programmes and labour market demands also contributes to the brain-drain. While higher education enrollment has increased, the skills acquired through education do not fully reflect the demands of the job market. Graduates find themselves ill-prepared for available jobs, leading to frustration and emigration. Furthermore, the quality of education, especially at higher levels, is perceived as inadequate, prompting students to seek better educational opportunities abroad<sup>4</sup>.

Social and cultural factors play a role in youth emigration as well. Cultural expectations and societal pressures can drive young people to seek success and validation abroad. The narrative that success is only achievable outside Albania is prevalent. Inadequate healthcare, social security, and public services contribute to a lower quality of life, prompting emigration<sup>5</sup>.

On the pull side, better economic opportunities abroad are a significant attraction. Western European countries offer significantly higher wages compared to Albania, attracting young professionals seeking financial stability. A broader and more diverse job market abroad offers better career advancement opportunities and professional growth.

The higher quality of education available abroad is another strong pull factor. Access to prestigious universities and better educational resources attracts students seeking superior academic qualifications. The availability of scholarships and financial aid for international students provides additional incentives for pursuing education abroad.

Young Albanians tend to perceive (potential) host countries as having greater political stability and better governance. This leads them to think that countries such as Germany, the UK, and the USA offer a secure environment for personal and professional development. Trustworthy and efficient public institutions in these countries enhance the

1 Pew Research Center. (2022). Global Attitudes & Trends: The Impact of Economic and Social Factors on Migration.

2 World Bank. (2023). Albania Overview.

3 Transparency International. (2023). Corruption Perceptions Index 2023.

4 UNESCO. (2023). Education for Sustainable Development: Country Profiles - Albania

5 OECD. (2023). Migration Outlook 2023

overall quality of life and provide a more predictable and enabling environment.

The improved quality of life in host countries is another significant pull factor. Access to advanced healthcare systems and comprehensive social services significantly improves living conditions. Higher levels of personal and economic security in host countries provide a safer environment for young people and their families.

Cultural and social networks also facilitate migration. Established Albanian diaspora communities in countries like Italy, Greece, and the USA provide support networks that ease the transition and integration process for new migrants. The multicultural and inclusive societies in many Western countries allow for easier cultural adaptation and integration<sup>6</sup>.

Efforts to address youth emigration from Albania require a comprehensive approach. The Albanian government should consider implementing economic reforms that stimulate job creation, particularly in high-growth sectors such as technology, tourism, and renewable energy.

## North Macedonia

North Macedonia, with its small population, is facing significant emigration. The 2021 census<sup>7</sup> highlighted a notable loss of 200,000 inhabitants compared to the 2002 census, where the population decreased from 2,022,547 to 1,836,713. This decline is primarily attributed to migration rather than a declining birth rate. The diaspora had the opportunity to register online during the 2021 census, revealing the widespread nature of emigration.

According to a 2021 survey conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy<sup>8</sup>, 58% of young Macedonians expressed a desire to leave the country, with only 6% of them planning to return. This indicates a substantial inclination towards permanent emigration among youth. North Macedonia has a history of long-term emigration. The 2020 Atlas of Migration<sup>9</sup> reported that the number of Macedonian nationals living abroad has been rising significantly, reaching an estimated 693,900 in 2020, which is almost 30% of the population.

Macedonian citizens commonly migrate to European countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and Slovenia. Overseas, there is notable interest in Australia, the United States, and Canada. Additionally, there is growing interest in migrating to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The emigration of highly skilled and intellectual workers from North Macedonia is a critical issue. The Resolution on Migration Policy 2021-2025 and the National Strategy for Cooperation with the Diaspora 2019-2023<sup>10</sup> highlight the high brain-drain. The World Economic Forum's global competitiveness report ranks North Macedonia among the countries with the highest brain-drain.

North Macedonia also sees significant internal migration, particularly towards the capital city, Skopje. Rural to urban migration continues, presenting both opportunities and challenges for urban areas and their population. Economic conditions, such as unemployment, low wages, job insecurity, and long waiting times for a job in the public sector, drive emigration. High wages and sectoral bonuses in destination countries attract many Macedonians.

