

Emigration of young people from Albania - an old wound of our society

Brunilda Hoxhaj (PhD)* Dorina Xhani*

* *European University of Tirana, Faculty of Human Sciences, Education and Liberal Arts Department of Psychology, Education and Sports*

* *To whom correspondence should be addressed brunilda.hoxhaj@uet.edu.al*

Abstract-Emigration is not a new phenomenon for the Albanian population, on the contrary, it is a known and continuous process for our society. Based on this fact, this study aims to identify the factors that push the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, at the University of Tirana, to emigrate. The study aims to identify the main pushing and pulling factors in the decision-making process for emigration.

The methods used in this study are secondary data analysis and quantitative survey research method, through which primary data was obtained. The sample of the population was 250 students. By means of the analysis in SPSS, it was possible to make an analysis and a graphic presentation of the issues raised in the study questionnaire. The study showed that most of the respondents are not very satisfied with life in Albania and would like to change the current conditions, considering the possibility of a possible emigration. The highest percentages of the chosen options are related to the desire to complete studies and work in Albania or abroad. Most of the surveyed students consider as potential emigration destinations countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, Germany, the countries of Northern Europe, otherwise known as the Scandinavian Peninsula. The high level of dissatisfaction among the respondents, which is reflected in the high level and commitment to emigrate, is mutually related to the impossibility to change the unfavorable economic situation. Most of the respondents consider the cost of living in Albania to be too high and the salaries to be low and emphasize the uncertainty of finding employment after graduation.

Key Words: Potential Migration, Push Factors, Pull Factors.

I. Introduction

This research aims to identify, describe, and analyze the main reasons that push and attract students towards a migration. Migration is an expression of human aspiration for dignity, security, and a better future (UNESCO; 2019: 17). Emigration is a very complex phenomenon, which in certain proportions, especially during the 20th century, has "affected" almost all the sociocultural "spaces" of our planet. During the last ten years, there has been a lot of increase, especially the number of emigrants left from the former socialist countries of the East, who went mainly to the more developed countries of the West. According to the calculations made by the study structures of international organizations in

1995, there were about 100 million immigrants and 27 million refugees and deportees (Dervishi; 2012: 1).

In sociological studies about the phenomenon of emigration, it is important to analyze the period of its formation and continuation. Through this analysis it is possible to understand the impact of the elements on the dynamics of emigration, on the social, economic, and cultural structure of the societies of origin and host societies (Likaj; 2015: 11). According to the widely used definition in social sciences, immigrants are people who live outside their country or country of origin for a long time and stay there for various reasons (economic, political, social, cultural, etc.). The phenomenon of

emigration has been characterized as one of the oldest social phenomena (since the beginning of humanity) of different groups and societies in the world (Ibid.: 38).

During the last decades, emigration has become even more visible, considering its global scope, role in domestic and foreign policies, as well as its significant consequences in the countries immigrated from and immigrated to. For the countries from which people emigrate, the departure of people causes concern due to the loss of population, especially people of childbearing age, and "brain drain" on the one hand, but on the other hand it creates hope that the money and knowledge taken by migrants abroad can support social and economic growth (Westminster Foundation for Democracy; 2019: 4). During the last 20 years, the phenomenon of migration has been at the core of political, economic, and social changes in Albania. In 2011, the population in Albania was 2.8 million, thus representing a decline of 11.1 percent from the population recorded in 1989. Although the birth rate is high (2.1), the population decline during the transition is a consequence of the migration of Albanians that started in 1991. By the end of 2011, about 1.4 million inhabitants or about a third of the Albanian population were estimated to live abroad (Gedeshi; 2012: 1).

The phenomenon of emigration has appeared in a unique form and has influenced the dynamics of the structure of Albanian society. From the collected data of this study, it is noted that most Albanians emigrated during the first years after the fall of the communist regime. In this period, the phenomenon of emigration was massive. International migration from Albania did not exist during the socialist regime, because it was illegal and severely punished, while migration within the country was regulated by the government. The collapse of the socialist system, the immediate opening of the country and the radical and chaotic transformation of the economy were accompanied by mass migration of the population in search of a better future, either elsewhere within Albania or abroad (Gedeshi; 2012: 1).

