

## BRAIN DRAIN TOWARD EU AND ITS IMPACT ON LABOR MARKET: ALBANIAN CASE

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the relationship that exists between human capital and the labor market. The focus of this study is the labor market in Albania. Albania, being a developing country, is facing the loss of its workforce as a result of the brain drain. The study analyzes the role of international migration policies in the management of this phenomenon. It emphasizes the role of the EU in acquiring skilled people from developing countries including Albania. It estimates that Albania has now turned into a sending country of workforce because the number of young people who have left Albania in recent years to migrate toward the EU has increased. Two of the main consequences of this phenomenon are the decrease in the workforce and the crisis in the pension system. The study also shows that despite Albania is one of the youngest middle-aged countries in Europe, brain drain has caused population decline.

**Key Words:** Human Capital, Population Decline, Labor Market, EU, Migration Policies.

### AB'YE DOĐRU BEYİN GÖÇÜ VE İŐGÜCÜ PIYASASINA ETKİSİ: ARNAVUTLUK ÖRNEĐİ

**Öz:** Bu makale, insan sermayesi ile işgücü piyasası arasında var olan ilişkiyi analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışmanın odak noktası Arnavutluk'taki işgücü piyasasıdır. Gelişmekte olan bir ülke olan Arnavutluk, beyin göçü nedeniyle iş gücü kaybıyla uğraşmaktadır. Makalede, bu olgunun yönetiminde uluslararası göç politikalarının rolünü analiz edilmektedir. Arnavutluk da dahil olmak üzere gelişmekte olan ülkelerden vasıflı insanlar kazanmasında AB'nin rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Makalede, Arnavutluk'un son yıllarda AB'ye göç etmek için Arnavutluk'tan ayrılan gençlerin sayısı arttığı için gönderen

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bir işgücü ülkesine dönüştüğünü vurgulamaktadır. Bu olgunun temel sonuçlarından ikisi işgücünün azalması ve emeklilik sistemindeki krizdir. Çalışma ayrıca, Arnavutluk'un Avrupa'nın en genç orta yaşlı ülkelerinden biri olmasına rağmen, beyin göçünün nüfusun azalmasına neden olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Beşeri Sermaye, Nüfus Azalması, İşgücü Piyasası, AB, Göç Politikaları.

## **Introduction**

The concept of brain drain has been generally discussed in the social sciences. Most researchers define it as a loss of skills for the country of origin. Loss of skills is caused by the emigration of professionals and talented people. This loss of talented people often referred to as brain drain, has negative consequences for both the country of origin and the host country, causing damage in various sectors such as education, health, and services. The rate of brain drain varies from country to country and there are a series of economic, social, and political factors that affect the rate of brain drain in a country.

“Brain drain began in the 1970s and was seen mainly as a negative phenomenon for home countries. But in the mid-1990s a new theory of brain drain was developed, stating that the benefits of skilled migration can outweigh the costs.”<sup>3</sup> Despite the different approaches on brain drain it is accepted that brain drain is a phenomenon that happens the most in less developed countries and it has a direct impact on the labor market. Also with the young group age immigrating abroad it is noticed a decline in the overall number of population. The incapacity of national migrations strategies to control brain drain in less developed countries and the efforts of international migration strategies to attract labor force has made brain drain a major problem in less developed countries.

Albania has been facing the brain drain problem since 1990 when the first migratory waves started in the country. This brought a decline in population and a loss in the young labor force in different sectors. There is a link between the economic structure of a country and the labor force. Albania is involved in international policies aimed at globalizing the economic system. The adoption of these globalizing policies in the economic system has had negative consequences on the country causing the loss of human capital.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Oded Stark, “Rethinking the Brain Drain”, *World Development*, 2004, 32 (1).

<sup>4</sup> Arta Musaraj, "Albania, the Human Factor, and Sustainable Development: A Lesson from the Present", *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, 2011, 4, p. 36.