6 International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2022).

7 State Statistical Office of North Macedonia, "Population Census 2021,"

8 Westminster Foundation for Democracy, "Survey on Youth Emigration from North Macedonia,"

9 [International Organization for Migration, "Atlas of Migration,"](#)

10 [Government of North Macedonia, "Resolution on Migration Policy 2021-2025,"](#)

Weaknesses in public policies, particularly in education, healthcare, clean air, and good governance, contribute to the perception of lack of future prospects in North Macedonia, fueling emigration. A significant portion of Macedonian migrants are low-skilled (43%), with 30.7% in the medium skill bracket. High-skilled migrants often move to the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, while low-skilled migrants typically move to European countries like Germany and Switzerland.

Migration decisions are influenced by macroeconomic conditions, meso-level migration networks, and micro-level individual aspirations. Socio-economic development at national and regional level significantly impacts migration trends. North Macedonia's high emigration and brain-drain require comprehensive strategies to improve economic conditions, governance, and opportunities for young people. Addressing these issues can help retain talent and foster sustainable development.

## Serbia

Serbia is experiencing significant emigration, with young and highly skilled individuals predominantly leaving the country. The average age of emigrants is 28.7 years, compared to the national average of 42.2 years<sup>11</sup>. Economic factors, such as unemployment, low standards of living, and job insecurity, are primary drivers of emigration from Serbia. Unemployment and poor living conditions are the main reasons for leaving, with political instability, crime, and corruption playing lesser roles.

A survey conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy<sup>12</sup> revealed that 64.5% of Serbian youth would emigrate if given the chance. Their main reasons include securing a better future (22.7%), higher salaries (20.1%), and a higher living standard (19.6%). Serbia is experiencing a high brain-drain, particularly in sectors like IT and healthcare. This results in significant economic losses, estimated at approximately €1.2 billion per annum<sup>13</sup>. Over 650,000 people have emigrated since the 2000s.

The loss of young and talented professionals has negatively impacted Serbia's labour market and the overall development. Youth unemployment fuels brain-drain and the erosion of human capital. Youth in Serbia often work in informal economy, holding flexible time and fixed-term contracts. They face low levels of social protection and are typically the first to be dismissed from employment.

A significant percentage of emigrants (20%) leave with their entire families, indicating permanent departure and complete loss of social and economic capital in their place of origin. Public opinion in Serbia is predominantly pessimistic about migration, viewing it as a threat rather than an opportunity. This outlook fails to recognize the potential benefits of return migration and circular migration.

Addressing brain-drain and youth emigration from Serbia requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. By focusing on economic development, education reform, quality of life improvements, and institutional strengthening, Serbia can create a more favorable environment for its young population. These strategies aim not only to retain talent but also to attract skilled individuals back to the country, fostering a cycle of growth and innovation.

Implementing these measures will require sustained efforts and collaboration between government, private sector, and civil society. Success in curbing brain-drain will ultimately contribute to Serbia's long-term economic growth, social stability, and global competitiveness.

<sup>11</sup> State Statistical Office of Serbia, "Population and Migration Statistics,"

<sup>12</sup> Westminster Foundation for Democracy, "Survey on Youth Emigration from Serbia,"

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, "Migration and Brain Drain in Serbia,"

## Methodology and timeline of the survey

This research is aiming to answer the question “**How to retain the people that have left their homeland?**”, referring to the countries Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia.

In order to answer the question, the international team of researchers performed desk research on previously published papers in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, including data from the Statistical Offices and the official strategies and working plans of the governments and responsible institutions.

A survey was performed during the first three weeks of May through Google Forms questionnaires translated in the three local languages: Albanian, Macedonian, and Serbian. The age group was from 1 to 35 years. 63 responses were collected in North Macedonia, 35 in Albania and 30 in Serbia. The qualitative analyses followed in June 2024.

### The Survey

This survey explores various aspects of migration, information, goals of migration, experience of current residents and former emigrants, perceptions of opportunities in their home countries, experience with integration and adjustment, ambitions for the future and proposals for policy improvement. Participants were invited to share their perspectives on migration-related issues, including reasons for thinking about migration, challenges faced in integration, perceptions of economic and social conditions, and ambitions for the future.

