



## Migration profile

### Albania

#### A. Executive Summary

The Republic of Albania is a small, mountainous European country located in the south-eastern part of the Balkan peninsula. After declaring its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, it was conquered by Italy in 1939 and occupied by Germany in 1943. Communist partisans took over the country in 1944. Finally, in the early 1990s, Albania established a multiparty democracy, ending 46 years of isolated communist rule.<sup>i</sup> The government applied for EU membership in 2009, which was granted in 2014.<sup>ii</sup>

Albania's migrant stock represents 0.53% of its total population, with immigrants mostly arriving from Greece, Italy, the United States, and Turkey.<sup>iii</sup> Due to its geographic location in the Western Balkan route, the country has also become a very common transit point for migrants going into the European Union.<sup>iv</sup> In fact, people originally from Tunisia, Turkey, India, Cuba, and Burundi try to enter Albania from Greece, cross Montenegro, and reach Italy through the Adriatic Sea.<sup>v</sup> Afghanistan, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, and Iran refugees also use this very route to enter the EU.<sup>vi</sup> In addition, asylum seekers arriving from Ukraine, Bangladesh, and Palestine are increasingly moving into the country.<sup>vii</sup>

Albania has one of the world's largest diasporas, and there are serious brain drain concerns.<sup>viii</sup> As of 2020, the government estimated that the emigration stock represented 59% of its total population, mainly residing in Monaco, Dominica, West Bank and Gaza, Antigua and Barbuda, and Guyana.<sup>ix</sup> Conversely, from 2011 to 2019, Italy, Greece, Germany, the US, and the UK were their leading destination countries.<sup>x</sup> Internal rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban migrations have been relevant in Albanian society, with an ever-growing population in cities like Tirana.<sup>xi</sup>

Albania has experienced slow economic growth and has high levels of public debt. The country is rich in natural and human resources, and agriculture is the economy's largest sector.<sup>xii</sup> The government has been implementing structural reforms and focusing on recovery from the pandemic, the devastating earthquake of 2019, and the recent war in Ukraine.<sup>xiii</sup> In 2021 Albania's GDP amounted to US\$ 18,255,787,480,<sup>xiv</sup> experiencing an annual growth rate of 8.5% in comparison to the previous year, which instead had marked a -3.5% decrease.<sup>xv</sup> In 2021, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows represented 6.7% of the GDP.<sup>xvi</sup> The inflation rate was instead 2% of its GDP.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **B. Country Profile**

### **I. Basic Information**

Albania is located in the southeast of Europe. It shares borders with Montenegro (north), Kosovo (northeast), the Republic of North Macedonia (east), and Greece (south and southeast). Likewise, its coastline overlooks the Adriatic Sea to the west and the Ionian Sea to the southwest. It is characterised by a mountainous relief, as well as short and torrential rivers.<sup>xxviii</sup> It is administratively divided into 12 regions and 61 municipalities.<sup>xix</sup>

It has an area of 28,748 sq. km,<sup>xx</sup> and a population of 2,793,592.<sup>xxi</sup> Its capital and largest city is Tirana.<sup>xxii</sup> The official and most spoken language is Albanian, whose dialects are called Gheg and Tosk. Minority languages include Greek, Aromanian, Romani, Macedonian, and Serbo-Croatian.<sup>xxiii</sup> There are 5 main religions: Sunni Muslim (the most practised), Bektashi, Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical. 60% of Albanians are not affiliated to any religion.<sup>xxiv</sup> Concerning ethnicity, more than 97% of the population is Albanian. Minority groups include Greeks, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Aromanians, Romani, and Balkan Egyptians.<sup>xxv</sup>

### **II. International and Internal Migration**

According to Albanian official statistics, as of 2021, 14,921 foreigners were residing in the country (representing 0.53% of its population). This marked a 9.6% increase compared to 2020.<sup>xxvi</sup> 59.1% of them came from European countries (8,812 people), 28.3% from Asia (4,222 people), 8.5% from the USA (1,270 people), and 3.8% from Africa (571 people).<sup>xxvii</sup> Nonetheless, this data only includes foreigners holding a residence permit. The UN International Migrant Stock provides a different estimate: as of 2019, it recorded 48,810 migrants (1.74% of the population): 29,643 coming from Greece (60.73% of the stock), 8,344 from Italy (17.09%), 2,225 from the USA (4.56%), and 1,961 from Turkey (4.02%).<sup>xxviii</sup>

Foreign residents in Albania have access to basic social rights (healthcare, primary and secondary education, and labour rights) and are equivalent to native-born Albanians. However, there are areas where their condition could be improved, like their political participation, transfer of social security funds to their countries of origin, and access to job opportunities in the public sector.<sup>xxix</sup>