Furthermore, the departure of young people is also one of the most discussed issues in the context of Albanian migration, given that more than 40 percent of academics and scientific workers left the country

during the period 1991 - 2008 (Gedeshi; 2012: 1) . The feature of the study lies in the analysis of emigration among young Albanians, based specifically on the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana. This research aims to study the main reasons that push the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, at the University of Tirana, to leave their homeland.

II. Presentation of the problem

The field of emigration has attracted the attention of many researchers of various scientific disciplines during the last ten years. However, in the study of this field, attention has mostly been focused on the economic relations of immigrants as individuals, their employment issues, the problems they encounter during the immigrant experience and so on (Zenelaga; 2013: 2). During the research in the literature, studies and various reports related to the phenomenon of migration, we found that there is less attention regarding the attractive or driving factors that push Albanian immigrants, especially young ones, regarding their decision-making to leave from the country of origin. Often at a crossroads, in many cases, after completing their university studies, they decide to leave, encountering great life difficulties in the country they are leaving, which is already a relatively "foreign" country for them, difficulties related to employment, sociocultural reintegration and in some cases housing, etc. This research aims to investigate the main reasons that push the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, at the University of Tirana, to leave their homeland. Therefore, the problems related to young immigrants and the challenges they face after completing their studies, along with efforts to weave and implement immigrant projects, require more and more attention.

The need for this study: First, the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana was chosen as a study target, because social phenomena are best studied in this faculty and are closer to the reality of individuals and society. It is also found that the phenomenon of emigration is very evident in this faculty. The Faculty of Social Sciences as an institution aims to highlight and study social problems, such as the phenomenon of emigration. Finally, the low demand in the current employment

market especially for students of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

III. Methodology

This study relied on the quantitative method to explore the main factors that push the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana towards migration. The research project was carried out at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana.

The purpose of the study: The general purpose of the study is to identify and describe the main factors that push second-year students of the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana to migrate.

Objectives of the study: To identify the dimensions of the migration of students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana, as well as to examine the push and pull factors that lead young people to emigrate abroad.

The realization of the study included several links such as the design of the survey questionnaire, the collection of data from the field and the processing of the data. The research was conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana. The Faculty of Social Sciences is part of the University of Tirana. The Faculty of Social Sciences dates to 1991. After the democratic changes of the Albanian society in 1990, the preparation of professionals in the field of social and political services, new specialties after the changes, emerged as an imperative of the time. The Faculty of Social Sciences is recognized as the first and only educational institution in the history of Albanian education, which has prepared the first specialists in Sociology, Psychology, Social Work, Administration and Politics of Social Work, Philosophy and Political Science (https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page_id=131 accessed on 18.12.2020).

Population and sampling

The determination of the sample for this study was carried out based on the preliminary data for the population. The population in which the study has been extended consists of approximately 300 Bachelor level students in the Department of Social Work. The sample was randomly selected by enabling the receipt of 51 questionnaires from second year Bachelor level students in the

Department of Social Work. Sampling selection was a form of non-probability sampling, i.e. random sampling.

Research instruments: In this study, empirical data was collected through survey, using a structured questionnaire. The design of the hypothesis, purpose and objectives in the study helped in the formulation and preparation of the questionnaire questions. Analysis of the wording of the questionnaire helped to understand more clearly the implementation of the quantitative research method that was used in this study. The survey contains 15 questions. The survey questions were broken down into alternative answers from which respondents could choose only one and were partially left open through the alternative "other."

The questionnaire consists of three sections organized into 15 questions through which the research issues are broken down. Sections contain certain topics.

First section: Individual data. The first section for individual data is organized into 5 questions related to the demographic and social status of the respondents. This section provides essential data for the study, as it contains information on the study variables that are: age, gender, employment, standard of living.