The survey comprised various questions designed to capture respondents' demographics, employment status, thoughts on migration, and future aspirations. Key questions included: Age and gender; Level of education; Current employment status; Consideration of emigration and motivating factors; Steps taken towards emigration; Long-term aspirations for themselves and their families; Future plans for staying in their home country or emigrating.

The answers were analyzed by categorizing them in topics and identified categories for the factors influencing emigration.

### The Target Group

The population or the target group was divided into four subgroups: Residents who live in their home countries and are willing to stay, Residents in their home country who are willing to migrate, People who have already migrated and are willing to remain in their country of migration, and People who have already migrated and are willing to return to their home country.

**There were 4 questions that targeted the residents living in their home country but willing to migrate seeking to identify the factors that motivate their leaving the home country:**

- Have you ever considered migrating to another country for better opportunities? (Yes/No)
- If yes, what are the primary reasons motivating you to consider migration?
- Have you taken any steps towards migrating, such as seeking information, applying for visas, etc.?
- What challenges do you face in pursuing migration?



**There were 4 questions that targeted people who had migrated from their home country:**

- What were the primary reasons for your decision to migrate?
- How do you perceive the economic, social, and political conditions in your country compared to your host country?
- Have you ever considered returning to your home country? If yes, what factors influenced your decision?
- What opportunities do you believe exist for returning migrants in your home country?

**There were 6 questions that targeted people who had migrated but were willing to return:**

- What factors would influence your decision to stay in your home country rather than migrating?
- What specific opportunities or support measures would encourage you to stay or return to your home country?
- What factors do you believe could attract other migrants to return to your home country?
- How do you perceive the potential for economic and social development in your home country?
- Are you aware of any support services or programmes available for migrants or returning migrants in your home country?
- What additional support or information would you find helpful in making informed decisions about migration or returning to your home country?

## The Data Analysis

After collecting the answers, the researchers categorized them according to the factors and similarities of the answers. The same data was compared between the three countries to obtain the regional perspective and correlation of migration factors.

## Discussing the Findings

### Findings in Albania

The issue of brain-drain and emigration in Albania has become a pressing concern for policymakers, educators, and the public. This quantitative analysis explores the reasons, motivations, and future aspirations of individuals considering or already participating in emigration.

Data from the survey conducted in Albania sheds light on demographics, employment status, motivations for migration, and future plans.

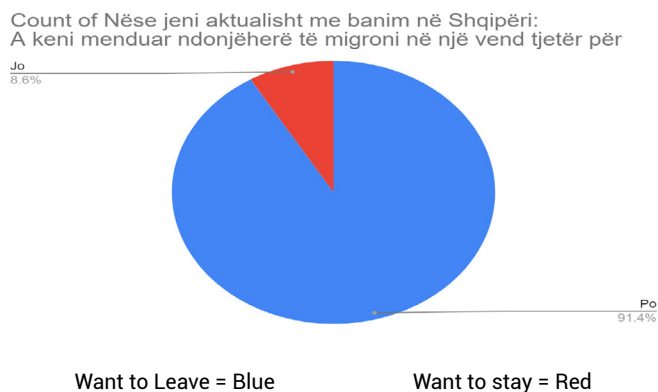


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who have thought about migrating from Albania

There are several motivations for emigrating from Albania: dissatisfaction with the current economic situation, lack of professional opportunities, and the desire for a higher standard of living as predominant themes. Respondents frequently noted a mismatch between their qualifications and the opportunities available locally, leading to frustration and the pursuit of opportunities abroad.

Economic dissatisfaction is a primary driver of emigration. Many respondents, particularly those with higher education degrees, feel that the local job market does not offer positions matching their skills and aspirations. This disconnect often forces young professionals to accept jobs below their qualification level or work in unrelated fields, contributing to a broader sense of economic stagnation. Addressing this dissatisfaction necessitates policies that create high-quality job opportunities aligned with workforce qualifications. Potential solutions include incentivizing industries that require skilled labor, fostering entrepreneurship, investing in growth sectors, and improving the business environment to attract foreign investment.