Even though international migrant flows to Albania are limited (as can be argued according to the figures previously provided), there is a significant and growing number of migrants arriving in Albania and other neighbouring Balkan countries as a transit point every year, using the so-called Western Balkan route into the EU. The 2022 reports highlight an increase of immigrants crossing Albania, mainly irregularly, to access the EU, and also a quite diverse representation of foreign nationalities using this entrypoint. Countries of origin like Tunisia, Turkey, India, Cuba, and Burundi have been detected in this migration route. Migrants mostly seem to enter Albania from Greece, then cross over to Montenegro, and from there reach Italy through the Adriatic Sea.<sup>xxx</sup>

Internal migration has been a very relevant phenomenon in Albanian society after the dissolution of the communist regime in 1990. Consistently since that time, there has been a double pattern of internal migration in place. Some people move from rural mountainous areas in the northern and southern part of the country into the urban areas located in the western lowlands. Others leave the poorest urban areas with the most outdated industrial sectors (Kukës, Elbasan, Berat, Dibër), and move to the most dynamic cities (Tirana, Durrës,

Fier). The sudden population increase of the Tirana-Durrës area has been greatly affecting a significant number of newcomers who have been unable to adjust to the new environment and have been left out of the city's economic development. Achieving the economic integration and well-being of this urban internal migrant population is one of the main policy challenges that Albanian public authorities are now facing.<sup>xxx</sup>

### III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Albania has one of the world's largest diasporas, and has been exposed to brain drain concerns.<sup>xxxii</sup> As of 2020, the government estimated that the emigration stock abroad was 1.68 million, representing 59% of its population. As a new preferred choice of residence, the top destination countries are Monaco, Dominica, West Bank and Gaza, Antigua and Barbuda, and Guyana.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In 2021, however, Albania's net migration was -32,853, with only 42,048 emigrants recorded abroad that year.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Previously, from 2011 to 2019, the leading destination countries were Italy, Greece, Germany, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom.<sup>xxxv</sup>

The first wave of mass emigration from Albania was the result of the Ottoman occupation in 1468. During the 19th century, the fast industrialisation and urbanisation processes in many European countries and North America encouraged labour emigrants to move to Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, and the United States. During the communist regime until 1990, only very few people tried to illegally cross the border.<sup>xxxvi</sup> After 45 years under the authoritarian regime and with the re-opening of its borders, about 60% of the adult population sought to leave Albania.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The main push factors are unemployment, poverty, lack of individual safety and better healthcare and living conditions abroad.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Most emigrants are in the working-age group and male.<sup>xxxix</sup> Many are highly educated. The share of migrants moving out of Albania with a tertiary education is higher than the general local population, with consequences for its economic growth.<sup>xl</sup> The government is trying to promote the volunteer return of qualified permanent or temporary migrants. Migration of unaccompanied migrants is also another important concern in the country.<sup>xli</sup> Remittances represent a key factor for Albanian migration, affecting the well-being of family members.<sup>xlii</sup> In 2021, they represented 9.4% of Albania's GDP.<sup>xliii</sup>

There are thousands of irregular migrants moving from Albania to other countries. In 2022, 21,301 irregular migrants arrived in the United Kingdom. From September 2021 to September 2022, a total of 900 Albanians had to forcibly leave the UK, and another 469 voluntarily returned. Furthermore, the Albanian government has signed an agreement with the UK to deter irregular migration, share information to combat human trafficking, and support repatriation services to Albania.<sup>xliv</sup>

### IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

In 2022, 2,306 refugees and 6 asylum seekers were registered in Albania.<sup>xlv</sup> They came mainly from Ukraine (35%), Syria (15%), Bangladesh (10%), Afghanistan (5%), and Palestine (2%).<sup>xlvi</sup>

People from these countries are fleeing armed conflicts, unrest, and poverty.<sup>xlvi</sup><sup>xlviii</sup> <sup>xlix</sup> <sup>l</sup> <sup>li</sup> It should also be noted that in 2021, 711 refugees obtained Albanian citizenship.<sup>lii</sup> In the same year, the Albanian government began accepting Afghan evacuees seeking protection after the change of government in Afghanistan and offered them temporary protection. The same phenomenon occurred for the Ukrainian population fleeing the war.<sup>liii</sup>