Second section: Plans for the future and potential emigration. This section contains 5 questions related to future plans and potential emigration of students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana. Also, these questions shed light on the future plans of the students, the main reasons for leaving Albania of the students who want to migrate, the place where the students are thinking of migrating as well as the long-term migration plan of the students who want to migrate.

Third section: Attitudes towards emigration and opportunities to emigrate. This section is divided into 5 questions through which students' attitudes towards emigration and opportunities to emigrate are investigated.

The administration of field surveys was carried out based on the detailed work plan. The survey started in December, 2020. The surveys were completed by 250 students of the entire faculty. Due to the situation created by COVID-19, from face-to-face interaction to collect study data, the collection and analysis of study data using SPSS program was modified. By means of this program, it was possible

to present graphic data about the issues raised in the study questionnaire. The truth of the data and conclusions of this study have credibility because the data are objective and based on statistical figures. During the completion of the surveys, the ethics of scientific research were strictly applied, where the respondents were presented with the purpose of this scientific research, and they were assured that their data will be confidential and will be used correctly only for the realization of this study. All the respondents answered with their full will.

The data collected was processed through the SPSS program, which allows the collection of information from users through a survey, presenting the data through numerical values, graphs, tables and including nominal values, frequencies and percentages.

IV. Analysis

Empirical findings and related discussions are structured in this study in accordance with the logical and chronological order of data collection and survey questionnaire. This study is essentially quantitative and aims to provide a clear picture of the identification and description of the main characteristics that push the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana to the phenomenon of emigration. Also, this chapter will identify the dimensions, the attractive factors, the driving factors and the places where the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana intend to emigrate.

The analysis of the data showed that 54.9% of the respondents belong to the age group of 18-19% who are students and the rest belong to the age group of 20-21%.

Based on the data on gender, it is determined that in n=51 there is a significant concentration of female respondents, i.e. 96.1% of the answers collected and about 2 boys. In the entire sample taken, being only 2 boys, it turns out that the participation in gender division belongs to girls. Since the study in the Faculty of Social Sciences is mainly characterized by marked gender differences, it is important for the study to analyze how this participation will be reflected in the commitment to emigrate.

Social independence is also conditioned by economic independence, part-time employment

policies and other similar categorizations of student employment. According to the results collected on the data of the students' employment form, it is evident that 5.9% of the surveyed students are employed full-time, 13.7% of the surveyed students are employed part-time and 80.4% are unemployed.

As for the data on the cohabitation model, about 80.4% of the surveyed students currently live with their family, 9.8% of them live with friends, 3.9% alone, 3.9% of the surveyed students have chosen the alternative " other" and 2% of respondents live with cousins. These figures show the strong dependence that Albanian youth have on their family, something that is closely related to their financial aspect.

In accordance with the current data, the respondents were asked whether the current study and employment opportunities in the country of birth are satisfactory to continue living. From the answers received, it turned out that more than 58.8% of the students are "not satisfied at all", which is most of them. These findings indicate a strong dissatisfaction among young people regarding the opportunity to feel fulfilled in their country.

Considering the analysis of the collected data, in the opinions of students, the possibility of employment after studies is seen as an essential factor in the future of young people, students of social sciences. For this reason, the highest percentages of the chosen alternatives are considered as the desire to complete studies and engage in work in Albania or abroad, respectively with the percentage of 39.2% and 31.4%.

In the continuation of the research, in percentage about 58.1% of the respondents consider leaving the country as the best choice now. Where 41.4% of the surveyed students want to complete the cycle of studies they have started and then get employed outside Albania, 9.8% of the surveyed students want to interrupt their studies and go to work outside Albania, 5.9% of the surveyed students want to continue a study cycle outside Albania and 2% of surveyed students want to interrupt their studies and continue them outside Albania. In all their answers, the desire to emigrate abroad is dominant.