The lack of professional opportunities is another significant factor driving emigration. Respondents often find limited career advancement and professional development opportunities within Albania. This scarcity of upward mobility makes emigration an attractive option for achieving career goals. Addressing this requires enhancing the education system to better align with labor market needs, including academic, vocational, and technical training. Partnerships between educational institutions and industries can ensure relevant curricula and practical skills.

The desire for a higher standard of living also motivates emigration. Respondents seek better living conditions, healthcare, education, and overall quality of life, which they perceive as more attainable abroad. Improving the standard of living in Albania involves significant investments in public infrastructure and social services. Ensuring access to quality healthcare, education, and social security, along with urban planning initiatives that enhance living conditions, can make staying in Albania more attractive.

The survey indicates that while many respondents have considered emigration, the extent of their actions varies. Some have actively sought information, applied for visas, or participated in visa lotteries, reflecting a high level of determination. To address brain-drain, measures should be implemented to retain talent and attract returnees. Incentives such as tax breaks, grants, and support for startups can make staying or returning to Albania more appealing, while programmes facilitating the reintegration of returnees can leverage their skills and experience.

Respondents' future aspirations vary, with many seeking personal and professional development, financial stability, and improved living conditions. These aspirations are closely linked to their motivations for emigration, suggesting a clear connection between current dissatisfaction and future goals. Policies supporting continuous professional development, career advancement, and financial security are crucial. Access to lifelong learning opportunities, mentoring programmes, and career counseling can help individuals achieve their goals, while fair wages, job security, and a balanced work-life environment contribute to financial stability and overall well-being.

Future plans among respondents are diverse, with some expressing a clear intention to emigrate and others remaining uncertain. This uncertainty underscores the fluid nature of migration decisions and the impact of changing domestic conditions. Creating a positive outlook involves comprehensive development strategies focusing on economic resilience, quality of life, and national pride. Transparent governance, effective public policies, and

active civic engagement are essential to building trust and confidence in the country's future.

Based on the findings, several policy recommendations emerged. Economic development should focus on investing in high-growth industries that require skilled labour, foster entrepreneurship, and improve the business environment to attract foreign investment. Education reforms should align curriculum with market needs, enhance vocational and technical training, and support continuous professional development. Quality of life improvements require investments in public infrastructure, healthcare, education, and urban planning. Incentives for talent retention and return should include tax breaks, grants, and support for business startups, along with programmes facilitating returnee reintegration. Career advancement and financial stability measures should provide access to mentoring, career counseling, fair wages, job security, and a balanced work-life environment. Governance and citizen engagement initiatives should promote transparent governance, effective public policies, and active civic involvement.

Despite the push factors for migration, respondents also expressed reasons for staying in Albania. Strong family ties and the desire to contribute to the country's development emerged as significant factors. The qualitative analysis reveals a complex interplay of economic, social, and personal factors driving migration decisions. Addressing the root causes of brain-drain – economic stagnation, political instability, and social issues – while promoting opportunities for professional growth and personal development, is essential for sustainable development and talent retention in Albania.

## Findings in North Macedonia

Survey results in North Macedonia underscore a substantial inclination towards migration, driven predominantly by economic instability and limited opportunities within the country. Economic factors are the primary motivators, with respondents seeking financial stability and enhanced job prospects. The prevailing economic conditions are perceived as insufficient, prompting many to consider alternative opportunities abroad.

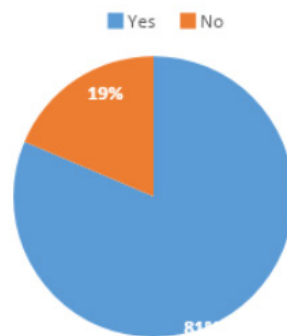


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who have thought about migrating from North Macedonia

Education is another significant driver, according to the respondents who view the educational system in North Macedonia as inadequate compared to international standards. The perceived shortcomings in educational quality and opportunity compel individuals to seek better prospects for their academic and professional development elsewhere. Corruption is also a major concern, with pervasive bribery and nepotism undermining trust in public institutions. This widespread corruption impacts economic opportunities and daily life, leading many to seek more transparent and merit-based environments abroad.