Economic factors and the desire for a better life have led many young people in Albania to leave the country, leading to shortages of human capital. The purpose of this study is to analyze the loss of human capital in Albania and the consequences of such a phenomenon. The study analyzes the importance of human capital and its relationship to the labor market. The study also highlights how the lack of human capital is turning into a national threat to Albania causing a reduction in population and a decline in the skilled workforce in certain economic sectors. Albania is facing a shortage of skilled labor in sectors such as education and health.

The study shows that many pull and push factors have influenced the decision to leave the country. There are a lot of international policies that aim to absorb the workforce from developing countries. Migration policies pursued by European Union aimed at acquiring labor from developing countries have had an effect in Albania as well by encouraging the process of brain drain. The study shows that Albania will soon face even greater population reduction and loss of skilled labor if new policies are not drafted aimed at managing the outflow of skilled people from Albania.

### **1. The Importance of Human Capital and its Relation to Labour Market**

The stock of human capital is an important indicator that shows the economic development of a country. It is also an essential condition for the economic and social well-being of a country, especially for poor countries. The stock of human capital in society influences the way resources are distributed, thus becoming a tool for poor families to increase production and profits. This in turn leads to increased social welfare. In various studies, human capital is often defined as a stock of knowledge, skills, and attributes that help the individual and the social group in which he belongs to achieve a certain status. Well-being in education and health is often an indicator of the equitable distribution of human capital.<sup>5</sup>

The debate over the movement of human capital was dominated by two main perspectives in the 1960s. One is the "internationalist view" presented by Harry Johnson. The second is the "nationalist view" presented by Don Patinkin and other scholars. Internationalists believe and defend the idea that the migration of skilled people serves to increase global development. Nationalists emphasize the negative consequences of losing human capital in countries of origin. In the 21st century, the dominant view became that of the

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<sup>5</sup> Kehinde Oluseyi Olagunju & Kolawole Ogundari, "Welfare Impact of Globalization in Developing Countries: Examining the Mediating Role of Human Capital", *Economies*, 2019, 7 (84), p. 2-4.

international movement which puts into question the two previous views highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each. The international movement of human capital can be identified as the movement of professionals across borders.<sup>6</sup>

Referring to this theory, it can be said that the labor market for qualified professional staff is becoming more and more global prompting researchers to analyze supply issues from countries of origin and demand issues from host countries. An increasing number of students, researchers, and professionals are gathering at the world's best universities and the most developed countries where the job market offers career opportunities. Also, the mobility of researchers is something that is supported by special funds and scholarships for those with the most qualifications.

These developments can have a direct impact on the countries from which human capital migrates. Some countries are more developed and better manage the attraction of human capital. However, even developing countries have undertaken important reforms aimed at opening up to this global labor market and adapting skilled people to the markets. These countries have promoted the integration of skilled workers in global economies with the aim of economic growth not only in the host countries but also in the countries of origin.<sup>7</sup>

In reality, while some countries have reaped the benefits of globalization, many others, especially developing countries, do not seem to have gained as expected. Due to the process of globalization, many developing or poor countries have lost human capital. The migration of skilled workers to countries that provide them with more economic income has caused a shortage of labor in developing countries. This has led to them being replaced by less qualified people thus reducing the quality of service provided in various sectors such as health or education.

Developing countries face two main challenges when it comes to creating opportunities for human capital development. On the one hand, the national policies of these countries support the education of students and academics abroad as an opportunity to enrich the country with qualified people. On the other hand, these countries face a lack of national policies to attract qualified students and professionals to the country. This is because countries of origin

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<sup>6</sup> Andres Solimano, "Globalizing Talent and Human Capital: Implications for Developing Countries", *Macroeconomía Del Desarrollo*, August 2002, (15), p. 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Sami Mahroum, "Highly Skilled Globetrotters: Mapping the International Migration of Human Capital", *R&D Management*, December 2002, 30 (1), p. 169.

compared to countries where these people have migrated offer fewer opportunities for career development.

## **2. The Role of EU Politics on Attracting Human Capital from Developing Countries**

Investments in education are important in a country's national investments because well-educated and well-qualified human capital is considered an important indicator of a country's well-being. For this reason, governments compete with each other to absorb human capital. Also, despite the differences that may exist in the conditions that push people to migrate, it can be said that the age group most prone to migrate are young people who leave less developed countries to more developed countries. In this regard, governments try to influence individual decision-making through human capital return policies.