Thus, based on the data collected through the survey, the high level of dissatisfaction among the surveyed students, which is reflected in the high level and commitment to emigrate, is mutually

related to the impossibility to change the unfavorable economic situation. The respondents are under the pressure of not being able to find a suitable job during, or especially, after their studies and as a result they face significant economic difficulties. Most of the respondents, about 31.4%, consider the cost of living in Albania to be too high and salaries are considered low, while 23.5% emphasize the uncertainty of finding employment after graduation. While the remaining 45.1% of the reasons are headed by the desire to emigrate to a country with more opportunities for professional development and a safer place to live. Most of the respondents, about 27.5%, considered countries like Great Britain as potential emigration destinations, and about 19.6% of the respondents chose the United States of America. About 13.7% of respondents chose Italy as their favorite destination, 11.8% Greece, 9.8% Germany, 7.8% Scandinavian countries, 3.9% Canada and 3% the continent of Australia.

As for the information about the country of emigration, the analysis of the collected data shows that 37.3% of the respondents chose to emigrate because they have family members who can support them in the countries they want to emigrate to, 23.5% affirmed that they are familiar with the language and culture of the country, 15.7% have chosen to emigrate because they have heard first-hand about the positive experiences of emigration in the country where they want to emigrate, 9.8% of the students have chosen the "other" alternative, 7.8% of the respondents have chosen these countries because they offer a higher quality education and there are those who agree to have secured a work contract in these countries, which are respectively 5.9% of the participants in the study.

If we refer to the data on the long-term plans of the students, there are about 66.7% of the surveyed students who want to emigrate and build a future outside Albania, 25.5% want to benefit from the experience of emigration and return to Albania and 3.9% want to use the country they want to immigrate to as a "transit" and then immigrate somewhere else. To examine the attitudes towards emigration as well as the possibilities to emigrate from the questions asked, it was found that 84.3% of the surveyed students have not tried to emigrate before and only 15.7% of the surveyed students have tried to

emigrate before. This indicates a previous experience of emigration among young Albanians.

An important point in the questionnaire was the fact that the participants would have financial support from the family to make this decision. From the analysis of the processed data, it was found that 49% of the surveyed students are sufficiently financially supported by their family in the expenses to emigrate, 27.5% of the surveyed students do not have the opportunity to be financially supported by their family in the expenses to emigrate, 21.6% of the surveyed students are fully financially supported by their family in the expenses to emigrate and 2% are not financially supported by their family in the expenses to emigrate.

Data on the support of students from relatives in the countries they wish to immigrate to show that 51% of the surveyed students are supported by one or several family members living in the country they wish to immigrate to, 25.5% are sufficiently supported by one or several family members living in the country they wish to immigrate to and 23.5% of the surveyed students are not supported by anyone in the country they wish to immigrate to.

In this study, the impact of the COVID-19 health pandemic on the plan to emigrate was analyzed. The pandemic certainly made their situation more difficult, but on the other hand, it encouraged them to be even more determined to emigrate, as a necessary solution to the increased problems in their families. Thus, in their opinion, it was observed that 76.4% of the surveyed students did not postpone the project to emigrate due to the situation created by the COVID-19 health pandemic, and they even claimed that they tried to speed it up. The remaining 15.7% have sufficiently postponed the project to emigrate due to the situation created by the health pandemic COVID-19 and a very small minority of 7.8% admit that they have completely postponed the project to emigrate due to the situation created by the pandemic.

Regarding their opinions regarding the statement: "I think that problems are not solved by emigrating, that's why I don't want to emigrate", it was seen that 70.6% of the surveyed students do not agree with the statement "I think that problems are not solved by emigrating, that's why I don't want to emigrate", thus expressing that the problems for most of the surveyed students are solved by emigrating and only

29.4% agree with the statement, expressing the opinion that the problems are not solved by emigrating, but by working hard and contributing to their country.