In addition, the pursuit of a higher quality of life – including improved living standards,

healthcare, and social services – motivates migration. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their current quality of life and believe that relocating could offer a more fulfilling and healthier lifestyle.

Systemic issues, such as administrative inefficiencies and deficiencies in the legal and educational frameworks, further contribute to the desire to migrate. The limitations within North Macedonia drive individuals to seek better job opportunities and professional development abroad.

The survey reveals that a substantial proportion of respondents have actively pursued migration. Actions such as researching job opportunities, applying for visas, and planning relocations are common. Some individuals have successfully completed their migration, while others are in the process of obtaining dual citizenship or permanent visas. This high level of engagement highlights the seriousness with which individuals are addressing their migration aspirations.

When evaluating the possibility of returning to North Macedonia, responses reflect considerable hesitation. Economic and social conditions are significant deterrents, with many expressing strong reluctance to return due to dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. However, family connections remain a potent factor, with some respondents indicating that they might consider returning if there are notable improvements in the economic conditions and quality of life.

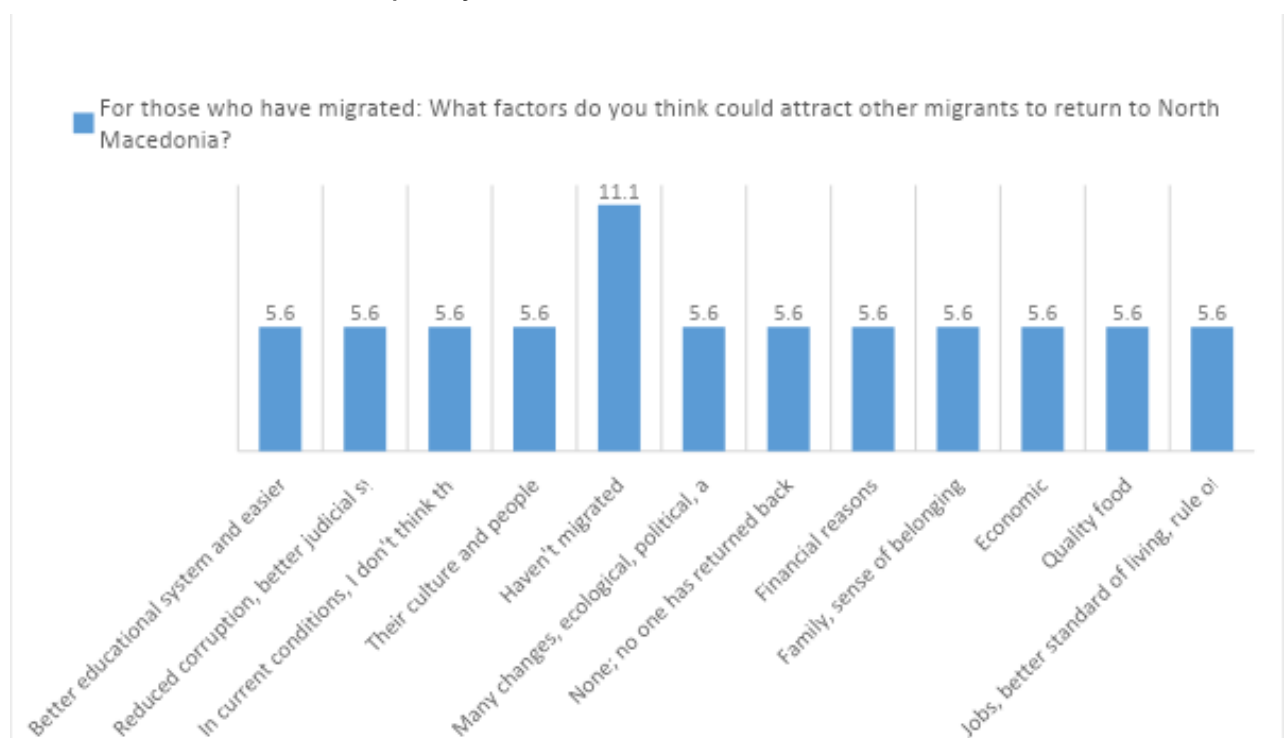


Figure 3. Migration Factors

There is skepticism regarding the opportunities available for returned immigrants. Many believe that success in North Macedonia largely depends on individual initiative rather than systemic support although the sectors such as tourism and agriculture present potential concerns for inadequate support for these areas. Family connections play a crucial role in the decision to return, but improvements in job opportunities, reduced corruption, and enhanced living standards are essential to make North Macedonia a more attractive option for returnees.