Albania is part of the Western Balkan route, which remains the most active migration pathway to Europe.<sup>liv</sup> <sup>lv</sup> This route began in 2012 when Europe relaxed its visa restrictions on people arriving from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia.<sup>lvi</sup> Often, people pay considerable amounts of money to human traffickers to cross the ocean, especially on the initial part of the route from Turkey to Greece. Once arrived in Greece, they try to resume their journey by reaching a final destination in northern Europe.<sup>lvii</sup> As a matter of fact, in 2022, 34,341 arrivals were recorded along the Balkan route, of which 7,273 were registered in Albania.<sup>lviii</sup> In early 2023, 5,649 arrivals used the Balkan route, and 179 of them were recorded in Albania.<sup>lix</sup> Their main countries of origin were Afghanistan, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, and Iran.<sup>lx</sup>

Albanian law recognises refugee and asylum-seeking claims, and the government has established a system to provide protection to refugees.<sup>lxi</sup> However, the law allows persons coming from safe countries of origin or transit to apply for asylum or be granted refugee status based on a list of safe countries drawn up by the government that includes Greece.<sup>lxii</sup> To claim asylum, individuals must present themselves to the Albanian Migration and Border Police, where they will be interviewed in a language that asylum seekers can understand.<sup>lxiii</sup> After applying, asylum seekers can be accommodated in the National Reception Centres located in Babrru and Karrec.<sup>lxiv</sup> However, these centres present significant problems related to overcrowding, lack of legal assistance, and poor living conditions.<sup>lxv</sup> To address this situation, the Albanian government and UNHCR have increased funding to improve reception conditions at the Babrru centre.<sup>lxvi</sup> Furthermore, there are no facilities for unaccompanied minors,<sup>lxvii</sup> even though they are a vulnerable group, as they face a higher risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation due to the lack of a sound protection system.<sup>lxviii</sup>

In addition, according to the asylum law, refugees can apply for employment authorisation, and if no rejection decision has been given within nine months, employment authorisation is automatically granted. The law also provides access to public services, including education, healthcare, housing, law enforcement, courts and judicial proceedings, and legal assistance.<sup>lxix</sup> <sup>lxx</sup> However, access to social assistance and services is a real challenge due to limited knowledge about refugees' rights to public assistance and social protection, leading to a denial of services. Furthermore, because the government offers these services online, the problem often faced by refugees is the lack of electronic identification needed to apply online.<sup>lxxi</sup>

In addition, in 2022 Albania registered 1,948 stateless persons.<sup>lxxii</sup> The country has taken significant steps to reduce the risk of statelessness by complying with the 2020 Citizenship Law and providing unrestricted citizenship safeguards to all children born in Albania.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Finally, in 2021 Albania also recorded 251 forced internal displacements caused by floods.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

## **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

Albania is Tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report. Traffickers exploit national women and children in sex trafficking and forced labour in the country, especially during the tourist

season. Recruitment is made by means of false promises of marriage or employment to exploit victims in sex trafficking later on. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, social media has been increasingly used. Children are forced to beg, perform other types of hard labour, or commit crimes. Some of them are also forced to work in Albanian cannabis fields or in drug trafficking. Children from the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities are also exploited for seasonal work and forced to beg. Likewise, traffickers exploit Albanian victims in sex trafficking in Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kosovo, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Albanian migrants seeking employment in Western Europe are vulnerable to forced labour and criminal activity, especially in the UK. Foreigners coming from European countries, Gambia, and the Philippines are also exploited in sex trafficking and forced labour in Albania. In this regard, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are very vulnerable to trafficking.<sup>lxxv</sup>

In 2021, the Albanian State Police investigated 61 cases with 27 alleged suspects (including 12 charged with child trafficking). The General Prosecution Office prosecuted 60 cases with 19 defendants (13 for child trafficking). Simultaneously, the Special Structure against Corruption and Organised Crime prosecuted 2 cases. Courts convicted 11 traffickers, all for child trafficking. Furthermore, judges convicted 5 traffickers from 8 to 25 year imprisonment sentences. In 2021, the Albanian government and NGOs identified 154 potential victims and 5 official victims. 61 were sex trafficking victims, 65 were involved in forced labour, and 33 were subject to multiple forms of exploitation. Moreover, 99 were female, and 60 were male. 112 were children. Although most were local victims, 3 of them were originally from Romania and Serbia.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

The government maintained an Anti-Trafficking Unit to investigate cases related to trafficking. It trained police officers, judges, prosecutors, labour inspectors, and victim coordinators on trafficking issues. In 2020, the government suspended 5 police officials after the media reported their involvement in an organised trafficking operation. It permanently dismissed a police officer for “prostitution and maintaining a brothel”. In 2021, it supported a multidisciplinary national referral mechanism with standard operating procedures. It operated one specialised shelter and also funded 3 NGO-run shelters. Victims could access food, mental health counselling, legal and health care assistance, educational and employment services, financial support, vocational training, and long-term accommodation.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Despite efforts to combat human trafficking, district prosecutors lacked professional experience and the capacity to duly prosecute trafficking cases. The anti-trafficking hotline did not function in 2020 or 2021, and the government did not make efforts to reduce demands for commercial sex. Screening efforts were inconsistently implemented for vulnerable populations, particularly migrants, asylum seekers, Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, and children. Furthermore, the government lacked resources for long-term care, employment, and reintegration of human trafficking survivors.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