Michel Beine in his paper: Brain Drain and human capital formation in developing countries: Winners and Losers explains some of the causes of brain drain. According to him a lot of countries have been trying to attract human capital with different policies. He states that starting with Australia and Canada in the 1980s, host countries have gradually introduced quality-selective immigration policies. "They are now engaged in what appears as an international competition to attract global talent."<sup>8</sup>

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The European Union area is one of the most popular targets for young people to migrate. The most qualified people of developing countries prefer the European Union to build their future. This is since the working conditions offered in most of the European Union meet the requirements of migrants. The increase in the number of qualified people seeking to migrate to the European Union has led European Union member states to take measures aimed at managing the phenomenon of the concentration of human capital in developed countries.

The attitudes of the European Union regarding this phenomenon are different. Some member states support policies aimed at increasing the mobility of human capital within the European Union. These countries call for policies that aim to support countries that are lagging in the process of acquiring human capital. In a declaration of the European Union, it is stated that:

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Beine, Frederic Docquier and Hillel Rapoport, "Brain Drain and Human Capital Formation in Developing Countries: Winners and Losers", *The Economic Journal*, April 2008, p. 631.

"Particular attention should be given to greater investment needs in human capital and ICTs Information and Communication Technologies. This investment should be done in particular in the Member States and regions that are lagging, and to ensure the efficient and productive use of such investment. This will be even more important in the new Member States."<sup>9</sup>

However, studies show that European countries are also considering the downsides of attracting human capital. For example, the European Commission proposed in 2000 to create a program that aimed to facilitate the entry and exit of migrants within the European Union by maintaining their links with countries of origin. So this means that immigrants have the opportunity to visit countries of origin without losing their status in their host country. The idea of such an initiative was to reinforce the idea that when accepting economic migrants the protection of the domestic labor market should be considered.<sup>10</sup>

Various studies show that the race to attract qualified people will intensify in the coming decades. This is clearly shown in the policies that developed countries are pursuing. Various countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and the US have adopted policies that seek to attract human capital.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.1. Human Capital Extraction from Albania to EU: Albania as an Origin Country**

With the change of the political system in 1990 from the totalitarian regime to the democratic one, Albania also changed the economic system, passing from a centralized economy to a market economy. With an unstable economy and a political system in transition, Albania tried to recover and offer solutions to its citizens. The period of economic recovery and transition was interrupted from time to time by various economic crises. Difficulties in earning a living pushed many young Albanians to emigrate. The number of those who emigrated increased, changing the category of people who emigrated from unskilled people to highly qualified and talented people.

The number of Albanians living abroad is thought to reach the value of 1 million. According to statistics obtained by the European Commission, the number of those living legally in the EU is around 780,000. Negative net

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<sup>9</sup> Nicola D. Coniglio, "Human Capital Accumulation and Migration in a Peripheral EU Region: the Case of Basilicata", *ERSA Conference Papers*, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Kuzvinetsa Dzvimbo, "The International Migration of Skilled Human Capital from Developing Countries", *World Bank Conference Paper*, September 2003, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Frédéric Docquier, Machado Carneiro and Joël, "Global Competition for Attracting Talents and the World Economy", *IRES Discussion Papers*, 2014, p. 2.

migration from Albania to the EU in 2005 reached high numbers, making Albania one of the sending countries of skilled labor. The economic and political factors in the country and the policies pursued by the countries of the European Union to absorb the labor force from the developing countries have contributed to the increase of the brain drain from Albania.<sup>12</sup>

Albania as one of the poorest countries in Europe has faced difficulties in hiring young people and especially skilled workers. The brain drain from Albania is driven by the lack of favorable working conditions in the domestic market. Young people migrate mainly for economic reasons, to provide income for themselves and their families. However, the economic factor is not the only driving factor that pushes qualified young people to emigrate. The lack of meritocracy and the lack of coordination of the labor market with educational institutions push qualified persons to look for golden opportunities in EU countries. The conditions offered in EU countries are quite tempting for a qualified group of Albanians who have lost faith in the domestic labor market.