The survey provides valuable insights into the migration motivations and actions of

North Macedonian residents, highlighting key factors such as economic instability, inadequate education, corruption, and the pursuit of a better quality of life. While many are taking significant steps towards migration, the potential for return is contingent upon substantial improvements in the economic, social, and political conditions. Addressing these challenges could enhance talent retention and improve the overall quality of life within the country.

## Findings in Serbia

As part of the research, we examined the attitudes of young individuals who have either migrated from Serbia or intended to do so. While there is extensive research on this topic, our focus was on identifying what changes are necessary to attract these migrants back to Serbia, specifically aiming to foster circular migration. Acknowledging that certain factors, such as starting a family abroad or finding a partner, are beyond the influence of policy recommendations, we assert that the primary cause of significant brain-drain from Serbia is the country's poor condition. Often, the decision to return is not driven by economic or political factors but by a sense of belonging, nostalgia, and perceived home communities (Horstein Tomić, Pichler, and Scholl Scheinder, 2018; Vesković Anđelković and Bobić, 2019).

The research involved 30 respondents from Serbia, consisting of 9 males and 21 females, with an average age of 24.2 years. In terms of education, 14 respondents were students, 9 had completed high school, and 7 had graduated from university, with 2 pursuing master's degrees. Employment-wise, 19 were unemployed, while 12 were actively employed. Notably, 26 out of 30 respondents considered relocating for better opportunities and living conditions, a statistic that aligns with a survey conducted by the National Youth Council of Serbia, which found that 50% of young Serbians wished to emigrate, and 25% were in the planning stages. The primary reasons cited for this desire to emigrate include the pursuit of a more dignified life and higher standard of living.

According to the findings, the motivating factors for migration of young Serbians include widespread corruption and crime, lack of educational opportunities, low wages, poor economic conditions (especially inflation), systemic instability, low security, and an underdeveloped labor market. Some respondents also expressed a desire for new experience and independence abroad.

A significant disparity exists between the strong desire to leave Serbia and the actual capability to do so. Despite the perception that life abroad is superior, many young individuals cannot initiate migration due to bureaucratic challenges, financial constraints, and other obstacles. This is evidenced by the fact that only half of our respondents had taken steps towards migration, such as inquiring about the process and applying for visas, despite 26 expressing a desire to relocate. This gap may also be attributed to the idealization of living abroad. While many claim they would prefer to live abroad, the reality of adapting to poor conditions in Serbia often becomes normalized.

However, conditions in Serbia are not entirely bleak. Recent studies indicate a trend of "brain-gain," with highly educated individuals returning to Serbia due to improved conditions for scientific work, particularly in institutions like the Institute of Physics in Belgrade. Returnees often cite patriotism and comparable working conditions to those abroad as reasons for their return, highlighting the idealization of migration and the potential for disappointment.

The research also explored the challenges faced during the migration process, such as repeated application processes, slow administration for work permits, and the impact of COVID-19 on visa issuance. Adaptation to new societies and separation from family were also significant challenges. The process of diploma recognition also posed difficulties.

When asked about their primary reasons for emigrating, respondents cited better education (especially practical education), poor political and economic situation in Serbia, and better salaries abroad. The same group perceived Serbia's economic, political, and social conditions as significantly worse compared to their destination countries. They highlighted issues such as nepotism, unqualified personnel, lower standards of living, and lack of political culture and dialogue in Serbia.