The Albanian Citizenship Law No. 113/2020 and the Albanian Constitution determine whether a person is an Albanian citizen. The Law has taken two important decisions regarding the acquisition of citizenship by foreigners, especially when the Albanian State has an interest in the field of culture, art, education, science, and sports.<sup>lxxix</sup>

The Albanian Parliament adopted Law no. 79/2021 as a “Law on Foreigners”, which repeals Law no. 108/2013.<sup>lxxx</sup> This Law along with the Labour Code regulates the regime of entry, stay, employment, and exit of foreigners in/from the Republic of Albania. It determines the functions and competencies of state authorities as well as of other public and private entities in relation to entry, stay, working and exit of foreigners in/from the Republic of Albania.<sup>lxxxi</sup> Law 9668/2006, “On emigration of Albanian citizens on employment grounds”, regulates emigration requests for purposes of employment or vocational training on the job of Albanian citizens leaving the Republic of Albania, as well as reintegration measures and services for returned migrants.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The Law on Asylum No 10/2021, drafted in accordance with European directives, outlines conditions and procedures for granting or withdrawing political asylum, subsidiary and temporary protection in the Republic of Albania. It also covers the rights and duties of asylum seekers, refugees, and persons enjoying temporary or subsidiary protection, as well as the conditions for their integration into the national territory.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Articles 110 and 128 of the Albanian Criminal Code criminalise sex trafficking and labour trafficking.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Albania signed and ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Albania also signed and ratified the 1949 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Migration for Employment Convention, and the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Albania is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, as well as the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 1992. It acceded to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 2003.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

## **VII. Main Actors**

### *The State*

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is the main authority responsible for the management of immigration and integration of foreigners. The Department of Border and Migration within the State Police is responsible for border control and prevention of illegal activities conducted across national borders, as well as the implementation of readmission agreements between Albania and other countries. It also includes the Directorate of Asylum Applications and the Directorate against Trafficking in Persons.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

The State Minister on Diaspora is currently responsible for designing an overall diaspora policy (the National Strategy on Diaspora, along with an action plan) in cooperation with other ministries. In addition, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, together with the State Minister on Diaspora, promotes and strengthens overall cooperation between the Albanian communities living abroad and other host countries.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The Ministry of Finance and Economy, in cooperation with other governmental actors, formulates the labour emigration policy and implements it. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is the authority in charge of coordinating and managing the implementation of the National Action Plans and National Migration Strategies, as well as policies on the migration of workers, both domestic and foreign, on Albanian soil. Its

Directorate for Migration Policies is responsible for the management of the migration phenomenon and related policies. The 2018-2024 National Strategy for Diaspora and Migration aims to provide Albania with a comprehensive diaspora policy and alignment to EU integration policy guidelines, as well as its management in accordance with international standards.<sup>xc</sup>

The Albanian State Police (APS) investigates child and adult cases of human trafficking, and the General Prosecution Office and the Special Structure against Corruption and Organised Crime prosecute human trafficking cases. The ASP's Criminal Police Department Directorate of Investigations of Narcotics and Trafficking maintains an Anti-Trafficking Unit, which investigates trafficking in persons in addition to drug and contraband trafficking.<sup>xc<sup>i</sup></sup> The Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and overall anti-trafficking efforts. The State Committee against Trafficking in Persons, including relevant ministry representatives, monitored and implemented various anti-trafficking efforts. The Office, however, did not meet in 2021. The government also maintained the National Anti-trafficking Task Force, comprising ministry officials, civil society representatives, and other participants.<sup>xc<sup>ii</sup></sup>

### *International Organisations*

UNHCR cooperates with the Government of Albania in pursuit of its pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, especially on eliminating legal inconsistencies and administrative barriers preventing refugees and asylum seekers from effectively accessing rights, ensuring that asylum procedures are fair and efficient, and strengthening the quality of asylum decision making. UNHCR's main government counterpart in Albania is the Ministry of Interior.<sup>xc<sup>iii</sup></sup> Together with the Albanian government and IOM, UNHCR is advancing towards differentiated, higher-quality pathways and procedures to address mixed movements and ensure efficient management and resource allocation. UNHCR remains engaged with authorities on the restoration of access to the territory and asylum procedure.<sup>xc<sup>iv</sup></sup>