Host countries are facing difficulties in managing the arrival of skilled migrants. They are establishing policies aimed at the partial return of migrants to their countries of origin or the coordination of labor markets between host and countries of origin. Albania in this process finds itself in difficulty because on the one hand, it is a country rich in numerous natural resources and human capital, and on the other hand, it faces the lack of administration of this natural and human capital. This produces a repetitive process of qualified people being forced to leave the country for a better life.<sup>13</sup>

Albania has made efforts to manage the problem of brain drain. There is a national migration strategy that is designed to prevent the emigration of qualified young people from the country and to manage the phenomenon of brain drain. However, it can be said that this process is being managed in two different directions. On the one hand, the aim is to bring back qualified young people. On the other hand, through cooperation with host countries, Albania aims to integrate qualified Albanian workers in the labor markets of the European Union. This agreement is thought to be profitable for both the countries of origin and the host countries. To illustrate this collaboration in

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Geiger, "Mobility, Development, Protection, EU-Integration! The IOM's National Migration Strategy for Albania", *Migration, Minorities and Citizenship*, 2010, 15 (32), p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Emiljan Karma, "Modern Emigration: Negative Effects in Albanian Economy", *Euro-Balkan Law and Economics Review*, 2020, 1 (2), p. 67-68.

the management of human capital the example of Albanian nurses that work in Italy can be given.

Albania in cooperation with several municipalities in the north of Italy has drafted a program for sending nurses to Italy. As a result of this agreement both countries benefit. On the one hand, Italy benefits from this agreement because in recent years it has faced a crisis for skilled workers (nurses) in the health sector because local workers refuse to work under working conditions there. On the other hand, the Albanian nurses who would be part of the contract, in addition to working in one of the European Union countries such as Italy, were also offered valuable training and specializations for their careers.<sup>14</sup>

This form of cooperation is thought to be profitable for both countries and guarantees a good example of the integration of skilled labor coming from developing countries into the European labor market. Despite these two directions that the phenomenon of brain drain follows in Albania, it can be said that its impact on the country's economy and the labor market is high. The results of this impact are varied, but the two main ones remain loss of workforce and the crisis in the pension system.

### **3. The Impact of Brain Drain on the Albanian Economic Sector and Labor Market**

Emigration of skilled labor as a result of brain drain brings negative consequences for society, especially in the economic sector. One of the main consequences observed in countries facing the phenomenon of brain drain is the reduction of the workforce in certain economic sectors. This simultaneously translates into fewer opportunities for the state to tax employers and jobseekers. The social impact that this phenomenon has is also high because the age of people who emigrate is generally the age of people who wants to create a family. The emigration of young people pushes the age of marriage and often makes it impossible as a result of the declining population.

According to Karma (2020), the effects of the brain drain phenomenon in Albania can be analyzed at two levels: macro and micro. At the macro level, he explains the crisis of the pension system as a result of brain drain. This according to him means lower incomes in the state budget and damage to certain sectors of the economy such as agriculture. At the micro-level, he talks about the effects that the phenomenon of brain drain has on the lives of

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<sup>14</sup> Dirk Willem Velde, "Globalisation and Education: What do the Trade, Investment and Migration Literatures Tell us?", *ODI Working Paper*, 2005, p. 50.

young people. Many young people deciding to leave the country create a vacuum in the labor market which has to be filled by less qualified people. On the other hand, a weak economy and a poorly regulated labor market push young qualified people to build their future abroad. This further increases the outflow numbers of skilled labor from the country.<sup>15</sup>

Also, another direct consequence observed by the brain drain phenomenon is the reduction of the workforce in the health sector. Studies show that there is a reduction in skilled labor in the health sector in Albania. This is because students who have emigrated before decide to stay in the countries where they emigrated after completing their studies. Their employment, especially in Germany, has led to shortages of qualified staff in Albania.<sup>16</sup>

The number of nursing students who want to migrate holds second place in the country according to a study conducted in 2018 entitled: New trends in potential migration from Albania. This number is preceded by call center employees who occupy the first place. While the third place in the ranking is occupied by construction workers.<sup>17</sup> The following table illustrates these data.