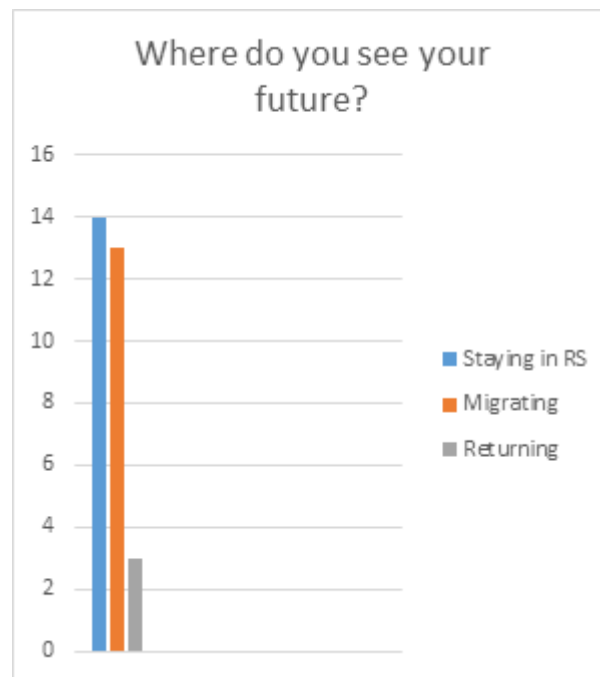


Figure 4. Future Plans

When asked if they would return to Serbia, most respondents indicated family and friends as the primary factors, with no answers suggesting a return out of patriotic duty. This indicates that emotional ties are the strongest pull factors for returnees.

Regarding opportunities for returnees, respondents were pessimistic, stating that Serbia offers no opportunities comparable to those abroad. They suggested that better career opportunities, greater competitiveness in the labor market, and initial capital brought from abroad are necessary for returnees to succeed. Some respondents felt that the only opportunity for returnees is to become part of the ruling party to secure employment.

In terms of staying in Serbia, family and emotional relationships were the most cited reasons. No respondents mentioned patriotic reasons for staying, indicating that while they love their country, they do not feel supported by the state.

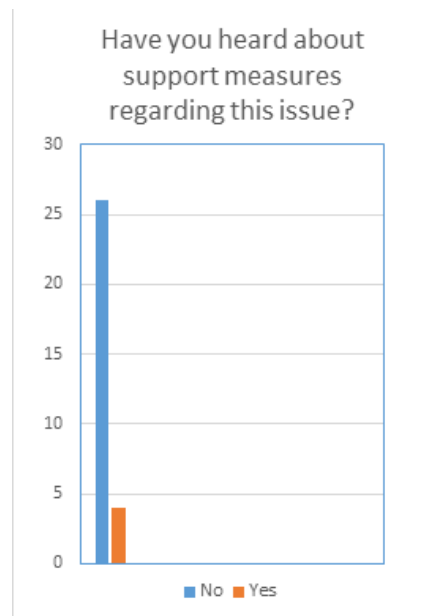


Figure 5. Supporting Measures

Respondents were generally unaware of support programmes for returning migrants, highlighting a gap between available initiatives and public awareness. Many believed that the government's efforts to improve living standards and career opportunities were insufficient. Campaigns promoting success stories of returnees and Serbia as an attractive destination for living and working were not widely recognized by our respondents.

## Policy Recommendations

To effectively address the issue of brain-drain and emigration in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia a comprehensive set of policy recommendations has been proposed, targeting key areas that influence individuals' decisions to leave or stay in their home countries.

### Economic Development Initiatives

Cornerstone of retaining talent lies in creating robust economic opportunities that incentivize skilled professionals to remain in the country. Governments should prioritize investments in industries with high growth potential, particularly those that require skilled labor, as these sectors can generate well-paying jobs and stimulate overall economic growth. In addition, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship is crucial. This can be achieved through comprehensive financial support, including grants and loans, as well as providing training and mentorship programmes that equip aspiring entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed. Improving the business environment by streamlining regulations, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and offering incentives to attract foreign investment is equally important. Countries can create a vibrant economy with ample high-quality employment opportunities.

### Education and Training

Aligning education with the demands of the labor market is essential for developing a skilled workforce that meets the needs of modern industries. Educational institutions should collaborate closely with industries to tailor curricula that reflect current and future market requirements. Such partnership ensures graduates possessing relevant skills that enhance their employability. Furthermore, there is a need to enhance vocational and technical education, which plays a critical role in providing practical, job-ready skills.