V. Results

In fulfillment of the goals and objectives of this study, it is concluded that there is an indirect, negative relationship between the level of satisfaction with the economic and social conditions in which the surveyed students are located and considerations of potential emigration. So, with the deterioration of the economic situation in the country, especially after the health pandemic of COVID-19, the level of potential emigration among young people, students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, is expected to increase. This will be of particular importance, since in the student population of public institutions in the country, students of all branches of social sciences mainly face a low demand in the current employment market. The deterioration of the current economic situation will lead to a decrease in potential employment demand and a deterioration in working conditions. The situation, especially for recent graduates, will worsen, expecting to increase the levels of emigration to some European countries. Other countries such as Great Britain or the countries of the Scandinavian peninsula are also considered because of the high standard of living. The push factors and pull factors, from the result of empirical findings, approximate the data in the literature:

Push factors

1. Living conditions
2. Small opportunities for employment during/after studies
3. Lack of quality at university levels of public education
4. Desire for a better life
5. Career development opportunities
6. High level of uncertainty

Pull factors.

1. Standard of living in host countries
2. Greater employment opportunities
3. Higher wages, better economic opportunities
4. Opportunities for professional development and various qualifications
5. Political stability

6. Meritocracy, stability

7. Providing the best services

Also, it should be noted that, due to the large gender differences in the population of students of the Faculty of Social Sciences (reflected and in the sampling), we came to understand that the desire to emigrate is high and from young girls doing it less important the gender variable. Potential emigration due to unfavorable economic and social circumstances of young people is not influenced by the gender variable. Therefore, in the conclusions of this study, it is recommended that there be an immediate intervention in youth employment policies, but also in the quality of education in public education institutions in the country. Employment policies should reflect the demand of young people, emphasizing part-time employment programs or employment programs specifically dedicated to students. Increasing quotas on public and private platforms of internships/work practices and long-term youth employment programs after graduation should be considered. Disadvantaged students should have a special focus, due to the small opportunities in career development and employment, especially those of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

VI. Conclusions

According to the data of the study, in the population of students of public institutions in the country, students of all branches of social sciences mainly face a low demand in the current employment market. The deterioration of the current economic situation because of the Covid-19 health pandemic will bring about a decrease in the demand for potential employment and a deterioration in working conditions. Disadvantaged students should have a special focus, due to the small opportunities in career development and employment, especially those of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

- According to the data of the study, it was found that 54.9% of the surveyed students belong to the age group "18-19 years old and are girls, taking into account that social science studies are mostly chosen by girls. The sample selected for the study turned out to be unemployed and

this was also reflected in the dissatisfaction they expressed towards the opportunities for employment in the country. Thus, it was found that 5.9% of the surveyed students are employed full-time, 13.7% part-time and 80.4% are unemployed. The study revealed a kind of non-independence conditioned by parental shelter for young Albanians, especially during the current period we are in and online learning. Referring to the data, it turned out that 80.4% of the respondents live with their family, 9.8% with friends, 3.9% of the respondents live alone, 3.9% have chosen the alternative "other" and only 2% of the respondents live with cousins. So, these numbers show the inability of young people to live away from their families because of high unemployment in Albania.

- In the study, the respondents were asked if the current possibilities of study and employment in the country of birth are satisfactory to continue living, where 47.1% are satisfied and 52.9% are dissatisfied, this for several reasons which are presented in study.
- On the other hand, it was evident that from the collected empirical data, an essential factor for the future of young people, students of social sciences, is the possibility of employment after studies. Therefore, the highest percentages of the chosen options are considered as the desire to complete studies and engage in work in Albania or abroad, respectively with the percentage of 39.2% and 31.4%.
- It was evident from the empirical data collected in percentage that the majority of the respondents, about 55.4%, consider the cost of living in Albania to be very high and the salaries are considered to be low, as well as stress the uncertainty in finding employment after graduation. While the remaining 44.6% of the reasons are headed by the desire to emigrate to a country with more opportunities for professional development and a safer place to live.
- Most of the respondents, about 47.1%, would consider countries such as Great Britain and the

United States of America as potential emigration destinations, while 13.7% of them would consider Italy as a potential place to emigrate, 9.8% have chosen Germany, 7.8% have chosen the Scandinavian countries, 5.9% have chosen the continent of Australia and only 3.9% have chosen Canada.