**Table. 1. The Percentage of People who want to leave the Country by Work Sectors**

Sectors	The percentage of people who want to leave
Working in a call center	85 %
Nurses	83 %
Construction	56 %

*\*Data is obtained from the study: “New trends in potential migration from Albania” conducted by Rusell King and Ilir Gedeshi with reference to CESS, Potential Migration Survey, 2018.*

Even though call centers and construction are not sectors that employ qualified staff, the departure of young people working in these sectors brings economic damage to the country. The construction sector faces difficulties in finding manual workers. On the other hand, the reduction in the number of

<sup>15</sup> Emiljan Karma, a.g.e., p. 67-74.

<sup>16</sup> Ilir Gedeshi and Rusell King, “Research Study into Brain Gain: Reversing Brain Drain with the Albanian Scientific Diaspora”, *Albania: UNDP*, 2018, p. 22-25.

<sup>17</sup> Russell King and Ilir Gëdeshi, “New Trends in Potential Migration from Albania”, CESS Center for Economic and Social Studies, 2018, p. 47.

employees nationwide leads to a reduction in contributions to the pension scheme. Also, young people leaving these sectors are generally dissatisfied with working conditions in Albania and leave never to return. Good working conditions in emigration are another contributing factor to the decision not to return.

The process of brain drain from less developed countries to more developed ones is characterized by two main consequences: remittances and unemployment. Both of these elements are interrelated and at the same time causal of each other. Thus, more specifically, the unemployment of less developed countries forces young people to immigrate to more developed countries such as the countries of the European Union. After migrating to these countries, qualified young people provide enough income to send to their countries of origin.

The qualified persons who migrated from Albania toward the EU have been sending remittances for years. The remittances have positive and negative effects on the Albanian economy. On the one hand, they provide economic income that increases the opportunities for families to afford the daily expenditure. On the other hand, remittances have created economic dependence. Family members of qualified workers, by being satisfied with this income, reduce their efforts to look for work. This increases the number of unemployed youth in the country. Also at the moment when they decide to look for work they migrate abroad to follow the example of their family members.<sup>18</sup>

So it can be concluded that unemployment in Albania remains a problem and remittances instead of fixing the situation are opening new challenges for the policymakers to fix this problem. By sending remittances they are becoming a role model for their family members who have difficulty finding a job and want to leave the country. The direct impacts that come from this are the reduction in the population number and the reduction of human capital.

#### **4. Population and Human Capital Decline as a Result of Brain Drain**

In the literature, there are many examples of countries that have faced population reduction as a result of brain drain. Albania is becoming part of these countries as a result of alarming data proving the outflow of skilled labor from the country. Young people in rural areas, in particular, choose to emigrate, leaving the rural part of the country populated only by the elderly. Besides having a young population if the brain drain problem will not be

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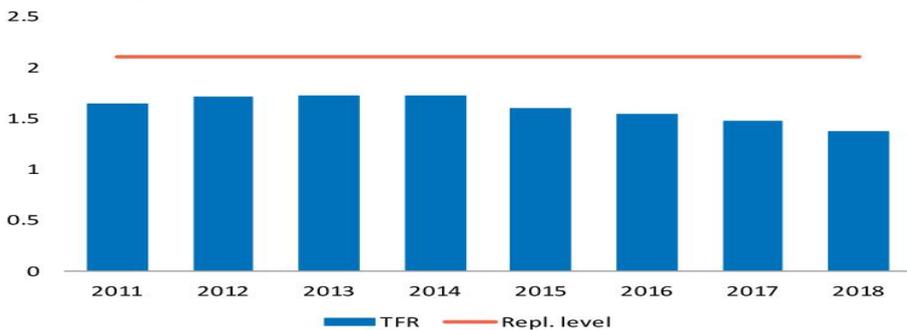
<sup>18</sup> Rusell King and Christos Nikas, "Economic Growth Through Remittances: Lessons from the Greek Experience of the 1960s Applicable to the Albanian Case", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 2005, 7 (2), p. 254.

managed in the following years, Albania will be dealing with one of the biggest problems a nation can have: the reduction of the population.