Supporting continuous professional development through lifelong learning opportunities is also vital, enabling workers to adapt to changing technologies and market conditions, thereby ensuring long-term career growth and job satisfaction.

### **Quality of Life Improvements**

Improving the overall quality of life is a fundamental strategy to prevent brain-drain. Investment in public infrastructure, including healthcare, education, and social services, is essential to create an environment where individuals feel their basic needs met. Developing urban planning initiatives that focus on improving living conditions is also crucial. This includes ensuring access to affordable housing, creating efficient and reliable public transportation systems, and designing cities that are safe and conducive to a high standard of living. When individuals perceive that their home country offers a good quality of life, they are more likely to stay and contribute to its development.

### **Incentives for Talent Retention and Return**

To make staying in or returning to their home country more attractive, governments should offer targeted incentives. These could include tax breaks, grants, and support for business startups, which would make the prospect of building a career or starting a business locally more appealing. In addition, programmes should be developed to facilitate the reintegration of returnees into the local job market, providing them with the support they need to transit smoothly and effectively contribute to the economy. Such initiatives can help reverse the brain-drain by making their return home a viable and attractive option for those who have emigrated.

### **Career Advancement and Financial Stability**

Ensuring access of individuals to career advancement opportunities and financial stability is critical to retaining talent. Governments and employers should provide access to mentoring programmes and career counseling, helping individuals navigate their career paths and achieve their professional goals. Fair wages are also essential to ensure that work is financially rewarding. Implementing measures that ensure job security and promote a balanced work-life environment will further contribute to job satisfaction, reducing the desire to seek opportunities abroad.

### **Governance and Citizen Engagement**

Finally, fostering transparent governance and effective public policies is essential for trust-building between citizens and the state. When individuals feel that their government is accountable and responsive to their needs, they are more likely to invest their future in their home country. Promoting active civic engagement is also crucial, as it empowers individuals to participate in shaping the country's future. By building trust and confidence in the country's direction, governments can create a more stable and attractive environment for skilled professionals to thrive.

These policy recommendations - if implemented effectively - could significantly reduce brain-drain and emigration by creating conditions that encourage skilled professionals to remain or return to their home countries, thereby contributing to their long-term development.



## Conclusion

Despite the various push factors that often drive individuals to consider migrating abroad, the survey conducted in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia reveals that many respondents also recognize compelling reasons to stay in their home countries. One of the most significant factors mentioned is the strong family ties and the deep importance of maintaining close familial relationships. These ties not only serve as emotional anchors but also reflect the social cohesion and robust support networks that exist within these countries. For many individuals, the presence of family and the sense of belonging to a close-knit community outweigh the challenges they might face, reinforcing their commitment to remain rooted in their homeland.

In addition to the strength of familial bonds, some respondents express a sense of cautious optimism about the future of their respective countries. They believe in the potential for positive change in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, and they are hopeful that ongoing reform and development efforts will yield tangible benefits. This optimism is often coupled with a strong desire to contribute actively to the growth and improvement of their country. These individuals see themselves as part of the solution, motivated by a sense of duty and patriotism to invest their skills and energies into the country's progress, rather than seeking opportunities elsewhere.

The qualitative analysis of the survey responses sheds light on the intricate motivations, perceptions, and aspirations that shape migration decisions in these regions. The findings underscore the complex interplay of economic, social, and personal factors that influence individuals when they consider leaving or staying. On one hand, economic stagnation, political instability, and social challenges serve as significant push factors, making the prospect of emigration attractive to many. On the other hand, the desire to remain close to family, the hope for national improvement, and the opportunity to contribute to the local development serve as powerful counterbalances.

This nuanced understanding highlights the dual challenges and opportunities associated with brain-drain. While it is clear that addressing the root causes of brain-drain – such as economic hardship, lack of political transparency, and unresolved social issues – is critical, it is equally important to create and promote opportunities for professional growth and personal development within these countries. Policies and initiatives that focus on fostering a stable economic environment, improving governance, and enhancing quality of life can significantly contribute to retaining talent. By addressing these underlying issues, Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia can work towards sustainable development, ensuring that their skilled and educated citizens see a future for themselves at home, rather than feeling compelled to seek it abroad.

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