IOM supported the development of the National Strategy on Migration Governance and its (2019-2022) Action Plan, which defines the main principles and objectives for migration governance in Albania, in line with the Migration Governance Framework (MiGoF) - a strategic framework developed by IOM and endorsed by all IOM member states (including Albania) in 2015.<sup>xc<sup>v</sup></sup> IOM in Albania works in four broad areas, migration policy, research and legislation, migration management, assisted voluntary return and reintegration, counter human trafficking, immigration and border management, labour migration, migration and development and operations and emergencies.<sup>xc<sup>vi</sup></sup>

UNICEF Albania provides shelter, health care, psychosocial support, and general socialisation opportunities to foreign unaccompanied and separated children and to Albanian children and their mothers repatriated from conflict zones and refugee camps in Syria and Iraq.<sup>xc<sup>vii</sup></sup>

### *NGOs and Other Organisations*

AVSI is an Italy-based international NGO which has been developing projects in Albania for over two decades. One of its main goals there today is offering support to Kosovan refugees in the Republic of Albania. The aid AVSI offers to people belonging to that vulnerable group includes carrying out educational and training activities in the 20 educational day centres located throughout the Albanian territory, renovating schools, and providing socio-educational assistance.<sup>xc<sup>viii</sup></sup>



Tirana Legal Aid Society (TLAS) is a local Albanian NGO whose activities prioritise, among other things, improving the condition of vulnerable people by providing them with assistance in legal matters. For instance, they have been providing help to asylum seekers in Albania, and a special priority has been offered to stateless people. TLAS offers free legal aid services to thousands of stateless children and adults and has continued helping to improve the birth registration system in partnership with Albanian authorities.<sup>xcix c ci</sup>

Regarding migrants abroad, there are also some initiatives, like the Shpresa Programme. Shpresa is an NGO focused on giving support to ethnic Albanian migrants and refugees in the UK. Their aim is to provide them with resources and support so that they can “play a positive and active role in British society.” Their programmes include offering Albanian children free-of-charge education in the English language and other subjects important for social inclusion, as well as providing different types of training to Albanian adults, and supporting families with legal aid and other kinds of advice, etc.<sup>cii</sup>

### *The Catholic Church*

The Episcopal Conference in Albania has expressed its concern about the phenomenon of depopulation in the country because of the large emigration flow.<sup>ciii</sup> In a statement made by the president of the Bishops’ Conference in Albania, the Catholic Church aims to find ways to curb this phenomenon, which in some cases also occurs in irregular forms and causes tragic events. The Bishops’ Conference in Albania stresses the importance of treating this problem with the attention it deserves.<sup>civ cv</sup> The Conference also has a Justice, Peace and Emigration Department dealing specifically with the issue of migration.<sup>cvi</sup>

Caritas Albania works to improve the living conditions of the neediest people in Albania. Since its foundation, Albania has gone through several crises, and the organisation has responded to these challenges by providing material assistance and restoring hope to communities. In recent years, Caritas Albania has been active in many humanitarian crises, such as floods, conflicts, and migrants, by providing medical assistance, education, and shelter. Caritas offers many different programmes: social, health, anti-trafficking, and support for women in distress.<sup>cvii</sup>

Cooperation with members of Catholic Relief Services, Caritas England, and Caritas Wales has been fundamental to its humanitarian work to facilitate relief and recovery in areas devastated by weather-related disasters. In addition, in the fight against human trafficking, it has been involved both at the grassroots level with communities at risk and the advocacy level supporting the endeavour of Caritas Europa and Caritas Internationalis.<sup>cviii</sup>

The Jesuit Refugee Service in Kosovo works in three reception centres: Magure, Vranidoll, and the Belvedere Centres. The main activities they offer are Albanian language and computer courses, psychosocial and medical support, provision of food and hygiene supplies. JRS is the only organisation present in these centres accompanying asylum seekers in their daily challenges and assessing their basic needs.<sup>cix</sup>

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) works together with Caritas Albania against human trafficking and exploitation, implementing an action plan to address this issue, with an emphasis on prevention, protection, prosecution, and cooperation.<sup>cx</sup> CRS’ focus is on helping survivors of trafficking and expanding their social support network so that they can resume their normal lives. The Agency holds special training programs for judges, prosecutors, police, border



police, and social workers to ensure they are well-informed and effective in caring for victims.<sup>cxix</sup> It also supports Caritas in humanitarian emergencies, helping the most vulnerable families.<sup>cxii</sup>

**March 2023**

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