Albania has faced a mass exodus of the population since the fall of the totalitarian regime until today. However, although this is not a new phenomenon for Albania, leaving the country has become a topic of discussion for the fact that today those who decide to leave are young. The departure of young people is accompanied by a reduction in the number of marriages and consequently births. The years in emigration push the age of marriage for a large part of them.

According to INSTAT (Albanian Institute of Statistics), the population of Albania has changed during the last 30 years as a result of migration. On 1 January 2019, the population of Albania was 2.86 million, and compared with 2011 has decreased by 1.5 %. The decreasing trend continues to be present even in preceding years. (Instant) Also during the period 2011-2018, the number of births per year has decreased significantly, from about 34 thousand in 2011 to about 29 thousand in 2018. The total fertility rate has been decreasing since 2011 when it was 1.65 children per woman, to 1.37 in 2018. The table below shows it.<sup>19</sup>

### Total Fertility Rate



*\*The data on the table is obtained from INSTAT (Albanian Institute of Statistics)*

The data obtained from the national census show once again the impact of emigration on the reduction of the population in Albania. Studies show that despite the demographic data that testify to a growing population, the immigration of young people has brought the country a demographic

<sup>19</sup> INSTAT, *Albanian Institute of Statistics*, <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/statistical-literacy/the-population-of-albania/>.

problem by reducing the population. If emigration had not taken place and the rate of natural increase had continued at the high rates of the 1990s, the population of Albania would have been much higher.<sup>20</sup>

Researchers are divided when it comes to assessing whether qualified young people should return to their country of origin. Many researchers support the idea that young people in emigration by working in well-paid emigration jobs can help the country with remittances, which may be necessary to cope with financial difficulties. On the other hand, their departure causes the country a reduction in the active working population and a decline in the population numbers in general.<sup>21</sup>

It can be summarized that the emigration of qualified young people from Albania can have benefits for their career and their contribution to the country remains important. Integration into international labor markets is already part of the national policies of developing countries. However, the mass exodus of young people can be associated with negative consequences for the country of origin both economically and demographically.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the process of brain drain from Albania toward the EU. The study analyzed the case of brain drain in Albania by focusing on the economic sector. In the first section, the importance of human capital and its relations to the labor market was analyzed. The next part of the paper focused on the role of EU politics in attracting human capital from developing countries. By giving examples of different EU countries that have approved different policies to attract skilled people, the study showed that the EU remains one of the most popular targets for young people to migrate.

The study showed that both origin and host countries have been collaborating in the management of the process of brain drain. A lot of effort has been made to attract lost workforce and skilled people from developing countries. Also, different attempts have been made to facilitate the entrance of skilled workers into the EU market. Despite most of these collaborations being productive for both countries the origin and the hosting ones, the study highlighted how the lack of human capital has become a national threat to Albania, causing a population reduction.

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<sup>20</sup> Rusell King and Julie Vullnetari, "Migration and Development in Albania", *Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty*, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Etleva Germenji and Lindita Milo, "Return and Labour Status at Home: Evidence from Returnees in Albania", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2009, 9 (4), p. 497.

The study showed that human outflows have had an economic and social impact on a small country such as Albania. This human flow relates mainly to the active population in the labor market, which Albania has exported to other countries as human capital. The economic structure of Albania and the factors that have contributed to the human capital loss were analyzed in this paper. The paper shows that among the important effects of brain drain in Albania are: the crisis of the pension system, lower incomes in the state budget, and the damage to certain sectors of the economy such as agriculture. At the micro-level, we can talk about the effects that the phenomenon of brain drain has on the lives of young people by making them leave the country and reproduce the brain drain phenomenon.

The study focused on the impacts of the brain drain phenomenon on the economic sector in Albania. However, the phenomenon of brain drain is a complex phenomenon that affects other areas such as politics and society. The social impact and social drama that such a phenomenon produces require separate analyses that can be done in future studies.

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