- Emigration to Great Britain is also the most preferred potential country of the respondents with about 22.9%.
- During the period of preparation to emigrate and the initial phase of settling in the host country, 37.3% of the surveyed students chose the country to emigrate because they had family and acquaintances there who supported them, 23.5% of the surveyed students chose the country to immigrate because they have knowledge of the language and culture of the country they want to immigrate to, 15.7% chose it because they had heard about it before, 7.8% chose it because they wanted better quality education and 5.9% had secured a work contract with that country.
- Another finding of the study was the fact that most female students want to build a future in the country they want to emigrate to and live there forever, and only a minority of respondents want to benefit from the country they want to emigrate to and return to again. in Albania or use the country they want to immigrate to as a transit country to immigrate to another country.
- Based on the data of the study, it was found that most students are sufficiently financially supported by their family in the expenses to emigrate, since they have financial difficulties in coping with emigration, and a very small part are not supported at all financially from their family in the expenses to emigrate.
- These young people accept that the country they choose to emigrate to is closely related to having a family member or relative in that country. Very few students are those who emigrate to countries where they have no relatives,

admitting that they have no support. It also resulted that the largest number of respondents did not postpone the project to emigrate because of the Covid-19 situation. They even admitted that this situation created by the pandemic has made their economic situation even more difficult, which has encouraged them to work and emigrate abroad. Due to the situation created by the COVID-19 health pandemic, they admit that they have experienced a difficult situation in fulfilling their needs to cope with the pandemic, but the opportunities they have here make them even more motivated to emigrate. To help their families cope with life and cure them from the pandemic.

- Their dissatisfaction and lack of hope can also be seen when asked about the statement "I think that problems are not solved by emigrating, that's why I don't want to emigrate", and most of them, more than 70%, answered by stating that the problems for most of them, they choose to emigrate and that's the only way they can help their family and create a better future for themselves. In all the conducted studies, their stance in favor of emigration and finding a job in the emigrated country is evident. According to them, this is the result of the difficult economic situation in our country, but also the complete absence of the state for the opening and creation of jobs, policies in favor of young people and their support for education and employment according to the relevant qualifications.

In order to improve the situation, programs can be designed to provide support for the employment of young people after completing higher studies, as well as the creation of partnerships between the government and donor communities to co-finance integrated active labor market programs aimed at promoting of employment among newly graduated young people. It would also be valuable to create support programs mainly for young people with a low level of education and no previous work

experience, something that turns out to be in large numbers among young Albanians.

References:

- [1] Dervishi, Zyhdi; *Sociologji kulture 1, analizë krahasuese ndërmjet kulturave përmes integrimit sociokulturor të emigrantëve shqiptarë në Itali*; Email; 2012.
- [2] Fshs.edu.al https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page_id=131 (accessed on 18.07.2020)
- [3] Gerdeshi, Ilir; Jorgoni; Elira; *Ndikimi social i emigracionit dhe migrimit rural-urban në Evropën qendrore dhe lindore*; GVG, 2012.
- [4] UNESCO; *Global education monitoring report; Migration, displacement, and education: Building Bridges Not Walls*; UNESCO, 2019.
- [5] INSTAT 2014; *Popullsia dhe dinamika e popullsisë në Shqipëri. Horizonte të reja demografike?*;
- [6] Instat.gov.al <http://www.instat.gov.al> (accessed on 20.05.2020)
- [7] Likaj, Matilda; *Emigrimi dhe integrimi social i emigrantëve shqiptarë pas viteve 1990*; 2015.
- [8] Poni, Merita; *Ndryshimet bashkëkohore në mendësitë e shqiptarëve për vajzat dhe gratë*; 2016.
- [9] Westminster Foundation for Democracy; *Cost of youth emigration*; Institute for development and innovation; 2019.